



Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

August 2025 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This month, at nightfall on August 2, Jews around the world will commemorate Tisha B'Av, the 9th day of the month of Av, which is the darkest day on the Jewish calendar. On this day we fast and mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and many other calamities. This year, Tisha B'Av feels even more relevant as we continue to mourn the lives of Jews murdered on and after October 7th, and are fearful for the lives of the remaining hostages in Gaza. As we reflect on this sad day, let us pledge to bring more light into the world and work to combat the hate and pain the Jewish community is currently facing.



This month's newsletter is sponsored by Homeric Tours. A family run operation, Homeric Tours came to fruition 50 years ago in a tiny second-floor walk-up on the west side of Manhattan. A pioneer in the travel sector, the company has seen exponential growth curating exceptional journeys to Greece, the Mediterranean, and beyond. Although a lot has changed since its inception the core values of Homeric tours remain the same, passion and love for travel. Learn more at <https://www.homerictours.com/>

This newsletter, our 196th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

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

We are open for Shabbat services 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 on Sundays and during the week by appointment. Email info@kkjsm.org to make an appointment. If you wish to sponsor a newsletter, contact us at info@kkjsm.org

Passings



We mourn the passing of the President of the Jewish Community of Corfu, Zacharias Matathias, who passed away in the early hours of Monday June 23, 2025 at the age of 73. His loss shocked the local community and the Jewish community of the island, which he had served continuously since 2014, when he was first elected to the position of president. Zacharias Matathias also contributed to KIS, of which he was a member during the three-year period 2016-2019. His funeral took place on June 25, 2025, at the Corfu Jewish cemetery, in the presence of the entire Jewish community and local authorities, led by the current Mayor and the former ones, and representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Diocese, as well as local residents.

Simchas

In July we celebrated the 91st birthday of Rose Eskononts. An early birthday present was the birth of her first great-grandchild.

We continue to celebrate the birth of Micah Elliot Esmaelzada. Born May 29, 2025. Proud parents Rachel Esmaelzada and Mathew Esmaelzada, grandparents, Laurie & Mark Serwetz and Beth & Zia Esmaelzada, and great-grandparents Rose (Capon) Eskononts & Murray Eskononts OBM.



We celebrate the 102nd birthday of Esta Varon.



We celebrate the 100th birthday of Phyllis Halio, mother of our dear friend Joe Halio.

We celebrate the birth of baby boy Abraham to our friend Rabbi Isaac Choua and Rachel Fogel Choua.



Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

In July we welcomed many new visitors to our synagogue for services and for tours of our museum. We were honored to welcome Zakinos Koen, who is a board member of the Jewish Museum of Greece and cousin of Rabbi Gabriel Negrin. He shared a special silver Shaddai amulet with us that was made by Rabbi Moshe Pesah from Volos. Alan Mustacchi, whose roots are from Corfu, visited KKJ, and his parents had their aufruf at KKJ many years ago. We welcomed an author who is writing a new historical novel about a Jewish woman in Salonika during WWII, and we welcomed many others for our recent Jewish genetics presentation.



Zakinos Koen & Alon Binyaminov



Alan Mustacchi

Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Our DNA, Our Story: The Jewish Genetic Discovery Foundation

On July 27th we hosted a fascinating presentation from the Jewish Genetic Discovery Foundation led by our community member Dr. Josh Lipson on recent genetic research and what it reveals about Jewish history across communities. The Jewish Genetic Discovery Foundation is a new nonprofit initiative dedicated to fostering genetic research on underrepresented Jewish communities, including Romaniote and Sephardic Jews, and helping uncover the hidden histories that our genes can reveal about our heritage. We had a packed house and it was very exciting to host the launch of this new initiative. You can get involved and learn more by emailing them at info@JewishGeneticDiscovery.org

Watch a video of the presentation here: <https://youtu.be/y7rfmPkzNfs>



Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

Launch of Siddur Yismah Libeinu – September 7 at 1pm

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG

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



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

TORAH & TAVERNA NIGHT

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

Thursday September 4 at 7:30pm

Join us for an engaging evening of Jewish insights,
savor delicious Greek food and drinks, and enjoy live
music with a rotating cast of guest musicians

Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

RSVP to Amarcus@kkjasm.org

Upcoming Events of Interest

Sephardic Musical Evening & Dinner – August 10 at 7:30pm

Learn more and register [Here](#)



Sephardic Musical Evening
An Unforgettable Night of Hazzanut, Torah & Piyyutim
Featuring some of the most gifted and inspiring hazzanim & musicians from across the
Syrian, Turkish, Spanish & Portuguese, and Moroccan traditions.



Dr. S. Torjman-Thomas · Rabbi J. Varon · Rabbi F. Varon · Benny Zalta · Rev. Z. Edinger · Mark Faiena

Sunday, August 10, 2025
7:30 PM – Dinner, Concert & Words of Torah
Early Bird Until August 1 - \$36 | General Admission - \$54

Tribeca Synagogue
49 White St, New York, NY 10013



Keynote Speaker
Rabbi Joseph Dweck



The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood of America
La Ermandad Sefaradi



THE
HABURA



TriBeCa
SYNAGOGUE



American
Sephardi
Federation

RSVP Required at tinyurl.com/sephardichazzanut

**Greek Language Online Learning Program for Children & Adults
Led by the Jewish Community of Athens**

The Jewish Community of Athens continues offering Greek language distance-learning classes ("Greek e-Learning") for the 5th consecutive year. The lessons are addressed to both children and adults. Our teachers have extensive experience in teaching the Greek language, and classes are conducted using either English or Hebrew.

Register by completing your details at the following link by Monday, August 18th, 2025:
<https://tinyurl.com/Greeke-learning2025-2026> For more information email: pmo@athjcom.gr



**e-Learning for adults
and children living abroad
GREEK LANGUAGE COURSES**

Wanting
to learn Greek
with a personal
touch?

Would you like
to strengthen
your Greek
language skills?

Would you like
to maintain
a Greek Jewish
Connection?

Would you like
to learn Greek
by a native
Greek speaker?



Course details

September 2025 – May 2026

1-2 times per week depending on the age group / Small groups

Yearly cost: €550 / \$638 / NIS 2171

Please register with the following form
<https://tinyurl.com/Greeke-learning2025-2026>
and we will be in touch with you after the deadline
as to the details of the date and times.

e-learning

Registration deadline:
Thursday 31st July 2025

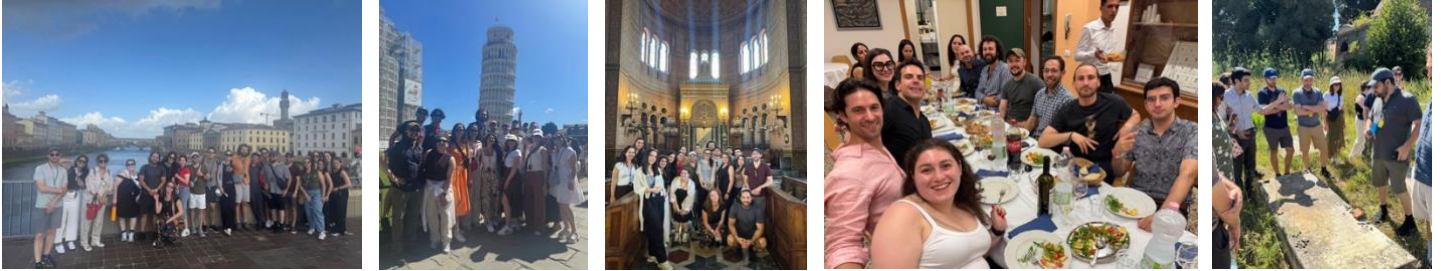
*Minimum class size is required for course
to take place.*

For additional information please e-mail: pmo@athjcom.gr or call +30 210 220 5915

Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Italy – Recap

Our Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network hosted a special tour of Jewish Italy in July with 24 community members, and we had an amazing experience. First, we kicked off the tour by visiting the gorgeous sites of Florence, including the Great Synagogue, the Duomo, and the Ponte Vecchio, and we savored delicious Florentine Jewish food. Next we visited Pisa and Livorno and learned about the storied Jewish presence of these historic communities. We even prayed at the grave of the famous Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh in the Livorno Jewish cemetery.



Next, we travelled to Rome where we visited the Great Synagogue of Rome, the Jewish Museum and Ghetto, the Coliseum and Roman Forum, Arch of Titus, and Vatican. We saw so many amazing sites, ancient buildings and monuments, and magnificent works of arts. We also experienced a beautiful traditional Italian Jewish Shabbat. We were proud to walk in the footsteps of past Jewish communities going back more than 2,000 years, and even though the Roman Empire is gone, we know that Am Yisrael Chai!



Finally, we travelled south, where we visited the synagogue in Naples, toured the ancient ruins of Pompeii, hiked to the top of Mount Vesuvius, and swam in the gorgeous water on the island of Capri. Local Jewish community member Roberto Modiano, whose family has roots from Salonica, guided us throughout Naples and helped make our trip so special. Our farewell dinner even featured live traditional Neapolitan music. Thank you to everyone who joined us and we can't wait to see everyone again soon!



Message from Theo Canter
KKJ Community Engagement Fellow



Shalom uVeraha dear friends and community members,

Summer is in full swing and our members are out and about in the world. A personal highlight of the summer so far has been joining our Young Professionals trip to Italy. We visited many museums, historical sites, cemeteries, and especially synagogues. These buildings reflected the full stylistic grandeur of their historical context, truly inspiring contemplation and prayer. It was a reminder and a point of pride of how our people have maintained our unique heritage while learning from the broader world around us - everything from science to architecture to philosophy.

On my own in the past few weeks, I have been traveling all across Europe: I attended the Black Mountains Cultural Festival in Epirus, just outside Ioannina, and joined the days-long celebration of Epirotic melodies, many of which remind me deeply of our Romaniote tunes from Tefila.

Last week at the Weimar Jewish Culture Festival, I studied with an ensemble of young musicians from Greece, Turkey, and Germany - studying the shared tunes between the many peoples of the Balkans. At many moments, we have played songs that each of us know lyrics to in a different language - Greek, Ladino, Hebrew, Arabic, and more.

Now in Berlin, I am leading a special week of education at the Berlin University Hillel, teaching a diverse group of students how the story of the Greek Jewish community's resilience and diversity can inspire others around the world today.

Teaching all these students, young and old, across the summer has reminded me how special and unique our community is. It's a reminder that we must never grow stagnant in our practice or our thought. As we enjoy the remainder of the summer, I wish you all blessings to keep growing in our learning and thought, and to be the people and the Jews that this moment needs.

Kalo kalokairi (have a happy summer).

Sincerely,
Theo

This month's newsletter is sponsored by Homeric Tours

A family run operation, Homeric Tours came to fruition 50 years ago in a tiny second-floor walk-up on the west side of Manhattan. A pioneer in the travel sector, the company has seen exponential growth curating exceptional journeys to Greece, the Mediterranean, and beyond. Although a lot has changed since its inception the core values of Homeric tours remain the same, passion and love for travel. Learn more at <https://www.homerictours.com/>

The desire to constantly improve in order to provide exceptional experiences in the travel sector led to the establishment of the San Marco group of hotels which comprises two 5 star properties: the San Marco & Epic Blue in Mykonos Island, Greece.

Perched above 'Houlakia Bay' a mere 4 km from Mykonos town, the San Marco & Epic Blue hotels fully encapsulate the Mykonian experience by embracing Cycladic minimalism and panoramic views of the Aegean Sea.

The San Marco, authentic to the Mykonian charm and hospitality consists of 84 elegant rooms & suites many featuring private balconies or terraces with Aegean views setting up a serene and peaceful experience.

The contemporary elegance of Epic Blue redefines luxury and invites you to immerse yourself in the essence of modern Mykonian living. It features 52 suites and villas with jacuzzies, private pools and breathtaking views of the Aegean.

Learn more at <https://www.homerictours.com/>



News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina

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 Greece and 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, Lesvos, 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.

A silver Megillah, 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.

In the late 1800s, 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 the Romaniote Jews of Greece preserved in NYC

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.

The only remedy for this situation, they realized, was to form their own synagogues, which they did at once. One of them, the [Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum](#), is still in existence and thriving today.

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 forty days of their lives. 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 Elissaf, the mayor of Ioannina. Dr. Elissaf, himself a descendant of the historic Romaniote community, was the first Jewish mayor of a Greek city. For more information on the Jewish Museum of Greece, [please see their website, here](#).

Teaching Seminar Held in Ioannina

On June 16-18, Centropa held its annual Greek teacher seminar "Teaching about 20th Century Greek Jewish History and the Holocaust" in Ioannina in partnership with the Jewish Museum of Greece. The seminar was held under the auspices of the General Secretariat of Religious Affairs and the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

Out of 240 applicants, Centropa invited 32 participants to attend this three-day seminar hosted by the Historical Archive of Epirus. We explored the Jewish traces of Ioannina in a walking tour led by Zanet Battinou, director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, and visited the Kahal Kadosh Yashan synagogue — one of the oldest Romaniote synagogues still in use.

Zanet Battinou and her colleague Dr. Eleni Kouki from the Jewish Museum of Greece provided expert lectures. Fabian Rühle, Director of Centropa Germany and Marina Vlachou, a university teacher from Athens, held a workshop on using Centropa materials in the classroom. The seminar also included the screening of "A bookstore in six chapters," a film about the Molho family from Thessaloniki from the Centropa archive.

The event was co-funded by the [European Commission](#) under the CERV Operational Grant as well as the [Claims Conference \(Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany\)](#) (Claims), [Bundesfinanzministerium](#) (the German Federal Ministry of Finance) and [EVZ Foundation](#).

Centropa was founded in 2000 with the goal of preserving Jewish memory in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, and the former Soviet Union, then disseminating our findings to the widest possible audience. Learn more at <https://www.centropa.org/en>



Rhodes

Holocaust Memorial Day 2025 in Rhodes

From July 18 to 20, 2025, the Jewish Community of Rhodes organized a series of events for Holocaust Remembrance Day, which began with a memorial service at the Jewish cemetery and a service at the Synagogue in the afternoon.

The main event took place on 20.7.2025 at the Kal Shalom Synagogue, in the Medieval City of Rhodes, which included a memorial service by the Rabbi of Athens Gabriel Negrin, candle lighting, greetings, a keynote speech and the laying of wreaths at the Holocaust Memorial, in Jewish Martyrs Square.

At the event at the Synagogue, the vice-president of the Jewish Community of Rhodes, Mr. Yomtov Robisa, the general secretary of the Jewish Community of Rhodes and Treasurer of KIS, Mr. Daniel Benardout, the MP of the Dodecanese, Mr. Vasilios Ypsilantis, the deputy regional governor, Mr. Apostolos Asprakis, the deputy mayor and deputy mayor for economics and the medieval city and monuments, Mr. Konstantinos Chalkias, and the general secretary of KIS, Victor Eliezer, delivered speeches.

The keynote speaker of the event was Dr. Vasiliki Giakoumaki.

Letters sent by the Ambassador of the State of Israel, Mr. Noam Katz, and the MP for the Dodecanese and former Deputy Minister of Shipping & Island Policy, Mr. Ioannis Pappas, were also read.

The events were attended by ND MP Mr. Vasilis Ypsilantis, the Deputy Governor of the South Aegean Mr. Apostolos Asprakis, the Press Secretary of the South Aegean Region Mr. Costas Taraslias, the Deputy Mayor Mr. Costas Chalkias from the Holy Metropolis of Rhodes, His Eminence Bishop of Olympus Mr. Kyrillos, the Imam of Rhodes Mr. Hassan Kara Ali, the President of the Vakuf Mr. Vintimi Sali, representatives of the military port fire and police authorities, the president and members of the council of the Israeli Community of Rhodes, and several believers.

The events concluded in the afternoon of the same day with the presentation of the book "The last transport: The Holocaust in the eastern Aegean" by Anthony McElligott. The presentation of the book was made by historian Dimitrios Varvaritis, associate of the Jewish Museum of Rhodes, who discussed with the author and asked him questions about his work and research. The author analyzed the historical documentation of his book, illuminating the unknown and shocking aspects of the history of the Jewish communities of the Eastern Aegean during the Holocaust.



The Jewish Community of Rhodes after World War II: From Destruction to Revival [Full article Here](#)

The story of the Jewish community in Rhodes is a powerful testament to faith, loss, and resilience. After the tragedy of the Holocaust, the community not only survived but also rebuilt itself, keeping its heritage alive to this day.

The Day After the War

In 1944, Rhodes witnessed the mass deportation of its Jews. Only 151 survived the concentration camps, and 40 more were saved thanks to Turkish Consul Selahattin Ülkümen. Those rescued were forced to leave the island. Lucia Modiano-Sulam and Samuel Modiano were among the few who returned. Lucia cared for the synagogue until her death in 2010, and Samuel, who lives in Rome, spent summers on the island, helping preserve its memory.

Remembrance and Recognition

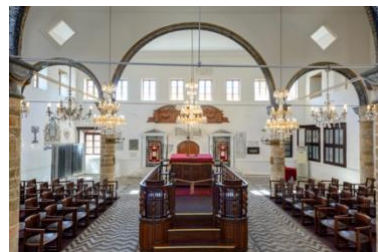
In 1946, when the Dodecanese joined Greece, Mayor Gabriel Charitos renamed the center of the Jewish quarter to "Jewish Martyr's Square" in honor of those lost. He also took part in international diplomatic efforts to establish the first borders of Israel, under the UN's guidance. supported diplomatic efforts around the founding of Israel.

Revival of the Community

In the early 1960s, a few Jewish families returned with support from the Central Jewish Board of Greece to reclaim properties and revive the community. Elias Soriano was the first post-war president, succeeded by his son Maurice. Despite challenges, the community remains active, managed by a three-member committee. Bella Restis served as president from 2000 to 2021, followed by her daughter Claudia in 2022.

Kahal Kadosh Shalom Synagogue

Built in 1577, it's the only pre-war synagogue still standing. Recognized in 2000 by the World Monuments Fund as a site of global cultural significance, the synagogue has been restored with European and local support. It remains active for events like weddings and bar mitzvahs and serves the global Rhodian Jewish diaspora.



Jewish Museum of Rhodes

Founded in 1997 by Aaron Hasson, the museum began as a photography exhibit and grew with community support. Since 2002, it has featured a permanent bilingual exhibition developed with the Jewish Museum of Greece. Additional renovations took place afterward, and in 2006, the museum reopened. The artifacts are donations from Rhodesis, some made through the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation and some directly to the museum, including religious items, household utensils, historical documents, religious books, costumes, and more. A full renovation in 2024 was funded by a European foundation, the local community, and the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation. Today, over 10,000 people visit annually, many of them non-Jews.



The Edmond Safra Library and Multipurpose Center

Opened in 2006 above the synagogue, the renovated area includes:

- The Edmond Safra Library
- Screening room and dining hall
- Fully stocked kitchen and outdoor patio

Safra has funded a visiting Rabbi for holidays since 1974, a commitment upheld by his foundation. Plans are underway to convert the space into a research center in honor of Bella Restis.



Cemetery: Destruction and Restoration

In 1938, the Italian authorities destroyed the old Jewish cemetery. Only 1,400 graves were saved and relocated; the rest were lost. In 1939, the community reburied remains in two mass graves and moved the graves of 18 rabbis. A Holocaust memorial was added in 1949, listing displaced families. A memorial for the 1940 Pencho shipwreck victims also stands here.



Since 1997, ongoing restoration has been funded by the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation, Maurice Amato Foundation, Aron Franco, and others. All gravestones have been photographed, translated, digitized, and repositioned to form an outdoor museum. A smaller museum nearby displays historic headstones and symbols, while a 2014 memorial honors 40 people killed in Allied bombings in 1944.

Memory, Diaspora, and Continuity

Since 2002, memorial ceremonies have brought together diaspora families. The synagogue has become a pilgrimage site symbolizing remembrance and renewal. The bond between Rhodes and its diaspora remains strong, guided by the principles of *Le Dor va Dor* (from generation to generation) and *Zakhor* (remember).

Continuing Research

In 2013, a joint project with the State Historical Archives, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and the Rhodes Community began digitizing Italian-era archives from 1912–1945—about 4 million pages. This effort has now concluded. Meanwhile, geophysical surveys led by the University of Hartford uncovered new insights beneath Rhodes' synagogues, adding to our understanding of Jewish life on the island.

The Rhodes Community didn't just survive; it became a beacon of historical memory, cultural strength, and spiritual continuity – a light that still shines in the Mediterranean.

Kos

In July 2025 a ceremony was held to unveil a new sign on the building of the Kos island administration where the Nazis concentrated the Jews from which they were moved to Athens and from there to Auschwitz.



Athens

A New Chapter in Athens Jewish Community Leadership

After 13 years of dedicated service and impactful leadership as Director of the Jewish Community of Athens, Ms. Taly Mair stepped down from her role. Her tenure was marked by significant contributions to the organization, efficiency, and infrastructure of the Community, as well as by the strengthening of ties with international institutions. Under her guidance, our Community achieved major milestones, was recognized as an official representative of the European Union for Greece's Cultural Route, and - with the support of our staff and volunteers - our social welfare services gained international recognition as a model of excellence, even among larger communities.



Moving forward, Ms. Taly Mair will assume the role of Special Advisor to the President, focusing on social welfare issues, cultural programming, international relations, collaboration with the MAZI project, and the planning of major events and projects in these areas. We deeply thank her for her invaluable contributions, wish her success in this new role, and congratulate her on simultaneously taking on the position of Director at the European Council of Jewish Communities.

Mr. Iakovos Atoun will now take on the position of Director of the Jewish Community of Athens. As the former Programs Director, he has played a key role in managing initiatives supported by the Lauder Foundation, shaping strategic projects of the Community Board, upgrading the Community website into a modern digital platform, and driving the overall modernization of our Community.

With extensive experience in finance, audit team management, human resources, and project management, Mr. Atoun brings vision, strategic thinking, and innovative ideas that will further strengthen the Community's operations and member services.

We warmly welcome Iakovos Atoun to his new role and wish him every success in his leadership.

In June the Jewish Museum of Greece unveiled two plaques in honor of Dr. Dimitri Argyriades, long time Board member of AFJMG, and donor. Another plaque was also unveiled in honor of the the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece for their contributions over the years to the Museum.



Antisemitic Attacks in Greece

Israeli teens say anti-Israel mob, armed with knives, attacked them in Rhodes Full article [Here](#)
Seeking to avoid Israel-related protest scuffle outside nightclub, youths say they tried to leave the area, but were pursued on motorcycles and on foot and were beaten as they hid

A group of Israeli teenagers was attacked early Wednesday July 23 by a gang of anti-Israel assailants while vacationing in the Greek island of Rhodes, the teens and their families said.

The teens told Hebrew media they were at the island's Hakuna Matata club, frequented by Israeli tourists, around 3 a.m., when anti-Israel demonstrators started rallying outside, sparking a confrontation, with the two sides shouting and cursing at each other.

"There was commotion and shouting, and we said we didn't want to get involved and we should go back to the apartment we'd rented," one of the teens, Shachar Gutman, recalled to the Ynet news site.

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"There was commotion and shouting, and we said we didn't want to get involved and we should go back to the apartment we'd rented," one of the teens, Shachar Gutman, recalled to the Ynet news site.

The teen said that as he and his friends were leaving the club, they happened upon some more of the pro-Palestinian demonstrators, "and one of them came up to us and asked if we were Israeli."

"He called out to all his friends — some 30 to 40 people — and they started to chase us. We also started to run, and we didn't think it was anything serious," he recalled.

"At one point there was a curve in the road and we didn't see them for a second — but then we heard motorcycles coming fast in our direction, and we realized there was nowhere to run."

Friedman told Ynet the assailants were armed with knives, and added: "I jumped up over a wall that I saw and hid there, and another friend saw steps and hid there. Another one hid behind a bush and another one behind a van. They came and kicked the one who was behind the van, and he begged for his life, that they wouldn't do anything to him. They photographed him and let him go."

"I've never been so afraid in my life. We just wanted to go to a club to have fun, and suddenly people with knives were chasing us. We were afraid it would end in a really bad way," he said.

Correspondence between Friedman and his parents in Israel, published by the news site, showed texts reading: "Urgent; answer; urgent; they're coming for us." The teen hid, and spoke briefly with his parents, who phoned the Foreign Ministry.

According to Channel 12, one of the teens caught in the assault was let go by the assailants after speaking some Dutch and convincing them he wasn't Israeli.

The 3 a.m. incident in Rhodes came less than a day after an Israeli-owned cruise ship was prevented from docking at the Greek island of Syros on Tuesday and was instead rerouted to Cyprus due to a large anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian protest taking place at the port.

Greece is a popular tourist destination for Israelis, and an estimated 621,000 visited the Hellenic Republic in 2024.

The country has seen a rise in antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents since the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led onslaught in southern Israel that started the war in Gaza.

Athens in particular has seen several attacks on Israeli tourists.

The Israeli National Security Council's current guidelines for travel to Greece put the country's threat level at two of a possible four, meaning Israelis and Jews are advised to take "increased precautionary measures" there.

Anti-Israel vandals descend on kosher eatery in Athens, threaten 'Zionists'

Attackers throw fliers at staff and patrons of King David Burger, spray-paint anti-Israeli slogans on walls and counters; owner says police investigating incident as a hate crime

A new Israeli-owned kosher restaurant in Athens was vandalized in Jul in what its owners said was an antisemitic attack, and which Greek authorities are treating as a likely hate crime.

King David Burger, which opened for business in the Greek capital in May, said in a post on social media on Sunday that at around 10 p.m. on Saturday, a group of six people entered the restaurant "and vandalized the place."



The masked attackers threw fliers at diners and staff and graffitied anti-Israel slogans on walls and counters, including "No Zionist is safe here," "Smash Zionism, fascism, colonialism," and "Israel Death Forces — rapists, torturers, murderers." The graffiti can be seen clearly in [video footage](#) of the incident posted to the restaurant's Instagram and TikTok pages.

The eatery, owned by Israeli businessman Tzvika Levinson, is located on the busy Ermou Road, just off the city's central Syntagma Square, and markets itself as a fast-casual dining option for Athens' Jewish residents and tourists alike.

"The restaurant displays kosher certification, clearly identifying it with Israel," Levinson told Israel Hayom on Sunday. He said that the vandals, whom he described as "pro-Palestinian anarchists," carried out the attack within a matter of seconds, "making intervention impossible."

He noted that the only staff members in the restaurant at the time of the attack were Greek nationals, and that his only Israeli staff member "arrived after the incident had concluded."

"When one employee attempted to leave, [the vandals] threatened him, saying, 'If you come out, it's over for you.'" Levinson told Israel Hayom.

Although he is currently in Israel, Levinson said he was in direct contact with the restaurant staff throughout the attack.

Levinson told the Israeli newspaper that suspects had been arrested in connection with the attack, which he said was being investigated as a hate crime. There was no announcement from Greek police.

However, police in Greece did announce that a leader of the Rouvikonas activist collective had been detained for questioning over a pro-Palestine march held on Friday, in which men wearing black uniforms emblazoned with the Palestinian flag marched through central Athens.

In the aftermath of the King David Burger attack, before the fliers had even been picked up off the ground, fans of the eatery turned out to show their support, footage published on the eatery's social media pages showed. "We wanted to say that such actions only strengthen us and the understanding of how much strength and unity our people have," the restaurant said of the attack.

The eatery said that it was operating on Sunday as usual. Levinson urged the Athens municipality to take steps to prevent such an incident from happening again, noting the large number of Israelis in the Greek capital, which is home to a large Israeli expat community and a top tourism destination. "Hebrew dominates conversation throughout this Athens neighborhood," he said. "Over 5,000 Israelis visit daily. Losing this Israeli presence would be tragic."

Athens has seen several attacks on Israeli tourists since October 7, 2023, when thousands of Hamas-led terrorists stormed southern Israel and killed some 1,200 people, taking 251 hostages.

In February, a group of Israeli tourists was attacked on Ermou Road after they were overheard speaking Hebrew. Last year, Greek police arrested seven people accused of planning to attack a synagogue and an Israeli-owned hotel in central Athens. The year before, Greece detained two people thought to have been sent by Iran to attack a kosher restaurant in the city.

The Israeli National Security Council's current guidelines for travel to Greece put the country's threat level at two, of a possible four, meaning Israelis and Jews are advised to take "increased precautionary measures" there.

KIS Statement on Antisemitic Attacks

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece expresses the strong concern of Greek Jews over the series of serious incidents that have recently occurred on the streets of Athens and in other areas of the country, which aim to intimidate and terrorize Israeli tourists and citizens of the Jewish religion.

We reiterate that criticizing, severely criticizing, the actions of the Israeli government and the statements of government officials does not constitute anti-Semitism. However, they do not stop at this criticism.

Of particular concern are the actions of organized "anti-Zionist" groups, as well as vandalism against Jewish landmarks and businesses owned by Israeli citizens. The recent incident in Syros, where a cruise ship carrying Israeli tourists was blocked, was a serious incident, violating the laws and principles of hospitality and freedom of movement.

Such actions not only harm the Jewish community and Israeli visitors, but undermine democracy, the rule of law, and Greece's image as a safe country for all.

We call on the State to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of citizens and visitors from any form of racist or anti-Semitic violence.

Tolerance of antisemitism and hate speech has no place in modern Greek society.

Because antisemitism begins with attacks against Jews but does not stop with Jews.

Athens, July 24 2025, Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece

'Rise of hatred is concerning,' Gen. Sec. of Greek Jewish body tells 'Post' Full article [Here](#)

The general secretary of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece said that Jews are welcome in Greece, as "nobody checks the religion of any visitor."

"Come to Greece and ignore the extreme cries of hatred and fanaticism," the general secretary of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece – Victor Eliezer – told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday.



The Post contacted Eliezer following a spate of incidents involving Jews or Israelis in Greece over the last few weeks, including a pro-Palestinian protest that blocked Israelis attempting to disembark from a ship in Syros, an alleged attack against Israeli teens in Rhodes, and an attack on King David Burger, a kosher eatery in Athens. Notwithstanding these, Eliezer told the Post that Jews are welcome in Greece. He said that "even religious Jews can move freely on the streets of Athens, and to date we have not received a complaint of an attack against any religious Jew." The exception to this was an attempted attack on the Chabad kosher restaurant in Athens a few months ago, when two Pakistanis were arrested.

He did note, however, that there are groups that come "mainly from the extreme Left," and "demonstrate against Israel and Zionists, accuse the Israelis of genocide in Gaza, write anti-Israeli slogans, put up posters against the presence of Israelis in Greece and recently attacked two businesses of Israeli citizens and did not allow the disembarkation of Israelis on the island of Syros."

Advice for Israelis visiting Greece

But, according to Eliezer, these are only a small minority.

"The Greeks are a hospitable people, and I think that in no way do these extreme acts represent my fellow citizens," he told the Post. "However, I would tell our Israeli visitors not to respond to provocations that aim to create noise and impressions; to come to Greece and ignore the extreme cries of hatred and fanaticism."

In terms of the permanent Jewish community of Greece, Eliezer said they are "not afraid" but are nevertheless "concerned by observing the phenomena of extreme rhetoric against Zionism and the State of Israel that go beyond the limits of criticizing the policy of a government."

Eliezer explained that antisemitism in Greece used to be based on prejudice and came from the "far Right and the neo-Nazi party that flourished in Greece during the economic crisis from 2012 to 2019."

"However, relations with Israel have developed rapidly under all governments, from the socialists of George Papandreou to the leftists of Alexis Tsipras and the conservatives of Antonis Samaras and the current Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis [resulting in] a strategic alliance between the two countries."

"After October 7, 2023, the extreme rhetoric of the Populist extreme Left has caused this 'Judeophobia' [taking the term from the French philosopher Pierre-André Taghief]. That is, they question Israel's right to exist and identify with the views of the Iranian ayatollahs. They adopt the slogan "From the river to the sea." This is the new form of antisemitism in Greece. The demonization of the State of Israel and the delegitimization of its right to exist."

He reiterated, however, that these phenomena and beliefs do not represent the majority of Greek society, adding that the government spokesman and other ministers of the Greek government, as well as leading figures of the opposition Socialist party, were quick to condemn any threat against Greek Jews or Israeli citizens.

Additionally, Eliezer explained that the prosecutor's office investigates all incidents and if a violation of the law is found, criminal prosecution is initiated.

In terms of communal security, Eliezer said that there was excellent cooperation with the Citizen Protection Ministry and the Greek Police, and that "fortunately to date we have not had any serious attacks against the Jewish Community and holy sites such as synagogues, cemeteries, museums and monuments."

There had been some graffiti on the walls of the Larissa synagogue and the Volos cemetery, but no serious damage was caused, he said. "In both cases, the local authorities reacted and condemned these acts."

How to explain to the Israeli cousin? Full article by Minos Moysis in Greek [Here](#)

In Israel today, my extended family consists of: An elderly paternal aunt (1), my six first cousins with their spouses (12), their thirteen children, some with their spouses (21), and their ten grandchildren (10). A total of forty-four people (44).

Of these relatives, my aunt and three of my first cousins were born and raised in Greece, while all of my first cousins also have Greek citizenship and speak Greek, as do some of their children. It goes without saying that they (also) feel Greek and that Greece is their homeland, in addition to Israel, where they live.



They come to Greece very often, some 3 or 4 times a year to see family here, others usually for their summer holidays on the islands, but also for family gatherings on the occasion of happy or sad events. Some have also acquired residence in Greece and reside here for long periods of time.

My first cousin, Itzik, is the most regular visitor of all to Greece. Last summer, Itzik and his wife brought their children Achiya and Eden with their Israeli girlfriends. They all traveled together throughout Greece. In the village of Stomio in Kissavos, where Itzik has been many times, his children met the family of Stavros Diamantis, the man who hid their grandfather's family of eight and my uncle, Makis, in his house during the occupation. "Mr. Stavros, your grandfather, saved my grandfather, and we owe it to him that we are alive," 35-year-old Eden said in broken Greek to 37-year-old Stavros Diamantis, and they fell into each other's arms, even though they had met less than half an hour earlier.

All of my cousins, their spouses, their children, their grandchildren, have served their terms in the Israeli army, and some who happened to do so in non-peaceful times fought. The family counts one deceased member who was killed as a soldier in the Lebanon War in 1982. In the Gaza War, from October 2023, three of my first cousins' children were called up as reservists to fight and fought.

This is pretty much my own family in Israel.

On Wednesday morning, Itzik called me. He had just learned and seen the videos of the incident in Syros, and in fact, a friend of his with his wife was also on the cruise ship. "What's going on?", Itzik asks me. "Don't they want us in Greece?" His voice was really shaking, we were talking and he was boiling with anger and indignation. A Greek had just realized that because he has the misfortune of also being Israeli, he wouldn't be able to go down to Syros if he himself was on the ship.

Now go and explain it to Itzik, who, although he knows Greece very well, couldn't fathom this. Now go and explain it to Itzik:

That this demonstration of activism on Syros was very well organized for days with posters and flyers that were circulated on the island, some even signed by institutional teachers' union bodies.

That everyone knew this incident would happen and no one did anything to prevent it. Not the prosecutors present, not the competent Coast Guard, not the Mayor.

That we have a law in Greece and it is clear and provides for strict penalties for those who take actions based on origin, nationality, religion. But that we have the habit of not applying the laws so as not to cause an escalation of actions.

That for some time now, actions against Israeli citizens in Greece have become almost a daily occurrence. That every Israeli is considered a murderer or potential murderer. That for the first time, the reaction and opposition towards a state and the policy of its government has been transferred to the citizens of that state, who are collectively accused of being bloodthirsty murderers.

That, in all these incidents, hatred, racism, anti-Semitism are produced and reproduced and the ball is rolling in for all of us, Israelis and non-Israeli Jews. That in 21st century Greece, the most dangerous dimension of racism has returned and is taking shape, that of collective responsibility, which in history has left only devastation.

That a bunch of supposedly sensitive leftists who, for them, human rights were born on October 8, 2023, not on the 7th, do whatever they like, curse and bully without any consequence, constantly remaining unscathed, as if, my child, there is a tacit agreement that they are useful for the balance of the system.

Now go explain to Itzik...

That in the country where his parents were born and of which he himself is a proud citizen, the next time he is in Athens and goes down with his wife to his beloved Psirri, they better speak English to each other.

That at every port in the country, and he has passed through almost all the ports of the Cyclades, they will welcome him with banners and slogans as an unwanted Israeli murderer and ask him to leave.

That the policy of the democratically elected prime minister of his country, with whom he himself disagrees on many issues and with whom he protests against every Saturday night with thousands of other Israelis, has become a reason to treat him as a pariah, a unique phenomenon, extremely racist, extremely inhumane.

"Itshik, calm down," I decided to tell him instead of explaining all this to him, which I can't even explain to myself. "It's something f@l@cks, as you know well in Greece, Israelis are welcome and people treat them well. It will pass." And I hung up the phone.

Of course, I have big reservations about the latter. But I didn't want to upset Itzik any more.

Note: All the details, names, and events are real. I did not write a novel.

Minos Moysis is a former president of the Jewish Community of Athens

Thessaloniki

83rd Anniversary of the "Black Saturday" of Thessaloniki

The "Black Saturday" of July 11, 1942, in Eleftherias Square in Thessaloniki, marks the beginning of the implementation of Adolf Hitler's "Final Solution" plan, which led to the deportation and extermination of 45.000 Thessaloniki Jews in Auschwitz and other hells of industrial death.



In Eleftherias Square, on that "Black Saturday" of July 11, 1942, the Nazis and their collaborators arrested and rounded up 9.000 Jewish men. There, in front of the eyes of hundreds of "spectators", under the scorching sun, the Nazis took away - every hour, every minute - the humanity of 9.000 people simply because they were born Jews. They humiliated and slandered them. Many of them were taken to labor camps and never returned. It was the beginning of the "absolute evil" that led to the Holocaust of 6.000.000 Jews, among them, 60.000 Greek Jews, many of whom, defending their homeland, fought against the Italian and German occupiers and breathed their last in the concentration camps with Greece deeply rooted in their souls.

It is the responsibility of all of us to make Freedom Square a place of remembrance again, so that citizens and visitors to the city can see the place of martyrdom, remember and learn how easily a society can be led down the path of barbarity if oblivion prevails. And today, we all must protect memory from all kinds of "willing" people to rewrite history, to trivialize the Holocaust, to demonize the Jews again.

The Holocaust Museum of Thessaloniki is currently under construction and symbolizes in practice the duty of all of us not to allow oblivion to prevail over memory.

Greek Ministry of Culture Describes Karya Railway Station in Fthiotida as a Historic Site

The Ministry of Culture is proceeding with the characterization of the Karya Railway Station area in Fthiotida as a historical site, following the positive opinion of the Central Council of Modern Monuments.

The Karya Station, as a place of important historical events, is a monument to the cruelty and atrocities of Nazism and is an integral part of the collective historical memory, not only for the Greeks, but also for the world community. The project served the supply needs of the Nazis, who had intensified their efforts to transport raw materials and military forces. The malnourished and exhausted workers were forced to break stones with their hands and load wagons under violent conditions. Many died either from exhaustion or from executions. After the completion of the works, the construction site was abandoned. The wooden barracks were removed by guerrillas, and today only a stone building and a well survive.



Minister of Culture Lina Mendoni stated: "Karya is a place of forced labor and a testimony to the Holocaust in Greece. It is one of the places where the Nazis implemented the policy of "extermination of Jews through forced labor". The workers had to open a cut in the side of a mountain for a railway line, under inhumane conditions, while many died during this process. 300 to 500 Jews from Thessaloniki worked at the construction site. The few survivors, upon their return to the city in August 1943, took the road to Auschwitz. For the designation of the Karya Railway Station as a historical site, evidence from an international research program was used that sheds light on the tragic history of Nazi forced labor in Greece. The Ministry of Culture, with this decision, as well as with the support of the joint exhibition organized in Athens and Berlin a year ago, dedicated to the forced labor of Greek Jews during the German occupation, recognizes the events in Karya and

pays tribute to the victims of Nazi forced labor in Greece. The surviving Ressler photographic archive constitutes rare documentation of the crime, while the rocky cut itself constitutes timeless testimony to the "extermination through labor" implemented by the Nazis in Karya. The Karya Railway Station constitutes a step towards historical vindication and the preservation of the collective memory of the Holocaust in Greece.

The aim of the Ministry of Culture is to carry out the necessary studies for the restoration of the Railway Station and its reuse as an exhibition space that preserves and highlights the memory of those who were victims of the hatred and atrocities of the Nazis."

The Service for Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Thessaly and Central Greece, within the framework of its mission to document and protect modern cultural assets, forwarded to the Directorate for the Protection and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Monuments a documentation file for the characterization of the Karya Railway Station in Fthiotida and the wider area of the Todt Organization construction site as a historical site, in accordance with articles 2 and 17 of Law. 4858/2021. The documentary material of the events in Karya emerged from the research project "Deadly Forced Labor in Karya - German Occupation and the Holocaust in Greece", which was carried out by the University of Osnabrück in collaboration with the Documentation Center for Nazi Forced Labor and the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. At the center of the research was the photographic archive of the German engineer Hans Hermann Rössler, which was rescued in 2002 by Andreas Assael, the son of a Holocaust survivor. The archive includes valuable photographs documenting the inhumane conditions of forced labor of hundreds of Greek Jews from the Thessaloniki ghetto at the Karya construction site in 1943. The research program identified material remains and other traces of the construction site and the living conditions of the Jews who were used in forced labor. In the autopsy carried out by the competent Service of the Ministry of Culture, it confirmed the historical character of the Karya Railway Station area.

Karya was located in the area of Italian occupation, but the Germans had full control of the railway network. The strategic importance of the point was decisive, as there the line passed near Lianokladi, an important sorting station. In 1943, Jewish men from Thessaloniki were taken to Karya in Fthiotida for forced labor. There, under the command of the German Organization Todt, and in order to serve the military needs of the Wehrmacht, they were asked to open a railway section 100 meters long and 20 meters deep in a rocky mountainside, in order to create a bypass line on the Athens-Thessaloniki route.

Here they worked like slaves for the Nazis Full article [Here](#)

A mission of German scientists investigated the decommissioned Karya station - a death camp for hundreds of Jews

Decades later, they could only search for fragments of history. In late March, German researchers combed the slopes of an eerie corner of Fthiotida with special radars, magnetometers and drones. They were at a crime scene, near the decommissioned railway station of Karya. They were guided by a rare photographic document from 1943 and the few available testimonies of survivors. Even though the landscape had been changed by the weeds they had grazed and the years of looting that had stripped the tracks bare, there was one sign they could not ignore. Ahead of them rose a 20-meter hill. Cut in two, it formed a large "V." It had been dug with shovels, picks, and hands by hundreds of Jews from Thessaloniki during Nazi forced labor in the summer of 1943.



The team from the University of Osnabrück recorded and photographed the entire area in videos and photos so that they could then create 3D models of it. But they also had to investigate something else: evidence of the possible existence of a mass grave in the wider area.

The rare document

It was April 2002 when Andreas Assael, an electrical engineer, graduate of the Technical University of Munich and history buff, discovered an album of photographs from the German Todt organization, which commissioned German companies to carry out technical projects in occupied countries, at an antiques market in Munich. "It was a thick folder. It started with a map of Greece and was followed by 400 photographs of works. The German engineer had taken them to document his work for the company," Mr. Assael, who collects photographs from the years of the Occupation, tells "K".

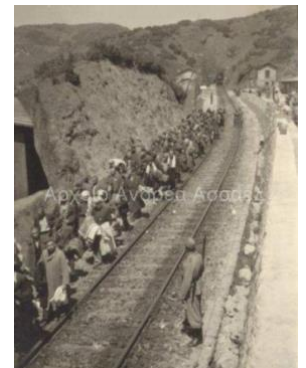


The gap opened by the forced labor of Jewish prisoners in 1943 as it can be seen today

He managed to distinguish in one of these images the figure of a worker wearing a star on his lapel. Above the photo was the inscription: "Karya, the workers are coming." He bought the album and in the following years carried out his own persistent research to piece together the story. His family in Thessaloniki was one of the few who had escaped with the help of their Christian fellow citizens and were not sent to the Nazi death camps.

As Mr. Assael recounts, he initially managed to locate one of the survivors in the Karya camp, Sam Nahmia, and showed him the photographs. "He was lucky because even though he had been badly hit in the leg, the head of the construction site spared his life and sent him to the hospital, instead of killing him on the spot," he says. "The work was done in horrible conditions, day and night, with dynamite, gunpowder and executions. They were given very little water all day long and for food a moldy piece of bread and a cabbage soup. It is described as the worst construction site that ever existed. Few were able to escape, because it was a very inaccessible place, in the middle of nowhere." The Germans had fortified the mountain with machine guns for fear of the rebels and the only entrance and exit were two tunnels, between which is the Karya station. But these were also kept.

Of the 400 photographs found by Mr. Assael, 80 correspond to the Karya camp. The album does not show the completion of the mountain cut and closes with tourist photographs of Athens. Mr. Assael also located other Karya escapees, in Israel and the USA, collected and recorded their stories, spoke with the post-war station guard, who was a witness as a child, as well as with other sources.



The material has been utilized in recent years by a multidisciplinary team of researchers to be exhibited in Germany and Greece in 2024. The project is being carried out by the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Topography of Terror Foundation, which are based in Germany, in collaboration with the University of Osnabrück and with the support of other institutions, such as the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens and the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

Mr. Assael has written a book about Karya, which is expected to be published when the relevant report is held. He also points out that he recently found documents that document which company and which individuals from Germany were responsible for the development of the railway project in Karya.

The construction sites: "The work was done in horrible conditions, day and night, with dynamite, gunpowder and executions. It is described as the worst construction site ever. Few were able to escape."

Historian Jason Chandrinos, who is participating in the project as a scientific director through the Documentation Center for Nazi Forced Labor in Berlin, explains to "K" that the exploitation of Greek Jews in forced labor is divided into two phases. The first begins on "Black Saturday", July 11, 1942, when the men of the Jewish community gather in Eleftherias Square in Thessaloniki. They are subjected to public humiliation, recorded and sent to labor camps. They work on various projects, mainly road construction in Northern Greece. The Jewish community pays a ransom to officer Max Merten for the release of its members and in March 1943 the first trains bound for Auschwitz follow. The second phase of forced labor begins in the same month.

In Southern Greece, the occupying forces are in great need of workers, they want to restore the railway network and increase its efficiency, as it is often the target of sabotage and guerrilla attacks. Mr. Chandrinou says that the main construction sites that have been identified were in Lianokladi, on the Asopos bridge, which had been blown up by British commandos in the summer of 1943, in Thebes and Karya. Not only Jews worked everywhere. Christians had also been taken to some construction sites, while in others, based on historical research, even captured Yugoslav soldiers participated.

"They were made to do something very difficult and with little chance of success, which is why they only used Jews," says Mr. Chandrinou of Karya, where about 300 Jews from Thessaloniki were sent. The first group was sent in late March 1943 and the second a month later.

"There was a station there and they wanted to complete a second, parallel, bypass line. They had to make a cut in a hill to lay the line. The earthworks were done with primitive means, with shovels and picks and rudimentary compressors," says Mr. Chandrinou. "The work was completed in August. A few of the workers, who could still move and looked like humans, were sent to Thessaloniki," points out Mr. Assael and adds that according to testimonies the rest were executed and placed in a mass grave, which has not yet been found. In August 1943, the last train for Auschwitz, the train of forced laborers, departed from Thessaloniki.

The team of researchers from the University of Osnabrück checked several places in the area that had also been indicated by locals as possible mass burial sites. Historian Christoph Rass, a professor at the German university, tells "K" that they were unable to find any relevant evidence at these locations. "We are sure that people were killed or died during the work and were definitely buried somewhere. We think that it is not at the places they showed us, the area is difficult and large and has changed over the years. This means that the executions probably took place elsewhere or the survivors were transferred to German camps and murdered there." The researchers did not dig in the area, as Jewish religious tradition prohibits the exhumation of the dead.



Mr. Rass's team was followed in the field by historian Valentin Schneider, who is recording in a database all the German military and paramilitary units stationed in Greece, a project he is carrying out at the Institute for Historical Research of the National Research Foundation with funding from the German embassy. Mr. Schneider is now searching German archives for evidence or reports about what happened at the Karya station. "The railway was the only artery for the maintenance of the troops in Southern Greece," he emphasizes. "They wanted to control the line in order to plunder the raw materials from Greece, to transport troops and munitions," adds Mr. Assael.

The findings

The Osnabrück researchers' work was complex. As Mr. Rass explains, they had to travel back in time and clarify which elements had been built in 1943, as the station also operated after the war. In the area where the barracks that housed the workers were located, they found a button, shell casings and other small elements that refer to the period in question.

"As a historian, I want to honor the memory of the victims, to make sure they are not forgotten. It is important to tell their stories," says Mr. Rass. "At the same time, we remind German society and the world of the crimes committed by my country during World War II. Part of the Holocaust was not only the deportation to concentration camps, but also forced labor."

Mr. Chandrinou emphasizes that until recently the phenomenon of forced labor was not among the priorities of collective memory in both Greece and Europe. He also points out that at least six fully identified testimonies (based on more than one source) about what happened in Karya have survived. Some of the few survivors had given interviews in the audiovisual archive created with the sponsorship of the Steven Spielberg Shoah Foundation and the researchers are waiting to receive the relevant material from the USA.

One worker who managed to escape was Isaac Moise Cuenca. In early 1944 he was arrested in a blockade in Athens and taken to Auschwitz, where he survived. In 1954 he wrote in the Spanish-Jewish language Ladino: "Karya was hell on earth."

The stations

March, 1943: At the end of the month, the first Jewish forced laborers are sent from Thessaloniki to the railway station of Karya, Phthiotis.

August, 1943: They complete their work, a cut in a rock to lay a railway line. They worked for months under extremely adverse conditions, with little water and food.

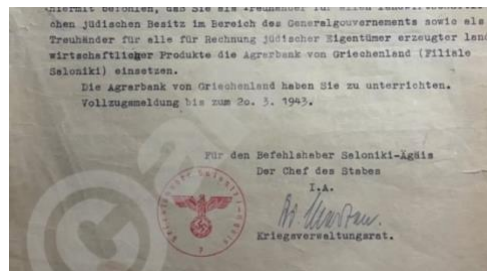
April, 2002: Andreas Assael finds an album in Munich with photographs of Nazi forced labor in Greece. It includes images of Karya. He begins a multi-year investigation, locates survivors, collects testimonies.

March – April, 2023: An interdisciplinary team of experts from the University of Osnabrück, Germany, is conducting research in Karya, also examining possible sites where, based on testimonies, there was a mass grave.

Jewish Property in Nazi Occupied Greece - New document shines a light on property reclamation

A historical document that sheds light on a little-known aspect of the management of Jewish property in Greece during the Nazi Occupation was discovered by researcher Dr. Leon Saltiel, representative of the World Jewish Congress at the United Nations in Geneva.

The document, signed by Max Merten and dated March 11, 1943, describes the transfer of management of the agricultural estates of Greek Jews to the Agricultural Bank.



"The document that I recently discovered and will donate to the Holocaust Museum of Thessaloniki under construction is an order from Merten, with an authentic signature, a swastika stamp and a registration number," Leon Saltiel told the Athens/Macedonian News Agency. As he explains, it is an original document, unknown until today, that is not even in Michael Molho's work "In Memoriam," which is the first record of the Holocaust in Salonika and includes a multitude of orders from Merten.

This specific order explicitly refers to the transfer of Jewish agricultural properties to the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Bank. "According to this order, the local branch of the Agricultural Bank acquired the responsibility for managing the fields that belonged to Jews in each prefecture," explains Dr. Saltiel.

The discovery is important not only for its content, but also for the fact that it confirms, for the first time, the existence of a central plan by the Nazi administration for the confiscation and exploitation of the agricultural property of the displaced Greek Jews. "We are talking about something unknown - until now - that perhaps opens new avenues to see how this property was managed," emphasizes Dr. Saltiel, leaving open the question of the fate of these properties after the war.

In fact, the finding is reinforced by additional documents found in Imathia. As he himself states: "I also located another document from June 1943, a few months later, from Imathia, which discusses how this order will be executed. In fact, it is noted that the entire process is progressing very positively. "He is carrying out this service normally and diligently," it states."

Dr. Saltiel emphasizes that there were indications of this process through fragments of files, such as in the YDIP archive, but for the first time the order is officially recorded. "For the first time we find the order itself, where

this was done centrally by the Germans and with Merten's signature. So we also learn about a new bureaucratic process," he points out.

The donation of the document to the Thessaloniki Holocaust Museum is not only an act of historical significance, but also a challenge for further research. What happened to these properties after the war? Did they return to their rightful owners or their descendants? Are there still archives at the Agricultural Bank or other public services that document this management?

This document may be the beginning of answering questions that have been pending for decades, and of approaching one of the darkest periods of modern Greek history more holistically.

The historical context of the era: Thessaloniki in the gloom of 1943

We were in Thessaloniki in February 1943, in one of the darkest moments in the city's modern history. An SS echelon from Adolf Eichmann's office arrives with a mission to implement the so-called "Final Solution". Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner take charge of the Nazi organization of the extermination of the city's approximately 50,000 Jews, with the assistance of the local administrative apparatus. According to Leon Saltiel, "in this process they find a willing collaborator, Max Merten, who is a military command advisor to the German administration of Thessaloniki-Aegean. He is a thirty-something, quite ambitious officer, responsible for political affairs and the relationship of the German administration with the local population". Merten takes charge of issuing orders concerning Jewish issues. "Many of the orders issued in February and March 1943 bear his signature," Dr. Saltiel points out. "He himself, at his trial, which took place in Athens in 1959, claimed that he was signing on his behalf, that is, on behalf of General Krensky."

The orders begin with the imposition of the yellow star, the compulsory settlement of Jews in the ghetto, their expulsion from professional associations (such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Bar Association), and end with the mass confiscation of their property.

"Don't forget," Saltiel emphasizes, "Thessaloniki had 50,000 Jews in a city of 250,000 inhabitants. So the whole management of the so-called Jewish properties became a big issue at that time, with discussions between both the Greek Administration and the Greek merchants, but also the German Administration."

The absence of Jews from the city's economic fabric led to the creation of the YSIP, responsible for managing the homes, household goods, businesses, and assets of the displaced. The questions that arose were numerous and daily: "Who would open the locked safes? What would happen to the safes? What about the merchandise that had been left in Jewish stores?"

Thousands of properties were transferred to Christian "trustees", while some businesses ended up in the hands of traitors or were looted by the occupying forces. "A large percentage of the security battalions were financed from these properties", reveals Dr. Saltiel.

The phenomenon took on such a massive dimension that, as he notes, "even furniture prices fell. The State Theater of Northern Greece had bought chairs and furniture for its sets. Imagine now, fifty thousand people, everything they owned, going out to the bazaar... We are talking about major changes in Thessaloniki that have left their mark to this day."

In conclusion, the discovery and donation of Merten's original document by Dr. Saltiel is not just a historical act. It is a reminder that memory is alive only when accompanied by knowledge and action.

Because History does not end with the events, but with the way we choose to remember them - and most importantly, to understand them.

Crete

For Sale: A Piece of Sephardic and Romaniote History in Crete

Tucked down one of Chania's narrow alleyways, the [Etz-Hayyim synagogue](#) in Crete is easy to miss, marked only by a Hebrew inscription and a security buzzer. The synagogue and the adjacent library are the last surviving remnants of Chania's Jewish heritage. Today, that history is at risk of getting even smaller.



This neighborhood was a vibrant Jewish quarter until the community was wiped out in WWII. Now, the library's building is up for sale. If Etz Hayyim isn't able to raise enough funds to purchase it, the space will likely be turned into tourist infrastructure. With the fundraising deadline approaching, the organization is turning to the international community for help.

"Our work is to preserve a European Jewish tradition and culture that otherwise would be completely lost," Adi Levant, the Fundraising Manager at Etz Hayyim, told us.

Romaniote and Sephardic communities used to have a presence in the major Cretan cities of Heraklion, Rethymno, and Chania. Etz Hayyim is the only remaining Jewish place left on the island. The archival collection in the library is an important piece in understanding and preserving that history.

The library is home to over 6000 titles. "The main focus is Jewish history and tradition, with a focus on Sephardi and Romaniote sources," Anja Zuckmantel, the organization's executive director, told us.

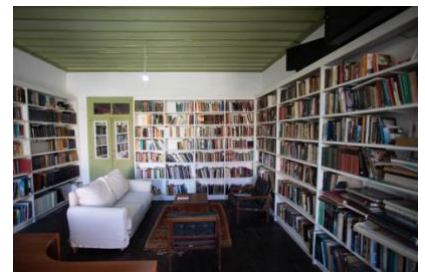
Some notable books in the collection include: *Jewish Salonica*, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora*, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture*, and a classical Jewish antique set with writings from Philo, Josephus, and other classical Jewish writers and thinkers.

But it's the archives that contain "micro-histories" - letters, journals, recipes - found in the library that have helped historians paint a picture of what Jewish life might have looked like on Crete.

"The archival material allows us to illuminate the story of the community, which is the main focus of our work," Anja said.

While the loss of the building wouldn't lead to the loss of the library's collections, it would restrict access and hinder research. With limited real estate space in the old town, Anja said that if they lose the building, the next location of the archives would be boxes. "We might be pushed into the new town, which disconnects us from the place."

Adi told us, "All the buildings inside the old Jewish quarter are very close to one another. The library is right in the synagogue; it's hard to imagine that something else would be there. It's [right] above our backyard, where we have the tombstones of the previous Rabbis of the community.



In 2010, [two arson attacks](#) were carried out against the synagogue and library, damaging the collection of books, archives, and CDs. If the building is lost to Airbnb or a hotel, security risks are front of mind for the synagogue.

"If there's an exchange of people we don't have control over, then we just don't know who's there," Adi said.

Not only is it a security risk, but if tourists are sunbathing or partying over the place where the tombstones and Mikva are located, it's inappropriate for the location.

Most tourists don't know that they're standing in the Jewish quarter when they come to this part of Chania. And that's because most locals don't, either. Losing the library would mean losing another part of that heritage.

If the organization can buy the building, they hope to open it to the public, so that residents and tourists can learn more about the Jewish history on Crete.

"As an Israeli, I never heard about the Romaniote culture. There is a narrative about what the Jewish cultures are around the world, and it was fascinating to see there's a space that's dedicated to preserving this tradition," Adi said.

Even though much of the area's Jewish history is buried or repurposed, historians at the synagogue have been able to uncover key sites from the old Jewish quarter. Thanks to their research, they can now offer walking tours that bring this hidden history to light.

Owning the building would open up more research opportunities through partnerships with universities and academic institutions. "It's such a small area of research, so I think for anyone studying the Romaniote and Cretan tradition, we are one of the only spaces where [they] can come study," Adi said.

A new volunteer from Ireland is helping Etz Hayyim revamp the library's structure and online presence. "We hope this is going to be the beginning of the next major step in preserving the library and its history," Anja said.

The fundraising campaign will run until the end of August 2025. [You can learn more about the campaign here.](#)

March of the Living 2025 – Honoring the Survivors with the Greek Participation of Benjamin Albala

This year's "International March of the Living," which took place on April 24, 2025 in Auschwitz, was honorably dedicated to the participation of 80 invited Holocaust survivors, symbolically for the 80th anniversary of the Liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in 1945. 80 stories of persecution, anguish, survival and ultimately endurance, strength, creation, with the aim of preserving memory.



Approximately 10,000 people, mainly young people, from 40 countries around the world participated in the March. The Greek delegation was represented by 8 young people from the ENE. The Remembrance and Life events were honored with their presence and participation by many officials, led by the Presidents of Israel and Poland, who particularly greeted the 80 survivors at a special event at Auschwitz I, before the March and the special ceremony at Auschwitz II (Birkenau).

The previous evening (April 23), as part of the events, there was a special ceremony for Yom HaShoah at the Krakow State Opera House with a memorial video, live music program and greetings with special reference to the release of the Hamas hostages, with two of the freed ones present. This was followed by the lighting of 6 candles for the 6 million Jews murdered in Nazi camps during the Holocaust.

Among the 80 survivors honored was Benjamin (Benis) Albalas, a hidden child in occupied Athens, President of the European March of the Living (EMOTL), Honorary President of the Jewish Community of Athens and former President of KIS. He was awarded, like the other 79 survivors, a special commemorative medal of honor, crafted especially for the occasion.

Rabbi Leon Pessah: The Fighting Rabbi [Full article Here](#)

A Fighting Rabbi

He was only five-foot-one; he wore owlsh glasses; he was, in appearance and manner, shy and unpretentious. He was a quiet-voiced speaker of numerous languages, a man who might be anything but a partisan warrior. Yet, Leon (Yehudah) Pessah was a trusted friend of and courier for the anti-Nazi partisan groups in the mountains of Greece during World War II. He was a man so devoted to his books, family, and faith that he three times risked his life to return, alone, to his German-occupied town to retrieve family and ritual objects. Leon Pessah was very much a fighting rabbi and a rabbi fighting for his faith.

Life Before the Invasion

Having grown up in Salonika, the large port city on the Greek coast that had been a great religious and cultural center of Sephardic life, Rabbi Pessah had the unwelcome distinction- due to the outbreak of World War II- of being a member of the last graduating class of Salonika's rabbinical seminary. In 1941, after serving in the Greek army, he took his first pulpit in Trikala, a town in the mountains of western Thessaly, where a community of nearly five hundred Jews had lived for centuries.

Rabbi Pessah and his wife, Gracia, who was an excellent seamstress, lived in the town, near the schoolhouse, where the rabbi also taught French to the town's children. Among his language students were the children of the local chief of police and the prelate of the Greek Orthodox church. Their admiration and respect for Rabbi Pessah would, eventually, save his life and that of his family.

After invading Greece in April 1941, the Nazis came to Trikala in 1942 to begin their roundups, decimations, and attempts at the ultimate destruction of the Jewish community.

Flee to Survive:

Although Rabbi Pessah, his wife, and their infant son, Joseph, were able to evade the roundup, the message was clear: they had to flee in order to survive, and so they arranged safe passage to the nearby mountains. The mountain people, many of whom hated the Nazis, had organized into partisan units and attacked the Nazis in the narrow passes, where the Germans could not bring their vehicles or tanks. Fearing an ambush, the Nazis were reluctant to invade the mountains, but when they came close, the partisans moved Jewish families including the Pessahs — to safer locations.

Becoming A Fighter:

Rabbi Pessah ventured back to Trikala to retrieve his leather-bound shochet's knife, the ritual slaughterer's implement, in order to help the Jewish guerrilla fighters and their families in the mountains to keep kosher. He also retrieved many of his religious books and astronomical resources.

Because he could speak Italian, Greek, French, and other languages and dialects of the area, Rabbi Pessah traveled between the mountains and the towns to relay messages among the various groups of partisans. He was stopped and picked up several times on these dangerous missions.

Once, he was even caught with a suitcase of Jewish books. He said he was a simple farmer delivering bags, whose contents he did not know. In such encounters, Rabbi Pessah relied on his courage, linguistic skills,



Photograph of Rabbi Leon J. Pessah with his class. Trikala, Greece, 1945. Collection of Joseph L. Pessah. After the war, Rabbi Pessah returned to the religious school where he had taught before the war. Many of the children had died. Here, Rabbi Pessah poses with students who survived. His son, Joseph Pessah, is at the lower right.



Given to Rabbi Leon J. Pessah, a ritual slaughterer (shochet), by his grandfather, Haham Yehoshua Matalon. Greece, made circa 1850. Collection of Joseph L. Pessah. Rabbi Pessah slaughtered animals according to Jewish law to provide kosher food for guerilla forces in the Greek mountains.

ingenuity, and faith to survive. The residents remaining in Trikala also knew if they turned in the rabbi or collaborated with the Nazis, the partisans would exact punishment.

German Invasion:

Finally, the Germans evacuated Greece in September 1944. But such moments of optimism and joy could not reverse what had happened in the towns and cities of Greece. Although the Jews living in the small towns of Thessaly, such as Trikala and Volos, were able to survive by hiding in the mountains or dispersing among their courageous neighbors, of the 56,000 Jews living in Salonika in 1941, less than 4 percent survived. Among the killed was the extended family of Rabbi Pessah and his wife.

Starting a New Life

Although the Trikala synagogue, along with its Torahs and ornaments, had survived — the Greek neighbors had camouflaged it as a warehouse so the Nazis would not destroy it — the Pessah family determined that they should eventually leave Greece.

In 1949, the rabbi, his wife, and sons Joseph, Marius, and Yehoshua came to the United States. Here, the Rabbi of Trikala became the Rabbi of a Romaniote synagogue, Kehila Kedosha of Janina, in the South Bronx. His son Joseph, inspired by his father, teaches secular education as well as Torah, Jewish history, and the Holocaust.

Israel

A Generous Greek Shabbat Breakfast Tradition Lives on in Shaily Lipa's Home

Shaily Lipa's Shabbat clothes were always dusted with powdered sugar on Saturday mornings. Her grandparents Levana and Angel hosted the whole family for a Greek Shabbat breakfast on their balcony in Holon, a city south of Tel Aviv. Before the meal was served, Shaily and her cousins would steal sugar-dusted Greek butter cookies called kourabiedes from the secret stash their grandmother kept under her bed. But, the sugar that dusted their clothes always gave them away.

"Shabbat breakfast was iconic," explains Shaily, who is the author of "[Yassou: The Simple, Seasonal Mediterranean Cooking of Greece](#)." Her grandmother covered her table with dishes her family brought with them from Greece in the 1930s, like the classic Greek salad horiatiki, individual spanakopitas stuffed with spinach, zingy white bean salad with lemon and vinegar, hard boiled eggs, creamy tzatziki, and taramosalata — the only item her grandmother bought at the market instead of preparing from scratch.

Levana and Angel lived in Israel, but their world was Greek. "All of their friends were Greek — from Thessaloniki," Shaily explains. They spoke Ladino amongst one another, played cards together on Friday nights, listened to Greek music, and ate Greek food. Most of their friends, she believes, were Holocaust survivors like her grandfather Angel. He was born in the Greek port city of Thessaloniki (Salonika), which was home to the largest Jewish community in Greece before World War II. Like most of the Jews of Thessaloniki, Angel's family was deported to Auschwitz in 1943.



Shaily's Grandparents, Levana and Angel, at their Wedding, September 1946.

His parents, two sisters, and one brother died; only Angel and his brother Dario survived. However, the two were separated during the war and didn't know that the other had survived until they both reached Puglia, Italy as refugees. Angel lived there in a home with several other Jewish refugees. Eager to find a place to pray, they converted one room into a small synagogue. Angel knew how to write in Hebrew and inscribed the parochet, a curtain that covers the Torak ark, for the small sanctuary.

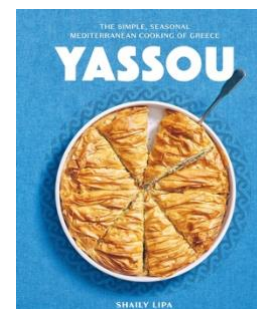
When Dario heard that another member of his family was alive, he went to the home and spotted his brother's handwriting on the ark, only to learn that Angel had left for Israel the day before. The two finally reunited in Israel and built new lives there — including the Shabbat breakfasts at Angel and Levana's home.



Both of Shaily's grandparents have passed away, but the memories of the Shabbat breakfasts remain strong and left a lasting impact on her life. Today, Shaily keeps her grandmother's tradition going by hosting Greek Shabbat breakfasts when her family is together, making [Greek salad](#), her grandmother's [white beans](#), and her own version of [spanakopita](#), which she serves as a large pie.

When she looks back at the Shabbats spent at her grandparents' home, dusted in sugar, she says: "I think this is the reason I love Shabbat — thanks to them. I like to host and be social — these are the things I learned from them."

KKJ is proud to sell copies of Shaily's beautiful cookbook Yassou.
Email info@kkjism.org to order your copy today.



On July 15, a memorial service for the Greek Jews who lost their lives during the horror of the Holocaust was held at the synagogue of Yad Vashem, World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, in Jerusalem. The Ambassador of Greece to Israel, Ms. Maya Solomou, read the last letters that Sarina Saltiel, a Greek Jew mother, wrote as a farewell to her son from the Thessaloniki ghetto, in March 1943, shortly before being deported to the Auschwitz death camp.

Ambassador Solomou also emphasized that the perseverance of all of us and the invaluable work of Foundations such as Yad Vashem, as well as the under-construction Holocaust Museum of Greece in Thessaloniki, will guarantee that the crime of the Holocaust will never be forgotten.



Montenegro

A milestone for Jewish life in Montenegro. Construction is underway for Montenegro's first synagogue, Har Hashem, in Podgorica. More than just a house of prayer, this future synagogue will also serve as a cultural and community center.



Belgrade, Serbia

Staro Sajmiste: Belgrade's fairground of death for the Balkans' Jews Full article [Here](#)

From formidable fairground to a camp of death, the dark history of the Nazi camp within Belgrade's borders

Amid the streets of New Belgrade, shops sit next to apartment blocks, businesses align with public parks, and the River Sava flows gently by.

Inside the neighborhood of Staro Sajmiste, a white tower glitters as it reaches up toward the sky. At the same time, the area echoes with crowds mingling, gazing at the modern technology of the 1930s, or enjoying ice cream, and children running around between pavilions, taking in the day.



Before it became a site of unimaginable horror in the Holocaust, the grounds of Staro Sajmiste told a different story. In the summer of 1937, workers rushed to complete what was then one of Belgrade's most ambitious architectural projects – a sprawling modernist fairground designed to showcase the industrial and cultural progress of royal Yugoslavia. Built in just three months, the complex officially opened on September 11, 1937.

The centerpiece of the fairgrounds was the imposing Central Tower, a slender steel spire that quickly became a symbol of Yugoslav modernity. Designed by architects Milivoje Trickovic, Rajko Tatic, and Dorde Lukic, the site embodied a forward-looking vision.

Surrounding the tower were a series of sleek exhibition pavilions – five representing different Yugoslav regions, one financed by the Nikola Spasic Foundation, and others belonging to international participants such as Italy, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Turkey, Germany, and the Dutch electronics giant Philips.

In total, the fairgrounds boasted 17,000 square meters of roofed exhibition halls, 20,000 square meters of open display space, and nearly 50,000 square meters of landscaped gardens, roads, and paths. It was, at the time, a symbol of promise for the country Yugoslavia hoped to be.

Within just a few years, however, that promise would be shattered, royal Yugoslavia had collapsed, and Belgrade would be split between the occupying Nazi forces and the Croatian fascist puppet state formed in the wake of independence. The architectural marvel designed to celebrate human achievement would become one of Europe's earliest concentration camps under Nazi occupation.

Occupation and disintegration

The Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941 set the stage for this transformation. Yugoslavia was swiftly dismantled by the Axis powers. Serbia proper was placed under German military occupation, while the Banat region and northern Kosovo were absorbed into adjacent puppet zones. Croatia was carved into the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), a Nazi-aligned regime led by the Ustase, a fascist army whose genocidal policies targeted Serbs, Jews, and Roma.

In Serbia, the Germans installed a puppet administration under Milan Nedic, a former army general. But while the collaborationist government handled routine affairs, actual power rested with Nazi officers, which included SS-Gruppenfuhrer Harald Turner and his security chief Wilhelm Fuchs. Turner, a central figure in implementing the Final Solution in the Balkans, coordinated the arrests, deportations, and killings of Serbian Jews with methodical precision. His successors, who included August Meyszner and Emanuel Schafer, ensured that the policy was followed ruthlessly.

Zemun, a former Austro-Hungarian town that was the birthplace of Theodor Herzl's grandparents and was situated near the site of the Sajmiste fairgrounds, was incorporated into the ISC but remained effectively within reach of German forces stationed in Belgrade. With the Ustase regime offering no resistance to German demands, the fairgrounds were selected in the autumn of 1941 as the site for a new concentration camp.

Known in German as Judenlager Semlin ("Jewish Camp Zemun"), the site became one of the earliest concentration camps established outside the borders of the Reich. Its proximity to Belgrade's central railway station made it ideal for transporting prisoners from across Serbia, and its location on the river banks made escape nearly impossible.

The camp initially held around 500 male Jewish prisoners, forced to set up a "self-administration" system, distribute food, and maintain order under German supervision. The perimeter was guarded by German police battalions, while internal patrols were carried out by Jewish detainees.

By October 1941, mass killings had already begun. Groups of prisoners were told they were being transferred to labor camps in Austria. Instead, they were taken to firing ranges outside Belgrade or to the village of Jabuka in the Banat region, where they were executed en masse. The deception was deliberate and carefully orchestrated. The final group of these initial male inmates were murdered on November 11, 1941.

As the German campaign against Serbia's Jewish population escalated, the camp filled with thousands of Jewish women, children, and elderly men – those left after the mass murder of the adult male population. Most were transferred from towns like Nis, Sabac, and Smederevo. Groups of Roma and political detainees were also interned.

The exhibition pavilions were never designed to house people. With no proper heating, broken windows, and leaking roofs, the halls offered little protection from the brutal winter of 1941-1942. Inmates slept on wet straw or directly on the floor. Food rations were meager, and disease spread rapidly. Death from typhus, influenza, starvation, and cold became routine. Some barracks reportedly housed more than 5,000 people in unbearable conditions. Many children did not survive their first weeks in the camp.

In desperation, appeals were made to local Serbian officials, some of whom tried to negotiate improved conditions, but to little avail. The camp remained under firm German control, and the suffering continued unchecked.

Drawings by inmates during this time have survived and show the terrible state of conditions, which included typhus epidemics and the invasion of rats. Roma inmates, detained under even worse conditions, were housed separately and subjected to forced labor. While some were released after several weeks, others vanished without a trace.

The gas van arrives

In January 1942, the Nazi regime decided to accelerate the extermination process. SS-Untersturmführer Herbert Andorfer replaced Edgar Enge as camp commandant. The following month, a gas van was delivered from Berlin on the orders of Harald Turner. This mobile killing machine would become the camp's most chilling tool of murder.

Before the development of fixed gas chambers, the Nazis employed mobile gas vans as a primary method of mass murder, particularly at sites like the Chelmno extermination camp. Two main models were used in Eastern Europe by the Einsatzgruppen: the smaller 3.5-ton Opel-Blitz, and the larger 7-ton Saurerwagen.

In Belgrade, the vehicle became known locally as the *dusegupka*, a grim term meaning "soul killer." Within SS bureaucracy, the vans were given sanitized labels such as *Sonderwagen*, *Spezialwagen*, or simply *S-Wagen*, meaning "special vehicle."

These vans were engineered to channel engine exhaust through pipes into a sealed compartment in the back, where victims were packed tightly. Once the engine was engaged, carbon monoxide filled the chamber, killing those inside by suffocation. The gruesome conditions found by those who witnessed the gas vans were among the factors that led camp commandant Rudolf Hoss to seek alternatives like Zyklon B at Auschwitz, although it, too, resulted in similarly horrifying effects.

Andorfer, by some accounts conflicted over his role, nonetheless carried out the gassings with calculated efficiency. Inmates were deceived into believing they were being transferred to a better camp. Announcements were made, lists posted, and belongings permitted.

Children were even given sweets by noncommissioned SS officers Wilhelm Gotz and Erwin Meyer to ease their fears. The famous Serbian writer of Sephardi origin, David Albahari, wrote an epochal short novel entitled *Gotz and Meyer*, translated into many languages, including English and Hebrew.

Today, the novel is regarded as essential reading for its powerful portrayal of the lasting emotional toll carried by the descendants of Staro Sajmiste's victims.

Once boarded, the van, carrying between 50 to 80 people per trip, was driven across the Sava into German-controlled Serbia. There, the exhaust was diverted into the vehicle. Victims suffocated within minutes. The corpses were then transported to the Avala firing range, where Serbian and Roma prisoners dug mass graves.

Survivor Lea Ben David (née Papo) was a teenage inmate at Sajmiste when she and her family were told they would be transferred to Austria for labor.

"We were told we would be moved," she recalled. "That we would go to Austria to work. I even packed my coat and a blanket. My mother combed my hair. That morning, my younger brother asked for his shoes to be cleaned. He thought we were going somewhere better. They took them to the truck. The next day, we knew. The children were gone. The truck never came back with them."

The awful truth became clear: They had been murdered in the gas van. Her account is preserved in the book *Testimonies from Jewish Survivors in Yugoslavia*, edited by Zeni Lebl.

This became a daily operation. The van arrived every morning except Sundays, and by May 1942 nearly all of the camp's Jewish population, estimated at more than 6,000, had been murdered.

The final group of Jewish prisoners at Sajmiste were gassed on May 8, 1942. The van was returned to Berlin shortly thereafter and was eventually repurposed for mass killings in Belarus.

Unlike other camps, such as Auschwitz, hidden in the Polish countryside and fed by endless rail lines, Sajmiste required no trains. Its victims were already within walking distance of the gas van. The city watched as death unfolded just across the river.

From extermination to detention

With its Jewish population annihilated, Sajmiste was renamed *Anhaltelager Semlin*, a general detention camp. It began housing thousands of new prisoners: civilians from Ustase-controlled regions, captured Yugoslav partisans, Chetniks, and Greek and Albanian resistance fighters. Many had previously been interned at Jasenovac or other Ustase-run camps.

Conditions, already dire, worsened. Food became even scarcer. Diseases like tuberculosis and dysentery spread rapidly. Suicide and psychological collapse were common. Of the 32,000 prisoners held during this period, at least 10,600 died.

In late 1943, Germany's ambassador to Serbia reportedly urged that the camp be relocated, citing its visibility from downtown Belgrade as "politically intolerable." His request was ignored.

Operation cover-up

As the war turned against the Nazis, efforts were made to erase the evidence of genocide. SS-Standartenfuhrer Paul Blobel, the architect of Sonderaktion 1005, arrived in Belgrade to supervise the exhumation and incineration of mass graves.

Beginning in December 1943, teams of Serbian prisoners were forced to dig up thousands of decomposing corpses. The bodies were burned on pyres constructed with railway ties and drenched in gasoline. These operations continued until April 1944. When the task was completed, the prisoners involved were executed – except for a few who managed to escape.

Vladimir Milutinovic, a Serbian gravedigger who survived, later testified: "Eighty-one or 82 trenches were prepared, and I helped dig all of them. At least 100 people fit into each trench. These were only for those suffocated in the truck. We dug a different set for those who were shot."

Bombing and closure

On April 17, 1944, Allied bombers struck Belgrade. One wave mistakenly hit the Sajmiste camp, killing roughly 100 prisoners and causing significant structural damage. A month later, the camp was officially transferred to ISC control. By July 1944, it had been permanently closed.

But the scars remained. Sajmiste had played a central role in the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, facilitating the near-total destruction of the country's Jewish population and serving as a transit point for tens of thousands of political and ethnic prisoners.

The site fell into disrepair, and survivors' voices were often ignored in the post-war reconstruction of memory.

Post-war and future hopes

For decades after the war, the camp's history was neglected or politicized. Under president Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, official narratives emphasized the camp's use against partisans while downplaying the scale of the Jewish genocide. In a country where Tito wanted Croats, Serbs, and others to live in brotherhood and unity, dredging up the scars of the past was not useful. Over the years, the neglected and deteriorating Sajmiste complex became home to several artists, with former fairground buildings repurposed into studios for painters and sculptors. Other enterprises gradually moved in as well, such as taverns and gyms.

However, a major public outcry erupted in April 2019 when news broke that a private kindergarten was set to open in one of the historic pavilions. The building in question had been purchased in 1998 by entrepreneur Milorad Krsmanovic, though a court later annulled the sale. Despite the ruling, Krsmanovic continued to operate various businesses there over the years, which included a nightclub, art gallery, restaurant, and fitness center.

During this period, the only indication of the site's past was a generic memorial slab, paid for by victims' families. It mentioned only that tragedy took place, with no reference to Serbs, Jews, or Roma murdered there.

The announcement reignited long-standing controversy surrounding the site's use. City officials appealed to the national government to reconsider the permit, while state authorities claimed there were no legal grounds to halt the project. Jewish organizations and parents groups voiced strong opposition, citing the site's history as a place of suffering and death. Krsmanovic, for his part, accused the government of attempting to strip him of his property rights.

The uproar once again highlighted the state's decades-long failure to properly memorialize and protect the Sajmiste complex, more than 75 years after the atrocities that occurred there.

In 2020, under the leadership of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, the Serbian National Assembly established the Memorial Center Staro Sajmiste to commemorate Holocaust victims. The site is currently undergoing restoration, but funding is lacking to complete the mission of turning it into a museum. The project is led by director and former ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro to Israel, Krinka Vidakovic Petrov, who gave the Magazine a tour of the site.

"You know, I am very angry with myself," Vucic stated to the Magazine when asked about the law. "I heard there were some problems, and I didn't follow the entire process, and now I am engaging myself once again to finish everything down there. Because if I don't do it, nobody will.

"We need to do it for our future. People will have to visit that place, people will have to see what happened there and understand what happened there, so nothing similar can happen to us at any time in the future."

Spain

Spain uncovers ring of fraudsters behind fake Sephardic citizenship applications

Multi-million-dollar fraud scheme allegedly exploited Spain's 'law of return,' which grants citizenship to Jews who can trace their roots to pre-Inquisition Iberia

Spanish police dismantled a major criminal network that allegedly falsified thousands of citizenship applications under the country's Sephardic nationality law, according to El País newspaper. The immigration scheme allegedly exploited a 2015 law, dubbed the "Law of Return," that allows the descendants of Jews expelled in the 1492 Spanish Inquisition to obtain Spanish nationality.



The suspects allegedly submitted thousands of fraudulent genealogical certificates, some of which bore the names of popular singers like Shakira and J Balvin, and charged clients between €6,000 and €8,000 (\$7,100 and \$9,400) for citizenship applications.

The six suspects, who included three notaries, were arrested in Málaga, a city in southern Spain, this week for the scheme, according to El País. One suspect believed to be the leader of the operation, who was identified as Y.S., described himself as a representative of Spain's Sephardic community.

In the alleged scheme, Y.S. would personally certify clients' supposed Sephardic lineage by copying genealogical data from the internet. Police discovered over 1,200 fake certificates at the home of Y.S.'s associate. "The scale of this fraud suggests earnings could easily have reached 10 million euros," or nearly \$12 million, an investigator told El País. "They lived lavishly — luxury cars, upscale apartments in Marbella, the high life."

Since it was launched in 2015, the "Law of Return" has attracted over 88,000 applications. More than 72,000 of the applications have been approved, but roughly 7,000 have been rejected — most of them after 2021, when authorities began rigorously reviewing thousands of suspicious cases after a police report indicated widespread fraud.

In 2021, the Justice Ministry, then led by Pilar Llop, began rejecting thousands of applications after the National Police alerted officials to rampant fraud involving fictitious applicants, falsified genealogical documents, and patterns of fraud involving lawyers, notaries, and intermediaries. Those involved in the fraud responded by publicly accusing Llop's department of antisemitism, El País reported. Amid the sudden spree of rejection in 2021, ministry officials told JTA that the applications were undergoing heightened scrutiny due to fears of fraud, but denied changing the criteria retroactively.

The controversy in Spain echoes similar issues in Portugal, where Rabbi Daniel Litvak of Oporto was arrested in 2022 following investigations into fraudulent citizenship applications linked to Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. Litvak's arrest heightened tensions between Portuguese Jewish communities. The community denied any wrongdoing.

Later, a Portuguese appeals court loosened the restrictions on Litvak, allowing him to travel freely while criticizing prosecutors for insufficient evidence against him. The recent Spanish fraud scheme is currently under investigation by Spain's National Court, underscoring persistent challenges and sensitivities surrounding Sephardic citizenship laws across Iberia.

13th Hermes Expo Trade Mission to Greece - September 6-16, 2025

From our friend Paul Kotrotsios, Founder & Chairman of Hellenic News of America and Founder, President & CEO of Hermes Expo International.

Last November, the *Hermes Expo* had the distinguished honor of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HELEXPO TIF, the largest trade and convention fair in Southeastern Europe, based in Thessaloniki, Greece.

As a result of this collaboration, Dr. Kyriakos Pozrikidis, CEO of HELEXPO, honored us with his presence at the 34th Hermes Expo in New Jersey, where he addressed the audience and praised the high caliber of exhibitors and sponsors such as Alumitech and Kleemann, Sponsors and participants at the Hermes Expo.



Now, we are proud to announce that we have been preparing for the **13th Hermes Expo Trade Mission to Greece**, taking place from **September 6 to September 16, 2025**.

Several companies have already signed up to participate in this unique business and cultural experience. If you are interested in joining us, please email paul@hermesexpo.com as soon as possible so we can proceed with group hotel reservations, ensuring we stay together, save time, and create meaningful networking opportunities.

Tentative Itinerary Includes:

- **Thessaloniki** – Including HELEXPO participation
- **Veria, Larisa**, and the **Region of Thessaly**
- **Meteora** – Visit to its historic monasteries
- **Ioannina, Corinth**, and **Athens**

We will coordinate exclusive meetings with:

- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Government & trade officials
- Businesses in your sector of interest

In addition to the business agenda, we'll explore Greece's best **museums, synagogues, wineries, restaurants**, and even take time to **relax at beautiful beaches**. You'll experience firsthand the rich culture, breathtaking landscapes, and exceptional gastronomy Greece has to offer.

What's Included:

- Transportation via private mini-bus
- Hotel accommodations (with breakfast)
- Daily lunches and dinners
- All business meetings & site visits
-

Please book your own airfare to and from Greece with your preferred airline.

Total Estimated Cost: \$3,475 For those attending HELEXPO in Thessaloniki, space will be available at the shared Hermes Expo booth.

Don't miss this unforgettable business and pleasure journey with Hermes Expo as we bridge American and Greek entrepreneurship.

Reserve your spot today! Email paul@hermesexpo.com

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



Only 7 days after the mournful day of fasting and sorrow of "Tisha B'Av" – the 9th of Av, comes the special joyous day of "Tu B'Av", the 15th of Av. This year, "Tu B'Av" falls on Shabbat, August 9th. Though often referred to in modern Israel as the 'Jewish Valentine's Day', this is a serious misnomer, but more on that further on.

On the one hand, this day is somewhat obscure and even unknown to many. On the other hand, in the tractate of "*Ta'anit*" [Fasts] in the Babylonian Talmud, we are told that there were no days in the Jewish calendar as happy as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur! The Sages understand why Yom Kippur is named, because what could be more joyful than G-d's forgiving the sins of His people Israel, but what was so special about Tu B'Av to warrant a direct comparison to Judaism's holiest day of the year? Compounding the question is the fact that in Halachic terms, Tu B'Av is merely a day we don't say penitential prayers – *Tahanun* – and nothing more. There are no special festive prayers, ceremonies or even a uniform explanation as to why it is considered such a joyful day. The Talmud does mention that on Tu B'Av, due to its festive nature, it was customary for unmarried girls in Jerusalem to dress in white and dance in the vineyards, calling on young men to find their brides.

So what makes Tu B'Av so special? The Talmud offers several possible reasons. The first is rooted in the Biblical Israelite tribal structure. All land rights and legacies were granted to males, and only when no male descendants exist did female offspring receive such rights and legacies. As such, it was customary and almost mandatory that women who had inherited land rights would marry only within their tribe to ensure that their inheritance would not become the legacy of a different tribe due to marriage. On Tu B'Av, however, this restriction was lifted, and women were free to marry men from other tribes, which is most likely the source of the custom of young women freely seeking husbands on that day. A second reason for Tu B'Av's joyful nature lies in the fact that it marks the end of Israel's wandering in the wilderness and cessation of the deaths of the "generation of the wilderness". As a result of the sin of the 'spies', G-d decreed that the entire "generation of the wilderness", meaning all those over the age of 20 at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb), must die over 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, as they were not worthy to enter the Promised Land. So, every year, on the night corresponding to the Hebrew date of the 9th of Av, the Israelites would dig graves to sleep in, and thousands would not arise in the morning. One year, everyone arose and no one died overnight. Concerned that they may have miscalculated the date, they continued sleeping in graves for the following 5 nights, but when they saw the full moon, they realized that it was the 15th of the month – Tu B'Av, and this must be the 40th, and final, year of wandering in the wilderness. A third reason offered for the joyous nature of Tu B'Av is that, following a horrible civil war and terrible crime of the tribe of Benjamin in the days of the Judges, the latter was excommunicated by the other 11 tribes, including a prohibition to marry any member of the tribe of Benjamin. However, after the tribe of Benjamin repented for their terrible sin, on Tu B'Av, the excommunication was cancelled, and the tribe was reaccepted as part of the Israelite nation. A fourth reason offered for Tu B'Av's joyous nature is that the cutting of all wood needed for a full year of sacrifices in the Temple was completed on that date. A fifth reason offered is that after the schism and splitting of the Israelite nation into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judea in the south after the rule of King Solomon, the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel forbade their subjects to make pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem in Judea, and even stationed armed sentries on the road to Jerusalem to enforce this prohibition. Eventually, however, on Tu B'Av, the northern Israel King Hoshea removed the sentries and once again allowed their subjects to ascend to the Temple in Jerusalem. Finally, the Talmud relates that after a full year of the Roman occupiers of Israel refusing to allow hundreds of thousands of Jews killed in the Bar Kochba revolt at Beitar to

be gathered from the battlefield and properly buried, they relented on Tu B'Av, and to everyone's amazement, the bodies had not decomposed at all.

In modern Israel, Tu B'Av is advertised and celebrated as the "holiday of love", in direct parallel with Valentine's Day. But this is a very superficial and incorrect perception of the essence of Tu B'Av. Indeed, Tu B'Av is directly connected to 'love', but not the classic physical or romantic kind. Rather, the focus is on Divine love of the nation of Israel in a much greater spiritual and national context. Furthermore, according to Kabbalah, when the fast day of Tisha B'Av becomes a joyous holiday in Messianic times, it will constitute the first day of a seven day holiday of redemption that ends with Tu B'Av, similar to the holidays of Pesah and Sukkot in all their joy and holiness and eternal connection between Israel and G-d. May this happen speedily in our days!!!



Rabbi Marc D. Angel

How and Why - Thoughts for Parashat Devarim

JewishIdeas.org

The people of Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and were now on the verge of entering the Promised Land. Moses had been their leader, their liberator, their link with the Almighty. Now, during the last days of his life, Moses re-emphasized his role as teacher—Moshe Rabbeinu. The book of Devarim records Moses's memories, chastisements, and his hopes for the future of his people.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wisely observed that Moses's last messages to the Israelites went beyond instructing them on how to conduct themselves. He sought to inspire them with the underlying meaning of their covenant with God. He addressed not only the How of Torah life—but the Why. He reminded them that "they are God's people, the nation on whom He has set His love, the people He rescued from slavery and gave, in the form of the commandments, the constitution of liberty. They may be small but they are unique. They are the people who, in themselves, testify to something beyond themselves. They are the people whose fate will defy the normal laws of history. Other nations, says Moses, will recognize the miraculous nature of the Jewish story."

Moses set an example for rabbis, teachers, parents, grandparents...all who are involved in the transmission of the Torah tradition. We need to communicate a sense of mission, a deep awareness that we are part of an amazingly powerful worldview that is life-transforming. Judaism is an adventure. It addresses every aspect of our daily life but puts things into a cosmic perspective.

Moses taught us to strive to go beyond our "ordinary selves" and aspire to live according to our "best selves." It's not only a matter of how we live...but why. Without the spark of idealism and striving for transcendence, life becomes insipid.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel lamented the decline in religiosity among moderns. For some Jews, religion has become a matter of rote. People follow the rules by habit, not by inner spiritual connection. For others, Judaism is honored for its past, but not granted a serious role in life today. And yet for others, religion is disconnected from the ongoing crises of everyday living, the challenges facing society at large.

He wrote: "When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living

fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless” (A. J. Heschel: Essential Writings, p. 49).

A story is told of a Rosh Yeshiva who was overseeing his class of Talmud students. As the young men pored over the texts and engaged in heated discussion, the Rosh Yeshiva suddenly slammed his hand on his desk with a loud thud. He called out: “There is a God!” The students were startled...and surprised. Of course there is a God; why was the Rebbi shouting what we all know? But the Rebbi explained: it often happens that we are so engrossed in the texts we forget why we are studying, we forget the divine source of our studies, we need to be reminded: There is a God. An important lesson for the students, and for all of us.

Moses taught the Israelites: There is a God. Life must be lived with awareness of this grand reality. We study and observe Torah not only to learn How. We study and observe to know Why.

An Open Letter Addressing Misinformation Spread by Noam "Nani" Vazana

We, the undersigned, are dedicated to the revitalization of the Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) language, which has been designated as an endangered language by UNESCO and the Endangered Language Alliance. Our community includes native and heritage speakers, ethnomusicologists, researchers, musicians, students, and advocates committed to sustaining Sephardic linguistic and cultural traditions.



Ladino, spoken by Sephardic Jews following their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, remains a living language with documented Ottoman and Moroccan variants and many opportunities for study and learning. Though it has been called by various names, for the purpose of this letter we will refer to the language and its variants as Ladino. We write in the context of growing concern over misinformation and misrepresentation, which continue to pose serious threats to the integrity of the Ladino language and Sephardic culture.

One pressing example is musician-songwriter Noam "Nani" Vazana, who has repeatedly misrepresented both Ladino and Sephardic culture, despite years of correction from scholars and community members. Unlike instances of inadvertent error or misunderstanding, her mischaracterizations have been persistent and have often appeared to be deliberate. An ambitious publicity campaign has further amplified these inaccuracies, making them a growing concern for the wider Ladino-speaking community.

Most recently, Vazana was awarded the LIET Prize, which is an international award for newly composed songs in minority languages. Vazana's winning song "Una Segunda Piel" is NOT in Ladino, as she claims. An article in the Dutch Jazz magazine *Jazzenzo*, along with linguistic analysis by native speakers, has provided clear evidence that it is not in Ladino or any of its Ottoman or Moroccan variants.

Scholars of the vast Ladino song repertoire, along with Ladino speakers and educators, actively encourage innovation and creativity in the language. Many have attempted to approach Vazana and offer corrections to the Ladino of her songwriting and the historical and cultural narratives in her performances, but these efforts have been met with resistance and outright rejection. Our concern is not with her artistry but with her distortion of Ladino, and Sephardic history and culture. None of Vazana's original songs is in any dialect of the Ladino language, and the cultural narratives that accompany them are often rife with inaccuracy.

On her website, social media, booking agency page, and promotional materials, Vazana has repeatedly marketed herself as the "World's First Ladino Singer-Songwriter" or the "World's First Millennial Ladino Songwriter"—claims that are patently untrue and run counter to a long-standing and well-documented tradition of original Ladino songwriting. For hundreds of years, and across many regions, composers have written and performed original songs in Ladino. This creative tradition is not only part of the historical record but continues actively today. Vazana has also falsely claimed to have received a Library of Congress "Living Relic" Honour, an award that does not exist. The Library of Congress has no award of this kind. This is not a minor embellishment but a serious fabrication, contributing to an inflated professional profile that lends false legitimacy to her work.

In addition to these claims, Vazana has performed copyrighted Ladino works, such as "Ocho Kandelikas" by Flory Jagoda (1983), without proper attribution, misrepresenting them as anonymous folk songs. She has also fabricated a Ladino connection to the Netherlands, falsely asserting that she discovered a Ladino lullaby manuscript in Amsterdam's historic Ets Haim Library. This is an assertion disproven by the library itself, and by ethnomusicologists internationally known as specialists in Ladino music and culture.

These, and many other, repeated misrepresentations not only distort Ladino history and culture but also undermine the integrity of the ongoing efforts to preserve and revitalize the language. Despite her limited knowledge of the language and culture, Vazana has consistently positioned herself as an expert in the field, promoting her work as a primary access point for those seeking to learn.

We urge Noam "Nani" Vazana to remove misrepresentations about her role in Ladino music and culture from her public materials. We call on venues and granting agencies to reconsider their support while these misrepresentations persist.

This letter is not issued in malice, but rather in defense of our endangered language and culture. Misinformation diverts attention and material resources from legitimate preservation efforts. This is not only about Ladino; it raises broader questions: who has the right to shape the narrative of a critically endangered culture, and what happens when one person distorts, co-opts, and claims to "save" what is still a living tradition?

We stand for accuracy, integrity, and the rightful representation of Ladino and Sephardic heritage.

Signed,

American Ladino League

Rachel Amado Bortnick, founder of Ladinokomunita, co-director of American Ladino League

Dr. Aldo Sevi, editor-in-chief of the all-Ladino cultural and literary magazine Aki Yerushalayim

Dr. Gloria J. Ascher, Tufts University (Emerita), Ladino poet, singer, songwriter, writer, teacher

Prof. Liliana Tchukran-Benveniste, co-founder and Vice President of Sefarad Cultural Center, Ladino teacher, Sephardic singer, writer and co-founder and editor of eSefarad.com

Prof. David M. Bunis, Center for Jewish Languages, Mandel Center for Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Susy Gruss, Salti Institute for the Study of Ladino, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan Israel

Karen Gerson Şarhon, director of the Sephardic Center of Istanbul & general editor of the Ladino newspaper, El Amaneser

Ethan Marcus, Managing Director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

Prof. Ora (Rodrigue) Schwarzwald, president of the Israel Academy of Ladino, Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and the Salti Institute for the Study of Ladino, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

Dr. Carlos Yebra López, California State University Fullerton, Ladino researcher and instructor, executive director and co-founder of Ladino 21

Alejandro Acero Ayuda, PhD (c), University of Oregon, heritage languages and Ladino researcher, co-founder of Ladino 21

Dr. Judith Cohen, York University, Toronto (Music Department), Sephardic Music Specialist

Daisy Sadaka Braverman, native Ladino speaker, former instructor, Columbia University, teaching Ladino for 19 years at the University of Pennsylvania, singer of Sephardic folk music, translator, actress and singer in Ladino Players, New York.

Simone Salmon, Department of Ethnomusicology, UCLA, doctoral dissertation on the Ladino music of Turkey, host and programmer of Ladino music radio show *Los Bilbilikos*, and former director of Ladino music singing ensemble Kantigas Muestras in Los Angeles

Benni Aguado, native Ladino speaker who knows the language well and has helped many people learn it

Ítalo Felizardo, Brazilian Sephardic Jew, heritage Ladino speaker

Esther Rute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Philologist and Historian. Judeo-Spanish Teacher at Cervantes Institute of Tel Aviv and Council of Sephardi & Oriental Communities in Jerusalem, Deputy Editor in 'Aki Yerushalayim' Magazine.

Patrijan Mi Tiri – Recipe from David Baruch

Eggplant with Cheese – A Romaniote Dinner

"This is my first attempt to prepare an Eggplant with Cheese dinner. It's accomplished by snapshot memories from Astro Baruch, my grandmother and Betty Baruch Elias, my aunt. The photo of both ladies was taken in Patras, Greece in the summer of 1936. Both of them were and continue to be very important individuals in my life. They always prepared the most delicious meals." – David Baruch

Ingredients

2 Eggplants - small to medium size
7.5 oz of Farmer cheese
1 Heaping tablespoon of whipped cream cheese
2 to 3 Eggs well beaten
3 Tablespoons of matzo meal

Cooking process

Take an aluminum pan coated with olive oil.
Microwave the eggplant to soften it (approximately 6 minutes).
Cut each eggplant into two pieces lengthwise.
Scoop the pulp from each half of the eggplant.
Set aside the pulp and remove the seeds.
Place the remaining eggplant shells in the aluminum pan.
Mix the pulp with farmer cheese, whipped cream cheese, matzo meal and the beaten eggs.
Fill each eggplant with the mixture.
Spread the top of each eggplant with plenty of bread crumbs and Parmesan cheese.
Take one well beaten egg and brush lightly the top of each eggplant.
Place the aluminum pan in the oven and bake at 350 degrees for 45 to 60 minutes until golden brown.

Have a glass of Sauvignon Blanc wine with your dinner.
Have a cup of coffee with a nice piece of baklava.
That was our dinner last night.



We are so proud of our community members who work to spread the story of our precious world. Elliot Colchamiro lectures throughout the southeastern Florida area. He takes no fee for himself but raises money for Kehila Kedosha Janina by asking for donations. Thank you Elliot.



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



Looking for Our Help

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

Note on Pursuing Greek Citizenship

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

Photos of the Month



From Reuven Emanuel in Israel: Discovered behind an old picture frame of his parent's wedding in Veria, a rare picture of the Jewish Choir "Hallel veZimra" in Salonika in 1930.



Broome Street and Kehila Kedosha Janina in 1965

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

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

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

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



**Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 196
August 2025**

**Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002
Website: www.kkjsm.org
Email: info@kkjsm.org**

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