



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

September 2024 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

As we enter the Fall season, we mark the new month of Elul on September 3-4. During this month, in anticipation of Rosh Hashana, Jews around the world recite Selihot prayers which call for introspection from each of us to improve our behavior, improve our relationships with one another, and improve our relationship with God. As we prepare for the New Year of 5785, we pray that all Jews and good people around the world are inscribed and sealed in the book of life for the upcoming year. As we prepare to gather together with family and friends, we urgently pray that our brothers and sisters being held in captivity return to their families and that we all can live in peace and security. May God hear our prayers and may the Shofar remind all of us of the opportunity to bring more light into the world.

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

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

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

This newsletter, our 185th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjasm.org.

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

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

Simchas

Mazal tov on the wedding of Rachel Serwetz to Matthew Ross Esmaelzada. Rachel is the daughter of Laurie and Mark Serwetz, and granddaughter of Rose Eskononts and Murray Eskononts of blessed memory.



On Saturday, June 8, 2024, Kahal Kadosh Yashan in Ioannina hosted the joyous B'nai Mitzvah of the 'Friedman Four'. This event celebrated the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs of Eva Wolf, Rhonie Adele, Abraham Harold, and Isaac Maurice Friedman, the children of Sarah Kate Levy and David Friedman, of Los Angeles. David is the son of May Naphtali and the grandson of Bella (Myones) and Matthias Naphtali, who each came from distinguished Ioanniote families. The service was conducted by Cantor Bill Kaplan, a friend of the family, and was made possible with the assistance of Allegra Matsa of Ioannina and the congregation of the synagogue. Over twenty friends and family members came from the US, UK, and Belgium to celebrate this milestone—the first B'nai Mitzvah in the history of this distinguished Jewish community. Among the ancestors of the Jewish community of Ioannina who attended were: Maya and Katya Naphtali, daughters of Dafna Naphtali. Dafna Naphtali, daughter of Tzvia and Leonard Naphtali. Allison Greenberg, daughter of Vivian (Naphtali-Menachem) and Mark Greenberg. Adam Weiser, son of Eleanor (Naphtali-Menachem) and Burton Weiser.



Passings

Rabbi Yaakov Peretz, a dedicated mentor and spiritual father to many Sephardic Rabbis around the world, passed away last month on the 17 of Av. From Rabbi David Benchlouch from the Rhodes Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle: "Rabbi Yaakov Peretz was the guiding light of my years in Yeshiva. His profound wisdom shaped every aspect of my life, from teaching me the intricate nuances of Halakha in the Sefaradi tradition to guiding me through my most significant milestones. Rabbi Peretz left the comfort and affluence of his Moroccan family at just twelve years old, choosing instead the humble life of poverty in Eretz Yisrael in pursuit of Torah.



He was unwavering in his commitment to truth, even at personal cost, and devoted his days and nights to the study and teaching of Torah, always punctual and living a life of remarkable humility. His selfless dedication extended to supporting his students, despite his modest salary, and he maintained a rigorous schedule, rising at 2:00 am to study and pray. Rabbi Peretz's life was a testament to integrity; he never uttered a falsehood and lived by the principles he taught, emphasizing the distinction between what is essential and what is secondary. He never discarded a scrap of trash in the Holy Land and fervently encouraged all Jews to make Aliyah and dwell in Israel.

His faith in Hashem was immense, coupled with an unparalleled work ethic and devotion. He performed Mitzvot with sincerity, consistently teaching his students the importance of daily Musar study, particularly Mesilat Yesharim, which he himself had studied over a hundred times. His teachings resonated deeply because they came from a place of genuine adherence and heartfelt commitment.

May we emulate his ways, may his Torah and Emunah guide us to love Hashem, love Eretz Israel, study Torah and Musar, make Aliyah, and live in Israel." ברוך דיין האמת."

Visitors to Kehila Kedosha Janina

KKJ was honored to welcome a delegation of Jewish leaders from Moldova for a tour of our synagogue and museum last month. Dr. Irina Şihova and Mr. Iulii Palhovici are the Directors of the new Jewish History Museum of the Republic of Moldova, and they were eager to learn about our experience preserving our synagogue, our community, and our Romaniote traditions. The tour was arranged by the US State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Learn more about Jewish heritage in Moldova [Here](#) and [Here](#).



We were also honored to welcome Consul General of Israel in New York Ofir Akunis for a tour of our synagogue and museum. It was a very special meeting as his family originally came from Thessaloniki and we discussed opportunities for our community to collaborate with the Consulate in the future.



We had the pleasure of welcoming Ifat Ovadia-Luski, Chairwoman the Jewish National Fund, who was visiting New York in August. She was very excited to learn about our community, especially because her family originally came from Izmir before they made aliyah to Bat Yam in Israel. Ifat made history as she is the first woman chosen for the role of Chairperson of JNF.



We always love welcoming new visitors and friends, and it was a pleasure welcoming a group of college students from the Macaulay Honors College at CUNY to learn about Greek Jewish history. They visited KKJ as part of their course on arts and culture in New York City.

Past Events

On Friday August 23 & Saturday August 24 KKJ hosted a special Greek Shabbat program featuring a dynamic young man Theo Canter. Theo spoke about his Romaniote heritage, his recent Fulbright Fellowship in Greece during which he lived in Athens for a year, and insights on the Torah portion. We had an incredible evening with 50 young community members sharing delicious food and great energy Friday night, and another 50 community members of all ages for services and lunch on Saturday. We were honored to have Consul General of Israel in New York Ofir Akunis attend on Friday night along with his family. Special thanks to Theo for his inspiring words Friday night and engaging class on Saturday. We look forward to many more meaningful times together.



Thank you to everyone who joined us last month for a special class led by Rabbi Joseph Dweck, Senior Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese community in the UK. He leads a dynamic Jewish educational organization called the Habura, and you can learn more [Here](#). Watch his class online [Here](#).



In addition to the wonderful Shabbat dinner held on August 23 for young community members, the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network held a summer BBQ and pool party which included a reunion of many of the participants on their recent trip to Jewish Greece and the Balkans. Special thanks to Joel and Elyssa Marcus for hosting this fun event!



Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

"In the Footsteps of the Jews of Greece"
New Book Presentation by Author Anastasios Karababas – Sept 15 at 1pm
RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE & MUSEUM
IS HONORED TO WELCOME

ANASTASIOS KARABABAS

FOR A SPECIAL PRESENTATION
OF HIS NEW BOOK

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF
THE JEWS OF GREECE**



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 15 AT 1PM
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NYC

This pioneering book presents a unique detailed historical overview of the history of Greek Jews from antiquity to the present day, including the period of the Holocaust when nearly 90% of the community was annihilated. Beyond this historical landscape, the book also highlights the contributions of Greek Jews to the economic, cultural, intellectual and political life of the country, and reveals the golden times and the darkest days in the coexistence between Jews and Christians in Greece.

Anastasios Karababas is a French-Greek historian, teacher and political analyst. He was a guide and lecturer at the Shoah Memorial in Paris from 2014 to 2020. In 2011, he began his research on the Jews of Greece, and his latest book is based on historical archives from Europe, Israel and the US. His research mainly focuses on genocides of the 20th century, the preservation of memory, and its transmission to younger generations.

SIGNED BOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE
REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

PLEASE RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJSM.ORG

Join us for High Holiday Services

Please RSVP to Amarcus@kkjism.org
View our full holiday schedule [Here](#)

2024

5785

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

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

**תזכו לשנים רבות
Χρόνια Πολλά**

ANYOS MUNCHOS I BUENOS

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

ROSH HASHANAH - OCTOBER 3, 4

YOM KIPPUR - OCTOBER 11, 12

PLEASE RSVP TO AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG

VIEW OUR FULL SCHEDULE AT WWW.KKJISM.ORG

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Kehila Kedosha Janina

280 BROOME STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10002

*The Officers and Congregation of Kehila Kedosha Janina cordially invite you to
Join us for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur Services*

*Kehila Kedosha Janina, at the same location on the Lower East Side for the past 97 years,
is the last remaining Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere conducting services in
the Judeo-Greek Romaniote Minhag (tradition)*

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| SUNDAY, SEPT. 29 | SELICHOT SERVICES | 7:15 A.M. |
| WEDNESDAY, OCT. 2 | EREV ROSH HASHANA | 6:00 P.M. |
| THURSDAY, OCT. 3 | ROSH HASHANA (1ST DAY) ROSH HASHANA (MINCHA & (TASHLICH) | 9:00 A.M. 6.00 P.M. |
| FRIDAY, OCT. 4 | ROSH HASHANA (2ND DAY) | 9:00 A.M. |
| SATURDAY, OCT. 5 | SHABBAT TESHUVA | 9:30 A.M. |
| FRIDAY, OCT. 11 | EREV YOM KIPPUR (KAL NIDRE) | 5:45 P.M. |
| SATURDAY, OCT. 12 | YOM KIPPUR MINCHA NE'ILA SERVICE | 8:00 A.M. 4:00 P.M. 6:00 P.M. |
| THURSDAY, OCT. 17 | SUCCOTH (1ST DAY) | 9:30 A.M. |
| FRIDAY, OCT. 18 | SUCCOTH (2ND DAY) | 9:30 A.M. |
| SATURDAY, OCT. 19 | SHABBAT CHOL HAMOED | 9:30 A.M. |
| THURSDAY, OCT. 24 | SHEMINI ATZERET (YIZKOR) EREV SIMCHAT TORAH | 9:30 AM 5:15 P.M. |
| FRIDAY, OCT. 25 | SIMCHAT TORAH | 9:30 A.M. |
| SATURDAY, OCT. 26 | SHABBAT BERESHITH | 9:30 A.M. |

*Prayer books and shawls are available at the synagogue
For additional information, please contact:
Marvin Marcus, President at info@kkjism.org*

Please RSVP for services to Amarcus@kkjism.org

*We Look Forward to Having You Join Us for the High Holy Days
Tizku LeShanim Rabot - Xronia Polla - Anyos Munchos i Buenos*

L'Shana Tovah

Marvin Marcus, President

Hashkavoth Memorial Prayers for Yom Kippur

Email memorial names to Amarcus@kkjism.org

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA HASHKAVOTH MEMORIAL PRAYERS

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

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

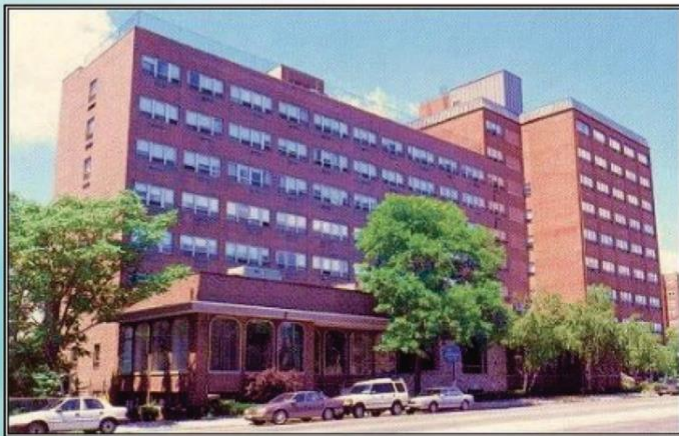
תזכו לישנים רבות

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
280 BROOME STREET NEW YORK, NY 10002
AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG

SEPHARDIC TEMPLE MEMORIAL HALL DEDICATION

Sunday, September 22, 2024

*Shahrit Prayer Service in the Main Sanctuary at 9 AM
Followed by Commemoration Program and Luncheon*



Left: Archival Photograph of The Sephardic Home for the Aged in Brooklyn



Right: "In These Lands Our People Dwelled for 500 Years", the map mosaic from the Sephardic Home for the Aged, now installed at the Sephardic Temple

**Join us as we consecrate the Memorial Plaques from
The Sephardic Home for the Aged, now known as
The Sephardic Foundation on Aging.**

**This dedication of the Memorial Hall will recognize and
memorialize all those involved with the Sephardic Home,
especially members of the Sephardic Temple.**

RSVP to the Temple office by September 13

**THE SEPHARDIC TEMPLE • 775 Branch Boulevard, Cedarhurst, NY 11516
(516-295-4644) admin@thesephardictemple.org**

Community Selihot Event – Saturday night September 28 at 11:55pm

5th Annual Community Wide Selihot



Sephardic Congregation of Fort Lee
313 Tom Hunter Road, Fort Lee



MOTZAE SHABBAT

SEPTEMBER 29 AT 12:30 AM*



ויעשו כולם אגודה אחת

Sephardic Congregation of Fort Lee
Benaroya Sephardic Center, Englewood
Congregation Shaarei Orah, Teaneck
Congregation Zichron David of West Orange
Kahal Kadosh Baba Sale New Rochelle
Kehila Kedosha Janina
Manhattan Sephardic Congregation
Sephardic Community of Fair Lawn
Sephardic Congregation of Paramus
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America
Sephardic Minyan of BMOB
Sephardic Minyan of CBY
Sephardic Minyan of JCT
West Side Sephardic Synagogue, NY

* 12:00 am Meet & Greet with refreshments followed by Havdallah & Selihot

OPEN FOR MEN AND WOMEN

**DEDICATED TO THE SUCCESS OF HAYALEI TZAHAL AND FOR
THE IMMEDIATE AND SAFE RETURN OF THE HOSTAGES**

News from Jewish Greece

Ioannina

From July 28 to August 4, 2024, more than 350 young Jews from 37 countries, members of the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), participated in their annual summer conference, SUMMER U, which this year took place in Ioannina. Workshops, lectures, exchange of views, search for new programs and activities, combined with entertainment, sports events and tours, were just some of the components of the successful event. In the context of this year's SUMMER U, the young people convened the General Assembly of the Organization, adopted resolutions on their positions and future, visited the Ioannina Synagogue, learned about Romaniote Judaism, were guided around the city and took a cruise on Lake Pamvotida.



At the official gala, the Mayor of Ioannina, Thomas Begas, addressed the gathering, who welcomed the new visitors to the city. G.G. participated on behalf of KISE. of the Board of Directors Victor Eliezer, who spoke about anti-Semitism and its expressions after October 7 and Israel's war on terror, focusing on the separation between criticism of Israel's policy or calls for a ceasefire and bigoted voices calling for destruction of Israel. Speakers at Summer U were, among others, Dr. Leon Saltiel, on behalf of the WJC ([HERE](#)), who spoke about the development of diplomatic relations and the role of strategic partnerships between organizations, MEP Anna Michelle Asimakopoulou and the President of I.K. Markos Batinos of Ioannina, who mentioned the Jewish history of the city. Summer U concluded with awards for innovative actions implemented by European youth ([HERE](#)), while EUJS did not fail to capture snapshots (videos and photos) of this year's event in its many social media posts. See related [HERE](#)- [HERE](#) - [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).



Karditsa

Event in Amaranto for the Rescue of Jews during the Occupation

24 kilometers from Karditsa and at an altitude of 720 meters is the Amarantos village of Agrafio (formerly Mastrogianni). In its central square, a monument dominates - a symbol for the Jewish history of the region. A monument different from the others because it is not dedicated to the memory of the Jews who perished, but to the memory of their saviors, the residents of the village who, during the German Occupation, gave safe shelter to 62 people, the entire Jewish community of Karditsa, together with another 20 people from other communities: 8 Jews from Thessaloniki, 5 from Trikala & 7 from Volos. The Gratitude and Recognition Monument - engraved with the words "Whoever saves a life saves the whole world" - was placed in the square of Amaranto in 2017, following the initiative & sponsorship of Viktoros Venouzios, whose family was saved by hiding in the village.



This year, for the first time, the Association of Uncharted Villages of Karditsa and Evrytania, as part of its project to highlight the history of the area, organized an event dedicated to the rescue of the Jewish community of Karditsa and the Jews who hid there in 1943-1944. The event took place on 11.8.2024, in Amarantos, and started with greetings from the local authorities. The history of the rescue of the Jews was spoken by the historian Mr. Vassilis Ritzaleos, a professor at the Democritus University, while the President of the Administrative Committee of the I.K. Karditsa Mr. Makis Kapetas and on behalf of I.K. Volos, Mr. Viktor Sakkis, who emphasized the gratitude of the Jewish community to the hospitable residents of Amarandos and the importance of their heroic attitude that should be presented as an example of humanity and solidarity. The rich cultural program also included the laying of wreaths at the Agrafio Fallen Memorial and concluded with traditional Agrafio and Sarakatsan dances.

Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki: The construction of the Holocaust Museum begins in 2025 – It will have a total area of approximately 9,000 sq.m.

The construction of the Hellenic Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki has now entered the starting line dynamically, since with the completion of the first works of organization of the construction site, the contractor consortium of companies "GEOEREYNA-OFS", in a period of seven months, will carry out the preliminary works of the project, which they concern excavations and supports and the construction of the foundation piles. The aforementioned is pointed out in today's announcement by the company "Samaras & Associates SA - Consulting Engineers", recalling that the Museum has a total area of approximately 9,000 square meters, will consist of six above-ground and two underground floors and will be developed around a small urban grove. It adds that in addition to the halls of the permanent exhibition, the Holocaust Museum of Greece will include rooms for periodical exhibitions, archives, education and research, as well as multi-purpose and recreational areas and administrative offices, while the outdoor space will be created on the adjacent property parking.



In the meantime, parallel to the works on the construction site, the preparation of the implementation study and the drawing up of the tender documents are progressing at an intensive pace, with the aim of early 2025 for the general contractor of the construction of the project to take over the reins of the construction of the Holocaust Museum of Greece, succeeding thus the contractor consortium that undertook the preliminary works and thus start the construction project at the beginning of next year, as emphasized in the announcement.

The drafting of the architectural study is co-signed by the architectural offices of Efrat Kowalsky Architects from Israel, Heide von Beckerath from Germany and P. Makridis & Associates SA. from Thessaloniki and as specified in the announcement, the Museum has been designed as a prominent monument inspired by the city's octagonal monuments, which during the night will diffuse light from the inside out, transforming the building into a living canvas that it imitates the lighting of lighthouses. The design is based on the principles of sustainability and sustainability, and the common goal of all parties involved is the certification of the project by the internationally recognized sustainable development system LEED.



The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, which is the owner of the project, together with the donors and the association of companies "Samaras & Synergates SA - Consulting Engineers" and Hill International in the role of project manager and Technical Consultant for the implementation of the project, worked intensively and coordinated, in order to complete the tendering process and contracting of the contractor on schedule, so that this first phase of construction can begin immediately. "Under the coordination of the government, in cooperation with the donors, IKTH, the project manager, the Municipality of Thessaloniki and in general with all the contributors, all the actions for the implementation of this emblematic project of our city are proceeding intensively", it is underlined in the communication.

For the Holocaust Museum of Greece, implemented by the Israelite Community of Thessaloniki and financed by the Federal Republic of Germany, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the Greek government, but also by donations such as Dr. Albert Bourla, the construction permit was issued at the end of December 2023 by the Department of Construction and Urban Development of the Municipality of Thessaloniki.

Watch a video rendering of the new museum here: <https://youtu.be/qmHQFW-z6Mk>

Rhodes

Reconnecting with My Jewish History in Rhodes

As I promised my grandmother's cousin in Ladino, it is my responsibility to share this story.

Full article by Alexandra Fellus [Here](#)

I stepped onto the tarmac and was greeted by the warm sun shining down on the Island of Rhodos for the first time. I vividly remember the smell of the ocean and I knew immediately that I loved this island.



In Greek mythology, Rhodos was a wife of the sun god Helios. Pindar, the poet, tells the story of Helios who claimed the new island which had yet to rise from the sea. For me, the great-granddaughter of Marie Franco and Esther and Isaac Cadranel, who called this island home, I claimed the new island which had yet to rise in my sea of consciousness.

Although I was several generations removed from my family's connection to Rhodos, their history came to life before my eyes as I walked through the [cobblestone streets](#) with my mother, landing at her grandmother's doorstep. It had been over 40 years since she had visited the island and seen the pomegranate tree still growing in the backyard as a young child.

Walking the streets of Rhodos, you would never notice the Hebrew etchings on the walled city's arches, some of the only lasting remnants of a thriving [Ladino-speaking Jewish community](#). One that at its peak was home to 5,000 Jews, four synagogues, Italian and French schools and a yeshiva. The Jewish community made up a quarter of the town's population. The story of the Jews of Rhodes is a tragic one, like that of many Jewish communities in Europe.

Although my great-grandparents left for Africa just years before World War II, their family was not so lucky. Nor was my grandmother's cousin Sami Modiano, now 94 years old and a Holocaust survivor. He returns back to the island every summer to tell his story. Sami and his family were taken from Rhodes to [Auschwitz](#) when he was 13 years old. He had his bar mitzvah in the camps and miraculously celebrated a second bar mitzvah in his childhood synagogue much later on in life – an experience he was robbed of at a young age.

On my visit, he greets us at Kahal Shalom Synagogue, originally built in 1575 in the Jewish quarter, which is called "la djuderia" in [Ladino](#). As he shows me the tattoo on his arm, number B7454, the scars of Auschwitz that he bears to this day, he tells me in French, "It's your responsibility to tell my story."

Sami remembers my great-grandparents and he takes us up the street to show us where they lived. When his mother wanted peace and quiet, she would send Sami to my Nona Marie's mother, Mercada, for a sweet treat and say "tene me aki," in Ladino, meaning "keep me here." Patiently, he would sit and wait and then finally, Mercada would give him something sweet and send him on his way home. Later, we learn that Mercada was taken with Sami to Auschwitz and died in the camps.

Sami takes us first to my grandmother Marie's house, and then across the street, he points to Esther's house. We do a double take. "Your great-grandparents lived across the road from each other." Little did they know, they would both move to the Congo, where their children would be born and raised, and eventually married. [He tells us in Ladino](#), "todos avlamos el ladino. Todos eramos amigos i komo hermanos in la djuderia." They all spoke Ladino in the Jewish quarter and it was a tight-knit community where friends were like family.

A day later, we head back into the old city looking to eat a delicious meal of dolmades. The Fates had it decreed that we run into Sami and his wife Selma strolling through the outdoor markets just steps away from the Jewish quarter. We were thrilled because we hadn't had the chance to say goodbye the day before. When

we turned to leave, he held my face with both his hands and looked at me right in the eyes. He said, “Tu m’as promis” – “you promised me.” I said, “Je t’ai promis,” – “I promised.”

Alexandra Fellus is the creator of @ladino.with.lex, her personal archive of ladino words, sayings and Sephardic culture. She is the editor of the Sephardic Brotherhood’s quarterly magazine, El Ermanado Sefaradi which is the only ladino print publication in North America.

Remembering the Longest Journey to Auschwitz – the deportation of Rhodes’ Jews decimated a small but vibrant community with centuries of Mediterranean history by Devin Naar

In the Old Town of Rhodes, a picturesque tourist destination in the Aegean Sea, [stands a monument](#) to a dark period in the island’s past. In the former “Djuderia,” [the Jewish quarter](#), a marble obelisk commemorates the deportation of the island’s small but vibrant Sephardic Jewish community to Auschwitz-Birkenau on July 23, 1944.

[The 1,700 Jews of Rhodes](#) had the misfortune not only of experiencing deportation late in the war, when Allied victory was almost in sight, but also of enduring [the longest journey](#) of any Jewish community sent to Auschwitz — a treacherous voyage that lasted 24 days.

In July 2024, 80 years after the tragic deportation, scholars, government officials, community leaders and Jews from Rhodes and their descendants — known as Rhodeslís — gathered on the island, which has been part of Greece since 1947, for [a week of commemorations](#). I participated as a historian from Seattle – [home to a large Rhodeslís community](#) – and [as chair](#) of the University of Washington’s [Sephardic Studies Program](#).



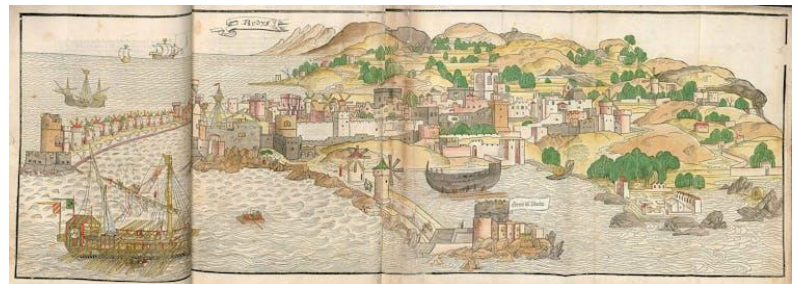
The fate of the Jews on this remote island is testament to [the scale and reach of the Holocaust](#): how the genocide of Jews [remained a Nazi priority](#) to the end, and the range of Jewish cultures decimated during the war. The Holocaust destroyed not only Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe, but also Ladino culture of the eastern Mediterranean.

Ottoman echoes

Like many Jewish communities in the eastern Mediterranean, the Jews of Rhodes are Sephardic Jews, whose forebears were [expelled from Spain in 1492](#) and settled in the Ottoman Empire.

While a Jewish presence on Rhodes dates to antiquity, around the second century B.C.E., the main Sephardic population emerged after the Ottomans conquered the island in 1522. Under the Ottoman Empire’s Sunni Muslim rulers, Jews on Rhodes paid [special taxes](#) in exchange for maintaining their own institutions, rabbinic traditions and Sephardic language, known as [Ladino or Judeo-Spanish](#).

In 1840, an economic dispute about the trade in natural sea sponges tested relationships among the island’s communities. With the support of European consuls, Greek Orthodox Christians on the island incited violence by promulgating [a blood libel](#): the antisemitic accusation that Jews use the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. But the Ottoman sultan intervened, affirmed the blood libel was false and restored calm.



In 1912, the Italians conquered the Dodecanese Islands, of which Rhodes is the largest. Still, Jews maintained cordial relations with their Muslim neighbors. [Auschwitz survivor Samuel Modiano recalled](#) that his father spoke Turkish with his Muslim neighbors, whereas relations with local Christians remained “decidedly thornier.”

These dynamics help explain why a Torah scroll featured in the Djuderia's renovated [Jewish museum](#) survived the Nazi occupation due to [the intervention of the local Mufti](#), a Muslim religious leader, who hid the Torah in a local mosque.

Italian paradoxes

Life transformed radically for the island's 4,300 Jews under Italian control, which lasted from 1912 to 1943. Italy saw Ladino as a Romance language, like Italian, and therefore considered the Jews natural partners in spreading "Italianness" in the region. In 1928, once Benito Mussolini had risen to power, the fascist government established [a prominent rabbinical seminary](#) on Rhodes, to which students flocked from across the Mediterranean. But if Italian fascism appeared to contribute to the flourishing of the island's Jews, it also contributed to their downfall.



In 1938, Mussolini followed Adolf Hitler's lead by introducing his own antisemitic [Racial Laws](#). The laws defined Jews as a separate, inferior race; banned intermarriage; and excluded Jews from military, government and professional positions, as well as [public schools](#).

Modiano, who played a central role in the recent commemorations, recalled [the humiliation](#) of being expelled from school: "That day I lost my innocence. In the morning I woke up as a boy. At night I went to sleep as a Jew."

As part of a broader Italianization campaign, the laws also expelled Jews who had arrived on Rhodes after 1919. Many Jews on the island had previously held Ottoman nationality, and Turkey was just 10 miles away. But as part of its own nationalization project, the Turkish republic denied them permission to repatriate.

In letters to relatives in Seattle, [Clara Barkey](#), whose father was originally from Aydin, Turkey, likened her family's expulsion in 1938 to the exile of her forebears from Spain in 1492. Barkey ultimately secured passage to Tangier, Morocco, one of the few places willing to accept Jews, given [immigration quotas](#) in places like the United States. Others joined Rhodesí diaspora communities in places like [Argentina](#), Belgium and what are now [the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe](#).

Destruction

For the 1,000 Jews forced to leave Rhodes in the late 1930s, the expulsion was a blessing in disguise. The Jews who remained could not fathom the fate that would befall them.

In September 1943, after Italy surrendered to the Allies, [German forces invaded the island](#). But for 10 months, the Nazis did not implement new anti-Jewish measures. On Rhodes, Jews did not face ghettoization, nor were they forced to wear the yellow star. By the following summer, the tide of the war was turning in the Allies' favor.

Nevertheless, the Third Reich made plans [to extend the "Final Solution" to the Dodecanese](#). On July 20, 1944, SS officers corralled most of the island's Jews into a makeshift concentration camp. The pretense was an identity document check, a trick that sealed their fate. Yet the local Turkish consul, [Selahattin Ülkümen](#), managed to exempt more than 40 Jews who were, or whom he claimed to be, citizens of neutral Turkey. The SS packed the island's Jews into cargo holds of three ships used to transport livestock. En route to mainland Greece, the ships stopped to collect 85 Jews from the island of Kos and continued to the port of Athens. With little food and water, several prisoners [died during the week at sea](#), and their bodies were thrown overboard.

In Athens, the Rhodesí followed the rail path previously trodden by Greece's 60,000 Jews – including [the country's largest Sephardic Jewish community](#), in Salonica. As the transport from Rhodes neared Auschwitz, the U.S. bombed nearby chemical plants and refineries – [but never the railroads, gas chambers or crematoria](#). Only 150 Rhodesí survived Auschwitz.

The Third Reich's decision to liquidate the Jews of Rhodes so late in the war underscores the extent of [Hitler's fixation on the mechanized mass murder of Jews](#), despite the cost to the war effort. Nazis allocated their dwindling resources to deport small Jewish communities [on the fringes of Europe](#), even as [the British bombarded Rhodes](#), and even as the Nazi occupation would collapse within six weeks. As [survivor Stella Levi](#) uncannily recalled, "It would have been simpler to murder us all here."

The 2024 commemoration events on Rhodes paid homage to the victims of the Holocaust – no Jews with prewar roots on the island remain there today. But they also honored the community's [traditions](#), [cuisine](#) and [spirit](#), kept alive among [Rhodeslís in diaspora](#) who made the pilgrimage to their ancestral island – an "island of memory."



Athens

Athens on high alert: Foreign intel warns Iran may attack Israeli interests in Greece

An official at the Citizen Protection Ministry confirmed foreign intelligence warned Greece of potential attacks in their territory. Full article [Here](#)

Greece's National Intelligence Service (EYP) and other counter-terrorism authorities were warned by foreign security services that Iran or Iranian-backed terrorists may attempt to target Israeli interests in the country, Greek daily Kathimerini reported on last month. The level of vigilance has only increased since Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Iran on Wednesday. While Israel has not taken responsibility for the death of the terror leader, Tehran has promised to attack Israel. Iran's mission to the United Nations [claimed that Hezbollah would target Israeli civilians](#) in coming attacks but only in Israeli territory. However, Iran-backed terror groups have increasingly targeted Jewish and Israeli sites in the Diaspora.

Previous attempted attacks on Israeli, Jewish interests

As referenced by Kathimerini, Iran attempted to carry out an attack in [Cyprus in December 2023](#). Two Iranians posing as political refugees were arrested for collecting information for future attacks on global Jewry in the wake of October 7.

There were also two attempted attacks on Israeli interests in Athens from 2023-2024.

In March, Mossad and EYP arrested two Pakistani nationals [planning an attack on a synagogue in Athens](#). The attempted attack was reportedly coordinated by Iran. The second incident in Greece was related to [arson attacks on an Israeli hotel and synagogue](#).

"The level of vigilance has increased," an official at the Hellenic Citizen Protection Ministry confirmed to Kathimerini. The official also confirmed that information from foreign intelligence warned of a possible attack in Greece.

The Jews of Greece: The Oldest Jewish Community in Europe Traces its History back more than 2,300 years. Full article by Anastasios Karababas [Here](#)

Greece is home to the oldest Jewish community in Europe, with the first evidence of a Jewish presence dating back to antiquity. An inscription dating from around 300 BCE, found in the Attica region, refers to a certain "Moschos Moschionos," a Jewish slave freed by his owner who is often considered the first Greek Jew. But while there is no clear evidence to prove it, it's likely that the Jewish presence in Greece goes back even further. After the [destruction of the First Temple](#) in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, some Jewish exiles are believed to have settled in Greece.



According to the [Book of Maccabees](#), which was written in the second century BCE, there were Jewish communities in different regions of Greece, including Attica (notably Athens), Macedonia (notably Thessaloniki), and on the islands of Crete and Rhodes. On the island of Delos, archaeologists have discovered a synagogue dating from around 150 BCE which is considered the oldest in Europe. In the first century CE, in the Acts of the Apostles, the apostle Paul confirmed the presence of Jews in several cities of Greece. Since Byzantine times, these ancient Greek Jews have been known as Romaniotes. Many Romaniote customs melded Greek and Jewish elements. They spoke a Greek dialect, known as Romaniote or Yevanic (Judeo-Greek), and chanted prayers in Greek, as Romaniote Jews still do today. Their style of Torah chanting was strongly influenced by Byzantine rhythms.

Beginning in the late Middle Ages, the community grew thanks to the arrival of Jewish refugees fleeing persecution elsewhere in Europe. During the Crusades, Ashkenazi Jews, mainly from Hungary and Transylvania, fled to Greece. So did Sephardic Jews fleeing the [expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal](#) in the late 15th century, bringing with them Iberian cultural traditions that they merged with Balkan and Oriental Jewish customs. And in the 16th century, a number of [Italian Jews](#) settled in Greece. Though the Greek Jewish community was diverse, the Sephardim were in the majority, and they imposed their language and culture on most of the other Jewish communities in the country.

The largest Jewish community took root in Thessaloniki (called Selanik or Salonika by the Ottomans), today the second-largest city in Greece. By the 16th century, more than half the population of Thessaloniki was Jewish, earning it the nickname "Madre de Israel" ("Mother of Israel," in Ladino) and, in the 19th century, "Jerusalem of the Balkans." Jews would constitute a majority in the city into the 1800s, during which Thessaloniki became the largest economic center of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and one of the most important seaports in the Mediterranean, even though the port was closed on Shabbat. The sultan even commissioned some Thessaloniki Jewish tailors to manufacture uniforms for the Ottoman infantry.

On the eve of World War II, about 75,000 Jews lived in Greece and more than 30 Jewish communities were recognized by the state, including Thessaloniki, Corfu, Rhodes, Crete, Athens, Volos, Larissa, Ioannina, Serres, Komotini and Kavala.

The Holocaust

During World War II, Greece was occupied by three countries: Germany, Bulgaria and Italy. The Germans and the Bulgarians began systematically implementing the Final Solution in the north of the country, where Thessaloniki is located, looting Jewish property and confining the Jews to [ghettos](#) before deporting them. The extermination rates in the north of Greece topped 95 percent. The Italians did not organize any deportations and sometimes even saved Jews. But in September 1943, the Nazis took over the Italian zone and began deporting Jews from Corfu, Crete, Ioannina and Athens, among others. In the Greek capital, the heroism of the city's chief rabbi, Elias Barzilai, assisted by sympathetic Greek leaders, including Athens Police Chief Angelos Evert, managed to help most of the Jews escape deportation.

In 1943 and 1944, an estimated 62,000 Greek Jews were deported to Auschwitz or Treblinka. Another 2,500 Greek Jews died before they could be deported. The route from Greece to the extermination camps could take as long as a month and is considered the longest deportation route inside Europe. It is impossible to know how many Jews survived the journey. All told, nearly 90 percent of Greek Jews perished in the Holocaust, one of the highest percentages in Europe.

After the war, 2,000 survivors returned from the camps, joining another 8,000 Jews who survived the war in hiding. These survivors attempted to rebuild their lives, but this was almost impossible. Greece experienced a civil war between 1946 and 1949, and the severe instability and persistent antisemitism pushed about half of those 10,000 Jews to leave, mainly for Palestine and the United States.



The Greek Jewish community today

Today, about 4,500 Jews live in Greece spread across nine communities. The largest is in Athens, with about 2,500 people. The others are in Thessaloniki (about 1,000 people), Larissa, Volos, Chalkida, Ioannina, Trikala, Rhodes and Corfu. Some Jews also live in Crete.

Antisemitism is a persistent problem, but it is largely confined to vandalism rather than acts of physical violence against Jews. During the economic crisis, between 2010 and 2020, many Jewish memorial sites and synagogues were vandalized. But the Greek government has taken a firm stance against extreme right-wing movements and promoted Holocaust memorialization, gradually adding Holocaust studies to the public school curriculum. Greece also maintains close relations with Israel. As of 2024, more than 360 non-Jewish Greeks received the title of [Righteous Among the Nations](#) from Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in recognition of their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust, a significant number for a small country.

Italy

The Jews of Italy: Jews have been present on the Italian peninsula from the time of Judah Maccabee. Full article by Ruth Ellen Gruber [Here](#)

The Jewish presence on the Italian peninsula dates back to ancient Roman times. The Jews of Italy's capital city claim to be the oldest continuous Jewish community in Europe.

Italy only became a unified country in the latter part of the 19th century, before which it was a patchwork of regions invaded, occupied and ruled at different times by different powers. The history of Italy's Jews reflects this, alternating between periods of prosperity and persecution depending on the ruler. "No other place in the western Diaspora can indeed boast a Jewish presence that has been so ancient, widespread and constant," the scholars Anna Foa and Giancarlo Lacerenza wrote in their book on the first 1,000 years of Jewish history in Italy.



Italian Jews in Antiquity

Jews probably lived in Rome by the third century BCE. In 161 BCE, only a few years after defeating the Seleucid [King Antiochus](#), Judah Maccabee sent a diplomatic mission from Judea to Rome headed by Jason ben Eleazar and Eupolemos ben Johanan. According to the historian Cecil Roth, the fact that the names of the two Jewish ambassadors are known bears a special significance.

"These are the first Jews to be in Italy, or to visit Europe, who are known to us by name," Roth wrote in *The History of the Jews in Italy*. They are "the spiritual ancestors of Western Jewry as a whole."

Ancient Rome's Jewish population was swollen by slaves and prisoners brought back after the sack of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. The Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum bears a famous carving showing Roman forces in a triumphal procession bearing the menorah and other loot from the [destroyed Temple](#). The arch was such a powerful symbol that Roman Jews refused to walk through it for centuries. They finally did so only in 1948, joyously parading beneath it to celebrate the birth of Israel.

From late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, most Jews lived in well-established communities in southern Italy and Sicily. Jewish catacombs and other archaeological evidence demonstrate a sizable Jewish population at Venosa, an important ancient crossroads between Naples and Bari from the fourth to the ninth century. The 12th-century Spanish Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela visited Italy on his journeys in the 1160s and 1170s. His trips took him to several Jewish communities in southern Italy, but he mentioned only two major Jewish communities north of Rome: Pisa and Lucca.



Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Jewish communities flourished in central and northern Italy in later centuries, bolstered by Sephardic Jews [fleeing Iberia after the expulsions in the late 15th century](#) and by small groups of Ashkenazi Jews from central Europe. Great ports such as Venice, Ancona and Livorno became crossroads of Jews from many lands and backgrounds. In some cities, Jews of different traditions built separate synagogues.

But in the decades after the expulsion of Jews from Iberia, Spanish rulers also banished all Jews from Sicily and south of Rome. Jews consequently moved north, to Venice, Ancona, Florence, Bologna and Padova. Both secular and religious authorities began instituting further restrictive measures. In 1516, civic rulers in Venice forced Jews to live in a closed district on the site of an old foundry. The word "ghetto" is believed to come from "geto," the Venetian dialect for foundry.

In 1555, Pope Paul IV instituted the ghetto in Rome and other cities in the papal states. Branding the Jews [killers of Christ](#), the decree condemned Jews to live in segregated areas, barred them from owning property or having more than one synagogue per community, forced them to trade only in secondhand clothing and required them to wear a distinguishing yellow hat or other mark. In 1569, Pope Pius V went further. He expelled Jews from almost everywhere in the papal lands, allowing them to live only in the ghettos in Rome and Ancona. Many Jews fled northward. Within little more than a century, closed Jewish ghettos were in place in most towns and cities in Italy that were home to Jews. New ghettos continued to be established until the end of the 18th century.

Despite this, Jewish religious and cultural life flourished during the ghetto period. Venice became a major European center of Hebrew publishing, for example, and behind anonymous outer walls, highly decorated synagogue sanctuaries were built.

Emancipation and the Holocaust

The emancipation of the Jews and the abolition of the ghettos didn't take place until the 19th century. Napoleonic rule in north-central Italy eased restrictions on Jews for a brief period at the turn of the century, but this was followed by a renewed crackdown after Napoleon's fall in 1815. With the Italian peninsula still under a variety of regional rulers, Jews became involved in the general struggle for unification, taking an active part in the Risorgimento, or Italian liberation movement, between 1848 and 1870.

The defeat of papal forces and confinement of the pope to Vatican City in 1870 brought down the gates of the last closed ghetto, in Rome. With emancipation, Italian Jews eagerly adopted an Italian identity and quickly integrated into mainstream society.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they built grand new cathedral-style synagogues that proclaimed their pride and freedom and they entered all professions and walks of life. There were already Jews in

parliament in 1871; Italy had a Jewish prime minister, Luigi Luzzatti, in 1910; and between 1907 and 1913, Rome had a Jewish mayor, Ernesto Nathan.

Like Italians in general, Jews backed both liberal and conservative political movements. Thousands of Jews even joined Benito Mussolini's Fascist party. In 1943, after Allied troops moved through southern Italy, Nazi Germany occupied northern Italy and began deporting Jews to their deaths. More than 8,000 Jews, around a quarter of the Jewish population, were deported and killed.

Italy's Jews today

Today, Italy's affiliated Jews number fewer than 30,000 out of a total population of 60 million. Around three quarters live in Rome and Milan with the rest in a handful of other towns and cities, almost all in northern Italy. But despite their small numbers, they make up a multifaceted, complex community, whose richness and diversity — combining Ashkenazic, Sephardic, native Italian and other Jewish traditions — bear witness to a complicated history dating back to antiquity.



Many Jews in Italy today are immigrants (or the children of immigrants) who came to Italy in the past few decades, including thousands of Libyan Jews who fled after bloody anti-Jewish riots in 1967. Three main types of religious rites are celebrated: Sephardic, Ashkenazic and Italian — the latter a local rite that evolved from the Jewish community that lived in Italy before the destruction of the Temple.

The vast majority of Italy's Jews are nominally Orthodox. Most, however, are not strictly observant. Even observant Jews are typically highly acculturated, with a strong Italian as well as Jewish identity. Jews are active in all fields, from the arts to business to politics, and despite their small numbers hold prominent positions.

All officially established Italian Jewish communities are Orthodox and operate under the umbrella of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), which is their official collective representative to the state. Particularly in the larger communities, there is a well-organized infrastructure of schools, clubs, associations and other services, including a rabbinical college.

Reform and Conservative Jewish streams are not officially recognized by the UCEI, although several small liberal Jewish communities have developed in Rome, Milan and Florence. They function outside of UCEI but affiliate with international progressive Jewish organizations. Chabad also operates outside the UCEI umbrella, with an active presence in Rome, Milan, Venice and Bologna.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II visited Rome's towering Great Synagogue, the first ever visit by a pope to a Jewish house of worship. John Paul made bettering relations between Catholics and Jews a cornerstone of his papacy, and his visit to the synagogue marked a watershed moment in the process — and was particularly significant for the Jews of Rome, who had suffered for centuries under oppressive papal rulers. His successors, Popes Benedict and Francis, also visited the synagogue and reaffirmed their commitment to Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Visiting Balkan Jews reminded us of the long tradition of mutual responsibility Full article [Here](#)

Igor Bencion Kožemjakin clutched the no-longer-kosher Torah scroll and read from it aloud as our group listened to his billowing voice across the otherwise-empty Sephardic synagogue in Sarajevo.

The ark was decorated under an arch of brilliant-colored tiles made up of bright blues and reds. To us, its design felt more reminiscent of a mosque than a synagogue.



Today there are only about 1,000 Jews left in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kožemjakin, our tour guide and the community's leader, told us that he is the last Jew in Sarajevo who can still read from the Torah. It is easy to hear this story and become discouraged about the state of Jewish communities in Europe. Sarajevo, long known as "[Little Jerusalem](#)," was once a melting pot of Muslims, Christians and Jews. At one time, it was about 20 percent Jewish.

Like many other communities ravaged by the Holocaust, it suffered extreme losses. But as our group of 17 young Jewish professionals from the Bay Area sat with Kožemjakin, the community felt anything but weak. We were deeply affected by this weeklong journey to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbor Croatia in early June with a group selected by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's [Entwine program for young adults](#) and the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund.

The trip was invaluable. It helped us learn critical lessons from people keeping Judaism alive in another corner of the globe, recognize the interconnectedness of the Jewish world and underscore our responsibility to take care of one another. It also built bonds among young leaders in the Bay Area Jewish community. Experiencing the trip together kept us from feeling powerless when confronting the realities of European Jewry. It also strengthened our resolve to create a richer and stronger Jewish Bay Area community when we returned home.

While traveling through the Balkans, we were reminded of how different it is to live in the Bay Area, home of the fourth largest Jewish community in the United States with roughly [350,000 people who identify as Jewish](#). We often take for granted how easily we can find a synagogue, be invited to a Shabbat dinner or Jewish event and engage in the time-honored tradition of playing "Jewish Geography." Not everyone is so lucky. We learned a lot from the Jewish community in Sarajevo, which was a pillar of support and safety during the [Bosnian War](#) in the 1990s. The Jewish Community Center we visited there supported hundreds of people during that devastating war. The JCC assisted the wounded and the hungry, operating a soup kitchen, hospital and community radio when resources were scarce. It did so with the help of the Joint Distribution Committee, the world's leading Jewish humanitarian group and a longtime Federation partner.

That spirit and the Jewish values of tikkun olam and tzedakah continue to this day. Kožemjakin travels throughout the Balkans to speak at interfaith gatherings and educate young Jews about the importance of involvement, engagement and crossing lines of difference to cultivate peace and understanding. We visited two Croatian cities as well. In Split, a father-daughter team shared their community's history and fears that their small synagogue is at risk of shuttering, which would cut off a lifeline for a Jewish community that has been in the region since the [7th century](#). In Zagreb, a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor named Melita offered her harrowing personal story and her decades of research on fellow survivors.

While the memories and the people in each place we visited were different, the message was always the same: We are resilient, and we are here together to repair our world.

It is powerful that no matter where we are in the world, there are Jewish values that we all share. This resonant lesson was all the more inspiring because we were connecting and learning together.

Living the heartbreak and history of our shared faith on this trip allowed us each to dive deeper into our personal responsibilities and the roles we will play as leaders in our community back home. We feel more energized and empowered to connect with the Bay Area Jewish community, whether by volunteering at a local Jewish nonprofit, starting a giving circle to support organizations that make the community stronger, joining the board of a Jewish organization we believe in, or encouraging our friends and family to become more involved too.

At a particularly challenging time to be a young adult and Jewish in America, seeing a small number of people do so much with so little reinvigorated us and reminded us of why now — more than ever — we need to continue our legacy of “arevut,” or mutual Jewish responsibility, and of tikkun olam for our community’s future at home and abroad.

Brazil

Silvio Santos, Brazilian media mogul and descendant of 15th-century Portuguese Jewish scholar-statesman, dies at 93 Full article [here](#)

RIO DE JANEIRO — Silvio Santos, a son of Sephardic Jewish immigrants who rose from working-class roots to become one of Brazil’s wealthiest men and a popular television personality, died Aug. 17. He was 93.



Born in Rio de Janeiro to a Greek Jewish father and a Turkish Jewish mother, the former street vendor built a media empire, including SBT, one of Brazil’s top three television networks. Calling him “Brazil’s first-ever celebrity billionaire,” Forbes magazine once compared him to Oprah Winfrey and Steven Spielberg.

“He was the greatest personality in the history of Brazilian television, and one of the country’s greatest communicators,” President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva tweeted shortly after Santos’ death, from bronchopneumonia due to an H1N1 infection, was made public.

“His departure leaves a void on Brazilian television and marks the end of an era,” added da Silva, who declared a three-day national mourning period.

Silvio Santos was the stage name of Senor Abravanel, who came to tears on air in 1988 when he proudly shared his epic family roots.

He was a descendant of Isaac Abravanel, a Portuguese Jewish statesman, scholar and financier in the 15th century who became King Afonso V’s treasurer. In Spain, he was unable to use his wealth and position to reverse the royal decree expelling all Jews in 1492. Abravanel (often rendered Abarbanel), who died in Venice in 1508, was one of the primary funders of Christopher Columbus’ voyage to the New World, and his Torah commentaries are still cited by scholars of Jewish text.

Although he never made it public, Silvio Santos made generous donations to the Jewish community. Despite his wife and daughters being devout Christians, he once educated millions of viewers about Yom Kippur and the reasons why he fasted as a Jew.

“Santos always made a point of maintaining his roots and values, becoming a symbol of pride for Jews throughout Brazil,” the Brazilian Israelite Confederation, Brazil’s umbrella Jewish organization, said in a

statement. "His contribution goes beyond television. His influence and leadership emerge as an important legacy for future generations."

Following a personal request to his family, Santos had a Jewish funeral on Sunday.

"Although he was not an Orthodox Jew, Silvio Santos was known for his essentially Jewish behavior," the confederation's president Claudio Lottenberg told CNN Brazil.

In 2013, Silvio Santos explained why he didn't sell time slots on SBT to evangelical churches, a strategy used by other TV channels to increase revenue.

"Don't you know that Jews lost everything when they let other religions into Israel?" he told Folha de S. Paulo newspaper. "Jews cannot allow another religion into their homes. That's why I don't allow any religion into SBT, which is a Jewish home."

In his Programa Silvio Santos, one of Brazil's longest-running television programs, the entertainer led game shows that became very popular with lower-income families. One of his most famous gimmicks was throwing paper airplanes made of money bills into the audience while shouting, "Who wants money?" as the crowd scrambled for them.

Silvio Santos' voice, laughter and perfectly coiffed dyed-brown hair became fodder among famous humorists and imitators. He constantly interacted with audience members, and with a custom microphone attached to his collar, he was free to wave his hands in the air.

Born Dec. 12, 1930, Santos was the son of Alberto Abravanel, a dockworker from Salonika who immigrated to Brazil at the turn of the century. A well-known figure around the port of Rio de Janeiro, Moises eked out a living working as an interpreter and tourist guide. He was fluent in about a dozen languages, including Yiddish, which he spoke as freely as Ladino, the language spoken in the Abravanel's Sephardic household.

Santos' mother, Rebecca Caro, was born in Smyrna, Turkey in 1905.

At the age of 14, Santos sold pens and plastic covers for voter IDs on the street. His sales pitches were so engaging that they led to an offer to audition as a radio host. His first television job came in the early 1960s. About a decade later, he acquired his first television concession and never looked back.

Silvio Santos' business empire, which included a cosmetics company, real estate assets and a bank, generated annual revenues of \$2 billion in 2013, reported Forbes. Santos became Brazil's single biggest individual taxpayer.

In 1989, he ventured into politics by launching a presidential campaign. However, his bid was cut short when the electoral authorities disqualified him due to his ownership of a television network.

In 2001, Silvio Santos' life story was honored by the samba school Tradicao during Rio's Carnival parade. Months later, he made headlines again when he was kidnapped for seven hours, just after his daughter Patricia Abravanel had been rescued from the same kidnapper.

Silvio Santos is survived by his wife Iris, six daughters, 14 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

National Sephardic Essay Competition – Winners Announced

The first cohort of winners and runner-ups in the National Sephardic Essay Competition has been announced. Presented in partnership between the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America and the University of Washington Sephardic Studies Program, the 2023-2024 “Muestras Konsejas” writing contest opened a new space for the telling of Sephardic stories.

The organizers received more than 60+ submissions of stories from all over the world and our expert panel of judges selected four finalists (across both “General” and “Student” submission categories) as the inaugural winners. The winning essays are now online on the UW Sephardic Studies website. We hope you enjoy reading ‘Muestras Konsejas’ from these accomplished writers!



Learn more and read the essays here: <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/sephardic-studies/>



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A circular portrait of Professor Bryan Kirschen, a man with short dark hair, wearing a blue suit jacket and a white shirt with a tie.

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel



Though none of the High Holy Days will this year in September, it does correspond with the Hebrew month of Elul, the month traditionally devoted to encouraging repentance and expressing our trepidation as we approach Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our Days of Judgment. These customs include the recitation of Selihot, sounding the shofar after the morning services, and recitation of certain psalms throughout the month.

But all four Sabbaths in September are also special, with special haftarah being recited as part of a total of seven 'haftarah of consolation', established by our Sages to be read from immediately after Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashanah. Three were already read during August, commencing with the Shabbat immediately following Tisha B'Av, often nicknamed "Shabbat Nahamu" after the first words of the first haftarah of this series, from the book of Isaiah, "*Nahamu, Nahamu Ami...Comfort, comfort My people...*'

The recitation of these special haftarah over a seven-week period parallels the traditional 'shiva' period of seven days of mourning for the loss of a close family member. Just as we visit the mourners over seven days to try and console and comfort them, God wishes to comfort Israel in our mourning for the destruction of the First Temple and being exiled to Babylonia. Therefore, not only did our Sages select the prophetic sections to be read from the Book of Isaiah, they also set a very specific order for their recitation to reflect the human mourning and consolation process.

The great Sephardic Sage, David Abudraham from 14th century Seville, Spain, offers very profound commentary on both the choice and order of these haftarah and God's consolation of Israel. He explains that our Sages established the first of these haftarah, as stated above, to be "*Comfort, comfort My people...*" (Isaiah 40:1-26). In this haftarah, God commands the prophets to comfort His nation in His name for the national calamity that has occurred. However, in the second haftarah, the people respond to God's consolation through the prophets by declaring: "*And Zion says, God has abandoned me...*" (Isaiah 49:14-51:3), meaning that we are *not, and nor will we be* comforted by prophets speaking on God's behalf. The prophets then convey this message to God in the third haftarah: "*A stormy afflicted one who will not be consoled...*" (Isaiah 54:11-55:5)" explaining to God that Israel is not appeased nor satisfied with the prophets offering condolences in God's name. The people desire that God address and comfort them directly, and not by proxy. God accepts this demand, subsequently approaching and consoling Israel directly over the next three weeks and haftarah: "*I, I am your comfort...*" (Isaiah 51:12-52:12), "*Rejoice O barren one...*" (Isaiah 54:1-10)", and "*Arise and shine because your light has come...*" (Isaiah 60:1-22)". As a result, Israel finally accepts God's consolation, which is expressed in the last of the seven haftarah: "*I shall surely rejoice in God...*" (Isaiah 61:10-63:9), where Israel declares that now we have reason to rejoice, as God Himself has consoled and comforted us: "*My soul will rejoice in my God for He has dressed me in garments of salvation....*"

According to Abudraham's beautiful interpretation, God well understood and recognized our need to be consoled and comforted directly, since the trauma and mourning over the destruction of the Temple was so great and almost unbearable. God's action not only illustrates His profound love and concern for Israel, but, perhaps even more important, His commitment to the undying, irrevocable, and eternal covenant with the Jewish people. And in these most trying and traumatic times for both the State of Israel and the entire Jewish world, we should also take comfort and draw hope from God's words of reassurance and consolation, as we continue to look forward in the expectation of the final redemption, speedily in our days.



Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Pursuit of Righteousness: Thoughts for Parashat Shofetim

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Professor Gershom Scholem wrote: "The Jewish mystic lives and acts in perpetual rebellion against a world with which he strives with all his zeal to be at peace" (Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 34). I think this statement is true not only of mystics, but of all truly religious individuals.

On the one hand, a religious person wants to live in harmony with God and humanity. He/she seeks a world in which the ideals of compassion, justice and truth are fully honored and obeyed. On the other hand, a religious person inevitably finds him/herself in rebellion against the rampant falsehood, cruelty and hypocrisy which characterize society. There is a horrible rift between the ideal and the real, and this rift tears at the soul of every truly religious individual.

The essential rift is not between the religious and the secular; it is between the righteous and the unrighteous. There are people who identify as "secular" but who live righteous, upstanding lives. There are people who identify as "religious" but who live unrighteous, immoral lives. Indeed, truly religious people are often most deeply pained when confronting moral turpitude among those who claim to be religious.

We expect—rightly—that people who present themselves as faithful adherents to Torah should live exemplary lives that set an example of righteousness and compassion. How painful it is to learn of "religious" individuals who engage in criminal activity, in child molestation, in spousal abuse. How disillusioning it is to confront "religious" teachers and leaders who display vile personality traits—arrogance, egotism, cruelty and self-righteousness.

To be religious means to serve God and humanity in righteousness, compassion and goodness. To be religious means to be honest, kind and thoughtful. Anyone who lacks these qualities is not "religious," no matter how careful he/she is in ritual observance.

This week's Torah portion instructs us to appoint judges and officers who will ensure righteous judgment in our communities. "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Devarim 16:20). This passage has often been interpreted to mean that we should be thoroughly imbued with justice. We should pursue justice only through just means, and we should never think that "righteous" ends can be achieved through "unrighteous" behavior.

This applies not merely to judges, but to all human beings. Our behavior should be pure, just as our inner lives should strive for purity. Truly religious people are not only troubled by the corruption and evils in our society; they strive to eliminate these corruptions and evils. They strive to improve themselves, their families, their communities, and society at large. They understand that the pursuit of righteousness is the foundation of religious life.

Religious people are perpetually in rebellion against a world with which they strive to be at peace. Peace begins with our own inner peace, putting our own spiritual lives in proper order. Once we are strong within ourselves, we can deal with our society with greater courage, honesty and success. The rebellion against evil will be won, one person at a time, one day at a time.

Sephardic Torah from the Holy Land - Defending Jerusalem: Rabbi Uziel, 1948

The return of my column, "Sephardic Torah from the Holy Land" by Rabbi Daniel Bouskila. Full article [Here](#)

Last month I was privileged to lead a tour of the Old City of Jerusalem. My group was 45 members of the beautiful synagogue in Herzliya where I now pray. Knowing that I work at the Sephardic Educational Center in the Old City, they asked if I can lead them on a tour of the Jewish Quarter. I picked a date, booked a bus and prepared a tour of the Old City titled "Jerusalem: From Destruction to Redemption."



Our journey featured the Chamber of the Holocaust and King David's Tomb on Mount Zion, the Zion Gate, the Sephardic Educational Center's Spanish Courtyard and Beit Ha-Rishon L'Ziyon (plus a delicious lunch!), the Four Sephardic Synagogues, the Hurba Synagogue, the Kabbalist's Yeshiva, the house of the Sephardic Rabbi Getz (the original "rabbi of the Kotel"), the Menorah in the Jewish Quarter, and Minha prayers at the Kotel.

My opening words to the group: "Today we will go deep into the DNA of the Jewish people."

I quoted S.Y. Agnon's famous statement from his Nobel Prize speech: "As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem."

As Jews, all of us are somehow "born in Jerusalem."

The last stop on our "DNA journey" was "The Jewish Quarter Defenders Monument." This touching memorial pays tribute to 48 heroic fighters who fell in the battle for the Old City in 1948. They were buried there in a mass grave, and in 1967, their remains were taken for proper burial on the Mount of Olives cemetery. Many of these fighters were Sephardic residents of the Old City, amongst them 18 students from the Sephardic Talmud Torah (today's SEC building). These heroes were actually born in Jerusalem.

As a tribute to their heroism, I read a statement by Sephardic Chief Rabbi Benzion Uziel, in response to yeshiva students who asked him for an exemption from joining the war in 1948:

"How can you ask for such a thing? Were it not for my old age and illness, I would pick up a rifle and hand grenade and defend my Jerusalem, the place I was born, my neighbor's homes, the streets and alleyways of the Old City and the Yohanan Ben Zakkai synagogue. How can you raise such an outrageous request while everyone else is fighting? This is a war of life and death. It's a mitzvah to fight. Remove these baseless ideas from your minds and go join the fight."

Rabbi Uziel's words send a powerful message to the Haredi "yeshiva world" – 1948 and 2024.

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila is the international director of the Sephardic Educational Center.

How Jewish is this Favorite Autumn Treat? Article [Here](#)

While the pumpkin spice latte as we know it today may not be a direct descendant of Jewish culinary practices, the spices that give it its distinctive flavor certainly are.

The pumpkin spice latte (PSL) has become a cultural phenomenon, especially in the fall, but its ingredients have roots that stretch back much further than the Starbucks menu. Interestingly, some of these roots can be traced to Jewish culinary traditions, particularly in the use of spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove, which are integral to the PSL's flavor profile.



Spices in Jewish culture

The blend of spices that constitutes what we now know as "pumpkin spice" has long been part of Jewish cuisine. Spices such as cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and clove have been used in various Jewish dishes across different regions.

For instance, Sephardic Jews, particularly those in the Mediterranean, have a rich history of incorporating these spices into their cooking. In the 16th century, pumpkin dishes flavored with cinnamon and other spices became associated with Jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. These dishes were not only delicious but also symbolically significant. For example, the word for pumpkin in Arabic, "qara," sounds similar to Hebrew verbs that imply tearing up harsh decrees, leading to the custom of eating pumpkin as a hopeful act during Rosh Hashanah.

Pumpkin in Jewish traditions

The pumpkin itself, while a New World crop, found its way into Jewish kitchens relatively quickly after its introduction to Europe. Jewish communities, particularly those in Sephardic regions like Greece, Turkey, and Morocco, began using pumpkin in their cooking, developing unique recipes that paired pumpkin with traditional spices. These recipes often became staples during Jewish holidays, further intertwining the use of pumpkin and spices in Jewish culinary tradition.

Influence on modern pumpkin spice

While the modern pumpkin spice blend we recognize today was popularized by companies like McCormick in the 1930s, the combination of spices it includes has deep historical roots. For centuries, Jewish cooks used similar blends in both sweet and savory dishes, influencing the culinary traditions of the regions where they lived. This cultural exchange, particularly in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jewish communities, contributed to the widespread use of these spices in various foods, laying a foundation that would eventually influence broader culinary trends, including the creation of the pumpkin spice flavor.

So, while the pumpkin spice latte as we know it today may not be a direct descendant of Jewish culinary practices, the spices that give it its distinctive flavor certainly are. The Jewish use of these spices, particularly in combination with pumpkin, reflects a broader history of culinary adaptation and cultural exchange. This history underscores the deep, sometimes surprising, connections between modern food trends and ancient traditions.

Keeping the Faith – Romaniote Film Project

Arlene Schulman of the Attas and David families is working towards completing her film, *Keeping the Faith: Meet the Romaniotes!* which examines the history, resilience, and survival of the Romaniotes.



Her Uncle Abie and his mother, Calomira, were two of the original founders of Kehila Kedosha Janina, donating \$100 towards the building of the synagogue in 1927. They were invested in keeping traditions alive for centuries to come.

Arlene is keeping traditions alive by producing and directing a film about her family, Romaniote and Greek Jews, and our synagogue. Films are expensive to produce and involve editing, music and video rights, color correction, photo rights, and graphic design.

Please help Arlene complete her film. Your gift of \$100, which matches Uncle Abie's, ensures that *Keeping the Faith: Meet the Romaniotes!* is completed with the production values that it deserves.

Here's how you can preserve Romaniote history. Our history. Thank you for considering a gift that tells our story. <https://gofund.me/5b87d611>

Photo of the Month Greek Jews on the Lower East Side 1980s Thanks to Sion Misrahi



Peppo Chimino, Jay Misrahi, Aaron Azouvi, Nissim Menashe, and Daniel Alhanati in front of Breakaway Fashions and Menashe's Store. In the doorway is Ino Menashe, you see him more clearly in the original photo and in the background is Jack Menashe trimming the window. Circa 1984-1986, 125-127 Orchard Street, NYC

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

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

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

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



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