



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## April 2021 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

For Jews around the world, this year, April will be a month where we stop and acknowledge the Holocaust. Yom HaShoah is commemorated on the Jewish Calendar on the day of the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For Greek Jewry, this is a painful day, our percentage of losses being among the highest in Europe.

Kehila Kedosha Janina and the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America will be joining together on April 11<sup>th</sup> for a virtual commemoration. Do join us for this special program. Details are included in this newsletter.

### In Memory of the Martyred Jews of



Ioannina  
Arta  
Preveza  
Volos  
Trikala  
Larissa  
Athens  
Chalkis  
Patras  
Salonika  
Rhodes  
Kos  
Corfu



Kavala  
Xanthi  
Drama  
Serres  
Veroia  
Kastoria  
Alexandroupolis  
Komotini  
Didimoticho  
Florina  
Crete



The Holocaust was not six million.  
It was one, plus one, plus one. . . .

This E-Newsletter is sponsored by Vivian Conan in loving memory of her mother Beatrice Conan and grandmother Hanoula Colchamiro Cohen (see tribute later in this newsletter). If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org). We already have sponsorships for May and June, thanks to the family of Louie Levy and Rose Eskononts, in honor of her husband's parents.

This newsletter, our 145<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjism.org](http://www.kkjism.org).

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

We have resumed Shabbat morning services in person on a monthly basis for now. Please email [amarcus@kkjism.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjism.org) if you would like to attend Shabbat services in person. We will share updates as we resume more frequent services.

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### Simchas

We joyously celebrate the birth of Abraham Daniel (Avishai Daniel) Kofinas, born March 1, 2021. The parents are Adam and Alexandra Kofinas, grandparents Chaim and Suzanne Kofinas, and great-grandparents Sol and Koula Kofinas. His big sister Stella, uncle Seth Kofinas, and great aunt Rachel Kofinas share in the celebration.

Abraham comes from a long line of Romaniote Jews from Ioannina, many of whom, unfortunately, were murdered in the Holocaust. His great great-grandparents were Haim and Rachel Kofinas of Blessed Memory, rounded up for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau on March 25, 1944. His great-great-great grandparents were Moise and Pernoula Kofinas, both of Blessed Memory. Moise died in Ioannina and Pernoula survived the Holocaust in Athens in hiding, as did Sol and his older brother Zinos.



## Passings

There were too many passings last month from our community, in Greece, in Israel, and in the USA.

### Greece

We mourn the passing of Chaim Nahmias of Athens Greece, the uncle of Yvette Nahmia Messinas. Yvette's words are so beautiful and capture the soul of Chaim. " On my dear uncle Chaim Nahmias, who crossed to the light this Saturday morning at his home, from his heart. May his memory be for a blessing. We dearly loved him. This is dedicated to his life and spirit!"



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We mourn the passing of Solomon (Monis) Errera. Monis passed in Athens on March 7, 2021. He was born in Thessaloniki on June 15, 1946, the son of Joseph Errera and Linda Saltiel. He leaves behind his wife Lina, his children, Joseph Errera and his wife Belina Obadia, and Jacob Errera and wife Eva Ganis, as well as his grandchildren Lina and Martha Errera, Maya and Matilda Errera. Monis was an avid member of the Ladino Choir of Thessaloniki and an active member of the Jewish Community of Athens. He will be missed by many.



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We mourn the passing of Leo Sousi, the son of Daniel Sousi and Rosina Koulia on March 13<sup>th</sup>. He was born February 4, 1923 in Corfu. He leaves behind his family including 4 great grandchildren.

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We mourn the passing of Sterina Iohana, the daughter of Noah and Mazaltov Yusurum. She was born in Athens, May 14, 1929 and leaves behind her children, Ilias Borboli, Noah and Clary Borboli and Johann Iohana and her grandchildren. She passed away on March 12<sup>th</sup> just short of her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday and was buried in Athens.



Sterina Iohana with  
Graciela Bourla



## Israel

### Jackie Handali (1928 - 3/20/2021)

The Greek-Jewish world mourns the passing of Jackie Handali, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Deported at the age of 15, Jackie was one of the youngest from Thessaloniki to enter the camps. Jackie Handali was born in Thessaloniki and arrived with his parents, brothers and sisters to the Auschwitz camp in 1943. The family was deported from Thessaloniki on April 7, 1943 and arrived at Auschwitz on April 13, 1943, spending seven days in the cattle car. In the camp, he lost his whole family.



According to the Official Records of Auschwitz: On April 13, 1943, "Approximately 2,800 Jewish men, women and children from the ghetto in Salonika arrive in a RSHA transport from Greece. After the selection, 500 men, given the numbers 114875-115374, and 354 women, given the numbers 40841-41204, are admitted to the camp as prisoners. The other approximately 1,936 people are killed in the gas chambers."

In the Death March in January 1945, Jackie marched with Eli Wiesel, who would become his close friend. Jackie in his life gave many dozens of testimonies in Yad Vashem and around the world and traveled dozens of times with teenagers travelling to Poland for Commemoration of the Thessaloniki community.

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### Passing from the Romaniote Community in the USA

It was with great sadness that the Jewish Community of New York learned of the passing of Cal Attas at the age of 93. Cal grew up on Broome Street across from Kehila Kedosha Janina and loved his Greek-Jewish world. Cal was the son of Solomon Attas and Anna Cohen Attas, and the grandson of Kalomira and Calef Attas. Cal's parents and grandparents were all born in Ioannina. Cal is mourned by his family (sister, Shirley Zetoony, daughter Amy and husband Stephen, sons, Lew and wife Neli, granddaughter Shana (Michael Brous) grandsons, Adam and Zachary and great-grandson Eli Benjamin Brous, and his extended family. The family has designated Kehila Kedosha Janina as the charity to which they would like donations to be made in Cal's memory. The Board of Trustees would like to thank Cal's family and the many family and friends who made generous donations. If you wish to make a donation in Cal's memory you can go on our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) and make a donation through PayPal or credit card.



## News from Kehila Kedosha Janina

### "Exhibits of Greek Jewry" Recent Digital Class Series

In case you missed our latest online series led by our Museum Director, you can view all these videos [here](#). Our recent series highlighted some of the past and present exhibits in the KKJ museum, including "Memories: The World We Left Behind and the World We Found Here;" "Family: Los Muestros, Dikoi Mas;" and "Our Gang: the story of Greek-Jewish men and women who served in the US Armed Forces during World War II." All past events can also be viewed on YouTube [here](#).

### Upcoming Events

The Museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina continues to work on genealogical research, compiling family trees and of course, collecting additional photos for our vast photo archives. If you have family trees you would like to add to our collection or questions on your Greek Jewish families, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org).

### Shabbat Services at Kehila Kedosha Janina in Person

As we monitor ongoing guidance from health officials, we will host Shabbat morning services on a monthly basis for now. We will continue to monitor the situation and keep our community updated as we plan to resume more frequent services or museum tours.

**Please join us for our next Shabbat Service in person on Saturday April 17, 2021 at 10am.**

People interested in attending services in person are strongly encouraged to RSVP in advance by emailing [Amarcus@kkjism.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjism.org).



## Upcoming Events

**International Romaniote & Sephardic Yom HaShoah Commemoration**  
**Sunday April 11 at 3pm ET**  
Register [Here](#)



The Sephardic Jewish  
Brotherhood of America  
*La Ermandad Sefaradi*



Kehila Kedosha Janina  
Synagogue and Museum

# SEPHARDIC & ROMANIOTE YOM HASHOAH COMMEMORATION

*Memorial ceremony to honor the victims  
from Ladino speaking Sephardic &  
Romaniote communities of Europe*

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**SUNDAY APRIL 11 3PM ET / 12PM PT**  
**LIVESTREAM VIA ZOOM & FACEBOOK**

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Join us for a special international commemoration of the Sephardic & Romaniote victims of the Holocaust. Program will include special testimonies, speakers, music performance, and a memorial prayer in Hebrew, Ladino, & Greek in honor of all those who perished.

**ZOOM LIVESTREAM**  
**REGISTER AT**  
**[TINYURL.COM/SEPHARDICYOMHASHOAH](https://tinyurl.com/sephardicyomhashoah)**

**FACEBOOK LIVESTREAM**  
**[FACEBOOK.COM/SEPHARDICBROTHERHOOD](https://facebook.com/sephardicbrotherhood)**



# INTERNATIONAL SEPHARDIC YOM HASHOAH COMMEMORATION

## National Partners



The Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America  
*La Ermandad Sefaradi*

Kehila Kedosha Janina  
Synagogue and Museum

SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER  
מרכז חינוכי ספרדי

קרן קדוש מנחם  
Congregation Mikveh Israel  
בית המדרש של קהילת מנחם

TEMPLE MOSES  
בית המדרש של קהילת משה

SEPHARDIC BIKUR HOLIM  
CONGREGATION

CONGREGATION  
EZRA BESSAROTH

SEATTLE SEPHARDIC  
ספרדי  
NETWORK

The Association  
of Friends of  
Greek Jewry

CONGREGATION  
OR VESHALOM  
קהילת אור ושלום

Sephardic  
Adventure  
Camp

the sephardic temple

ETZ CHAIM  
SEPHARDIC  
CONGREGATION

Congregation  
**Ahavath Achim**  
Portland's Sephardic Synagogue

**Congregation Etz Ahaim  
Sefardic**  
230 Denison St, Highland Park NJ  
(732) 247-3839

Greek Jewish & Sephardic  
Young Professionals Network  
Κοινότητα Κρητική Κομunita

Sephardi Federation  
of Palm Beach County

## International Partners

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ATHENS

COMUNIDAD SEFARADI A.C.

FeSeLa  
Federación Sefaradi Latinoamericana

Comunità Ebraica di Roma

SYNAGOGUE Simon et Lina HAIM

Est. 1960  
Sephardi Hebrew Congregation of Cape Town

The Sephardi Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg

OSMANLI-TÜRK SEFARAD KÜLTÜRÜ ARASTIRMA MERKEZİ OTTOMAN-TURKISH SEPHARDIC CULTURE RESEARCH CENTER SENTRU DE INVESTIGACIONES SOBRE LA CULTURA SEFARDI OTOMANA - TURKA

## News from Jewish Greece

### Athens

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin and the Jewish Community of Athens have launched a new website that explains how to host a complete Passover Seder according to Romaniote and Sephardic traditions. Do check out this website, which includes beautiful videos and songs in Greek and Hebrew:

<https://www.jathens.gr/>



We also wish Rabbi Gabriel Negrin a Mazal Tov on the publication of his new book of Greek poetry: *Μεταξύ Υψίστου Ιδεατού και Ανθρώπων*. Learn more, order the book online, and watch a video of one of the poems [here](#).

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### Ioannina

Mayor of Ioannina Moses Elisaf was recently declared an Emeritus Professor of the University of Ioannina. This proclamation coincides with the release of the list of Greek researchers with significant international reach by US Stanford University professor Giannis Ioannidis. According to this report, Moses Elisaf is in third place of researchers with the highest reach in international literature at the University of Ioannina and 28th place at the nationwide level.

The study maps the extraordinary scientific potential there is as the database presents data for 63,951 scientists who have published at least five full international publications (data from Scopus), along with everyone's detailed reach in scientific literature in all 174 Scientific fields.

Among them is the Emeritus Professor and Mayor of Ioannina, who, as shown by the evidence, presents an important research project.



We salute Ioannina Mayor Moses Elisaf for his participation in the recent International Mayors Summit Against Anti-Semitism. As the first Jewish Mayor in all of Greece and President of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, Mayor Elisaf serves as an inspiring example of the perseverance of Greek Jewry and a beacon for Jewish inclusion across Europe. Watch his remarks online [here](#).





## 77<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jewish Community of Ioannina

We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, will never forget



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## Thessaloniki

### 78<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki



Watch a video of the commemorations held this year on March 15<sup>th</sup> in Thessaloniki [Here](#)

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### We remember the 77<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jewish Communities of Athens, Chalkis, Patra, Kastoria, Larissa, Volos, Trikala, Preveza and Arta on March 24/25, 1944

Testimony from David Baruch:

"On March 25 1944, 77 years ago, on Greek Independence Day, the Nazis transported the Jews from Patras, Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, and other Greek cities to the concentration camps. Among the transported Jews were my aunt Hannah and uncle Yaakov Zadick from Patras. Both of them were exterminated upon their arrival in Auschwitz. My aunt Esther and uncle Yaakov Gabbai (wedding photo) were transported from Ioannina. Uncle Yaakov was exterminated upon arrival to Auschwitz. Aunt Esther was liberated by the English army in October 1944. She was transferred by the Red Cross to a hospital in Stockholm Sweden due to her illness and returned to Patras approximately 18 months later."



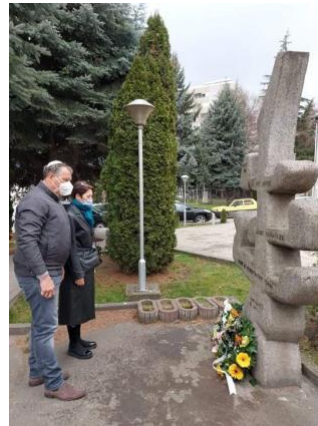
**We remember the 78<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jewish Communities of Kavala, Serres, Drama, Xanthi, Alexandroupolis, and Komotini on March 3/4, 1943. Let us never forget the Bulgarian complicity in these deportations.**



Serres

### Bitola (Monastir) and Skopje

On March 11, 1943, 798 families with 3,351 Bitola Jews were deported. In their memory, today, as every year, a delegation from the Holocaust Fund and the Jewish community put flowers on the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Bitola, the bust of the national heroine Estreja Ovadia-Mara and the Memorial of fallen fighters in the National Liberation War. The delegation also visited the Jewish cemetery in Bitola and commemorative activities continue tomorrow in Skopje. Due to the Covid pandemic and the recommendation of the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia not to hold mass gatherings, March 11 - the commemorative day of the Macedonian Jewish Holocaust, will be marked without gatherings for the general public.



**We also remember the 78<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation by the Germans of the Jewish Communities of Florina, Veroia and Soufli (deported April 30, 1943)**



Florina Jewish Community



**Celebrating 200 Years of Greek Independence: 1821-2021**



**Kehila Kedosha Janina  
Synagogue and Museum**

AND THE ENTIRE  
GREEK JEWISH COMMUNITY OF THE UNITED STATES  
CELEBRATE THE

**200<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
GREEK INDEPENDENCE**

MAY WE GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

**חזק חזק ונתחזק**

**Συγχαρητήρια και Καλή Επέτειος  
Χρόνια Πολλά**



AS THE ONLY ROMANIOTE SYNAGOGUE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA IS PROUD TO CONTINUE THE TRADITIONS AND HERITAGE OF THE JEWS OF IOANNINA THAT TRACE BACK OVER 2,000 YEARS.

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NYC  
[WWW.KKJSM.ORG](http://WWW.KKJSM.ORG)



## Greek Independence Day Celebrated Around the World



Australia



Paris



Venice



Athens



Thessaloniki



Athens



Niagara Falls, NY



New York City



San Francisco

## News from Israel

### **Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries are first ancient Bible texts to be found in 60 years**

A 6,000-year-old skeleton of a partially mummified child and a 10,500-year-old basket were also discovered.  
By Patrick Smith

A new set of Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient fragments of biblical texts dating back almost 2,000 years and thought to have been hidden during a Jewish revolt against Rome, have been found in an Israeli desert.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced Tuesday that a four-year archaeological project uncovered portions of the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, including the books of Zechariah and Nahum. It was the first such discovery in 60 years.

Also uncovered was a 6,000-year-old skeleton of a partially mummified child and a 10,500-year-old basket, which Israeli authorities said could be the oldest in the world. A CT scan revealed the child's age was between 6 and 12 — with the skin, tendons and even hair partially preserved.

Among the recovered texts, which are all in Greek, is Nahum 1:5–6, which says: "The mountains quake because of Him, And the hills melt. The earth heaves before Him, The world and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before His wrath? Who can resist His fury? His anger pours out like fire, and rocks are shattered because of Him."



The authority said these words differ slightly from other Bible versions, shedding a rare light on how biblical text changed over time from its earliest form.

The first set of Dead Sea Scrolls to be discovered were found by a Bedouin shepherd in the same area in 1947 and are considered among the most important archaeological finds of the 20th century, although biblical scholars disagree on their authorship.

Most of those scrolls are in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem but both Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have disputed their ownership. Qumran in the West Bank, the site where the first scrolls were found, is part of land seized by Israel in the 1967 war and would be part of a future Palestinian state.

"It is very exciting to see these finds and expose them to the public, finds which shed great light on our history," Avi Cohen, CEO of the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, said. "These finds are not just important to our own cultural heritage, but to that of the entire world."

Other items include a cache of coins bearing Jewish symbols, including a harp and a date palm, arrowheads and spearheads, woven fabric, sandals and lice combs — all thought to date from the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-136 A.D.), in which Jews fought against Roman rule in Judea.



The treasures were found in what the Antiquities Authority called the "Cave of Horror" in the Judean Desert. The area's unique dry climate means documents found there have survived in unusually good condition.

Using methods more likely to be seen in a Hollywood movie than in an archaeological project, researchers had to rappel down a precarious cliff face to reach the cave opening, which is 262 feet below a cliff top and flanked by gorges on either side. Drones were also used to survey hard-to-reach parts of caves.



The authority was keen to point out in its announcement Tuesday that accessing the cave is forbidden on safety grounds.

The remarkable discoveries were made during an Israeli project to prevent looting in the Holy Land, which experts says has been a constant threat to undiscovered artifacts since the first Dead Sea Scrolls discovery.

Antiquities Authority Director Israel Hasson, who launched the operation, urged the Israeli government to do more to protect other undiscovered treasures.



Archeologists Hagay Hamer and Oriah Amichai sifting finds at the "Cave of Horror" in the Judean Desert

"The newly discovered scroll fragments are a wake-up call to the state. Resources must be allocated for the completion of this historically important operation," he said. "We must ensure that we recover all the data that has not yet been discovered in the caves, before the robbers do. Some things are beyond value."

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### **"May All of the Streets of the World Be Yours"**

"Let all the streets of the world be yours." This song is dedicated to the memory of Avraham Alberto Hanan, a Holocaust survivor from Thessaloniki. The song published today in honor of Alberto's birthday (4/1927) and ahead of the forthcoming publication of his book: "May All the Streets of the World Be Yours" published by the Leon Recanati Center for the Heritage of Salonika and Greek Jewry in Israel. The book and song tell the life story of Avraham Alberto Hanan from Thessaloniki, his hometown, to the Land of Israel, the homeland. The song was created on the purity of volunteering from writing the lyrics, melody, playing, arranging and performing at the initiative of Asi Yechiel, the Greek Israeli singer who is a descendant of Greek Jewry who participates in performing the song along with artists from Israel and Thessaloniki in a unique, exciting project that closes another circle in Alberto's life story. The name of the book and the song is based on the blessing of Alberto's grandfather who stood in front of the synagogue in Thessaloniki on Alberto's Bar Mitzvah day (4/1940), and laid his hands on his head and blessed: 'KE SEAN TUYAS, TODAS LAS KAYES DEL MUNDO.' "May you have the privilege and you will be free to visit all of the streets in the world and make them yours."

Watch this moving song on YouTube [here](#)

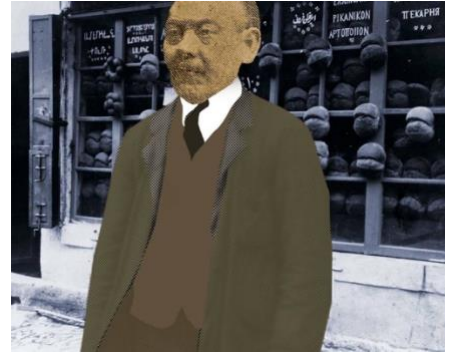




## Was Elia R. Karmona the Sholem Aleichem of Ladino?

The prolific author wrote stories with a satirist's keen eye, but remains relatively unknown today  
Full article by Matt Alexander Hanson in Tablet Magazine [Here](#)

In the Sephardic diaspora cities of Istanbul and Seattle, the history of Ladino is being rewritten as new discoveries surface from dusty piles of periodicals and books in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scripts among Ottoman ephemera, including many trans-Atlantic steamship tickets. If Sholem Aleichem is a measure of Yiddish as a literary—and in that sense an international—cross-cultural language, based on the global popularity of theatrical adaptations of his short story “Tevye the Dairyman,” then Elia R. Karmona could be an apt candidate by which to assess the universal humanism of Ladino’s expression in writing, and a source to begin reckoning with it as literature.



This April, Chicago University Press publishes *Sephardic Trajectories: Archives, Objects, and the Ottoman Jewish Past in the United States*, with scholarly contributions from Ty Alhadeff at the Stroum Center for Jewish Studies of the University of Washington, and Kerem Tinaz of Koç University in Istanbul. Initially produced to accompany an exhibition of heirloom objects tracing the history of remembrance and preservation, *Sephardic Trajectories* is a landmark demonstration of international collaboration between Turkey and the United States, advancing Jewish historiography by integrating the latest digital technology to copy, itemize, and disseminate Ladino literature. *Sephardic Trajectories* is not a sole beneficiary of state or foundational backing, but a collective labor of love involving over 80 community members from organizations as diverse as Koç University’s Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED) in downtown Istanbul and the Sephardic congregation of Bikur Holim in Seattle. The collections of Sephardic material, largely originating from printers and manufacturers in the Ottoman Empire, currently housed at the University of Washington, exemplifies the potential of community-led archives.

It was the poverty afflicting Ottoman Jewish publishers that led Karmona to serialize popular fiction, beginning with folkloric *konsejikas* (Ladino for “bits of advice”), as told by his mother. According to Laurent Mignon, professor of Turkish at the University of Oxford, writing in *Sephardic Trajectories*, it was arguably his Jewish mother in Istanbul, and her storytelling, which prompted modernism in Ladino literature. Her succinct morality tales struck a chord with the peculiarly entrepreneurial and creative editorial ear of Karmona. Her yarns sold, and soon he had the finances to set up his own printing press.

As soon as Karmona earned enough money, he worked with the Greek printer Alexandros Numismatidis. When his mother’s tales tapered off, Karmona went to Armenian theater director Mardiros Minakyan for material. Minakyan and Ladino translators promoted Shakespeare and the latest Western literature in Ottoman Turkey.

Whether onstage, on the street, or at home, Ladino texts were written with the knowledge that most would listen to them recited. As Mignon explains: “The Ottoman Turkish novelist, just like Eliya Karmona and other Ladino novelists, would have been conscious of the fact that their books were read aloud, and in many ways performed, and embraced a style that kept the listeners’ attention continuously, taking them by the hand through the many exploits of their heroes and, indeed, heroines.” Mignon goes on to compare Karmona to canonical Turkish novelists Ahmet Midhat Efendi and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. While readers of Ladino enjoyed Karmona’s originality, they also read Gallicized translations of Emile Zola’s *Nantas*, published in Cairo in 1904 by M. Menashe, who Mignon asserted, “was attempting to establish a literary language” out of Ladino.

Karmona, who was born in Istanbul in 1869, wrote about Ottoman Jewish immigration to Europe and America, yet remained within the realm of the sultan throughout his career as a newspaperman and novelist in the heyday of Ottoman publishing, serializing over 50 books of fiction in his satirical broadsheet, *El Jugeton* (translated as *The Big Clown*, or *The Joker*).

The first issue of *El Jugeton* came out in 1909 following the Young Turk Revolution, which reinstated constitutional rule during the despotic Hamidian era, an infamous chapter in Ottoman history when Abdul Hamid II provoked unprecedented violence against Christians, ultimately disintegrating Ottoman multiculturalism and setting the stage for WWI.

In a recent compilation of research and writing titled “From Our Fathers’ Newspapers,” Turkish translators Ninet Bivas and Leon Keribar printed the brief, picaresque autobiography of Elia R. Karmona in Turkish, Ladino, and English. On the 18th anniversary of *El Jugeton*, Karmona wrote “How Eliya Karmona Was Born” with his characteristic levity. His

autobiography details his trials as a working Ottoman Jewish journalist in Cairo and Istanbul on the fringes of Western society. He was like Jacob Riis, recounting economic hardship firsthand with a muckraking sensibility, yet Karmona's proto-metafiction adds a hefty dose of Jewish humor.

"How Eliya Karmona Was Born" chronicles the author's work history, beginning with his birth on Oct. 21, 1869, or 16 Heshvan 5630: "Old women say that Heshvan is not a lucky month and this is probably true, since throughout my life I had to face an unending series of problems, and miseries that you are about to read in the present story." Karmona was the coddled, only son of a Jewish patriarch whose family wealth had declined since the early 19th-century reign of Mahmud II, when the sultan strangled their ancestor Behor Karmona. After a short-lived ordeal in the stock market, his father became a tramway ticket seller and sent him to Talmud Torah school in the waterfront quarter of Ortaköy.

While the teenage Karmona learned French at a newly opened Alliance school in Ortaköy, where the Tree of Life synagogue still stands along its busiest thoroughfare, his father landed him a job teaching French, the world's lingua franca, to the children of Abdul Hamid's grand vizier. But he was still learning French himself, and soon fell out with the palace. He became one of those pesky children who continue to roam the streets of Istanbul, most now from Roma families, selling matches and tissues for spare change. But his mother would not see him, a Karmona, as a lowly street peddler. His forebears had monopolized Ottoman imperial banking and walked with the Sabbatai Zevi.

It was by chance that one of Karmona's powerful relatives saw him arguing in the street with an Iranian patron over 5 kurush (cents). While at the Tree of Life synagogue in Ortakoy, David Karmona caught wind of the embarrassing, public pickle. The young Karmona answered his call, came to see him blushing, and got an earful about family honor.

In 1877, David Karmona was one of two Jewish senators in the first Turkish parliament. The son of Behor Yitzhak, assassinated by Sultan Mahmud II, his cousin was Rafael Karmona, Elia's father. David Effendi, as he was respectfully titled, got Elia a job at El Tyempo, one of the first Ottoman Jewish newspapers, founded in 1872, launching his career in journalism. Karmona worked as a printer for Moshe Kohen and David Ben Shelomo out of their workshop in the old Italian colony of Galata. While friendly, they underpaid despite promoting him to chief typographer when Shelomo left to work for a new magazine, El Enstruktur. Karmona ran into the philanthropist Baron Hirsch the day he quit.

He used his street smarts to tease out the route of the wealthy man's carriage, and catching him by Dolmabahçe Palace, loaded a tray with cigarette papers, presenting himself as the poor Alliance student he was. "I am the son of an old Jewish family that had once been very rich but has now fallen into poverty," he yelled out to the rich baron, who would only finance a quarter of the cost of a printing machine and typographic characters. Karmona started an itinerant garment trade in the hopes that he would one day afford the equipment. But walking the streets, shouting, "Clean Woolen Flannels" attracted a thief, and he was left penniless once again.

Karmona's next short-lived venture was with a Jewish rag and rope merchant in Besiktas at the southern end of the Bosphorus not far from Elia's childhood quarter of Ortakoy. Soon, he was a printer's mechanic again. He wrote, "I met a beautiful girl who lived near our house" (he lived with his parents), and "it was she who taught me how to write love stories."

On Dec. 4, 1893, the first night of Hanukkah, the father of his anonymous fiancée gave Karmona a lira at their home engagement. Soon after, he went to an all-night ball, and met a woman named Rosa. They danced the Cadrille and Lansey, and drank till dawn. "No one had the nerve to hug a girl and get nearer to her than squeezing her hand," he wrote. He slept at work the next day, and was awoken by a courier carrying a letter from Rosa. She was the only child of a wealthy antique dealer, and gave him an English pound every time they parted. He was now in a bind, whether to stay true to his poor fiancée, who might be as good as orphaned after a bad engagement, or take the money and run with Rosa.

He loved Rosa. But he was a good Jewish boy, and listened to his mother, who implored him to respect the blessing of his initial promise, although she did not know of Rosa. Yet, to his relief, Rosa was married off. Love triangles and class struggles would frequent the pages of Karmona's novels, as would the visitation of distant relatives in search of work.

Karmona's first trip abroad was to Salonica, where his relative, Leon Karmona was said to be one of the richest men in that ancient sister city of Istanbul on Greece's northern Aegean coast. "Listen my boy ... all sounds appear nice to your ears from far away but when you get closer you get a headache," Leon told Elia, and gave him 5 liras to live on for the month.

Not three weeks passed when he emigrated again over the Aegean Sea to Izmir on the Anatolian shore across from Athens. That year, he spent Rosh Hashanah of 5657 (1897) depressed, alone, over a bottle of raki and salad at an inn, missing his mother and fiancée when a fellow Jewish guest joined him. The young man turned out to be a murderer on the lam.

He dreamed of Paris. Jewish migrant workers, particularly Ladino-speaking Sephardim, commonly travel between Salonica, Izmir, Istanbul and Paris in Karmona's novels, which also came to include Marseille and New York. In the world of Ottoman Jewry, money and love are bedmates who scrounge for each other in the depths of the late modern city's dreaming.

But he would not realize the perennial migrant dream that was fin de siècle Paris, and instead returned to Istanbul to care for his ailing father. He swapped odd jobs with Armenians. "That year, many Armenians left Istanbul for political reasons," he wrote, observing early signs of genocidal expulsion. He ended up hawking paper marionettes on the cobblestoned streets.

Another botched French teaching assignment led Karmona back to the home of his mother, where he embarked on his seventh job. He applied his typography skills to print his mother's stories. That year, Theodor Herzl declared the right to a Jewish state. "That night, my mother told me a story about destiny and how what's written in the skies cannot be changed in this world," he wrote in his autobiography. "I knew that Jews who didn't know either Turkish or French, would read Spanish. So I started to write in the popular language which both children and adults understood."

With a loan of 200 francs from a colleague at the Alliance school, Karmona bought a set of Spanish typographic characters and worked in the printing workshop of Numismatidis. After profiting on his first three stories, he successfully bid on a book by a Salonica-based Jewish author, and his following editions included the story "The Two Orphans."

"The Two Orphans" was among the initial eight stories that Karmona published inspired by his mother's tales of domestic morality: "The Rich Juliette," "The Passion for Money," "The Gardener's Daughter." In his autobiography, he boasted of transforming the "small stories" of his mother into "full-length novels."

One tale, corresponding to the titular motif of "The Two Orphans," Sephardi diaspora historian Devi Mays has translated as "The Two Siblings." It is just shy of 10,000 words, hardly a novel, or even novella by current standards, though a hearty piece of short fiction. Karmona printed it in *El Jugeton* in 5681 (1921-1922), selling it for 100 paras (cents of an Ottoman lira).

"The Two Siblings" is a post-WWI tragedy, recounting the untimely downfall of a man named Israel Behar, whose misfortune is reminiscent of Karmona's. Largely set in the Galata district of Istanbul, it is a succinct picture of Istanbul's Jewish communities and its internal class struggles reflecting the broader socioeconomic context of life in late Ottoman society. "The Two Siblings" relays the efforts of a "benevolent society of women" who come to the aid of single mothers like the fictive widow, Klara Behar.

Karmona was unique for writing about the world around him, as an Ottoman Jew, writing fiction about Ottoman Jewish life. He had a keen eye for young people. His stories are about the dilemmas of maturity, from childhood to adolescence, and into adulthood, as a metaphor for Jewish modernity.

"Karmona was known as an author and a satirist, a social commentator as well in the way that we could think of Sholem Aleichem," said the translator Mays. "In his works he's definitely grappling with the Jewish present by framing it in terms of a Jewish past in a way that you can see Sholem Aleichem also doing with Tevye and his daughters."



## Italy

The Prague-based educator, curator, and filmmaker Martin Šmok reviews the privately established Jewish museum that opened in 2016 in Lecce, at the very tip of the heel of Italy's boot, where Jews flourished in the middle ages but were expelled half a millennium ago. He found his visit a "refreshing and energizing experience" in a museum "filled with question marks."

**Medieval Jewish Lecce and its New Jewish Museum** Full article by Martin Šmok [Here](#)

I have to admit that visiting small regional Jewish museums in Europe can be quite a stressful experience for an educator involved in anti-stereotype education, a person like me. I have spent the last fifteen years teaching educators that a racist group label remains a racist group label even when it gets flipped into positive, that Nazi racial laws are not valid anymore and that the Communist label of "person of Jewish origin" is based on nothing else but the Nazi Nuremberg laws. Sometimes the well-meant local exhibitions end up promoting stereotypical claims about "the Jews," featuring only the rich, famous and influential families, using unnecessary atrocity imagery for shock impact at the end of their narratives, mistaking it for Holocaust education.



That is why visiting the private Jewish museum in Lecce was such a refreshing and energizing experience for me. Of course, I did not come to Lecce, a baroque city in Puglia, Italy, because of its Jewish Museum. I came there to explore the city nicknamed the Florence of the South, former capital of Terra d'Otranto. But once there, I was intrigued and attracted by the tourist attraction called "Palazzo Taurino – Medieval Jewish Lecce". The museum is located in what is now the underground area of a baroque palazzo. The cellars that used to house a restaurant were rented by a group of private investors and cleaned of the modern alterations only after it was determined that this was the site of a 15th century synagogue and mikveh.

The story the museum presents is filled with question marks and "not-knowing-for-sures" — it was this admission that was so appealing for me.

Quite a few important features of the space were destroyed when it was adapted into a restaurant some 20 years ago, such as the steps leading to a medieval mikveh. There are other pools visible now under a glass floor, but why use a whole set of mikvaot like that? Or were these pools rather connected to the prevalent Jewish trade of textile dyeing? At this point the exhibition and the guide explain the role of a mikveh in Jewish life. Similarly, the exact function of the niche in the eastern wall is unclear, but the exhibition makes sure to explain the role of orientation towards Jerusalem in Jewish prayer and includes a map delineating that direction for the South of Italy. The guides do not hide gaps in factual knowledge, but point to potential answers, especially in the context of other Jewish communities in the region: Trani, Otranto or Bari. A 3D outline of the Jewish quarter of Lecce is being created, which the visitor could juxtapose against the baroque city above the ground.



*Hebrew Epigraph (Funerary Inscription). Bronze Engraving, first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (?)*

*Lecce, Private Collection.*

*A non-faithful copy of the Hebrew epigraph of Hannah, the daughter of Iuliu (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century), found in Oria (where it is still kept in the local "De Pace-Lombardi" Library) between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

*The forgery was probably executed in Oria, following the antiquarian fascination of the scholarly circles of Alessandro Maria Calefati (1726-1793 - Bishop of Oria 1781-1793) and Giuseppe Antonio Lombardi (1773-1863).*

From the educational point of view, of great value is the exhibition content exposing the deep roots of anti-Jewish hatred – and also the obsession with Judaic artefacts after the destruction of Jewish life.

The yellow signs Jews had to wear on their garments in medieval times are represented in church frescoes throughout the region, hinting to us the inspiration for the yellow stars of the Nazi days. A forged Jewish

bronze funeral tablet on display in the museum captures the romantic craving for Jewish artefacts at a time when no Jews were left in Lecce.

After the city came under the direct rule of Ferdinand I, King of Aragon, there was an outbreak of violence against the Jews. Many were murdered, survivors were forced away. What else could better document the hatred of everything Jewish than combining the expulsion, destruction and obliteration with denigration and offence, such as the fact that a stone slab containing a Hebrew inscription, originating from the Lecce synagogue, got inserted into the ceiling of a latrine, making sure that the holy Hebrew words would be facing downwards?

It clearly is the passion of the private persons behind this museum that drives its “work in progress” feel.

I met two of the founding fathers, prof. Fabrizio Lelli, who teaches Hebrew Language and Literature at the University of Salento, and Michelangelo Mazzotta, owner of a Bed and Breakfast in Via della Sinagoga. Both are continuing the search for remains of medieval Jewish Lecce, striving to educate the locals, inspiring them to join in the hunt for clues. Michelangelo continues to document the subsequent evolution of the synagogue space, which, like elsewhere, became a church, at least in part serving converts from Judaism. Today, even this church is gone. But Michelangelo located a precious few early 20th century photographs in which its original cross can still be seen.

We immediately felt the strong bond that links those who hunger for knowing more. For tourists and visitors with a similar craving, I can only recommend a tour of the Jewish Museum in Lecce.

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## Nice

While working in the archives of the Alpes-Maritimes in Nice, France, sorting Holocaust-era documents related to a 20<sup>th</sup> century politician in Vichy, American historian Robert Levitt ran across a letter that gripped his attention like no other.

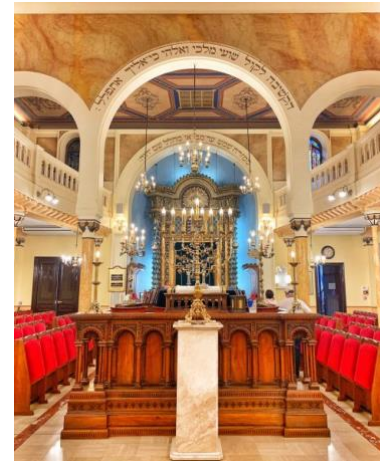
**Exploring Jewish Nice and Its Many Layers of History** Full article by Robert Levitt [Here](#)

The Jewish heritage in Nice is not about places that “used to be” something else. The city’s Jewish heritage remains in full view, although it takes some interpretation to see and understand it. You can trace Jewish history from medieval times to the present. You can explore the old ghetto, visit synagogues and the Jewish cemetery, experience the life of a contemporary Jewish community – and even visit a museum dedicated to the works of the great Jewish painter Marc Chagall, who spent the last decades of his life nearby. But you can also recall the sound of the heavy boots of Gestapo soldiers racing upstairs during World War II.

Indeed, the letter in the archive that drew me into the study of Jewish Nice was one of palpating fear. I could almost feel the sweat dripping with each word. Because of the war, the writer could not obtain his original documents, and now he had nowhere to turn. Here was a non-Jew speaking of the terror of the unknown, his first realization of what Jews had been feeling for several years or perhaps even centuries.

It was a letter that made me realize that I had moved to one of the most important cities for Jews in World War II, and also a city with a long Jewish history.

As a medieval historian and reader of Latin, and with a great deal of archival experience, I began both to discover and to explore this history – and eventually I founded a history company that focuses on research but also offers specialized Jewish heritage tours. Jewish history in Nice goes back many centuries. The city became part of France only in 1860. Since 1388, it had been part of the County of Savoy, ruled by a Duke in Torino.



In 1430, the Duke of Savoy imposed a ghetto — “Juiverie,” and Jews were mandated to wear a yellow badge on their clothing. But the authorities in Nice apparently didn’t listen, because 18 years later, a follow-up letter was sent to those authorities castigating them for their failure to separate the Jews in the city. And, while in Torino the government was provoking the Jews, in that same year, 1448, the city of Nice gave its banking franchise to a Jewish banker named Bonnefoy de Chalons. Reading the Latin contract, I could see that Bonnefoy had full rights to live wherever he pleased, which made no sense if a Jewish ghetto had been imposed by the city the same year.

Whether a ghetto was ever actually imposed in Nice during the medieval period remains an outstanding question in my mind. We know, however, that in 1733, the ghetto in Nice did become a reality. Permission was given that year to designate a synagogue on the third floor of a building owned by the Catholic brotherhood Pénitents Noirs, and there was a mikveh in the basement. (Sold to help finance the construction of the new Temple Israelite, or Great Synagogue, built in 1885-86, the building today bears no indication that it once housed a synagogue.)

The former ghetto is located in what is today rue Benoit Bunico in Nice’s Old Town. The buildings on at least one side of the street had underground tunnels to the adjacent street, rue Droit, which would allow the Jews to come and go when they chose. In 1750, the obligation for Jews to wear a badge was formally abolished, and all other legal restrictions on Jews were finally ended in 1848.

The Jewish cemetery on Colline du Chateau overlooking the city opened in 1783 and contains burials transferred from an earlier Jewish cemetery believed to have been founded centuries earlier. (Some sources state the oldest tombstone in the cemetery dates to 1540, but so far the oldest I have found dates from 1762.)



The gravestones tell the history of Jewish families that made their way to Nice from near and far. They bear epitaphs written in French, Hebrew, Polish, Italian, Russian, English, and German – and the name of the city (named after the Greek goddess of victory, Nike) is spelled in a corresponding variety of ways – Nice, Nizza, Niza, Nica, Nissa, Ніцца, Нікція, Nicaea, Nicaea, Nisa, Ніцца.... The people interred here were born in Kiev, Vasylkiv, Warsaw, Kishinev, Mariupol, Kherson, Odessa, Nikolaev, Kaunas, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Lwów, Radautz of Bukovina (Rădăuți, Romania), Algeria, Oran, Constantine, Taganrog, Constantinople, London, Rangoon, Cairo, and Johannesburg.....

As I have dug deeper into the history of individuals interred there, I found Jews whose ancestors were chased in the Medieval period from England, Spain, Portugal, North Africa, the Middle East and many other places. Indeed, by researching those buried in the cemetery, one can almost piece together the pattern of movement of Jewish communities throughout Europe, and it is this research will I actively pursue.

Extraordinary Jewish stories took place during World War II. Nice was initially part of the Nazi-allied unoccupied part of France, known as Vichy France. The Germans ordered roundups of Jews to begin in August 1942, but a month later, Nice fell under the jurisdiction of the Italians, who refused to hand over Jews to the Germans. At one point, as many as 100,000 Jews crowded the city, seeking refuge. But the Germans took over the Italian zone in September 1943 and occupied the city until August 1944. They brought in the infamous Jew hater S.S. Alois Brunner as Obersturmbannführer – he took over the belle époque Hotel Excelsior as his headquarters, and the hotel also served as a Nazi prison.

The thousands of recently arrived Jews in the city became easy targets, but Nice reacted, working through resistance groups to hide Jews, especially Jewish children. The ghetto-era tunnels in the city’s Old Town may well have housed Jews during WW2. In a private cellar, I discovered a Star of David and a Menorah, as well as communist symbols, and one symbol still unknown, engraved into the walls. Still, thousands were deported from Nice and surrounding areas, most of them to the French concentration camp of Drancy and then Auschwitz. In 1951, a memorial was erected in the Jewish cemetery in remembrance of both the resistance heroes and the martyrs, but the traumatic wartime experiences remained largely hidden history over the following decades.

Only relatively recently has the city become open again to examining what occurred. A monument to the Justes (Righteous among Nations) was erected in 2014, and a new memorial was slated to be unveiled in January 2020 commemorating the more than 3,800 people from the region who were deported to their deaths. Nearly 75 years after the end of World War II, these memorials add to the many layers of Jewish history in Nice — and finally recognize a layer that must no longer be ignored.



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



The month of April continues with the Hebrew month of Nissan, and depending on when this bulletin is issued, perhaps still within Pesah. In any case, as mentioned last month, one of the special mitzvot – commandments – exclusive to the month of Nissan is “Birkat Ilanot” – the blessing on trees. The mitzvah is mentioned in the Talmud and the Shulhan Aruch, and is not limited to the Land of Israel, but meant to be recited anywhere Jews live, but exclusively during the month of Nissan. The Talmudic source is from tractate Brachot, pg. 43B: “R. Yehuda says: If one goes outside in the days of Nisan [spring time] and sees the trees sprouting, he should say: “Blessed be He who has not left His world lacking in anything, and has created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees for the enjoyment of mankind.”

The rationale behind the blessing is that according to the Jewish calendar, in terms of nature, Nisan is the beginning of Spring, symbolized, at least in the northern hemisphere, by the first blossoming of trees. Our sages determined that the blessing is reserved for fruit trees, from which man gains the most material benefit, and which will ripen and be ready for picking by the holiday of Shavuot – which is called, among other names, the “holiday of the first fruits”.

As part of the critical connection between nature and the seasons of the year to all pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem and the Temple – Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot, our sages saw fit to institute a special blessing on the “renewal” of fruit trees and their first blossoming. This represents life, fertility, and the beginning of springtime, as well as other more mystic symbolism and comparisons between trees and mankind in Jewish sources. For example, like comparing human beings to ‘trees in the field’, reflecting similar stages of life: a young sapling maturing into an “adult” tree, blossoming in the springtime, which in Judaism means Nissan, the month of redemption, and finally giving of itself by providing fruit and nourishment for the world. Even the popular custom of a boy getting his first haircut at age 3 is based on the comparison of the first 3 years of a tree’s first and ‘raw’ fruit, called “orlah”, to a young child’s hair. Beyond that, Judaism is strict about proper care and treatment of all flora, with fruit trees meriting special prohibitions about cutting them down, neglecting their care and more. For example, it is forbidden to uproot or cut down a fruit tree for convenience or decorative reasons only, and at most one is commanded to transfer the tree to a new area. So “Birkat Ilanot” reflects this concern for nature, the celebration of renewal of spring and specifically, a sensitivity to our appreciation for God’s not only providing us with “goodly creatures” and “goodly trees” for our enjoyment and benefit.

The mitzvah is simple: A single blessing said outside next to a minimum of two blossoming fruit trees. If one waits until fruit has already appeared, it is too late! The blessing can also be said in a private grove, garden or yard where fruit trees have been planted, does not require a minyan, and can be said by men, women and children individually or together. And though it is meant to be recited only during Nissan, certain Rabbis allow it to be said a few days before or after Nissan if a tree has already flowered but might lose the flowers if one waits too long. Finally, though the vast majority of Jews have always lived in the northern hemisphere, which became the standard for all nature and season-connected mitzvot, Rabbis have ruled that those living below the Equator, where the seasons are the exact opposite, the blessing can be said at the onset of spring and fruit tree blossoming during the appropriate month for those countries. This further illustrates the universal nature and purpose of this wonderful but simple blessing, and how much importance Judaism attaches to nature and the world God created.

However, the heavily urban lifestyles characterizing the vast majority of Jews around world have definitely contributed to the non-observance of this mitzvah, not to mention the distances many people would have to travel to find a grove or orchard with fruit trees. Thank God, in Israel, where no one is really that far away from fruit trees, including many who have planted such trees in private gardens and yards, Birkat Ilanot" is widely observed, and even entire congregations will walk a short distance from the synagogue to fruit trees and recite the blessing jointly and with tremendous joy.

So, if possible, for those that can, perhaps make the effort to perform this mitzvah till the end of Nissan – April 11th, and revive this time-honored Jewish tradition and celebration of nature and spring.

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**Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé**  
**Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America**



Parashah of the Week - Pesah Message  
Freedom to Be Free

The story of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt and their redemption from slavery has had great impact around the world since Biblical times. Many peoples and many different cultures, inspired by the Torah, have tried and even succeeded to redeem themselves from serfdom and have become free. This very story inspired the founders of the United States and they used it as a model for their own independence. But, while praising this concept and its strengths, one still wonders, who is really free? What does it really take to become a real free individual?

The Rishon LeSion, Rabbi Ben Sion Meir Hai Uziel, First Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, states that while freedom and liberty might be attained by breaking away from the yoke that others imposed on the slave against his will, true freedom can only be gotten when one abandons those traits and habits that create that submissive mindset. Chains are used to imprison the slave, yet there are character traits that will keep an individual imprisoned, subdued and unable to break away. He explains that real freedom is that which allows such a person to feel equal to others, where he does not allow others to abuse him and rule over him. Where he is able to recognize and test his own potential and capabilities. He states that in order to attain real freedom, one is to analyze those debilitating qualities and to abandon them and break away from them. One must stay away from following or pursuing debilitating traits that will bring further damaging characteristics.

Rabbi Uziel reminds us that there are all types of dominant trends in culture and society. We must be wise and choose those trends that are beneficial to our beings. Still, on the other hand, we must be aware and wary from embracing trends that will eventually harm our good traits and health. He warns us to not just mimic society, masses do not necessarily embrace healthy practices. He further states that once bad traits are adopted, one can not easily uproot them and they can also be easily passed on to the next generation.

The Torah long ago introduced to the world a concept that revolutionized humanity, namely, that man is free. He is the owner of his own destiny; he chooses and does as he pleases. No human being stands above another; each person rules his own or her own life. Indeed, we must remember that freedom emanates from our minds. We create our own destiny, we are free to choose and we choose to be free.

Shabbat Shalom and Pesah Alegre!



## **Passover Symbols - Symbols for our Lives by Rabbi Marc D. Angel**

The Haggada explains the historical background of the three main symbols; but I wondered if other important ideas were also hidden within them. Here are some thoughts.

### **Matzah:**

Matzah is a basic, no-frills item. It is flour and water, without leavening. It stands for our basic selves, unpretentious, not inflated with vanity or pride. Matzah reminds us that we need to remember who we are; that we need not (and should not) participate in the rat race of one upmanship; that we cannot let our own internal happiness be dependent on how others judge us. Matzah is what it is, without apology, without need to impress others, without worrying if other foods are fancier or more elegant.

Because of its sheer simplicity and honesty, Matzah symbolizes freedom. When we really know who we are, we gain a fine sense of our own freedom. We can be strong unto ourselves; we can rise above the fray; we can stop playing games of who has more, who has better, who has control. When we are free within, we have the confidence to live our own lives, not the counterfeit lives that others would impose on us.

### **Pessah:**

The Pessah offering in the ancient Temples in Jerusalem was to be eaten in groups of family and friends; the paschal lamb was not to be prepared for only one person. If Matzah symbolizes the inner strength of the individual, the Pessah offering reminds us that we are part of a family, part of a larger community. For us to grow as meaningful human beings, we need to see beyond our individual selves. We remember our family origins--our parents and grandparents, our earlier generations. We link ourselves to those traditions and see ourselves as part of a grand dramatic unfolding of family history. We recognize that we are also links in that chain of family tradition, with responsibilities to family and friends--and to generations yet unborn.

### **Maror:**

The Maror, bitter herbs, remind us that the world includes many people whose lives are filled with suffering, pain and bitterness. As we are grateful to the Almighty for the blessings He has showered upon us, we cannot forget the bitter tears that are shed by hungry children, by helpless parents, by lonely and frail elderly people. We cannot forget the immeasurable pain inflicted by wars, by terrorism, by cruelty, by disease, by poverty...

As we sit around the seder table, the Matzah reminds us of our basic individuality; the shankbone (symbolizing the Pessah offering) reminds us of our link to family and friends; the Maror reminds us that our happiness and fulfillment also depend on our concern for those who are less fortunate, those whose lives are embittered.

The Maror also reminds us that no one gets through life without experiencing times of sadness and pain. At those times, we need family and friends to come to our aid, to comfort us; and when others are grieving, they need us to console them and help them.

Matzah, Pessah and Maror, then, have ongoing messages for how we can lead better, happier and more meaningful lives. Together, they contribute to our inner freedom, our family continuity, our commitment to make this a better world.

I wish you a happy and meaningful Passover festival. Mo'adim leSimha, Hagim uZmanim leSason.

## Other Articles of Interest

### **The Struggle to Preserve Afghanistan's Jewish Heritage** Full article [here](#)

HERAT, -- Afghanistan's western province of Herat was once home to a thriving Jewish community that has now all but vanished from the region. Its monuments and properties have either fallen into disrepair or disappeared completely, and murky rules of tenure and stewardship of historical sites have left officials and residents arguing over their fate.



In the 18th and 19th centuries, Jews escaping religious persecution in Central Asia and Iran fled to Afghanistan, the only Muslim country where they could freely practice their faith. Mostly comprising middle-class traders and artisans, they lived in harmony with their Muslim neighbors for centuries.

But over the course of the 20th century, they left the country. Compelled by the search for a better life, many of Afghanistan's Jews started moving to Israel and the United States in the 1940s after initially immigrating to British India.



"Muslim-Jewish relations were mostly tolerant and peaceful," says Sara Aharon, a Jewish author whose father was born in Afghanistan. "There were 5,000 to 6,000 Jews in 20th-century Afghanistan, so there was no reason to feel threatened by the Jewish community."

Most of the Jewish community had emigrated by the early 1980s before the outbreak of Afghanistan's civil war. As the Jewish population continued to decline in Herat over the next few decades, their houses, synagogues, and other monuments were abandoned.

Several synagogues, a cemetery, and a bathhouse remain, according to Herat's cultural officials. But existing regulations make it difficult to determine who owns or is responsible for the properties.

One Herat resident claims he is the owner of the public bathhouse. He says he had the 250-year-old property partially demolished.

Zalmai Safa, Herat's director of historical monuments, says the man is the legal owner but was not given permission to tear down the site. "He wanted to acquire and reconstruct the bathhouse," he told Radio Free Afghanistan. "But due to its antiquity, construction method, and significance to Herat's Jewish history, we did not permit its demolition."

### Disputed Land, Neglected Property

The revolutions, large-scale displacement, and horrific violence of the past half-century have left a legacy of conflicts at all levels across Afghanistan. Disputes over land and property ownership are the most common kind of conflict between individuals and communities. The fact that Herat's Jewish community left decades ago has encouraged some to take over the dilapidated communal properties.

Safa says these properties are relics of the Jewish community and have immense value for Afghans wishing to remember their legacy. His hope is for Afghans to preserve the remaining monuments so that they will exist for future generations as a testament to religious tolerance.



"These monuments are important because of their historic heritage. They showcase the tolerance our society had for the adherents of various faiths," he noted. "It is our duty to preserve them for future generations just as our ancestors preserved them for us."

Herat officials say that before they fled the country Jews transferred the ownership of synagogues, cemeteries, and other properties to the Afghan government. Others sold them outright.

Herat resident Younis, who like many Afghans goes by one name only, fondly remembers living next door to a Jewish family in the 1970s. He says in those days religious differences were never a topic of discussion.



"There were probably 70 to 80 Jewish families in the area we were living in. We had a good relationship with them," he said. "We went to their shops, and they came to our homes. But then the revolution came, and everyone fled; they all moved to Israel," he said of the last few families.

Gul Ahmad, another Herat resident, says Jewish history is a staple of Afghan history. "On one side lived the Jews; on the other side was us," he said. "Both sides tolerated and respected each other. Our faith was never contentious between us, so it was not discussed," he said.

#### Following Their Ancestors' Footsteps

Today, Jews travel to Herat's old city to see where their ancestors lived for generations and what they left behind. "Jewish families send their children to come back and visit these sites, to meet us and revisit their roots," Ahmad said. But many are afraid that the monuments are deteriorating due to neglect and without the proper care will erase the memory of a once-vibrant community.

The synagogues of Yu Aw, Mulla Ashur, Shamail, Golkia, and Georgia, the bathhouse, cemetery, and many mud dwellings are all hanging by a thread. In the old city, three out of the five remaining synagogues have undergone some sort of preservation. Yu Aw, the largest synagogue in Herat and the only synagogue to undergo proper preservation of its original characteristics, has been declared a historic site. Shamail was turned into a school after repairs.

The Mulla Ashur synagogue has remained in shambles without any repairs in sight because of the government's lack of a restoration budget. And Golkia, a former place of worship for the Jewish community, has been turned into a mosque, though its architecture remains the same.

Some of the graves in the Jewish cemetery have been restored with financial assistance from the Jewish diaspora.

Like most Afghans and especially ethnic minorities in the country, Herat's Jews were multilingual, speaking their own tongue along with the local language. They could read Hebrew and speak their version of Judeo-Persian, a dialect of the lingua franca of Afghanistan.

Homayoun Ahmadi, a cultural expert in Herat, stresses the need to rebuild and restore the remnants of the Jewish community in order to better attract foreign tourists.

"The existence of synagogues in Herat represents a degree of religious tolerance in Afghanistan," he said. "It showcases that the Jews in Herat lived in harmony during many different periods in Afghanistan."

Nilly Kohzad wrote this story based on reporting by Shapoor Sabe

**This E-Newsletter is sponsored by Vivian Conan  
In Memory of Beatrice Conan and Hanoula Colchamiro Cohen**

"My mother, Beatrice (Beckie) Conan, was the sixth of nine children born to the doting grandparents I called Nona (Hanoula Colchamiro Cohen) and Papoo (Isaac Jacob Cohen). I'd never imagined they might not have been that way as parents, being so preoccupied with paying the mortgage they couldn't give much attention to any one child. My mother didn't start school until she was seven, because Nona kept her home to care for her brother, four years younger. When she graduated from elementary school, Nona and Papoo came to the ceremony. Afterward, the three of them walked home together, the first time my mother was alone with both parents. She told me how proud she felt making her way down the block between them, for all the world to see."



Nona and Papoo (center) and their eight children, from right: Sara Hazen, Mollie Weissbard, Rachel Maresco, Beatrice Conan, Jack Cohen, Sophia Gruebel, Esther Henry, Diana Bergman. At the wedding of Sarah Hazan's daughter, Bea Alwadish. 1948.

When I interviewed my mother for her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday book, these are some of the things she said:

"I used to think my glass was half empty. Now I know it was half full. As child number-five out of eight [one never reached adulthood], I was left to my own devices. Mama was busy cooking and cleaning and sewing and getting us off to school or work or whatever. I just grew. But not long ago, out of nowhere, came a flash of wealth and richness in my life. I suddenly realized that Mama spent her days creating an atmosphere that enriched us all. She created a home in the house that Papa built and I still live in it—since I was 12 years old. When we celebrated holidays like Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, I always felt I was part of it. She enriched us by providing seders and other appropriate celebrations. Her giving pervaded all of life for all of us...."



Nona and Papoo, circa 1901



Papoo, Nona. Still holding hands.  
Circa 1960s.

"When she didn't let me go to college in the daytime, because we needed the \$15 a week I could earn by working, I went at night. Mama never saw me—work all day, school at night. She missed me and felt compassion. One day, she said, "OK, switch to day school. I'll give you fifty cents a week for carfare." And she did. So I became a teacher, and looking back, I see my life was and is enrichment..."

"I have a picture of my mother by chance, on a shelf, right in my bedroom. And I look at her, and I thank her. I thank her for being my mother. I enjoy her more now, I think, than I did when she was alive. I'm not sure why.

I feel lucky that my mother and I had a rapprochement when she was in her eighties. As she shared her recollections with me, I came to understand how some of the ways she treated me were a result of her own experiences. And I saw that love and caring can get misinterpreted and passed down through generations in ways both beautiful and broken.



Vivian, Beatrice and Marvin, 1945

I recently published a book, [Losing the Atmosphere, A Memoir: A Baffling Disorder, a Search for Help, and the Therapist Who Understood](#), about living with and healing from mental illness. Both my mother and Nona are in it, as are my wonderful, sprawling, extended Greek-Jewish family. When I was ready to re-enter, they were there to receive me.

This newsletter is dedicated to my mother, who opened a whole new world when she said, "It's love at second sight," and to Nona, who created the strong sense of family that exists even now, several generations later."

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### Nikos Stavroulakis

Ioanna Galanaki is completing her PhD at Southampton University, writing about the revival of the Etz Hayyim synagogue and community in the ancient port of Chania, Crete. In this intensely personal essay, she pays homage to the late Nikos Stavroulakis.

**"Makom" in a Revived Synagogue in Crete: The Role of Nikos Stavroulakis z"l** Full article [here](#)

By Ioanna Galanaki

According to Jewish tradition, every miracle comes out of 'something': out of a small quantity of oil that remains sufficient, out of some simple and supposedly naïve ritual, out of one person performing an act that is seemingly incomprehensible, and sometimes even inconceivable.

And so it was with Nikos Stavroulakis and the revitalization of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue and its community in Chania.

The co-founder and former director of the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens, Nikos was the driving force behind the restoration of the synagogue in the 1990s. Originally built as a church in the 15th century, it had been converted into a synagogue in the 17th century but had stood empty and desecrated for decades after the Holocaust.

Following the restored synagogue's rededication in 1999, Nikos became the heart of a havurah-like community there that attracted Jews and non-Jews alike.

"How did you find all these people?" I once asked him. "I didn't find them," he replied. "They found me!"

He went on to explain that at the very beginning, immediately after its re-opening in 1999, he would go to the synagogue every morning in order to pray, completely alone, even though he was not





particularly religious at the time. This simple ritual gradually attracted people and steadily created a diverse community.

It was a community that emerged through one person's dreams, resourceful thinking, determination, and commitment. All this formed the intangible "cruse of oil" which together with Nikos's belief in "the impossible" created a new, and what I would call marvelous, reality.

Nikos was much more than merely an empathetic person, however; he was a friend. A friend who was considerate, understanding, sharing, supportive, inspiring – even at a distance. His was a friendship that always communicated a powerful message: you can achieve what you want; do not accept anything less than the truth; keep moving forward and bear in mind that there is no time to delay or to postpone what you can do. Over the years that I knew him he shared with me his knowledge, his experience, his adventures, his passions, his house, his art, his cooking, his pets, his stories, his network of friends, his time, his love; he also dedicated time to introducing my research to others.



Describing Nikos's capacity for loving, caring and sharing doesn't do him justice, however, because he was much more. He was a diverse universe in himself, a whole world wherein the moment you thought you had grasped its limits, another completely unknown aspect would unfold.

He shaped the Etz Hayyim community according to his likeness. He managed to bring together such diverse people, inducing among them an appreciative atmosphere of dialogue and an enduring spirit of friendship despite their sometimes conflicting individual backgrounds. But stating that Nikos brought different people and different cultures closer together, created life friendships, inspired reconciliation, broke conventions, and established a positive precedent in a place and at a time much needed still wouldn't do justice to him.

Because Nikos was a visionary: I strongly believe that his work regarding the Etz Hayyim Synagogue will have an impact on Jewish heritage and on notions of 'Jewish space' on a larger scale. Moreover, his work and his legacy have the potential to empower and reshape Jewish/non-Jewish relations within Greece and beyond.

Nikos dared to dream the impossible and thus he generated profound change.

Non-Jews praying along with Jews at an old traditional Synagogue that just a few decades ago hardly anyone remembered, or, as Nikos himself might have put it, that most people had intentionally chosen to forget all about. This old Greek Synagogue formed part of an unwanted and long-neglected heritage that was excluded from the official national narratives. This unwanted heritage could trigger bad memories and could provoke unsettling or even 'dangerous' questions.

The general spirit of oblivion could not make Nikos stop. On the contrary, he was particularly passionate to reveal and expose those invented stories that so often were taken for historical facts. He knew that only if you know the truth concerning the past can you reconcile in the present. Reconciliation cannot be based on lies or on beautified versions of history.

What makes strong communities is awareness. The current Etz Hayyim community is strong and well-connected to the city's present fabric, and at the same time it is mindful of the past and of the future of Judaism in Greece. In my view, it is becoming a place with dual attributes according to the meaning of the Hebrew word makom. Makom means both the actual place and also a co-constructed space between people of different backgrounds and faiths.

And is also a place where Nikos's memory continues to dwell. Throughout his life he inspired and influenced the lives and the work of so many people – including me and my own current academic research on the Etz Hayyim. His wisdom is and will be present, his spiritual youthfulness still blossoming within the dense network of people that he met and brought together; his memory is and shall always be a blessing.

## Some Light Thoughts

### A Bottle of Ouzo that Can Cure COVID by Leon Saltiel

During one of my travels, I was invited to a distant aunt's for dinner. To please me, as I am from Greece, she asked me, "Would you like some ouzo?" Not to be rude, I agreed, and here came the strangest bottle of ouzo I had ever seen.



The etiquette was written in Greek, stuck on an old glass bottle. It read: "Exceptional Ouzo 'Into' – Double Distilled – Distillery of A. Bourla Brothers, Victor Hugo 3 street, Thessaloniki." The upper label was even more surprising. In Hebrew letters, it said that this product was "Kosher for Pessach," that is it fulfilled the dietary rules of the Jewish Easter holiday. There was also a tassel hanging from the top, with a Star of David stamped on a lead circle.

I was surprised as I had never seen anything like it before! A bottle of this famous drink that came from a Jewish distillery in Thessaloniki! I was not aware of a Jewish company in Thessaloniki that produced ouzo after the war.

I narrated the story to my grandmother, who of course knew of this brand, and directed me to the daughter of one of the two Bourla brothers. She confirmed that it was a product of her father's store and was so moved as she had not seen such a bottle for a long time. In fact, the bottle could have been a gift from my grandfather to my aunt's father when he visited them decades ago.

The story of this company starts in pre-war Thessaloniki, where Into (pronounced in-to) Bourla owned the liquor shop bearing his first name at Athonos square in the city center, together with his partner Simon Mordoch. The Jews of Thessaloniki were big producers and also consumers of ouzo or raki, which was known for its high quality and was consumed by the lower and upper classes alike. A rare photo, shared by Bourla's granddaughter, informs us that the shop would sell ouzo, cognac, liqueur, different types of wine, such as retsina, Samos, Muscat, and kokkineli, but also vinegar.



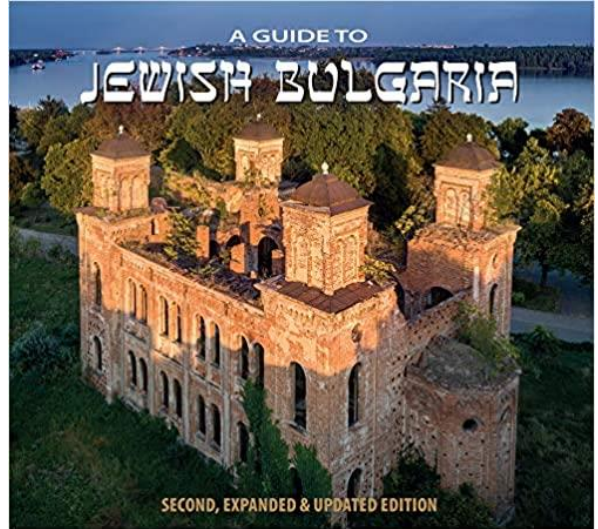
During the German occupation of Thessaloniki, Into's family, his father, Abraham Bourla, his mother, Rachel, his sister, Graciela, and his younger brother, David, were all deported and perished in the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, together with 50,000 Jews of the city. Into and his elder brother, Mois, both managed to survive the war by fleeing from Thessaloniki and hiding in Athens, which was at the time under Italian control. The shop was passed on to Christian custodians. After the war was over, the two brothers returned to Thessaloniki to find that they had lost most members of their family and that all their property and belongings had been stolen or sold. They started from scratch and they opened the liquor shop again as partners under the same name, in a new location, on Victor Hugo street. They ran this successful business together until they both retired.

A small but important detail: Mois Bourla, is the father of Albert, the Thessaloniki-born veterinarian who rose to become the CEO of Pfizer, the first company to release a vaccine against COVID-19!

This bottle has been since donated to the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, and all visitors can see it and learn about its history. (for more information about visiting see [www.jmth.gr](http://www.jmth.gr))

## **A Guide to Jewish Bulgaria** **Book Review by Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos**

This book is a welcome second edition to the original book (published in 2011). It is my pleasure to write a review of this book. When I first came in contact with Anthony Georgieff, shortly after he published the original book. He had approached me on buying a copy. Because of my problems with Bulgarian revisionist interpretation of their role in the deportation of Jews in Occupied Greece and Former Yugoslavia, and the fact that my family were among those deported, I told Anthony that, before I could think of purchasing his book, I wanted a copy to read from cover to cover to see how he handled the areas I found troubling. After reading the book (from cover to cover) I got back to Anthony and booked him for a book presentation at Kehila Kedosha Janina and, subsequently to lead our tour to Jewish Bulgaria, as part of our tour in 2013.



Anthony is a journalist by profession and has brought these skills to his writing. He also does not gloss over parts of Bulgarian history that might seem troubling to many Bulgarians, namely their culpability in the deaths of over 11,000 Jews who had the misfortune to live in the Bulgarian Occupied territories in Greece and Former Yugoslavia (now North Macedonia).

The book is a beautiful hard-covered book filled with excellent photographs. I was happy to see that Anthony expanded his research to Turkey, Greece, Serbia, North Macedonia and Romania.

The book can be purchased on Amazon for \$50. Kehila Kedosha Janina is hoping to carry this book in the future.

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### **Looking for Our Help**



We know that this photo contains Manny Cantos, Molly Levy and Sol Cantos. We are particularly interested in identifying the others in the photo.

Spurred by reflections of Rose Matza Goldstein, who was born in 1918, as she took her COVID-19 vaccination at the age of 102, wondering if there were any from our community on the Lower East Side who succumbed to the pandemic of 1918-1919, we are reaching out for any stories. Please contact us at [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)



## Photo of the Month



Lea Azouvi with her husband, Rabbi Zacharia Sasson (Chief Rabbi of Larissa) and their children. Lea was the sister of Rabbi Judah Azouvi, Rabbi Gabriel Azouvi and Rabbi Abraham Azouvi. She was also the sister of Eliachon Azouvi, Esther Filosof and Esther Misrahi. Thank you Louise Rostker for this amazing photo.

**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. **We need donations more than ever now. You can do this on line on our website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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



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