



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## June 2021 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, in the United States, we welcome Summer. This year, thanks to a decline in the COVID-19 numbers, many of us can get back to normal. While many of us are not yet ready to travel abroad, we are looking forward to a full return to normalcy in 2022. We know that 2022 will be a record year for travel to Greece so, for those who wish to join a 2022 Tour to Jewish Greece through the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org).



Past tours to Jewish Greece

This E-Newsletter is sponsored by Rose Eskononts in memory of her in-laws of Blessed Memory, Mordechai (Max, died June 1935) and Tehru (died Feb 1961) Askinazi (Eskononts) both born in Ioannina in the 1890s, from their grandchildren and great-grandchildren: Maxine Jacobs-August, Marcia Jacobs-Seldine, Laurie Eskononts-Serwetz, Malcolm Jacobs, Mordy Eskononts, Sherri Eskononts-Busch, Michelle August-Pangburn, Jennifer August, Matthew Seldine, Russell Hochman, Sam Hochman, Benjamin Busch, and Miriam Busch.

They lived at 275 Broome Street and watched KKJ grow from the very beginning. In fact, their son Murray Eskononts OBM was born in 1927, the year KKJ officially opened its doors. Too bad they never saw how the synagogue grew in reputation and how many people have crossed its threshold to see how it has grown and flourished through the years, becoming a Landmark building bringing the Romaniote story and history to the general public. Though small in number, we are big in our determination to educate the public on our ancient and unique history.

See more on the Eskononts family later in this newsletter.

If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org). We already have sponsorships planed for July and August thanks to Elliot Colchamiro (in July) in memory of his wife Gladys Colchamiro, and Jesse Levy (in August) in honor of his Grandfather, Rabbi Jessoula Levi.

This newsletter, our 147<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjism.org](http://www.kkjism.org).

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

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

Starting June 6, our Museum will be open every Sunday from 11-4. Reservations are suggested and mask wearing is required.

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### Simchas

We now have full information on the family of Ethan Ari Sullivan! Born April 8, 6 lbs. 8 oz.



Ethan Ari was born into an illustrious Yaniote family, the Menahems. The proud parents are Lauren Menahem Sullivan and Andrew Sullivan. Ethan is adored by his big brother Noah. Ethan's proud grandparents are Sam and Susan Menahem. Ethan is the great-great grandchild of Victor and Annie Menahem OBM. Victor was born in Constantinople Annie and Annie in Brooklyn. Ethan is great-great-grandson of Menahem Moise m. Lula Levy Moise.



Samuel and Esther Menahem with their children Lucy, Victor, and Michael



Lula Moisis with two of her daughters and four of her grandchildren

## Passings

We are saddened to report the passing of Isaac Mizan, the last Holocaust survivor from the (former) Jewish community of Arta in northwest Greece and one of the last survivors alive. Isaac died at the age of 94. He was born in 1927 in Arta, where he lived until 1961. He was the youngest of six children of the family of Joseph and Anetta Mizan.

In March 1944 Isaac was arrested by the Nazis, along with 351 other Arta Jews. They were transferred to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and then to Bergen-Belsen. He returned to Greece and Arta in August 1945. Of the twelve members of the Mizan family who were forced on the death voyage to Auschwitz, only three returned.

“His last wish, before he passed away, was to return to his birthplace, where the house where he and his family were taken from on March 24, 1944, is still preserved,” Dimitris Vlachopoulos, who wrote Mizan’s biography, said.

He was the last Jew of Arta to leave his hometown at the age of 35 for Athens, but his love for his city remained unquenchable to the end.

Mizan revealed the magnitude of the trauma left behind by the Holocaust to those who managed to emerge alive from the hell-camps of the Third Reich. “And there were moments when we felt guilty because we, the lucky few, survived and the others were lost [...] and we spent beautiful and happy moments,” he said in the pages of Vlachopoulos’ book.

Before the war, according to Vlachopoulos, the Jewish community of Arta had two synagogues and a school and numbered 500 in the 1930s and over 400 in the 1940s, shortly before the war broke out.

Of the 352 who boarded the death trains, only 23 returned, others left for Athens and others for the then newly established state of Israel.



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## In Memory of the Jews of Arta

*From the research archives of Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina, published in honor of Isaac Mizan.*

Before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arta was the true center of Romaniote Jewry. The indigenous Jews of Arta, Greek speaking Romaniote Jews, would be supplemented by Jews from Apulia Italy and Spain, as persecutions and forced exile reached those Jewish communities further west. When Arta became part of the Modern State of Greece in 1881, Ioannina was still under Ottoman Turkish rule, not becoming part of Modern Greece until 1913. During that 32 year interim, commerce and trade in Arta would suffer



and many of the Jews who relied on trade with Ioannina, moved to other Jewish communities in Greece, notably Athens, Ioannina and Corfu. The Jews in Arta were engaged in a number of occupations, many having to do with textiles. They owned small shops but also were engaged in commercial enterprises that took them to other parts of the Mediterranean.

The community supported a Jewish school and a synagogue. According to the 1939 census the community numbered 500. At the time of the deportations, the official count was 384.

On the night of March 24, 1944, timed to coincide with the approach of Greek Independence Day and the round-up of most of the remaining Jewish communities in Greece, the Jews of Arta were arrested by the Germans and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Jewish School



Synagogue

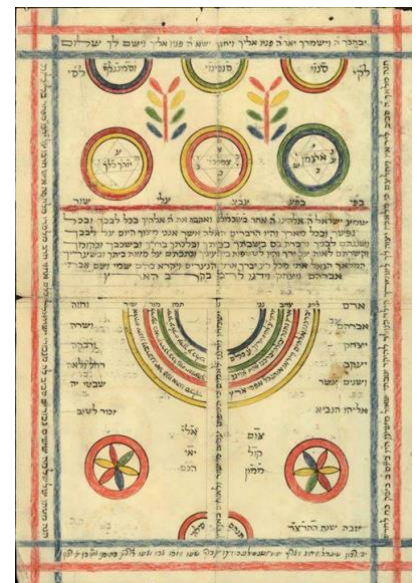
Official records note that 347 were deported, 28 escaped deportations by hiding in surrounding villages and 30 returned from the camps, leaving the number of 317 as the official number of those murdered. In 1947, only 60 Jews made up the Jewish community of Arta and, in 1959, the Community was officially dissolved. Most of the survivors had moved to Athens or immigrated to either the United States or Israel. Later, the Jewish cemetery was expropriated and the site where the Synagogue once stood was allotted to the Municipality<sup>1</sup>. Other than the remains of a few former Jewish homes and a recent plaque noting the loss of the community, nothing is left of the former Jewish Community of Arta.

We have worked for a number of years on the list of the Jews of Arta who perished in the Holocaust. We have included the names of Jews who were born in Arta but deported from elsewhere. There are more names on our main list than the official number of 317. Even with trying to make sense of duplications at Yad Vashem, we have had to live with discrepancies and errors. We have tried our best.

For additional information on the Jews of Arta, access the article "The Jews of Arta" by Constantinos A. Tsiliyianni, Chronika [issue 192: July/August 2004], translated by Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou. [See Here](#)



Bridge of Arta



Alef of Sabettai Saul Mizan  
Arta 1935

<sup>1</sup> This last information is from the official website of KIS (Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece)

## Passing from the Syrian-Jewish Community in Israel

Rabbi Avraham Hamra, a major leader in the Syrian Jewish community and the last chief rabbi of the country, died in Israel at the age of 78.



Hamra had spent most of his life in Syria where he was one of the few remaining spiritual leaders for the remaining Jewish population following the mass exodus of Syrian Jewry in 1947. Rabbi Hamra oversaw kashrut, marriage and education of the Jewish community in the Middle Eastern country, and protected his community. He served as chief rabbi in Damascus until 1994, when then Syrian President Hafez al-Assad allowed the last Syrian Jews to leave. Hamra, along with more than a thousand other Syrian Jews, ultimately relocated to Israel. Hamra had also worked with Mossad to smuggle Jewish artifacts – such as ancient Torah scrolls and manuscripts – out of the country, according to Haaretz. In his later years, he was also involved in supporting other Jewish communities in the Arab and Muslim world. Rabbi Hamra was the last chief rabbi of Syria, and as such intimately knew the needs of Jews in Muslim countries. Although his health was deteriorating due to his illness, he was always there to answer questions and give advice.

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### News from Kehila Kedosha Janina

**Please join us for our next Shabbat Service in person on Saturday June 5, 2021 at 10am.**

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



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
INVITES YOU TO JOIN OUR

**SHABBAT SERVICES**  
**IN PERSON**  
IN THE ROMANIOTE TRADITION

**SATURDAY JUNE 5 AT 10AM**

JOIN US FOR SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES IN PERSON AND  
HELP US CONTINUE OUR ROMANIOTE TRADITIONS

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

שבת שלום

## **Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum Reopening**

We are excited to announce that Kehila Kedosha Janina will be reopening for Museum visits and tours beginning Sunday June 6. Join us every Sunday between 11am and 4pm to reconnect with our Romaniote heritage and experience our historic synagogue and museum. We look forward to welcoming your entire family for a tour. Masks and all public health guidelines will continue to be followed. People interested in visiting our museum are strongly encouraged to RSVP in advance by emailing [Museum@kkjism.org](mailto:Museum@kkjism.org)



### **KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM**

## **KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA MUSEUM REOPENING**

**WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA WILL BE REOPENING FOR MUSEUM VISITS AND TOURS BEGINNING JUNE 6.**

**JOIN US EVERY SUNDAY BETWEEN 11AM AND 4PM TO RECONNECT WITH YOUR ROMANIOTE HERITAGE AND EXPERIENCE OUR HISTORIC SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY FOR A TOUR.**

**MASKS AND ALL PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES WILL CONTINUE TO BE FOLLOWED. PEOPLE INTERESTED IN VISITING OUR MUSEUM ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO RSVP IN ADVANCE BY EMAILING [MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG](mailto:MUSEUM@KKJSM.ORG)**

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

## Upcoming Events of Interest

Register now for what will be an excellent presentation on The Architecture of Greek Synagogues by Dr. Samuel Gruber on June 2 at 7pm ET via Zoom. Sign up [Here](#)

### CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES ART AND ARCHITECTURE SERIES

# The Architecture of Greek Synagogues: Near and Far, Then and Now

An Illustrated Zoom Lecture by Dr. Samuel D. Gruber

**Wednesday, June 2, 2021 at 7 pm via Zoom**

Register at [https://architecture\\_of\\_greek\\_synagogues.eventbrite.com](https://architecture_of_greek_synagogues.eventbrite.com)



Jews have had synagogues in Greek-speaking lands and within the modern boundaries of the Hellenic Republic for two thousand years. The art and architecture of these buildings tells the story of identity, tenacity, adaption, and influence as Greek Jews developed and sustained language, liturgy, and distinctive culture through Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman rule. Ancient Romaniote traditions were supplemented by the culture of Sephardi Jews who found refuge in Ottoman lands after 1492. In the 20th century, this mixed Romaniote-Sephardi Jewish heritage was transported in a new Greek-Jewish diaspora in the United States, and after the Holocaust, in Israel.

Only a small Jewish population survived the Holocaust in Greece. Many synagogues of the destroyed communities have been demolished. Those that remain—and the small, but vibrant Kehila Keodsha Janina Congregation in New York—bear witness. This talk, building on the work of several researchers and utilizing the photography of Vincent Giordano, focuses on the architecture of the synagogues in Ioannina, Greece and in New York, placing these surviving buildings in the context of a longer history.



Architectural historian **Dr. Samuel D. Gruber** is president of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments and teaches part-time in the Jewish Studies Program at Syracuse University. For Queens College, he curated the online

exhibition *Romaniote Memories, A Jewish Journey from Ioannina, Greece, to Manhattan: Photographs by Vincent Giordano.*

This program is being held in conjunction with the online exhibition *Romaniote Memories, a Jewish Journey from Ioannina, Greece to Manhattan: Photographs by Vincent Giordano.*

<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/romaniote-memories/index>

[www.qc.cuny.edu/centerforjewishstudies](http://www.qc.cuny.edu/centerforjewishstudies)  
718-997-4530/4531



## Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

We are happy to share news that registration is now open for this year's Sephardic & Romaniote Birthright Trip! For 10 days, you'll be able to travel around the country with amazing people with Sephardic, Greek, and Turkish backgrounds, all while exploring everything Israel has to offer. You'll be able to ride camels in the desert, raft down the Jordan River, explore the Old City in Jerusalem, and a whole lot more. The trip is totally FREE and anyone between the ages of 18 and 28 who hasn't been on a Birthright Israel trip before is eligible. Even if you've been to Israel before on a non-birthright trip, you may still be eligible. The trip will take place August 22 to September 1, 2021, and will follow all COVID-19 Health Guidance as required by the US Centers for Disease Control and the Israel Ministry of Health.

You can sign up now at [sephardicbrotherhood.com/birthright](https://sephardicbrotherhood.com/birthright). Registration takes less than 10 minutes and no final commitment is necessary. When registering, make sure to write "Sephardic Israel" as your "referred by" group and Amazing Israel as your trip provider.



# Sephardic Birthright

## ★ Israel Trip ★

**AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 1 2021**

JOIN US FOR A **FREE 10 DAY BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL TRIP**  
ESPECIALLY FOR SEPHARDIC JEWS FROM  
ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

**REGISTER NOW AT**

**SEPHARDICBROTHERHOOD.COM/BIRTHRIGHT OR VIA  
EMAIL AT INFO@SEPHARDICBROTHERHOOD.COM**





**Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network**

**Picnic for Young Families**

**June 20 at 12pm – Ross Dock Picnic Area in the Palisades Interstate Park, NJ**  
**RSVP to [info@SephardicBrotherhood.com](mailto:info@SephardicBrotherhood.com)**



The Sephardic Jewish  
Brotherhood of America  
*La Ermandad Sefaradi*

# Sephardic Young Families Picnic

SUNDAY JUNE 20 AT 12PM ET

ROSS DOCK PICNIC AREA IN THE PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK

Join us for a special Sunday Picnic  
in the Park especially for *young families and their kids ages 0-10*  
with delicious Sephardic treats!

Cost per Family

Brotherhood Members - \$10

Brotherhood Non-Members - \$18

Must RSVP in advance to  
[info@sephardicbrotherhood.com](mailto:info@sephardicbrotherhood.com)  
or 347-371-0313



## News from Jewish Greece

### Ioannina

Thank you Periklis Ritas for this photo from 1955 of young community members in Ioannina.



Consul General of USA from Thessaloniki visited the Synagogue in Ioannina

The Jewish Community of Ioannina hosted a recent visit of members of the Friedrich Nauman Foundation.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (German: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit) (FNF), is a German foundation for liberal politics, related to the Free Democratic Party. Established in 1958 by Theodor Heuss, the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany, it promotes individual freedom and liberalism. Usually still referred to as the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung), the foundation supplemented its name in 2007 with the words "for Freedom" (für die Freiheit).

The Foundation follows the ideals of the Protestant theologian, Friedrich Naumann. At the beginning of the last century, Naumann was a leading German liberal thinker and politician. He resolutely backed the idea of civic education. Naumann believed that a functioning democracy needs politically informed and educated citizens. According to him, civic education is a prerequisite for political participation and thus for democracy.

In this regard, the Foundation is an agent of organized liberalism. It promotes this through civic education, international political dialogues, and political counselling. The Foundation has numerous offices in Europe, Africa, America, and Asia. It also enjoys close links with Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Liberal International (LI).

While the Foundation's activities in the field of civic education consist of seminars, conferences and publications aimed at promoting liberal values and principles, the international political dialogue program provides a discussion forum for a wide range of liberal issues. The Foundation's counselling programs focus on candidates for political office, liberal political parties and other democratic organizations.



## Athens

### Jewish Museum of Greece Launches New Virtual Tour

The Jewish Museum of Greece has launched a new interactive virtual tour of their museum. You can explore their incredible collection that spans more than 2,000 years of Greek Jewry. View the museum tour [Here](#).



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## Larissa

Jewish Heritage Europe wrote in December about the stalled campaign to restore the structurally threatened Etz Hayyim synagogue in Larissa, central Greece. The restoration started in October 2019, but was halted two months later because of lack of funds and then Coronavirus restrictions. By now, the historic synagogue has been closed for more than a year and a half, standing empty, with its furnishings dismantled and removed.

The small Jewish community in Larissa has now renewed its appeal for aid to help complete what it now says is an estimated €450,000 project. It has posted updated photos and other information on its web site — and a new video about the campaign, the synagogue, and the community.

In a statement in April, leaders of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece described the challenges of the restoration and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The restoration project started in October 2019 when the Jewish Community of Larisa received a small initial funding from the program “German–Greek Fund for the Future” in order to conduct a detailed soil technical and static assessment.

Two months later and after the Synagogue had been completely despoiled and exposed to any danger, the project froze for almost one year, due to lack of funds and due to the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown.

During that pause, the Jewish Community of Larisa launched a large fund–raising campaign with a view to motivate both individuals and institutions in Greece and abroad to contribute, since it is certain that the restoration of this cultural and historic monument should be a concern of Judaism worldwide.

Up until today, the Jewish Community of Larisa, with the continuous help of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece as well as with the help and support of the other Greek Jewish Communities, has managed to raise the amount of 140,000 Euros but we strongly feel that this amount is not enough and every day that passes the Community of Larisa and the bond between its members weakens without the Synagogue.

See the webpage of the Jewish community of Larissa and how to donate [HERE](#)



**The Remarkable Trajectory of Greece-Israel Ties** by David Harris in the Algemeiner. Full article [here](#)

Recent developments underscore the remarkable trajectory of ties between Greece and Israel.

First, there was the quadrilateral summit in Paphos, also involving Cyprus and United Arab Emirates. Historic would not be an overstatement in describing this gathering, as it reflects the strategic results of last year's Abraham Accords and connects the Eastern Mediterranean with the Arabian Gulf. Moreover, it would not be surprising to see other regional actors seeking to join this group in the future.



Second, the two countries just announced a large defense deal, indeed the biggest ever between Athens and Jerusalem. Needless to say, it didn't come out of nowhere, but rather was the result of ever growing strategic and military cooperation — and the trust it bespeaks.

What may seem obvious today about overlapping interests and values between Greece and Israel was anything but obvious forty years ago, when I first became interested in the relationship.

At the time, I was shocked to learn that bilateral ties were quite frigid, to the point where Greece and Spain were the only two West European countries that had not established full de jure relations with Israel. And when Spain finally did so in 1986, Greece became the lone holdout.

It made no sense to me. Sure, I heard that Greece was closely tied to the Arab world and feared it would lose its standing if it also connected with Israel, but the argument didn't hold water. Other West European nations were able to successfully juggle their ties with both sides of the political equation. Meanwhile, of course, Egypt and Israel had signed a peace deal in 1979.

Rather, I was a believer in what Winston Churchill had seen years earlier. The legendary British leader said: "No two cities have counted more with mankind than Athens and Jerusalem. Their messages in religion, philosophy, and art have been the main guiding lights of modern faith and culture. Centuries of foreign rule and indescribable, endless oppression leave them still living, active communities and forces in the modern world, quarreling among themselves with insatiable vivacity. Personally, I have always been on the side of both..."

How could it be that two democratic countries, sharing the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and with so many overlapping features, were estranged from one another, I asked. And I wasn't alone. A number of Hellenic-American leaders, led by the late Andrew Athens, and American Jewish Committee (AJC) representatives, led by the late Maynard Wishner, asked the very same question and, joined by several Members of Congress, resolved to do something about it. But it wouldn't prove to be quick and easy.

In 1986, I was asked to prepare a memo for Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou on a Jewish perspective of Greek foreign policy. I noted the absence of full diplomatic ties, the close friendship with Syria and the PLO, the weakness in dealing with terrorism, a largely hostile voting record at the UN, and the fact that no Greek foreign minister had ever traveled to Israel since 1948. The overall assessment, in other words, was pretty bleak.

But within five years, things began to change dramatically. A new prime minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis, and his foreign minister, Antonis Samaras, established full links with Israel and changed the overall tone.

Encouraging as that was, a question lingered: Would the upswing in the relationship survive the inevitable political pendulum swings in Athens?

It wouldn't take long to find out. Andreas Papandreou returned to power in 1993. Given the fall of the Soviet Union, the break-up of Yugoslavia, and an increasingly assertive Turkey, his hard-line views mellowed, as we were to discover in our own meetings with him.

And by now, in 2021, after many twists and turns in Greece's governments, the verdict is in. Leaders of various, and often disparate, parties have come to embrace fully the ties with Israel, recognizing they form a pillar of Greek foreign policy and, at the same time, do not negatively affect links with the Arab world.

Today, it's clear that relations between Athens and Jerusalem are blossoming in every sector. Putting the pandemic aside, tourism is booming. And visitors say they feel very much at home in each other's country. Political and strategic dialogues are now the norm. High-level summits take place regularly. Cooperation in new technologies and energy are expanding rapidly. The devastating legacy of World War II continues to impact both nations. The Jewish community in Greece and the Greek Jews who resettled in Israel form a bridge across the sea. The list goes on.

Some say this is really all about Turkey. Sure, Turkey looms large in the geopolitical thinking of both countries. But, let's be clear, the main driver is not Turkey. Rather, it is the belated recognition that Greece and Israel have vast potential, as two neighbors and two Western-oriented democracies, to develop their links in just about every sphere. In doing so, they serve the highest interests of both nations.

And, to return to Churchill's theme, I, too, am on the side of both and couldn't be happier with the burgeoning ties. This is indeed another reminder that history is not static. In the span of four decades, this relationship went from detached to full-blown, with, no doubt, more to come.

David Harris is CEO of American Jewish Committee (AJC).

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## Bulgaria

### **The long-awaited restoration of the long-derelict synagogue in Vidin has officially begun**

The long-stalled, long-awaited restoration of the long-derelict synagogue in Vidin, a historic town overlooking the Danube, has officially begun. The building will become a multipurpose cultural center dedicated to the Vidin-born Jewish artist Jules Pascin, to include a museum, library, meeting hall, park area, and spaces for prayer and for the commemoration of the Holocaust.

Officials symbolically break ground for the Vidin synagogue restoration Photo: Vidin Municipality  
At a ceremony May 28 Vidin Mayor Tsvetan Tsenkov, joined by Municipal Council Chair Gennady Velkov and architect Andrey Todorov, of the company that will carry out the work, used shovels to symbolically break ground in front of the building.

"There is no way the history, the future of Vidin can continue without the restoration of this beautiful temple, which is an exceptional creation of architecture and spirituality," Tsenkov said, according to a news report on the Vidin city web site.



Artist Rendering

The report said the ceremony was attended by the entire municipal leadership; the Metropolitan Daniel of Vidin; District Governor Ognyan

The report said the ceremony was attended by the entire municipal leadership; the Metropolitan Daniel of Vidin; District Governor Ognyan Assenov; Chairman of the Municipal Council Gennady Velkov; the President of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom" Alexander Oscar; members of the Vidin Jewish community, the regional mufti Nejati Ali, representatives of various institutions and organizations, as well as local citizens.

After the ground was broken, children from a nearby village splashed water on the site — a gesture the report said was a traditional means of wishing a successful outcome to the project.

Plans have long been in the works — and long stalled — to restore the neo-Gothic synagogue, built in 1894. The first renovation works, sponsored by the government, started in 1983 but were abandoned in 1989, after the collapse of the communist regime. Workers had already removed the building's roof, leaving the building unprotected and open to the elements.



Ruined synagogue, Vidin. January 2020

In 2004, the synagogue was added to the World Monuments Fund Watch list — a list of historic sites around the world that are under particular threat.

It was announced in 2012 that it would be transformed into the cultural center, but little moved forward. During an official ceremony in November 2017, the Bulgarian Jewish community formally transferred ownership of the synagogue to the municipality, hoping that the restoration work could finally start.

Architectural plans for the conversion were revealed at a public meeting in December 2018. At a presentation of the project plans in February 2021, the architect Dragomir Yosifov from the DZZD "Pasken 2020", said the aim is to restore the Synagogue to its original appearance to the maximum extent.

At the ground-breaking ceremony, Tsenkov thanked the Jewish community for donating the building to the city and "expressed gratitude for the support provided to the Embassy of Israel in Bulgaria" and He emphasized that "the project will be strictly monitored to be implemented qualitatively and on time."

The restoration of the synagogue and transformation into the Jules Pascin culture center is being implemented under the Operational Program "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020 (OPRG), which includes financing from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and national co-financing. Bulgaria's Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works is the Managing Authority for the Program. It comes under the OPRG's section focusing on the development of regional tourism related to cultural heritage of international significance.

The total project budget is 9,775,300 Bulgarian lev (around €5 million). The restored synagogue/culture center will form part of a larger set of nearby attractions including the Archaeological Museum and medieval Baba Vida fortress.

## Turkey

Our thanks to Jewish Heritage Europe (and Ruth Gruber) and Salom Magazine for the following news.

### **200-year-old former synagogue in Istanbul's Hasköy quarter is being restored as a library. It had been used as a "hookah cafe"**

A 200-year-old former synagogue in the Hasköy quarter of the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, used in recent years as "hookah cafe," is undergoing restoration to become a library and youth center.

Citing information received from the district administration, the Anadolu News Agency (AA) writes that the work will include preservation of the masonry walls, floors and woodwork of the building, which dates from the early 19th century. Inside, a U-shaped mezzanine floor constructed of steel will be added in the arched main hall, and space will be created for a gallery.



In February, Beyoğlu Mayor Haydar Ali Yıldız told the Jewish publication Salom that work should be completed by the end of the year. He said the district had consulted with the local Jewish community on the project and that the restoration of the building would maintain reference to its original identity as a synagogue.



"We do not want this identity to be lost," he was quoted as saying. "Our young people who come here will be able to benefit from the library service and will know that this place was previously a synagogue. Sadly, it was operated as a hookah cafe for many years. As a Muslim, I cannot accept smoking hookah in a place of worship, regardless of the religion that it belongs to."

The Haskoy quarter of Beyoğlu, north of the Golden Horn, once had a thriving Jewish population and there are a number of former synagogues in the area, most used for other purposes such as workshops or warehouses. It also has a historic Jewish cemetery.

Yildiz told Salom that he hoped that the restoration of the Esgher synagogue would help recover awareness of the multicultural, multifaith history of the district.

"Freedom prevails in the thousands of years of history of Beyoğlu. Today, the continuation of an old synagogue as a library is a step towards both its existence and the future. It is a letter sent to the future. Different beliefs will continue to exist here. Different cultures will be able to freely live their own lifestyle. This is also a guarantee of this."

## Serbia

Again we thank Jewish Heritage Europe (and Ruth Gruber) for this information.

### **Serbia: Restoration of the former "Small Synagogue" in Senta is underway, funded by the Hungarian government**

Restoration work is underway at the former "Small Synagogue" in Senta, located in northern Serbia not far from the border with Hungary. The project is funded by a 220-million-forint (around €611.000) allocation from the Hungarian government and is expected to be completed by early December 2021.

Used for decades as a sport center known as "Partizan," the 400-square-meter building is today property of the Lajos Thurzó Cultural and Educational Center, and it will become a cultural space that will host an art gallery and also a permanent exhibition on local Jewish history.



The synagogue was built in 1928-29 and served the local orthodox/Hasidic community. The municipality acquired it in 1956. The city also acquired the town's Great Synagogue, built in 1873 for the Neolog community, but demolished it in 1957 – a monument has stood on the spot since 2001.

The work on the Small Synagogue started the first week of April. Scaffolding surrounds the building, and on April 15th the city's mayor, Rudolf Czegledi, along with Róbert Szabados, president of the Association of Jewish Communities in Serbia, and István Vatai, the architect in charge of the works, met with local reporters at the site.

They said plans foresee the creation of a two-story exhibition area, featuring an art gallery, with the upper floor entirely dedicated to the history of the Jews of Senta (known in Hungarian as Zenta). The exterior of the synagogue will also be renewed, including the façade and entrance. A wrought iron fence will be installed to replace an old brick wall, and a parking lot will be constructed.

Architect Vatai told reporters that no original blueprints have been found for the building, so the renovations would be based on its current state.

"The city's cultural offer will be expanded with this renovation, as we will have a fine art exhibition space and a smaller area suitable for holding events such as classical music performances," Mayor Czegledi told reporters. He said that while the Hungarian government is covering all the costs of the physical renovation work, the city financed the preliminary steps, such as the planning, documentation, and inspection of the building.

Szabados said his feelings were bittersweet. "It's about rejoicing on the one hand because the synagogue building will be renewed. On the other hand, I have a feeling of sadness because there are almost no more Jews in Senta; there are one or two families left over from a large community that had nearly two thousand members until World War II," he said.

"Therefore," he added, "the small synagogue will first of all remind the next generations that Jews were present here."

The synagogue's last rabbi, from 1939 to the deportation of the community to Auschwitz in 1944, was Moshe Teitelbaum, who survived Auschwitz and eventually moved to the United States, where in 1980 he became the Satmar Rebbe, the world leader of Satmar Hasidim. He died, aged 91, in 2006.



## United Kingdom

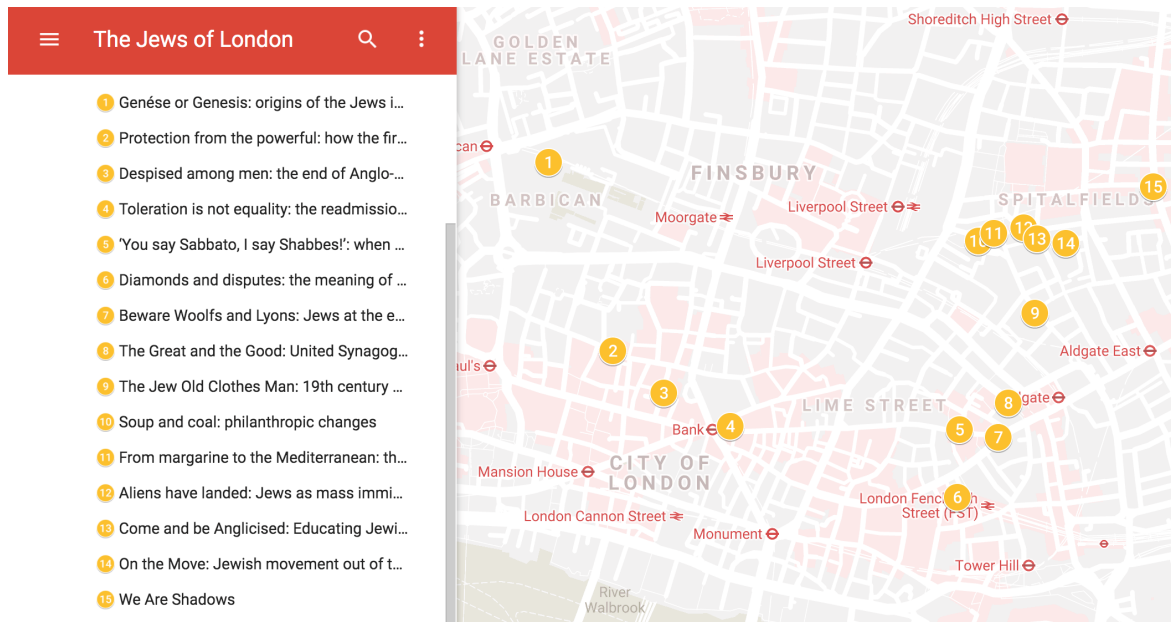
### New “Jews of London” self-guided walking tour launched

The COVID vaccine roll-out is raising hopes for eased restrictions on travel and visits to cultural sites. Just in time - United Synagogue, the British orthodox synagogue umbrella, has launched a free new smartphone self-guided walking tour of historic Jewish London.

The Jews of London tour is organized around 15 thematic “stops” in central London and the East End. It is not a downloadable app, like so many self-guided tours. Instead, it is based on podcasts about the places and their history, which users must contact on the spot via smartphone data. The podcasts last around four to six minutes and are accompanied by a picture and text, as well as a map of the “stop” location and directions how to walk there.

Sometimes the podcast will be about a broad period or area of Jewish history in London, and the picture or text will focus on something narrower. Sometimes, the document or text will be about something seemingly unrelated to the podcast, but we hope it will give you context.

The walk is connected through a web site, which also has an overall map — and you can also listen to the podcasts and read the textual material in your browser.



The tour begins at the Barbican and ends at Fournier Street, Spitalfields. Walking at the pace used by Google Maps to calculate distances and timings, if one walked from the first stop at Barbican to the last stop in Fournier Street, Spitalfields, it would take 52 minutes to cover the distance of just under 2.5 miles.

However, each podcast is 5 or 6 minutes long, and there are fifteen of them. That adds an hour and a half to the tour, not including any detours, loo breaks, coffee stops or avoidance of rain. Not all destinations are equally-distanced. The last six or seven destinations in particular, are closer to each other than the others.

All in all, we hope that a fit walker who is keen but not so uncurious that they won't be distracted by anything, might comfortably complete the tour in under four hours, taking some time for something to eat and without rushing. This doesn't include travel time to or from the start (nearest tube: Barbican) or the end (nearest tube: Aldgate). You might find the walk easier if you don't do it all on one day, or even if you use a bicycle or a scooter between stops.

## Manchester, UK

### UK: Manchester Jewish Museum to reopen July 2 after two years of expansion & redevelopment

The Manchester Jewish Museum is counting down until it reopens July 2, after being closed for two years for a large-scale expansion and redevelopment, which has included construction of a modern new wing and full restoration of the Victorian synagogue where it has been housed. The builders officially handed over the complex to the Museum at the end of April, formally presenting the keys to the museum's Chief Executive Max Dunbar and staff.



The only Jewish Museum in the UK outside of London, the Manchester museum opened in the synagogue in 1984. The £6 million development project is doubling its size and adding new galleries and a revamped core exhibit. The project received a £2.89 million National Lottery grant. The museum's Spanish and Portuguese synagogue was built in 1874 and closed for worship in 1983.

"Our magnificently restored synagogue is a rare gem and is in itself a living artefact telling the story of Jewish migration from the 1870s," Dunbar said in a news release. "It will sit alongside our contemporary extension, the design of which has been inspired by our synagogue's stunning Moorish architecture. In addition to a new world-class exhibition space, our extension boasts a café and a learning kitchen where Jewish culture can be experienced and shared through food."

Last year, during the construction and restoration of the building, workers found a time capsule — a large, sealed glass jar tightly stuffed with documents, newspapers, and even some coins — hidden in the wall near the ark, placed there when the building was construction. The museum said the capsule and its contents will form part of the museum's new core exhibit.

In the final run-up to the opening, it said, the museum's curator, Alex Cropper, meeting and interviewing past congregants of the synagogue: capturing oral histories and memories to add to the museum's collection of over 500 oral histories that reveal stories of Jewish Manchester. A selection of these will feature in the museum's new exhibition exploring the universal themes of journeys, communities and identities.

In addition, the Museum announced that an art and film installation by Turner-prize-winner Laurie Prouvost and inspired by the synagogue's history will form part of the opening events. Installed and partly shot in the synagogue's women's gallery, it will have as part of its focus the voices and experiences of women congregants.

A key factor in the Museum redevelopment has been a full restoration of the synagogue, with a focus on the interior decorations and painting, and also the stained glass windows. The Museum has posted an informative article about the delicate process of restoring the windows, featuring an interview with Stephen Evans, from stained glass restoration experts Recclesia Ltd., about the process — which he said was a complex undertaking. The Manchester windows were a challenge as in they were circular panels that were housed in a metal frame and surrounded by stone. Each window was made up of 5 sections – circular centre and four arched quadrant surrounds which took time to rebuild. The panels were also heavily soiled with a mixture of grime and exhaust dust which took a lot of cleaning.



## Australia

### **Australia Jewish Board of Deputies CEO, Vic Alhadeff, on his passion for Greek causes** [Article here](#)

After 16 years as chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (Australia), Vic Alhadeff has decided it's time for him to finally step back from leading the community organization. But as he stresses to The Greek Herald, this decision is 'resignation not retirement.'

"My intent is to continue to make a contribution in the areas in which I can. 16 years is a long time and it has been a passion," Mr Alhadeff tells The Greek Herald exclusively. "Essentially what drove me was the need to do whatever was within my ability to make NSW a more harmonious society, which meant denouncing bigotry in all its forms through the prism of the Jewish experience."



To do this effectively, Mr Alhadeff has had to 'build mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with other faith groups, politicians, media and groups across civil society.' One of these particularly special relationships is with the Greek Australian community as the chief executive actually has a personal connection to Greece.

Vic Alhadeff's Greek roots: When I ask Mr Alhadeff about this connection, it's clear he is very proud of his Greek roots. He stresses that the Alhadeff family was 'one of the largest Jewish families on the Greek island of Rhodes,' and both of his parents were also born there. "But in 1938, a year before WWII erupted, anti-Semitic decrees were passed in many parts of Europe banishing Jews from civil society, which meant for example that Jews could no longer own businesses or go to public schools," Mr Alhadeff says.

"There were 4,000 Jews living on Rhodes at the time and approximately half of them left... and went to [places such as] the United States and South Africa." Mr Alhadeff's father went to Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia, with the aim of bringing out his parents, his teenage sisters aged 14 and 16, and his fiancé Becky. But sadly, WWII eventually broke out and no one else was allowed to travel.

"In July 1944, German forces arrived on the island and the 1,700 Jews who were still on Rhodes were put on three ships and sent to Auschwitz, which was the largest of the Nazi death camps," Mr Alhadeff explains. "My father's parents were murdered at Auschwitz, as were 151 Alhadeff's. My father's sisters both survived." In the case of the fiancé, Mr Alhadeff says that although his father was told Becky had also been killed in Auschwitz, it turns out she wasn't.

"25 years ago, my father was on holiday in Cape Town, South Africa, in a restaurant no less, and he overheard his fiancé's name, discovered she had survived and was a grandmother living in Belgium... He contacted her and they spent one hour together at Brussels airport," the chief executive says. But of course, it must be mentioned that whilst Becky survived WWII and the Holocaust, the same can't be said for a large majority of the Jewish population on Rhodes.

"Essentially, because of the Holocaust, the Jewish community of Rhodes was decimated and today, there are about five Jewish families left on Rhodes," Mr Alhadeff stresses. "In fact, there is also still an Alhadeff street and Alhadeff park on Rhodes named in honor of my family."

Championing Greek causes: With such strong ties to Greece, it's no surprise then that in his 16 years as CEO of the NSW JBOD, Mr Alhadeff has worked very closely with Greek community groups in Australia.

In fact, over the years, Mr Alhadeff has not only spoken at Greek community events, but he has also led the 'Keep NSW Safe' initiative with the help of multicultural organizations across NSW, including Greek ones. This is something he is incredibly proud of.

"I was the spokesperson for the campaign and we achieved legislative reform in that the state government passed a law on June 27, 2018, and that law says it is a crime to incite violence on the basis of race, religion, gender and sexual preference," he explains. "That campaign was approximately 200 meetings and media interviews over three years and like I said, friends in the Greek and Hellenic communities were an integral part of that campaign." More recently, Mr Alhadeff has also advocated for the Federal Government to officially recognize the Greek, Armenian and Assyrian genocides.

"We have a monthly meeting of members of the JBOD and the theme of the April meeting was the need to recognise the Greek, Armenian, Assyrian genocides and there were speakers from all of those communities," Mr Alhadeff says. "At the end of the night, a resolution was put forward and passed unanimously to endorse a policy of our federal counterpart, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, which calls on the Australian government to recognise the genocides."

Of course, these are small steps, but they make a world of difference and Mr Alhadeff has no plans to stop advocating for the cause. In fact, he says that because he comes from a Jewish community which itself has suffered a genocide, he feels even more strongly that the Greek, Armenian and Assyrian genocides need to be acknowledged.

"It's something that I personally and the Jewish community... feels very strongly about because it's bad enough that the community has suffered a genocide, but for recognition to be denied is to just inflict even further pain and injustice on that community," he concludes. Powerful words which clearly show that despite the fact his days at the helm of the NSW JBOD are coming to an end, Mr Alhadeff will continue championing worthy causes, including those relevant to the Jewish Australian and Greek Australian communities.

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### Articles of Interest - The Pontic Genocide

The history of Pontic Greeks goes as far back as Ancient Greece itself. The first recorded Greek colony, established on the northern shores of ancient Anatolia, was Sinope on the [Black Sea \(Pontus\)](#), circa 800 BC. The settlers of Sinope were merchants from the Ionian Greek city state of Miletus. At the time, the shores of the Black Sea were known to the Greek world as Axeinos Pontos ("The Inhospitable Sea"), with the name later changing to Euxeinos Pontos ("Hospitable Sea").



After the fall of the Black Sea kingdom of Trebizond (centered on modern-day Trabzon) to the Ottomans in 1461 and especially during the 18th and 19th century wars, Pontians migrated to southern Russia and the Caucasus. By the mid-19th century the Greeks of Pontus were flourishing, economically and demographically. In 1865 there were 265,000 Pontians, but by 1880 their number had grown to 330,000.

By the early 20th century their population had reached 700,000. In 1860 there were 100 Greek schools in Pontus, along with printing businesses, newspapers, magazines, clubs and theaters. The year 1908 was a grim milestone for the peoples of the Ottoman Empire. It was the year of the formation of the "Young Turk" movement, the hard nationalist party that launched the persecution of Christian communities and started the Turkification of the region.

These Turks, on the pretext of "national security," displaced the majority of the Greek population in Asia Minor's inhospitable hinterland, via so-called "labor battalions." The men who would not join the Turkish Army were forced to join these units. They were put to work in quarries, mines and road construction under crippling, inhumane conditions. Most soon died of hunger and disease.

Reacting to the oppression of the Turks — the murders, deportations and the burning of villages — the Pontic Greeks took to the mountains to salvage what was possible of what was left of their lives. After the genocide of the Armenians, the Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk then began the Pontic genocide. In 1919 the Greeks, with the Armenians and the temporary support of the Eleftherios Venizelos government, tried to create a standalone Greek-Armenian state.

This plan was thwarted by the Turks, who took advantage of the event to advance to their "final solution," the Pontic genocide. On May 19, 1919, Ataturk landed in Samsun to start the second and most brutal phase of the Pontic Greek genocide — under the guidance of German and Soviet advisers.

By the time of the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922, the number of Pontians who died had exceeded 200,000; some historians put the figure at 350,000. Those who escaped the Turkish sword fled as refugees to southern Russia. After the end of the 1919–22 Greco-Turkish War, most of the Pontian Greeks remaining in the Ottoman Empire were transported to Greece under the terms of the 1923 population exchange. The number of the people exchanged between Greece and Turkey is estimated to be 400,000.

## The New Sephardic Generation: Young Jews are organizing in an effort to preserve Sephardic culture in America by Paula Jacobs in Tablet Magazine

When Ethan Marcus, who grew up in a traditional Jewish household in New York, started Princeton in the fall of 2014, his first Shabbat at Hillel was a rude awakening. The Orthodox service was unlike what he attended at [Kehila Kedosha Janina](#), a Greek Romaniote synagogue on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. And the Ashkenazi [cholent](#) that he tasted for the first time was a far cry from his customary Sephardic Shabbat lunch of [bourekas](#), feta cheese, and assorted salads. Marcus, whose paternal ancestors came to America from the Ottoman Empire a century ago, was realizing for the first time his own minority status within the larger Jewish community.

Since immigrating to the U.S. in the early 20th century, Sephardic Jews have struggled to gain acceptance as both Americans and Jews. In the Ashkenormative American Jewish society, where Ashkenazi culture is the norm, their Sephardic roots were often a source of embarrassment. Even today, at Jewish day schools and college campuses, Sephardic students say that they feel marginalized because of the absence of Sephardic minyanim and programming or acknowledgment of their cultural and religious heritage—and even when it is recognized, they feel patronized because the context is often limited to food, rather than Sephardic contributions to Jewish literature, philosophy, and the arts, or rabbinic approaches to contemporary Jewish issues.

“Sephardic Jews were a minority in their places of origin, and also in some American communities they were a minority within a minority,” explained [Sarah Abrevaya Stein](#), a [historian](#) of Sephardic Jewry, [UCLA professor](#) and author of the [book](#) *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century*. Over time, Sephardic Jews have integrated into American society, but preserving their identity has become more difficult as younger Jews become many generations removed from the immigrant ancestors who directly passed along their history and traditions. “My kids didn’t have access to my grandparents who spoke Ladino and came from these Ottoman lands where Sephardim had lived for hundreds of years. I had that connection,” said Marc Ben-Ezra, an active member of the Sephardic community in South Florida and soon to become the first Sephardic president of Young Israel of Hollywood-Fort Lauderdale.

In recent years, though, a new generation of Sephardic Jews—from college students to young professionals—has stepped up to reclaim its heritage and ensure its continuity in an America that celebrates different cultures and heritages. “This is a moment where diversity is being embraced in the wider American landscape,” said Stein.

Young Sephardic Jews are trying to disentangle the umbrella category of Sephardic Jews that often refers to all non-Ashkenazi Jews, and give more specific content and meaning to their own family trajectories, such as Ladino-speaking, Moroccan, Syrian, and Persian backgrounds, explains [Devin Naar](#), 38, who chairs [Sephardic studies](#) at the University of Washington.



“They want acknowledgment that these are distinct and legitimate cultures and communities with their own histories (and futures) that should not all be reduced to a broad amorphous category of Sephardic or non-Ashkenazi,” said Naar. He speaks Ladino with his children, both to honor his immigrant ancestors and connect his young kids with their roots.

He also sees today’s resurgence of Sephardic identity as a repudiation of Ashkenormativity. “I think it is part of a broader phenomenon of a younger generation confronting the blind spots and injustices of the dominant

Jewish communal stories,” said Naar, whose [lecture series](#), “Sephardic Jews and Race in the United States,” provides a historical perspective.

Indeed, this new generation of Sephardic Jews is actively working to tell its story and secure its solid place within the American Jewish narrative, using social media as a key tool. Their initiatives—from education to culture—speak to the diversity of the Sephardic experience reflecting family roots in Greece, the Balkans, Turkey, North Africa, and across the Middle East.

“The Sephardic community has a voice and we need to have people from outside the community listen to us,” said 24-year-old Julia Cassuto Keahey, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor from Salonica, whose activism was ignited during a [Sephardic Birthright trip](#) to Israel in 2019. “While our voice is getting stronger, it requires people to listen so we aren’t shouting into a void.”

After his initial culture shock during his first year at college, Marcus became active in Jewish student life at Princeton Hillel: Center for Jewish Life, the Yavneh House of Princeton (Orthodox Jewish community), and Chabad on Campus. He organized events and programs such as a Jewish tour of Greece, an academic lecture on the Sephardic community of Salonica, and a Greek Jewish themed Shabbat dinner at Hillel. In summer 2015, his brother Andrew created the first [Greek Jewish street fair](#) in New York City—an annual event before the pandemic, attracting more than 10,000 visitors in 2019. Marcus also became active with the [Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America](#); during his sophomore year, he created the first Sephardic Birthright trip to Israel in 2016, with 40 participants.

Since graduating in 2018 from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, he has dedicated himself to the Sephardic community—as community development director for Seattle’s Sephardic Jewish community and as a [Fulbright Research Scholar](#) in Greece. “If I don’t step up in a professional capacity for the Sephardic community, no one will,” he explained.

Marcus, 25, is currently managing director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America. In spring 2020, he launched the Sephardic Digital Academy, with an initial five online classes. It now offers more than 350 classes and online lectures, averaging 15 classes per month that attract more than 35,000 unique participants across the world. Instructors include leading Sephardic scholars, thinkers, rabbis, professional chefs, and community organizers who teach on such topics as: contemporary Jewish issues from a Sephardic perspective, women in the Sephardic tradition, Torah, and Sephardic history. Recordings are posted on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#). The century-old brotherhood is now focused on developing a cadre of young leaders, with plans for a national youth conference in the fall. Its Sephardic Young Professionals Network hosts social and cultural events such as a Sephardic Lag Ba’Omer picnic in Central Park held this May and a Zoom book club.

Indeed, ensuring the continuity of Sephardic Judaism requires a strong educational foundation. “It’s beautiful to celebrate culture and language but it is not sustainable long term. The greatest challenge is to find meaning for Sephardic Jews in the 21st century,” cautioned [Rabbi Daniel Bouskila](#), director of the [Sephardic Educational Center](#), which teaches the moderate Halachic approach and tolerant worldview of classic Sephardic Judaism’s major rabbinic figures such as [Maimonides](#).

The SEC works to strengthen Jewish identity and build a new generation of Sephardic leadership, with classes and trips to Israel. During high school, Brandeis University sophomore and Ladino-speaker Robert Carlson organized a Ladino reading group in his native Los Angeles where he took classes at the local SEC branch to better understand his own heritage. He hopes to inspire other young Sephardic Jews to learn about their traditions. For now, he is spreading the word on social media, and working to ensure that SEC messaging and programs target his generation.

To foster a Sephardic identity, education must begin at an early age. “We need to preserve the history before it’s too late,” said 21-year-old Binghamton University student Zack Ben-Ezra, director of programming at [Sephardic Adventure Camp](#)—the only Sephardic camp in the U.S. During the summer, he teaches campers

about Sephardic identity, traditions, and history; he has created experiential educational programs such as a mock Sephardic wedding and “[Escapando de España](#),” which simulated the escape from the Spanish Inquisition.

Yet, revitalizing Sephardic life in America remains an uphill battle. In the U.S., while a handful of Sephardic synagogues remain, there are no Sephardic rabbinical schools to train the next generation of Sephardic spiritual leaders, and limited resources have been invested in the Sephardic community. There are few university Sephardic studies classes and most Americans know little about Sephardic Jews in America and their history—something that Max Modiano Daniel, a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA, aspires to change upon publishing his dissertation about Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles and Jewishness in the Sephardic world.

Moreover, today’s U.S. Sephardic population is relatively small: only 3% of American Jews self-identify as Sephardic (plus an additional 1% if Mizrahi Jews, i.e., from North Africa and the Middle East, are included) according to the recent Pew Survey of Jewish Americans. Even in Seattle’s [vibrant Sephardic community](#), the figure is 8%, reports the 2016 [Seattle Jewish Community Study](#). And in Broward County, Florida, where a relatively large Sephardic population resides, the figure is 16.4% according to the 2016 [Jewish Federation of Broward County Population Study](#).

To ensure the future of the Sephardic tradition for many generations to come, today’s young generation of Sephardic Jews must be prepared to confront these challenges—and also garner the support and financial resources of mainstream Jewish institutions. “It’s time for Sephardic Jews to stand up for themselves, start a Sephardic movement, and be recognized that we have a unique voice and needs, and a unique identity in the American Jewish experience,” said Marcus. “Only through our generation will it happen.”

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### **Archival Video Footage of Broome and Allen Streets**

Thanks to the Eskononts family, we are proud to share rare home videos of Broome Street and Allen Street on the Lower East Side circa 1950. Watch these delightful home movies on YouTube [Here](#)



**This E-Newsletter is sponsored by Rose Eskononts in honor and memory of the parents of Murray Eskononts OBM: Mordechai (Max) Askinazi/Eskononts who died in June 1935, Tehru Askinazi/Eskononts who died in 1961. Both were born in Ioannina in the 1890s. The sponsorship is from their Grandchildren and Great-grandchildren: Maxine Jacobs-August, Marcia Jacobs-Seldine, Laurie Eskononts-Serwetz, Malcolm Jacobs, Mordy Eskononts, Sherri Eskononts -Busch, Michelle August - Pangburn, Jennifer August, Matthew Seldine, Russell Hochman, Sam Hochman, Benjamin Busch and Miriam Busch.**

“They lived at 275 Broome Street and watched KKJ from the very beginning. In fact Murray was born in 1927, the year it officially opened.

Too bad they never saw how the synagogue grew in reputation and how many people have crossed its threshold to see how it has grown and flourished through the years, becoming a Landmark building bringing the Romaniote story and history to the general public.”





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



"Jerusalem Day", which celebrates the liberation of all of Jerusalem by the IDF in the 1967 Six Day War is officially celebrated on its Hebrew date of 28th of Iyar, which corresponded with June 7th of that year. Given the recent events in Israel and the unabashed outbreak of antisemitic violence and attacks the world over, and the growing and even UN supported denials of any Jewish connection with Jerusalem, it is more important than ever to revisit the events of June 7th, 1967 and understand Jews' and Judaism's deep and eternal connection with Jerusalem.

The importance and centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish People and faith need not be reviewed here. More pertinent is the fact that since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jerusalem was occupied by one foreign power or another, and Jewish life often severely curtailed, restricted and even forbidden. Nonetheless, there was always a Jewish presence in Jerusalem, even if less than ten people at certain times, until 1948, when the Old City was conquered by Jordan, and all Jewish residents were expelled from their homes. And despite official UN agreements granting Jews the right to reach their holy sites in Jordanian-occupied Jerusalem, in practice Jews were completely forbidden from entering the Old City and pray at the Western Wall. Even worse, whether during the War of Independence or the subsequent Jordanian occupation until 1967, all major synagogues in the Old City were either totally destroyed or gutted and used as storerooms and even garbage dumps. A "no-man's land" and barriers separated east and west Jerusalem, and constant sniper fire from Jordanian soldiers was a routine and fatal action face by Jews living on the Israeli side of the barriers. And despite an obvious longing to have an Israeli governed and united Jerusalem, Israel did not violate UN ceasefire conditions, and reluctantly accepted the status quo with Jordan, even as the latter continued to violate all UN resolutions. In fact, even as war with Egypt and Syria was clearly inevitable and imminent by May, 1967, Israel warned King Hussein through various channels not to enter the war, since Israel did not consider Jordan as an enemy on the same level as Egypt or Syria. However, King Hussein ignored the warning and joined the fray, only to lose the entire West Bank and East Jerusalem. As for Israel, the every-hopeful but seemingly unattainable yearning of a united Jerusalem was suddenly and abruptly realized!

But beyond strategic and national implications of this miraculous liberation of Judaism's holiest city and most significant holy sites, the reaction of everyone involved in the liberation of the Old City and the Western Wall surpassed the most emotional, intense, spiritual and yes, religious feelings that one ever imagined. The minute the then Paratroop Brigade Commander Motta Gur broadcast the now famous words "Har Habayit beyadeinu." – "The Temple Mount is in our hands", the entire Jewish world changed. No one involved in the liberation could hold back his or her emotions nor tears at this awesome achievement. Famous photographs of soldiers staring in awe at the now accessible Western Wall; the emotional statements of everyone, from the most so-called secular military commanders at the time: Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan and Uzi Narkiss, to the then Chief Rabbi of the IDF, Rabbi Shlomo Goren; the shedding of incontrollable tears of joy and disbelief. In 1967, The holiday of Shavuot fell just a few days after the liberation, and the Old City was officially opened to the Israeli public. While masses of pilgrims were certainly anticipated, the actual numbers surpassed anything the security forces had expected. The human stream of over 200,000 Jews who wanted to touch the ancient stones of the Western Wall and celebrate the end of close to 2,000 years of exile, banishment, persecution and yearning of the Jewish people for Jerusalem, was unstoppable.

But no less important than the numbers, was the demography of this massive Jewish pilgrimage. As the Jerusalem Post reported at the time:

"Every section of the population was represented. Kibbutz members and soldiers rubbing shoulders with Neturei Karta. Mothers came with children in prams, and old men trudged steeply up Mount Zion, supported by youngsters on either side, to see the wall of the Temple before the end of their days." Some wept, but most faces were wreathed in smiles. For 13 continuous hours, a colorful variety of all peoples trudged along in perfect order, stepping patiently when told to do so at each of six successive barriers set up by the police to regulate the flow."

This miraculous and G-d sent event in 1967 cannot be overemphasized. The incredible expression of love and longing for a single city by an entire people, from the most atheistic, agnostic, non-observant and even anti-observant, to the most Orthodox and stringently observant of Jewish law, shows how deep and heartfelt was the spiritual connection to Judaism's one and only spiritual capital. And while Jerusalem may indeed be holy to both Christianity and Islam, this only derives from Jerusalem's unique significance and origins in Judaism, and Jerusalem is not the center or even the most important city to either faith, whether geographically or spiritually. No matter how strong the attempts to disconnect, demonize, delegitimize, denigrate, deny, ignore or simply refuse to acknowledge the Jewish People's and Judaism's unbreakable and eternal connection to Jerusalem, they will not succeed, as the events of June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and world Jewry's reaction to having a reunited, liberated, accessible and free Jerusalem prove beyond the shadow of any doubt.

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



Parashah of the Week - Behaalotekha  
A Very Humble Man

Towards the end of our Parashah, the Torah tells us that Miriam and Aharon, while speaking to each other, complained and disapproved of Moshe's character and prophetic status. But even when Moshe Rabbenu became aware of the criticism of his siblings, he kept silence and did not counter. The Torah then states, "Now Moshe was a very humble man, more than any other man on the face of the earth." Indeed, Moshe was most humble and attained the greatest level of prophecy. But, what is the true meaning of humility and why is this quality praise by so many?

Addressing their criticism, Rabbi Yishak Shrem (1) explains that Miriam and Aharon thought that Moshe saw himself greater than them as he separated himself from others and even from his own wife. Based on the words of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, Rabbi Shrem states that in truth, Moshe in his modesty, never sought any special status. (2) Making the connection in between prophecy and humility, HaRambam states that in order for someone to attain prophecy, one must be wealthy, wise and strong. (3) Rabbi Hayim Vidal Anjel (4) comments that Maimonides' statement applies to modest individuals, to be humble means to know how to measure one's actions and behaviour. (5) Real strength means to be able to control one's desires.

Interestingly, Rabbi Angel's words find an echo within modern researchers and scholars. Mike Austin, Ph.D., professor of philosophy at Eastern Kentucky University states, "A big part of humility is knowing our own limits, our strengths and weaknesses, morally or otherwise." And as stated by Maimonides, he adds, "But

beyond just knowing ourselves, humility can also build upon other positive traits that we already have. Studies have associated humility with healthy adjustment, good leadership and other positive emotions."

He describes other outstanding characteristics that come from humility, he states, "People who practice humility tend to reflect inward, but when it comes to where they focus their energy, it's all about other people." He writes that humble people tend to place others before themselves, but are sensitive to their own selves. He writes further, "Some people think of humility as thinking little of yourself, but I would say it's someone who just doesn't think about themselves that much." He explains further, "Their focus is just outward. They have a real interest in others and their contributions to the world." Humble people have more courage to try new things, he writes that when there is less pressure to be perfect one is free to take more risks. Great success can be attained by getting in touch with our modest side and it does not require much self-deprecation.

Rabbi Abraham ben HaRambam, the son of Maimonides, adds other traits that are common amongst humble people. He states that modest people recognize that they stand in front of G-d and they also acknowledge when they stand in front of greater people than them. They remember that they are equal to everyone else, they are never arrogant to others and always pleasant. Humble individuals are always first to greet others and are always ready to return a greeting to Jews and non-Jews alike. When in public, they know their place, when to stand out and when not to. Amongst other insights, he states that when encountering arrogant people - those that are modest - tend to stay away and not to dwell much on those personalities.



**Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Beha'aloteha  
by Rabbi Marc D. Angel**

Some years ago, a seventh grade student in a yeshiva day school asked me a serious question. His Rebbi was teaching the class about the sin of embarrassing another person. The Rebbi stated that if A embarrasses B, then Hashem transfers all the mitzvot of A to B, and all the sins of B to A. The student was puzzled by the severity of this punishment, and he asked me: "Is this really true?"

While not wanting to undermine the authority of the Rebbi, I also did not want this student to think that the Rebbi's words were literally true. Indeed, the Rebbi's statement is problematic in various ways. 1. Does anyone (except for a prophet) have first-hand knowledge as to how God decides on rewards and punishments? Isn't it pretentious in the extreme to attribute policies to God, when in fact there is no way to verify such claims? 2. Is it proper religious education to present God in such a way as to make Him appear egregiously unjust? How is it fair to deprive a person of all his/her mitzvot and to transfer them to one he/she has embarrassed? How is it fair for God to transfer all the sins of the victim to the one who embarrassed him/her? 3. Does the Rebbi imagine that his simplistic lesson will be accepted blindly and unthinkingly by his students? Does he really think they will now be less likely to embarrass one another because they fear such dire consequences from God?

I told the seventh grader that the Rebbi was drawing on a classic Midrashic style of rhetoric. The lesson is not to be taken as literally true, but is a figurative way of saying: embarrassing another person is a very bad thing to do. Similarly, Hazal taught that embarrassing someone is akin to murder. They did not mean that one was literally guilty of murder and subject to a death penalty; they used hyperbole to express the seriousness of the transgression.

When teaching the words of our Sages, we need to have the literary tact to know how they used language. If we teach hyperbolic statements as being literally true, then we not only misconstrue the teachings of our Sages, but we unwittingly mislead our students into believing problematic things. As they grow older and wiser, they may say to themselves: if our Rebbis were mistaken on this, perhaps they were mistaken on many other matters.

In this week's Torah portion, we read: "And the man Moses was very humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth" (Bemidbar 12:3). When we read the accounts of Moses in the Torah, we do indeed see instances where he displayed humility. But we also see many examples of strong public action: he confronted Pharaoh fearlessly; he led the Israelites with fortitude. Although he described himself as having a "heavy tongue" and lacking eloquence, Moses spoke to the Israelites with strength and great oratorical skill. In what sense was Moses "very humble?"

We generally identify humility with meekness, shyness, quietude. Yet, perhaps the Torah is indicating another perspective on true humility. Moses was the most humble person specifically because he was the person who came closest to God, who spoke to God "face to face." Because he confronted God on such a high level, Moses was the human being who best understood the ultimate limitations of humanity. While others were living on the mundane level—filled with competitiveness and jealousy and interpersonal strife—Moses lived on an entirely different plane. He achieved exceeding humility by being as close as possible to the eternal and infinite God. His grand vision transcended petty human jealousies and strife. The closer one is to God, the loftier one's religious vision becomes. The loftier one's religious vision, the more humble one becomes.

This humility does not necessarily manifest itself in meekness and shyness. Rather, it manifests itself in a spiritual wisdom and serenity that rises above the human fray, and in an overwhelming desire to live life in context with eternal God. It necessarily leads to an honest evaluation of what we know, and what we do not know, and what we cannot know.

I believe that this lesson very much applies to the way we live and teach Torah. While none of us will reach the level of Moses, all of us can aspire to a true humility that entails intellectual honesty, compassion, and a genuine knowledge of our limitations. Since we are not prophets, we should not speak as though we are prophets; we should not speak with certainty of supernatural things beyond our ken; we should not make claims about how God does or doesn't mete out punishments. When we read rabbinic teachings that go beyond these basic guidelines, then we should understand them in their literary, rhetorical spirit. As we learn in Pirkei Avot: "Sages, be very careful with your words." Just as proper words can bring people closer to Torah, improper words can ultimately alienate people from Torah.

## **Congratulations to Sadis Matalon (Born in Athens)**

Matalon Named 2021 Dean's Excellence Award Winner in Research  
Thank you Anna Frances Matathias for this article

Sadis Matalon, Ph.D., Dr.Sc. (Hon.), FAPS, Distinguished Professor and Alice McNeal Endowed Chair in the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine, is the senior faculty winner of the 2021 Dean's Excellence Award in Research.



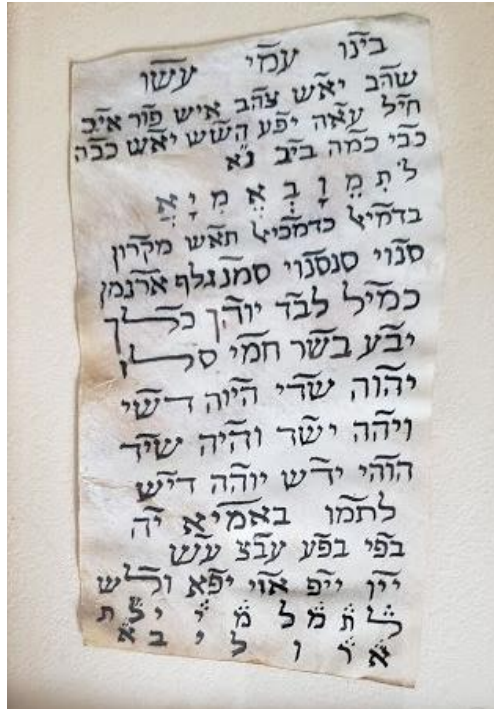
Matalon was born in Athens, Greece, and came to the United States in 1966 as an undergraduate Fulbright Scholar, earning his degree in physics from Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He earned both his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota; his research exploring novel treatments for lung disease has been continuously funded by the NIH since 1978. In 1987, he received an American Lung Association Career Investigator Award, which he used to study the role of an artificial version of a substance in the lungs—pulmonary surfactant—in repairing severe lung injury. Matalon also received a MERIT from the National Institute of Health for his studies to understand the mechanisms by which viruses damage the lungs.

Throughout his 34 years at UAB, Matalon has tirelessly showcased his dedication to his research and the department. He serves as the vice chair and director of the Division of Molecular and Translational Biomedicine and is also the founding director of the UAB Pulmonary Injury and Repair Center in the School of Medicine. Previously, he was the associate editor of *News in Physiological Sciences* (1997–2003) and associate editor and deputy editor of the *American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology* (2003–2011). He has been a member of the American Physiological Society since 1975 and has served on the editorial board of *AJP-Lung* since 1994. His success as a distinguished researcher culminated in him being named editor-in-chief of *AJP-Lung* (2012–2018) and editor-in-chief of *Physiological Reviews* (2018–2023). He has published more than 280 articles in peer-reviewed journals and received two honorary Doctor of Science degrees from the University of Thessaly and the University of Athens, Greece.

"This award celebrates a story of a distinguished life of science and a remarkable contribution that spans five decades," said Dan E. Berkowitz, MB BCh, chair of the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine. "This award also celebrates a career of collaboration, devotion, and dedication to students and mentees. It is this intellectual curiosity, grit, mentorship, and lifelong learning and hard work that define Dr. Matalon. There is no one that I believe is more deserving of this award than he."

## Looking for Our Help

Anita Altman would love to know what this document says.



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My grandmother's name was Fortuni Vituli (maiden name). Her first husband's last name was Matza so that would have been her married name when she returned after the war. She was the only one from her large family who was living in Greece. The rest of her family lived in Albania where they were all saved by their Muslim neighbors.

My grandmother returned to Janina but I am not sure how long she stayed there. She ultimately went to Gjirakastra to reunite with her family there (parents, grandmother, brothers and sisters). At some point between liberation and the Albanian timeline she met another Greek Jewish man who ultimately became my grandfather. He too was a Holocaust survivor but had lost his family (wife and children). His name was Isak Jakoel.

At one point you mentioned that you had some interest with her maiden name: Vituli. I am curious if you have info about origins of the name as well. I live in Brooklyn with my wife and children.

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This photo was taken in Long Beach, NY. Looking for clues related to who erected this memorial.



## Photos of the Month



Corfu 1930s

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As we come out of the pandemic, we are overjoyed to print the pictures of our "heroes." For many of our seniors, these last 14 months have been particularly hard, many sheltered away from their loved ones in facilities dedicated to protecting the most vulnerable. Therefore we honor our "heroes." Here is beautiful 93 year old Annette Politis Binder. Send us pictures of your senior heroes. We would especially like to see photos of the happy reunions with loved ones.



**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 online on our website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) by clicking the Donate button in the upper left corner.**

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



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280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002  
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Email: [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)**

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