



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

## Synagogue and Museum

### September 2025 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

As we enter the Fall season, we look forward to Rosh Hashana and the start of the new year 5786. During the month leading up to Rosh Hashana, Jews around the world recite Selihot prayers which call for introspection from each of us to improve our behavior, improve our relationships with one another, and improve our relationship with God. As we prepare for the new year, we pray that all Jews and good people around the world are inscribed and sealed in the book of life for the upcoming year. As we prepare to gather together with family and friends, we pray that our brothers and sisters in Israel can return to their families and that we all can live in peace and security. May God hear our prayers and may the Shofar remind all of us of the opportunity to bring more light into the world.

One of the meaningful traditions in our Greek-Jewish community is the remembering of our dearly departed on Yom Kippur. On Erev Yom Kippur, we follow the centuries-old Romaniote custom of our people by reciting Hashkavoth (Memorial Prayers) and the individual names of our dearly departed during the Kal Nidre Yom Kippur Eve service. If you wish to honor your family members or friends in this very special way, please email their names to [Amarcus@kkjasm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjasm.org). It is customary to include a voluntary donation of your choosing. The names and donations may be submitted via our website using this [Link Here](#) or mailed to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002.

Help us continue our cherished Romaniote traditions and join us for High Holiday services.  
View our full holiday schedule [Here](#), and please RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjasm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjasm.org)

תזכו לשנים רבות  
Tizku Leshanim Rabot  
Χρόνια Πολλά  
Anyos Munchos i Buenos  
May You Merit Many Happy and Healthy Years

---

This newsletter, our 197<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.kkjasm.org](http://www.kkjasm.org).

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

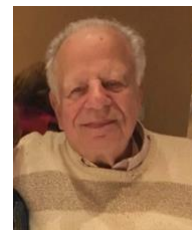
We are open for Shabbat services every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email [amarcus@kkjasm.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjasm.org) if you would like to attend, and enjoy a traditional Greek kiddush lunch after services. Our Museum is open on Sundays and during the week by appointment. Email [info@kkjasm.org](mailto:info@kkjasm.org) to make an appointment. If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at [info@kkjasm.org](mailto:info@kkjasm.org)

## Passings

We mourn the passing of Doreen Yamali, daughter of Mike and Ruth Yamali, and the mother of Michael, Mathew, Andrew, and Ryana. She will be mourned by many including Stella Yamali Bakola and Stella's children, Eric and Elyse, and Rae Yamali. May her memory be a blessing.

We mourn the passing of Ira Ezratty, beloved husband of Rochelle Ezratty; treasured father of Sydney Ezratty and Jocelyn Ezratty; and cherished brother of Jeffrey Ezratty and Jaime Ezratty.

We mourn the passing of Marco Beja, past President of the Sephardic Jewish Center of Canarsie; beloved husband of the late Phyllis Beja; treasured father of Mitchell (& Robin) Beja, Karen Beja (& Hal Weiner), and Jeff (& Patty) Beja; and cherished brother of the late Albert Beja, and the late Victor Beja.



---

## Simchas

We are happy to celebrate the birth of Abigail Michal Oberman on August 22, 2025 to Rose (daughter of Maurice and Kathy Askinazi) and Stefan Oberman.



We celebrate the arrival of baby Taliyah Diane Hochman born July 27th, to Russell Hochman and Tara Drobecker Hochman. Russell is the son of Tehru Eskononts Hochman (of Blessed Memory) and Richard Hochman and stepson of Ellen Hochman. Russell is also the grandson of Beatrice and Samuel Eskononts (both of Blessed Memory) and the great-grandson of Mordechai Eskononts and Esther Cohen (both of Blessed Memory).

**Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina**

**Launch of Siddur Yismah Libeinu – September 7 at 1pm**

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

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM AND  
THE UNION FOR TRADITIONAL JUDAISM**

**ARE HONORED TO HOST TWO PRESENTATIONS  
TO LAUNCH SIDDUR YISMAH LIBEINU**

**SIDDUR YISMAH LIBEINU:  
ITS CONTEXT AND HISTORY  
BY HAKHAM DR. ISAAC SASSOON**

**AND KEYNOTE PRESENTATION:  
REFLECTIONS ON TWO DECADES OF  
PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPERIENCE IN  
TRANSLATING SIDDUR YISMAH LIBEINU  
BY RABBI DR. HAYYIM G.Z. SOLOMON**

**SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 7 AT 1PM  
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10002**

Join us for the official launch of Siddur Yismah Libeinu, a new siddur by Rabbi Hayyim G.Z. Solomon, featuring an original English translation with an introduction to the Siddur in English by Hakham Isaac Sassoon.

Siddurim will be available for purchase & signing.  
Refreshments will be served.

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

**Torah & Taverna Night - September 4 at 7:30pm**

Space is limited. RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjsm.org)



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

# TORAH & TAVERNA NIGHT

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

Thursday September 4 at 7:30pm

Rabbi Sjimon den Hollander, scholar of Jewish philosophy and Arabic, will teach about the dramatic words and rich historical context of Et Sha'are Ratzon, a Sephardic poetic prayer recited on Rosh Hashana.

Join us for an engaging evening of Jewish insights, savor delicious Greek food and drinks, and enjoy live music from Prinkipo Trio who will share traditional melodies, rhythms, and maqams from across Greece, Turkey, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Kehila Kedosha Janina  
280 Broome Street NYC

RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjsm.org)

**Join us for High Holiday Services**

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

View our full holiday schedule [Here](#)

2025

5786

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM  
WISHES YOU A**

**HAPPY, HEALTHY, AND SWEET  
NEW YEAR**

**תזכו לשנים רבות**

**Χρόνια Πολλά**

**ANYOS MUNCHOS I BUENOS**

**YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US FOR SERVICES  
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA - 280 BROOME ST NYC  
OUR SEATS ARE FREE AND OUR HEARTS ARE OPEN**

**ROSH HASHANAH - SEPTEMBER 23, 24**

**YOM KIPPUR - OCTOBER 1, 2**

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

**VIEW OUR FULL SCHEDULE AT [WWW.KKJSM.ORG](http://WWW.KKJSM.ORG)**

## KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA

# HASHKAVOTH MEMORIAL PRAYERS

On Yom Kippur it is traditional to recite memorial prayers for the dearly departed. In many synagogues this ritual is observed by conducting a Yizkor service. At Kehila Kedosha Janina we follow the centuries-old Romaniote custom of our people by reciting Hashkavoth (memorial prayers) and the individual names of our dearly departed during the Kal Nidre Yom Kippur Eve service. If you wish to honor the memory of your family members or friends in this very special way, please email their names as soon as possible to [Amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjsm.org). It is customary to include a voluntary donation of your choosing. The names and donation may also be submitted via PayPal on our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org).

WISHING YOU GOOD HEALTH AND HAPPINESS  
AS WE APPROACH THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

תזכו לשנים רבות

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NEW YORK, NY 10002  
[AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG](mailto:AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG)

**My Romaniote Patrimony**  
**Presentation and Book Signing by Author and Researcher Alexander Moissis**  
Save the Date – October 26 at 1pm. Please RSVP to [Amarcus@kkjsm.org](mailto:Amarcus@kkjsm.org)



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

# **My Romaniote Patrimony**

**How precious family memorabilia  
led to 15 years of research and 5 books  
related to Greek Jewry and Ioannina**

**Sunday October 26 at 1pm  
280 Broome St NYC**

Join us when author Alexander Moissis will present how texts in his grandfather Asher's archive and stereoscopic glass photographs that came from his grandmother Hiette's family led to 15 years of research and to several books related to the Jews of Greece and to the history of the city of Ioannina.

Alexander Moissis grew up in Greece, close to his father's Romaniote Jewish and his mother's Orthodox Christian family. After graduating from high school in Athens, he studied at MIT where he earned four degrees in Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, and Management Science. He then moved to Silicon Valley, where he has contributed to the success of several now well-known business software companies. Following time in Paris, he lives in Portola Valley, California, where he works in English, reads in French, and multiplies in Greek. Alexander won an award by the Academy of Athens for his book "The Nissim Levis Panorama: 1898-1944 - Stereoscopic photos and travels of a doctor from Ioannina."

**Signed copies of Moissis' latest book "The Lost World of Henriette de Serviana" will be available for purchase.**

**Refreshments will be served**

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

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



Shalom uVeraha dear friends and community members,

The summer has been full of adventure, relaxation, and meaningful time with family and friends.

I have just returned from Bulgaria, where I participated in the European Union Jewish Students Association's annual summer conference with hundreds of other Jewish youth from 32 different countries. There, I provided a voice to the youth of the broader Romaniote and Sephardic world, and helped highlight our heritage through the week's programming of art, music, food, and Torah. Together, we sang piyyutim in Hebrew, Greek, and Ladino, and lived out the true spirit of Jewish global cultural exchange.

At this conference every year, awards are given out to different Jewish student organizations around the world, and I was honored to be on stage representing Greece as the Jewish Youth of Greece (ENE) won the award for best developing organization of the year. My time spent there, and the people I met, gave me both a deep sense of hope in, and responsibility for, the future of our people. It is something I carry with me as I return to New York now and begin the new year.

As we talk of return, it is now the Jewish month of Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashana. It is a time of teshuva, often translated as repentance, but really better translated as "return."

During this month, before we enter the High Holidays, let us take the time to look back on the year. Yes, there are certainly things we can each do better. Although on Yom Kippur we confess our transgressions in the plural — "ashamnu" — this process is individual, complex, and is done by each person at their own pace. As we undertake this serious look at ourselves, it's important we also acknowledge all the beauty, all the good, all the strengths and successes of the past year.

Our tradition recognizes that change comes in many steps, and people come in many forms. Because of this, we have a wide variety of prayers and rituals around the season, building over the course of the coming weeks: Selihot prayers, studying texts, hearing the shofar, and more.

I hope to see many faces, old and new, in our sanctuary for the upcoming holidays, and wish all of you a fruitful season of reflection and teshuva. Tizku leshanim rabot.

Sincerely,  
Theo

## Romaniote American Oral History Project

We want to hear from you! Contact [Theo@kkjsm.org](mailto:Theo@kkjsm.org) to learn more and share your stories

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

# ROMANIOTE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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

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

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

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

Contact Theo Canter at [Theo@kkjsm.org](mailto:Theo@kkjsm.org)  
to learn more and contribute your voice as we  
write the next chapter of our community's story

## Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Classes

Email [Theo@kkjasm.org](mailto:Theo@kkjasm.org) to learn more



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

# Romaniote Bar & Bat Mitzvah Tutoring

**FREE**

**Learn How To...**



**Read Torah & Haftara**

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



**Give a Derasha**

Prepare a speech analyzing the weekly Torah portion



**Lead Tefillah**

Recite the prayers for Shabbat with our beautiful ancient melodies

Classes taught by KKJ Community Engagement Fellow Theo Canter

Email [Theo@kkjasm.org](mailto:Theo@kkjasm.org) to learn more and sign up



Greek Jewish & Sephardic  
Young Professionals Network

Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

# **ROSH HASHANA SEDER & DINNER**

**Tuesday September 23  
Holiday Services at 7:15pm  
Seder & Dinner at 8:00pm**

**Kehila Kedosha Janina  
280 Broome Street New York, NY 10002**



Join us for a special Seder and Dinner on September 23 - the second night of Rosh Hashana! Celebrate the new year with a traditional array of symbolic foods, enjoy a delicious Sephardic dinner, meet other young community members, and learn more about our Sephardic and Romaniote customs.

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

**SPACE IS LIMITED  
MUST RSVP TO [INFO@GREEKJEWISHYPN.ORG](mailto:INFO@GREEKJEWISHYPN.ORG)**

**EARLY BIRD PRICE \$50 UNTIL SEPT 15  
\$65 PER PERSON AFTER**

## Upcoming Events of Interest in New York

### Walking Tour of Jewish New Amsterdam to celebrate Landing Day September 9 from 5:30pm - 7:15pm

Walk the same streets inhabited by Jewish Settlers in the colony of New Amsterdam. See the site of the first synagogue in North America. Space is limited! RSVP [Here](#)

In celebration of Landing Day, join the Manhattan Jewish Historical Initiative ([MJHI](#)) as we walk the neighborhood in lower Manhattan that once held the early Jewish settlers in the colony of New Amsterdam - now New York City. We will discuss the 23 Sephardic Jews that formed the first congregation in North America, and follow the path of these individuals who have made a contribution beyond measure to so many things that we find vital in society today.



On this tour, we will visit the former sites of locations relevant to the lives of the Jewish community that arrived in 1654, including the early Spanish and Portuguese rented synagogues, and the Mill Street Synagogue. Discuss influential individuals like Asser Levy, the first kosher butcher in the colony, who fought constantly on behalf of Jewish rights.

This event is being sponsored by the Manhattan Jewish Historical Initiative (MJHI), a community-based project, interactive in scope, formed to explore, compile and record the extraordinary history of the Jewish community of Manhattan, and disseminate it through web, social media, etc. MJHI is known for their annual Awards program honoring Jews that have made an extraordinary contribution to Manhattan.

The tickets are free (donations accepted) and space is limited, so please register early and only if you truly plan on attending so you don't take a registration spot away from somebody else. Thank you.

This tour, which lasts approximately 90 minutes, is led by urban historian Bradley Shaw, an experienced and licensed NYC Tour Guide who was born on the Lower East Side, and has a BA in History and Education from Brooklyn College. He shares with us his passion for history, and has been a docent, walking tour guide and manager at various museums and institutions in NYC.

---

### Reimagining Ladino Song: Lily Henley Live in Concert – September 18 at 7pm



Join groundbreaking singer-composer Lily Henley and multi-instrumentalist Duncan Wickel as they reimagine Ladino music, blending its lyrics with the rich textures of Celtic and Americana folk. Once spoken across the Mediterranean by Jewish communities, Ladino is now a language spoken by fewer than 100,000 people. A blend of Old Spanish, Hebrew, Turkish and Arabic, Ladino carries centuries of Sephardic history, storytelling, and cultural tradition. Lily isn't just preserving this 500-year-old tradition—she's reinventing its music for today.

In Henley's one-hour concert, she and Wickel will perform brand-new songs from her upcoming album, alongside selections from their acclaimed release *Oras Dezaoradas* (Lior Editions Paris, 2022). After the concert, Henley and Ladino expert Bryan Kirschen will engage in an insightful conversation about the cultural history, resilience, and ongoing revival of the Ladino musical tradition.

Learn more and purchase tickets online [Here](#)

## Save the Date – Sephardic Brotherhood Gala December 7, 2025

“Join the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America for the International Sephardic Community Gala celebrating our collective Sephardic identity, culture, and community. The evening will feature delicious kosher Sephardic food, live Sephardic and Mediterranean music, special Sephardic guests of honor, dancing, and a whole lot more.

The evening will be hosted at the beautiful Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and includes complimentary access to one of the Museum's featured exhibits. The evening will also celebrate the 110th Anniversary of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood, and bring together participants from our communities throughout the United States and around the world.” Learn more online [Here](#).



THE  
SEPHARDIC JEWISH  
BROTHERHOOD OF AMERICA

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO OUR

*International Sephardic  
Community Gala*

CELEBRATING 110 YEARS OF SERVICE TO  
THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025  
6:00 P.M.

MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE:  
A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST  
36 BATTERY PLACE, NEW YORK CITY

*Guests of Honor*

  
**JOEL BENOLIEL**  
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER  
COSTCO

  
**MITCH JULIS**  
CO-FOUNDING PARTNER  
CANYON CAPITAL

  
**SARAH LEVIN**  
COMMUNITY LEADER &  
ADVOCATE

## Past Events in New York

### First Sephardic Rabbinic Conference

The inaugural Sephardic Rabbinic Conference, held August 10–11, 2025 at the Orthodox Union headquarters in Lower Manhattan, brought together over 50 Sephardic rabbis and community leaders from across the United States and around the world. Representing Syrian, Persian, Greek, Turkish, Moroccan, Iraqi, Spanish & Portuguese, and Bukharian traditions, the two-day summit marked the first gathering of its kind in U.S. history.

Leaders attended from communities across North and South America, Europe, and Israel, including Seattle, Atlanta, London, Lisbon, Jerusalem, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City. Backed by major Jewish organizations such as the Orthodox Union (OU), the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), and The Tikvah Fund, the conference, focused on the future of Sephardic Education, signaled a major shift toward greater inclusion of Sephardic voices in mainstream Jewish life.



"This was a historic beginning," said Avi Garson of The Habura. "For the first time, a broad coalition of Sephardic leaders came together in the U.S. to shape our future collectively."

"This conference set the foundation for long-term collaboration and influence," added Ethan Marcus of the Sephardic Brotherhood. "We're ensuring the Sephardic approach to Judaism has a permanent place in broader Jewish communal life."

A major highlight was Sunday evening's public musical program, which drew a packed audience and celebrated the rich cultural heritage of Sephardic Jewry through music, song, and communal spirit. Six hazzans from different traditions led a moving journey across the pan-Sephardic liturgical landscape.

The event was hosted by a coalition of Sephardic communal and educational institutions including the The Habura, Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, the American Sephardi Federation, and the Orthodox Union. For more information, visit [sephardicrabbinicconference.org](https://sephardicrabbinicconference.org)

---

### Israeli Foreign Minister meets U.S. Jewish leaders ahead of U.N. speech on hostages' plight

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar met with some two dozen American Jewish leaders in New York City in August, briefing them on developments in Israel and hearing their concerns, ahead of a speech in the United Nations about the plight of Israeli hostages being held in Gaza. Sa'ar's meeting came as American Jews are increasingly voicing their concerns about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and as the Israeli government is threatening to expand Israel's military campaign in the enclave, potentially including a full occupation of the Strip.



"It was not just a briefing, but a serious and constructive exchange with a broad cross-section of American Jewish leaders. There was thoughtful dialogue and real engagement around the complex challenges and opportunities facing Israel and the Jewish people," William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told eJP.

"In light of Minister Sa'ar's upcoming address to the United Nations Security Council, we also noted the importance of keeping the plight of the hostages visible to the international community," Daroff said. Sa'ar spoke to the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday about the hostages still being held in the Gaza Strip in light of the release of videos showing the emaciated conditions of two Israeli captives, Rom Braslavski and Evyatar David. In his speech, Sa'ar decried the international body's silence on the issue and criticized the countries that have announced plans to recognize a Palestinian state in September.

The meeting with Sa'ar came three weeks after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the United States without meeting American Jewish leaders — his third time in a row forgoing a sit down with them during a U.S. trip.

"That the minister set aside significant time for this meeting, during a 15-hour visit to the United States, reflects his interest in engaging directly with our community," Daroff said.

Other participants, who spoke on condition of anonymity as the meeting was held off the record, said that the topics focused on the burning geopolitical issues of the day, including the war in Gaza, the conflict with Iran in June, Israel's relationship with the Trump administration and Israel's public diplomacy efforts.

The U.S. participants included representatives from a wide array of American Jewish organizations, including Hadassah, the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish federation system, as well as the Conservative movement, Orthodox Union and Zionist Organization of America. Marvin Marcus, President of Kehila Kedosha Janina, was also in attendance.

There were few representatives from American Jewish groups representing more progressive communities, though some of that is a function of the last-minute nature of the meeting, which was only organized the day before it happened. The Reform movement, for instance, was invited but did not send a representative due to scheduling issues. Many of the organizations that were invited also had representatives meet with Sa'ar and other Israeli leaders last month during the Conference of Presidents' solidarity mission to Israel. In addition to Sa'ar, Israel's New York Consul General Ofir Akunis and Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon attended and spoke at the meeting.

## **'We need to have this data': JIMENA shares findings from 1st national study of Sephardic and Mizrahi American Jews** Full article [Here](#)

As the executive director of JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa since 2010, Sarah Levin has repeatedly received the same questions from funders: How many Sephardic and Mizrahi American Jews are there and what do we know about them?

"I would always have to tell them, 'We don't have good research. There's no good data. We've never been studied despite being the oldest Jewish community in the United States,'" Levin told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.



After receiving a grant from the Jewish Community Response and Impact Fund three years ago, JIMENA took on the task of answering these questions.

"There was finally an understanding amongst certain philanthropies that we need to have this data," Levin said. "In order for us to create a more inclusive Jewish ecosystem, we need to know who Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews are."

Today, JIMENA released its study, "[Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the United States: Identities, Experiences and Communities](#)," the first-ever national demographic study of these groups. The results paint a portrait of communities with many similarities — tight family ties, deep connections to Judaism and Israel — but also great diversity between them.

The research, directed by Mijal Bitton, a visiting researcher at the NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, included quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was taken from national and communal surveys, including the Pew Research Center's 2020 survey of U.S. Jews; while qualitative data was gathered from the Brooklyn's Syrian community and the Bukharian community in Queens, the Persian community of Los Angeles and South Florida's Latin Sephardic community.

The study found that Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews combined account for 10% of the Jewish population in the U.S. Bitton was moved "to see how proud people are of their communities," she told eJP. Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews interviewed by the research team had "a very strong sense of collective identity."

"They express a morality and a worldview that is much more connected to being part of a group. It's very focused on the idea of family, and that sometimes pushes against a more liberal, individualistic ethic that is very prevalent in the West," she explained.

The study makes several recommendations, including avoiding centering American Jewish narratives on the Ashkenazi journey and cultural norms and not viewing Sephardic and Mizrahi identities through the lens of "marginalized peoples" or victim narratives.

"Very often the discourse around diversity can become a little bit shallow," Bitton said.

While some Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews identify as Jews of color, the majority don't. According to Bitton's research, which was pulled from local community surveys in Chicago, Los Angeles, Greater MetroWest NJ, Kansas City, Long Beach, Calif., Louisville, Kent., and Delaware, 12% of Sephardim and 17% of Mizrahi Jews identified as a "person of color." In fact, in qualitative interviews, many bristled at the term. "We found a lot of opposition to a very racialized discourse as being the main discourse to describe the Sephardic/Mizrahi experience in the U.S.," Bitton said. "And we found a lot of concerns around DEI, or other efforts like that, to be the primary efforts through which to include Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews." Many of the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews interviewed in the study lean politically moderate or conservative. Terms like "Jews of color" may simply not fall within their worldview.

"Others would express a sense of 'Why are you trying to divide us into different categories if we don't need to do that?'" she said. "Some of it was just that it's just not the language that is used."

Race and ethnicity break down differently outside of America, Bitton pointed out. "Racial discourse in America is very American... You go to Argentina, where I'm from, and we have our own racial and ethnic divisions. Sometimes there is a sense that there is a superimposition of certain American racial categories that actually do not take into account any of the developments, migrations and other aspects of the way that communities and individuals develop."

Levin hopes the study will push "diversity work and [lift] it away from just racial and ethnic diversity, moving it towards something that is reflective of all of our diversities and our Sephardic and Mizrahi heritage."

Another way Sephardic and Mizrahi communities often don't fit neatly into American categories is the way much of the American Jewish community is split into denominations, such as Reform, Conservative and Orthodox, which have roots in Europe. Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews commonly see themselves as "traditional" and report higher rates of religious practice. For instance the study found that 80% of Mizrahi Jews and 65% of Sephardic Jews reported fasting on Yom Kippur, compared to 48% of Ashkenazi Jews.

The study also found that 27% of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews are "economically vulnerable," which surprised Levin. Though the statistics are painful to look at, she hopes the survey leads to these families and individuals getting the support and services they need.

For the qualitative research, the study focused on four communities with post-1965 immigration patterns. That year is when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abandoned previously discriminatory quotas that favored Northern and Western Europeans, allowing a surge of immigrants from the Middle East.

Once established, some communities began trends of "ethnic replenishment," Bitton said, referencing a term coined by Stanford professor Tomás Jiménez. This occurs when new waves of immigrants to communities revitalize ethnic identity and cultural practices of the immigrants who came before. The Syrian community in Brooklyn, according to the study, began immigrating to the U.S. in the late 1800s and continued to absorb immigrants until 1994, with each new wave enhancing the community's cultural identity.

There were many commonalities between the communities studied: family-centered lives, weekly Shabbat practices, intergenerational ties, low intermarriage rates compared to Ashkenazim, collective values and Zionism. But there were also many differences — some rooted in the reasons the communities came to America in the first place, whether it was for economic reasons or because they were fleeing persecution. The diversity within the results "made for a very complicated and also exciting research project in which you really have to think through the fact that you are representing, on the one hand, like populations, on the other hand, many different communities and individuals that feel very different from each other," Bitton said. Funding for the study was provided by the Jewish Community Response and Impact Fund, a partnership which included the Jim Joseph Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Paul E. Singer Foundation, the Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation and Maimonides Fund, with additional funding from UJA-Federation of New York and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.

Levin hopes that this study helps Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews "feel recognized, and they understand that we're paying attention, and that the Jewish community is paying attention, and they're not on the margins." Sephardic and Mizrahi are terms representing broad groups of people, and this study was not exhaustive, Bitton said. Instead, she hopes the study will inspire further research.

"I don't think that every institution or every individual needs to adopt all of [the study's recommendations]," she said. "but I do think that they are important to grapple with and to consider, particularly for Ashkenazi majority institutions and spaces that self-identify as wanting to be more inclusive and as wanting to better understand Sephardic Jews."

## News from Jewish Greece

### Athens

#### Jewish Youth of Greece Honored

This year the European Union of Jewish Students' 42nd annual Summer U program was held in Bansko, Bulgaria. The program is an opportunity for over 300 Jewish students representing Jewish student unions in over 32 countries to connect, learn, and plan. At the conference's gala, the organizers award Jewish student unions who have distinguished themselves over the past year.



This year, the Jewish Youth of Greece (Εβραϊκή Νεολαία της Ελλάδας - ENE) won the award for Best Developing Union, in recognition of their activities from the past year, including hosting two international Shabbatons: the "We Will Dance Again" festival in Athens last October and the "Bridges of Identity" arts seminar in Thessaloniki this March. The award was presented by Yoni Hammerman, director of the NextGen program at World Jewish Congress, and received by Theo Canter and Victor Moissis, board member of ENE.

Moissis, an educator in the Jewish community of Larissa, is also an accomplished musician with a new album dropping this fall, follow him on Spotify [Here](#)

---

#### Bat Mitzvahs Celebrated in Athens

The Bat Mitzvah ceremony for seven young girls in the Jewish Community in Athens took place on Sunday, June 22, 2025, at the Beth Shalom synagogue of Athens. Mazal tov to Arianna Eliezer, Lina Herrera, Thomas Levi, Anastasia Lucia Mavroudi, Mikaela Anneta Menagia, Alma Baum, and Alicia Saia.

This year's ceremony was dedicated to the Greek Righteous Among of the Nations, the women who courageously protected Jews during the German occupation. Each girl presented the life and action of one of these heroines, carrying a deep message of hope, responsibility, and memory. The central message of the ceremony, inspired by the Talmud, reminded us all of the phrase: "Whoever saves one life saves the whole world." The girls actively participated in word, prayer and song interpretation, filling the synagogue with voices, emotion and light.

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin blessed the girls with words of encouragement and love, while the President of the Community, Mr. Albertos Taraboulous officially welcomed them as adult members of the Jewish Community of Athens, emphasizing the importance of Jewish identity and the continuation of tradition. At the end of the ceremony, Annita Soussi offered gifts on behalf of the Jewish Community, while Mrs. Felicia Heim, on behalf of WIZO, offered symbolic souvenirs to the girls. Mazal Tov!



## **"We Must Remain Vigilant" - Greek Holocaust Survivor and European March of the Living Chair Benjamin Albalas Reflects on The Rising Antisemitism in Greece** Full article [Here](#)

In light of a surge in antisemitic incidents across Greece—including threats and attacks on Israeli tourists—*March of the Living Europe* Chair and Holocaust survivor Benjamin Albalas shares his personal reflections. The conversation follows a wave of anti-Israel protests, including incidents where demonstrators prevented Israeli cruise ships from docking. The Greek government has condemned such acts, but tensions remain high as pro-Palestinian organizations announced a "Day of Action" across the islands last month.



The recent increase in antisemitism is mainly driven by anger towards the State of Israel over the war in Gaza but it's not just about the war. The conflict has become a convenient excuse for extremists in Greek society—especially those aligned with pro-Palestinian causes—to express hostility towards Israel. Roughly 80% of this comes from progressive left-wing ideologies, with the Communist party often taking the lead. Their actions echo what we might call "red fascism." We're seeing increased demonstrations and blockades targeting Israelis and even the IDF. Among leftist parties, there's a kind of competition to appear the most sympathetic to Hamas and the Palestinians of Gaza. I call upon the Greek authorities to enforce anti-racism laws more strictly, especially when it comes to daily Palestinian activism.

- Do you believe Greece remains a safe place for Jews? Have you personally felt the need to hide your Jewish identity or avoid Jewish events?

Greece is still a safe place for Jews. My family and I feel completely secure and continue our daily lives without fear. We don't hide who we are, and many of our Christian friends understand that Israel is doing the "dirty work" of defending Western values. Because it's summer, there are fewer Jewish events, but I expect all scheduled activities after the High Holidays will proceed as planned—with perhaps some additional security.

- Have you witnessed solidarity from non-Jewish Greeks during this period of rising antisemitism?

Yes. In both the media and daily life, many non-Jews have expressed support. A good example was on the island of Rhodes, where local authorities warmly welcomed passengers from an Israeli cruise ship, under police protection.

- As Chair of EMOTL, what role do you believe Holocaust remembrance plays in combating antisemitism today? Greek society does still respect the memory of the Holocaust. Many Greeks continue to publish stories about Jewish life before and after the war. We must continue to remind the world what happened 80 years ago. The Holocaust was the result of unchecked antisemitism in Germany and across Europe. This is why we have the annual March of the Living in Greece on March 16, to commemorate the first deportation of Jews from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz.

The events of October 7th can be seen as a "small Holocaust," and we must remain vigilant. People need to be cautious about embracing leftist ideologies that target Israel and the Jewish people.

- As a Holocaust survivor, how did you feel seeing the emaciated images of Israeli hostages such as Evyatar David and Rom Braslavsky? Did it bring back memories of your own trauma?

When I saw the tragically starved bodies of Evyatar and Rom, my thoughts went immediately to their families and to the hostages still in captivity. The images were profoundly painful—completely inhumane. They brought back memories of Auschwitz survivors and my own experience as a hidden child during the Holocaust.

- What should Jewish communities around the world understand about the current situation in Greece?

It's a difficult time, especially for young Greek Jews. But we believe that once there's a resolution in Gaza, antisemitic sentiment will decrease. Greek Jews continue to live in a friendly society. The strategic alliance between Greece and Israel is a positive step toward regional peace and prosperity. Of course, Turkey plays a

role in fueling anti-Israel propaganda—and it's well known that most Greeks oppose Turkey's current government.

- Looking ahead, what gives you hope?

My hope lies in the prospect of a viable peace. But for that to happen, some journalists, authors, and politicians—both in Israel and the Diaspora—must stop falsely accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. These lies fuel global antisemitism. Telling the truth is essential if we want peace.

About Benjamin Albalas: Benjamin Albalas was born in Athens in 1937. As a young child during the Holocaust, his family survived thanks to the bravery of Dr. Panos Macheras, a Greek physician who warned them of Nazi plans in 1943, shortly after the deportations began in Thessaloniki. The family adopted Christian identities and went into hiding. "We took every precaution," Albalas recalls. "We stayed hidden until the end of 1944, when Greece was liberated." On March 24th, 1944, while the family was in hiding, hundreds of Jews were rounded up at the Athens synagogue—where Albalas had lived as a baby—and deported to Auschwitz. Few survived. Dr. Macheras was later recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem for his courageous actions.

---

### **KIS Meeting with Deputy Prime Minister of Greece Kostis Hatzidakis: Greece stands against every form of racism and anti-Semitism**

On July 30, 2025, the leaders of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) had a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, Kostis Hatzidakis, during which the escalation of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli incidents in Greece was discussed. KIS President David Saltiel, KIS Vice President Manos Alchanatis, Secretary General Victor Eliezer and Treasurer Daniel Benardout expressed the strong concern of Greek Jewry, pointing out that these are dangerous phenomena that incite violence - some of which have already manifested themselves in violence, desecration, and / or vandalism - violate the fundamental rights of citizens due to their religion or nationality, and reinforce the confusion about the dividing lines between political criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism. KIS representatives delivered to Mr. Hatzidakis a report with an indicative record of the relevant incidents for the first 7 months of 2025. Following the meeting, the Vice Presidency of the Government issued the following Press Release, which refers to Mr. Hatzidakis' statements and expresses the Government's clear and unequivocal stance against anti-Semitism. Read the full statement [Here](#)



---

### **Righteous Among the Nations Honor**

The Yad Vashem "Righteous Among the Nations" medal was awarded by the Israeli ambassador to Greece, Noam Katz, to Mary Kalou, in memory of her mother Angeliki Kalou.

The Israeli ambassador stated: "Last week, in the presence of her beloved family, I had the honor of awarding the Yad Vashem 'Righteous Among the Nations' medal to Mary Kalou, in memory of her mother, Angeliki Kalou, a Greek heroine who saved Ino Fais during the Holocaust in Athens."



In 1943, according to what Mr. Katz reports, Angeliki Kalou, risking her life and that of her children, hid Inos in her attic until liberation.

"Her courage not only saved him, but also led to a love story – Ino later married Angeliki's daughter, Mary. Angeliki's bravery reminds us that even in the darkest times, the light of humanity can shine. True heroes choose compassion over indifference, shaping lives for generations, and Israel is indebted to them," the Israeli ambassador's post concludes.

## Ioannina

European Jewish Students' summer event: In August 2024, Ioannina hosted the annual summer meeting for the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), and the positive news regarding this event was reported in August 2025 by Greek media. The program, called SUMMER U, gathered over 350 young Jews from 37 countries for workshops, lectures, and cultural tours. This shows Ioannina's continuing relevance as a location for Jewish heritage and education.

Jewish Community of Ioannina website: For official news and events, you can visit the community's website at [jewishcomioannina.gr](http://jewishcomioannina.gr)

Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum: For a broader perspective on the history of Ioannina's Jewish community, the museum's website is an excellent resource: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)

Ioannina: As in all Jewish communities, the strict internal organization of the Romaniote Community of Ioannina guaranteed its smooth running, especially when under the Ottoman Empire. The rabbi, who bore the title Marbitz Torah from the 16th century, was both the religious and administrative leader. He was chosen for his wisdom and sound judgement and there was no specific duration to his term of office. He was assisted in his administrative tasks by the Maamad, a seven-member strong legislative and executive body with authority, a president called the gabbai and a treasurer called the gizbar. He represented the community to the Sublime Porte and other national bodies. There was also a religious court, the Bet Din, which was officially recognized by the Ottoman authorities. It was presided over by the rabbi and dealt with intra-community issues in accordance with Halakha.

The ordinary everyday life of those in the community was regulated by certain people fulfilling a vocation; among them were the shohet, who slaughtered animals the kosher way; the melamed, or teacher of religion; the Shamash, or synagogue caretaker and community land keeper. When the new Greek State came into being and its national institutions gained power, this community organization still retained some of the important role it had held in the past.

Charity and solidarity, the cornerstones of Judaism, are far removed from any form of self-gain or self-promotion in the community. They are fundamental values, vital to the survival of the community and through its charitable societies they have led to people getting the help they have needed ever since the Middle Ages. Thus, it is that in the community of Ioannina there are many charities. Hevra Kedoshah, an honorary brotherhood of volunteers who oversaw the burial of the dead, was one of the first, as was Bikur Holim, a charity that arranged visits and care for the sick and needy. Community bodies and wealthy individuals saw that religious schools were protected and able to provide canteen meals for needy pupils. There was also Aruhat Aniyim, which distributed schoolbooks, stationery and clothing, and Matanot Levionim, which sometimes exempted pupils from school fees. Hevra Talmud Torah, the Jewish Society for Education, was very active in this respect. Then there were charities that supported young mothers and provided dowries for young women of little or no means (Hevra Nose Yetumot). During the Turkish occupation, Pidyon Shevuyim, a charity that collected for the liberation or purchase and release of Jewish slaves, proved necessary and was active over a wide area. There were also community institutions such as Beth Yeshua ve Rachel care home for the elderly.

Organizations of a community, cultural, political or Zionist nature began to make their appearance in the latter 19th century. The Zionist society Hevra Amele Zion was founded in Ioannina in 1918 for the purpose of spreading propaganda about the need to establish an independent Jewish state in Palestine. It collected money in aid of this mission and helped those who wanted to immigrate to Palestine. The Jewish Youth Society, which brought the young people of the community together, was founded at the same time.

Source of texts and photos: The Jewish Museum of Greece, <https://www.jewishmuseum.gr>



## Volos

### Greece's Volos Residents Protest Arrival of Israeli Tourists at Port [Full article Here](#)

Residents of the city of Volos in central Greece held two simultaneous demonstrations at both port exits to protest against the arrival of Israeli tourists. These echoed earlier protests at the ports of Syros and Rhodes, both popular Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.



The demonstrations began early in the morning, shortly after 7:30 a.m., when a large group gathered in the Palaia district of Volos near the port. Their aim was to prevent passengers from the cruise ship *Crown Iris*—which had docked earlier that day—from disembarking.

#### Tensions at the port

At around 9 a.m. local time, demonstrators advanced toward the main entrance of the port, where they encountered a heavy police presence. When they attempted to enter the port area, riot police responded with flash grenades, heightening tensions.

Carrying banners and chanting slogans, those at the protests marched through nearby streets, voicing strong opposition to the presence of Israeli tourists in the city, with some calling them “unwelcome.”

#### Police in Volos, Greece on high alert during protests against Israeli tourists

Security forces maintained a strong deployment throughout the area to prevent disturbances and ensure the orderly disembarkation of the Israeli tourists from the docked cruise ship.

Despite heated exchanges and visible tension, the situation did not escalate into violence, and police remained vigilant throughout the entire duration of the protest.

#### Previous demonstrations on Syros and Rhodes

Earlier this year, pro-Palestinian demonstrators on both Syros and Rhodes staged similar protests aimed at blocking Israeli cruise passengers from disembarking.

In both cases, activists gathered near port entrances, chanting slogans and displaying banners, while police intervened to maintain public order. The protests were part of a broader wave of actions across Greek ports expressing opposition to Israeli tourism amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

---

## Rhodes

Last month, news sites reported an incident in Rhodes where pro-Palestinian, anti-Semites attacked Israeli teenagers on July 23, 2025. Our Museum Director was able to reach Carmen Cohen in Rhodes to find out what happened. Yes, there was an attack. Carmen said it was blown out of proportion. According to the official representative of the Jewish Community of Rhodes, the aggressors were Swedish Muslim youngsters, who were drunk. The bar where the incident occurred had a reputation for problems. Carmen said the Israeli teens were probably drunk too, both groups (Muslim and Jewish) not being used to drinking. Carmen said “It was 3:00 in the morning..... You can imagine what and how much they have drunk or smoked....”

This is why we must be careful before we spread misleading information. Carmen was particularly upset. Last year's summer was a disaster with fires on the island and the need to evacuate. Record high temperatures last summer and this summer have kept many tourists away.

## Thessaloniki

### **Anniversary of the Great Fire - A century ago, Jewish Salonica burned. It was rebuilt, only to be destroyed anew** Full article by Devin Naar [Here](#)

A fire on Aug. 18, 1917, destroyed much of the Greek city, which was heavily populated by Jews.

Exactly a century ago, on Aug. 18, 1917, a massive fire roared through the Mediterranean port city of Salonica, Greece, then home to the largest and most dynamic Ladino-speaking Sephardi Jewish community in the world.

According to local legend, the fire erupted one Sabbath afternoon amid World War I when the coals of a war refugee roasting eggplants overturned. A fierce wind catapulted the flames into a major conflagration that left two-thirds of the city in ashes and 70,000 residents homeless, 52,000 of whom were Jews. Thirty-two synagogues, 10 rabbinical libraries, eight Jewish schools, the communal archives, and numerous Jewish philanthropies, businesses and clubs were destroyed.



A local teacher bemoaned the fate of his city: "Of the brilliance and grandeur of this famous Jewish community, nothing remained but mountains of ashes. Everything was lost; everything disappeared." A journalist further lamented: "The most important thing that the fire destroyed was the Jewishness of Salonica. It is a terrible story."

Such devastation paled in comparison to what would befall Salonica's Jews exactly 26 years later. In the spring and summer of 1943, the Nazi occupying forces deported nearly 50,000 Jews from Salonica to Auschwitz; 96 percent perished. The last of the 18 deportation transports arrived at Auschwitz precisely on Aug. 18, 1943.

If the fire of 1917 was the beginning of the end, deportations to Auschwitz signified the finale — or at least that's how the story could be told.

But the reality was not straightforward. Remarkably, after the fire, Salonica's Jews persevered and rebuilt their institutions — despite resistance from the Greek government — to such an extent that the Nazis encountered a robust Jewish communal presence upon their occupation of the city.

Recent discussions have highlighted the role of gentrification in dramatically reshaping urban demographics and the cityscape, especially in the wake of catastrophes, like the case of New Orleans. A recent New Republic article explains that gentrification is not only about people with disposable income moving into the neighborhood and displacing those who lived there before, but rather about "profit and power, racism and violence on a massive scale." Similar dynamics were at play in Salonica.

Salonica had suffered from a series of fires in its history, but during the four centuries under the benign rule of the Ottoman Empire, the city's residents were permitted to rebuild without much state interference. Not so after the Great Fire of 1917. The Greek government, which had only recently annexed Salonica during the Balkan Wars (1912-13), saw in the fire an opportunity to transform once and for all Jewish and Ottoman Salonica into Greek Thessaloniki.



With this nationalist goal in mind, the government expropriated the burnt terrain and prevented residents from rebuilding on their land. Instead, under the guise of promoting state interests and a modern, European urban plan that would transform the downtown into a middle- and upper-class Greek space, the government auctioned off the razed property: Those who could pay, rather than those who had lived in the area, became the new occupants of the city center. The National Bank of Greece outbid the Jewish community for the plot on which the Talmud Torah, the main Jewish communal school, had stood before the fire. Today, the upscale Electra Palace hotel sits in the heart of the city where another Jewish school, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, once stood.

The prime minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, encouraged British and French urban planners to view the city as a “blank slate” and ignore the centuries-long imprint left by Jews and Muslims. One of the urban planners described Venizelos as “particularly enthusiastic about the new Salonica, almost to the point of regarding the fire as providential” and conceded that the “fundamental purpose of the plan was to deprive the Jews of complete control of the city.” But the planner also noted, as if to offer consolation, “There was no desire to oust the Jews completely.”

Local Jewish leaders petitioned Jewish organizations abroad and the great powers to intervene with the Greek government, but they met with little success. Even *The New York Times* noted in 1919 that the Greek government never offered a “satisfactory explanation” for the cause of the fire — the burnt eggplant story was not convincing — and that “natural suspicions of the inhabitants were accentuated by the shouts of joy” coming from the main Athens newspapers, which celebrated “the disappearance of the ancient ‘ghetto of Macedonia.’”

Largely prevented from rebuilding in the city center, the Jewish community began to rebuild on the city outskirts, including new neighborhoods established in allied military barracks to house the mostly poor Jewish fire victims. Others opted to emigrate. A Jewish leader in Salonica explained that it was not so much the fire itself, as devastating as it was, but rather the “profoundly demoralizing” impact of the plan for the “new” and “modern” city that propelled many Jews to flee. One Ladino satirist quipped: “Doesn’t ‘modernism’ mean ... ‘anti-Semitism’?”

But a sentiment of optimism coexisted with the sense of despair. The fire provoked the creation of an important daily Ladino newspaper, *El Pueblo* (The People), which aspired to “return our great community to its prior flourishing state” and to “assure the future of the Jewish people.” The same Jewish teacher who had lamented the destruction of the fire also expressed hope, saying “Little by little ... our great community, so cruelly afflicted today, will be reborn from the ashes more brilliant than ever before!”

Remarkably, the period after the 1917 fire witnessed the most vibrant Jewish cultural productivity in the city’s history, with more Jewish newspapers, magazines and books published in Ladino (and French, Greek and Hebrew) than ever before. Since so much literature had been destroyed — both religious and secular — there was a desperate need for new publications. The resulting Ladino-Hebrew edition of psalms even wound up in Sephardi libraries as far afield as Seattle, Washington.

Despite growing tensions between Salonican Jews and the Greek state and increased demands that Jews — like the cityscape itself — become more “Greek,” the Jewish community succeeded in building several dozen new synagogues and a new school system. It restarted the Jewish hospital and medical dispensary and established new institutions, including a tuberculosis clinic, girls’ orphanage and maternity ward. By 1938, there was talk of the Jewish communal offices being transferred back to the city center — but the outbreak of the war prevented the move.

As much as Salonica’s Jewish community rebounded from the fire of 1917, the destruction wrought by the German occupation was insurmountable. Beyond the dispossession, deportation and murder of almost all of Salonica’s Jews by the Nazis, the entire character of the city was irrevocably transformed. Several dozen synagogues, with the exception of one or two, were destroyed by the Nazis and their collaborators; visual traces of the Jewish presence in the built environment were gone.

Salonica’s vast Jewish cemetery — the largest in Europe, dating to 1492, with more than 300,000 graves over a terrain the size of 80 football fields — also became prey to the ostensible demands of modern urban planning. Due to the 1917 fire and the subsequent expansion of the city (compounded by the arrival of 100,000 Orthodox Christian refugees from Turkey following a forced population exchange), the Jewish cemetery became the new geographic center of what was supposed to be Greek Thessaloniki. For 20 years, the Jewish community succeeded in deflecting efforts made in the name of urban “progress” to expropriate the burial ground.

But the defense failed once the city came under Nazi occupation. The Greek authorities used the occupation as a pretext to demolish the Jewish cemetery. They utilized marble tombstones to erect much of the rebuilt, modern city — to refurbish churches damaged in the 1917 fire, to construct “modern” walkways and “modern” town squares,

and to fashion the campus of the largest university in the Balkans, which now stands atop the former Jewish burial ground.

Pillaged relics of the Jewish dead became the literal building blocks of urban renewal — a systematic and violent process begun a century ago, in the wake of the fire of 1917, intensified during the German occupation and continued in its wake. The result can be seen today. A stroll through Salonica reveals many modern buildings and a vast university campus in a city still suffering from a financial crisis. But few will notice that many of those modern buildings were built on land expropriated from Jews in 1917 — or again in 1943.

Perhaps this Aug. 18, in commemoration of the Great Fire of 1917, the city will deepen its effort to come to terms with its past and acknowledge the dark legacies of modern urban planning. Such would be a prerequisite for the city to again become, as a Guardian writer phrased it, “a place of multicultural amnesty.”

Devin E. Naar is the chair of the Sephardic studies program and an associate professor of history and Jewish studies at the University of Washington.

---

## Ionian Islands

### From the Archives: 1953 Earthquake and Israeli Rescue Efforts

August 12, 1953: A devastating earthquake struck the Greek islands, killing 871 people, 1,690 injured and 145,052 left homeless. Zakynthos, Ithaca and Calunia were destroyed completely. Warships of the newly established country of Israel, which had just completed naval exercises in the Aegean Sea and returned to base, when receiving a radio message about the event, immediately changed course and headed towards Cephalonia to help the victims of the earthquake. The Israelis were the first to rescue the dead and injured from the ruins, to set up improvised hospitals on the waterline of Ergostoli, to operate severely injured, to settle others in tents, to provide medicine, food and water. Greece officially thanked Israel for its intervention and lifesaving assistance, and even named a square in the capital Ergostoli after Israel.

Original article from August 12, 1953: As the Israeli naval flotilla which last week worked with American, British and Greek naval units in rescue and relief work among the many thousands of survivors of the disastrous earthquakes which struck the Ionian Islands off the Greek coast today left Greek waters, Israeli aid to the stricken Greek people entered a new phase.

The first transport of blankets desperately needed by victims of the tremors, many of whom are injured and some of whom barely escaped from homes which were wrecked, was today flown from Israel to Athens. The shipment was prepared by the Israeli Red Mogen David.



Mordos Family

The shipment was addressed to Archbishop Spyridon, chairman of the Greek relief committee for the victims. It was the Archbishop Damaskinos, who during the Nazi occupation issued a declaration calling on all Greeks to aid the Jews. For this he was jailed by the Germans. The Bishop of Zakynthos, Chrysostomos, along with the Mayor, Lucas Carrer, were instrumental in saving the Jews of the Island.

Greek King Paul and Queen Frederika today thanked the commander of the Israeli flotilla for the assistance given by his men. During the operations the Israeli commander was a member of the relief command which consisted of a Greek general and the commanders of the American, British and Israeli rescue units on the scene. When the Israeli units, which had served chiefly in transporting the wounded and survivors from the islands to the mainland, sailed for Haifa an American band played Hatikvah in their honor.

## Halkida

An article by Margarita Pournara about the city of Halkida in reference to the history of the Jewish community of Halkida: "...However, the people of Asia Minor have come to an environment with a multicultural influence. Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together inside the destroyed walls of the ancient city. We met Meir Maisis in the synagogue of Halkida and he talked to us about the history of the community. "It was one of the oldest Romaniote communities in Greece and Europe, which was later enriched by the Sephardic Jews and experienced great prosperity." Halkida was a Jewish center. I am of Italian descent and my ancestors arrived here in 1600. Many Jews dealt with textiles," Meir Maisis emphasizes.



---

## Crete

### Etz Hayyim Synagogue

Last week the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Chania welcomed Marko, a descendant of the original pre-war Cretan Jewish community in Chania. His family immigrated to Smyrna (modern-day İzmir, Turkey) in 1912. Marko's family, along with other Cretan Jewish families, established their own congregation at the Roş Ha Har synagogue, which was built in the Karataş neighborhood of İzmir sometime during the end of the 19th century. According to anecdotes from Marko's family, the Roş Ha Har synagogue was referred to by the community as Etz Hayyim!



---

### Wildfire on Greek island of Crete scorches forest, forces evacuation of over 1,000

Hundreds of firefighters battled a blaze that forced the evacuation of over 1,000 people on Crete island on July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Hundreds of firefighters battled a blaze in July on Crete island, which burned swathes of forest and olive groves and forced the evacuation of over 1,000 people, officials said, underscoring the region's vulnerability to destructive wildfires. At least 230 firefighters, along with 46 engines and helicopters, were deployed to contain the conflagration, which broke out a day earlier near Ierapetra town on the southeastern coast of Greece's largest island.



Stoked by gale-force winds, the blaze reached houses and hotels, fire brigade and local officials said, with local media reporting damage to some homes but no injuries. Scores of residents and tourists were evacuated and moved to a temporary shelter at an indoor stadium in Ierapetra. Some left Crete by boats, authorities said.

"Three settlements were evacuated and more than 1,000 left their homes. Some were taken to health centers with respiratory problems," Crete's deputy civil protection governor, George Tsapakos, told public broadcaster ERT. July tended to be the most difficult month of the fire season due to high temperatures and strong winds, he said.

Greece and other countries in the Mediterranean are in an area scientists have called "a wildfire hotspot" - with blazes common during hot and dry summers. These have become more destructive in recent years, authorities say, due to a fast-changing climate. Thousands have fled wildfires in Turkey and at least eight people have died as a result of a heatwave in Europe.

## World War II treasure hunters love this rugged Greek island Full article [Here](#)

Top collectors on the island of Crete have amassed hundreds of thousands of artifacts — and there are still more being found.

The metal helmet held by Stelios Tripalitakis is heavy, with a small hole in one side and a jagged gash on the other, likely caused by a bullet. It probably belonged to a German soldier, Lieutenant Schimkat, who fought and died in the Battle of Crete during WWII. The hole in the helmet, Tripalitakis surmises, was Schimkat's fatal wound.

"I bought this helmet from an elderly man in Daratsos village, about a kilometer from here," recalls Tripalitakis, sitting in his living room in a village in the northwest of Crete, Greece's largest island. Crete is a rugged place, with a number of historic towns, ancient sites, and scenic beaches.

While it doesn't attract the masses like the nearby Cyclades, Crete gets a fair number of tourists. Not all who come are here for a beach vacation or even ancient Greece, though. It's something more recent that drives them to this island and into the living room of Tripalitakis. Crete is brimming with World War II treasures. Tripalitakis is just one of dozens of artifact hunters, part of a not-so-quiet subculture of amateur historians and military memorabilia enthusiasts searching for and preserving remnants of the pivotal 1941 Battle of Crete.

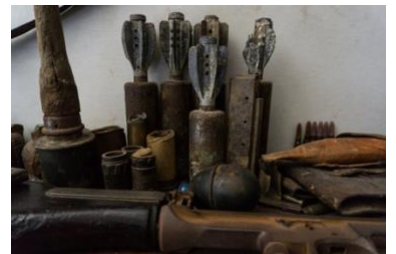
So numerous are the remnants from this war-changing event that Tripalitakis has a collection of more than 100,000 artifacts—and it's still growing. He lives with his family of four in Galatas, a small village. The Battle of Crete began on May 20, and the Galatas area was one of its main battlefields. Tripalitakis started learning about it at just nine years old, and his collecting started at 16.



He managed to identify the helmet through two original photographs, both showing the makeshift grave of the German lieutenant. "Both photos capture the helmet from the same angle, clearly showing the bullet entry hole, which is identical in size and position to the helmet I have," he explains.

One photo belongs to Dimitris Skartsilakis, a researcher and collector from Rethimno, a nearby city. He owns more than 10,000 photographs, many depicting grim scenes, ranging from local executions and battlefield casualties to soldiers' graves.

The other is from a German paratrooper's album of the 3rd Parachute Regiment stationed in the Galatas area. "The lieutenant's grave is visible with the same helmet, and the name on the cross is also clearly seen," says Tripalitakis. When he searched the German archives, he found that Schimkat was killed on May 22 in Galatas, shot in the head.



### A Generational Pursuit

Tripalitakis' front yard resembles a WWII vehicle cemetery, with several pieces of rusted metal scattered on the ground. But it's the room on the first floor of his house where history truly overflows. The 42-year-old has transformed his former living room into what may be the world's most densely packed private WWII museum, showcasing relics ranging from rifles and grenades to rare photographs and uniforms. Tripalitakis is not alone. Collectors in Crete become interested in this history from a very young age and many who had lived during the German occupation were still alive in the 1990s.

"My family runs a pastry shop in Rethimno, and I used to hear countless war stories from our customers, many of whom were around 70 years old at the time," fellow collector Skartsilakis, now 42, says. "Both of my grandmothers also shared stories from those years. That's how I first became interested in all this."

Tripalitakis talks about his artifacts with such passion, and so fast, it's as if he's trying to share as much as possible before time runs out. He's had to practice talking fast. He collaborates with at least six travel agencies in Chania that run daily Battle of Crete tours, all of which include a "strictly one-hour visit" to his museum.



According to Yannis Skalidakis, historian and professor at the University of Crete, the Battle of Crete played an extraordinary role in WWII. It was the first—and last—large-scale battle in which the attack was carried out entirely from the air using paratroopers. And Crete "was essentially the only free territory left in Europe," he explains.

Due to the strong local resistance, however, the elite German unit suffered heavy losses, which prevented them from attempting further airborne operations during the war. The relentless opposition by the Cretans was another harbinger.

"The resistance of the Cretan people marked the beginning of armed civilian resistance across Europe against Nazism. The citizens of Crete—ordinary people—were the first to fight back, alongside the Greek and British armies," notes Skalidakis, author of a book on German-occupied Crete. (There is also the disputed theory that the Germans getting bogged down in Crete contributed to the delay of the German invasion of the Soviet Union—a delay which cost them dearly.)

A uniquely documented battle

Collectors like Tripalitakis can be found across the island, with the Chania region holding the largest share. But you would be mistaken to think this is a mere hobby.

"In reality," asserts Skartsilakis, who is currently collaborating with the Historical Museum of Crete for a temporary exhibition, "if it weren't for us, much of this material would have ended up as scrap and been lost forever."

Since Tripalitakis started collecting in 1999 he estimates he's spent more than €100,000 on artifacts, and nearly €50,000, maybe even more, just on fuel. "I work several jobs and invest everything into this," he admits. Guided by history books, local testimonies, and intuition, Tripalitakis has scoured the island's battle sites by land and sea multiple times. Most of the collectors also scan the web for important findings. That's because Crete might be the most photographed battle of the war, the historian Skalidakis contends. "Almost all the Germans had cameras with them and captured many moments of the battle, both before and after it, resulting in an extremely rich visual archive that doesn't exist for other battles." The regime did it for potential propaganda purposes.

The collector Skartsilakis has used photographs to find objects. "It's sometimes astonishing to see that, even after 80 years, shell casings from the battle are still lying on a wall where I have a photo of soldiers positioned during the battle," he shares. It should come as no surprise, then, that these photographs can fetch lofty sums.

"I've bought a single photograph on eBay for €300. Especially the ones showing paratroopers with full gear in the midst of battle are extremely expensive," Tripalitakis shares. "A paratrooper's full photo album, can go for as much as €5,000 and may contain 150–200 photographs. Under Greek law, items from 1453 and earlier are considered antiquities and are automatically state property. Anything found that dates after 1453—the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans and the end of the Byzantine Empire—is not considered ancient and can be legally owned as collectibles.

Weaponry and ammunition that are still functional must be officially registered with the Greek police. Small arms require a permit and must be deactivated.

## A Story of Courage During WWII

Together with my heroic aunt, Sara/Sarika Frizi-Forti Geoshua, known as Captain Sarika.

My grandfather Colonel Mordochai Frizis had 11 brothers and a sister (12 siblings in total). His only sister was Zaphira, who was a fairly young widow, and while her second daughter, Sarika, was just two months old (her oldest daughter, who was 5 years older than Sarika, was Aunt Fifi). That's when my grandfather took his sister and her two daughters to live with his family. This is how aunt Sarika, was raised in the first years of her life, along with my grandfather's family, from whom she was drastically influenced.

During the German Occupation, at the age of about 15 years, Aunt Sarika joined the resistance and in a short time, she was known as a Captainissa and she sowed fear and terror to the Nazi Germans and the assailants. Sarah became a prominent and very respected figure in the Resistance movement in Greece. Until the age of 18, she was known as "Captain Sarika". The Nazis sent a whistleblower to try and apprehend her but because of misinformation Mandy Moskovic was arrested by mistake, and brutally raped and murdered. The whistleblower was found and executed.

Sarika emigrated to the newly formed Israel. Where on one of the "illegal" boats filled with Jewish immigrants, she met her husband, who was acting as the captain of the ship, on behalf of Haganah. He was a Jew from Greece.

Sarika, today at the age of 96, lives in Tel Aviv (her house was the first house in Israel to be hit by an Iraqi Shant missile, in the First Persian War).

In the photo below is also the son of Ephraim Forti and in the photo on the right, is also the beloved cousin Reuven Frizis, a well-known bodyguard of Israeli politicians and celebrities.



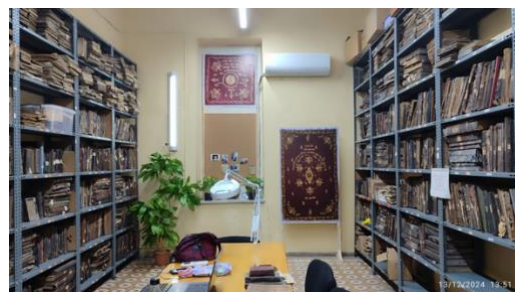
Sarika is in front. Salvador Bakolas is behind her



## Turkey

### The Rediscovery of Izmir's Rabbinic Library: A Testament to Sephardic Legacy [Full article Here](#)

On December 17, 2024, an invaluable treasure of Jewish heritage was unveiled in Izmir. The Rabbinic Library of Izmir, housed in a dedicated room within the Karataş Jewish Hospital, officially opened its doors, revealing a collection of more than 1,700 books printed between the 17th and 20th centuries. This remarkable repository, containing rare manuscripts and handwritten notes from the revered rabbis of Izmir, stands as a testament to the city's historical prominence as an intellectual and religious hub of the Sephardic world.



At the heart of this extraordinary revival is Donna Dina Eliezer, a Jewish educator from Philadelphia, whose deep roots in Izmir and unwavering dedication led to the salvaging and restoration of this forgotten collection. Born in Izmir to a family that later immigrated to Israel, she grew up immersed in the culture and traditions of her ancestors. Although she eventually settled in the United States, her ties to Izmir remained strong. When an unexpected opportunity arose in 1999 to assist the Jewish community in revitalizing its educational programs, she embraced the chance to reconnect with her heritage.

During her visit that year, Eliezer was introduced to the decaying remnants of the Hahamhane (Rabbinate) library. Hidden behind a heavy door in an abandoned building, the books lay in a state of heartbreaking neglect—water-damaged, covered in dust, and forgotten by time. Shocked by the sight, she exclaimed, “This is the treasure of your community. These are your rabbis’ works. And look, you are killing them.” Recognizing the historical and religious significance of the collection, she resolved to save it.

Her initial efforts involved relocating the books to a safer environment within the Karataş Jewish Hospital. Over the next several summers, she meticulously cataloged the collection, deciphering publication dates using Gematria, as many of the books bore only biblical references instead of standard year notations. The collection included works by luminaries such as Rabbi Yosef Escapa, Rabbis Hayim, Avraham, and Itshak Palacci, Rabbi Moshe Benveniste, and Rabbi Eliyahu Hazan. These books spanned responsa literature, sermons, religious law, and Ladino novels, reflecting the intellectual and cultural vibrancy of Izmir's Jewish community.



One of the library's most astonishing discoveries was the abundance of marginalia—handwritten notes in the books' margins penned by Izmir's rabbinic scholars. Many of these notes, written in Solitreo (a cursive Hebrew script used by Sephardic Jews), provided unique insights into rabbinic discourse and legal interpretations. Determined to bring this treasure to academic focus, Eliezer initiated a documentation project, enlisting volunteers and a professional photographer to photograph over 630 instances of marginalia. Thanks to the support of the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe and the Kiriati Foundation, these handwritten annotations have been digitized and are now part of the National Library of Israel's KTIV manuscript collection.

The rediscovery of the library was not without its challenges. Over the years, leadership changes within the community led to lapses in security, and some books were lost. When the hospital was leased to another institution, the library room was repurposed as a storage space, further endangering the collection. However, in 2022, Eliezer advocated for a renewed commitment to preservation. With the community's leadership support, the space was cleared, a new cataloging system was implemented, and state-of-the-art security measures—including cameras and restricted access—were introduced to safeguard the books.

The newly organized library is now accessible to scholars and researchers. A detailed catalog allows visitors to navigate its extensive holdings, categorized into sections such as marginalia, rabbinic works, Ladino literature, prayer books, historical newspapers, and even handwritten booklets for *meldados* (memorial prayers). Some volumes bear the names of the city's prominent Jewish families, offering a glimpse into Izmir's genealogical history. Hidden among the pages, unexpected artifacts were found—a ketubah, invitations to Jewish congresses, and personal dedications from revered rabbis. Each discovery adds another layer to the rich tapestry of the community's past.



Izmir was once a major center of Jewish learning, home to influential printing houses that produced first-edition texts and shaped the religious landscape of Sephardic Jewry. This library serves as a bridge between past and present, preserving the wisdom of sages whose rulings and teachings continue to guide Sephardic communities today. As Rabbi Hayim Palachi once wrote, *"El ke se olvida de su istoria, se olvida de si mismo."* ("He who forgets his history forgets himself.") Thanks to Eliezer's dedication and the unwavering support of the Izmir Jewish community, the city's rabbinic legacy will not be forgotten.

Looking ahead, Eliezer envisions the library as a hub for academic study, inviting researchers from around the world to explore its treasures. Her recent presentation at Bar-Ilan University generated significant interest, underscoring the need for greater scholarly engagement with Izmir's Jewish heritage. Though she now steps into an advisory role, she remains committed to ensuring the library's ongoing preservation and accessibility.

The opening of the Rabbinic Library of Izmir is not merely the restoration of old books; it is the revival of a legacy. It is a reminder that history, when cherished and preserved, continues to illuminate the path forward. *"Esta es nuestra erensya, i no tenemos ke deskuydarla"* ("This is our heritage, and we must not neglect it"). With this renewed commitment, Izmir's Jewish community honors its ancestors and secures its place in the annals of Jewish history.

## Cyprus

### **Greek Intelligence declassifies reports on 1974 coup and Turkish invasion** Full article [Here](#)

For the first time, intelligence documents shed light on the events that led to the division of Cyprus 50 years ago

The National Intelligence Service of Greece (EYP) has released declassified documents detailing the events surrounding the 1974 Greek-led coup in Cyprus and the subsequent Turkish invasion, providing new insights into a pivotal moment in Cyprus' history. The release includes 58 redacted reports from intelligence officers, compiled during July and August of 1974. These reports offer an inside look at the coup that overthrew Cyprus' President Archbishop Makarios, and the Turkish invasion that followed just five days later, leading to the division of the island. The decision to declassify these documents coincides with the 50th anniversary of the events. It also comes at a time when Greece and Turkey are seeking to improve their diplomatic relations. According to EYP director-general Themistoklis Demiris, "Fifty years is a long time, which, even if it doesn't force you to, allows you to look back and reflect on both national and professional awareness."



Greek-Cypriot soldiers arrested by Turkish invaders

The reports, dated primarily from early to mid-July 1974, shed light on the growing tensions between Cyprus and the Greek military junta, which had taken power in Athens in 1967. Nicosia felt that Athens was meddling in Cyprus' internal affairs, particularly supporting the EOKA B paramilitary group, which was plotting against the Cypriot government.

One report from July 2, 1974, describes the alarm felt by Cypriot officials who wanted to limit the Greek military presence on the island. Another report voiced fears of a Communist takeover if the Greek influence was reduced. "Talk of expelling Greek officers has sown fear among nationalist-minded people," the report said, adding that there was widespread belief that a Communist threat would rise if Greece withdrew.

On July 15, 1974, the junta in Athens orchestrated a coup in Cyprus, which immediately triggered Turkey's military invasion. The invasion led to Turkey occupying the northern part of the island, and within days, Greece's military junta collapsed.

Later reports focused on military activity and troop movements in both Cyprus and Greece, as Greece issued a general mobilization alert in response to the escalating crisis.

This is the first time that the EYP (National Intelligence Service of Greece} has made such archival material available to the public. The documents offer a rare look at the internal discussions and decisions made during one of the most significant and turbulent periods in Cyprus' modern history. Read the full report in Greek [here](#).

---

### **Cyprus-Greece Ferry Launches**

The Daleela ferry launched its first Cyprus-Greece service for the 2025 maritime season in July, just as officials announced a surge in cruise tourism and reaffirmed Cyprus' ambition to become a key player in the global cruise sector.

Deputy Shipping Minister Marina Hadjimanolis, speaking at Limassol Port, highlighted strong public demand and projected 170,000 cruise passengers from 130 ships this year, up from 120,000 in 2024. "With the completion of Cyprus' first National Cruise Strategy, we are confident we can put Cyprus on the global cruise map," she said.

Now in its fourth year, the Cyprus-Greece ferry link remains the island's only sea route to Greece. Hadjimanolis emphasized the government's continued commitment, noting that improved procedures and safety inspections were among recent upgrades. The Daleela ferry itself has been enhanced by Scandro Holding Ltd, in collaboration with DP World Limassol and local authorities.

The deputy minister also confirmed interest from companies exploring potential maritime connections with Israel and Lebanon, calling Cyprus "ready to respond to any entrepreneur wishing to launch something new."

---

### **Greece introduces new cruise tax: How much will passengers have to pay?**

Cruise ship passenger fees will increase starting July 1, Kathimerini reported. The fee will be imposed per passenger and per port and its amount will vary depending on the time period.

For Mykonos and Santorini during the peak tourism season, it will be set at 20 euros. According to information, the competent ministries are about to sign in the next few days the relevant decisions for the measure, which aims on the one hand to decongest saturated cruise destinations, such as the two aforementioned Cycladic islands, and on the other to increase resources from the activity to finance infrastructure projects in the ports involved and tourism.

## Egypt

### **2,000-Year-Old Statues Resurface From Sunken City Off Alexandria, Egypt** Full article [Here](#)

Archaeologists have recovered a series of ancient statues from the seabed near Alexandria, Egypt, offering new insight into a once-thriving city submerged for over two millennia. The discoveries were made in Abu Qir Bay, where divers and cranes recently brought several large sculptures and relics to the surface.



The recovered artifacts include royal statues, sphinxes, and carved figures that had been lying beneath the Mediterranean Sea for centuries. Experts say these ancient statues likely belonged to the city of Canopus, a prominent hub during the Ptolemaic (Greek) and Roman periods.

Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city, continues to yield significant finds from its coastal waters, reinforcing its status as a vital center of ancient history.

Buildings, reservoirs, and sacred structures were uncovered

The excavation revealed limestone buildings believed to have served various purposes, such as places of worship, housing, and commercial activities. Researchers also identified reservoirs and stone-cut ponds, which were possibly used for storing water and cultivating fish. These structures reveal a highly organized and developed urban landscape.

Among the most notable finds was a partially preserved sphinx bearing the cartouche of Ramses II, one of Egypt's most renowned pharaohs. Other statues included a headless granite sculpture from the Ptolemaic era and the lower half of a Roman noble figure carved in marble. Many of the pieces show damage from centuries underwater.

The recovery operation drew attention on Thursday when cranes slowly hoisted the statues from the seabed as divers in wetsuits watched and celebrated from the shore.

Tourism and Antiquities Minister Sherif Fathi said the team can only retrieve selected items based on strict archaeological criteria. He emphasized that the majority of the ruins will remain submerged, forming part of Egypt's underwater cultural heritage.

In addition to statues and buildings, researchers discovered the remains of a merchant ship, stone anchors, and a harbor crane near a 125-meter (410-foot) dock. The dock is believed to have operated through the Ptolemaic, Roman, and even Byzantine periods, supporting small boats and local trade.

Modern threats to Alexandria's coastal legacy

The city of Canopus, along with the neighboring port of Heracleion, was lost to the sea due to a combination of earthquakes and rising water levels over time. These natural forces gradually swallowed the coastal centers, leaving them buried beneath the bay.

Today, Alexandria itself faces a similar threat. The city is sinking by more than 3 millimeters (0.12 inches) each year and is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. According to the United Nations, even under the most optimistic forecasts, one-third of Alexandria could be underwater or uninhabitable by 2050.

As recovery efforts continue, officials say the finds will help piece together the daily life, trade, and religious practices of one of Egypt's most dynamic ancient cities.



## Israel

**The Mysterious Figure Who Mediated Between Zionists and Arabs a Century Ago** Full article [Here](#)  
Menachem Asher Saphir, a Jerusalem-born journalist and diplomat long forgotten by collective memory, quietly worked behind the scenes to bring the Zionist and Arab leaderships closer in the early 20th century. This is his story.

In the Haim Harari Archive at the Gnazim Institute, nestled among yellowing papers and memories from the First World War, a French military postcard was discovered some time ago. It contained a brief message in French, written under the restrictions of army censorship – yet beneath the surface, the message also carried another voice, a Hebrew voice. The card was sent by a soldier in the French Foreign Legion on the Western Front: Menachem Asher Saphir. Here is what he wrote, loosely translated:



*"Dear Mr. Harari,  
I'm puzzled not to have received a reply to my last letter. How are you? Have you had any news from Palestine? [...] I'm well, thankfully, for now – though tomorrow, who knows. [...] Shalom, yours, Saphir"*

What was a Jewish native of the Land of Israel doing in the trenches of the French army? What would drive a young man from Jerusalem to risk his life under foreign fire on a faraway front? That postcard stirred my curiosity – and led me to the story of a nearly forgotten figure: a journalist, a diplomat, a behind-the-scenes mediator whose face flickers in the background of press photos and in passing mentions scattered through diaries and confidential reports. This is the story of Menachem Asher Saphir – as told by the documents.

### Roots and First Steps

His family settled in the Land of Israel as early as 1832, among the disciples of the Vilna Gaon. But they weren't confined to the study hall. His grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Halevi Saphir, carried a different kind of title: he was a shadar, an emissary to Yemen, a researcher of Jewish communities, and the author of *Even Sapir* – a travel narrative that also stands as an ethnographic document and an early work of Zionist thought. His brother, Eliyahu Saphir, was one of the founders of the Anglo-Palestine Bank. His uncle, Zalman Natan Saphir, wrote for the newspaper *HaLevanon*. In fact, all three men were writers who contributed to the paper. It was into this Eastern European–Jerusalemite mosaic that Asher Saphir was born, likely in 1893. There are no surviving records of his childhood – perhaps because it was unremarkable – but by the early 1910s, he took an unexpected step: a journey to the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, to study law.

### Constantinople: An Intellectual Hub

He wasn't alone. At the time, Constantinople was a hotbed of intellectual ferment in the Middle East. Clubs, cafés, salons – new political and cultural currents emerged from every direction. The Young Turks had already overthrown the Sultan, and Pan-Arabism was on the rise. There, in the thick of it, Saphir forged surprising friendships: ties with figures like Emir Shakib Arslan, Aziz Al-Masri, and Nuri al-Said – names that would later be etched into the annals of Arab political history.

Between café conversations and university debates, Saphir began to write. His first journalistic post was as a correspondent for the German newspaper *Osmanischer Lloyd* – a step that might be seen as the beginning of his public career. But it quickly became clear that Saphir wasn't content with writing alone.

### 1913: From Reporter to Diplomat

One day, he turned up at a hotel where sensitive negotiations were underway between a Bulgarian delegate and a representative of the Ottoman government, right in the midst of the Balkan Wars. Somehow, this young man in his twenties found himself at the heart of a delicate diplomatic effort, earning the trust of both parties and helping to move the talks forward. The result: a signed agreement. In the years that followed, Saphir's acquaintances would recall how he proudly displayed the silver pen used to sign the deal. The event caused a stir and was reported in several Jewish newspapers of the time, which celebrated the young diplomat as "one of our own."

Perhaps this early success inspired the driven young man to pursue his future in "the cultural capital of the world," Paris. His young Arab peers may have acknowledged Constantinople as the capital of the Ottoman Empire, but they considered it provincial next to Paris. So Saphir made his way to the Sorbonne, where he continued his studies and remained close with members of the Arab nationalist



movement – many of whom found Paris a more comfortable base of operations than the Turkish capital. It was there that they founded the society Al-Arabiya Al-Fatat ("The Young Arabs"), and there, in June 1913, that a "Pan-Arab Congress" was convened. Among those Saphir was in contact with were Awni Abd al-Hadi, who would later serve on the Arab Executive Committee, and Jamil Mardam, a future Prime Minister of Syria.

#### 1914: War and a Twist

The good times in Paris came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of World War I. As Ottoman subjects, students from Palestine were barred from continuing their studies. While some escaped to neutral Switzerland, Saphir took a different, unexpected path: he volunteered for the French Foreign Legion. He was not alone. In fact, during the first three weeks of the war, some 6,000 Jews enlisted in the French military. It's unclear exactly how much influence Saphir had on this development, but David Tidhar, author of *The Encyclopedia of the Pioneers of the Yishuv and Its Builders*, wrote that Saphir "helped organize 4,000 Jews to volunteer for the Legion."

These Jewish volunteers fought with great courage, despite often being treated with condescension by French officers. Saphir's unit – the 2nd Regiment – was deployed to the Artois front in northeastern France. During the Battle of Carençy, Saphir, who served as a communications officer, was decorated for bravery under fire. According to Tidhar's encyclopedia, he was wounded twice over the course of the war.

By 1915, Saphir had been transferred to Thessaloniki, where he served as an adjutant – a position requiring linguistic skill and the ability to mediate across cultures. By this point, it seems, he was already seen as an officer with a head on his shoulders, an orientalist, a mediator. It was a role that foreshadowed his later career.

#### Jerusalem, 1918: A Zionist in French Uniform

In 1918, Saphir arrived in Jerusalem. (A French delegation led by François Georges-Picot – of Sykes-Picot fame – had been stationed in the city since Allenby's entry in 1917.) In a photo from that year, Saphir appears in uniform alongside a Zionist delegation at the Western Wall.

Even while still in uniform, he wasted no time becoming involved in Zionist affairs. Throughout the interwar period, he moved between Jerusalem, Thessaloniki, and Paris.

A glimpse into this period appears in a letter written by Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Harry Friedenwald on March 9, 1919 (Friedenwald was then acting chairman of the Zionist Commission). Jabotinsky wrote:

*Lieutenant Colonel Havard, the former military governor of Jaffa, said in the officers' lounge of the YMCA building in Jaffa – in the presence of both British and French officers – that if pogroms were to break out against Jews in Jaffa, he would not intervene. Two French officers who were present at the time – Dr. Lindsay and Saphir – reported these remarks to the Zionist Commission.*

In 1920, Saphir attended the Zionist Conference in London as the representative of the city of Thessaloniki – though he seems to have spent most of his time in Jerusalem (which likely already had a representative). From London, he filed reports for his newspaper *Doar HaYom* – but more on that later.



#### 1922: Secret Diplomacy

In 1922, Saphir played a central role in one of the most significant events of his career – acting as a covert envoy for the Zionist Organization under Chaim Weizmann. The event was a secret round of negotiations between the Zionist movement and "Arab representatives from Syria and Palestine." The talks took place in Cairo. Representing the Zionist side were Dr. David Eder, a British Zionist and trusted aide of Weizmann; Felix De Menasce, an Egyptian banker and Zionist leader; and Asher Saphir. For Saphir, it was a rare chance to realize his vision of Jewish-Arab cooperation between the two national movements. On the Arab side were Sheikh Rashid Rida, a leader of the Syrian Unity Party; Rida Bey al-Solh, also from Syria; and Emil Kuri, a Christian Arab journalist from Egypt.

The agreement the negotiating parties sought to formulate was based on shared interests: the Arabs' desire for independence from colonial powers, and their willingness to cooperate with the Jews, whom they viewed as "bringing with them a progressive culture, but not representing a colonial force." In return, the Jewish side agreed not to base their demands on the Balfour Declaration. In exchange, they asked for an end to incitement and acts of hostility toward the Jewish population of the land (the *Yishuv*), and a commitment to maintaining good neighborly relations in the future. The discussions were seen as a preliminary stage toward the establishment of a joint committee that would formalize the agreement. That committee was never formed, and the hoped-for accord was never signed.

The 1922 talks were kept secret, but in 1937 Saphir published them in a self-funded pamphlet. He had hoped to testify before the Peel Commission; when that opportunity was denied, he sent them the pamphlet instead. A summary was also published in the newspaper *Davar*. This may have marked a breaking point. The idea of Zionist–Arab cooperation was pushed to the sidelines, and Saphir – who had tried to be a bridge between the sides – was left holding only documentation and a sense of missed opportunity.

#### “Doar HaYom”: A New Voice, an Old Struggle

In 1919, in Jerusalem, a young but determined group set out to create a different kind of journalistic voice. They called themselves the *Hasolel Group* (named after a Jerusalem street), and included figures like Itamar Ben-Avi, Alexander Aaronsohn, Rivka Aaronsohn – and Asher Saphir.

They weren't content with idealistic declarations or eloquent phrases. They founded a newspaper that appeared in three languages:

*Doar HaYom* in Hebrew, *Palestine Weekly* in English, *Barid al-Yom* in Arabic.

Itamar Ben-Avi served as editor-in-chief. Asher Saphir took on the role of managing director – but he was also a writer, fundraiser, liaison, and policy shaper. This was a different kind of journalism – not the restrained, Western tone of *Haaretz*, but an Eastern, energetic, and direct voice.

#### Why create a new newspaper?

Rivka Aaronsohn put it simply in an interview with the American newspaper, *The Hebrew Standard*:

*"We wanted freedom of expression... We wanted a paper with an open policy and a desire to improve all of Palestine... We couldn't express our views in the existing paper [i.e., Haaretz\*]."*\*

Indeed, the first issue of *Doar HaYom*, published on August 8, 1919, proclaimed:

*"The time has come for the young Land of Israel – especially for those born here... We are free birds [...] Easterners we wish to remain, [...] and Westerners – along with all the rest [...] Give us electricity and Orith [light], give us airplanes and wireless."*

Saphir and his colleagues spoke in a new voice – native-born, Zionist yet cosmopolitan, hopeful yet sharply critical. Not everyone was a fan.

#### Clash With “Haaretz” – and With the Establishment

The reactions were swift. Moshe Glickson, writing in *HaPoel HaTzair*, accused *Doar HaYom* of being “yellow journalism” and said it was “becoming more harmful to our national cause by the day.” *Haaretz* simply called it a threat to the revival of a Jewish state.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, however, defended the paper with sharp words:

*"Haaretz may be respectable, but it's not a newspaper. Doar HaYom may not be respectable – but it is a newspaper."*

The controversy wasn't only about tone and style. It was also about content and ideology. *Doar HaYom* promoted Arab–Jewish cooperation, cultural integration, and even criticism of core Zionist figures like Menachem Ussishkin. It was a political stance – and during that period, Saphir was the one shaping it. A photo from the Gnazim Institute shows the newspaper's three founders: Saphir seated on the right, Itamar Ben-Avi standing, and Alexander Aaronsohn beside them. A fresh issue of *Doar HaYom* lies on the table. It's more than just a press photo – it's a portrait of cultural rebellion.

#### The End of a Partnership

According to Itamar Ben-Avi's memoirs, Saphir left the newspaper after his shares were purchased by Shmuel (Sam) Aaronsohn. Was it a matter of profit? Disillusionment? Ideological differences? Possibly all three. In any case, Saphir stepped away from journalism – and turned to a new arena.

Paris Again

With journalism behind him, and Jerusalem in the rearview, Saphir did not vanish. He returned to Paris – a city he knew well – this time not as a student, but as an entrepreneur, a businessman, and go-between. His story splits here into two threads: the documented version, and the version that can be read between the lines.

What do we know? An obituary published in *HaMashkif* after his death in 1944 claimed that he operated a publishing house in Paris, though it did not specify what he published. In British Mandate records, Asher Saphir, listed as a Tel Aviv

resident, appears as the local representative of *Etablissements Sainraph et Brice*, a French construction firm. In other words, he continued moving between worlds: Palestine and Paris, commerce and the Middle East.

But that's only the surface. David Tidhar – who devoted ample space in his writings to Saphir's character – offered a more intimate portrait:

*"In his home in Paris, Jewish and Arab activists would gather – locals or visitors passing through – and he always sought to bring hearts closer... Jewish writers and artists were also among his guests."*

He held no official diplomatic post, was appointed to no public office – yet people still seemed to see him as a figure of significance. Moshe Sharett, who would later serve as Israel's Prime Minister, wrote in his diary in 1939, following a conversation with a PICA (Palestine Jewish Colonization Association) secretary:

*"Someone who does not mince words – that is, Asher Saphir – claimed to possess documents showing that extremist Arab factions are prepared to make peace based on large-scale immigration."*

Sharett, characteristically terse, added: *"I told him to send such people to us. If they don't come – it means they're charlatans."*

It was a familiar pattern: Saphir would try, propose, mediate, hope – but the political world no longer had ears for him. Between ideals and realities, between dreams and diplomacy, the gap had only widened.

1940–1944: Final Chapter – Intelligence Officer, Exile, Soldier

Then came World War II. Saphir was in Paris when the Germans invaded. Nearly fifty, he didn't make way for the younger generation. On the contrary – just as he had once before, he found himself facing a burning European map, and once again, he chose to act. In June 1940, as France fell, he escaped occupied Paris at the last possible moment. On June 24, he boarded the British ship *SS Ettrick*, which carried exiles and French activists to London. Among them were figures soon to join General Charles de Gaulle's Free French Forces.

In London, Saphir was commissioned once again – first as a lieutenant, and later (according to some accounts) promoted to captain. His role: intelligence officer for Middle Eastern affairs, Palestine expert, liaison – once again, the discreet go-between straddling multiple worlds.

After Saphir's death, René Cassin recalled:

*"Beyond his intelligence work, he enjoyed the personal trust of General de Gaulle. Before he died, de Gaulle visited Saphir at his bedside and promoted him to the rank of captain."*

In the eyes of the French Republic, Saphir remained a man of honor.

He died in 1944, in a hospital of the Free French Army. The cause of death remains unclear – an old injury? illness? The surviving documentation is sparse. What is known is that he was buried in England, in the St Mary the Virgin churchyard cemetery, in the town of Horsell. Notices of his death were published in the *Palestine Post* and the Yiddish newspaper *Forverts*. Not front-page headlines. No bold fonts. But they were there. His memory, at least in part, was preserved.

Epilogue: A Bridge No One Crossed

Saphir's name appears now and then in historical works on Zionist–Arab relations, or in academic research on the press in Mandatory Palestine. But more often, it is absent.

That may be no accident. Perhaps his identity, and the ideas he championed – regional partnership, non-colonial Zionism, a mediating Hebrew–Eastern identity – didn't fit what came next.

And yet the postcards, the photographs, the quotes in the press, the letters, the pen that signed agreements – all of them bear witness to a remarkable and unusual figure in our history.

## The Salonika and Greece Jewry Heritage Center in Memory of Leon Recanati

For those not familiar with the Heritage Center in Israel at Beit Recanati Petah Tikva, one may wonder at the strange name. For many years, the Center only told the story of Jews from Salonika. Now, due to the efforts of impassioned Israeli Romaniotes, such as Anna Garty (of the Bakola branch of the Colchamiro family) the story of the Jews from Ioannina and other Romaniote communities is also told. Do visit when you are in Israel. Here is a comment from one group of visitors:



"I visited today with my granddaughters. We found a lot in common starting from the origins of our parents born in Thessaloniki, was moved to see the striped cotton clothing from the camps previously worn by Avi Michael.

Alliance Elementary School - all Israeli friends in Shebazi with the teachers; Stolier and his sister (new to me) the French teacher, Ben Menachem, Spanish, the principal Tajer and his wife also a teacher (new to me), their son Bina. Really a shared nostalgia despite the 10-year age difference between us." Yoma - 84.

A happy day to receive a personal invitation from Roni Aranya and me to visit for the first time the "Heritage Center for Judaism Shaloniki and Greece" in Beit Recanati Petah Tikva. Learn more [Here](#)

---

### Italy

#### Shining a Light on the Hidden History of Jews in Siena Full article [Here](#)

The first time I visited the Jewish ghetto in Siena was by accident. I'd just stumbled my way out of the Palazzo Pubblico — the civic seat of the Sienese Republic, today a museum — and my focus was singularly on tracking down a plate of *pici* for lunch. But my tunnel vision was broken by marble plaques I spotted along the street, memorializing, in Hebrew and Italian, two tragic events in the history of Siena's Jewish population.



Peering closer, it became clear that behind this unadorned façade were Siena's synagogue and a small museum sharing the story of the city's Jews. Feeling that familiar push-pull of belonging and struggle, I knew then that the site would become a place of comfort for me, a Jewish American doctoral student writing her dissertation on Renaissance Siena.

#### Connecting with community history in Siena

I wasn't totally new to Italy, nor to exploring my identity within it. I'd visited the Venice ghetto and, in Rome, had inadvertently come across some of the brass "stumbling stones" commemorating Holocaust victims in view of the Portico d'Ottavia. I was living between Florence and the US at the time of my serendipitous visit to Siena's synagogue, and occasionally walked by the Tuscan capital's (far more conspicuous) bluish-domed Tempio Maggiore, never quite finding the time or nerve to venture inside. The interest in Siena's history arose much more organically than the self-inflicted "shoulds" I felt about exploring *eredità ebraica* — Jewish heritage — in more famous communities. Like any good researcher, freed from the tyranny of the "should," I went down the rabbit hole even more willingly.

The presence of Jews in Siena was recorded as far back as the 13th century, and the community was vibrant, comprising Italians, Spaniards and northern Europeans. Given Siena's long history as a banking capital, the city's Jews also had their own bank, established in 1335 by a certain Vitale di Daniele. While Jews were officially exiled from the city following the Black Plague, some persevered, remaining clandestinely enshrined in the local population.

A century later, they were given permission to practice openly and founded a Jewish seminary, or *yeshivah*, which became a hub of Jewish learning and attracted more Jews to the city. These freedoms didn't come without a cost, however: Following a rise in antisemitism spurred on by the preaching of San Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) and his contemporaries, Jewish men were required to wear physical markers — usually yellow hats — to denote their identity, though they were still able to live and work freely in the city.



In 1555, Florence and the armies of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici conquered Siena. Sixteen years later, Cosimo established the Jewish ghetto, a year after he'd enacted a similar policy for Jews in Florence. But Jews were still able to attend Siena's university: Over the course of the 16th century, at least 10 matriculated to study medicine. Archival records show that the Jewish population rose during the grand ducal period, ballooning from approximately 100 residents to 500 in the 17th century.

With the growth of the community came the move of the synagogue in 1730 — to the very location, a medieval building, that I'd almost breezed by unaware. Renovation work on it began in 1750. But the move and subsequent changes weren't entirely about growth-related expansions or "upgrades." The raised sanctuary on the second floor (or *primo piano*, in Italian terms) and the unassuming façade were precautions taken by a population who feared attack. (Given that I was slow on the uptake several centuries later, their approach seems to have been an effective one.) Still, the sanctuary itself, designed by the Florentine Zanobi del Rosso, doesn't downplay its beauty. It's elegantly appointed, with a large marble ark where the torahs are stored and white decorative lattice grates demarcating the women's balcony.

A brief rebirth, followed by persecution and perseverance

Things started to look up for Siena's Jewish population — at least briefly — with the arrival of the French at the end of the 18th century. In March 1799, the French abolished the ghetto, granting citizenship to the Jews, and the doors to the ghetto were publicly and ceremoniously burned in the nearby Piazza del Campo. But this independence was short-lived: In June of the same year, members of the anti-Napoleonic Viva Maria movement seized control of the city and embarked on a *pogrom*, a riot that saw 13 Jews publicly burned alive in the very piazza where they had, just months before, burned the ghetto gates in a moment of rapturous liberation.

Siena's ghetto remained active until 1859 and the rise of the Italian unification movement, when the gates were once again blown open — but this time, for good. Jews were integrated into Italian society, though their population in Siena dwindled over time. Sienese Jews were nonetheless proud of their heritage, fighting in World War I as members of the Italian Army. In 1938, however, the Fascist regime enacted new restrictions with the *Leggi Razziali*, or Racial Laws, and 14 Jews were deported to Auschwitz in 1943 and ultimately murdered. This is the tragedy — along with the *pogrom* of 1799 — that is today commemorated on the plaques outside the synagogue and that pulled my attention far from lunch on my first visit.

The streets of the ghetto were reorganized as part of an urban renewal project in 1935, but visitors today can still explore the synagogue, visit the Jewish cemetery, and view the ghetto fountain, although its main sculpture of Moses was removed in 1875 and is now housed in the Palazzo Pubblico.

A reflective return to Siena amid the holiday season

This year — long after I first stumbled upon the synagogue and the story of Siena's Jews — I had a chance to return at the height of the holiday season. While twinkling Christmas lights lavishly festooned much of the city center, the synagogue's street remained unadorned. Yet there was a warmth inside the building that, for me, the lights — as much as, admittedly, I love them — couldn't touch. The story of Hanukkah itself reminds us of the power of perseverance; like the miraculous oil that managed to burn for eight nights instead of only one,



the Jews of Siena have managed to prosper despite many attempts to limit them. A document now hanging in the atrium of the synagogue attests to the contemporary bonds between the Jewish people of Siena and their city. Dated 5778, or 2018 by the Gregorian calendar, a central illustration depicts the nearby Palazzo Pubblico. In Latin, the city's motto, *cor magis tibi Siena pandit* (Siena opens a wider heart), is displayed across a green banner while the city's name is inscribed in Hebrew transliteration: סיינה. Jewish people have always been nestled in the heart of the city, though it's taken time for citizens to welcome them with open arms.

Learning about Siena's synagogue prompted reflection on my own intersectional identity as a Jewish doctoral student studying the art of Renaissance Siena — a duality that, previously, I might have all too readily written off. It also offered a new lens through which I might consider not only the art of centuries past, but the recent spikes in antisemitism in Italy and the larger world. Facing this as a teacher and an art historian, I'm heartened by news that just yesterday, UNESCO launched a virtual learning program for US educators to "address the antisemitism, the distortion and denial of the Holocaust in schools," and that last month, the Uffizi Gallery finally identified Jona Ostiglio, the Jewish artist of a number of unattributed paintings that he illegally produced for the Medici court.

This holiday season, the stories of Siena's Jews can serve as a reminder for all — regardless of how we do or don't worship, how we do or don't identify — to persevere in times of trouble.

If you go: Jewish Synagogue and Museum of Siena, Vicolo delle Scotte, 14, Siena. <https://www.jewishsiena.it/>

---

## Spain

### **Spanish discovery suggests Roman-era 'church' may have been a synagogue**

Oil lamp fragments point to presence of previously unknown Jewish population in Ibero-Roman town of Cástulo

Seventeen centuries after they last burned, a handful of broken oil lamps could shed light on a small and long-vanished Jewish community that lived in southern Spain in the late Roman era as the old gods were being snuffed out by Christianity. Archaeologists excavating the Ibero-Roman town of Cástulo, whose ruins lie near the present-day Andalusian town of Linares, have uncovered evidence of an apparent Jewish presence there in the late fourth or early fifth century AD. As well as three fragments of oil lamps decorated with menorahs and a roof tile bearing a five-branched menorah, they have also come across a piece of the lid of a cone-shaped jar bearing a Hebrew graffito. While experts are split over whether the engraving reads "light of forgiveness" or "Song to David", its very existence points to a previously unknown Jewish population in the town, which eventually fell into decay and abandonment 1,000 years later.



The discovery of the materials has led the team to consider whether the ruins of a nearby building, assumed to be an early Christian basilica dating from the fourth century AD, could perhaps have been a synagogue where Cástulo's Jewish community came to worship. When the site of the supposed church was first excavated between 1985 and 1991, archaeologists assumed it was a Christian edifice. "During the 2012-2013 [dig], we found the roof tile with the five-armed [menorah]," said Bautista Ceperián, one of the archaeologists working on the Andalusian regional government's Cástulo Sefarad, Primera Luz project, which aims to uncover the town's Jewish history. "Until that moment, we didn't know that there could have been a very small Jewish community in Cástulo."

In a recently published paper, Ceperián and his colleagues David Expósito Mangas and José Carlos Ortega Díez consider the possibility that the "church" could in fact have been a synagogue. They argue that the lack of Christian materials in the site, combined with an absence of evidence of burials or religious relics – which

would normally be expected in a Christian church of the era – could point to its use as a Jewish temple. A nearby baptistry, in contrast, has already yielded Christian finds and burials. Jewish religious law, however, forbids burials within 50 cubits (23m) of a residential area. “When we looked at the interior of the building a little more closely, there were some strange things for a church; there was something that could have been the hole for a big menorah,” said Ceprián. “It’s also strange that this building doesn’t have any tombs.”



The authors also point to the site’s architectural features, such as its layout, which is reminiscent of some synagogues found in Israel.

“Synagogues of that time could be more square in shape than Christian basilicas because in Jewish worship, there’s usually a central bimah [raised platform], which people sit around,” said Ceprián. “In a church, the priest performs the rituals in the apse, which means things are more rectangular.”

Then there is the location of the possible synagogue; it would have sat in an isolated part of town near a ruined Roman bathhouse that would have been feared and hated by the local bishops.

“The Roman baths were the last pagan place that remained in a city,” said Ceprián. “It was something diabolical and therefore something that had to be outside the Christian world. It seems to be the case that the baths in Cástulo had already been closed by the end of the fourth century, or the beginning of the fifth century.”

He argues that the synagogue’s location, so close to a font of paganism, would have helped the local Christian hierarchy in its efforts to conflate Judaism with unholy practices: “The Jews would have had few options and at that moment it’s clear that it’s the bishops who are fundamentally organising the town – and it would allow them to relate Jews with evil.”

If the researchers’ theories were to be confirmed, the Cástulo synagogue would be among the very oldest Jewish temples on the Iberia peninsula. Spain’s handful of surviving original synagogues are mainly medieval. The most recently discovered synagogue, in the Andalusian city of Utrera, dates from the 1300s.

The problem for Ceprián and his colleagues – as they acknowledge – is the lack of written historical corroboration. “I’m sure there will be criticism, which is totally legitimate – that’s how science works and how it has to work,” he said. “But of course we believe we’ve provided data with enough seriousness to allow ourselves to posit it.”

Whether the building was a church or a synagogue, those digging up Cástulo have uncovered evidence of what would appear to be a small Jewish community living, if only for a while, in peaceful coexistence with their Christian neighbours. As the centuries wore on and the church propagated the otherness of Spain’s Jewish inhabitants in order to forge and galvanise a Christian identity, there were pogroms and, finally, the expulsion of the country’s Jewish population in 1492.

“It shows us that there was a good coexistence between all the different social groups or faith groups that were there at that time,” said Ceprián. “But later, from the time when the Christian church begins to grow stronger in the Roman government, you start to get powerful groups opposed to those who are weaker in society. Oddly, that’s something that’s happening now, too.”



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



Rosh Hashanah, the "Jewish New Year", is celebrated this year on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. It also ushers in the "10 days of repentance", when God sits in judgment, finally determining the fate of each and every one of us on the holiest and awe-inspiring day of the year: Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement.

However, limiting the description of Rosh Hashanah as only the Jewish new year is not completely accurate. In fact, in Jewish tradition, Rosh Hashanah is actually a new year in a very big way for the entire world and human race! This may sound strange, since everyone knows that the new calendar year for virtually the entire non-Jewish world is January 1<sup>st</sup>. What universal importance, if any, does Rosh Hashanah have?

The answer lies in the very essence of God's creation of the world. According to Jewish tradition, the first human being, Adam, was created on Rosh Hashanah (Midrash Rabbah, Leviticus 29:1). Based on this tradition, the Talmud says (Mishnah Tractate Rosh Hashanah, 1:2): "*On Rosh Hashanah **all** human beings pass before Him like young sheep, as it is said (Psalm 33:15): 'He fashions all their hearts together, Who understands their deeds.'*"

This clearly means that not only is the Jewish people judged by God on this very Holy day, but the entire world, with every person marching like a young sheep through a narrow opening in the corral, while God looks down and considers the "case" of each and every human being of every nationality, creed and faith.

What, then, is our role in this process? The answer is that, as God's chosen people, we are saddled with an awesome responsibility that we cannot shirk. God demands that we be the "defense team", so to speak, for His Heavenly court of justice. We are mandated to pray not only for our own welfare and peace, but for the entire world, as well as be God's messengers to call on all peoples to repent and recognize God as king of the world. This message is not only an intellectual tradition, but is reflected in segments of the day's prayers and the unique commandment of blowing the Shofar: – to awaken ourselves and the world and announce God's imminent coming and His impending judgment of one and all: "*This day the world was brought into being. This day brings in judgment all Thy creatures of earth, whether like children or servants; if as children, have mercy on us, like that of a father to his children, and if as servants, our eyes hang on Thee till Thou show us Thy favor and make clear our judgment, most holy One!*" (From "Musaf" – additional- service on Rosh Hashanah); "*Join hands, all you peoples - sound the Shofar to the Just One with a cry of joy! For the Compassionate One is supreme, awesome, a great Sovereign over all the earth*" (Psalm 47, verses 2,3, recited just before the Shofar blowing).

Yet Rosh Hashanah is also considered a day of great joy, because by returning to God and proclaiming his divine sovereignty, we become 'new' people, and the world may continue to exist. The great Sephardic sage and commentator on prayer, David Abudraham (Seville, Spain circa 1340), cites an ancient teaching about the holiday: "*If a human being does teshuvah [repents] on Rosh Hashana, the Holy One, blessed be He, considers him as if he was just now created in the world, as every human being who returns through teshuvah is like a new creature*" (Abudraham – Laws and Commentary on Rosh Hashana). And due to its joyous nature, Jewish law and custom forbids fasting or even crying on Rosh Hashanah. It is also worthy of note that, with all its solemn and awesome nature, no penitential or confessional prayers are recited on Rosh Hashanah. This joyous side of Rosh Hashanah is due to the fact that we are full of joy and confidence that God will indeed answer

our prayers and the sound of the Shofar, forgive our transgressions and continue to sustain the Jewish people and the entire world for another year!

Still, with all the antisemitism and hatred of Israel that Jews continue to experience from almost every country, why should we want to play any role in trying to 'fix' this often cruel and hateful world, particularly against Jews? Does the world really deserve our 'help'?

The answer is simply that this world was created by God, and it is the only one we have. There is no question that God recognizes the cruelty, ingratitude and suffering of the Jewish people in His world. But as His chosen people, he expects and even commands us to act as His agent to pray and act for the benefit of this world, no matter how difficult the task may be. In fact, throughout history, the Jewish people have shown how seriously and comprehensively we fulfill this role. In every age and every country, from ancient times till today, Jews are always at the forefront of social action and philanthropy in numbers way beyond their proportion in any population, for the benefit of the world-at-large, and in every sphere. Such actions go way beyond moral and ethical principles: They are indeed part of our DNA as God's emissaries and agents for "*tikun olam*" – the repairing God's world.

*Shanah Tovah* to one and all. May we all be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life and enjoy good health and happiness. And may our prayers and efforts to ensure the continued existence and prosperity of the world-at-large bear fruit, and true brotherhood and peace be realized speedily in our days!



**Rabbi Marc D. Angel**  
**Eyes Open and Eyes Shut: Thoughts for Rosh Hashana**  
[JewishIdeas.org](http://JewishIdeas.org)

Paul Gauguin, the famous 19th century French artist, commented: "When I want to see clearly, I shut my eyes."

He was referring to two different ways of perceiving reality. With our eyes open, we see surface reality—size, shape, color etc. But with our eyes shut, we contemplate the context of things, our relationship to them, the hidden meanings.

With our eyes open, a dozen roses are 12 beautiful flowers. With our eyes shut, they may be full of memories and associations—roses given or received on our first date; roses at our wedding; roses growing in our childhood home's back yard; roses on our grandmother's Shabbat table.

How we see fellow human beings is also very different with open or closed eyes. With our eyes open, we see their physical features. With our eyes shut, we remember shared experiences, friendships, happy and sad moments. When we want to see clearly—comprehensively—we shut our eyes.

Mircea Eliade, a specialist in world religions, has written in his book, *The Sacred and The Profane*, about the pagan view of New Year. For them, human life is a series of recurring cycles, always on the verge of chaos. On New Year, people descend into this primordial chaos: drunkenness, debauchery, chaotic noise.

The Jewish view is radically different. For Jews, reality isn't a hopeless cycle of returns to chaos, but a progression, however slow, of humanity. Rosh Hashana is not a return to primeval chaos, but a return to God, a return to our basic selves. Our New Year is observed with prayer, repentance, solemnity, and a faith that we can—and the world can—be better.

The pagan New Year is an example of seeing reality with open eyes. Things really do seem to be chaotic when viewed on the surface. Humanity does not seem to improve over the generations. We always seem to be on the verge of self-destruction.

The Jewish New Year is an example of viewing reality with our eyes shut, of seeing things more deeply, more carefully. While being fully aware of the surface failings of humanity, we look for the hidden signs of progress and redemption. We attempt to maintain a grand, long-range vision. This is the key to the secret of Jewish optimism. While not denying the negatives around us, we stay faithful to a vision of a world that is not governed by chaos, but by a deeper, hidden, mysterious unity.

The problem of faith today is not how to have faith in God. We can come to terms with God if we are philosophers or mystics. The problem is how can we have faith in humanity? How can we believe in the goodness and truthfulness of human beings?

With our eyes open, we must view current events with despair and trepidation. We see leaders who are liars and hypocrites. We see wars and hatred and violence and vicious anti-Semitism. We are tempted to think that chaos reigns.

But with our eyes shut, we know that redemption will come. We know that there are good, heroic people struggling for change. We know that just as we have overcome sorrows in the past, we will overcome oppressions and oppressors of today.

Eyes open and eyes shut not only relate to our perception of external realities, but also to our self-understanding. During the season of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we focus on penitential prayers. We confess our sins and shortcomings. But as we think more deeply about our deficiencies, we also close our eyes and look for our real selves, our deeper selves, our dreams and aspirations.

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, noted that the high holy day period is symbolized by the shofar. The shofar must be bent, as a reminder that we, too, must bow ourselves in contrition and humility. But shortly after Yom Kippur comes Succoth, with the lulav as a central symbol. The lulav must be straight, not bent over. The lulav teaches us to stand strong and tall, to focus on our strengths and virtues. The holiday season, then, encourages us to first experience humility and contrition; but then to move on to self-confidence and optimism. Our eyes are open to our shortcomings; but when we shut our eyes, we also can envision our strengths and potentialities.

Rosh Hashana reminds us to view our lives and our world with our eyes open—but also with our eyes shut. We are challenged to dream great dreams, to seek that which is hidden, to see beyond the moment.

Rosh Hashana is a call to each individual to move to a higher level of understanding, behavior and activism. Teshuva—repentance—means that we can improve ourselves, and that others can improve, and that the world can improve.

This is the key to Jewish optimism, the key to the Jewish revolutionary vision for humanity, the key to personal happiness.

A sample in the most recent issue, written by Rabbi Marc. D. Angel's son, Rabbi Hayyim Angel, gives us all something to reflect on. From the editor's introduction on page IX:

A religious worldview based on a broad vision of Orthodox Judaism

---The overarching purpose of the Torah is to serve God, and through Torah's Laws and religious guidance to build towards an ideal personal life, family, community and the world (Tikkun Olam).

---Inclusive: Judaism and its institutions must be committed to Torah, *halakha*, and Jewish belief, while concurrently embracing the whole totality of the Jewish people. There is room for every Jew, regardless of his background or religious commitment, under its roof.

---Non-coercive: Threats and authoritarianism do not win people's hearts. A loving and honest approach that provides multiple authentic avenues into Jewish tradition is the best educational model.

---Unity without Conformity. Although we long for Jewish unity, the goal is not achieved by trying to get everyone to agree. On the other hand, our tradition champions debate. We foster respectful dialogue and conversation through teaching a diversity of valid opinions, opinions and world views.

---Confident Faith: a confident faith does not stifle questioning, nor develop misleading or apologetic answers to coverup genuine questions. People with a confident faith recognize uncertainty, as there is not one definitive answer to many questions. They also embrace the notion that people of different beliefs and backgrounds may contribute to scholarly and human endeavor.

---Universalism and Particularism: Judaism is based on the unique covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Simultaneously, it has a religious message to all of humanity that can be conveyed in universalistic terms. Judaism must be faithful to both of these principles.

---

## Emma Lazarus

Article from the American Sephardi Federation on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Today is the 176<sup>th</sup> birthday of Emma Lazarus, one of the most fascinating literary figures of 19th century American history. ASF Broome & Allen Fellow Leonard Stein gave a tour de force lecture, "Jewish Spain in American Tongue: Emma Lazarus' Sephardic Return," in multiple languages and based on original archival research discoveries that is well worth (re-)watching to mark the occasion.



Poet, playwright, critic, journalist, and a self-proclaimed "Jewish outlaw," Lazarus (1849-1887) became famous for her sonnet, "The New Colossus," a transcendent vision of American purpose that adorns the Statue of Liberty ("Give me your tired, your poor/ Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,..."). Today, that poem has transcended its author in fame — and controversy .

In March, a French Member of the European Parliament started a debate that quickly spread online about whether the Statue of Liberty should be reclaimed or returned. Matt Walsh, a populist commentator and occasional "poet," insisted upon keeping the Statue, but only in a desecrated form shorn of its significance. "I do think we should remove that dumb poem about the 'huddled masses' and send that to them.... People talk about that stupid poem like it's some kind of founding document. It was written in 1903. It wasn't even an original part of the statue, much less an original part of our nation's founding," wrote Walsh

While "Liberty Enlightening the World" (Lady Liberty's formal name) was a gift of France to the United States of America to mark the Declaration of Independence's centennial, the victory of the Union in abolishing slavery, and Franco-American friendship, the pedestal on which she stands was paid for by the American people. In support of that great eleemosynary endeavor, specifically the American Committee for the Statue of Liberty's fundraising campaign with a very long name ("Art Loan Fund Exhibition in Aid of the Bartholdi Pedestal Fund for the Statue of Liberty"), Lazarus was persuaded to write a poem befitting what she called the "Mother of Exiles."

"Inspired by her own Sephardic Jewish heritage, her experiences working with refugees on Ward's Island, and the plight of the immigrant," Lazarus' purpose in 1883 (not 1903, 16 years after her death), was to welcome immigrants upon arrival, as well as to raise the funds for the Statue's NYC abode. More than 120,000 Americans responded positively, voting with their hard-earned contributions to the cause. The pedestal donors' intent for the Statue is lost on Walsh, as well as the antisemitic commenters who were quick to point out Lazarus' Jewishness as a trump card to thinking about our creedal nation.

Indeed, Lazarus was a descendant of the 23 Sephardic refugees from Recife, a Shearith Israel ("Remnant of Israel"), whose flight from the Inquisition brought them to New Amsterdam (later New York) and the founding of America's 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish community, over 120 years before the Declaration of Independence. Put another way, Lazarus's American ancestry is likely older and more illustrious (her relatives include Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Cardozo, as well as Annie and Maud Nathan) than many of her contemporary "nativist" detractors, whose ancestors came later and who have obviously failed to assimilate what it means to be an American.

Coming from an Irish background, Walsh might be interested in Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army George Washington's 2 December 1783 letter to "the volunteer Associations & other Inhabitants of the Kingdom of Ireland" in New York City. Washington prayed that Americans would set an "Example" for other nations "successfully contending in the Cause of Freedom." After praising Ireland's "bold & manly conduct" seeking redress and wishing "the blessings of equal Liberty & unrestrained Commerce may yet prevail more extensively...", Washington turned to the meaning of immigration to the would-be Land of Liberty:

The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent & respectable Stranger, but the oppressed & persecuted of all Nations & Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights & privileges, if by decency & propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.

As America's first President, George Washington returned to these themes when writing to the Sephardic Congregation at Newport on 18 August 1790. "Citizens of the United States of America," according to Washington, "have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy [i.e., the Declaration of Independence and Constitution]: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship." Transcending tolerance to achieve liberty and justice for all was only made conceivable because "happily... the Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction and persecution no assistance."

In these difficult times, when antisemites of all parties abound and give cause to be afraid for the future, let us resurrect (so to speak) the meaning of America as envisioned by our Founder George Washington and his fellow creators of the architecture of freedom, as embodied by the Statue of Liberty, as beautifully expressed by Emma Lazarus's poetry, and as experienced in the lives of millions of Americans. And, on this day and throughout the year, "May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths...."

"Towards peace, love, and justice."

## East Village Historic Preservation

Village Preservation is working with fellow local preservation organizations and parishioners to preserve the endangered historic Most Holy Redeemer Church at 173 East 3rd Street (Avenues A and B) in the East Village. With roots in waves of immigration dating back to the 1840s, the church was once one of the largest in the city and one of its tallest structures. A devastating fire at its school led to pioneering reforms in fire safety measures that remain with us today, and the church, which was restyled over time, was the site of significant innovations in the use of electricity in church structures as well as the introduction of Gregorian chants at Catholic Churches. We have called on the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission to landmark the structures to ensure they are not destroyed.



Most Holy Redeemer has been a cornerstone of the East Village community for over a century and a half, and embodies so much of this neighborhood's and New York's rich immigrant history and culture. Recent moves halting masses there show the future of this historic site is in doubt. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has had a poor track record of preserving churches, synagogues, and other historic sites in the East Village in recent years, and in general has become increasingly averse to landmarking and preserving endangered historic sites. They need to hear from YOU that Most Holy Redeemer Church and its history MUST be preserved.

---

## Tour of Jewish Greece

Our Museum Director Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos was unable to do her annual tour to Greece in 2025 since she was still recovering from back surgery. Thankfully she is in the process of healing and is exploring a tour in 2026. The potential 2026 tour would occur in May 2026 during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. Tentatively, the tour would start in Athens on May 21<sup>st</sup>, then go to Ioannina for 3 days, Salonika for 2 days, then flying from Salonika to Mykonos and finishing the tour in Rhodes. The tour would run from May 20<sup>th</sup> (travel day) to June 4<sup>th</sup> (travel day). If you are interested, email Marcia at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)



## Note on Pursuing Greek Citizenship

We often receive emails from those of our community who have their roots in Greece, who are interested in obtaining Greek citizenship. It is not as easy as one may expect. First, you must have proof that one grandparent was born in Greece. This proof must be in the form of a document from Greece. Papers from the United States (ship manifests, census records, etc. won't work). You cannot get into the municipal archives in Ioannina (or any other Greek city). You would have to pay a lawyer. Unfortunately, too many unscrupulous lawyers have taken the money without producing any results. If you feel that you meet the requirements you can email us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)

---

## Where is Marvin

Sometimes it is hard to keep up with the President of Kehila Kedosha Janina Marvin Marcus. In July, he headed out to South Hampton to attend the annual Greek Festival and ran into our dear friend, Father Alex.



## Looking for Our Help

We are looking for the descendants of Zacharia Yomtov and Mazalto Moises Yomtov for the purpose of acquiring DNA testing. Such scientific evidence will eliminate assumptions as to actual relationships and will help connect the many Yomtov family lines. If you are interested, email [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)

-----

*"I send you the story of my family as told in Athens (Hidden Children in Occupied Greece -Exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Greece September 29,2003) from my aunt Anna Mosiou Gani, born in 1930 in Athens, the sister of my father Samuel Mosios.*

My grandfather was named Iakovos Mosio and he was living in Athens. He was exterminated at the Nazi camps, and he was married to Stamatoula Kofina from Ioannina. Stamatoula was a survivor, and she was born in 1906. She died at Athens 1969.

Iakovos and Stamatoula had 3 children, Samuel (my father 1932-1984), Anna (1930-2017) and Etyhia who died unfortunately when she was liberated.

I wonder, can it be that my grandfather Iakovos met my grandmother Stamatoula in Ioannina and then moved to Athens? Or he was from Athens and just married Stamatoula from Ioannina?

Is there any chance to find something more?

---

We are blessed with talented and impassioned people in our community, one of whom is documentary filmmaker, author, and photographer, Arlene Schulman. We are awaiting the release of Arlene's documentary about our Romaniote community. Until then, we can enjoy her present work. We cannot print the full article but you can access it at Pastrami a go-go and Other Wry Tales of the City.



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

The Rhythm Is Gonna Get You: A True Senior Prom

A Y in Manhattan is transformed with a Latin dance party, culminating in the crowning of a king and queen

By Arlene Schulman, August 20, 2025

At the Nagle Avenue Y in upper Manhattan, 75 is the new 50, hips sway to beats of salsa and bachata even when music isn't playing, and Larry Morgan is the king of dance.

Prom nights, modeled after debutante balls, are still highly anticipated events at high schools across the country, signaling the passage of time from adolescence into adulthood. Since the late 1800s, proms have involved the nervous ritual of finding dates, the wearing of dramatic gowns, makeup masking acne and anxiety, the selection of corsages, dancing under the watchful eyes of chaperones, all culminating in the crowning of prom king and queen.

The Y's senior prom, however, kicked off not long after breakfast and just before lunch at 11:15 a.m. on a Thursday in June. Finely dressed partygoers clutching \$7 tickets (\$12 at the door) lined up even earlier. Instead of limos, the Y's 20-person van picked up promgoers while one of the many women used her half-priced OMNY senior fare card to ride the city bus up Broadway. One son chaperoned his parents.

Morgan, a 15-year member of the Y's Center for Adults Living Well (advertised for those "60 and better"), joins a flock of colorfully dressed and well-coiffed women and a handful of men. "Females outlive men," Morgan explained of the shortage. He is 81.



## Photos of the Month



Wooden travel chest clad in turquoise-colored metal sheeting, with interior lined in brown paper hand-stamped with a multicolored floral pattern (Fabrication No. 5851). A workshop label is affixed to the inner lid: Moise J. Mano, 28 Megalou Alexandrou Street, Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, first half of the 20th century © Historical Collection – The Jewish Museum of Greece. Photo credit Leonidas Papadopoulos

**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. Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy. **You can do this online on our website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) click 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 197  
September 2025  
Kehila Kedosha Janina  
280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002  
Website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)  
Email: [info@kkjsm.org](mailto:info@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](http://www.kkjsm.org).**