The following exhibit items are on display in the permanent collection of the Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum. Curated by Isaac Choua, KKJ Associate Museum Curator, and Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé, Executive Director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, this exhibit features items that were brought from Greece by the immigrants to our Romaniote Jewish community in New York. A video presentation of this exhibit is available online here.
Shaddayoth / Takhshiṭim

One custom unique to the Romaniote community is the dedication of silver plaques known as Shaddayoth (sg. Shaddaya) or Takhshiṭim (sg. Takhshiṭ meaning ornament). The Shaddayoth commonly open with one of the sacred names of the Lord, El Shaddai (God Almighty) – which is where this ornament derives its name from. El Shaddai is followed by the donor’s name and usually the occasion for the donation, the date, and the congregation. The inscriptions of the Shaddayoth reveal the reason for the donation: in memory of a loved one, to celebrate the birth of a child, to request financial prosperity, to request health or the curing of an illness, or in thanksgiving for deliverance from danger or illness. These ornaments differ from other donations made to the synagogue because of the special service performed to sanctify them. The Shaddayoth are only made out of silver, sometimes plated or colorized as gold, but always made only of silver.

The plaques would be donated to the synagogue on special days in the Jewish calendar like Sukkoth, Pesah, Shavu’oth, Sabbaths, Rosh Ḥodesh (New Moon), Rosh haShana (New Year), Yom haKippurim (The Day of Atonement), and occasionally during Ḥanukka and Purim. According to the Communal Service Notebooks written by members of the Kahal Ḳadosh Ḥadash synagogue (New Holy Congregation) in Ioannina the Shaddayoth were offered during the Shaharith (morning services) of Holidays, New Moons, and Sabbaths. A special service would be recited, and the donation ceremony was called Takhshiṭ eRimonim (An Ornament and Tora Finials).

The ornaments were usually sewn onto the Parokheth (Tora ark curtain) or hung along the walls of the synagogue on special occasions. They were often rededicated and displayed again on the Parokheth in order to bless the family with good fortune.

Most of the early ornaments are inscribed in rhythmic poetic Hebrew, interwoven with Biblical verses. After the mid-18th century, the language became simpler and less poetic, often containing only a single phrase. The inscriptions are engraved in Hebrew using ashuri script (commonly known as Square script). The engraving appears to have been performed by local, likely non-Jewish engravers, lacking the firsthand knowledge of Hebrew.

Among the Greek Orthodox there is a similar tradition to the Shaddayoth called the Tammata (sg. tāmμα gr. vow). These too are made of silver and are supplicatory offerings dedicated to an icon or shrine, as a prayer for healing, on behalf of a sick family member to a saint, or when a request for a particular need or prayer had been fulfilled. Embossed on the plaque are images representing the subject of plea or prayer for which the plaque is offered. The Tammata are usually donated during special celebrations, like the festive day of a patron saint.

Sources:
Dedicated by Menahem Moshe
for the Health of his son Elia
Ḳahal Ḳadosh Yashan Synagogue in Ioannina
Shavu’oth 5614 | 1854
Dedicated by Astro (Esther)
Wife of Shemuel Yeshua haLevy
in Memory of Her Daughter Leah
Kahal Kadosh Yashan Synagogue in Ioannina
Shavu’oth 5664 | 1904
Dedicated by Fina
Wife of Shemuel Nahum
in Memory of Her Daughter Hanna
Ḳahal Ḳadosh Ḥadash Synagogue in Ioannina
5672 | 1912
Dedicated by Yisrael Shemuel haLevy
in Memory of his daughter Hanna
Ḳahal Ḳadosh Yashan Synagogue in Ioannina
22nd Iyyar 5679 | 1919
Dedicated by Hanna
Wife of Haim Ezra Yaakov and Her Children
in Memory of Her Husband and Their Father
Ḳahal Ḳadosh Yashan Synagogue in Ioannina
27th of Av 5679 | 1919
Dedicated by Sara
Daughter of Yaakov Nahman haLevy
in Memory of Her Father, Mother Hanna, and Husband Ezra Haim Yaakov
Ḳahal Ḳadosh Yashan Synagogue in Ioannina
Rosh haShana 5682 | 1921
Dedicated by Nissim Matathia Menahem
in Memory of his Mother
Kahal Kadosh Hadash Synagogue in Ioannina
Shabbath haGadol (10th of Nisan) 5681 | 1921
Sophie daughter of Yehuda Cohen
5th of Kislev 5698 | 1937
Dedicated by Stamo Moshe Genee
in Honor of Herself and Her Children
20th of Shevaṭ 5698 | 1938
Dedicated by Esther Yesula Cohen
in Memory of Her Son Yosef Cohen
On the Day of Ḥanukka
Dedicated by Miriam Haim Yisrael
in Memory of her Father Shelomo Yishak Tagir
and in Memory of her Father-in-Law Yisrael Haim Yeshua
Dedicated by Esther Benjamin Mordekhai
in Memory of Her Mother
Rosh haShana 5710 | 1949
Dedicated by Simha Wife of Yosef Menahem
in Honor of Her Husband and Children
on Ḥanukka
Religious Texts

Like other Jewish communities throughout the diaspora, the Romaniote Jews of Ioannina developed unique liturgical traditions and songs. Over the centuries, many of the original piyyuṭim (liturgical songs) produced by the community were memorized and recorded in handwritten notebooks, passed down through the generations. As printing became cheaper, they started to canonize these piyyuṭim. Sepharadi, Italian, and Ashkenazi piyyuṭim and prayers found their way into the Romaniote répertoire, but luckily many of the unique Romaniote liturgies have been formally recorded and published.

This exhibit highlights the variety of religious texts, including prayer books, songs of praise, and works of study that were used by Romaniote and Sephardic Jews both in Greece and here in the United States. We are fortunate to have some of the piyyuṭim of old that have not been canonized. Please take note of the beautiful scribal work in the handmade books, as well as the evolution of Judeo-Greek and Greek texts written in the Hebrew alphabet and later in the Greek alphabet.
Maḥzor for the Entire Year
According to the Italian Tradition

Due to limited printings of Romaniote prayer books, some Romaniote community members acquired Italian prayer books, which contained similar liturgy. In addition, many Italian Jews migrated to Greece over centuries and integrated into Romaniote communities.

Featured: Megillath Antiyokhus recounts the story of Ḥanukka and the history of the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire.

Printed: Venice
Year: 5550 | 1789
Illustrated Pirḳé Avoth - Ethics of Our Fathers
by Zekharia Barukh
Belonged to Shabbetai Naftali
Donated by Sam Samuels
Ioannina, Greece
Year: 5560 | 1799
Mahzor for Yom Kippur
Featured: Shaharit of Yom Kippur, Priestly Benediction
Belonged to Refael Eliasaf Batino and Moshe Eliyah Avraham Negrin
Year: Circa 1822
Judeo-Greek Songs for Purim
According to the Traditions of Ioannina and Arta
Featured: Song “Kina Glossa”
Printed by Ezra M. Negrin
Thessaloniki
Year: 5635 | 1874
Sefer ʿOlah Tamid
Printed by Yosef Nahmuli
Printed: Corfu
Year: 5642 | 1881
Pirké Avoth - Ethics of Our Fathers
Hebrew with Greek Translation
Translated by Yosef Naḥmuli
Printed: Corfu
Year: 1886
Maḥzor for Rosh haShana
Sephardic Tradition
Under the Rule of Sultan ʿAbdul Ḥamid Han
Printed: Thessaloniki, Greece
Year: 5660 | 1899
Maḥzor for Shalosh Regalim (Pesah, Shavu'oth, and Sukkoth)
Featured: Handwritten Outline of the Seder Plate and Order of the Seder for Passover
Year: Circa 19th Century
Rosh haShana Piyyut
Handwritten copy of a Liturgical Song for Rosh haShana, sung before Hagba (lifting the Tora), inserted into a printed Siddur.
Year: Circa 1900
Handwritten Book of Piyuytim (Liturgical Songs) in Hebrew for Various Holidays
Belonged to Avraham Shelomo Lafazan
Year: Circa 1900
Passover Haggada
According to the Customs of the Sepharadim with Ladino Translation
Published by Joseph Schlesinger
Printed: Vienna, Austria
Year: 1900
Handwritten Book of Piyyuṭim (Liturical Songs) in Hebrew and Greek
Featured: Ἀκεδάθ Υισχα (The Binding of Isaac) in Greek
Belonged to Sam Abrams (Shemuel Avraham Nikokiri) and his son David Abraham
Year: Circa 1910
Book of Mishnayoth with Vowels
According to the Sephardic Tradition
Seder Mo‘ed, Part II
Published by Shelomo Belforte
Printed: Livorno, Italy
Year: 5679 | 1919
ΑΣΜΑΤΑ ΔΙΑ ΠΟΥΡΙΜ
ΕΚΔΟΣΙΣ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗΣ
ΒΕΚΟΥΡ ΧΟΛΗΜ

'Ιωάννινα τῇ 'Αδὰρ 1 5685

'Αρχήνα γλώσσα νά διλήσης, θαυμάσωμα νά 'μολοχήσης, κοιμημένους νά ξυπνήσης, με κρασί νά τους μεθύσης.

Φάτε πιέτε και μεθάτε τόν Θεόν μη λησσωνάτε, τήν λευτερία του μολογάτε, και πολύ γαροκουάτε.

'Οφανον μη λησσωνάτε, και μεθάτε προ-βοδάτε, πλούσιον και πτωχούς καλνάτε, άλω τόν Θεόν ποινάτε.

'Εμπρός ὁχτήν βαρηματία του, ἔφτιασε τήν γιατρία του, και ἐβασίλευσε ἡ σιμοτία του, γιά νά βρεθή ἡ γιατρία του.

'Η Ἐστή ἡ τιμημένη, και ἡ μόσχο ἀναθρεμένη, δέν λέγη πούδε εἶλε γεννημένη, ὅτι ἔτσι ἦτον παραγγελμένη.
Megillath Shir haShirim - The Song of Songs with a Greek Translation
According to the Traditions of Ioannina and Arta
Written by Avraham Moshe Ikokir, teacher in the Alliance Israelite School in Ioannina
Printed: Thessaloniki, Greece
Year: 5686 | 1926
Sefer Piyyuṭim (Liturgical Songs)
Written by Shelomo ʿEzra Yosef in Honor of his Brother Menahem ʿEzra Yosef
Featured: Piyyuṭim for Simḥath Tora
Printed: Ioannina, Greece
Year: 5686 | 1926
Book of Liturgical Songs from the Beth Avraham veOhel Sara Synagogue located in the Ohel Moshe neighborhood of Jerusalem. This synagogue was founded by Jews from Ioannina. By Yaakov Gani, Gabbai of the Synagogue
Printed: Jerusalem, Israel
Year: 5728 | 1967
Mahzor for Yom Kippur
With a New Greek Translation
Translated by Asher Raphael Moissis, Honorary Consul of Israel in Athens
Donated by Solomon Attas
Year: 5729 | 1969
Siddur Sha’are Tefi lla
Featured: Shema’ in Hebrew and Greek
Printed: Greece
Year: 1974