Kehila Kedosha Janina
Synagogue and Museum

July 2023 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This year, from the evening of July 26th until the evening of July 27th, Jews around the world commemorate Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av is considered the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, traditionally assigned to those same dates in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., respectively. For Sephardim, the day has additional significance, since it coincides with the date of the 1492 expulsion edict.

Arch of Titus, Rome

This newsletter, our 172nd will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

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

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

Simchas

This newsletter is sponsored by Holly Kaye, in honor of the birth of her granddaughter, Gwen (Gigi) Golombek and her grandson, Sam Golombek.

We would love to share our joy in celebrating the 100th birthday of Esta Varon and the 93rd birthday of Shirlee Paganetti.

Esta is the daughter of Sophie and Morris Hazan (both of Blessed Memory) and the granddaughter of Steroula Colchamiro Dalven and Israel Dalven, both of Blessed Memory (Steroula born in Ioannina and Israel in Preveza. Esta's children, Joseph and Cheryl, her grandchildren and great grandchildren join in the celebration.

Dalven (Dalian) Family


Shirlee in the infamous "moutra" picture

Shirlee is the daughter of Eva Eliezer and Morris Cabillis (both born in Ioannina and both of Blessed Memory), the granddaughter of David and Sarina Cabillis, and the great-granddaughter of Moses Cabillis. On the Eliezer side, Shirlee is the granddaughter of Josef Eliezer and Rachil bat Shamos Eliasaf and the great-granddaughter of Eliezer Eliezer. Her children, Rhoda and Glen, along with grandchildren and great-grandchildren, join in the celebration.

On Saturday July 1st the Colchamiro clan gathered at Kehila Kedosha Janina to celebrate the baby naming of the adorable Lauren Sophie Katz, the daughter of Evan Katz and Ruth Weintraub, the granddaughter of Leon and Nancy Weintraub, the great-granddaughter of Stella Colchamiro and Isaac Weintraub, the great-great granddaughter of Leon Weintraub and Joyia Mazza and the great-great-great granddaughter of Jessoula ben Matathias Colchamiro and Rachel Galanos.

Upcoming Events
Sounds of Cyprus - Concert at Kehila Kedosha Janina
Save the Date - October 15, 2023 at 5pm

Tickets $20 in advance **online here** or $25 at the door

Past Events

Kehila Kedosha Janina Celebrates the 75th Birthday of the State of Israel

For the first time ever KKJ participated in the Celebrate Israel Parade in NYC with our own float! We were proud to represent our Greek Jewish community's support for Israel. We danced to live Greek and Israeli music and had an amazing time celebrating the 75th birthday of the State of Israel. Thank you to all our community members who joined us, and all our partners who made it happen!














Greek Jewish Festival – Videos

Watch highlight videos from our 8th annual Greek Jewish Festival held in May on our YouTube page **Here**
And check out our full album of photos **Here**


Kehila Kedosha Janina participated in the Egg Rolls, Egg Creams, and Empanadas Festival

KKJ was proud to participate in the annual Egg Rolls, Egg Creams, and Empanadas street festival hosted by our neighbors at the Eldridge Street Synagogue. We were proud to offer baklava, Greek Jewish books for sale, and t-shirts to show off our community pride. Special thanks to Sofiana Kohen for her help at our booth.

Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina
ΔΙΚΟΙ MAS / Los Muestros / Our Own

We are always overjoyed to welcome "our own." In June we welcomed members of the Behar family from Seattle, the great great granddaughter of Rabbi Moshe Pessah (of Blessed Memory) from Volos, multiple tour groups, and other special visitors.

Ela Malka (left) is the great great granddaughter of Rabbi Moshe Pessah from Volos. Ela is from Israel but now lives directly across the street from KKJ! She visited with her friend Lily (right).

Howard and Lynn Behar visited KKJ with their granddaughter. Howard is the former CEO of Starbucks and his family is originally from Bulgaria.

The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry Hosted their most successful Tour of Jewish Greece from June 2-16

Ioannina

Corfu

Pitsirilos

Elias family connection

Nachum Matsas, Rhonda Saldias & Abraham family

Allegra Matsas & Linda Silverman (granddaughter of Shorty Matza)

Abraham cousins

Marlene Hoffman from Matza Family and Rachil Simon from Eliezer family

Naphtali cousins

Volos

Marcia's Farewell Song, composed by Deborah Schnapf to the tune of Miserlou.
Farewell song for Marcia 6/14/2023. To the tune of Miserlou. Deborah Schnapf

Marcia has taken us on a great Grecian tour.
Where we saw more stray cats than ever before.
We were carefree in Corfu-enjoyed the Ionian Sea
After the synagogue, we even saw an olive oil factory.
Then on to Ionanna, where a lot of us have family.
It was quite moving, visiting their cemetery.
The Castro was fascinating, as we all imagined our family's history.
Let's not forget quaint Metsovo and Kastoria,
Please never confuse it with Astoria.
Lots of Greek salads and tons of tsadiki,
Then on to the big city of Thessaloniki.
With Hella our guide, we learned a lot there too.
There was never a time when we had nothing to do.
Constantly learning, our minds were churning with facts.
The only complaint is we had little time to relax.
In Volos we arrived in the land of Jason and his golden fleece.
On the bay of Aegean, it really was quite unique.
Our last stop is Athens, the land of the Parthenon.
Just two more days and we will all be gone.
Efhorasto to dear Marcia and our great driver Christos.
We are all so grateful, we would like to make a toast.
Yiassas for making this a wonderful tour.
We could not have asked for anything more!
Thanks Deborah!

Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

Thank you to everyone who joined us in June at our Rooftop Pool Party and BBQ! We hosted more than 60 people for an incredible evening in Brooklyn with great food and drinks, live music, and amazing vibes. Special thanks to our host Ben Morgenroth and the musicians who treated us to a live show. It was definitely a great way to kick off the summer. We can't wait to see everyone again soon!









Greek Jewish & Sephardic
Young Professionals Network
Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita
Summer
Beach Day
TUESDAY JULY 4 AT 12PM
ROCKAWAY BEACH
JOIN US FOR A FUN DAY TO HIT THE WAVES, GET SOME SUN, AND ENJOY GREAT COMPANY AS WE MAKE THE MOST OF THE SUMMER SEASON!
RSVP to GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com
EXACT MEETING LOCATION PROVIDED WITH RSVP. OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR 20S AND 30S

News from Jewish Greece

Athens

In June the Jewish Community of Athens celebrated the Bat Mitzvah ceremony for three young community members – Victoria, Lizeta, and Sarina. Mazal Tov!




KISE (Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece) General Secretary Victor Eliezer participated in the Day of Actions, entitled "From Genocide and National Catastrophe to Rebirth", organized by the Program Secretariat of New Democracy, at the central stand of New Democracy, at Syntagma Square, on Wednesday June 21, 2023.

The Day of Actions included special thematic sections dedicated to Armenians, Jews, Pontians. The General Secretary of KISE, in the program dedicated to the Jews, spoke with Pr. Minister Haris Theocharis, MP Sofia Voultepsi, Ann. New Democracy program secretary Antonia Dimou and many other ND executives on history, the Holocaust and the post-war reconstruction of Jewish communities in Greece.

At the same time, topical issues concerning Greek Jews were discussed, such as the need to advance the case for the construction of the Holocaust Museum of Greece in Thessaloniki, anti-Semitism, educational programs about the Holocaust and the importance of education for society in general and especially for the younger generation.

"Antisemitism threatens the core values of a democratic society. This is because hatred of Jews begins with Jews, but does not stop with Jews. That is why it is necessary to put an end to the tolerance of hatred and racism, whether it is directed against Jews or against any minority living among us," said Victor Eliezer. "86% of Greek Jewry was exterminated in the Nazi death camps, with the Community of Thessaloniki and other Jewish communities such as Ioannina, Arta, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Rhodes and Kos being almost completely wiped out. It is where anti-Semitism was pervasive, where local authorities collaborated with the occupiers, where institutions and society ostentatiously ignored the expulsion of their Jewish fellow citizens. A crime committed with the perpetrators of the Nazis and the German extermination machine, but also with the tolerance of the spectators, with the tolerance of many governments, many local rulers, who then rushed to plunder the properties of those who were forcibly deported and brutally killed. We have said before that if there were more Mayors like Karrer of Zakynthos, Archbishops Damaskinos and Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, more Angels Evert, more resistance fighters of EAM, more Schindlers and more Wallenbergs, then far fewer Jews in Greece and throughout Europe would follow the path of martyrdom in the death camps", the Secretary General of KISE pointed out.

Regarding the reconstruction of Jewish communities after the Holocaust, Victor Isaac Eliezer told his interlocutors: "In 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of World War II, the BBC asked the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks to make a film about Auschwitz. His response was, "I will only do it if I can tell the story the Jewish way." They asked him, "What is the Jewish way?" and he replied, "A Jewish story may begin with tears, but it always ends with hope." Today, therefore, the Jews of Greece are organized in 8 Jewish Communities operating in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Volos, Chalkida, Ioannina, Trikala and Corfu. A few Jews also live in Rhodes, Karditsa, Chania and Kavala. Jewish life in Greece was reconstructed with tears but also with hope, in schools, museums and synagogues. But we are not complacent... We must be reminded of what can happen again to humanity if memory fades from oblivion and if hatred prevails as a tolerable rule in a society. Because "absolute evil" did not begin at Auschwitz. It started with hate speech and ended up in Auschwitz."

The event was accompanied by a video projection from the life, tradition and Holocaust of Greek Jews, produced by the Jewish Museum of Greece, as well as music from the CD "Unknown musical treasures of Greek Jews", of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, performed by soprano Mariangela Chatzistamatiou. KISE distributed a number of books that were exhibited on a special stand at the venue.

Daniel Esdras is the first Jewish Greek Minister. On May 25 he was appointed interim Minister of Immigration and Asylum in the interim Government of Prime Minister Ioannis Sharma until the elections of June 25, 2023.

Daniel Esdras is the former head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Special Envoy of the Director General of IOM to the Greek Government and Advisor to the Regional Director for the Mediterranean. In 2022, the Minister of Immigration Notis Mitarakis awarded him a commemoration of Immigration Assistance A' class.

KISE, on the Board of Directors of which D. Esdras had been a member in the late 80s and early 90s, sent him the following congratulatory letter for taking up his duties in the very important Ministry of Immigration:
Dear Danny,
It was with great joy and emotion that we learned of your appointment to the Interim Greek Government as Minister of Immigration and Asylum, which is a recognition of your remarkable multi-year work and your wholehearted commitment in the field of immigration and the assistance of immigrants.
The Greek Jewry is familiar with your willingness to contribute, even from your young age. Your tenure on the Board of Directors of KIS, alongside your decisive role in the establishment of the Jewish Youth of Greece, was the harbinger of a long and successful contribution to the common good and to humanity.
This long journey was recognized by the Greek State and by the Greek Prime Minister and makes you the first Greek Jewish Minister in the history of our country and community.
Warm congratulations and best wishes for success in your work.
Yours sincerely
Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece
President David Saltiel, General Secretary Victor Eliezer

Thessaloniki

Unknown musical treasures of Greek Jews, Sephardim and Romaniotes, were presented on June 21, 2023, in an event organized for World Music Day by the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, together with the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

The event entitled "The Musical Tradition of the Greek Jews" took place with the support of MOMus-Museum of Contemporary Art, in the Amphitheater of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The event, which was organized on the occasion of the completion of two research programs under the auspices of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, was introduced by the Museum's scientific associate, Dr. Mariandzela Hadjistamatiou, and the Museum's scientific manager, Dr. Xenia Eleftheriou.

In the show, edited and performed by the soprano Mariangela Hadjistamatiou and the band Pellegrinaggio Al Levante Ensemble, live songs from the CD "Unknown Musical Treasures of the Greek Jews" were presented, which constitutes an important contribution to the musical tradition of the Jewish population of Greece.
The cd is a production of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki through the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, from which it is available. At the same time it is also available for streaming from platforms such as Amazon, Spotify, iTunes and Youtube.

The disc contains Romaniote songs (in the Greek language or bilingually, in the Greek and Hebrew languages) as well as Sephardic songs (in the Hebrew-Spanish language). Some of them are associated with religious holidays and ceremonies, while others belong to the cycle of life (marriage, birth, lullabies). There are also songs with references to Thessaloniki, songs of the Holocaust, prayers, a fairy tale and a song of the Zionist movement. Special attention was paid to the observance of the Hebrew-Spanish pronunciation. The selection of the songs was made after many years of bibliographic and field research, which concerned the origin and variations of each of the songs, the possible connection of the songs with local tradition and history, as well as the circumstances associated with each song. Most of their songs or selected tunes are rarely – if ever – found in the international commercial discography. The disc includes a booklet with the lyrics of the songs in English and where a Greek translation is required.

The concert also featured for the first time anecdotal songs included in the CD Songs of the Holocaust of the Greek Jews, which is a unique historical document of audio historical sources about the traumatic events of the Holocaust. The cd is going to be released soon together with the publication of the historical research of the Assistant Doctor of the A.P.Th. Mariandzelas Hadjistamatiou from Alexandria publications.

The soprano **Mariangela Hadjistamatiou**: she completed her undergraduate and graduate studies in classical singing at Bowling Green State University's College of Musical Arts (Ohio, USA). She also studied Italian language and culture at the Italian Università per Stranieri di Perugia. She has appeared in numerous events and opera performances in Greece and abroad, while she has also worked as a voice teacher at the Voice College of Music of Mahidol University in Thailand.

The guitarist **Nikos Panagiotidis**, responsible for organizing and creating music guides, has completed postgraduate studies in early music at London's Guildhall Academy of Music. He has appeared in numerous concerts and recitals in Greece and abroad, while he has also made recordings. He works as a teacher of guitar, lute and Basso Continuo.

The band **Pellegrinaggio al levante Ensemble** consists of Mariandzela Hadjistamatiou (vocals), Vassilis Agrokostas (vocals, political lyre), Kostantinos Koletsios (vocals, guitar), Michalis Meletis (new), Christos Daskalopoulos (violin), Panagiotis Sakkoulas (lute), Nikolas Mylonas (percussion), Nikos Panagiotidis (lafta, vihuela, baroque guitar, tzouras, acoustic guitar and direction of musical ensembles).
*Data from Press Release I.K. Thessaloniki

Campbell Pogrom and Fire of 1931

Thank you Sabi Hanan for the translation of this article. It was the end of June 1931 and the burning of the Campbell Jewish settlement, when it entered history as the most violent episode of an anti-Semitic attack in Greece. It wasn't the only tragic event, as in 1927 a large fire in Thessaloniki claimed the lives of 50,000 Jewish victims.

Some of them resided in the late Campbell settlement (1927) which intended to house some fire victims. According to estimates, some 210 families are homeless and a total of 788 people were affected.

The emigration of parts of the Jewish population has already begun as, some after the fire of 1917 and others from 1922, with the legislation of the law banning work on Sundays (Jews have a day off on Saturday), have chosen to settle outside Greece.

On the night of June 29, 1931, members of the national organization (anti-Semitic and anti-communist) "Ethniki 'Enosis "I Hellas" attacked and set fire to the settlement, murdered Leonidas Pepe and Leon Vidal and injured many others. Source: https://www.ertnews.gr/.../to-pogkrom-kai-o-emprismos.../

A Sephardi Renaissance is Underway – Full article by Leon Saltiel **Here**

Bet HaRav dedication ceremony a century ago, on 12 Sivan, 5683 / May 27, 1923. Seated on the dais is Rav Abraham Isaac Kook wearing his fur spodek; to his L are Harry Fischel, Herbert Samuel, and Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yaakov Meir.

While these nations have become increasingly vocal about welcoming the return of Jews, they have painful histories of violence.

While obscured by the prevailing narrative of globally rising antisemitism, another story offers cause for optimism: a renaissance of interest in and appreciation for Jewish culture and history.

This focus is specifically centered on Sephardi Jews and the countries where they have had a prominent presence, including Spain, Morocco and Greece. This momentum must be nurtured.

First, a bit of background: Sephardi Jews, today numbering 1.5 million to 2 million, are descendants of those expelled from Spain in 1492 who then settled in diverse places around the Mediterranean basin as well as further abroad, carrying their unique blend of Jewish and Iberian culture.

Increased attention to Jewish culture and history
Now, governments, local authorities, civil society, academics and the media in countries such as Morocco and Greece have been looking at their histories with a more inclusive and accurate eye. This has resulted in an increased attention to Jewish heritage, culture and traditions.

At the end of May, I participated in an educational visit to Morocco, the "Erensya Summit," organized by Centro Sefarad-Israel, an agency affiliated with the Spanish Foreign Ministry that aims to increase dialogue and exchange among Spain, Israel and the Jewish world at large.

For three days, participants from 20 Jewish communities and organizations representing 12 nations explored the rich Jewish heritage of Casablanca, Tangier and Tetouan, and we visited impressive museums, synagogues, cemeteries and other sites.

Morocco has a long and rich Jewish history. During the 1950s, a large number of Jews left the country; out of a community of some 300,000 people, less than a few thousand remain. Yet synagogues and cemeteries are now being restored, and groups visit these locations as well as take part in pilgrimages to sites of religious significance. The Abraham Accords and the reestablishment of relations between Israel and Morocco have clearly provided the extra push needed for these developments.

In my native Greece, there is a similar revival of Jewish life and culture. For instance, former Thessaloniki mayor Yiannis Boutaris played a pivotal role in reconciling his city, a historic center for Sephardi Judaism, with its Jewish past while fostering new prospects. Ioannina, a city in northwestern Greece home to a Romaniote Jewish community, voted for Moses Elisaf to become mayor three years ago, the first Greek Jew to ever be elected as mayor. Sadly, Elisaf passed away a few months ago, leaving a big gap, but his legacy continues: starting in May, there will be direct flights between Tel Aviv and Ioannina, enabling thousands of Israelis to visit the city and discover the region.

The Sephardi renaissance is also having a unique moment in the Iberian peninsula itself. In wishing to reverse the legacy of the Inquisition, the Spanish parliament followed the example of Portugal in adopting a law giving the descendants of Sephardi Jews the ability to request citizenship in a simplified process. Today, both countries have increased their Jewish populations, while the "juderias," the former Jewish quarters that can be found in many towns, have been magnets for tourism, culture and entertainment.

Challenges in welcoming Jews
Still, challenges remain. While these nations have become increasingly vocal about welcoming the return of Jews, they have painful histories of violence (Morocco), forced exile or conversion (Spain) and a mix of collaboration and indifference that decimated its Jewish population during the Holocaust (Greece).

To ensure that recent overtures toward Jews are truly meaningful, it is essential to go one step further and have widespread societal support and investment. Governments should offer ongoing funding to preserve, renovate and promote their country's Jewish heritage and make local Jewish communities more visible. Local Jewish history should become part of school curricula and textbooks so that new generations consider it as their own. Histories need to be vigorously taught to build true understanding, reconciliation and resilience – and not avoid the darker chapters.

At the opening of the recent Morocco event I attended, the executive director of Centro Sefarad-Israel, Jaime Moreno Bau, expressed the wish that Spain becomes a country with one of the biggest Jewish communities in the world. Similarly, Casablanca Mayor Nabila Rmili asked us to consider Morocco as "our home." A Sephardi renaissance is clearly underway. We should all support these efforts as we build a better future for all, Jews and non-Jews alike.

The writer is a historian of Sephardi Jewry. He is the director of diplomacy for the World Jewish Congress.

Greek Jews: Insights from Holocaust Historian Dr Leon Saltiel Full article **Here**

Historian Dr Leon Saltiel discusses the Nazi persecution of Jews in Greece, following the 80th commemoration of that dark epoch when the first train to Nazi Germany's death camp Auschwitz, left Thessaloniki, where 50,000 Greek Jews were killed.

People leave candles and flowers on train tracks during a memorial marking the 80th anniversary of the first deportation of Jews from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz, in Thessaloniki, Greece March 19, 2023.

Last Monday [April 24], on the eve of Anzac Day, the Melbourne Holocaust Museum presented a lecture by visiting historian Dr Leon Saltiel on commemoration of the 80th year of the deportation and extermination of the Greek Jews of Salonica, or Thessaloniki by the Nazis.

Dr Saltiel has dedicated his life to studying the Nazi persecution of Jews in Greece, especially the Sephardic Jews of Thessaloniki. His book "The Holocaust in: Reactions to the Anti-Jewish Persecution, 1942–1943," won the 2021 Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research. His book, "Do Not Forget Me: Three Jewish Mothers Write to their Sons from the Thessaloniki Ghetto," details how the Nazis began persecuting the country's Jews, starting with small indignities, and culminating in mass imprisonment and deportations.

Over 80 percent of Thessaloniki's Jews perished
In 1941, just under 70,000 Greek Jews were in Greece and now "less than 7000 remain" says Dr Saltiel. Up to 50,000 Jews from Thessaloniki were sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing centre. At Birkenau, the SS murdered virtually all the Salonika Jews upon arrival.

Talking to Neos Kosmos, Dr Saltiel said that the Sephardic Jews in Salonika had a different position compared to the Romaniote Jews, who had been in Greece since antiquity and had become more entrenched in parts of Greece. "They [Sephardic Jews] weren't as embedded in Hellenism or evidently as others."

On October 28, 1940, fascist Italy invaded Greece from Albania. However, the Greek army drove the Italians back into the Albanian mountains. To secure the Balkan flank for an imminent invasion of the Soviet Union,

Hitler ordered the invasion of former Yugoslavia and Greece. On April 6, 1941, the Germans, Italians, Bulgarians, and Hungarians attacked. By April 28, Axis troops had occupied most of the Greek mainland, but Greek resistance on the islands continued until June.

The Jews of Thessaloniki were Sephardim from Spain who found safety in the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion during the Inquisition.

"They were often identified by their accent, born of a mixture of Spanish, Hebrew, Turkish, and Greek. This accent made them seem alien to some," says Dr Saltiel.

Although there was major resistance to the Nazis, the Nazis always sought allies in every place they occupied, including Greece.

"Greece had three puppet governments during the occupation and even developed a paramilitary that worked with the Nazis."

Death camps and Resistance
In July 1942, German military authorities deployed 2,000 male Jews on forced-labour projects in Salonika. In February 1943, the Germans concentrated the Jews of Thessaloniki in two enclosed ghetto-like areas of the city.

Italians were the only occupiers who largely protected Jews in their occupation zone in Greece. The Bulgarians and Hungarians were often willing accomplices to the Nazis' desire to exterminate the Jews. But after Italy surrendered to the Allies in 1943, the Germans took control and implemented the "Final Solution" in all of Greece.

Between March 20 and August 19, German officials deported over 50,000 Jews from Salonika to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing centre. At Birkenau, the SS murdered virtually all the Salonika Jews upon arrival. Dr Saltiel says that that "many Greek Jews joined the [EAM ELAS] Resistance, which was communist led."

The historian points to the fact that the Nazis rounded up Jews in Thessaloniki in 1943, just as the Resistance was starting. Whereas in Volos and Larisa the persecutions began in 1944 "and the resistance was better organised."

"Jews played a significant role in the resistance as Greeks, not as a separate resistance as in Poland." Often Greek Jews in the Resistance "created pseudonyms so it was very difficult after the occupation and after the Greek Civil War to determine who was Jewish and who wasn't."

Greek Jews did not speak Yiddish, so the German concentration camp guards could not understand them and gave them the worst details, of cleaning the incineration ovens. Greek Jews led one of the few uprisings in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

"Some escaped and even killed a few guards, but overall, it was futile exercise as most were exterminated," he says. As Greece fell into successive right-wing governments, after the war, and the bloody Civil War between left and right in 1945-1949, and many Jews did not want to "come out" as former Resistance fighters. It wasn't until the 1980s with the Papandreou led PASOK government, that the Resistance was recognised.

Antisemitism in Greece is difficult to define
Antisemitism in Greece according to Dr Saltiel "is difficult to define" and changes from place to place. "There were different patterns of how Jews were seen or treated in Greece, and those patterns reflected different areas and histories in Greece."

What is evident says the historian, was that antisemitism in Greece differed from Germany and other parts of Europe. "There was no racialise aspect to Greek anti Semitism, like in Germany. In Greece, there was no racial aspect to anti-Semitism, Greek Christians and Jews did not see themselves as racially different, much of the anti-Semitism was largely based on the historic Greek Orthodox Church's view that the Jews killed Christ."

He points to how in Sydney Archbishop Makarios who made clear that antisemitism was not welcome and called it a dark chapter in Greece's modern history. Dr Saltiel stressed "economic opportunism," rather than antisemitism in Thessaloniki.

"Economic opportunity played a factor and many properties once owned by Greek Jews ended up the hands of local Greeks." Greece was a poor Balkan nation where the Jews occupied similar occupational and class position as non-Jewish Greeks.

Dr Saltiel makes a distinction of the "different patterns and in different regions" of Greek antisemitism. While the Romaniote Jews had a "more secure Hellenic identity" Dr Saltiel says "what is clear, though, is that the Romaniote Jews also suffered tremendously."

"Romaniotes in Athens had a more secure Greek identity and were less evident, they were not seen as other, whereas Sephardic Jews were always other mainly because of their accent." Dr Saltiel says "it is not the sort of antisemitism that was evident in parts of Europe, and still is."

"You have still a form of that kafenion (coffeehouse) anti-Semitism where discussions occur about conspiratorial nature of Jews and this is benign compared to the antisemitism that was, and is experienced in other parts of the world," Dr Saltiel says.

He points to the 2008-2017 Greek Financial Crisis "where Jews particularly for the right wing became a focus." According to Dr Saltiel the Greek left's general anti-Israel attitude in the 70s and 80s, "often veered into anti-Semitism, whereby anti US, anti-Israel attitude flipped over into anti-Semitism."

"There is nothing wrong with criticising Israel, and Israel's governments, but often you'll find the criticism provides a certain cloak for anti-Semitism."

He says that in the 1990s, in the 2000s, as the conflict between Israel and Palestinians escalated. "You'd often see Greek newspaper cartoons of Israeli soldiers depicted as Nazis and Palestinians as Jews, which is profoundly wrong."

"One can criticise Israel and its defence forces, but IDF are not Nazis and Palestinians are not being driven into gas chambers." Greece and Israel a complex relationship that's now closer than ever

Dr Leon Saltiel is positive over how Greece in the last ten years had sought to actively combat antisemitism. "Things have changed tremendously and that the relationship between Israel and Greece is unprecedented in terms of its robustness and its closeness now. There is incredible exchanges and investment between Greece and Israel in areas of economics, science, military and culture."

There are "more Jews returning, particularly from Israel that may have had Greek ancestry, however at the height there were at least 65,000 Jews before the Holocaust."

Dr Saltiel is a member of the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and of the Greek delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. He now lives in Geneva where he serves as Director of Diplomacy, Representative at UN Geneva and UNESCO, and Coordinator on Countering Antisemitism for the World Jewish Congress.

Ioannina

While in Ioannina from June 5-8, our group paid our respects at the grave of Moses Eliasaf, with Nachum Matza saying ashkavah. In the synagogue, all those present had the opportunity to have Kaddish said for their relatives, again with the help of Nachum Matza. Thank you Allegra and Nachum.

Threads of Tradition: Unraveling the History of Ioannina's Romaniote Jews Full article **Here**

For 2,000 years and until the Holocaust, descendants of Jews who left Israel or were taken into slavery after the destruction of the second Temple lived in Ioannina, now only a few dozen remain to pray in their distinct style and preserve their memory.

Just a thin thread still connects Ioannina, the capital and largest city of northwestern Greece's Epirus region, and the Jewish community that lived there for 2,000 years. The Jewish presence is not felt around the city although its mayor for the past four decades, Prof. Moshe Eliasaf, a medical doctor who passed away recently, was a proud Jew.

Its Jewish history can be found only in the modest and beautiful synagogue in the city's ancient quarter and in its Jewish cemetery.

Of the 2,000 Jews who lived there until 1944, only 40 remained in 2022, and all but two, live in one apartment block. There are only memories gently floating here in the breeze, answering the voice of Allegra Matza, who holds all that the city conceals and for whom the secrets of its Jewish community are laid out like an open book. She is the keeper of the remaining community and literally guards the keys to its past.

Ioannina, or as it was once called Yannena after John the Baptist, was called by its Jews Ioannina or in Hebrew Aneni Na, in a call for G-d to answer their prayers.

They were Romaniotes, Jews named after the eastern parts of the Roman Empire - Byzantium, who were spread over four countries: Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Albania. They were neither Sephardi nor Ashkenazi but rather descendants of those who either left the Land of Israel or were taken from it into slavery after the destruction of the second Temple. They spoke a dialect of Greek with letters that resemble ancient Hebrew.

Allegra tells us to meet her near the taxi station at the gates of the Old City. Its walls would be visible from all directions throughout our visit. Taxi drivers make room for us to park as we rush to follow her hurried footsteps through the alleyways, holding the keys to the synagogue in her hand.

Just 30 minutes after arriving in this city, we are at the most important site for us. The few who pray in this place, seek to preserve the original Romaniote tradition and a large crowd gathers only on the High Holidays, when visitors, who are mostly descendants of past residents from Israel or the United States, arrive here, wishing to daven as their ancestors did.

At first glance, it is evident that this is a synagogue like no other. Allegra tells us there are 400 seats arranged back to back with worshipers facing either the altar or the east. I searched but could not find one prayer book (siddur) in the Romaniote style, later, I failed to find one in Israel as well.

Only with the help of Allegra's friend who had moved to Israel, I finally located one sole copy edited by the gabbai (who assists in the reading of the Torah) from the Romaniote synagogue in Jerusalem, which has since been taken over by a Sephardi community.

Ioannina's synagogue was built in the 8th century and was last renovated in 1826. From inside and undetected from the exterior, is a big blue dome leaning on six pillars. To prevent passersby from mistaking it for a mosque, the dome was covered by a tiled roof, masking the unique purpose of the structure.

The interior walls display works of art, typical of the community, but most outstanding, are silver plates sewn onto the ornamental curtain covering the front of the ark, they are the masterful work of a local artisan. The city was renowned for the works of its silversmiths.

According to local custom, in celebrations, be it weddings, bar mitzvahs or briths, families would donate palm-size silver plates inscribed with a description of the occasion. For years, the curtains were heavy with them, so they would be taken down every now and then and replaced with newer ones.

The holy ark is sunken into the east wall and contains six Torah scrolls. One, Allegra says, was written 500 years ago. They are adorned with woodwork depicting Ioannina's rose, the city's emblem and the symbol local Jews adopted as their own, Allegra explains. The scrolls are covered in heavy cloth and magnificent embroidery.

"These are the work of Jewish women who were masters of artistic embroidery," Allegra says.

In the late 15th century to early 16th century, Jews who were expelled from Spain and Portugal began to arrive. Synagogues in Greece would pray either in the Sephardi tradition or in the older Romaniote one, but the local rabbis were not pleased with the newcomers' ways, and they soon left.

The ancient community was decimated along with the rest of European Jewry in the Holocaust. On March 25, 1944, 1,980 of Ioannina's Jews were deported to the Auschwitz death camp. In one day, 96% of the community was murdered. One of those responsible for their extermination was Austrian Nazi Kurt Waldheim who would later become UN secretary general and president of Austria.

When the war ended, only 164 Jews returned to Ioannina and hoped to rebuild their lives there.
The Nazis destroyed three of the city's synagogues and the fourth was saved thanks to the local bishop and mayor. Soon after the Jews were deported, both filled the building with books from the municipal library and local churches and declared the structure a research center belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church.

When the few surviving Jews returned, the books were removed, and the synagogue was returned to its rightful owners. A marble slab expressing gratitude to both men hangs to the left of the ark.

Marble slabs fill the walls with names of those who perished in the Holocaust. Even without being able to read Greek, it is easy to decipher that the same family names are repeated many times over.

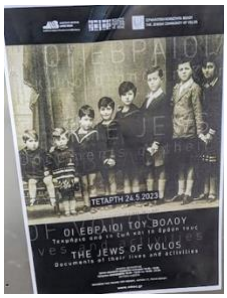
Until 1944, Jews lived inside the Old City walls and clues to their presence can be recognized on buildings through the Star of David and Hebrew writing on their facade. On one street named after a Jewish poet, we see where the "new synagogue" stood.

The Jewish cemetery is not far away in the center of town and a number of gravestones rise above the grass. Most are of Jews who died in the past 30 years, but the cemetery is enormous and houses hundreds if not thousands of graves.

Allegra pulls out a different key from her chain and we pass through the gate. The city had planned to turn the cemetery into a park and pave a road through a section of it. But the few local Jews enlisted their neighbors to fight the initiative and succeeded. In recent years, groups of young Israelis come to Ioannina to work and preserve the cemetery so that it would serve as a reminder of a magnificent community that had lived there for 2,000 years.

Volos

Our Tour of Jewish Greece had the opportunity to view the excellent temporary exhibition on the Jews of Volos, which opened on May 24, 2023.



Linda Matza Silverman finds her relatives in the Museum (the Negrin Family)

Synagogue destroyed in the earthquake

Baby Naming (Fandario) in Volos

On Sunday June 18 the fadario (naming ceremony) of little Jacqueline, daughter of Elinda Maisi and Yiannis Giouvanakis and granddaughter of Iakovos and Emilia Maisi, took place at the beautifully decorated with flowers Holy Synagogue of Volos.

The ceremony was held by the Rabbi of Larissa, Mr. Elias Sabetai, with the religious minister of the Volos Jewish Community Mr. Makis Moisi, in the presence of friends and relatives of the family.

The President of the GCM, Mr. Marcel Solomon, taking the floor, stressed that he is happy because such ceremonies are rare in our Community and touched because little Jacqueline is the granddaughter of his friend and classmate James.

He then extended good wishes to the parents, sister and grandparents and gave a symbolic gift on behalf of the Community. The family accepted the wishes of the guests, offered sweets and sugar plums to everyone and then lunch followed at a well-known hotel in the city. We wholeheartedly wish little Jacqueline and her family, Mazal Tov, health and prosperity.

Larissa

The Ambassador of Israel, Mr. Noam Katz, had the honor to be welcomed by the Community of Larissa on Thursday, June 15, 2023, on his first visit to the city. Mr. Katz, accompanied by President Elias Kampelis, Vice-President Moses Manouach, Gen. Secretary Betty Magrizou and Director Alina Moses, listened with interest to the history of the Jewish Community of Larissa and visited the Synagogue under reconstruction and the Holocaust Victims Memorial.

He was then welcomed by the members of the Community at the Community Center, where, in a very friendly atmosphere, he was greeted by President, Rabbi of Larissa Elias Sabetai, as well as the Hebrew teacher Victor Moses, along with the children of the school. In his very interesting speech, Mr. Katz referred to the relations between Greece and Israel and their development prospects, the situation in the Middle East and the opportunities and challenges of the State of Israel.

A screening of two short films related to the Community of Larissa followed and the evening ended with a dinner in his honor, where the members of the Council had the opportunity to get to know him better as a Diplomat and as a person. The next day, accompanied by members of the Board of Directors, he visited the Chamber of Larissa, Mayor Apostolos Kalogiannis and the Joist Innovation Park, in order to explore possibilities for cooperation with common benefits for the region of Larissa and Israel. After a full program with the Ambassador of Israel, the President of the Jewish Community of Larissa, Elias Kambelis and Alina Moisis, found time to give my group an introduction to the Jewish Community of Larissa.

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel

The fast day of the 17th of Tammuz is on July 6th. Though it is a "12 hour" fast, meaning from morning to evening, it introduces a very solemn and tragic period on the Jewish calendar, culminating in Judaism's most mournful and serious "24-hour" fast of the 9th of Av – Tisha B'Av – in commemoration of the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, as well as other historical tragedies that befell the Jewish people, including the expulsion of the Jews of England in 1290, the expulsion of the Jews of Spain in 1492, and the start of WWI, which, besides the upheavals it caused the Jewish world at the time, led directly to WWII and the Holocaust. The 17th of Tammuz itself commemorates other tragedies that remain imbedded in our collective memory and traditions, including events directly connected with the tragedies and mourning marked by Tisha B'Av.

As such, in Jewish tradition, the 17th of Tammuz ushers in a 3-week period of semi-mourning, that culminates on Tisha B'Av. There are differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim regarding the intensity of the customs of mourning during this period, though common to all Jews is that they continue to intensify as Tisha B'Av approaches, especially on Rosh Hodesh Av (9 days before the fast), and the week (meaning Motza'I Shabbat) when Tisha B'Av occurs. Including refraining from shaving and haircuts, no wedding ceremonies, not wearing new clothes and even – if practically possible- avoiding legal litigations with non-Jews.

The "Mishnah" in the Babylonian Talmudic Tractate of Ta'anit [Fasts] enumerates the specific tragedies that occurred on the 17th of Tammuz: "*Five misfortunes befell our forefathers on the 17th of Tammuz … The [first] Tablets [Ten Commandments] were broken, the daily [Temple sacrifice] was stopped, the city walls [of Jerusalem] were breached, Apostamus burned the Torah scroll, and an idol was placed in the Temple*."

As for Moses' smashing of the first two tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments due to his anger at the Israelite's worship of the Golden Calf, the Biblical narrative records the 17th of Tammuz as the exact date. As for the cessation of the daily offering in the Temple on the 17th of Tammuz, this occurred in both Temple eras (586 BCE and 70 CE respectively), when both the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar and the Romans led by Titus in their respective eras forbade the practice on pain of death. The breaching of the walls of Jerusalem before the destruction of the First Temple was actually on the 9th of Tammuz, but when Titus breached the walls in Second Temple times on the 17th of Tammuz, our Sages decided that the Babylonian conquest would also be commemorated on the 17th of Tammuz. As for the tragedy of a certain Apostamus burning the Torah, this event is somewhat shrouded in mystery. It is not clear whether he was a Greek general, which would place this incident in the much earlier Hasmonean period of the Second Temple era, or a Roman officer, which would place the incident toward the end of the Second Temple, or even somewhat later. In any case, as tragic as such an action may be, it would certainly not warrant historical perpetuation in its own right. There are therefore two interesting traditions offered, which make this tragedy worthy of mention and commemoration, both due to the Mishnah's use of the definite article ('The' Torah scroll): One opinion holds that 'the' Torah scroll burned was the "prototype" of *all* Torah scrolls, written by the Biblical scribe Ezra, and which still serves as the model and standard for all properly written scrolls. A second opinion offers that not only one Torah was burned, but 'the' Torah, collectively referring to Apostamus burning every Torah scroll he could find. Either way, the purpose was clear: to literally, and symbolically, eradicate the Torah from the Jewish nation. As for the introduction of a large pagan idol into the Temple, while some attribute this to the same Apostamus, a stronger opinion attributes this heinous act 'one of our own', so to speak: The evil Menashe [Menasseh], King of Judea, who was infamous for his blatant violations of Jewish law and open support for idol worship (Kings II, Chapter 21, Verse 7).

Nonetheless, given the overriding tragedy of the total destruction of both Temples on the 9th of Av, the events of the 17th of Tammuz seem to pale in comparison. Still, our Sages saw fit to establish a special fast day, in hopes that, beyond the commemoration of historical events, future generations would be inspired to learn from these very human tragedies, and, like other fast days in Judaism, use the day for self-reflection and self-improvement in their own spirituality and how they relate to their fellow man.

Rabbi Marc D. Angel
Shepherds for Our Communities: Thoughts on Parashat Pinchas
JewishIdeas.org

When Moses approached the end of his career, he asked G-d to appoint a new leader for the Israelites, so that "the congregation of the L-rd be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Bemidbar 27:17). He wanted to be sure that his successor would be someone who would lead the people as a shepherd who tends his flock.

A shepherd is often lonely. A shepherd often loses sleep. A shepherd watches over the entire flock, especially the weaker sheep and the stragglers. A shepherd keeps the flock in order, making sure that all are accounted for. A shepherd leads the flock with thoughtfulness and devotion.

A shepherd fails if he can't keep the flock in a harmonious framework. He fails if he favors the strong sheep and ignores the weaker ones. He fails if he does not look out for the welfare of the flock, but places his own personal needs before theirs.

A good shepherd is strong enough to maintain control, and gentle enough to be sensitive to the needs of each member of the flock.

To be a shepherd of sheep is challenging. To be a shepherd of a community of people is far more challenging. Moses knew from experience how difficult it was to shepherd the Israelites. His plea to G-d was for a successor who could lead the people effectively, honorably and harmoniously.

Moses wanted the Israelites to have a leader who would emulate the best qualities of a shepherd.

An article by Professor Christine Porath (New York Times, June 21, 2015) discusses key research on the nature of effective leadership. She notes how incivility in the workplace leads to demoralization and to a decline in quality of productivity. A survey of 4500 doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel, found that 71% tied medical errors to abusive, condescending or insulting conduct by those in authority. 27% tied such behavior to patient deaths!

Various studies have demonstrated a sharp decline in efficiency and effectiveness when employees were treated with incivility. They have shown that "the number one characteristic associated with an executive's failure is an insensitive, abrasive or bullying style." Such executives may think that rudeness and bullying are signs of power; in fact, these are the very qualities that undermine the success of those executives. They have not understood that a shepherd needs to be strong, but also gentle and sensitive to the needs and feelings of others.

What is true in hospitals and industry is even truer in religious institutions. When the shepherds, whether rabbinic or lay, serve the community with selflessness, idealism and sensitivity—the result is a harmonious community where everyone feels valued and respected. When the shepherds, whether rabbinic or lay, behave in a callous and bullying manner—the community becomes demoralized. When the community feels that the shepherds are more interested in their own power than in the needs of the people, the community begins to unravel. Demoralized people stray away, lose confidence, stop attending, and stop contributing. Without genuinely devoted shepherds, "the flock of the L-rd" loses direction.

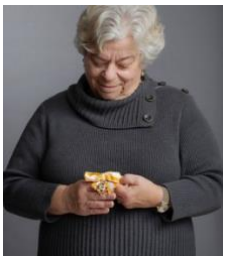
In responding to Moses' request, G-d replied: "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay your hand upon him….and you shall put of your honor upon him so that all the congregation of the children of Israel may hearken" (27:18-20).

The Me'am Lo'ez, the classic Ladino biblical commentary, explains that Joshua was a man "of spirit," a man who understood the needs and sensitivities of each person. "And I [G-d] know that he is a man in whom the spirit resides, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, thoughtfulness and strength, fear of G-d and spirit of prophecy." Joshua would be the successor to Moses because Joshua had the qualities of a genuine shepherd. He was strong and was also considerate of each person. He put the interests of the public before his own personal interests. He was not one who hungered for, or abused, power.

In asking Moses to transfer authority to Joshua, G-d wanted the public to witness the smooth transition of leadership to Joshua. The people needed to be assured that they would be led by a true and good shepherd, someone endowed with the spirit of G-d.

Selfless, devoted and talented shepherds are not easy to find. But without them, we are lost.

The Road to Knighthood – Full article from Tablet Magazine **here**



For her efforts in helping Jews regain their Spanish citizenship, Doreen Alhadeff was honored—in Queen Isabella's name

A funny thing happened to Doreen Alhadeff on the way to getting her Spanish citizenship. What started out as an effort to regain something Spain had taken from her family five centuries ago ended up with her being knighted into an order named after Queen Isabella, who exiled her family in the first place.

Alhadeff has loved Spain ever since she spent two years as a student in the country in 1969. The only thing missing for the then-19-year-old resident was the Jewish culture she grew up with back in Seattle, which has the third-largest Sephardic population in the U.S. Although almost 500 years had passed since the expulsion, she told me, "the knowledge of [Spain's] Sephardic heritage at that time was not at all present. People weren't aware of it at all."

Still, Alhadeff—whose family traces its history back to Spain via Italy and Turkey, and came to Seattle in 1906—was drawn to the country; "I have always felt a strong affinity to Spain," she said. She returned frequently over the years while also increasing her involvement in Sephardic organizations back home. She helped organizers in Madrid hold Erensya, an international Sephardic heritage conference, and then persuaded the organization to hold a conference in Seattle. She co-founded the Seattle Sephardic Network, which helps people find cultural resources in the Pacific Northwest, and she was named ambassador to Red Juderias of Spain, which supports and publicizes a group of cities in Spain with Sephardic heritage.

She was in Madrid in May 2015 when Parliament was considering the repatriation law—allowing people who could document their Spanish heritage to regain their citizenship—and stayed up late in Seattle to hear the results of the final vote a month later. After it passed, she jumped at the chance.

"It was something that had been taken away from family and ancestors of mine," she said, "and, given the opportunity, it was something I wanted to take back."

It wasn't easy. Applicants had a two-year window (which was later extended by a year) to provide proof of ancestral ties to Spain, get certification of claims recognized by a Jewish community organization in Seattle, translate the papers into Spanish, and get them notarized—in Spain. In less than a year, Alhadeff became the first American to gain citizenship under the law.

Alhadeff quickly realized her work wasn't done, however. "I knew what it meant to me," she said. "I felt like I was this one person at the time who could help people get through the process."

She fielded questions from people all over the world, including Jennifer McCullum—who was new to Seattle, got a late start on the application process, and didn't know where to turn until she was referred to Alhadeff. The encouragement proved extremely helpful, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic ground the process to a halt.

"At every step—whether it was pointing me in the right direction, commiserating with me over three years without a word, text messages saying, 'Have you heard anything?'—her encouragement and faith in me meant everything," McCullum said. It also helped her weather the storm when her application was initially rejected.

McCullum was devastated. "It feels like the wound is still fresh," she recalled. "It's the closest I have come in this process to feel what my ancestors must have felt in being told you are no longer welcome in a place that is your home, in a place you know is your birthright."

McCullum had to sue the Spanish government to reconsider before she was finally approved.

At the same time she was busy helping applicants, Alhadeff also helped lobby the Spanish government to make applying easier by modifying the required cultural test and language test—both written in modern Spanish, which is much different from the Ladino that many Sephardic Jews, including Alhadeff, speak. "There were a few of us that said nobody's going to go learn a second language at this point, and for many of those over 65, the language that they knew, that they grew up with wasn't current-day Spanish. It was Ladino," she recalled. "So, it was a little bit of a problem."

As a result of the lobbying effort, the government exempted children under 18 and adults over 70 years old from the testing requirement. So, Alhadeff also applied for and received citizenship for her grandchildren.

Luis Fernando Esteban Bernaldez, the honorary consul for Spain in Washington and Oregon says he believes that Alhadeff helped more than 100 people gain their Spanish citizenship, which is why he nominated her for the knighthood in honor of her "demonstrated loyalty in furthering Spain's relationship with the Americas."

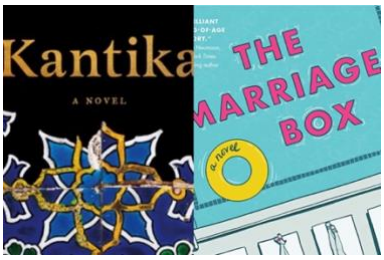
Esteban said he believes that Alhadeff—who was officially knighted at a ceremony in Bellevue, Washington, on Oct. 17, 2022, when she was given a medal on a ribbon and a pin—may be the first Jewish woman to receive the honor from the Order of Queen Isabella the Catholic.

Alhadeff isn't necessarily a big fan of Queen Isabella and the Alhambra Decree, which forced the country's Jews into exile in the late 1400s, but she is excited about what becoming the first female Sephardic Jew to receive the honor symbolizes. "I just think it shows unbelievable change," she said. "With people working at it and wanting it, that change can come about. I think that's huge."

She's already seen some of that change in the years since she began visiting Spain.

"I see the difference from when I was there [first] because there was no awareness of the heritage or the Sephardic history. It wasn't discussed. It wasn't taught. Now organizations are speaking out about Sephardic heritage, restoring Sephardic sites as well as teaching it in school," she said. "That's been quite a journey for me, but it's also been quite a journey for Spain."

Sephardi Women Take Center Stage in Two New Coming-of-Age Novels Reviewed by Hannah Srour-Zackon Full article **Here**



Kantika by Elizabeth Graver

The Marriage Box by Corie Adjmi

When I think about the English-language Jewish literary landscape, I also notice what's missing: the stories of Sephardi Jews.

Few people are aware that the very first Jews to come to North America were of Western Sephardic background. And yet, despite a centuries-long presence, there has been a notable absence of a Sephardic literary tradition.

Enter two recently released groundbreaking novels: Elizabeth Graver's Kantika and Corie Adjmi's The Marriage Box. Set in different segments of the Jewish community and in different time periods, these narratives shatter conventions by bringing to the forefront coming-of-age stories of Sephardi women. And, in the process, they have won my heart.

Kantika—meaning 'song' in Ladino—traces the life of strong-willed Rebecca Cohen from her childhood in Constantinople at the turn of the century, winding through to her adult years in America. Born into an upper-class Sephardic Jewish family, Rebecca's childhood is almost charmed. Yet the tides change when her family falls on hard times, forcing them to leave their beloved city for Barcelona.

As the book unfolds, Rebecca's life is continually upended by the turbulent events of the twentieth century and personal circumstances. Despite displacement, including from her own family, she proves adaptable and resilient.

Graver emulates the experience of flipping through the cherished photo albums of elderly relatives: offering an intimate glimpse into the lives of loved ones at a stage in their lives before we knew them. This photographic quality permeates the novel, which in fact draws inspiration from the life of the author's own grandmother. In fact, the author includes photographs from the life of the "real Rebecca" at the beginning of each chapter. Through these evocative images, she imaginatively brings to life moments previously frozen in time.

Rebecca's story raises thought-provoking questions about the enduring nature of cultural inheritances across generations, and the impact of migration and displacement. What emerges is the notion that these experiences merely colour one's traditions, rather than erode them entirely. Rebecca's own Sephardic identity—her kantika—may adopt new musical motifs, but the song itself remains unwavering.

Corie Adjmi's novel takes place some decades later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Marriage Box delves into the story of Casey Cohen as she teeters on the precipice of adulthood.

Trouble begins when Casey falls in with the wrong crowd in her hometown of New Orleans. In a fit of panic, her parents relocate the family back to Brooklyn, believing that immersing Casey in the world of their Orthodox Syrian-Jewish community will set her on a different course. Suddenly thrust into an unfamiliar environment, Casey finds herself in a tight-knit marriage-minded community, where it's not uncommon for classmates at her all-female high school to drop out to wed.

Though initially resistant, Casey meets Michael, whom she marries when she is just 18. Torn between her intellectual aspirations, and the restrictions imposed by her husband, Casey is left to grapple with whether pursuing one direction would mean abandoning another.

The Syrian-Jewish community is portrayed in the novel as insular and patriarchal, yet it also exudes a profound sense of warmth and strong communal bonds. Adjmi skillfully walks a literary tightrope, presenting Casey's story with honesty and authenticity without painting an entirely negative view of the community. The result is a nuanced and poignant novel that illustrates Casey's journey to find her own voice.

In the novel, the 'Marriage Box' is a pool deck, where teenage girls lie around in bathing suits to attract potential husbands. It serves as both a physical location and a symbol representing Casey's own marriage, characterized by profound loneliness and the stifling of her intellectual growth. Many scenes unfold within the confined space of her apartment, heightening the feeling of entrapment. While one might yearn for Casey to break free from the constraints of her marriage, she knows that leaving her husband could result in being ostracized from a community she has grown to love.

I cannot help but feel a deep personal connection to the stories conveyed in both these novels. As a Sephardi Jew, I have longed for literature which reflects my family background. (Much of my own family is part of the Syrian-Lebanese community—which is depicted in The Marriage Box.)

These publications fill a void in the landscape by skillfully capturing the complex inner lives of Sephardi Jewish women, set against a backdrop of profound love for their communities, but without shying away from difficult topics.

The Sephardi woman has finally entered the literary conversation. I hope she's here to stay.

'Savor': A Menu of Music and Food Full article **Here**

There's a certain kind of magic in the perfect melding of food and music that creates our most enduring memories. Think homemade challah and the *zemirot* sung around the Shabbat table, or "Happy Birthday to You" with a favorite cake.
Those special moments are what inspired singer-songwriter Sarah Aroeste and chef Susan Barocas to create the multimedia, multifaceted project *Sa**vor**: A Sephardic Food and Music Experience*.

The modest title, which means taste or flavor in Ladino, belies this rich portal into a world that explores Sephardi culture through classic Ladino songs, traditional recipes and detailed cooking videos. The project, however, began simply. Aroeste, an internationally known performer as well as an advocate for contemporary Ladino music, was researching songs for a new collection—her eighth—during Covid lockdowns.

At the same time, she said, "I was leading virtual song workshops and was asked to share family recipes as well, as I had been doing a lot of cooking with my daughters"—she has two with her husband, Jeffrey Blaugrund. "To enhance the sets, I was inspired to start looking at songs that related to the food I was preparing."

With visions of songs dancing in her head about the many ways to cook eggplant and the delights of making bourekas with a child, Aroeste realized that the music was only half the story. You can't have an album about food and not have the actual food, she realized.

She reached out to her friend Barocas, a chef as passionate about Sephardi food as Aroeste is about the music, and the two began to build the project. Barocas recruited a community of well-known female Sephardi chefs from around the world. That was important to them, because, as Aroeste said, one "impetus of Savor was to highlight the important role women have played—and continue to play—in preserving

Sephardic culture. There were no written Jewish cookbooks that came out of medieval Spain, but the women in the diaspora kept on cooking and taught their daughters who taught their daughters. That's how the food remained distinctive. And when they cooked, they sang, and through the songs and the food, they preserved their rich history."

Each of the chefs found songs that inspired them, and their 10 resulting recipes and how-to videos, alongside an album of 10 songs performed by Aroeste and her band, make up the *Savor* package. (Both a physical CD and access to a digital portal with the recipes, videos and music can be purchased at saraharoeste.com.)

In one video, nonagenarian writer Kaye Israel, alongside her daughter Marcia Israel Weingarten, seems to time the precise hand-turned crimps on her crisp bourekas to the rhythm of Aroeste's rendition of "*Chico Ianiko*." The sweet tune about making the savory stuffed pastry with a grandson was originally written by Bosnian Sephardi musician Flory Jagoda.

Komida de Berendjena, a honeyed eggplant and hummus dish, gets a free-style demo in a video by exuberant young chef Hélène Jawhara Piñer, whose bona fides include a Ph.D. in medieval history and the history of food. The dish is paired with "Siete Modos de Guisar La Berendjena," an equally lively song describing seven ways to cook eggplant, one of the essential ingredients of Sephardi cuisine.

Ropa Vieja, classic Cuban shredded beef, is revealed as a centuries-old Iberian dish by historian-chef Genie Milgrom. She prepares the recipe to a lilting counting song, similar to those sung on Pesah, "Ke Komiash Duenya," that commemorates a vast meal that went on for days.

Taken together, the recipes with their videos create an exuberant delectable meal.

But there is more to Savor. Barocas and Aroeste are developing in-person events this fall that will combine singing, historical education, cooking demos and hand-on experiences. For a more expansive adventure, the two are putting together a tour similar to the first Savor Athens-to-Istanbul cruise they led in May, which included Sephardi music performances, workshops and guided tours in the cities they visited.

Preserving memories of food and music by passing them along to new generations and making Sephardi culture accessible to everyone is what Savor is all about, said Aroeste.

"We have survived so much and come out the other side carrying these traditions that are so magnificent and so beautiful," she said of the Sephardi diaspora. "We want to share the culture with joy."

Yaprakes Finos/Stuffed Grape Leaves

From Jennifer Abadi, author of T*oo Good to Passover: Sephardic & Judeo-Arabic Seder Menus and Memories from Africa, Asia and Europe* and *A Fistful of Lentils: Syrian-Jewish Recipes from my Grandmother Fritzi's Kitchen.* The recipe pairs with *"Una muchacha en Selanika,"* the first song on the Savor album.

Makes about 2 dozen stuffed leaves

Wrapping

One 16-ounce jar grape leaves, packed in brine

Filling

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil plus more to grease the pan
1/2 cup coarsely chopped white onion
1 1/2 teaspoons dried mint leaves
1 cup cold water
3 tablespoons pine nuts
1/4 cup dried currants
3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoons sugar
1/2 cup uncooked Turkish-style rice or another medium-grain white rice, rinsed several times in cold water and drained

Sauce

1/2 cup cold water, plus more if needed
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus more if needed. 1/2 lemon for serving

Drain and dislodge grape leaves from the jar. Unroll, separate them gently and place in a medium bowl. Set the bowl in the sink and fill with cold water to soak and rinse the leaves. Remove rinsed leaves and place in a large colander over a bowl or plate to drain. When well drained, separate leaves into 3 piles–larger, smaller, and ripped.

Use olive oil to grease a 9- or 10-inch skillet, 2 to 3 inches deep, with a tight-fitting lid. Line the bottom with some of the smaller and/or ripped leaves that won't be used for filling and rolling.
To prepare the filling, heat the oil in a large skillet (about 12 inches) over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Add the onion and cook until soft and transparent, about 5 minutes. Crush the mint in your hands over the onion. Add the water, pine nuts, currants, salt, cinnamon, and sugar. Mix well, then stir in the rice. Simmer over very low heat, uncovered, about 10 minutes until the liquid is mostly absorbed and the mixture becomes porridge-like. Pour the mixture into a large bowl to cool to room temperature. There will be about one and half cups of filling.

To stuff and roll the leaves, spread out a large grape leaf with the veined underside facing up and base or stem closest to you. Trim the stem close to the leaf if it's longer than the leaf. The shiny, smooth side should be the outside of the stuffed leaf once rolled.

Place about 2 teaspoons of filling at the bottom-most center of the leaf and gently arrange the filling in a horizontal line about 3 inches long. Fold the bottom part of the leaf tightly over the filling. Fold in the left and right sides of the leaf just up to the edges of the filling. Continue to very tightly roll up to create a cigar shape.
Place the rolled grape leaf, seam side down, on top of the flat leaves lining the skillet. Continue filling and rolling leaves until the filling is finished, placing rolls close together in the pan. The rolls must fit together snugly to prevent them from unraveling while cooking. If you run out of room on the bottom of the pan, layer the remaining stuffed leaves on top in a crisscross pattern or in the opposite direction of the ones underneath.
Make the sauce by stirring together the water and olive oil. Pour evenly over the stuffed grape leaves. Place a small plate on top of them to compress and prevent unraveling while cooking. Cover the skillet with its tight-fitting lid.

Simmer 1 to 1 1/2 hours over low heat, or until the stuffed grape leaves are tender, but not mushy, and the filling is very soft. Check every half hour, and, if all the liquid is absorbed and the leaves appear dry, make another sauce mixture and pour it over the yaprakes. When cooked, remove from the heat, let cool to room temperature, still covered.

To serve, arrange the stuffed grape leaves on a platter or plate and squeeze juice from 1/2 fresh lemon on top.

Leonardo da Vinci Was Jewish Full article in Tablet Magazine **Here**

Italian historian Carlo Vecce set out to debunk rumors of da Vinci's foreign origins, but a newly discovered document changed his mind.

In all likelihood, Leonardo da Vinci was only half Italian. His mother, Caterina, was a Circassian Jew born somewhere in the Caucasus, abducted as a teenager and sold as a sex slave several times in Russia, Constantinople, and Venice before finally being freed in Florence at age 15. This, at least, is the conclusion reached in the new book Il sorriso di Caterina, la madre di Leonardo, by the historian Carlo Vecce, one of the most distinguished specialists on Leonardo da Vinci.

The official version of da Vinci's birth is that it was the fruit of a brief fling between the Florentine solicitor Piero da Vinci and a young peasant from Tuscany called Caterina, of whom almost nothing was known. Yet there had long been a seemingly unfounded theory that Leonardo had foreign origins and that Caterina was an Arab slave. Six years ago, professor Vecce decided to kill the rumor for good. "I simply found it impossible to believe that the mother of the greatest Italian genius would be a non-Italian slave," he told me. "Now, not only do I believe it, but the most probable hypothesis, given what I found, is that Caterina was Jewish."

Vecce was the right man for the job—he published an anthology of da Vinci's writings and a biography, Leonardo, translated into several languages, and he collaborated on the exhibition of da Vinci's drawings and manuscripts at the Louvre and Metropolitan Museum in 2003. He embarked on the research for his latest book during the reconstruction of da Vinci's library, which is where he found the document that changed everything. Dated Nov. 2, 1452, seven months after Leonardo's birth, and signed by Piero da Vinci in his professional capacity, it is an emancipation act regarding "the daughter of a certain Jacob, originating from the Caucasian mountains," and named Caterina. According to the document, Catarina's owner appears to have been the wife of rich merchant Donato di Filippo, who lived near the San Michele Visdomini church in Florence, and whose usual solicitor for business was Piero da Vinci. The date on the document is underlined several times, as if da Vinci's hand was shaking as he proceeds to the liberation of the woman who just gave him a child.

Slavery was still current practice in 15th-century Italy, though on a much smaller scale than in the Ottoman Empire. The city of Florence alone had at least 1,000 slaves—among them Russians, Abkhazes, Turks, Serbs, and, like Caterina, Circassians from the Caucasus. Who was this woman who gave birth to one of the greatest geniuses of the Renaissance?

Investigating her story, professor Vecce traced another part of the history of the Jews. "Traveling from Russia," he told me, Caterina "certainly passed through the Taman peninsula, near Crimea, which opens on the Azov sea." The peninsula owes its name to David of Taman, the king of the Jewish Khazar kingdom that briefly existed there during the seventh to 10th centuries. "It seems that some traces of the Khazar kingdom still existed in the 15th century, when the peninsula was controlled by the Genovese Jewish Ghisolfi family. The region was ruled by Jewish consuls until the Ottoman Empire put an end to it at the end of the 15th century." Most of the slave ships traveled from the Venetian colony implanted at Azov (then Tana) to Constantinople. From there, we can follow Caterina to Venice, and then to Florence where she was brought by her new master, Donato di Filippo, who put her to work both in his clothing workshop and at the service of his wife. That she was a sex slave is attested by the fact that she already had several children by Filippo when, at 15, she met da Vinci, Filippo's solicitor, who at first "borrowed" her as a nanny for his daughter Marie and then fell so much in love with her that he freed her from slavery after Leonardo's birth. "Da Vinci himself was no stranger to the Jews," says professor Vecce. "His main customers were among the Jewish community of Florence."

Piero da Vinci ended up leaving Florence for Milan. Caterina died there in 1493 and is probably buried in the San Francesco Grande church, where Leonardo had painted the "Verginne delle rocce" a few years before.

As for Donato di Filippo, after his death he gave his money to the church of San Bartolomeo a Monte Oliveto, for which Leonardo would paint the "Annunciation." Coincidentally enough, the background of this painting shows a mountain very similar to Mount Elbrus, the highest summit of the Caucasus mountains. An Oriental port quite similar to the port Caterina passed through when she was a slave also figures on the painting.

According to professor Vecce, "Caterina certainly fed young Leonardo's imagination with the memories of her travels. Circassian people had a reputation for being untamed, free of mind, and wild. I like to think she taught him the spirit of absolute freedom that can be found in his scientific and intellectual research. The freedom of a mind that is not bound by prejudices or authority."

Balaam the Prophet – Full article **Here**

The infamous story of the prophet with the talking donkey demonstrates the Bible's awareness that powers of divination were not limited to Israelite seers.

As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness on their way to the promised land, Balak, the king of Moab, began to get anxious: Too many foreign people, too close to his territory, spelled trouble. Unable to force them to leave, Balak called on a professional prophet to curse them, hoping that might do the trick. The prophet was Balaam, and the story of his interactions with Balak, Israel, and his donkey take up a full three chapters of the Book of Numbers.

The plot of Balaam's story is simple enough: Balak sends Moabite emissaries to hire him, but it takes some convincing because G-d has told Balaam not to agree to curse Israel. When Balaam finally relents, he cannot understand why his donkey refuses to walk in a straight line, eventually just lying down in the road. As Balaam hits the donkey, the donkey speaks—which seems not to be all that surprising to Balaam—and it is revealed that a divine messenger has been blocking the donkey's path the whole time.

The messenger gives Balaam permission to go on to Moab, but on the condition that the prophet speak only what G-d tells him. Upon arriving, Balaam doesn't curse the Israelites as Balak requested, but blesses them. Furious, Balak demands Balaam do what he was hired to do, but Balaam again blesses Israel. And so on repeatedly, from different vantage points and with different words, but always with the same outcome. Here then, in the middle of Israel's trek through the wilderness, we find an extended discourse not just on Israel's blessedness, but even more so on the nature of prophecy and the power of the word.

The Bible is generally opposed to what we might call non-standard forms of divination: sorcery, witchcraft, and the like. These are forbidden not because they are some sort of false magic, but because they are in fact effective. So too with words of blessing and curse, even from a foreigner. Balak knows that Balaam's words are effective. "He whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed," Balak tells him in Numbers 22:6. So too, implicitly, does G-d, who instructs Balaam not to curse Israel "for they are blessed." Words have real power in the Bible — oaths are binding, blessings are permanent. Balaam's story is built on the recognition that a word of curse could spell Israel's doom, even if that word came from a foreigner. Even if that word had been bought and paid for.

But Balaam also reveals that the true prophet cannot say just anything. As he says repeatedly, "I can utter only the word that G-d puts into my mouth." Balaam is obedient to the divine will—indeed, he even goes so far as to refer to Israel's deity as his own. Balaam thus also symbolizes the extent of G-d's power and influence.

That power and influence is manifest at this particular moment in Israel's story. Here, as Israel has become so numerous and is about to enter the promised land, Balaam comes to fulfill the promise G-d made to Abraham in Genesis to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. Balaam uses identical language here: "Blessed are they who bless you," he says. "Accursed they who curse you." Balaam even echoes G-d's promise that all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed through Abraham, saying, "May my fate be like theirs."

Though a foreigner, Balaam holds a lasting place in Judaism. His words—"How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel" (Num 24:4)—are part of the regular prayer liturgy and adorn synagogue sanctuaries around the world. Yet despite what appears in these chapters to be an unstintingly positive portrayal—of a foreigner who is compelled to say only what Israel's deity tells him, who is true to G-d rather than following Balak's money—a tradition runs through the Bible that understands Balaam to have been almost entirely the opposite.

In Deuteronomy, we read that though Balaam was hired to curse Israel, it was G-d who turned the curse into blessing — as if Balaam wanted to curse Israel, but failed. Even worse, according to Numbers 31, the Israelites killed Balaam when they conquered Midian because Balaam incited them to worship foreign gods. This weird mixture of positive and negative press is mirrored in the rabbinic literature, which both praises — or at least respects — Balaam as a recipient of the prophetic spirit, and condemns him as evil and, following the brief biblical allusions, as being responsible for Israelite apostasy.

The ambivalence that surrounds the depiction of Balaam may be a reflection of ambivalence around the status of foreigners in ancient Israelite and early Jewish society; a reticence, perhaps, to give too much credit to a non-Israelite, or to admit the possibility that G-d might have spoken through a foreigner. Whatever the reason, Balaam's reputation remains somewhat up in the air, even as his words remain part of the Bible and Jewish liturgy to this day.

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 accessing the donation link in the upper left hand corner.**

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

Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 172
July 2023
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002
Website: www.kkjsm.org
Email: museum@kkjsm.org

Your donations enable us to continue our work. You can send donations via mail directly to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002, or you can donate via our website www.kkjsm.org.