



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

June 2022 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

In June we celebrate Shavuot - the receiving of the Torah. The word Shavuot means "weeks," and it marks the conclusion of the Counting of the Omer. Its date is directly linked to that of Passover: the Torah mandates the seven-week Counting of the Omer, beginning on the second day of Passover, to be immediately followed by Shavuot. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the giving of the Torah. On Passover, the people of Israel were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on Shavuot, they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving G-d.

Shavuot also marked the wheat harvest in the Land of Israel. The Book of Ruth is traditionally read on this holiday, which takes place during harvest time. The story recounts how the Moabite woman Ruth accepts G-d as her G-d and accepts the Israelite people as her own. In Ruth 1:16–17, Ruth tells Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Ruth would later give birth to the grandfather of King David. King David was born and died on Shavuot.



Dairy is traditionally eaten on Shavuot, a great time to enjoy cheese bourekas

The E-Newsletter is sponsored by Leon Weintraub
in memory of his sister Ada Finifter and cousin Leonard Colchamiro.
If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at museum@kkjism.org.

This newsletter, our 159th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjism.org.

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

We are open for Shabbat every Saturday morning starting at 9:30am. Please email amarcus@kkjsm.org if you would like to attend, and enjoy a traditional Greek kiddush lunch after services.

Our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm. Please RSVP to museum@kkjsm.org if you would like to visit. Proof of vaccination and masks are required.

Simchas

We joyfully celebrate the birth of Henry David Cohen, the son of David and Olivia Cohen, and little brother to Isaac, the grandson of Nathan and Judy Asher Cohen, great-grandson of David and Esther Asser, great-great-grandson of Rabbi Simon Asser and Lulu Nachman Asser, and the great-great-great-grandson of Menachem ben Asser Lamias and Regina Bassara. On the Cohen side, great-grandson of Isaac and Sarah Cohen, and great-great-grandson David A. and Esther Cohen (David A. Cohen was an original member of KKJ). Henry was born on April 21, 2022



Congratulations to David and Sandra Merenstein Cohen on the occasion of their 50th Wedding Anniversary. David is the grandson of David A. and Esther Cohen

We celebrate the Bat Mitzvah of Addison Gottlieb on 4/9/2022. Addison's parents are Lori and Adam Gottlieb, her Grandparents, Steven and the late Sandy Matza, her great Grandparents, Mollie and Harry (Aaron) Matza and Eva and Solomon M. Solomon. Thank you Audrey Solomon for this information and the generous donation in honor of Addison.

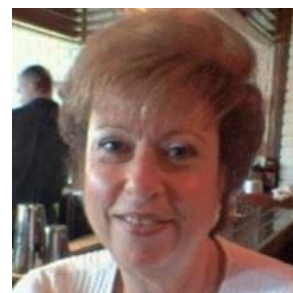


Pashas all over the world are celebrating Max Negrin's 95th birthday. A true child of the Lower East Side, Max was born on May 23rd, 1927, the same year that Kehila Kedosha Janina opened its doors.



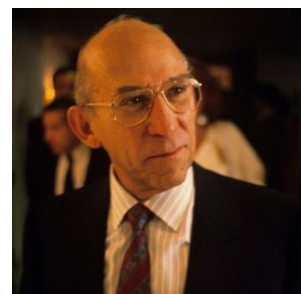
Passings

Marsha Artel, resident of Boynton Beach, Florida passed away on May 15, 2022 at the age of eighty. Marsha was the beloved wife of Joseph Artel; Loving mother to Brad (Tara) Artel, and Craig (Natalie) Artel; Cherished grandmother to Samuel, Allison, Joshua, and Ilana; and Dear sister to Ronald (Lynn) Rosenzweig.



“With sadness, this is to inform you of our second cousin's passing, Marsha Artel. I was contacted today by her brother, Ronnie Rosenzweig who asked me to inform the family. Marsha was the daughter of Jean Matza and Sol Rosenzweig who resided on Brighton 5th Street. The Rosenzweigs lived with their parents/grandparents Joe Matza (Nona's brother) and Thea Ida (Menachem). Marsha dated Joe Artel in high school and they were married 59 years. They moved to Boynton Beach in the last decade. She passed away May 15 after a 12 year diagnosis of lung cancer. Moshe saw her during his visit this past summer, and said she looked good. Ronnie said she loved to go on cruises with her family. She was hospitalized with an infection only a few days before her passing. Her family was able to be with her at her bedside. She is survived by her son's Bradley and Craig and families with 4 grandchildren. She would have been 81 years old this coming December. Marsha is interned at Eternal Life near Boynton Beach, FL. I write this to those who grew up in Brighton with them, while some of you may have or have not heard about them. May she rest in peace and may the family find inner strength.” Love, Rhoda

The Sephardic Brotherhood joins the entire global Sephardic community in mourning the recent passing of Nessim Gaon zt"l on May 12th at the age of 100. Gaon was the longtime President of the World Sephardi Federation and fought diligently on behalf of our Sephardic communities around the world. Born in Sudan to Turkish Sephardic Jews, Gaon was an influential member of the Jewish community of Switzerland and played an active role in Israeli politics. He was a tireless advocate in the fight against discrimination against Sephardim in Israel and played a key role in the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement of 1979. Ke Su Alma Repoze en Gan Eden - May His Soul Rest in the Garden of Eden.



In Israel, Gaon was perhaps best known as president of the World Sephardi Federation, an organization that he revived in 1971. The federation's aim was to improve Sephardi education in the Diaspora and to boost educational and developmental assistance to Israel's Sephardim – Jews whose roots are from Spain, Portugal, and possibly Western Asia and North Africa.



Gaon, whose family originated in Turkey, was born in Sudan where his father was an officer in the Sudanese government. During World War II, Nessim joined the British army in Cairo, then joined the family business in Sudan. He moved to Geneva in 1957 where he built up an import-export business that would eventually become the global Noga real-estate and commodity empire. The company owned a chain of hotels, including Geneva's Noga Hilton.

Gaon's behind-the-scenes role on the diplomatic front remains largely unknown. Living in Egypt and a close friend of the late prime minister Menachem Begin, Gaon, served as a conduit and mediator between Egypt and Israel. The negotiations would eventually culminate in the 1977 rapprochement between the two countries.

**This E-Newsletter is sponsored by Leon Weintraub
in memory of his sister Ada Weintraub Finifter, and his cousin Leonard Colchamiro**



Ada Weintraub Finifter
6/6/1938 - 10/29/2011



Leon and Julia Colchamiro with their children



Leonard Colchamiro
12/22/1938 - 1/4/2022

The man on the upper far right is Max Bakola, Leon's nephew and the elderly woman in black remains unidentified. Ada's mother (Stella) is the beautiful smiling girl seated on the right and Leonard's father is the young boy wearing the sailor's uniform on the left.

Ada and Leonard came from a large, proud Romaniote family, their grandfather a major founder of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Passed down to them through the generations was a love for their family history and a deep connection to Kehila Kedosha Janina. Leonard was the architect who enabled Kehila Kedosha Janina to become a New York City landmark in 2004, receiving the Lucy G. Moses award for architectural preservation in the same year. Ada left a substantial bequest to Kehila Kedosha Janina, enabling us to complete the restoration of our downstairs communal room, which now bears her name: The Ada Finifter Communal Room and Education Center.

Visitors Return to Visit Kehila Kedosha Janina

It is a joy to open our doors to visitors, both old friends and new friends. Once you walk through our doors, you are a welcomed friend. As always, there are those from our community, Los Muestros, Δικοί Μας (our own) who seek us out when they are in town. In May, we welcomed visitors from Maryland as well as a special group of Holocaust Educators from Greece.



Anna Politou and Marcia



Holocaust Educators from Greece



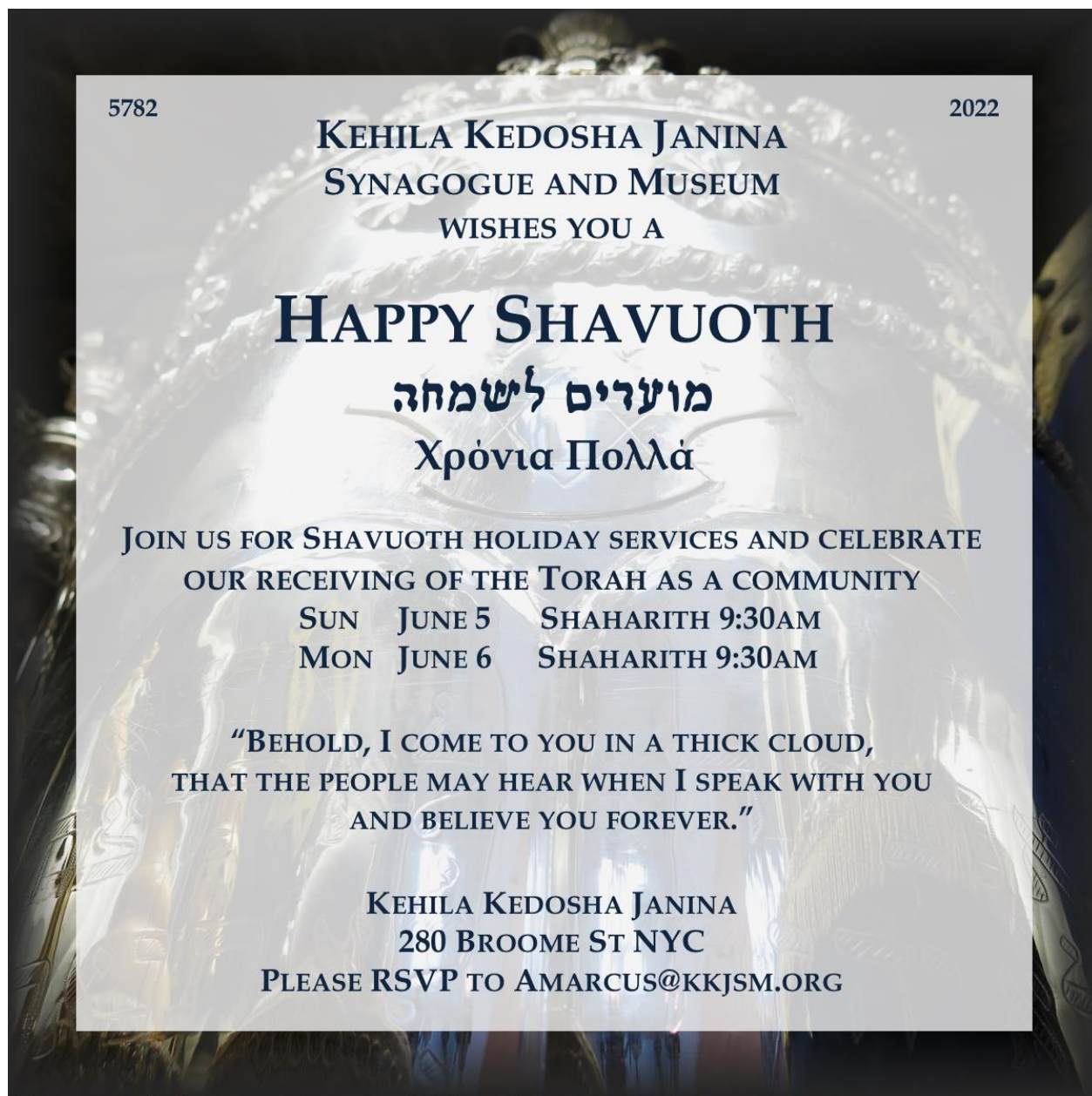
Visitor from Maryland



Marcia Haddad-Ikonomopoulos & Vassilis Schoinas

Upcoming Events

Shavuoth Holiday Services - June 5, 6



5782 2022

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM
WISHES YOU A

HAPPY SHAVUOTH

מועדים לשמחה
Χρόνια Πολλά

JOIN US FOR SHAVUOTH HOLIDAY SERVICES AND CELEBRATE
OUR RECEIVING OF THE TORAH AS A COMMUNITY

SUN JUNE 5 SHAHARITH 9:30AM
MON JUNE 6 SHAHARITH 9:30AM

*"BEHOLD, I COME TO YOU IN A THICK CLOUD,
THAT THE PEOPLE MAY HEAR WHEN I SPEAK WITH YOU
AND BELIEVE YOU FOREVER."*

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME ST NYC
PLEASE RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG

Join us this Sunday June 5 and Monday June 6 for Shavuoth morning services starting at 9:30am.
Celebrate this special holiday with us and help us continue our Romaniote traditions.
Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org

Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network
Greek Jewish Shabbat June 11 - with Special Class by Rabbi Joe Wolfson
RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org



**Greek Jewish & Sephardic
Young Professionals Network**
Κοινότητα קהילה Komunita

INVITES YOU TO A

GREEK JEWISH SHABBAT

SATURDAY JUNE 11
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC

9:30AM - SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES
12:30PM - KIDDUSH LUNCH
2:00PM - SPECIAL CLASS WITH RABBI JOE WOLFSON

MEET OTHER YOUNG SEPHARDIC & ROMANIOTE JEWS
ENJOY A DELICIOUS TRADITIONAL GREEK JEWISH LUNCH

HEAR INSPIRING WORDS OF TORAH FROM
RABBI JOE WOLFSON, JLIC NATIONAL CHESED
COORDINATOR AND NYU COMMUNITY RABBI



RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MICHAEL MINTZ
IN MEMORY OF DENISE HAMETZ דינה בת ישראל ושרה

Join us on Saturday June 11 starting at 9:30am for a special Greek Jewish Shabbat experience. Shabbat morning services begin at 9:30am, followed by a delicious traditional kiddush lunch at 12:30pm. After lunch, we are honored to welcome Rabbi Joe Wolfson at 2pm who will offer inspiring words of Torah and lead a special Shabbat class.

Rabbi Joe Wolfson grew up in the UK, received degrees from Cambridge University and UCL School of Public Policy, and Rabbinic ordination from the Israeli Chief Rabbinate after many years of study at Yeshivat Har Etzion. From 2015 to 2022, he has led the Orthodox student community in Downtown Manhattan in his role as the OU-JLIC Director and Rabbi at New York University. A renowned educator, he has served as a faculty member for London School of Jewish Studies, The Tikvah Foundation, Drisha and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. He was recently [recognized](#) by the Jewish Week's 36 Under 36 for his COVID response work and in addition to his local responsibilities, he now heads up OU-JLIC's Hased and volunteering operations across the country. He has published numerous articles including pieces reflecting on his relationships with [Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks](#).

Past Events - Greek Jewish Festival

Thank you to everyone who joined us for our seventh annual Greek Jewish Festival on May 15th. More than 10,000 people came out to celebrate our amazing Romaniote and Sephardic community with wonderful music, delicious foods, vibrant dancing, synagogue and museum tours, kids activities, and so much more. The event was an incredible success and the smiles on everyone's faces attest to the pervasive sense of joy. A special thank you to all of our sponsors, community partners, and volunteers who made the day such a fabulous success - we could not have done it without each of you. View more photos [Here](#) and view videos [Here](#).



Past Events of Interest Outside New York

From May 4th - 8th, our Museum Director Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou, and Ethan Marcus from the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, visited Portland, Oregon, to introduce the film "Romaniotes." After the screening there was a lively question and answer discussion. In addition, Ethan and Marcia visited the Jewish Museum in Portland and the Holocaust Memorial.



Judith Margles, Jewish Museum Director, Al Menashe, & Ethan Marcus



Holocaust Memorial

Show Off Your Romaniote Pride – Order Our New T-Shirt Today



Our newest t-shirt says it all: show off your Romaniote pride and order one today! This super soft shirt is a tri-blend indigo fabric and is available in crew-neck in Small, Medium, Large, and Extra Large. \$25 in our museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina or \$30 with postage and handling in the US. Email museum@kkjasm.org to order one today! Pay online by clicking the Donate button on our website www.kkjasm.org or by check made out to Kehila Kedosha Janina and mailed to the same at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002.

News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina - Athens - Thessaloniki

The first musical lecture of the award-winning American ethnomusicologist Christopher C. King entitled "On the Margins of History: The Music of Greek-Jewish Women in the Early 20th Century" was completed with great success, which took place on 5/24/2022 at the Cotsen Hall Amphitheater. The protagonists of the night were the Romaniote Jewish singer from Ioannina, Amalia Vaka (Matsa) and the Sephardic Jewish singers from Thessaloniki Rosa Eskenazy and Stella Haskill.



The presentation was opened with a greeting and welcome by the Director of the Gennadio Library, Mrs. Maria Georgopoulou. The discussion of Mr. King with the journalist and coordinator of the evening Mrs. Marianna Skylakaki, the intermediate music pauses from the recorded songs on authentic 78 rpm records that sounded in the amphitheater and the live music of Eleni Vratti (oud), Dimosthe Karachristodoulou (political lyre) and Evangelia Flitouri (voice), transported the viewers on the journey of the multifaceted and at the same time marginalized history of the music of Jewish women in Greece of the early 20th century.

The event was honored by the presence of the Deputy Minister of Finance Mr. Theodoros Skylakakis, the ND MP Mr. Filippos Fortomas, Mrs. Shanna Surendra, Cultural Attache of the US Embassy, the General Treasurer of the Central Isra Council Of Greece Mr. Daniel Benardout and the Greek composer, lyricist and producer Mr. Minos Matsas.

The series of three music lectures in Athens, Thessaloniki and Ioannina, are held with the support of the US Embassy in Greece, the Consulate General of the USA in Thessaloniki, of the Central Israeli Council of Greece and under the auspices of the Municipality of Ioannina. Strategic partners of the three lectures are the KIS, the Gennadius Library, the Jewish Community of Athens, the Jewish Community of Ioannina, and the Department of Music Studies of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Watch the recorded event [Here](#).

Concert in Ioannina – Report from Samuel Gruber

On May 29 there was a lecture/concert by American musicologist and 78 rpm record collector Christopher King and others at the synagogue in Ioannina. This is a place I know well - albeit always through the photo work of the late Vincent Giordano, who work I edited last year in the exhibition "Romaniote Memories." So last night was a chance to experience the place for myself - and to see it filled with people and music.



King, who is author of "Lament from Epirus: An Odyssey Into Oldest Surviving Folk Music," played a series of old 78s on a up in the center of the synagogue in front of the grand Hechal early 19th century synagogue, and responded to a series of an informed Greek interlocutor and from the audience.



He focused on three well known Greek Jewish women who had immigrated to American and become big on the "feta performers and recording artists. These were the Romaniote Jewish singer from Ioannina Amalia Vaka (Matsa) and the Sephardic Jewish singers from Thessaloniki Rosa Eskenazi and Stella Haskil. After about an hour of this a trio of young musicians from the University of Ioannina's music department - Eleni Vratti (ut), Demosthenes Karachristodoulou (Constantinopolitan lyre) and the singer Evangelia Flitouri -played a series of songs all of which to me sounded like laments.

King was interesting and I will now read his book, but I think more people came for the live music and would have liked a little more of it. This was one of three such evenings across Greece by King and his associates. The program was supported by the American Embassy in Greece, Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece, and the Municipality of Ioannina. Ioannina mayor, the widely admired Dr. Moses Elisaf, opened the evening. Elisaf is also head of the small Jewish community and he participated by Zoom in our Romaniote Memories programming at Queens College last year.

The Fascinating History of Romaniote Jews in Greece's Ioannina Full article [Here](#)

The Romaniote Jews, or the Romaniotes, are a Greek-speaking ethnic Jewish community native to the Eastern Mediterranean. They are one of the oldest Jewish communities in existence and the oldest Jewish community in Europe.

Large communities were located in Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, Volos, Chalcis, Chania, Thebes, Corinth, Patras, and on the islands of Corfu, Crete, Zakynthos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes, and Cyprus, amongst others.



The Romaniotes have been, and remain, historically distinct from the Sephardim, some of whom settled in Ottoman Greece after the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain. David Saltiel, President of the Jewish Community of Greece, and vice-chair of the World Jewish Congress recently said during a lecture attended by Greek Reporter that the Romaniote community lived for centuries alongside the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities in Greece. They constitute a completely unique branch of Jewry.

“Despite the fact that they were almost totally decimated during the Holocaust,” they persevered, Saltiel explained. They constitute the single oldest community of Jews in the entire European diaspora.

Archaeologist Dr. Zanet Battinou, a member of the Romaniote community herself, said that the Romaniote Jews maintained a community there since the 4th century BC. Adopting the Greek language but keeping Hebrew words, they created a unique dialect of both written and spoken language as seen in inscriptions throughout the area.

They combined their own traditions and customs into unique folkways while preserving Hebrew for worship. There is evidence of a synagogue in the area built as early as the first century BC. Their community remarkably remained intact despite all the many upheavals of the Greek state until the Second World War.



Greece's Ioannina became a focal point for the Romaniote Jews. Ioannina became a significant urban center beginning in the eighth century, even attracting Jews from other areas. The first clear historical reference to a Jewish population in the city was seen in the 14th century in the form of a government decree.

Living under Ottoman rule beginning in the 1400s, the Jewish population of the area was left more or less in peace during those centuries, allowed to practice their religion and their trades. In the 16th century, co-religionists even began arriving in Ioannina from Sicily, according to Dr. Battinou.

The population continued to flourish and increase under the rule of Ali Pasha in the 19th century. Most of the Romaniote Jews were involved in trade with small shops and family businesses.

The synagogue, the center of the community, was within the Jewish quarter within the castle walls of the city, and remarkably, it still exists today. Another synagogue, built for the Italian Jews, was completely destroyed in WWII.

Finely-worked silver a mark of Ioannina culture

The synagogues housed many treasures, including ornate oil lamps and Torah scroll finials, all finely-worked silver, which became the hallmark of Ioannina. Silver dedicatory plaques were also common in the city, becoming another well-recognized mark of the city's culture.



From the collection of Kehila Kedosha Janina

Silver Megillot, or parchment scroll holder, also of finely-worked silver, holds the story of Esther, recounted each year during the feast of Purim. One of the only surviving such scroll holders in existence, it is in the collections of the Jewish Museum of Greece.

Although the Romaniotes used colloquial Greek as their everyday language, "they wrote it in Hebrew characters, Hellenizing the Hebrew syntax, leading to the birth of the Judeo-Greek idiom—an aspect of which has survived down to our day," Dr. Battinou explained.

Unique Liturgical songs, and yearly festivals important part of Romaniote life

Special liturgical songs, chanted on festivals and holy days, were also recorded in books in the unique dialect with charts showing the occurrence of the festivals throughout the year; some of these survive today.

In a heartwarming aside, Dr. Battinou shared that the women of Ioannina were well-known for their immaculate housekeeping skills, whitewashing their courtyards every single Friday afternoon.

On Fridays, their Christian neighbors would light candles for their Jewish friends so they would not have to work at all on the Sabbath. Later on, after services, the Romaniote families would take long walks by the lake of Pamvotis in the beautiful city or go on excursions into the countryside.

From 1899-1924, as many as 4,000 of the residents left for the greener pastures of Palestine or New York City. After the Balkan Wars, the city of Ioannina became a part of the modern state of Greece, and Jews "played an active role in the social and political life" of the city, Battinou said.

181 people survived from a community of thousands

"When the Axis Powers gained control of Greece," she related, "Ioannina came under Italian administration, and that situation was relatively benign for the community as they were left in peace."

However, in July of 1943, a German division arrived and took charge of the city, she explained — which was the death knell for many residents of the historic community.

On March 25, 1944, Battinou stated, trucks arrived in Ioannina which were meant to transport the Jewish residents of the city — whose ancestors had lived there for nearly two thousand years — to their doom.

"1,870 Jews were loaded onto the trucks and taken through Trikala to Larissa and from there crammed onto trains and taken to Auschwitz," Battinou states. Ninety-two percent of the Jews of Ioannina were never to see their homes again.

At the end of the war, she said, the Jewish community "numbered only 181 souls. And even many of those left for the United States or Israel. Still, however, "they never lost touch with their hometown, Battinou stated, "maintaining their sense of belonging and community spirit that common roots produce."

Rich history of Romaniote Jews preserved in New York City

Dr. Mimis Cohen, the founder of the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, related in the lecture a bit about the history of the Romaniote Jews who emigrated to New York City who were not considered “real Jews” by the dominant Ashkenazi community because they did not speak Yiddish.

The Sephardic Jews of the city took pity on them, at least allowing the Romaniotes to be buried with appropriate Jewish rites. Note: editor: “in 1907, the Romaniotes formed their own burial society and, in 1914, the Romaniote community in New York City was incorporated. Kehila Kedosha Janina was opened in 1927 and is still functioning as the only Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.”

In one example of the passing on of Romaniote traditions, Kehila Kedosha Janina offers reproductions of Romaniote Alefs. An Alef is a type of birth certificate and amulet that was traditionally created for baby boys to help protect them during the (*first*) forty days of their lives.



An Alef from the collection of Kehila Kedosha Janina

The synagogue states that this is the first time since WWII that new Alefs have been reproduced for their community and that it is currently the only source in the world offering brand new customized Alefs. Cohen also lauded author Rae (Rachel) Dalvin, who wrote the scholarly work *The Jews of Ioannina*, as another force for preserving the history of the Romaniote Jews. Born in Preveza, she visited Ioannina for some time in the 1930s, gleaning a treasure trove of information on the unique culture there.

Recreating their history, culture (including folk beliefs), unique liturgies, and even musical scores, Dalvin’s seminal work is one of the touchstones for anyone who would like to know more about these fascinating people.

The Romaniote Jewish Community of Ioannina: A Journey Through Time and Two Nations was the subject of a fascinating webinar hosted in 2021 by the American embassy in Athens and the Consulate in Thessaloniki.

The lecture was the 15th annual event in memory of David Tiano, a Consulate employee who was tortured and executed by the occupying German forces in December of 1941. Tiano had been a descendant of the Romaniote Jews of Ioannina. The discussion was led by Dr. Zanet Battinou, Archaeologist, Director of The Jewish Museum of Greece; Professor Mimis Cohen MD, the Founding member of the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece and Dr. Moissis Eliasaf, the mayor of Ioannina. Dr. Eliasaf, himself a descendant of the historic Romaniote community, is the first Jewish mayor of a Greek city.

For more information on the Jewish Museum of Greece, please see their website at www.jewishmuseum.gr/. For more information on Kehila Kedosha Janina visit our website at www.kkjsm.org

Editor’s note: *There were some mistakes in the article that we chose to correct (corrections in italics). Knowing both Mimis Cohen and Zanet Battinou, we are sure that they were not accurate quotes of theirs. We also took the liberty of adding some photos from our collection which we felt benefitted the article.*

Athens

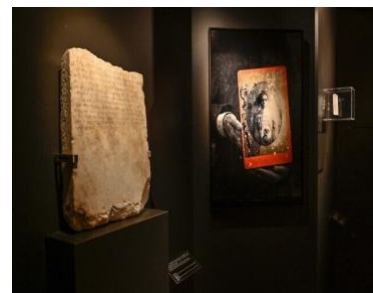
New Athens Exhibit on Greek Jews Reveals Community's Ancient Roots Full article [Here](#)

Athen's Chief Rabbi says artifacts on display at local Jewish museum, including inscription from as early as 4th century, show Jews are 'an integral part of Greek identity.'

Little is known about the origins of Jews in Greece, but their presence dates back centuries and they were an "integral" part of ancient society, a new exhibit in Athens reveals. The show is a treasure trove of ancient inscriptions unearthed during more than two decades of research by the Jewish Museum of Greece.

It is the first time that the Jewish presence in the country has been confirmed as early as the fourth century BCE — one of the oldest recorded religious and cultural settlements in Europe, according to the show's website.

Their existence proves the crucial role that Jews played in the social, religious, political, and cultural life of ancient Greece, curators say. "The Jewish community is an integral part of Greek identity, a fact that has been too often denied for centuries," Athens Chief Rabbi Gabriel Negrin told AFP on Monday at the exhibition's inauguration. "This history should be passed on to future generations in order to combat ignorance and prejudice."



There are around 5,000 Jewish people living in Greece today, a small fraction of the Orthodox Christians who make up about 90 percent of the population. An estimated 67,000 Greek Jews perished in the Holocaust — around 87 percent of the prewar community. Rabbi Negrin hopes the show will shed light on a little-known history — one that is quickly fading as aging Holocaust survivors around the world perish. It's "vital," Negrin said.

The exhibition, which opened Tuesday, features a Greek inscription referring to Jews dated to between 300 and 250 BCE. The precious piece was discovered at the sanctuary of Amphiareion near Athens, and makes reference to a freed slave from Judea. A total of 10 inscriptions are on display at the Jewish Museum, while another 29 are on display at the Epigraphical Museum, which is co-hosting the exhibition. Curators say the show proves that Greek society was always multicultural, and not exclusively dominated by Greek Orthodox religion. "Inscriptions do not lie," said archaeologist Eleni Zavou from the Epigraphical Museum.

Greece's ancient Jewish community, known as Romaniotes, settled mainly in the northwestern region of Epirus and the city of Ioannina. They were followed by Sephardic Jews who arrived from Spain in the 15th century and mainly settled in Thessaloniki, which became known as "Jerusalem of the Balkans." The exhibition's findings "demonstrate the political, artistic, religious and economic importance of Jewish communities" in ancient Greece, Zavou said. The show, "Stone Paths — Stories Set in Stone: Jewish Inscriptions in Greece," runs until February 2023.

Patras

A Greek family saved them from Nazis. Now, they found how to thank them Full article [Here](#)

'Without them, my family wouldn't have survived the war,' said Josephine Velelli Becker, who lives in Maryland.

She was just 6 years old then, but even now, at 85, memories of when the Michalos family hid her from the Nazis are etched in Josephine Velelli Becker's mind. 67,000 Greek Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. The Velelli family was spared — a miracle owed, in large part, to Elias Michalos, a gracious non-Jewish man who invited them to hide in his family's small cottage in the tiny mountain village of Michaleika.

"Without them, my family wouldn't have survived the war," said Velelli Becker, who is from Patras, a city about 130 miles from Athens.

Her father, Emmanuel Velelli, had done business with Elias Michalos, and they became friendly. In 1943, when Germany occupied Greece, Michalos bravely offered to shelter the Velelli family — a kindness that came with tremendous risks.

Velelli Becker and eight family members — including her parents, sister, three uncles and grandparents — hid from the Nazis in Michalos's two-room cottage, which was originally intended to house employees and had no running water or bathroom.

Although the Velelli family spent each night sleeping fearfully on the floor for more than a year, they felt lucky. They were filled with gratitude for Michalos, who put himself and his family in grave danger to protect them.

Shortly after the war, both families emigrated to Baltimore, and they still live in the area today. On numerous occasions, Emmanuel Velelli tried to pay Elias Michalos for all he did, but Michalos refused to take his money.

Finally, though, nearly eight decades later, the Vellellis were presented with a meaningful opportunity to thank them. They pooled their funds to help Vasilios Kanaras, Michalos's grandson, open a new restaurant. His previous eatery, the Crabby Greek in Towson, Md., was forced to shutter amid the pandemic.

"I lost my restaurant because of covid," Kanaras explained, adding that the Crabby Greek was in an office building, and with widespread remote work, customers dwindled drastically. "The money was gone." On one of their usual catch-up calls, 84-year-old Angela Kanaras — who is Vasilios Kanaras' mother, and the late Elias Michalos's daughter — told Velelli Becker about her son's struggles. When Velelli Becker's children heard about the Michalos family's financial plight, they knew what they wanted to do.

"We wanted to give back," said Velelli Becker's daughter, Yvonne Fishbein, who sent an email in January to her extended family, soliciting support. "We all got together and helped. Everyone pitched in what they could." "Their whole family just started pouring money in," Vasilios Kanaras said. With their help, "I didn't have to worry." Their generosity was much appreciated, though it was not at all expected.

"I was overwhelmed," Angela Kanaras said. "I couldn't believe that they would do that." In total, the Vellellis contributed more than \$10,000 to help Kanaras get his latest venture, the New Southern Kitchen in Cockeysville, Md., up and running. The money went toward electrical repairs, food, and other supplies. By early February, the restaurant was open for business.

Not only did the Vellellis feel indebted to the Michaloses for what they did 80 years ago, but to this day the families remain close.



Angela Kanaras, left, and her son, Vasilios Kanaras, with Josephine Velelli Becker



Corfu

In June, 1944 the Jewish Community of Corfu was Deported by the Nazis. In Memory of this community on the 78th anniversary of the deportation, we are honored to include the following article by Dr. Michael Matsas

The Story of the Jews of the Greek Island of Corfu (How an American Diplomat and a German Colonel Tried to Save the Jews and How an Official of the State Department is Indirectly Responsible for the Death of 1,813 Jews of Corfu) By Dr. Michael Matsas

The Jews of Corfu, like the other Greek Jews, did not know what the Germans were doing to the Jews outside of Greece until the end of the war. The British and Americans knew everything but remained SILENT, although they had the means to inform the Greek Jews. On May 2, 1944, Burton Berry, the American Consul in Istanbul, Turkey, sent this message to the U.S. State Department - "Mr. Michael Boyiadjoglou, a tobacco merchant, arrived in Istanbul and reported the following: On April 30, while on a train from Athens to Thessaloniki, Mr. Boyiadjoglou talked with three German officers who said that they were on their way to Corfu where they were to deport all the Jews. These officers left the train in Larissa."¹



Holocaust Memorial in Corfu

The U.S. official who received this message in Washington could have contacted the British military mission closest to Corfu. This mission was assisting the Greek Resistance which could have asked the Jews to disperse in the many mountain villages of their large island. From May 2 until June 8, 1944, when the Germans ordered the Jews to return to their homes, there was plenty of time for the Jews to save themselves. This official did not take any action. He classified the message as "Top Secret" and buried it in the archives. In 1975, thanks to the Freedom of Information Act, I discovered it in the FDR Library in Hyde Park.¹ I became very angry and very sad. You keep top secrets from your enemies. Were the Jews of Corfu the enemies of the United States? Were they the enemies of President Roosevelt who was beloved by the Jews of America? Rabbi Joshua Boettiger, a great grandson of President Franklin D. Roosevelt said the following about his famous ancestor, "If he knew about the slaughter of the Jews in Europe and he did not act, that is very serious, inexcusable."²

The German commander of Corfu was Colonel Emil Jaeger. When he was informed about the impending deportation of the Jews of Corfu, he attempted to disobey the order. In a lengthy report that he sent to Berlin, he explained the reasons that this order could not be obeyed. He wrote, "the vessels which at present are at our disposal are totally inadequate. In case that additional vessels were available, they should first be used to transfer the Italians of Badoglio who, as former soldiers, are much more dangerous than the Jews against whom, by the way, we never expressed any complaint (emphasis mine)."³ On June 11, 1944, three hundred women, many of them pregnant, were placed on barges pulled by motorboats which arrived at a nearby port of Igoumenitsa on the Greek mainland. Waiting trucks transported them to Athens. From Athens they were sent to Auschwitz. Dr. Miklos Nyiszli described their arrival in the death camp: When they arrived at the loading platform, half of them were already dead and half in a coma. The victims were kept for 27 days without food or water. All of them were sent to #2 crematorium.⁴ Armandos Aaron of Corfu told me his story: Only 50-60 Jews escaped arrest. On June 9, 1944, at 5am, the Germans knocked at every Jewish door and ordered everyone, including the sick and invalids, to go to Army Square. The Greek police helped the Germans. The captives were taken to the nearby old fortress where they were forced to surrender their valuables and the keys to their homes. Eventually, the homes were looted by the Germans and the people looted the rest. The rest of us, 1,600 people were also put on barges, pulled slowly by motorboats on the way to the city of Patras.

In Patras, when the Germans went to have lunch, we were guarded by their Greek collaborators of the security battalions. A man I knew from Corfu was passing by and the Greek guard gave us permission to talk. I found myself a couple of feet away from my place when the Germans were returning and my friend instantly disappeared. I started moving forward like a blind man. I was afraid I would be killed in front of my parents. A

young barber asked me, where do you go friend? Come into my shop. You are filthy. I am going to clean you and tonight you can stay in my home. Tomorrow morning, I will show you the way to partisan territory. This is how I became a partisan of ELAS and survived.⁵ Two sisters, Finetta and Cleio, from Patras married two brothers from Corfu, Matathias and Menahem Cohen. One of the Greek guards recognized the sisters and he remembered how grateful he was to their father who helped him in the past. He told them that he could save them and their families. They asked what about their mother-in-law. He said that he could not move around with an 85-year-old lady. The girls refused to abandon their mother-in-law. They all died in Auschwitz.⁶ This is how the beautiful island of Corfu which was the summer resort of emperors and kings and which was the birthplace of Prince Philip of England and where the Jewish communities of Corfu was one of the oldest in Europe has almost no Jews there anymore.

Footnotes: 1) FDR Library, War Refugee Board, Container No. 26, p. 109. 2) Joseph Berger, "Roosevelts and the Quirks of Destiny," New York Times, March 16, 2005. 3) NOKW 1915 Nos. 3784/44 and 6493/44 -Records of the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. 4) Dr. Miklos Nyiszl, Auschwitz (Greenwich, CT, 1960), p. 83. 5) Mark Mazower identifies George Mitsialis as the man who saved Armando Aaron. Inside Hitler's Greece, 1993, p. 255. 6) Story told to me by Joseph (Pepos) Yohanas of Patra, June 1976.



Dr. Michael Matsas was born in 1930 in Ioannina, Greece, and from October 1943 to October 1944, he survived WWII in the free Greek mountains with his immediate family. He graduated as a dentist from the University of Athens in 1953 and served as a dental officer for three years in the Greek Army. In his last year, he was the dentist of the Military Academy of Athens. He is the author of *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews*

During the Second World War, second edition, Vrahori Books, 2021



Dr. Michael Matsas' book, *The Illusion of Safety*, is available from Kehila Kedosha Janina for \$25 (includes P&H within the Continental USA). Email us at museum@kkjism.org to order a copy.

In memory of the Jewish Community of Corfu, we publish these photos shared with us by relatives of the deceased. Thank you Stella Leontsini

We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, never forget.



David & Rosa Velleli and children



In Memory of the Jewish Community of Hania

On the 78th anniversary of the loss of the Jewish Community of Hania, Crete, deported in June of 1944. Loaded into the hull of a ship (the Tanais) thr Germans bombed the ship, killing all aboard, the Jewish community of Hania and Italian prisoners of war. It was only 50 years later that the British opened their archives revealing this loss.

A memorial plaque inside the synagogue reads: "In memory of the Jews of Hania the community of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, who perished 9 June 1944."

We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, never forget.

Elias Messinas Publishes New Book on the Synagogues of Greece

A Jewish Renaissance in Greece: Abandoned synagogues get new life Article by Elias Messinas [Here](#)

Jewish communities – the Greek-speaking Romaniotes – were established in Greece in antiquity, in cities such as Ioannina and Halkis.

Something is changing in Greece. The Jewish heritage sites once abandoned or demolished or serving other uses, are now slated for reconstruction and reuse as synagogues, nearly 80 years after the Holocaust. Jewish communities – the Greek-speaking Romaniotes – were established in Greece in antiquity, in cities such as Ioannina and Halkis. Sephardic communities were established after 1492, in important Jewish centers such as Salonika (Thessaloniki), and throughout Greece – from Corfu to Rhodes and from Didimoticho to Crete.

In the Holocaust, 87% of the Jewish community in Greece perished. The destruction took a heavy toll in Jewish heritage as well. Synagogues, libraries, community buildings, Jewish schools, and Jewish clubs were either demolished or taken over by other organizations. Important synagogues in Salonika were demolished, while in November 1943, the ancient Jewish cemetery of the city, with valuable marble tombstones, was turned into construction material. Some tombstones can still be found today in private courtyards.

In the mid-1940s, Kanaris Konstantinis, employee of the Hellenic Post and a representative of the newly established Central Board of Jewish Communities, traveled throughout Greece and documented in detail the state of the Jewish communities in the early years of reconstruction after the Holocaust.

In the 1980s, Nicholas Stavroulakis the former director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, along with photographer Timothy deVinney, undertook the first survey of Jewish sites in Greece, and documented through photography the synagogues and Jewish sites, a few since lost.

In 1993, shortly after graduating from the Yale School of Architecture, and following architectural practice for two years in New York, I undertook the next step of documentation. Inspired by the work of my predecessors, and understanding the need to document the small number of synagogues that survived the destruction of the Shoah, I undertook the first ever architectural survey and study of the synagogues of Greece.



The state of the Beth El synagogue in Komotini is surveyed by the writer in 1993, a year prior to its demolition

The survey project – once a private endeavor – has turned today into a very important historic resource. It is described very vividly in the new book that this writer presented throughout Greece and at the Greek Community Center in Jerusalem in April 2022. Titled *The Synagogue* by Infognomon Editions in Greece, it is my third book on the subject.

As opposed to my previous books, it does not only present the historic and architectural background of the synagogues, it also describes the experience of traveling from city to city, and the effort to preserve the Jewish memory, through surveys, interviews and meetings with locals and Jews, some of whom have since passed away. Also included are the actual surveys of the synagogues, some of which have since been demolished. For many years, the survey project remained in folders and computer discs, disseminated in books, articles, exhibitions and lectures around the world. However, there was no actual use in sight.



This changed in 2014, when the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, decided to renovate its two remaining synagogues – Monastirion (built in 1926) and Yad Lezikaron (built in 1984). The community president David Saltiel turned to my team with associates KARD Architects – Dimitris Raidis and Alexandros Kouloukouris – based in Thessaloniki. The renovation aimed to restore the historic importance of the monuments, and included restoration of the interiors and exteriors, new furnishings, upgrade of systems and improvement of accessibility.

The reinstallation of the Ten Commandments in marble at the top of the arch of the front facade was a renovation highlight, thanks to earlier research on historic synagogues. In Yad Lezikaron the highlight was restoring the historic

heichal dating from 1921 and belonging originally to the Sarfati synagogue demolished after WWII, again based on earlier research.

In 2017, in Trikala, a city in Central Greece, dampness issues from rising underground waters due to Climate Change, required immediate solutions to protect the historic synagogue Yavanim built in the 19th century. The Jewish Community President Yakov Venouziou, with the support of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, turned again to my team, this time with associate architects Petros Koufopoulos and Marina Mariantheos based in Athens, to also restore the historic synagogue.

The team solved the dampness issues, and restored the historic interior and the two bimot – a unique example where two traditions survive side by side inside the same synagogue: the Romaniote bimah against the western wall, and the Sephardi bimah in the center of the prayer hall. Moreover, the team demolished the three stores that blocked the synagogue's view from the street since after WWII, thanks to earlier research and documentation of the historic relationship of the synagogue to the street.

In 2019, I collaborated with Yvette Nahmia-Messinas and the Eforate of Antiquity of Piraeus and Islands toward a unique project to preserve and protect the mosaic floor that belonged to an ancient synagogue of the 4th century CE still standing in the courtyard of the Archaeological Museum of Aegina. The mosaic was discovered in 1829, and studied by several archaeologists including Elazar Sukenik in 1928.

The collaboration with the Eforate led to an exhibition on the mosaic and a campaign which successfully secured the commitment of the Ministry of Culture to restore the mosaic and of the Jewish businessman, owner of music company Minos-EMI, Samuel-Makis Matsas, to donate the design and construction of the protective roof over it. The bureaucratic process is under way and the work is expected to conclude in 2023.

Recently, unexpected news reached me from the northern Greek city of Komotini, where the mayor Yiannis Garanis declared in public on March 9 that he is determined to "rebuild the demolished historic synagogue Beth El in Komotini." This, Garanis said, would be made possible "thanks to drawings made by architect Elias Messinas," referring to my survey completed in 1993, just before the synagogue was demolished.

The mayor, with whom I met on April 13, is currently in the process of requesting the necessary approvals, especially from the Greek Archaeological Service, as the synagogue once stood adjacent to the Byzantine walls, with the Jewish quarter located inside the walls.

Finally, in the last year, another unexpected phone call brought another surprise. This time from the eastern island of Kos, northwest of Rhodes. In Kos, the synagogue was built circa 1936 during Italian rule, after the older synagogue was destroyed in the earthquake of April 1933. Following the deportation of the Jewish Community in 1944, the synagogue stood abandoned and later purchased by the municipality to serve as a cultural center for the island. Up until now, the closest functioning synagogue was the 16th century Shalom synagogue in nearby Rhodes in the Jewish quarter of the old city, which attracted many Israeli and Jewish visitors. Lately, as more Israeli tourists choose Kos as their vacation destination, a need for a functioning synagogue was raised.

The municipality, in collaboration with the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and with the assistance of my architectural team and a local engineer, is weighing, the possibility of adapting the interior of the synagogue also to the needs of a Jewish prayer hall, with all the necessary furnishings, seating and decoration. I had the opportunity to discuss the issue locally when I visited on April 11 for a presentation of my new book *The Synagogue* where I also presented a sketch of the interior design of the synagogue, based on research at the Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art in Jerusalem and the municipal Italian archive in Kos.



The writer is an architect and urban planner, researcher of the history and architecture of Greek synagogues since 1993. He authored the books *The Synagogue* (Infognomon, 2022), *The Synagogues of Greece* (Bloch, 2011) and *The Synagogues of Salonika and Veroia* (Gavrielides, 1997).

New Exhibit on the Art of Memory at the Jewish Museum of Greece

The Jewish Museum of Greece (JMG) is pleased to announce a new temporary exhibition, entitled **"Stone Paths – Stories Set in Stone: Jewish Inscriptions in Greece"**, which it is co-organizing and co-hosting with the Epigraphic Museum and with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and its Services. The exhibition is financed by the German Federal Foreign Office, from the Greek-German Future Fund. The exhibition, which will be on show in the temporary exhibition halls of the two museums, will be inaugurated on Monday, 16 May 2022, and runs until the end of February 2023.



An integral part of the joint enterprise is an art exhibition, **"Art of Memory and Commemoration."** curated by Viktor Koen, to be held at the Jewish Museum of Greece, which proposes a new reading of archaeological material through the contemporary gaze of ten artists from the world of the fine and applied arts. It presents an initial attempt to communicate with the specific remnants of a bygone world that usually lie disconnected from their historical and natural contexts. The treatment of ancient inscriptions as an early form of design requires the involvement of artists from a wide range of art forms but also creators from the field of design: font designer Yannis Karlopoulos, industrial designer Andreas Varotsos, artists Artemis Alcalay, Xenis Sachinis and Katerina Zafeiropoulou, artist duo Kalos & Klio and photographers Aris Georgiou and Marilia Fotopoulou have ensured a wide range of styles and results. The exhibition is completed by a painting by Morris Ganis (1973–2019) that bridges this world with the "other". The exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual catalogue and special educational programs for school groups.

The exhibition was inspired by the publication of the academic volume *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae: Corpus of Jewish and Hebrew Inscriptions from Mainland and Island Greece (Late 4th c. BCE–15th Century)*, which collects and presents 108 epigraphic items of Jewish interest that are located in Greek territory. The epigraphic corpus was awarded a prize by the Academy of Athens in December 2019. The aim of the joint exhibition is to highlight and showcase selected items of the historical and archaeological evidence of the Jews of Greece (mainly from the late 4th BCE to the 15th century). The information this evidence contains allows us to reconstruct aspects of one of the oldest religious and cultural communities in Europe while it also reveals the multicultural past of the country.

The art exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Morris Ganis, who died before his time.

For more information about the exhibition, please contact the Jewish Museum of Greece, Monday–Friday: 09:00-14:30, tel: + 30 210 32 25 582, info@jewishmuseum.gr, www.jewishmuseum.gr

Greek Prime Minister Visits Washington Read more from the US Embassy and Consulate in Greece [Here](#)

"Today, I welcomed Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the White House for a bilateral meeting. We reaffirmed our strong relationship, celebrated 201 years of Greek independence, and discussed our ongoing efforts to support Ukraine." - President Joe Biden, May 16, 2022

"Today, I presided over a joint meeting of Congress with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece. The ties between our two countries are strong and growing deeper every day." - Vice President Kamala Harris, May 17, 2022



Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



Shavuot is one of the 3 Biblical pilgrimage festivals but is quite different from Pesah and Sukkot/Shmini Atzeret in many ways. First, though the historical events of Sukkot and Pesah are expressly stated in the Torah (dwelling in 'sukkot'- temporary booths- for 40 years in the wilderness, and the Exodus from Egypt and freedom from Egyptian bondage), there is no express mention in the Torah that Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Second, the other two festivals each last several days, while Shavuot is relegated to a single day (2 in the Diaspora). Third, both Sukkot and Pesah include a plethora of Biblically mandated and very tangible symbols, while Shavuot is totally bereft of any unique symbols or even Halachic demands. Finally, the very date of Shavuot is not stated in the Torah, as opposed to all other Biblical festivals.

What, then, accounts for these major differences and an ostensibly 'diminished' status of Shavuot in comparison with the other festivals?

In fact, virtually all these differences are due to the intrinsic connection between Pesah and Shavuot, with Shavuot actually being in many ways the pinnacle and fulfillment of Pesah. First, the very name "Shavuot" – "weeks" in English – is directly connected to Pesah, with Pesah being the spring festival of the initial budding of trees and crops, while Shavuot celebrates the ripening and harvesting of the new produce and grains, symbolized and marked by the completion of the seven week counting of the "Omer"- sheaves, between the second day of Passover and Shavuot: "*And you shall count from the next day after the 'sabbath'* [meaning in this case Pesah], *from the day that you brought the 'omer'* [sheaf] *of the wave offering; seven weeks shall be complete.*" "... *you shall you count fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal offering to the Lord'* (Leviticus 23:15-16). This is Shavuot- the 50th day, and the 'offering' is in the Temple of the new first fruits, whose growth began on Pesah.

This description of Shavuot also explains the lack of a specific date being fixed in the Torah, since Shavuot depends on when Pesah falls and the counting of the Omer. In Temple times, when the Hebrew calendar was set by seeing the new moon – Rosh Hodesh, Shavuot could come out on either the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan, but once the Hebrew calendar was fixed by the Sages, Shavuot always comes out on the 50th day after the second day of Pesah, which is the 6th of Sivan. As for the fact that Shavuot is so short, this is a direct result of the Biblical command, which mandates only a single-day festival. However, since the Cohanim could not complete the offering of first-fruit sacrifices of all the pilgrims in a single day, they continued offering peoples' first fruits for another 7 days after Shavuot formally ended. This continuation of the Shavuot offering was an extension of the festival, leading to a custom still practiced by all Sephardim and some Ashkenazim today, of not reciting 'tahanun' (penitential prayers) in daily services until the 13th of Sivan to mark this semi-holiday status.

But it is the spiritual significance of Shavuot that dominates its celebration today, making it arguably the most important festival on the Jewish calendar, since Israel received the Torah on Shavuot. Though this is not expressly mentioned in the Biblical segments describing Shavuot, in the description of the revelation of Sinai and the Ten Commandments in the Book of Exodus, the chronology of events shows that the Torah was given to Moses on the 6th of Sivan, meaning Shavuot. And the giving of the Torah at Sinai was also the culmination of the spiritual process that Israel began on Pesah with our redemption from Egypt as a collection of former slaves and spiritually bereft individuals and ending on Shavuot with our becoming a holy nation as G-d's chosen people and receiving the Torah.

So perhaps at first glance, Shavuot seems to be 'diminished' in comparison with the longer and more complex holidays of Pesah and Sukkot, but in terms of its significance, one could argue that it is the most important festival of all. To paraphrase a famous cliché, the best things often do indeed come in small packages! A Happy Shavuot to one and all!



Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Revelation's Ongoing Messages: Thoughts for Shavuoth

Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals – JewishIdeas.org

The Revelation at Mount Sinai was a national experience for all the people of Israel—but it also was very personal. Each Israelite heard the same words—but in different ways!

The Midrash teaches (Shemot Rabba 29:1) that God spoke “bekoho shel kol ehad ve-ehad,” according to the individual abilities of each listener. The universal message of Torah was made direct and personal. The miracle at Mount Sinai was not only the Revelation of God to the nation of Israel, but the individualized Revelation to each and every Israelite man, woman and child.

The message of this rabbinic teaching goes further. It does not merely refer to the receptivity and ability of Israelites at the moment of Revelation at Mount Sinai. It also recognizes that each individual’s koah—strength of understanding—is not stagnant. As we grow, deepen our knowledge, expand our sensitivities and open our minds and hearts—our koah evolves. In a sense, we receive the Revelation anew at each stage in life—actually, every day and every moment of life. This is the wonder and glory of Torah: it speaks to us directly and personally throughout our lives.

The foundational experience of the Revelation has an ongoing impact on how we confront life. Among the lessons is the importance of interiority, of being strong within ourselves.

The Me'am Lo'ez, the classic Ladino biblical commentary (Turkey, 18th century), notes that the original Revelation on Mount Sinai was a highly dramatic episode. Moses ascended the mountain as the people of Israel gathered below with great anticipation. The scene was marked by thunder and lightning and the sound of the shofar. The voice of God was heard by all. Yet, shortly afterward, the Israelites were dancing around a golden calf! When Moses came down the mountain and witnessed this idolatrous behavior, he threw down and shattered the tablets of the law.

Later, Moses ascended the mountain again. This time, there was no public fanfare, no miraculous sounds and lights. God told Moses that he himself would have to carve out the stone on which the Ten Commandments would be inscribed. The second set of the tablets of the law--received by Moses alone and through his own hard labor--was preserved.

The first tablets of the Ten Commandments, given with so much drama, were destroyed. The second tablets, given privately and quietly, survived and became the spiritual foundation of the people of Israel.

The Me'am Lo'ez points to the moral of this story: the really important and lasting things in life are often done by individuals in privacy, through their own exertions. Things done with much publicity may not be as permanent. We ought not judge the value of a person or an event based on external glitter and fame. Rather, we ought to realize that greatness and permanent value are often found in obscurity, in seemingly small and unnoticed acts of kindness or spiritual insight.

External fame, power, and popularity do not necessarily correlate to internal worth. What is truly important is what we do through the sweat of our own brow, quietly, without seeking publicity or glory. What is valuable

and lasting in us are those things which are authentic, honest and good in the eyes of God, and which bring goodness and kindness to our fellow human beings.

Another lesson of the Revelation is that the Torah provides a grand and universal religious vision. A famous Midrash teaches that the Revelation at Sinai was split into 70 languages i.e. contained a message for the 70 nations of the world (understood to refer to all humanity). The Torah is not to be understood or limited as being a narrow message intended for a small sect. The Torah is not to be limited to a reclusive people living in self-contained ghettos; rather, it is to provide spiritual insight to all humanity. The great 19th century Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh stressed Israel's role as the most universal of religions, a religion that provides the moral framework for civilization a whole.

The Revelation accounts in the Torah also provide guidance on how to live as full, real people, with a healthy and wholesome sense of self. The Talmud reports (Berakhot 8b) that the holy ark in the Tabernacle contained the two sets of the Tablets of the law: the broken pieces of the first set, and the complete tablets of the second set. "Luhot veshivrei luhot munahot ba-aron."

A lesson from this is: we each have "complete" and "broken" tablets within ourselves. We have our greatest strengths and achievements; and we also have our failures and shortcomings. If we only focus on the "complete" aspects of our lives, we may tend to become arrogant and egotistical. If we focus on the "broken" aspects of our lives, we may become demoralized and crushed. To be whole and strong human beings, we need to value both sets of tablets within us. We need to draw on our strengths and learn from our failings. We need to balance self-confidence with honest awareness of our limitations and weaknesses.

On Shavuoth, as we celebrate the anniversary of the Revelation at Mount Sinai, we should direct our thoughts to that special moment in the history of Israel and to the ongoing lessons it provides to us in our own lives.

Recipe of the Month

Kaltsonia (Romaniote variation on bourekas) from Rae David

Dough: for such things as Pastella, Cassatas, Kaltsonia
(Makes about 30 K's)

3-cups flour

1 tsp salt

1/2 cup oil

about 3/4 cup water

Mix first three ingredients and add water gradually

Separate into 2 large balls

Separate each ball into 10-15 pieces

Work flour into each piece and round out

Roll each piece of dough into a sphere

Bake filled on greased cookie sheet ...350 degrees



Cheese filling

Mix together the following:

1/2-lb farmer cheese

1/4-lb cream cheese

3 eggs

3/4 tsp salt

Add a little flour (1 or 2 tblsp) so mixture will not be too loose

22

Pictures of the Month

We are so proud of Arlene Schulman (from the Attas and David families) who received her Masters from Columbia University in Documentary Film Making. She has been documenting our community at Kehila Kedosha Janina from a new perspective; creating our future. Thank you Arlene.



A Special Photo of Samuel Cohen of Blessed Memory



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

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

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

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



Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 159

June 2022

Kehila Kedosha Janina

280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002

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