



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

February 2025 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This year the holiday of Tu BiShevat – the New Year for Trees – falls on January 13th. Among the Sephardim there is the tradition of reciting a special "Seder" that was compiled in Tzfat in the 16th century by the renowned Kabbalist Rabbi Haim Vital. The main reason behind this celebration is the Jewish mystical tradition that sees the Torah as a tree of life, with roots in Heaven and branches extending to earth, bringing life and blessing to the entire world. Therefore, the New Year for Trees is indeed a holy time when we can eat the fruit of trees, especially the seven species grown in the Land of Israel, and thank God for His blessings of renewing life. Join us on February 8th for a special class led by KKJ Community Engagement Fellow Theo Canter when he will discuss this holiday and the significance of the fruits we eat. We pray that this auspicious time heralds the return of all of the Israeli hostages. In addition to eating traditional fruit, this is also the time in Israel for the planting of trees in memory of loved ones. This year we have a forest of trees to plant.



This newsletter, our 190th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

We 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

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email 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

Simchas

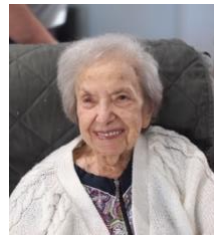
This newsletter is filled with Simchas. We love to share our moments of joy with our reading audience, especially now, when so much sadness in Israel weighs so heavily on us.

Photos of joy with the return of our hostages



Esther Colchamiro turned 105 on February 1st. Esther Colchamiro also became a great great-grandmother when Nehama Zirkind gave birth to Eliahou in December.

Rae Yamali was born on December 3, 1922 and turned 101 in December. Rae is a beloved aunt and sister-in-law whose stories are a living memory of her family and culture (the Yamalis, the Bacolas, the Couenca and Roman). Aunt Rae remains vibrant and engaged-staying closely connected to the lives of relatives and many friends. She has reminded those close to her to never take for granted who they are by encouraging all to look more deeply into their histories and to learn what they owe to the past. Rae is related to so many. She is the daughter of Abraham Matza and Mollie Vitoulis (both of Blessed Memory) and, through this connection, related to Genees (through her sister Sally who married Abe Genee, Hy Genee's older brother) and the Gottliebs through her sister, Irene. Rae is related to the Vitoulis families through her mother.



Most recent picture of Rae at 102



Rae and Albert Yamali on their wedding day



Celebrating Eric Bacolas and Michael's anniversary in Mexico. Stella Bacolas was there to join in the celebration.

Passings

We are very sad to share the news that our community member Annette Binder has passed away. The funeral will be this Sunday February 2 at 11am at Beth Moses cemetery. Annette was born January 22, 1928, the only child of Joseph Politis and Esther Josephs. Annette often recounted that her parents would take her everywhere, especially to the Bronx to visit relatives. By blood or through marriage, Annette was related to an unbelievable number of Yannote families and was a repository of memories. May her memory be a blessing.



We were so saddened to hear of the passing of Sam Matsa at age 90. Sam was cared for by his devoted wife Perry. Sam is a multi-generational member of the KKJ community. His father Morris Matsa was President of KKJ until 1969 when he passed away and Hy Genee became President. Sam Matsa's father was Morris and his mother Louiza. Mae Gabrielides' father was first cousins with Sam's.

We mourn the passing of Yeshaya Sampson Boyarin, son of Elissa Sampson & Jonathan Boyarin. Elissa and Jonathan are part of KKJ's extended community from the Lower East Side. Yeshaya is survived by his parents and by his brother Yoyneh (Jonah) Sampson Boyarin, and sister-in-law Nekhe (Jacqueline) Krass. May the family be comforted amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

We mourn the passing Ezra (Rouli) ben Zion Bacola, who passed away at the age of 78. Rouli was the brother of Anna Bakola Garty. He was from the Bakola branch of the Colchamiro family and was one of the first children born in Ioannina after the war in 1947.



Isak Haleva, Turkey's chief rabbi and face of Jewish minority, dies at 84 Full article [Here](#)
During Haleva's lifetime, Turkey's Jewish population fell from 100,000 to 15,000.

Turkey's Jewish community is mourning after Isak Haleva, chief rabbi since 2002, died at 84 in January.

Haleva was the 35th person to hold the title of Hahambaşı, by which the chief rabbis of both the modern Turkish Republic and the Ottoman empire have been known since the position was established after the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul – then Constantinople – in 1453. "We are deeply saddened by the loss of our esteemed elder, our Chief Rabbi Rav Isak Haleva, who always believed in the unifying power of peace and love and who led our community in line with this belief for many years," the Turkish Jewish community said in a statement.



Haleva served as the leading avatar of Turkish Jewry to the country's Muslim majority during a period of transition in Turkey. A year after his election, he led the community through its first major trial of the 21st century, the 2003 bombing of two Turkish synagogues by Al-Qaeda.

Elected the same year that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan took power, Haleva also presided over a diminished community as Turkey went from an ally to Israel to one of its staunchest critics. Since October 2023, Turkey has endorsed Hamas and cut off trade with Israel in response to the war in Gaza. Erdogan called the lay leadership of the Turkish Jewish community to express his condolences, the office of the Turkish presidency announced.

"During his duty, Rav Haleva, with his warm and constructive personality, established personal friendships with both our president and many statesmen who visited our country," the Turkish Jewish community said in a statement. Haleva was present when President Barack Obama visited the country in 2009 and when Pope Francis did in 2014. He also met with Syria's Bashar Al-Assad when he met with Erdogan in Istanbul in 2008. "I, as a religious official, do not involve myself in political matters. The prime minister of Turkey summoned me, so I came," Haleva later told an Israeli news outlet about the meeting, adding that he encouraged Assad to make peace with Israel.

Officials from the United States and Israel who had developed relationships with Haleva said he would be missed. "During my many meetings with Chief Rabbi Haleva as Consul General, I have been inspired by his messages of our shared humanity," said Julie Eadeh, the United States's consul general in Istanbul. "His leadership and dedication to the Jewish community will be remembered and cherished. Our condolences go out to his family, friends, and all those whose lives he touched."

"He will be remembered as a great leader and educator; he not only led the ancient Jewish community in Turkey, but also advocated for dialogue and friendship between people of different faiths, especially between Jews and Muslims," Israel's president Isaac Herzog said on X. "While Chief Rabbi Rav Haleva's voice will be greatly missed, his legacy will serve as a guiding light for future generations."

Haleva's son Naftali, also a rabbi and a candidate to replace him, said he had received condolences from a diverse set of people. "Because of his characteristic personality, he touched everyone's heart," Naftali Haleva said in an interview. "In these past two days I'm getting that message from everyone who calls, Jews and non-Jews, locally and internationally."

Indeed, for Turkey's Jews, both at home and abroad, he is remembered as a fatherly figure who had a zest for life and Sephardic Judaism. "I lost not only our chief rabbi, but also my spiritual father," Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, the president of Turkey's organized Jewish community, said on X. "Rabbi Haleva gained the love and appreciation of the entire community, young and old, everyone was able to speak to him in a fatherly manner," said Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, Chabad's emissary in Istanbul who had known Haleva for over 20 years.

Haleva's influence also stretched far outside of his native country to reach Turkey's Sephardic diaspora in America and Israel. "I would say that the hahambaşi represented the best in our Sephardic tradition and the ideal rabbi, what a true Sephardic haham, in all reading of the word, should be," said Ethan Marcus, the managing director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America. "His light-heartedness, his deep sense of wisdom and commitment to Ladino and the Sephardic tradition and his warmth — there was a certain real *joie de vivre*, you know, love of life, that he had — which were very unique monikers of Ottoman Sephardic rabbis that unfortunately, With his passing, goes with him."



Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, a Turkish-born Jew and scholar of Israel-Turkey relations at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center, said Haleva represented a bygone era. "The Jewish community in Turkey is currently a small community. We could also call it a big family," Yanarocak said. "Unfortunately, I feel as though we have lost a beloved grandfather in our family. Rabbi Haleva was kind-hearted, warm, and one of us with his ever-smiling face. He filled the position he held with wisdom, but at the same time, sitting next to him felt like sitting next to not just a chief rabbi but also a family member. His passing truly marks the end of an era for this community." For the many Turkish Jews who, like Yanarocak, have emigrated to Israel, Haleva remained an important figure in their lives. "We all grew up under his knees — in the synagogue, the Jewish high school, his presence was felt very much," Yanarocak said.

Born in 1940, Haleva lived through the tumultuous latter half of the 20th century, during which Turkey's Jewish population declined from nearly 100,000 to around 15,000 today. Many Jews left in the middle of the century following events targeting non-Muslim minorities, including the infamous 1942 wealth tax and 1955 Istanbul pogrom. Later, economic and political instability in the 1970s and 1980s led to a slow trickle of departures further depleting the community.

Haleva, too, spent time in Israel, receiving his rabbinic ordination from the Porat Yosef Yeshiva there in the 1960s. There he learned from leading rabbis including Ovadya Yosef, Yaakov Ades, and Ben Zion Abba Shaul.

"For the 20th and 21st century, these were the most prominent Sephardic rabbis for the entire universe," Naftali Haleva said. "These were the teachers he had." But Haleva soon returned to Turkey to complete his Turkish military service. As chief rabbi, he held tightly to that Turkish identity even as Spanish and Portuguese citizenship became available to Sephardic Jewry, telling JTA, "I'm a Turkish Jew, period," during a visit to Portugal in 2016.

Though Haleva was born at a time when Ladino was the common language of most of Istanbul's Jews, he was the first chief rabbi to begin giving sermons in Turkish, recognizing the changing reality of Turkey's Jews. "He was in many ways a connector generation," Marcus said. "He was born into a world where Ladino was the *lingua franca*, albeit diminishing in use. He was born into a world where the idea of being Sephardic was that ethos of warmth and love and being steeped in one's traditions and halacha but also fully engaged in the wider world and its challenges. It's something he was fully immersed in."

"That's something that's now hard pressed to find, and losing him is really losing one of those last connections to that world that we're trying to uphold and preserve," Marcus added. Later this year, Turkey's Jewish community will hold an election between Turkey's other rabbis — one of whom is Haleva's son — to decide his successor. The community uniquely allows all adult Jews to cast ballots in rabbinic elections.

Note: Ethan Marcus is the younger son of KKJ President Marvin Marcus and, along with his older brother Andrew, has been instrumental in reaching out to the next generation.

Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

In January we welcomed visitors from our Greek Jewish world, students from universities, the Chairwoman of the Jewish Community Relations Council of NY, the Israeli Consul for Cultural Affairs, Greeks from Ioannina, and many other new friends.



Cheryl Fishbein, Chair of JCRC & Phil



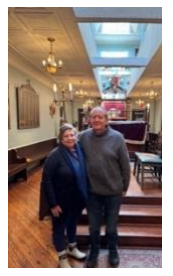
Graduate students from Yeshiva University



Susan & Michael Gordon, from the Lafazan, Yakouel, Yohanan families



Yael Hashavit, Israeli Consul



Rick & Rebecca Lockenbach

Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Torah & Taverna Night – January

What an incredible night! Our Torah & Taverna Night series started off as an amazing success. Israeli author Ruby Namdar enchanted us with mystical insights on Judaism and life, our guest musicians played vibrant Greek and Mediterranean music, everyone enjoyed delicious mezedes and drinks, and we danced the night away. We can't wait to see everyone at our next one in February!



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

Thank you to everyone who came to our amazing Greek Jewish cooking class last month! We cooked delicious spinach and potato borekitas, baklava, and Greek salad. Special thanks to guest chef Laura Codron for sharing her family recipes and to our assistant chefs Aaron, Rebecca, and Theo for making it such a successful event! Check out the recipes here: <https://bit.ly/borekitasrecipe>



Holocaust Remembrance Day for Greek Jewry

Hosted on January 22 by the Consul General of Greece in NY and the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, the moving program featured a keynote address from Professor Spyros Orfanos on the lasting psychological effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their descendants. The story of Spyros' family was highlighted as part of the Greek Christian community on the island of Ereikoussa who defied the Nazis and saved the lives of four Greek Jews. The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry honored the entire Ereikoussa community in 2015 with the award for moral courage. This story of bravery is told in the book "Something Beautiful Happened: A Story of Survival and Courage in the Face of Evil" by Yvette Manessis Corporon, available for sale at KKJ.



Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

Roots of Faith: Mystical Meanings of Mediterranean Fruits

**A Special Shabbat Class in
Celebration of Tu BiShevat
led by Theo Canter**

**Learn about mystical teachings on
the fruits of the Mediterranean in
the Jewish tradition compared
to Greek and other cultures
through art, poetry, and myth**

**Saturday February 8
Shabbat Services - 9:30am
Kiddush Lunch - 12:30pm
Class - 1:00pm**

**280 Broome St. NYC
RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org**

Torah & Taverna Nights – February 26 at 8pm

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

TORAH & TAVERNA NIGHTS

A Monthly Salon of Greek Jewish
Culture, Thought, and Music

Wednesday February 26 at 8pm

Psychologist and researcher Josh Lipson will lead a fascinating talk on psychedelics in Biblical, Rabbinic, & mystical texts and lessons from modern medicine

Join us for an engaging evening of Jewish insights, savor delicious Greek appetizers and drinks, and enjoy live music with a rotating cast of guest musicians

Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

Join us on Wednesday February 26 at 8pm for our monthly evening program Torah & Taverna Nights! Each month will feature guest Jewish educators and musicians and offer an engaging evening of insights, live music, delicious appetizers, and more. Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

Jewish Comics & Sephardic Stories – March 2 at 1pm

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR

JEWISH COMICS & SEPHARDIC STORIES

BOOK PRESENTATION

by visiting authors

● *Arnon Z. Shorr &
Joshua M. Edelglass*

**Sunday March 2 at 1pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome St NYC**

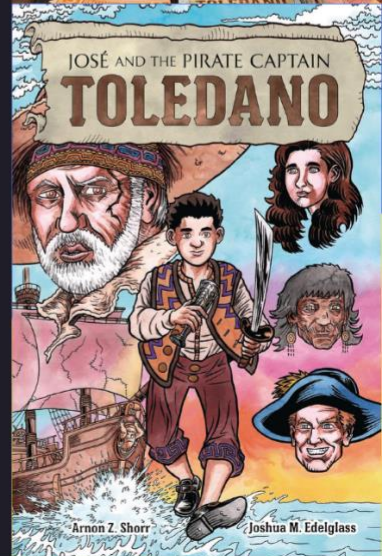
Join comic book creators and Jewish educators Josh & Arnon for a fun multimedia presentation that explores how they created the graphic novel *José and the Pirate Captain Toledano*. The program includes a screening of Arnon's award-winning short film *The Pirate Captain Toledano*. The authors will explore the creative process of how a graphic novel gets made, from script to painted page to finished comic book. They will also present the real history of Jewish pirates and how they brought these Sephardic characters to life. Along the way, they will also discuss what it means to tell Jewish stories, the depiction of Jewish characters in American media, and their passion for highlighting diverse Jewish characters.

Signed books will be available for sale

Refreshments will be served

Open to all ages

Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org



Save the Date!
Greek Jewish Festival - Sunday May 11, 2025

Stay tuned for the full performance schedule. Check the festival website for updates [Here](#)

GREEK JEWISH FESTIVAL

Past Events of Interest

Sephardic Genealogy Class – Watch Online [Here](#)



 The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood of America
La Ermandad Sefaradi

SEPHARDIC DIGITAL ACADEMY

**SEPHARDIC GENEALOGY,
MIGRATION, & HISTORY**

A THREE PART EXPLORATION OF SEPHARDIC HERITAGE WITH
EXPERT GENEALOGISTS IN THE FIELD

Jan 13, 20, & 27
12pm ET / 9am PT

Register at tinyurl.com/sephardicgenealogy

 The Migration of Jews from Italy to the
Ottoman Empire and North Africa
Dr. Alexander Beider

 Paths of Exile and Return: The History of
Moroccan Jewry and Its Diasporas
Dolev Revivo

 Legacies of Sephardic Ancestors
in our Genomes
Leo Cooper

Romaniote American Oral History Project

Contact Theo@kkjism.org to learn more and share your stories



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

ROMANIOTE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

A community-sourced archive for
preservation, research, and inspiration



What does it mean to be a Romaniote Jew
in the US in the 21st Century?

After more than 100 years in America,
Kehila Kedosha Janina is excited to launch
this new research project to document our
community today, exploring questions of
identity, culture, preservation, & adaptation.

We want to hear from you! Submit
testimonies, family stories, recipes,
photographs, traditions, songs, memories,
& more.



Contact Theo Canter at Theo@kkjism.org
to learn more and contribute your voice as we
write the next chapter of our community's story

Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Classes

Email Theo@kkjism.org to learn more



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Tutoring

FREE

Learn How To...



Read Torah & Haftara

Read Torah & Haftara in Hebrew, chanted in the centuries-old Greek Romaniote rite



Give a Derasha

Prepare a speech analyzing the weekly Torah portion



Lead Tefillah

Recite the prayers for Shabbat with our beautiful ancient melodies

Classes taught by KKJ Community Engagement Fellow Theo Canter

Email Theo@kkjism.org to learn more and sign up

**Message from Theo Canter
KKJ Community Engagement Fellow**



Shalom uVeraha dear friends and community,

In our weekly perashiot at this time of year we are still in Egypt, but palpably on the cusp of freedom. Though the cold remains, the weather this season is slowly growing more mellow, with our hopes for both warmer weather and better news on the horizon.

This coming month we celebrate Tu Bi'Shevat, the Jewish new year of the trees. Much like how we mark Rosh Ashana and Pesah (our two other new years), we celebrate this holiday with a Seder where we eat delicious fruits with mystical significance. These fruits we eat are the traditional species of the land of Israel - figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. They may remind many of us of Greece too. That is no coincidence, and I will be teaching a class at on Saturday February 8th at 1pm on this exact topic - the mythological meanings of Mediterranean fruits. Please join us!

It may seem odd to be celebrating trees when the weather is still nevertheless cold. But that is exactly the point - as we say in the tefiloth, "reshith tzemihath geulathenu" – "the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption." Every new beginning, every individual mitzva, every moment spent dedicated to holiness, however small, are all worth celebrating.

In that spirit, as the secular year begins, it has been a season already of great sprouting. I have begun studying with several community members, of a range of ages, to prepare them for bar and bat mitzvahs in the coming year. We have also received a great response to our new Romaniote American Oral History Project, with people sharing their memories and reflections on our special identity and history. It's still not too late to add your voice to this project – please email me at Theo@kkjism.org if you have materials you want to share!

Finally, in the secular calendar, this week we also mark Groundhog Day. Last year when I was teaching in Greece on Fulbright, I taught my 7th grade English class about this holiday as an example of American culture. The school priest happened to be walking by as I was teaching, and extemporaneously offered his own "derasha" about Bill Murray's 1993 film Groundhog Day - one which I found beautiful and relevant:

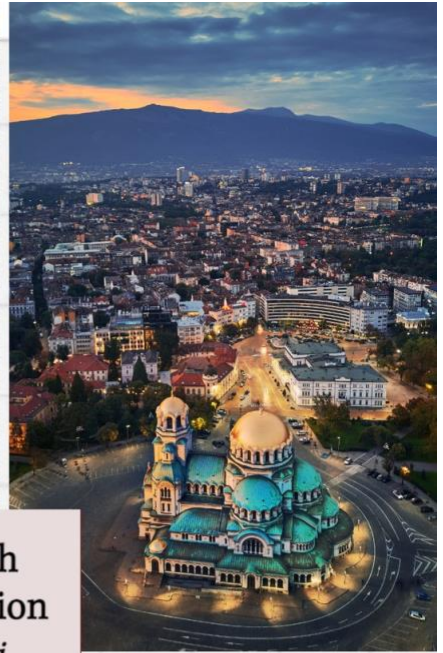
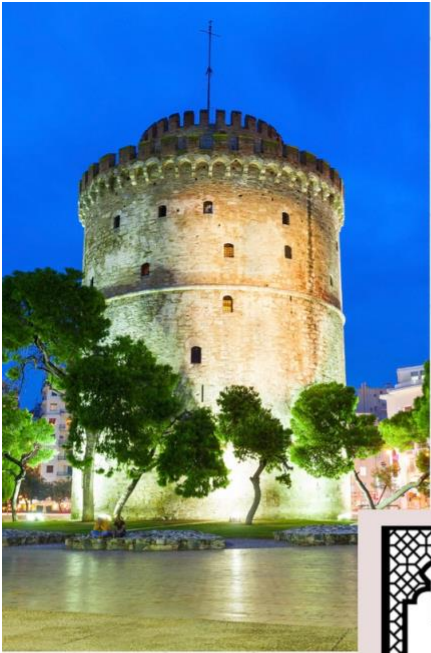
Like the film's protagonist, we are put in the same situations over and over again. Rather than fighting to escape them, we must use these chances to learn, to improve both ourselves and the world around us. And, I may add, to continue growing in our tefiloth, our Torah learning, and our mitzvot.

May we all have a fruitful Tu BiShevat and a timely spring!

Theo

Tour of Jewish Greece & the Balkans – Summer 2025
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

The Sephardic Brotherhood will be leading a special tour in 2025 that will visit 3 countries and 8 cities with Romaniote and Sephardic heritage. The tour will feature walking tours of the Jewish neighborhoods, a special Sephardic Shabbat experience in Salonika, visiting the historic Jewish Cemetery of Monastir, a day trip to the Romaniote community of Ioannina, touring the Acropolis of Athens, and the gorgeous beaches on the island of Corfu. Learn more and register at <https://www.sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece>.



The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood Foundation
La Ermandad Sefaradi

TOUR OF JEWISH GREECE & THE BALKANS

June 22 - July 3, 2025

**INCLUDES SOFIA, PLOVDIV, SKOPJE, MONASTIR (BITOLA),
THESSALONIKI (SALONIKA), IOANNINA, CORFU, & ATHENS**

**REDISCOVER YOUR HERITAGE AND CONNECT WITH OTHER
SEPHARDIC JEWS ON THIS ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE**

**To register and learn more go to
[sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece](https://www.sephardicbrotherhood.com/tourofjewishgreece)**



Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network
Tour of Jewish Italy – July 2025

The Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network is excited to announce their Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Italy! They will trace the roots of our communities and visit the beautiful cities of Florence, Rome, Naples, Livorno, Pisa, Pompeii, & Capri. The tour runs July 6-16, 2025. Spots are limited and the deadline to register & submit deposits is January 15. Open to Jewish young adults in their 20s and 30s. Make sure to sign up now for this once-in-a-lifetime experience while there are still spots left! View the full itinerary here: <https://bit.ly/YPIItaly2025> and email info@GreekJewishYPN.org to learn more & sign up.



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS TOUR OF JEWISH ITALY

July 6-16, 2025

**INCLUDES FLORENCE, ROME, NAPLES, LIVORNO,
PISA, POMPEII, & CAPRI**

**REDISCOVER YOUR HERITAGE AND CONNECT WITH OTHER YOUNG
SEPHARDIC JEWS ON THIS ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE**

View the full itinerary at bit.ly/YPIItaly2025

**To register and learn more email
info@GreekJewishYPN.org**





Greek Jewish & Sephardic
Young Professionals Network

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

Frutikas

Sephardic Tu BiShevat Wine & Fruit Tasting

Wednesday February 12 at 7pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome St NYC

Join us to celebrate the Jewish New Year for
Trees with a traditional Sephardic Seder featuring
wine, cheese, fruit, and more

Enjoy drinks while meeting other
young members of our community

Open to Jewish Young Professionals
in their 20s and 30s

RSVP to info@GreekJewishYPN.org

**New Sephardic Community Magazine
from the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America
"La Djente"**

La Djente - The People. I am honored to introduce you to the new name of our beloved community magazine. This is the first and only national Sephardic community magazine in the United States, and the only print publication in North America that is publishing new, original Ladino language articles.

There is a Jewish idea that a person's name can illustrate one's character: kishmo ken hu – "Like his name, so is he." The Midrash teaches us that although prophecy no longer exists, there is one small area in which we are still granted a glimpse of Divine wisdom when we struggle to find the right name for our children. And what about a name change? In the Torah, when God gives someone a new name, it can symbolize a new identity and destiny. For example, Abram's name is changed to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude of many nations." All that to say, a name and its meaning are incredibly significant predictors of one's life journey. *En kurto*, in short, after many years of publication as *El Ermanado Sefaradi*, it is time for a new identity and destiny as *La Djente*.

Over the decades, the Sephardic Brotherhood and the community it represents in America has evolved, so too has our print and digital reach. To reflect this, our Community magazine evolved into a broader cultural platform, maintaining its commitment to Ladino language and Sephardic heritage while adapting to the changing needs of our audience, ensuring the enduring legacy of Sephardic identity and voices are more fully represented. Hence, we have chosen the unique name of *La Djente*, never before used for a previous Ladino language or Sephardic communal publication, to better reflect the broader voices of the Sepharadim who write for us, while still grounding ourselves in our language and identity. The use of the 'Dj-' is also a deliberate choice, as it better reflects the linguistic diversity of the Ladino language.

As the only print publication featuring original Ladino content in North America, our magazine has always included Sephardic culture, identity and food, spiritual insights and Ladino articles from our very own people, going back to the first edition printed in 1922. With a new name that symbolizes the magazine as the voice of the Sephardic Ladino-speaking Community, *La Djente* will celebrate the diverse perspectives of Sephardic thought leaders around the world, from New York to Seattle, Istanbul to Salonika, and Mexico City to Cape Town. This change comes as part of *La Ermandad's* efforts to modernize the organization and to reach new audiences.

What's more, *La Djente* is also going digital, with the launch of our new magazine website ladjente.com, where members and non-members alike can access articles and magazine archives, making it easier to share articles and to reach more people. As part of this new vision for the magazine, we are encouraging members to get involved and share your stories. Please submit article ideas to info@sephardicbrotherhood.com so we can continue to welcome a multiplicity of Sephardic voices, sharing them with the broader Jewish world.

The incredibly rich and unique voice of *los nuestros - our own* deserves to be heard far and wide.

Buyrun a La Djente - Welcome to the People

- Alexandra Fellus, Editor in Chief



News from Jewish Greece

Athens

Memorial Day for the Greek Jewish Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust

On January 27, 2025, the President of the Hellenic Republic Mr. Katerina Sakellariopoulou laid a wreath in memory of the Greek Jewish victims of the Holocaust at the Holocaust Memorial, in Thissio, in the presence of ministers, distinguished MPs, politicians, representatives of the Jewish Community of Athens and other Jewish Communities, representatives of the Armed Forces and the Church. All the participants stood together to affirm Never Again.



We Remember... Greek Parliament and Athens City Hall lit up in memory of the victims of the Holocaust on International Holocaust Remembrance Day



Trikala

The Jewish Community of Trikala held ceremonies for International Holocaust Remembrance Day, with our friend Anastasios Karababas speaking at the synagogue. The events were organized by the Region of Thessaly, the Municipality of Trikala, the Jewish Community of Trikala and the Directorate of Secondary Education. The event included wreaths laid and a commemorative service in the Synagogue by Rabbi Ilias Sabetai. Followed by the lighting of six candles for the 6,000,000 of those killed in the Holocaust and a seventh for the coming generations.



Larissa



The City of Larissa participated in the international We Remember campaign by displaying the logo on the Municipal Conservatory building on the night of January 26-27, which has been designated as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Mayor Thanasis Mamakos, Rabbi Elias Sabethai, President Moses Manoah and members of the Jewish Community of Larissa give a common, resounding message about the value of Remembrance, as a shield for the fight against anti-Semitism and all forms of racism.

Veria

Sacred Connection Through Place: My Experience in Veria, Greece Full article [Here](#)

Reflecting on my recent journey to the Balkans and Greece with the Sephardic Young Professionals Network, I am filled with a profound sense of connection and gratitude. This trip was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit many historically Jewish towns, which included three towns where my great-ancestors lived for hundreds of years. Among these, the town of Veria in Greece left an indelible mark on my heart.



Veria's untouched charm and natural beauty were breathtaking. The town is graced with a clean, majestic river and springs that flow through it, believed to be blessed with fruitfulness and fertility. As I walked through the town, its roads lined with all original pavers and cobblestones, I felt an overwhelming connection to my ancestors, especially when I visited the original synagogue of Veria where my family once congregated and served as rabbis.

The synagogue, fully intact and well-preserved, stood atop a hill with views overlooking a beautiful tree-topped horizon. Giant figs hung from the surrounding trees perfectly ripe for eating. Seeing my family's name, Mordechai, inscribed in stone beside the Torah ark was a deeply moving experience. Although the synagogue is no longer active, as the Jewish population was tragically annihilated during the Holocaust, it is lovingly maintained by a non-Jewish property manager named Evi.

Evi's dedication to the synagogue is nothing short of remarkable. Despite not being Jewish, she spoke to us with tears in her eyes about her role in overseeing the inactive synagogue. She shared how meeting groups like ours, who come from afar to learn about their ancestors, has profoundly connected her to our story and the Jewish people as a whole. Evi feels honored to pass down the stories of the synagogue and the former community to living descendants, helping visitors connect with their relatives who have also visited Veria over the years.

Some members of our tour group may have initially found it odd that a non-Jewish person would be so emotionally invested in our story. However, I understood her emotions wholeheartedly. As a real estate asset manager with a special interest in properties with historical or cultural significance, I could relate to Evi's sense of purpose as a steward of time and place. Buildings often outlive generations of humans, and those with significant legacies and experiences become rich with stories and palpable energy. In my ten years managing real estate, I've seldom met others who openly admit to feeling a spiritual connection to physical built spaces. I believe for those of us who do, like Evi and myself, the responsibility to manage such an important place means to be its spokesperson; to deeply understand its history and to ensure its story is shared and its meaning adopted by future generations.

To be part of history in any way is a great honor, and there may be no greater version of this honor than being an unaffiliated "outsider" entrusted with preserving the holy, both physically and culturally. I am deeply thankful to Evi for her part in bridging the gap between centuries of ancestors, for keeping alive our stories and heritage by holding sacred, our sacred place.

Thessaloniki

"Never Again" is the message of the event for the National Day of Remembrance of the Greek Jewish Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust

The message "Never Again" and the warnings about the danger of the rise of neo-Nazism, the far right and anti-Semitism in Europe dominated the event for the National Day of Remembrance of the Greek Jewish Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust held in Thessaloniki.



"The duty is one: To never allow some perverts to attempt to turn our land into an immense cemetery again. For us, it is a duty and a duty of honor to be able to teach our children that what happened once is something that no civilized person should allow to happen again," emphasized in his greeting the Deputy Minister of the Interior (Macedonia and Thrace) Costas Gioulekas and continued: "No one expected that after the global devastation of 1939-1945 we would experience a war in Europe again. And yet, unfortunately, for the last two years a war has been raging over our northern borders, in the Heart of Europe, in Ukraine. All of these are signs of a constant vigilance, awakening, and vigilance for all that we must do so that this does not take on greater dimensions. which is happening there".

Mr. Gioulekas also conveyed the greetings of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the event.

"Eighty years after World War II and the liberation of Auschwitz, it is deeply disappointing to hear reports that anti-Semitism is not decreasing but is alarmingly increasing," Israeli Ambassador Noam Katz said. He added: "This resurgence has been further fueled by the turmoil in the Middle East, particularly following the heinous terrorist attack by Hamas — a recognized anti-Semitic and genocidal terrorist organization — in Israel in October 2023. This attack, the deadliest against Jews since the Holocaust, claimed the lives of 1,200 Israelis and led to 251 others being taken hostage. Anti-Israel protests and rhetoric, often labeled as "anti-Zionism," too often devolve into blatant anti-Semitism, with rhetoric or "silent calls for the destruction of the world's only Jewish state and the targeting of Jewish communities around the world. These realities must not fade from our consciousness, even in this fragile moment of ceasefire, as hostages are being released, with four women released yesterday, at enormous cost to Israel. It is a stark reminder that vigilance and action against hate remain as critical as ever."

The Israeli ambassador referred to the once thriving Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the fact that 94% of its 50,000 members were exterminated by the Nazi death machine, and described the destruction of European and Greek Judaism by the Nazis as an "indelible stain on the history of humanity."

He spoke about the story of the Thessaloniki "violinist of Auschwitz", Jacob Strumsa, who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, with music proving to be a lifeline for him, and stressed the need to preserve memory and be vigilant as anti-Semitism is on the rise.

Regarding the current Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, he said that "although much smaller, it continues to play a prominent role in the life of the city while preserving its rich heritage."

He also emphasized that "the creation of the Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki is an important step forward for the memory of the Holocaust and the honor of the history of the Jewish community, and we look forward to completing the honor of the Community's heritage in Eleftherias Square, further ensuring that this memory will be woven into the fabric of Greek history."

"As the generation of Holocaust survivors dwindles, our commitment to preserving memory intensifies. Together, we must work for a future where the atrocities of the Holocaust will not be repeated. By embracing the lessons of the past and strengthening unity, we can ensure that "Never Again" is not just a phrase but an enduring commitment," he said, concluding his speech by saying in Greek "NEVER AGAIN."

"Thessaloniki remembers one of the darkest periods of its history every day, and we do so not simply because we have a debt, but because it was indelibly etched in the social and historical subconscious. Because the city and all of us learned to live with an open wound and to pass on the lessons of that era to future generations, with the emphasis that they must not and cannot forget, so as not to allow such an atrocity to be repeated," pointed out the regional governor of Central Macedonia, Athena Aidona.

"Greece honors the 67,000 innocent Greek Jews who were exterminated. 50,000 of them were from Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, few of those who experienced the horror are able today to speak about what they went through," said the president of the Central Jewish Council of Greece, David Saltiel, and continued: "This helps the rise of parties that, with extreme and divisive rhetoric, celebrate historical triumphs, reshaping the political landscape in Europe, as a result of a society of inequalities and generalized insecurity. At the same time, as the era of the martyr approaches its twilight, we see a dramatic rise in anti-Semitism in Europe. An anti-Semitism that, wherever it comes from - right or left - is the same poison."

Mr. Saltiel spoke about the "complicity" of those who knew about the Holocaust and remained apathetic and inactive and noted: "Only the full understanding of what happened in World War II, only the deepening and consolidation of the memory of the Holocaust can be a response to the phenomena of nostalgia for barbarity that are strongly observed in our days."

The keynote speaker at the event, which took place at the Port's Warehouse C, was the mayor of Thessaloniki, Stelios Angeloudis, who emphasized: "The inhumane regimes have collapsed. However, as it is proven, even today the monster of anti-Semitism is still here, alive, in every corner of this very fluid and changeable world that is changing at a rapid pace. And it is also proven that whoever is not afraid of the face of the monster, as the late Manos Hatzidakis used to say, is beginning to resemble him. The weapons we have in our hands today to defeat the monster and not get used to being afraid are two. The preservation of memory and constant vigilance. Let us always be ready so that not only does humanity never know such horror again, but also to make it even more humane, more tolerant, more inclusive our society".

Mr. Angeloudis expressed optimism that the pending legal matters will soon be resolved and that work will begin in the coming months on the creation of the Memorial Park in Eleftherias Square.

A written message was sent by former Deputy Prime Minister Panagiotis Pikramenos, while a greeting was delivered by the Deputy Governor of Thessaloniki, Konstantinos Gioutikas.

The event was attended by the ambassadors of Germany Andreas Kindle, Canada Anna-Karin Asselin, the chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy in Athens, Maria Olson, the consuls general in Thessaloniki of the US Jerry Ismail, Germany Monica Frank, France Jean-Luc Laveau and the Republic of Cyprus Konstantinos Polykarpou, the Secretary General of the N.D. Party, Stavros Kalafatis, as a representative of the Speaker of the Parliament Nikitas Kaklamanis, the N.D. MPs. Dimanantis Golidakis, Fanis Papas, SYRIZA-PS MP Katerina Notopoulou, as a representative of the party's president Socrates Famellos, Thanasis Glavinis (member of the PASOK-KINAL Coordinating Political Center), as a representative of the party's president Nikos Androulakis, the Coordinator of the Prime Minister's Office in Macedonia Yiannis Papageorgiou, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Philotheos, representatives of the Military Authorities and the Security Forces, etc.

The event was followed by the laying of wreaths at the Holocaust Memorial on the coastal Nikis Avenue.

"My mother boarded the train to Auschwitz twice" Full article in Greek [Here](#)

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp, Emma Mordo-Mekiou and Benjamin Albala tell how they escaped being transported to the death camp while commemorating their family who never managed to return.

A few days before January 27th, memories are reawakening. This year, 80 years after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet army (January 27, 1945), which has also been declared International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a major event has been planned, where dozens of leaders and heads of state are expected to attend. Only survivors will speak at the event, and no political speeches will be heard, while descendants of Greek-Jewish victims and survivors will also be present.

Among the victims of the genocide are at least 60,000 Greek Jews out of the 73,000 who – according to the 1940 census – lived in occupied Greece. Some were lucky. They are the few who survived with the help of fellow citizens, anonymous but also institutionally organized in the Resistance, the Church and the Police. Today, very few of them are alive. They managed to hide alone or with their parents and did not "leave" for the death journey to Auschwitz. They lived and still tell their story.

"I have one wish, that such atrocities never happen again"

At Mrs. Emma Mordo-Mekiou's home in the center of Athens, one takes a journey back in time. She awaits us in her living room, the album unfolded in her arms. "Here, take these photos. They are all lost, they are no longer alive, they went to Auschwitz," she says with a heavy heart.

"My paternal family is Mordo. My parents were originally from Thessaloniki. My father was Jacques Mordo and my mother was Laura Modiano. The war found them in Thessaloniki, because that's where they lived and also because, having Italian citizenship, they had some protection. But when the capitulation took place, the problem grew and so they decided to leave Thessaloniki for Athens," he continues.

"If you didn't have papers with a Christian name, they would take you and the convoy would leave for the camps. Many of our family perished. That's how my grandmother, Moseri by name, a large family from Thessaloniki, also left."

"My other grandmother, Mordo in the last name, my father's mother, also left on the trains. And so did my father's brother, his wife, and a baby they had. My family were more courageous. They didn't wait. Dad wanted to be away from the rest. Away from the ghetto, where they had put all the Jews. He told my mother: 'Now you are married, you will come with me.' And so it happened and he essentially saved her. Because my mother got on the train twice to leave, and she didn't leave."

Mrs. Mordo-Mekiou's parents were among the lucky ones. Although they knew no one in the capital, they managed to hide and survive.

"Here in Athens, they didn't know anyone. They randomly knocked on a door at a brothel and made up a story. They said they were in love and that my mother's brother was after them. And the brothel lady didn't say anything. First they paid them for it. They stayed there for about 15 days and then they found a house. My grandfather got off in Athens in the meantime on the Italian train."

As Mrs. Mordo-Mekiou tells us, her parents paid and obtained identity cards with Christian names. "Chrysanthi and Christos Markopoulos. And they could and did move around, with fear for their souls of course, because



Emma Mordo-Mekiou is leafing through the photo album. "They are all lost, they are no longer alive, they went to Auschwitz," she tells us.



Emma with her mother Laura Modiano, years after liberation. Emma was born in a clinic in Athens while they were in hiding to avoid capture by the Germans

mom didn't speak Greek well. And dad always said that he had fallen in love with an Italian woman and his Italian brother was chasing them," she continues.

One day a truck full of Nazis caught my grandfather. My mother was ready to rush in, to go with him. My father held her back.

"Today I can laugh a little about the story," he confesses. "But one day a truck full of Nazis caught my grandfather. My mother was ready to rush in, to go with him. My father held her back. But he thought that someone had betrayed them and they began to wander around Athens. Then they found refuge in another brothel where they remained for about a month."



Soon, however, things took a different turn. In early 1944, her mother became pregnant. "And that was a problem. She and my father managed to stay hidden, but she had to give birth somewhere. They had met a gynecologist who looked after the girls in the brothel. He had a clinic on Solonos Street. And they booked an entire floor of the clinic, for a fee. He didn't ask anything about whether they were Jewish or not, but he must have understood. And they stayed there for almost two months. A boat became my bed, from what I was told. They would shut my mouth so that I would be quiet. I don't remember, of course, but I know how difficult it was after my childhood. I didn't speak or I spoke very little. I didn't eat," she recalls with regret.

The wedding of Emma's aunt, Flora Modiano, outside Baron Hirsch's ghetto in Thessaloniki. Flora Modiano managed to return with her husband and child from the concentration camp where she had been sent.

"What does memory hold? My parents told the story differently. Maybe my mother thought she had nothing to eat and had to breastfeed. Maybe my father remembered something else. And in the early years, during the holidays, they cried all the time. When everyone returned from the camps, they believed that their own people would return too. But unfortunately, no one returned, except for my mother's sister with her husband and child."

"Then my parents had a second child, my sister. The grief began to fade. And then a third child came along, my brother. And then we truly became a family and I got over it. I can say that with the arrival of my little sister, I slowly got over myself and changed too. Today I tell this story over and over again. To you, to students in schools, where they call me. And all I hope is that such atrocities never happen again. Never again."

Benjamin Albalas

"The trauma is still great. We must not forget."

Mr. Benjamin Albalas, a child of the Holocaust. Today he is the general secretary of the Jewish Museum of Greece, and was also a former president of the Jewish Community.

Mr. Benjamin Albalas was born in Athens in 1937 in Ano Petralona. "Behind the church of the Three Hierarchs," he tells us one morning at his home in Maroussi. He treats us to contractors and chocolates in his living room, which is full of family photos.



"In 1943, when the persecution of the Jews of Thessaloniki began, my father, Iakovos, a small merchant, realized that something was wrong." They later learned that on March 15, 1943, the 39 trains left Thessaloniki bound for Auschwitz.

Mr. Benjamin's father immediately mobilized to help them hide. With the help of the family doctor, Panos Macheiras, who was a doctor for many Jewish families in the Petralona and Thissio areas, and also a member of EDES, they moved to Daphne. "With the help of the police and the Archdiocese of Athens, my parents changed their names. They got new IDs and the family was renamed the Orestis Donis family. I was Kostas Donis. My mother Stavroula Donou and my godmother, my grandmother became Maria Donou," he recalls with emotion.



Among the few documents that remain is the Greek identity of Mr. Albalas' grandmother

"In a horse-drawn cart, we loaded the necessary belongings and went to a house in Daphne," he tells "K." "Then the system, the network of our friend, Panos of Machairas, the doctor, had to be activated, so that they could take jewelry from my mother's mother, take it to Athena and sell it. And they brought food so that we could survive the 20 months that our isolation lasted. I didn't go out at all. My parents wouldn't let me go out to play with the children, because they were afraid that because of my age I would betray my real name," he continues.

They had to keep up appearances. His father pretended to be leaving for work every morning so as not to arouse the suspicion of the neighbors. "My grandmother, who was very old, also lived with us. My father and mother were worried that if my grandmother got sick and died, where would they bury her? Fortunately, thanks to the care of my mother and father, she made it."

On March 24, 1944, at the Synagogue in Thissio, the Jews of Athens were arrested. And then the Nazis went to the houses to arrest the rest.

The day that everyone was afraid of in the meantime came. The blockade in Athens took place on March 24, 1944, at the Jewish Synagogue in Thissio, a year after the persecution in Thessaloniki, "That's where the Jews of Athens were caught. And then the Nazis went to the houses to catch the rest. Those who had remained were arrested. The 800-900 Jews were initially taken to Haidari. And from Haidari they joined Jews from other communities, from Rhodes, from Kos, from Larissa, from Ioannina and they were sent to Auschwitz. Fortunately, we did not have major losses from my family, except for my mother's parents, who were sent to the death camp and then disappeared. We never saw them again," recounts Mr. Albalas.

"After the liberation, we returned to Petralona, and we found our old house. There we were informed that the Gestapo had come and were asking the neighbors over and over again if they knew where the family was. We hadn't told anyone where we were. Not even my mother's and father's brothers. For security reasons. The doctor who saved us remained a friend for life. He passed away about ten years ago. I went and saw him often. When I lost my own father, I felt like he was my father, as you can imagine," he says.

"I have been to Auschwitz many times. If one does not visit the camp, one cannot understand this feeling of being at the place where about a million Jews, homosexuals and communists lost their lives. In the well-known martyrdom way, with suffering, with pain and certainly with killing in the gas chambers. When you are in the crematoriums where the bodies were burned, then you feel it. The trauma is still great. We must not forget."

The Art of Remembering - a documentary film about the work of the Greek visual artist Artemis Alcalay and her thirty-year artistic career. An inquiry into trauma, memory, healing and reconciliation. Watch a trailer of the film online [Here](#)



The Greek Jews Who Boxed for Their Lives to Survive Nazi Camps [Full article Here](#)

Two Greek Jewish boxers from Thessaloniki, who survived Nazi concentration camps after being forced to beat other prisoners in the ring, are featured in the new podcast "[Holocaust Histories](#)."

The five episodes highlight different boxers from across Europe who were in the prime of their lives and careers in the 1930s and 1940s, but whose dreams were shattered by Hitler's army.

Episode Four focuses on Salamo Arouch and Jacko Razon, who were born and raised in Thessaloniki, which had the largest Jewish community in Greece. The two men, both Jewish, trained together at a boxing gym; Arouch eventually became a successful fighter while Razon turned his attention to soccer.



Greek Jewish Boxers Forced to Fight in Nazi Camps

As Hitler advanced through Europe, both men joined the Greek military, and were eventually captured. In the spring of 1941—one month apart—they were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the infamous concentration and death camps in German-occupied Poland.

There, and at other camps, they boxed other prisoners to stay alive, forced to do so by Nazi guards. Each won fight after fight, often against far larger men, knowing that one loss would likely mean death. Arouch was only 1.67 meters tall (5 feet 6 inches) and weighed just 61 kilograms (135 pounds), but in one fight, he knocked out another inmate who stood 1.98 meters—a foot taller.

"We fought until one went down or they got sick of watching," Arouch told *People* magazine in 1990, referring to Nazi guards who would place bets on the fights. "They wouldn't leave until they saw blood. The loser would be badly weakened. The Nazis shot the weak," he said.

Jonathan Bonder created the *Holocaust Histories* podcast and narrated the episodes. He called it "remarkable that between the two of them [Arouch and Razon], they won a combined 328 fights in concentration camps with their life on the line—never losing." Bonder, 36, answered questions from *Greek Reporter* in an email from his home in Toronto. Bonder said Arouch and Razon "shared many experiences and horrors during the Holocaust; however, in the end it tore them apart rather than [bringing] them together."



In 1989, more than forty years after they were liberated, Arouch's story was made into the Hollywood movie, *Triumph of the Spirit*. Willem Dafoe played Arouch, who consulted on the movie. Razon sued, claiming the story was his and had been stolen. He eventually settled out of court, but it severed any relationship they had, Bonder said. Razon died in 1997 at age 76 while Arouch died in 2009 at age 86.

Bonder said their extraordinary personal story drew him in, but so did "the rich Jewish history of their birthplace, Thessaloniki. I was unaware of the significant Jewish history of Greece, specifically Thessaloniki," he said.

Podcast Also Delves into Greece's Resistance to Nazis

The episode details the boxers' lives, but also examines the city's Jewish history. "I want to paint a picture from the start, during the 15th century up to the present day," Bonder wrote. "The Jewish community in Thessaloniki grew substantially until the great fire of 1917. The drastic drop in the Jewish population between those times is shocking, going from the most populous Jewish community in Greece to about 1,200 today. The great fire of 1917 was a significant historical event that was tragic for citizens of Thessaloniki, only to have tragedy strike again with the Holocaust soon following, and 96 [percent] of the Jewish community killed."

Thessaloniki had a population of more than 50,000 Jews before World War II — some 46,000 of whom were forced out and killed at Nazi death camps. Before the deportations, the Jewish community in the city—which

was mainly comprised of Sephardic Jews whose ancestors had been chased out of Spain in 1492—had flourished to the point where it had earned the nickname “The Jerusalem of the Balkans.”

Looking into the stories of Arouch and Razon also provided a window into Greece’s own fierce fight against the Nazis, Bonder said. “The Greek rebellion was strong and Germany was surprised by this,” he noted in his email. “This was especially the case on Crete. I was blown away by the stories of regular people taking up arms to fight the Nazi invaders. The personal accounts in the episode are incredible.”

Battle of Crete and Triumph of Hellenic Spirit

The Battle of Crete was the scene of one of the largest German airborne operations of World War II. In Greek history, it has come to symbolize the bravery and ultimate triumph of the Hellenic spirit.

The Cretans came out of their homes and challenged Hitler’s forces using whatever weaponry they had at their disposal. It was the first time the Germans had encountered significant opposition from a local population. Despite repeated attacks from the Nazis on local villages and communities, the Cretan Resistance remained active until the Germans surrendered in 1945.

Bonder added that “the people of Greece and Thessaloniki suffered horribly during World War II. When the Holocaust is mentioned, countries like Poland, France and the Netherlands come to mind...I want Greece to be thought of in the same manner,” he said. “In 1943 to 1944, there were 11,000 Greek prisoners in Birkenau concentration camp, which is a significant proportion; and by the end of the war, over 500,000 people died...We should never forget the stories of Thessaloniki, Salamo and Jacko.”

Regie Vardar A Jewish 'Garden City' in Thessaloniki (1917-1943) Full article by Gila Hadar [Here](#)

In this article we tried to understand how a poor Jewish working-class neighborhood became a microcosm organized around a sub-culture which provided a measure of inner unity. In addition, we will attempt to understand the influence of the urban-geographic setting on the social relations and activities of a neighborhood whose inhabitants were neglected both by the city and by the Jewish community.

Régie Vardar: A Jewish 'Garden City' in Thessaloniki (1917-1943).

An administrative and commercial center for centuries, Thessaloniki was one of the main places of settlement for the Sephardic Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century (1492-7). From the end of the 19th century until 1924, the Jews were the largest and most dominant ethnic group in the city. The overall significance of the town and its harbor shaped the character of the Jewish community, which was involved primarily in commercial activities, being itself highly stratified in different classes, professions and income groups. Culturally, however, the Jewish community developed its own distinct traditions in terms of family values, religion rituals, Language and literature (in Judeo-Spanish language called Ladino), and everyday life customs and habits.



With the incorporation of Thessaloniki into to the Greek national state after the Balkan wars (1912-3), the Jewish community was placed in an ambivalent position. Under the pressure of economic hardship combined with the assimilationist policies of the Greek nation-state but also under the influence of modern ideological movements (especially Zionism and Socialism), the Jews of Thessaloniki began to immigrate to Palestine, France and the Americas. The eventual place of settle for the immigrants was inevitably influenced not only by political contingency and personal preference but also by class, income and ideology. What in more, the rate of immigration out of Greece assumed greater proportions after the Lausanne Treaty and the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, which resulted in a great influx of ethnic Greeks from Anatolia and eastern Thrace into Greek Macedonia. The goal of this lecture is to understand how a poor Jewish working-class

neighborhood became a microcosmos organized around a sub-culture which provided a measure of inner unity. In addition, we will attempt to understand the influence of the urban-geographic setting on the social relations and activities of a neighborhood whose inhabitants were neglected both by the city and by the Jewish community.

Sources for this paper include the Sepharadic Jewish Press of the period (written in Ladino), the Jewish Community Archives, interviews, theatrical plays, and of course, all relevant secondary sources written in Hebrew, Ladino, French, Greek and English.

Read the full article by Gila Hadar [Here](#)

"We Lived as Greeks and We Died as Greeks": Thessalonican Jews in Auschwitz and the Meanings of Nationhood Full article by Paris Papamichos Chronakis [Here](#)

When recounting his days in Auschwitz, survivor Jack Azous, a Sephardi Jew from Thessaloniki, often had recourse to his national identity in order to talk about himself and his experiences. The adjective "Greek" abounded in his narrative. "All inmates were Greeks when I first came in. Then they mixed us up," he said at the beginning of his testimony. "I used to have a friend, another Greek guy who was a barber ... [And] the lageraltester was a Jew, a Greek also," he continued. Further on he mentioned: "I was singing in the nights for the Germans. We used to be three– four Jewish guys from Thessaloniki ... One used to play the guitar and we sang Greek and Italian songs."

Azous' testimony is not an exception. The word "Greek" is systematically used by all Jewish Holocaust survivors from Thessaloniki when they talk about their sufferings, whether in writing or when speaking, whether in Israel, France, and the United States, or in Thessaloniki itself. They employ the term in an obvious and unproblematic manner in a way that suggests that its meaning is evidently transparent. And yet, for the historian, the term is a stumbling block. The more one comes across it, the more one notices its elusive nature. There are Jews called "Grecos," there are "Greek guys from Thessaloniki," there are "courageous Greeks," as there are also "Greek songs" sung in both Ladino and Greek. There are even Jewish inmates masquerading themselves as "Greeks." Clearly, for the Thessalonican Jews the term "Greek" was of critical importance. It allowed them to speak about the unspeakable and to comprehend the incomprehensible. It gave meaning to the world around them and to their own vanishing selves. But what were the meanings of the word itself? What did it mean to be a "Greek" in Auschwitz? This question has attracted some scholarly attention in the past two decades.

The blossoming of testimonial discourse in Greece and the increasing visibility of the Holocaust of Greek Jewry in academia coalesced with a broader interest in Greece's ethnic minorities and a sustained inquiry on the processes of Modern Greek identity formation to turn the Greekness of the survivors into a topic of historical investigation. Approaches could not have been more diverse, however. In 1998, Panagis Panagiotopoulos argued that the "minimalist" references of Auschwitz survivors to Greece were a "stratagem of survival." That is, they were a means to overcome the racial logic of the perpetrator, a logic that legitimized their extermination by degrading them as "Jews." The national referent was therefore not a "self-conscious choice," but a response to an extreme situation. For this reason, it did not constitute a compact, coherent identity, let alone a positive affirmation of a national ideology. Rather, it only secured the survival of the deportee, both as a physical entity and as a bearer of memory.

Read the full article by Paris Papamichos Chronakis [Here](#)

Greece poised to replace Turkey as Israel's closest trade ally

Israeli delegation returns from Athens with plans to triple trade volume, marking Greece as a key economic ally amid fallout from Turkey-Israel tensions

Greece is on track to become Israel's primary trade partner, replacing Turkey within months, as Israel seeks to mitigate the economic fallout from a Turkish boycott on economic ties with the country. Israel's reciprocal boycott of Turkey has exacerbated disruptions across construction, industry, and commerce.



According to initial estimates, following a discreet visit of an economic delegation to Greece last week, trade between the two nations is expected to triple, surging from \$1.3 billion to approximately \$4 billion annually. This development would position Greece as one of Israel's largest import-export partners. In comparison, trade with Turkey has been valued at \$6 billion annually in recent years.

The Israeli delegation, which marked the first high-level economic mission since the outbreak of the war, returned from Athens on Thursday. Delegation members described their reception as "warm and enthusiastic," with Greek economic leaders eager to strengthen ties with Israel. While Greece has been cautious not to frame this expanded partnership as simply filling Turkey's void, officials expressed a strong interest in bolstering economic relations, particularly with Israel's thriving tech sector.

The visit was initiated by Israel's Foreign Ministry's Economic Division and led by Dr. Ron Tomer, president of the Manufacturers Association of Israel and head of the Business Sector.

During the visit, Israeli officials met with senior members of the Greek government and held discussions with prominent Greek trade and investment organizations such as the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Greece, a government agency promoting trade and investment.

Dr. Ron Tomer said the historical bond between the two nations. "Greece has been a steadfast friend of Israel since its establishment. Even amid the current conflict, Greece has consistently supported us. While many Israelis associate Greece with tourism, the country has much more to offer. Given its geographic proximity, Greece is a natural trade partner, and there's significant potential to expand cooperation across all industries, particularly in Israeli exports to Greece, which remain relatively modest."

Yael Ravia-Zadok, the ministry's deputy director general for economics, highlighted the strategic importance of economic ties, citing energy projects such as the undersea cable connecting the two countries' electricity grids. "The economic and trade partnership between Israel and Greece is a cornerstone of our strategic alliance, contributing to regional stability and economic development through collaborations in energy, tourism, and technology," she said.

Trade between Israel and Greece had already risen by 41.3% from 2023 to 2024, growing from \$920 million to \$1.3 billion. In 2024, Israeli exports to Greece totaled \$353.4 million, with chemicals (41%), basic metals (25%), plastic products (10%), and electrical machinery (8%) leading the way. Greek imports to Israel reached \$902.8 million, dominated by basic metals (42.2%), electrical machinery (15.7%), chemicals (6.8%), and products in plastics, textiles, and wood.

With trade expansion accelerating, Greece is poised to play a pivotal role in Israel's economic landscape, fostering deeper ties and mutual growth.

Europe must combat antisemitism as thousands of Jews abandon the continent, top Jewish leader says [Full article Here](#)



Governments across Europe need to immediately take action against a precipitous rise in antisemitism that's driving thousands of Jews to abandon the continent, the leader of a prominent European Jewish organization said Monday.

Rabbi Menachem Margolin, chairman of the European Jewish Association (EJA), said some 40,000 Jews have already left Europe in recent years with no intention of returning as a result of a rise in antisemitic sentiment.

Instead of a wave of solidarity with Israel following the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack that triggered a war now in its 15th month, Margolin said antisemitism has skyrocketed by 2,000%, according to statistics he says have been collated by organizations that monitor antisemitism.

Margolin said 2025 will be a "critical year" for European Jews because the course of action that governments will take to combat antisemitism will determine the future of Jewish communities on the continent.

"There's still a chance that Jewish people will be living in Europe," Margolin told The Associated Press in an interview ahead of a gala dinner honoring former Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades for his efforts to foster closer Cyprus-Israel relations during his tenure.

"But if the governments of Europe will not take serious measures that we are demanding from them in this year this is the beginning of the end of Jewish presence in Europe," he said.

His said the EJA, the largest Jewish organization in Europe representing several hundred Jewish communities, brought together Jewish leaders from across the continent for a summit on tackling rising antisemitism.

He said European governments need to move beyond mere verbal condemnations of antisemitic behavior and take effective action to ensure the safety and security of Jewish institutions and Jews practicing their customs in Europe.

Authorities also need to establish a "code of conduct" by which demonstrations against Israel don't devolve into antisemitic protests, Margolin said. These immediate steps should be accompanied by "strong and swift" punishment of individuals found guilty of antisemitic actions.

Over the long term, Europe needs prosecutors who have a clear understanding of the many forms antisemitism can take, as well as programs introduced in schools to educate people against antisemitic attitudes. "But more important is the willingness of the government to combat antisemitism," said Margolin.

The EJA chairman said antisemitism is "coming from all sides of the political spectrum" as Russia's war in Ukraine fuels concern and uncertainty within Europe that's compounded by "demographic change."

Margolin attributed political shortsightedness to European elected officials who "pretend to think that everything is just alright" and "do not understand the emergency of combating antisemitism." He said his organization chose to hold the summit in Cyprus because Jewish people on the eastern Mediterranean island nation feel "very, very welcome" and secure while the government has close relations with the state of Israel.

According to Margolin, opposition to the Jewish state is the prime reason for antisemitism in Europe. "The moment the government is friendly towards Israel and understands and defends Israel's right to defend itself, it reduces a lot of tension against Jewish people," Margolin said.

Biography of A Lost World – “A Sephardi Turkish Patriot” by Anthony Gad Bigio

Full article from Centro Primo Levi [Here](#)

Several books published in the last years explore the experience of Middle Eastern and North African Jews in the late or post-Ottoman period. I am thinking in particular of academic or literary works dedicated to the life and migration of families or of an entire Jewish community in the first half of the twentieth century. Such is the case of Sarah Abrevaya Stein's *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century* (2019), Michael Frank's *One Hundred Saturdays: Stella Levi and the Search for a Lost World* (2022) or *La casa sul Nilo* ("The house on the Nile," 2022) by the Italian journalist Denise Pardo. Despite their differences, these books – that take readers to places as different as Salonika, Rhodes and Cairo – share the focus on the microscopic history of individuals, their assumptions on the present and expectations about the future. They regard history as connected to the narrator, rather than a distant episode that exists primarily as an object of research.

In a poignant pamphlet entitled *Singular Pasts: The "I" in Historiography* (2022) – historian Enzo Traverso explained how the recent proliferation of historical books written in the first person might be due to the process of depoliticization that followed the end of great ideologies and to “[a] reification of the past,” seen as a patrimony ready to become more than anything else, a commodity. Even though one can agree with Traverso, in the case of Sephardi and Mizrahi history the combination of history and fiction, of academic rigor and (autobiographical) literary flavor appears to be a productive way to illuminate a past that has remained at the margins of Jewish historiography. At the same time, a balance needs to be found between the collective and singular dimension, so as to interpret an individual life not as a history in itself but as the microcosm “of an entire social stratum in a specific historical period”.



The recent book *A Sephardi Turkish Patriot: Gad Franco in the Turmoil of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* by Anthony Gad Bigio is an example of effective balance between historical research and family memoir, or between the collective and singular dimension. The book tells the story of the Jews of the late Ottoman Empire and of early Republican Turkey through the life of Bigio's maternal grandfather – the prominent journalist and jurist Gad Franco (1881-1954). *A Sephardi Turkish Patriot* combines academic references, family papers, photographs and personal recollections. The narrative follows Franco during his youth in *fin-de-siècle* Izmir, and then in his career as a jurist, lawyer and journalist in early Republican Istanbul, up to his downfall during the Second World War and the Turkification measures taken by the government against all minorities. Thus, the account offers a glimpse onto his life, showing its extraordinary and ordinary aspects: from the great achievements in the fields of law and journalism to the socio-political and familial dimension.



Franco was a committed Kemalist who believed in the modernizing project of Atatürk and, on the other hand, maintained a strong opposition to Zionism, viewing it as a threat to Jewish assimilation in Turkey and elsewhere. His biography, though at times peculiar, in many ways exemplifies the post-Ottoman Jewish bourgeoisie of the Eastern Mediterranean: think of the strong cultural and linguistic connection to France, or the secularized yet still profoundly Jewish identity that Franco maintained throughout his life.³

Moreover, his intellectual itinerary can be viewed in parallel with that of other Jews – for example the Jaffa-born pro-Zionist journalist Shimon Moyal (1866-1915) – who believed in a harmonious coexistence between Jews and Muslims in the post-Ottoman Middle East.⁴ This belief began to fade in the 1930s and 1940s, when more radical forms of Turkish and Arab nationalism led to the estrangement of Jews and other minorities who, in the wake of decolonization, were nearly equaled to European settlers.

In the vein of other historical, literary and cinematic works – from Andre Aciman’s memoir *Out of Egypt* (1994) to the documentary *Forget Baghdad* (2002) – *A Sephardi Turkish Patriot* might appear as a chronicle of an incommensurable yet inevitable loss. However, from the perspective of his protagonist, a Jew and a committed Kemalist was nothing extraordinary. It was the almost natural outcome of a long process of integration in the Ottoman Empire and participation in the reformist and modernizing agendas that characterized the passage from Empire to Republic. Nonetheless, by the mid-twentieth century and “despite all the attachment to their country that my Turkish family and the Jewish community in general had held over the centuries” —Anthony Bigio writes at a distance of several decades since the death of his grandfather—“their collective and individual belonging had been denied, triggering punishment, exile, broken identities, and a nostalgia I was only beginning to fathom”.



Exile, broken identities, nostalgia: is this the inheritance that Franco left to his descendants? Is the history of the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa forcibly characterized by the melancholic longing for a world that went by? Books such as that of Bigio testify that the legacy of what is perceived as a lost world has not vanished entirely: the memories of it – or the memories of its absence – remain and pass from one generation to the other, even beyond the Jewish world. Think for example of how the voices of the *mellah*, the traditional Moroccan Jewish quarter, in the city of Meknès studied by Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Hanane Sekkat Hatimi – are still echoed today among neighbors, friends or fellow worker of the Jews who once lived there. The feelings of loss and nostalgia help explain the outpour of so many memoirs, novels, autobiographies and to an extent academic books written in a more personal style about the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa. In fact, these more personal historical narratives give the impression that what the anthropologist Michèle Baussant called “silenced memories” can finally, albeit partially, be heard.



In addition to the more personal and familial aspects, *A Sephardi Turkish Patriot* sheds light on how a Sephardi intellectual from early Twentieth century Istanbul situated himself in relation to his own ethno-religious group and to the social class to which he belonged. It is, in other words, the biography of an individual, of his world and of a family that lived through the turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, by the time Gad Franco died in 1954 in Istanbul, most of his family had already left Turkey and was scattered between Israel, Italy and the US. Furthermore, the birth of the State of Israel, the

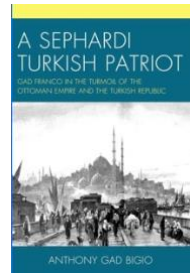
Holocaust, and the changes in the attitude of Turkey vis-à-vis the Jews had led him to reconsider his sharp critique of Zionism: “I find myself in the position of someone who can only accept the defeat of his ideas” – Franco wrote in an essay published in December 1950 in the magazine *L’Étoile du Levant*. The 1942 Wealth Tax Law that targeted fixed assets and enterprises – and, up until its repeal in 1944, resulted in a discriminatory measure against non-Muslim Turks – together with the period spent in an Anatolian labor camp, had led to his economic and then social downfall. For this reason, “past loyalties,” such as that Franco had nurtured for the Empire and early Republican Turkey, “no longer made sense within the framework of the new national borders that appeared”. Looking back at his life and career, he was forced to admit that his ideals had been defeated by the sirens of nationalism and pervasive anti-Jewish prejudices.

The life of Franco is in many ways emblematic of the changes and upheavals that the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa encountered in the first half of the twentieth century. Its historical reconstruction is a testament to his legacy and to a vanished epoch: “before the horrors and broken hearts, there had been a time of hope, of emancipation”. But reading the more personal and autobiographical parts of Bigio’s book, for example the introduction where he explains why he chose to write about his grandfather, one wonders to what extent this *before* still impacts on our present and even more so if it is the present – the complex and often disheartening early twenty-first century we live in – that makes us look back at the past with a hint of nostalgia. Surely, Franco’s final years demonstrate that the past can be a tragic and sad memory too, characterized by loss and dispossession. It is undeniable that for the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa, before the 1940s and the great migratory waves of the 1950s and 1960s, “there had been a time of hope” –

as Bigio argues. This is a feeling that persists until today, leaving one to ask if there might have been a different future and another Middle East. And even though this is a possibility historians cannot discuss or write about since it never happened – it is enough to trigger a certain curiosity for this past and for ancestors we never met.

Finally, if it is true that loss is something inherent to human history, some spaces and times appear more distant than others. This is certainly true for the early twentieth century Middle East and North Africa, for late Ottoman Salonika and interwar Alexandria, but also for *fin-de-siècle* Odessa or 1920s Berlin. Deportations, forced migrations, exile and the making of new national entities made these places like “cit[ies] of ghosts,” populated by memories that struggle to find a place in today’s world. *A Sephardi Turkish Patriot* is an attempt at recovering these memories against the background of crucial moments in the history of Turkey – such as the early Republican years and the consolidation of Atatürk’s regime – and of the post-Ottoman Mediterranean at large. It is a difficult challenge that, however, those interested in the history of the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa should not dismiss. Only through a dialogue between historians and other scholars, curators, memory entrepreneurs and the Middle Eastern and North African Jewish diasporas themselves, it will be possible to construct a nuanced and balanced historical narrative, without neither idealizing or denying a past that could perhaps help us imagining a better future

Note: KKJ is proud to sell this book “A Sephardi Turkish Patriot: Gad Franco in the Turmoil of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic” for \$25 plus \$7 shipping. Email info@kkjism.org to order a copy.



Upcoming Events of Interest

“Archiving and Translating Ottoman Historic Records at Mount Athos , the Holy Mountain” Webinar Panel Discussion

With the blessing and under the auspices of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, join the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Academia Symposium Committee who will present a webinar panel discussion: “Archiving and Translating Ottoman Historic Records at Mount Athos , the Holy Mountain” which EMBCA is hosting on Sunday, February 2, 2025 at 2 P.M. EST. Lou Katsos a member of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Academia Symposium Committee and EMBCA’s President will be moderating this discussion. This unique discussion will be with among the foremost authorities on the subject and who have started to archive, translate, research and analyze the very valuable historic Ottoman documents at Mount Athos. The distinguished panel will include:

Prof. Dr. Johannes Niehoff - Panagiotidis of the Freie Universitat Berlin

Anastasios Nikopoulos - Lawyer and Law Historian

Richard Wittman,PHD - Associate Director of the Orient-Institut Istanbul

Jamshid Tirani, PHD graduate student in translation studies at Freie Univeritat Berlin

Fr. Kosmas Petris (Simonopetris), PHD

Dr. Venessa R. de Obaldia, with Maciej Pawlinowski Head of CHIL at Cambridge University Library.



The Ottoman records on Mount Athos provide a valuable historical perspective on the interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the monastic community on this holy mountain. Mount Athos, a very significant center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, became part of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. Despite the empire’s Islamic foundation, Ottoman sultans granted privileges to the monastic community, allowing the monks to

preserve their religious practices and self-governing status. The Ottoman records, primarily tax registers, property deeds, and legal documents, reveal the empire's complex approach to governing non-Muslim subjects. These documents illustrate the fiscal arrangements that enabled monasteries to pay taxes in exchange for protection and autonomy, preserving their lands and spiritual traditions. The records also shed light on issues such as land disputes, economic contributions of the monasteries, and interactions with local Ottoman officials.

Watch the event online here: https://www.youtube.com/live/A4R7vQq_bQk

Queens College Judaic Studies is proud to present the following programs, all available on Zoom:

Spring 2025 Programs

Our first two programs are coming up on 1/27 and 2/18 and I hope to see some of you at the Center. Over half of the programs this semester are also taking place both in person and online and you can find all the information, including registration links here: <https://khc.qcc.cuny.edu/events/>.



Holocaust Memory / International Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration – In Person & Virtual
Communicating the Past: Exhibiting the Holocaust in Memorial Museums
Monday, January 27, 2025, at 6:00pm EST

To attend on Zoom: <https://tinyurl.com/mr49ark5>

To attend in person: <https://khc-jan2025-ihr.eventbrite.com>

January 27, 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. With so few survivors and eyewitnesses left to share their stories of survival and resilience, Holocaust memorial museums will become even more critical educational spaces. In commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, join Dr. Amy Sodaro, author of *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (2018), for a discussion about the evolving ways in which the Holocaust is represented in museums and the challenges ahead in communicating this history to new generations.

Special Partner Program – Virtual only

Allyship and Religious Freedom: Jews, Muslims, and Others

Friday, January 31, 2025, at 3:00pm EST

Click here to register: <https://foundation.wvu.edu/event/allyship-and-religious-freedom>

Democracy is a system of governance that upholds the principles of equality, participation, and individual rights. A fundamental aspect of democratic societies is the freedom of religion, which allows individuals to practice, change, or abstain from religious beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination. This freedom fosters a pluralistic environment where diverse faiths coexist, encouraging dialogue and mutual respect among different communities. By protecting faith communities and showing allyship we can continue to practice our democracy through Jewish-Muslim cooperation and building community. Join Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, Professor of Religion and Philosophy and Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center at Manhattan University, as she discusses her work and how civic discourse and engagement through acknowledging one another's status as minority religious groups is possible.

This lecture launches the Ray Wolpov Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity at Western Washington University's new online webinar series in memory of local educator and Holocaust survivor Noémi Ban. It is co-sponsored by the Kupferberg Holocaust Center; Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Purdue University Fort Wayne; and the Sam and Frances Fried Holocaust and Genocide Academy at Fried Academy.

Spanish Audio Tour, Torah Restoration & the Classroom

1. In the next few weeks, we'll be debuting the Spanish audio tour for our Nazi concentration camps exhibition
 2. Restoration of the KHC's signature artifact, the Torah, is now underway. We met with the person who donated it to the KHC and can confirm we only have a small portion of a Torah scroll--it is not a complete Torah, nor can it be used for religious purposes. We also discovered that the donor added the pegs which he purchased in the US. The artifact is now in the KHC's workroom where we'll be examining its condition before it is remounted in a brand-new wheeled display case. The restoration team includes two specialists from the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim, along with two QCC professors and myself. The upper part of the display case, the plastic shell (vitrine), will take several months to arrive. The target completion date is May 1st, followed by a community event where we'll discuss how the artifact came to the KHC, and the process involved with its remounting. In the meantime, the silver beams that used to hold it in place in the Glass Box have been removed, which gives us much more flexibility as we look to begin refreshing the primary exhibition.
 3. The first part of the classroom project is nearly complete: the installation of seven of eight total tv monitors that showcase the existing artwork digitally. This semester, I'm working with a genocide studies expert to correct the historical inaccuracies on the existing boards, while adding another seven case studies (bringing the total to 14 examples). Target completion date is June 1 given the amount of research and image clearance involved, plus the design of the boards. This setup gives us (and the College) more flexibility into how the room is used, as well as the option to more easily showcase new content. (See attached photos)
-

Past Event in Washington DC for Holocaust Remembrance

Ninetta Matsas Feldman presents the History of the Greek Jews and her personal experience hiding in the mountains at SHIN DC - YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/live/bRwMbyqMtvM?si=OQ4yixDGkgWaCOvX>

We are looking forward to the publication of Ninetta's book telling the story of hiding in the mountains at the age of five.

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



This year, Tu B'Shvat - the New Year for Trees - falls on February 13th. In the Mishnah and Talmud, Tu B'Shvat, which means the 15th of the month of Shvat, was simply the date chosen as the "new year" for fruit trees in determining the annual cycle of tithes, and to which year newly budding fruit belongs in the 7-year "*Shmitah*" [Sabbatical year] cycle. The 15th of the month was chosen since by then, the wintry rains have mostly ended, ushering in the season when the earliest blossoming trees emerge from winter and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle. But beyond this very legalistic status, there is no record in the Talmud or early Halachic literature of any kind of celebration of Tu B'Shvat as a holiday.

This changed with the Tzfat Kabbalists of the 16th and 17th centuries, who celebrated a "Seder Tu B'Shvat", based on the Pesah Seder, including consumption of four cups of wine and the special fruits and grains of the Land of Israel, as well as the recitation of a Tu B'Shvat 'Haggadah' containing many mystical ideas revolving around these fruits and grains, and celebrating the intrinsic connection between man, God, and nature. This seder became especially prominent in the Land of Israel, but also spread to other communities around the world, and is still held today in synagogues, homes, Jewish schools and other institutions. Unique and local aspects of nature, ecology, agricultural renewal and revival have been added by almost every community, which only adds to the beauty and significance of the day. Yet along with the growing popularity of the Seder Tu B'Shvat, much less is known about its origins and mystical foundations.

As mentioned, the generally accepted position is that the Seder Tu B'Shvat was suggested and instituted by the Tzfat Kabbalists, led by the "Ari", z"l (Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, 1534-1572). Though there is no clear mention by the Ari z"l of instituting the seder, the "*Kitvei haAri*" [the writings of the Ari, z"l] were recorded by his main disciple, Rabbi Haim Vital (1543-1620), with significant emendations by others, including Haim Vital's son, Rabbi Shmuel Vital (1598-1677). It is therefore quite reasonable to assume that the Seder Tu B'Shvat originated with the Ari z"l and his disciples.

Another opinion, however, places the origin of the Seder Tu B'Shvat in a somewhat controversial book called "*Hemdut Yamim*", first published in 1731 in Turkey, and long after the Ari z"l's demise. There are references to the Ari z"l in this work, but the author remained anonymous and some of its teachings were questionable in the eyes of certain Sages. Adding to these suspicions was the fact that it was published only 55 years after the death of the false messiah Shabtai Zvi (1626-1676). This led to certain authorities to ban the book based on the claim that the book contained there were suspicious and hidden references to Shabtai Zvi, meaning, in their view, that the work was authored by either Shabtai Zvi himself, or by his main supporter and enabler, Nathan of Gaza (1643-1680). However, beyond these suspicions, there was little hard evidence to back up this claim, and ultimately the work was accepted and considered legitimate by most rabbinical authorities.

But the earliest written mention of the Seder Tu B'Shvat actually comes from a book first published three years before *Hemdut Yamim*, in 1728, called "*Birkat Eliyahu*" by a Rabbi Eliyahu of Ulyanov [apparently in Russia]. Rabbi Eliyahu cites his contemporary, a Rabbi Moshe Hagiz of Jerusalem (c. 1671-1750), regarding a Tu B'Shvat seder. Rabbi Eliyahu quotes Rabbi Hagiz as clearly stating that he himself instituted this custom, based on the words of his teachers, both his father, Rabbi Yakov Hagiz of Morocco (1620-1674), and his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Moshe "Magen" Galante (1621-1689), whose own grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Galante of Tzfat (d. 1608) was a disciple of the Ari, z"l. As Rabbi Hagiz writes: "...as it is written, "man is a tree of the

field" [Deuteronomy 20:19], and so I established a custom, based on what I have seen from my rabbi and my teacher [Rabbi Moshe Galante] who, on Tu B'Shvat, would customarily recite many blessings on fruits and pray to Hashem to renew for us a good year."

After Rabbi Hagiz's basic establishment of a seder for Tu B'Shvat, other Kabbalistic elements were added by the work *Hemdat Yamim*, including the consumption of four cups of wine. Subsequently, in Venice in 1728, excerpts taken from the work *Hemdat Yamim* were collected and published as a separate pamphlet called "*Pri Etz Hadar*"; which became the Tu B'Shvat "Haggadah" that is still used today.

And while the Seder Tu B'Shvat may be an ancient Kabbalistic tradition, this year it will be more relevant and significant than ever. Among so many other tasks and needs, as Israel begins to recover from the horrible scars of war, there will be massive replanting and replenishing of orchards, vineyards, forests, vineyards and fields that were totally decimated or severely damaged. This renewal and revival is the very essence of Tu B'Shvat, and may it indeed be a symbol and usher in a new, prosperous and peaceful New Year for the Land of Israel and the entire Jewish world!



Rabbi Marc D. Angel
Freedom to Complain: Thoughts on Parashat Beshallah
JewishIdeas.org

When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and saw the destruction of their Egyptian enemy, they were elated. The Torah tells us that they revered the Lord and had faith in Him and in Moses His servant. They sang a magnificent song praising God for granting them a miraculous redemption.

After having described this stunning spiritual high, we would expect the Torah to then relate wonderful things about the newly liberated Israelites. Yet the passages immediately following the Song of Moses are filled with one grievance after another: the Israelites complain that the water is bitter, that they want meat, that they would rather have died in Egypt than be in the wilderness. When they complained that there was no water to drink, Moses was driven to despair. He called out to God: "What shall I do for this people; they are almost ready to stone me!"

What happened to their faith in the Lord and in Moses His servant? How could the people have fallen so low in such a short time? Why were they constantly complaining?

I think we should understand these passages as an important POSITIVE stage in the development of the children of Israel. When they were slaves in Egypt, they could not complain! And if they did complain, they had no expectation that Pharaoh would listen to them. In servitude, the Israelites had to eat and drink whatever was given to them, like it or not. If they were unhappy with the menu, that was too bad for them. There was no recourse to governmental authorities for an improvement in the situation. On the contrary, Pharaoh was an arbitrary despot who had total power over them--he could order the murder of their children, he could force them to make bricks even without his providing the necessary ingredients for brick-making. He was ruthless and unapproachable.

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, something important happened. For the first time, they felt they could complain! They felt that they had rights. They felt that their leader was obligated to respond to them and satisfy their needs. Slaves could not do this! Moses learned that leadership over free people was not dictatorship; he was answerable to the public.

If the Torah describes the constant complaining of the Israelites and the bitter frustrations of Moses, it is describing a new phase in the history of Israel--the first stages of freedom. Instead of viewing these passages as demonstrating Israel's lack of faith, we ought to see in these passages the emerging sense of self-respect and independence of the former slaves.

A vibrant and free society is characterized by rights and responsibilities, by complaints and compliance, by responsive leadership. Upon attaining freedom, the Israelites complained and demanded that their leader deliver on his campaign promises. The former slaves learned quickly to appreciate their freedom, to demand their rights, to assert their grievances, and to expect their leader to respond effectively.

As people develop a more sophisticated understanding of freedom, they move beyond complaining and demanding. They start to realize that they themselves must assume responsibility to make things better. They come to see that "leaders" and "constituents" have mutual responsibilities, and that each person needs to do his/her share. True freedom must entail a sense of empowerment, prodding each person to exert him/herself to resolve the problems of self, family, community, and society as a whole.

If things aren't right...complain! And if you can do something to improve the situation...stop complaining and do something!

Hellenic Studies Program: Postdoctoral Associate Opportunity, Yale, 2025-2026

On behalf of the Hellenic Studies Program at Yale, I am pleased to share information about a newly posted Hellenic Studies Postdoctoral position focusing on topics related to Modern Greece and Modern Greek Studies. You can find the link and description for further details [here](#).

I would greatly appreciate it if you could share this opportunity within your networks and encourage any promising candidates to apply.

Best regards,
Maria Kaliambou
Senior Lecturer II, Director of Undergraduate Studies
Hellenic Studies Program, MacMillan Center, Yale University
Phone: 203-436-4194

Where Are the Sepharadi Yeshivot? Full article by Avi Garson [Here](#)

A quick glance across the Jewish educational landscape reveals a startling reality: the absence of traditional Sepharadi yeshivot across America, Europe and Israel. Jewish schooling, higher education and rabbinic training for Sepharadim have almost been entirely outsourced to institutions which offer a distinctly Ashkenazi approach to Torah study, halakha and, often, life.

The Sepharadi Yeshiva—one in which Sepharadi halakha, pronunciation, and culture is the norm, one in which Sepharadi *Hakhamim*(1) are studied, one in which Bible literacy and Hebrew grammar is prioritised, and one in which Torah is harmoniously integrated with worldly wisdom—does not exist. The idea today is a mere relic of the past and figment of the imagination.

We have a choice though: to lament and indulge in nostalgia, or to channel our admiration of this illustrious heritage into concrete efforts to build, restore, and renew. To understand what we are missing—and why its absence matters—we must first reflect on the legacy of the Sepharadi Yeshiva. From the flourishing academies of Spain to the vibrant Yeshivot and Rabbinic schools of the Middle East, North Africa, Western Europe and across the Ottoman Empire. Obviously, there is no one 'Sepharadi' Yeshiva; there were many, each with its own unique focus and flavor. However, today—at least to my knowledge—there are no institutions that can truly call themselves such, aware of its own unique identity and history, embodying the ethos and core ideals of a classical Sepharadi yeshiva.* That void should deeply trouble the Sepharadi community.

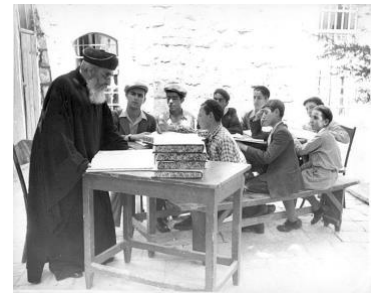
The Sepharadi Yeshiva: Wisdom Woven Into Torah

In Babylonia, the great *metivot* of Sura and Pumbedita safeguarded the Oral Law and produced a long line of Geonim. In *Mikhmanei Uziel*, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel—the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel—writes that it is “without a doubt that these great Hakhamim, studied all the innovations of the wise sages and philosophers of the nations... separating the kernels from the chaff.” He further states, “The Yeshiva is dedicated to Torat Yisrael, but Torat Yisrael is not just a book of statutes, laws, commandments, and testimony. It is a *cluster of henna flowers*,(2) in which everything is contained. It is impossible to understand it, let alone plumb its depths, without a wide and comprehensive knowledge of the wisdoms of the world and the sciences that are hidden and concealed within creation and its mysteries.”(3)

This legacy and tradition moved westwards through Kairouan in Tunisia, then towards Al-Andalus, where Lucena, “the Jerusalem of Andalusia” became one of the most important centers of Jewish scholarship in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Yeshiva of Lucena was led by luminaries such as Isaac Ibn Gayyat who is described as “one of the most distinguished of the Hebrew poets in Spain—a philosopher, physiologist, cosmographer, and astronomer”. Ibn Gayyat was “well versed in Greek wisdom” and “devoted himself to, and excelled in, three spheres of studies, Liturgical Poetry, Philosophy, and Talmud.”(4) Talmudists like Isaac Alfasi and Joseph Ibn Migash introduced a systematic approach to Halakha that became the model for Sephardic legal scholarship. It was from this milieu that the great Maimonides emerged. Studying at the feet of these giants, mastering Miqra, grammar, and Talmud, we see he was also immersed in the works of Aristotle, and his Muslim interpreters. By his teenage years, he had completed a purely philosophical work on logic, *Maqala Fi-Sinat Al-Mantiq*.

This rich intellectual environment and rounded education, which seamlessly blended Torah study with philosophy, science, and broader wisdom, exemplifies the archetypal Sepharadi Yeshiva—a place of learning that embraces both the Word and World of God, in the pursuit of wisdom, truth and the knowledge of God.

In Exile: The Survival and Disappearance of the Sepharadi Yeshiva



Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, learning with young students in Jerusalem

The expulsion from Spain and subsequent dispersion, devastated Sephardic communities and uprooted the bastions of learning in Spain but the tradition survived. Manifesting differently in each locale, this legacy continued to live on across North Africa, the Middle East, Italy, Ottoman Empire, and Western Europe. Salonica, famously became a thriving hub of Sephardic life, and we know its Yeshivot attracted scholars from across the Jewish world.(5) R' Samuel Isaac Modiliano referred to Salonica as a "legendary city among Israel, praised since ancient times; a prominent city of world-class scholars from which halakhic guidance radiated to all the provinces of the world". (6)

We have records of Ashkenazi rabbis visiting the Amsterdam yeshiva in the 1600s. Passing through, R. Shebatai Horowitz lamented, "I wept over this, wondering why we cannot do the same in our own lands." A certain R. Pohovitzer from Pinsk witnessed in the Sepharadi community in Hamburg remarking, "Even the least among the Sephardim are experts in the Bible." (7) Unfortunately, such institutions are no longer —חבל על דאבדין—*Alas for what we have lost.*

A couple of years ago I was in Rhodes and I of course visited its Jewish Museum, housed in the Kahal Shalom Synagogue. There I noticed remnants of the short-lived Yeshiva of Rhodes. (8) This institution built in 1928 aimed to train Rabbis to serve the Sephardic diasporas. I was struck by the diversity of books lined up on its shelves. Designed to train rabbis, teachers, hazzanim, and *shohetim*, the Seminary offered a broad curriculum that integrated traditional Jewish studies, such as Hebrew language and literature, halakha, biblical exegesis, and religious philosophy, with modern secular subjects like mathematics, sciences, history, and multiple European and regional languages.



Students and teachers of the Rabbinical College of Rhodes circa 1930

Unfortunately, Sepharadi institutions of higher education suffered a serious decline by the early 20th century - or sooner, for a whole host of reasons. Another Sephardic Chief Rabbi Hakham Yaakov Meir, lamented the state of the Rabbinate, arguing that Torah scholars must also be people of science, capable of bridging worlds. He stated:

"We must not separate ourselves from anything; rather, we must absorb everything and make it part of who we are. If our God-fearing sages were more roundly educated, we could produce a generation that bridges the worlds of Torah and wisdom." (9)

Today, this model is absent. What exists are yeshivot which are 'Sepharadi' in name alone but not in substance or in thought. In *The Other Jews*, Prof. Daniel J. Elazar lamented that Sepharadi yeshivot have been replaced by imitations of Ashkenazi institutions, which focus narrowly on Talmud study at the expense of Tanakh or broader intellectual engagement.

"In the Israeli religious sphere, there are now dozens of small Sephardic yeshivot but no great metivta (institute of higher Torah learning) in which the Sephardic way of Torah is expressed. Instead, each of these small yeshivot imitates one or another Ashkenazi model in ways that inevitably cause them to be inferior to the Ashkenazi yeshivot. Efforts to establish an institution of higher torah learning that would reflect the broad Sephardic approach, combining the study of halakha and classical texts with Jewish history and thought, rhetoric, and languages, have failed for lack of proper support - moral support from Sephardic chief rabbis, monetary support from the Sephardic rich, or intellectual support from sephardic academic world". (10)

This was written in 1989, it would hold true today. This article, however, is not a lamentation, but a call to action.

Reclaiming the Sepharadi Yeshiva

It is time to correct course. We need institutions that are deeply rooted in Miqra, Sepharadi halakha (*lema'ase*) and the customs, melodies, and rich cultural heritage of the Sephardic tradition. At the same time, these

institutions should integrate Judaic studies and worldly wisdom, producing leaders who are not only steeped in rabbinics but who can also serve as eloquent ambassadors of Judaism to the wider community.

In an era that demands sophistication and nuance, we need leaders of whom the nations—and perhaps more importantly, Jews themselves—can say: *עַם־חָכָם וְנָבוֹן הַגִּי' הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה* "a wise and discerning this great nation is". (11)

We deserve rabbinic leaders who inspire us with their Torah, and who can stand as dignified, articulate representatives of our tradition and people. Without institutions we cannot expect to produce such individuals. We must create spaces that reflect the depth, wisdom, and beauty of the Sepharadi tradition—places the best and brightest will be proud to attend.

As Theodor Herzl famously wrote, "If you will it, it is no dream." We must first recognize what we are missing first. Once we will it—then God-willing—this dream can turn into a reality.

Let us reclaim the legacy. Let us reignite this old flame. Let us rebuild—for the sake of the Sephardic tradition we love, for Israel, and for a brighter Jewish future. (12)

Endnotes

(1) In particular the great Sepharadi Rabbis who lived in the four centuries between the two great Marans: Yosef Qaro and Ovadia Yosef.

(2) Reference to Shir Hashirim 1:14

(3) Mikhmanei Uziel, 405-406

(4) Rev. Dr. Chaim Zwi Taubes, Ph.D., Lekutay R. Isaac Ben Judah Ibn Gayyat to Tractate Berachoth

(5) Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi, one of the foremost Ashkenazi sages of his era, studied in Salonica where he became well-versed in the Sephardic approach. According to his son, the famed Rabbi Yaacov Emden, Hakham Zevi learnt Judeo-Spanish. This broad Sephardic training may have contributed to Hakham Zevi's ability to serve as a fair arbitrator when Hakham David Nieto faced accusations of Spinozism in London. See She'elot Teshuvot Hakham Zevi #18

(6) Ne'eman Shemuel, no.31

(7) Yosie Levine, Hakham Zevi and the Battlegrounds of the Early Modern Rabbinate Littman Library, 2024 p.151

(8) As Aron Rodrigue highlights in *The Rabbinical Seminary in Italian Rhodes, 1928–38* (Jewish Social Studies, Fall 2019), the seminary relied on funding and scholarships from the Italian Government and the Jewish community. Its closure in 1938 was ultimately due to insufficient investment and financial instability.

(9) Lucien Gubbay, *Memorable Sephardi Voices* (Montefiore Endowment, 2020)

(10) Daniel J. Elazar, *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1989). p201

(11) Devarim 4:6

(12) Micah Goodman, *The Wandering Jew* (Yale University Press, 2020), discusses how Sephardic traditionalism and can help bridge the divide between secularists and isolationists and help mend Israel's fractured society and address many of the difficult halakhic dilemmas of the day.

*There are some Sephardic Rabbinical colleges such as the Montefiore College which reopened in 2005 and the Syrian community's Sephardic Rabbinical College based in Brooklyn that try to embody these ideals and play an important role, but these are semikha graduate schools not Yeshivot in the traditional sense. Yeshivat Moreshet Yerushalayim may be one exception, although it describes itself as a post-high school one year gap year program for young Syrians.

My Poppi and Chickpea Soup Full article by Susan Barocas [Here](#)

Sunday was my father's day to get into the kitchen and relax by cooking wonderful dishes, including Sephardic favorites from his family like chickpea soup. Poppi started the soup by browning a good-sized beef bone with lots of diced onions also in the pot. Once all the sides of the bone were browned and the onions were almost soft, he would add some minced garlic, let it cook a couple minutes more and then add water to cover the bone by a few inches. After bringing it all to a boil, he put the lid on and let the ingredients simmer for at least an hour before skimming foam off the top. At that point he added lots of good, sweet paprika and the chickpeas, cooked from dried if he had time or else canned. The soup simmered for another half hour or so to blend flavors and make sure any meat still on the bone fell off.



I think in our family of six, I was the only one who really loved chickpea soup as much as Poppi, and I was his helper all those years ago, which no doubt contributed to my passion for cooking. However, because I stopped eating beef many years ago, I created a vegetarian/vegan version of chickpea soup, adding chard and vegetable broth for flavor and nutrition.

Chard was hard to find when I was growing up in 1960s Denver, but was a favorite ingredient of the Jews in medieval Spain. They grew it in their gardens and often ate it raw or cooked with a drizzle of vinegar and sprinkle of salt. If you prefer, you can use fresh spinach.

Chickpeas were cultivated on the Iberian Peninsula at least since the Romans with chickpea soup dating back to biblical times. For the Jews of Spain, chickpeas were an important protein source, especially when slaughtering kosher meat was banned during the Inquisition and kosher butcher shop destroyed. Paprika was added when the Spanish Jews, including my ancestors, found safe haven in the Ottoman Empire, where there was a lot of culinary sharing between the Sephardim and the Ottomans. For this soup, paprika is essential to the flavor, so use sweet, hot or a combination of both paprikas as long as you use really good quality. You could even add smoked paprika to your taste.

Healthy, easy, filling... this soup ticks a lot of boxes, but most importantly, making and eating it take me back to Sundays in the kitchen with my Poppi and the simple, yet fulfilling, flavors of onion, garlic, paprika and love.

Chickpea and Chard Soup

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, diced
1 bunch Swiss chard (about a 1 pound) or spinach, well washed
2-3 cloves garlic, minced
8 cups vegetable or chicken broth or water
2 tablespoons good, finely ground paprika (sweet, hot or a combination)
About 3 cups chickpeas cooked from dried or 2 15-ounce cans
Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Heat oil in a soup pot on medium. Add onions, sprinkle with a couple pinches of salt, lower heat to medium low and sauté about 10 to 12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened but not browned. While this cooks, remove the large stems from the clean chard or spinach and chop into about 1/2-inch pieces. Stir the chopped stems into the onions and let cook together several minutes. Tear or chop chard leaves into bite-sized pieces and set aside in a separate bowl.

Add the garlic to the onions and stems, cook about 2 minutes, stirring a few times as the garlic releases its flavor. Stir in the broth or water, cover, bring to boil, then turn down the heat and let simmer about 20 minutes until the stems are almost soft. Add the paprika, the chickpeas with the liquid from the cans and the chopped or torn chard leaves. Stir well, cover and let simmer 15 to 20 minutes until chard is soft and flavors blended. Stir well, taste and add salt and pepper to taste. This soup is good on its own or served with sprinkling of grated parmesan or another sharp hard cheese. Add a salad and crusty bread to make it a meal.

Why Ladino is having a big moment — both in New York and the rest of the world Full article [Here](#)
Ladino Day celebrates the Judeo-Spanish language that has made it to Netflix and the New Yorker's crossword puzzle

This Sunday is Ladino Day in New York — a vibrant celebration of the language that was central to the culture of Sephardic Jews worldwide for more than 500 years. Right now, Ladino is having an unexpected moment in pop culture, with appearances on Netflix, *The New Yorker* crossword puzzle, and in a fantasy novel on the bestseller list.



Ladino is one of the most important diasporic languages in Jewish history. Also known as Judeo-Spanish, or Judezmo, Ladino is a Romance language — a variety of Spanish that includes both words and phrases from Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, Greek, French and Italian. It originally developed in medieval Christian Spain; after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, it moved along with Jewish exiles, and then developed independently of Iberian Spanish. For 500 years, Ladino thrived, and was the mother tongue of generations of Sephardic Jews.

If you think you've noticed snippets of Ladino lately, you're right. "The first popular Netflix show, *Kulup (The Club)*, used Sephardic consultants in Istanbul to get many of the details right, and afterwards, *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem* was a longer series that kept people watching and hearing Ladino," said [Jane Mushabac](#), a writer and important figure in the Ladino world whose work will be performed Sunday.

Mushabac's dramatic narrative telling the story of the expulsion of the Jews of Spain first appeared on NPR in 1992 — the 500th anniversary of the Alhambra Decree, or the Edict of Expulsion. It's a moment in history that transformed the direction of the Jewish people. [Mazal Bueno: A Portrait in Song of the Spanish Jews](#) will be performed again, live, at the celebration. The piece is close to Mushabac's heart, and she was honored to be commissioned to write it.

"I'd been brought up on Sephardic history my entire life by my Turkish Jewish parents, even though both Greenwich Village and a Long Island suburb where we lived were both decidedly Ashkenormative. My parents traced their ancestry to Spain, proud that their ancestors had accepted exile instead of submitting to forced conversion," Mushabac said.

The original version was narrated by actress Tovah Feldshuh. This year's version will star [Julie Benko](#) who was described by *The New York Times* as the "2022 breakout star for theater". New York's Ladino Day will also feature Rachel Amado Bortnick, another prominent figure in the Ladino world. AmadoBortnick grew up in Izmir, Turkey, and will share "Tales from Ladinokomunita," described as "the groundbreaking worldwide online correspondence circle she founded and directs." Through Amado Bortnick's initiative, people from all over the world are now writing to each other in Ladino.

Though the specifics of Ladino Day celebrations vary by location, the essence of what it is remains the same. "Ladino Day is a public celebration of the Judeo-Spanish language and its many varieties as well as Sephardic culture; it acknowledges the history, resiliency, and hope of its speech communities," said Bryan Kirschen, a professor of Spanish Linguistics at Binghamton University and co-director of the American Ladino League. The celebrations are a way to say—"endangered no more."

"A language that is regularly categorized as endangered and moribund, native to communities that have experienced exile and persecution for generations, Ladino takes center stage each year not only to recognize the past but to celebrate the fact that speakers and learners as well as communities and universities come together to celebrate Ladino's rich history, while highlighting new literary, artistic, and linguistic works in the language," Kirschen said.

You don't need to have any familiarity with the language at all, to participate. In fact, Ladino Days around the world often provide a good introduction. And planning Ladino Days has strengthened the language community.

"For some programs, such as the one we host in New York City, planning begins six or seven months in advance," Kirschen said. "Excitement about Ladino Days often generates interest from local communities and allows for

opportunities to brainstorm, network, create, and rehearse in the language, leading to in-person and, in recent years, online experiences that keep audiences engaged and interested in participating in Ladino-related activities throughout the year.”

While many Ladino Days involve in-person performances and community gatherings, interestingly, the idea originated online. “The idea for an annual Day of Ladino, or International Ladino Day, was first proposed in the online correspondence group *Ladinokomunita*,” Kirschen said. “In January 2013, Zeldia Ovadia of Israel, who was born and raised in Turkey, wrote a message—in Ladino — asking the forum’s more than one thousand members for their thoughts on selecting a date for what she hoped would become an annual celebration of the language. The response was overwhelmingly positive, as speakers and learners of Ladino from around the world began planning local celebrations.”

The idea kept getting more and more support. “The National Authority for Ladino, along with its president at the time, Yitzhak Navon, Israel’s 5th President, enthusiastically supported the idea. Soon, communities around the world — from Turkey to Spain and from Argentina to the United States — began hosting lectures, concerts, plays, and roundtable discussions in and about Ladino,” Kirschen explained.

Since Ladino Days started, the profile of Ladino has risen. For example, Ladino is definitely appearing more often in contemporary American literature. Elizabeth Graver’s *Kantika*, a Sephardic multi-generational saga, won the National Jewish Book Award and was selected as a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2023. Michael Frank’s *One Hundred Saturdays: Stella Levi and the Search for a Lost World*, which portrays Frank’s encounter with Stella Levi, who grew up in the Juderia of Rhodes, Greece, was a finalist for the 2024 Sami Rohr Prize.

“I guess I must report the cherry on top, that a 2025 *New Yorker* crossword puzzle had a clue that said “ _____ Kandelikas” (you guessed it: ocho),” Mushabac said.

“We’ve made it out of the Sephardic cultural ghetto to a seat at the powerful Ashkenazi table. But have we? For many of us, the most exciting development for those actually brought up with Ladino, or those attending Sephardic synagogues, or those serious Sephardic wannabes that thrive on what I’ll call the Sephardic vision, the most exciting story really is our getting to know one another in unexpected places, ranging from academic conferences to museum exhibits, where we have found ourselves pointing at the same spot on a map of Turkey,” Mushabac said.

Celebrations around the country are also growing in number—and are usually held at this time of year..

“The Sephardi Federation of Palm Beach County just held their 11th annual Ladino Day celebration, which featured a concert. Here in Seattle, where I live, we just celebrated the city’s 12th annual Ladino Day, featuring the fantasy writer Leigh Bardugo,” said Hannah Pressman, co-director of the American Ladino League.

If there is no Ladino Day celebration near you, there may be one soon.

“One thing the American Ladino League definitely wants to do is to encourage more local communities around the country to organize their own Ladino Day celebrations, on the scale that works for them, and provide support to help make these programs possible,” Pressman said. “If you can dream it up — we want to help make it happen.”

Though there is a lot of joy associated with Ladino, it’s impossible to forget that the language is closely tied to the expulsion from Spain. I wondered if this year was different, with an American president threatening mass deportations.

“I do feel the history of Spanish Jews connects to the present moment,” Mushabac said, when I asked her about it. “Jews deported from Spain in 1492 could not be easily compared to migrants being deported today from the U.S. For one thing, the Jews had flourished in Spain for over a thousand years, and they had achieved prominence in many fields, and owned significant amounts of property, all very different from the migrants who today are already being targeted for deportation.”

“Nonetheless, I find the two situations have something in common, the underlying animus, the cruelty, the impunity of the leaders involved in initiating and carrying out these orders,” Mushabac said. “Plus the unawareness of how important the Jews were to Spain back then, and the migrants to the US, and how terribly self-destructive is the impulse for ethnic cleansing of one stripe or another.”

We are proud of members of our community who through their passion for our heritage are ensuring that we preserve it

A Lingerie Shop Celebrates 100 Years on New York's Lower East Side

Owner Miriam Kohn upholds the family business commitment to customer service at A.W. Kaufman Full article by Arlene Schulman [Here](#)

In Miriam Kohn's lingerie shop on New York City's Lower East Side, garment racks stuffed with robes, negligees and dresses cover almost every inch of space in a store that's been around for 100 years.



Kohn is not 100 but her cash register is, dating back to when her grandparents first sold silk stockings and cotton panties. The ornate register with its push buttons and hand crank still works. And Kohn, in the tradition of her parents, grandparents and other shop owners who opened up businesses in the neighborhood in the early 1900s, personalizes service molded to each customer's taste, size and budget (and personality).

Long time customer and veterinarian Amy Attas travels from her home on the Upper East for nightshirts, camisoles and tank tops on a day when she's not tending to cats and dogs in their home. And when Attas is short on time, Kohn will FaceTime with her. "If I see something, I'll call and she'll get it for me," relayed Attas, who has shopped at A.W. Kaufman for 40 years. "And then everything magically gets shipped to my house. She has beautiful styles with great prices."



A More Personal Shopping Experience

A.W. Kaufman has been around since 1924 when Regina and Abraham Kaufman, immigrants from Hungary, opened first on Delancey Street and then to a cozy narrow storefront at 73 Orchard Street. The building was built in 1900. Eight blocks long, it was once a destination for coats and jackets, underwear, towels, linens, socks and hats sold from pushcarts and storefronts in a crowded jumble of buyers, sellers and tailors.

The Lower East Side was one of the few neighborhoods where you could shop on Sundays. "Blue Laws" dating back to 1656 forbid "all manner, of public selling or offering for sale of any property upon Sunday" in New York. Because so many shopkeepers closed on Saturdays in observance of the Jewish Sabbath, closing on a Sunday prevented their main revenue day. But risking fines, shops opened anyway, attracting hordes of bargain hunters who desired a more personal shopping experience than department stores.

"Shopkeepers would pool their money to pay the fines," said David Favaloro, Senior Director of Curatorial Affairs for the Tenement Museum which anchors the neighborhood at the corner of Orchard and Delancey. "Shopkeepers would take turns with paying if they got ticketed for operating on Sunday in violation of the blue laws."



The ban was finally repealed in 1976. The neighborhood began to shift and change. Sons and daughters of shopkeepers attended college or moved away. They had no interest in earning a living selling linens and towels. Stores closed. Rents doubled and tripled. Buildings were sold. Picky New Yorkers shopped in department stores and then online.

Today, the neighborhood has been invaded by smoke shops, restaurants and bars. And by a twenty-something crowd who bring in friends and credit cards with an eye out for vintage items from the 1980s. Kohn works behind the original wood counter in front of shelves filled with plastic bins of designer bras, panties and peignoirs. Kohn once knew every shop owner. "I know nobody on my block," she said. "I know not a soul, which is kind of sad."

"People came down with their families," Kohn recalled. "We used to have a line at the door, and it was myself, my parents, and we had two salespeople at that time. People would wait outside. You saw the same people every second week. They would make a pilgrimage with the family. They'd go from here to Ratners or Grand Dairy to eat."

Kohn is the only one of her two siblings to join the family business. When her mother, Phyllis, married Ben Kohn in 1957, he joined the business, expanding the store's selection from silk stockings, handkerchiefs and blouses to designer lingerie. Miriam's first memory of visiting the store was when she was six, with counters overflowing with cardboard boxes filled with undergarments under tin ceilings and hanging lights.

"I liked to hang out with my grandparents," Kohn recalled. "When I was tired, my grandfather would push the boxes on the side and make room for me to lay down to take a nap. And my grandmother used to sit between the two counters and petit point or needlepoint. Those," she added, "are the good old days."

After his in-laws died, Mr. Kohn purchased inventory while Mrs. Kohn handled the fitting, sales and selection. Since she was 14, Miriam Kohn has been waiting on customers, sorting merchandise and ringing up sales. College, she decided, wasn't for her so she came onboard on a full-time basis after one semester at Brooklyn College. And she never left.

She accompanied her father on buying trips to wholesalers as he changed the inventory to more expensive designer lingerie. "We used to choose together. He'd turn over the garment inside and look at the seams," Kohn recalled. "I used to say, 'Tatte (Yiddish for father), what are you looking at?'" Her father replied, "I want to see how the seams are made. I want to look at the fabric."

"He was very into quality. He started bringing in a little bit more in the lingerie department, like nightgowns, and then it just spiraled into all high end," Kohn said. "My father used to say, 'you're always better off with high end. Even if someone buys one, they'll like it, they'll enjoy it, they'll keep it, they'll be happy with it, whereas things that are literally disposable are not. And customers come back when they buy something that they enjoy and it lasts."

Kohn learned to measure sizes simply by looking at each customer's proportions, a specialty learned from her mother. Customers who have purchased ill-fitting bras with incorrect cup sizes or fit come to her to be fitted properly.

"I can look at someone and know their bra size," she said. "It's kind of a lost art. Many places do not know how to fit a bra. They don't know how to fit the right shape or the right style."

In the narrow store stretched from east to west on Orchard between Grand and Broome Street filled with new and vintage clothing all under plastic for protection, Kohn can't pinpoint a best seller. "It depends on the day. Some days it's sleepwear, some days it's clothing. There's no rhyme or reason," she said. "As my father says, it's an open door."

With an old-fashioned sense of privacy, her social media consists of a basic website page and an Instagram account managed by her niece. Locals and celebrities recommend others while costume designers know where to find her. Kohn will not divulge her age, if she owns the building, or the names of customers. But they keep coming.

Customer Service and Fit

"I'm not interested in competing. I'm a very small, old fashioned mom and pop store," she said. "We're about 'Welcome. Can I help you?' when you step inside."

"One thing that hasn't changed is the importance of service and fit," notes Larissa King, Assistant Professor of Fashion Design, Intimate Apparel, at the Fashion Institute of Technology. "This will always be a lucrative business because everyone needs underwear."

As styles, fabrics and tastes have changed, so has Kohn's clientele. Now, many of her customers are women in their twenties, women from Australia and Europe, and celebrities. "The bottom line is really good customer service that you can't get from online shopping or anywhere else. She knows her business."

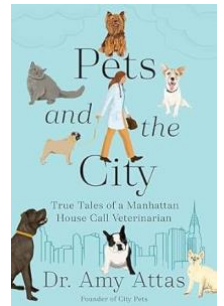
"There's a whole new generation. They just want to look," Kohn said. "I tell them, 'This is here, this is there. You're more than welcome to look if you want help.' Sometimes they'll say, 'Can you help me?' My old customers always come in and say, 'Miriam, I'm looking for a nightgown.' And I'll ask questions like, long, short, whatever and I'll pull, I'll pick, and we'll choose from there. That's usually the way we always did our business. We're about helping the customer."

Attas agrees. "Miriam prides herself on customer service and that sets her apart," she said. "The bottom line is really good customer service that you can't get from online shopping or anywhere else. She knows her business."

After 100 years, the next century is a mystery. "I'm not going anywhere," Kohn said. "If my niece wants the store, she can have it. If not, we'll sell off everything and wave goodbye."

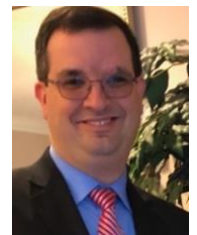
Arlene Schulman is a writer, photographer and filmmaker living in Manhattan. She is the author of several books, including the critically acclaimed "The Prizefighters: An Intimate Look at Champions and Contenders" and "23rd Precinct: The Job." Visit her at www.arlenesscratchpaper.com She's also on Instagram: @arlenesbodega

Amy Attas is a brilliant member of our community who uses her passion for her Romaniote heritage to share it with the world Her most recent venture is a book, "Pets and the City: True Tales of a Manhattan House Call Veterinarian"



Amy is the daughter of Norma Attas and Cal Attas of Blessed Memory, and the sister of Lewis Attas and Nell Attas, the granddaughter of Solomon Attas and Anna Cohen. Solomon was born in Ioannina and Anna in Paramythia, a small market town close to Ioannina. They arrived on Martha Washington on July 19, 1909. They lived at 275 Broome Street in 1930. Amy is the great granddaughter of Kallomira Attas (1865/1858-d. 1951) and Calef Attas (b. 1841-d. 8/31/1917). Calef and Kalomira arrived July 12, 1913 on the Argentina (sailed June 23, 1913 from Patras). Going to son (Nissim Calef Attas) at 58 Allen Street.

We are proud of members of our community who excel. Michael Silverman is a perfect example: Michael Silverman, has been recognizing for "Excellence in School Technology" by the New York City Department of Education. This award acknowledges his innovational use of enterprise tools, and his efforts to always try innovative programs. He is passionate about inspiring and engaging his students and the school community, in the world of technology.



Michael lives in New Jersey with his wife, Dina, and his daughter Rachel. He is the son of, Linda Matza & Robert Silverman, the grandson of Anne Naphtali & Morris Matza, great grandson of Leah Confino & Judah Naphtali and Rose Negrin & Solomon Mossian Matza

Looking For Our Help

My cousin is Yahaloma Matsa Ygael. She is a tour guide in Israel and in Greece. Her parents were born in Ioannina. The following is the information she sent me. Are you able to help? Do you know someone who might be able to help?

From Yahaloma:

Can you try and check for me in the Greek community of N.Y. someone that carries the name Taraboulous. Originally they were from Volos Greece. The ones from the family that are alive were born in NY but their father immigrated from Greece to the US after WWII.

Please tell the researchers that this family is related to me but we lost contact since their father died and maybe even before. The name of their father was John and the name of their grandfather was Jacob (Yaakob). I believe one of them was named after the grandfather. Their last name is **Taraboulous**. I believe they should be around 60-70 years old. Their father left Greece after the war. I don't know their names or how many children he had. I think 2 boys. Not sure.

I hope you can help us or let us know someone that can.

Thank you very much,
Rhonda (Matza Amira) Saldias
2famnews@gmail.com
818-468-7329

We pride ourselves on answering requests. We passed on the info that the President of the Jewish Community of Athens was named Taraboulous, We are now looking for Taraboulous in the USA. Contact us at info@kkjsm.org if you have any information to share.

Susan Colchamiro Tregerman, daughter of Mathew Colchamiro and Esther Lippman, has this photo of her mother. Knowing that her mother was supportive of the Bialystoker Home for the Aged home, she is curious about her mother's involvement.

Contact us at info@kkjsm.org if you have any information to share.



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

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

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy. **You can do this online on our website: www.kkjsm.org accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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



**Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 190
February 2025
Kehila Kedosha Janina
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