



Jottings

K'K' Etz Hayyim

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SHANAH TOVAH – 5772

We had hoped to announce the New Year with another multi-faith calendar that would have been illustrated with photographs of details from some of the local churches, mosques and our synagogue. We were well harnessed for this until it became increasingly obvious that we were not immune to the present economic crisis that has hit Greece somewhat numbingly. With the impact of a tsunami, especially here in Hania where tourism is a major source of income for many, prices rose and the level of tourist activity fell considerably. We have had to tighten our belts accordingly.

Bizarrely enough we have had a steady flow of visitors and especially for Erev Shabbat Services we have had an increase in attendance but the cost of living has dictated that we stand as firm as we can on income producing projects – and alas, the Calendar was not one of them. We hope perhaps next year to resume its creation as in many ways it was in itself a symbol of the almost forgotten thread of Hania's history which was, not unlike Sarajevo, a city of rich multi-cultural, religious and ethnic complexity. Etz Hayyim Synagogue and the nearby Capuchin monastery and seat of the Catholic Bishop (who lives on Skiathos) as well as a number of mosques are the remaining witnesses to this nearly forgotten thread in our history.

The Fish Symbol that has been used as the New Year greeting is what Aldous Huxley and Carl Jung might have referred to as a perennial symbol that is not necessarily Jewish. Like the Magen David, it is found in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu symbolism, and has a universal meaning that many mystics and teachers have elaborated on in all of these traditions and that is perhaps especially meaningful

today. When we lose the essential character of being 'fishlike' or like birds we inevitably become grasping, acquisitive, possessive, and greedy which appears to be the motivation behind many of our grosser activities and that lead to personal or communal unhappiness. Fish live in schools as do birds live in flocks and as individuals they swim or fly leaving no traces of themselves. We have much to learn from both as so much of the root of our unhappiness as humans is the result of an almost desperate need to leave traces of ourselves and to live our lives as affirmations, interpretations and repetitive variations of these traces. Lot's wife is a symbol of this need to re-live and grasp her traces as she looked back to Sodom. Lot, and even his daughters in their own manner, were swimmers.

N. Stavroulakis



Memorial Service

As has been our custom for the past ten years an annual Hashcabah service was held for victims of the 'Action' taken by the Germans in 1944 that saw the destruction of the last kehillah of Etz Hayyim. This year the Synagogue was filled and we were especially grateful for the official attendance, for the first time, of an Archimandrite who represented the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Hania, the local Catholic Capuchin monks as well as a delegation sent by the Mayor of Hania and the City Council. We also had special thoughts sent by his Eminence Emmanuel Exarch of all Europe, who has his residence in Paris. This year we were fortunate that Ms. Lilian Capon, who is from a Haniote Jewish family, gave a very moving short talk about her memories of childhood in the Jewish Community of Hania. After reading out loud all of



the names of its members, candles were lit and special prayers were recited in the South garden where are buried four rabbis and where we now have the ossuary that contains the bones of thirteen Jews whose remains were found a couple of years ago in an extension of the Jewish Cemetery that were discovered during the initial excavations for an apartment building.

N.S.



Jewish Holidays

We had a very large attendance for Passover and as usual had booked the Myrovolos Restaurant for the Seder. This year we had our own Haggadah in readiness – in Hebrew, Greek and English – with even some Ladino inserts. We were very fortunate to have, as usual, Rabbi Nicholas de Lange who acted as ‘pater familias’ and Ovadia Garcia had prepared several members of the Community to sing some of the traditional songs in Ladino – and encouraged participation with the transliterations. It was a very happy evening and much wine and good food for the dinner made it the more happier.

Evlagon Centre for Cretan Jewish History Established

With the establishment of the Evlagon Centre for Cretan Jewish History in spring 2011 we have embarked on a new project that adds yet another valuable aspect to Etz Hayyim Synagogue. With a generous donation by Nikolaj Kiessling we were able to set up a space for the research and resource centre, which had been envisioned by Nikos Stavroulakis ever since he initiated and directed the rebuilding of Etz Hayyim Synagogue in the 1990s.

The Research Centre, named after the last chief rabbi of Crete, Avraham Evlagon (1846-1933) will provide the institutional venue for the study of the almost 2,500 years of Cretan Jewish history from Antiquity to the Shoa. For this purpose the Research Centre will run a library and an archive; initiate and/or facilitate research projects; publish findings of this research for the academic community as well as present those findings to the general public. The centre is located on the upper floor of a building adjacent to the

Synagogue, above the apartment of the Synagogue’s caretaker. In spring 2011, Etz Hayyim’s collection of books on Jewish history, theology, and philosophy as well as books on general history were moved to the new research centre to provide the core of its resources. The renovation of the space and installation of book-shelves for the centre has been accomplished and it now provides up to three workstations and a reading area. However, we still hope to expand our library collection to include further relevant publications on Hellenistic Judaism as well as Greek and Cretan history. As a first research project the Evlagon Centre will facilitate the compilation of a database of the dispersed archival holdings on Cretan Jewish history in libraries and archives worldwide, e.g. Jerusalem, Oxford, London, Cambridge, Paris, the Vatican, Venice, Istanbul and Crete.

A.Z.



Library restored and expanded

Since January 2010, when two arson attacks damaged and destroyed large parts of the library of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, we’ve received many generous donations of books from supporters worldwide. About 1,400 books were donated; including several sets of prayer books and various chumashim, furthermore encyclopedias and books on Jewish history, theology and philosophy along with books on general history and art history. The donations allowed us to replace a considerable amount of the destroyed or damaged books but many were also valuable additions to our collection. The majority of the book donations came from the US, mainly due to a call for donations published on the website of the Yiddish Book Center. We are very grateful to the Yiddish Book Center for facilitating this call for donations and most of all of course to the many donors who helped us recover after the two arson attacks. Most generous donors were Judy Humphrey and Ken Schoen of Schoen Books.



Etz Hayyim Synagogue and Cretan Jewish History presented at Jewish Community Centre in Munich

On June 16, Etz Hayyim Synagogue and its newly established Evlagon Centre for Cretan Jewish History were presented at an “Evening on Greek Jewish History” at the Jewish Community Centre in Munich. Dr. h. c. Charlotte Knobloch (President of the Jewish Community of Munich and Upper Bavaria and former President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Germany) had extended a kind invitation so that the event could take place in the Burda Hall of the Jewish Community Centre. The event was organized by the Foundation for Jewish History and Culture in Europe and the Department for Jewish History and Culture of Munich University to promote Etz Hayyim Synagogue and its latest project. Among the audience of about eighty people were Archpriest Apostolos Malamoussis, Emanuel Kugiumutzis (President of the Cretan Association of Munich), and Munich city councilor Konstantinos Gianakakos as well as members of the Jewish community and Greek community of Munich and graduate students of the Department for Jewish History and Culture of Munich University.

After an introduction by Prof. Brenner (director of the Department for Jewish History and Culture) and welcome addresses by Dr. h. c. Charlotte Knobloch and Emanuel Kugiumutzis, Senator h. c. G. Nikolaj Kiessling, the vice-director of Etz Hayyim’s Board of Trustees, and Anja Zückmantel, librarian and coordinator for the Evlagon Centre of Cretan Jewish History gave short presentations. Anja Zückmantel introduced the aims of the research centre and highlighted some of the aspects of Cretan Jewish history that are already documented to some extent, especially the Venetian period and the destruction of the Jewish community during the Shoa. Nikolaj Kiessling spoke about his personal attachment to Etz Hayyim Synagogue and recounted the immense task of reconstructing Etz Hayyim, which was initiated, conceptualized and implemented by Nikos Stavroulakis, and about the immense challenge of recreating Jewish life on Crete based on Mr. Stavroulakis’ vision for the Synagogue for being a place of worship, remembrance and reconciliation. A slide show of photographs showed current activities like the observance of festivals, concerts and visits of school classes at Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

Prof. Katherine Fleming (New York) explained in her presentation on “Greek Jews before and after World War II” how Greek Jewish identity had essentially developed after the First Balkan War and received a further stimulus during the Shoa, when Greek Jews were active as Greeks among the resistance in Greece and Nazi concentration camps. Prof. Fleming pointed out that Greek Jewish heritage needs to be further explored and recognized in Greece and abroad and that Etz Hayyim’s Evlagon Centre for Cretan Jewish History would immensely contribute to that important task and should be supported in that endeavor. Many of the guests expressed their sincere support for and interest in the work of Etz Hayyim Synagogue and the research centre and we hope to cooperate with them in future projects and welcome them to upcoming events.

A.Z.

Concert by Ros Bandt and Gabriel Negrin, and Voices of Etz Hayyim Project

In early spring, Dr. Ros Bandt and Gabriel Negrin presented a memorable concert that was very well attended and featured Sephardic and Romaniote music, including original pieces inspired by Jewish liturgical music and from the story of the Synagogue itself.

Dr. Bandt, an Australian musicologist as well as lecturer at the University of Melbourne, while working with our own quite considerable collection of Sephardic music (on CD’s that survived both the fires of 2010) also created a very fine CD for the Synagogue: A tapestry of her own soundscapes interwoven with vocal testimonies about the Synagogue, which she collected from members of the fraternity (Havura) as well as others who have felt a special connection with the Synagogue.

What has increasingly interested me in the course of the last ten years since the Synagogue was renovated is what prompts people, Jews as well as non-Jews, to closely attach themselves to it as much as they can. That Jews of most denominations: Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Liberal etc. derive some common understanding of their Jewishness is in itself somewhat remarkable. What is more remarkable is the fact that non-Jews – who have no interest in ‘becoming’ Jewish – have a somewhat similar relationship with the Synagogue and this especially intrigued me after the ‘Fires’. On the morning after the first fire I remember sitting in the mess that resulted as a consequence of several hours of police, firemen and on-lookers. It was inevitable that I wondered if in fact I had created a Golem that in the end no one really wanted. In spite of the indifference and perhaps a certain cynicism from the ‘Powers that be’, the Synagogue and its usually quite silent presence had survived. But to see it suddenly abused so senselessly quite naturally made me think in practical terms. Was it all worth it? Though we began cleaning up and clearing away that very morning and were ready for Erev Shabbat services that Friday evening – the smell of smoke clinging to us all and Chico, the Synagogue cat again sleeping on his cushion. Ten days later, after the second fire, it could have been that we simply give up and return the building to what it had evolved into from 1944 until 1996. What I kept coming back to in my mind constantly were the many hundreds of people who had visited the Synagogue and how many of them kept in touch with us. There was also the non-definable community made up of Jews and non-Jews who gathered together to honour our Jewish heritage every Friday for Erev Shabbat prayers, attended the annual Seder at Pesach, came for Erev Rosh HaShannah services and were active participants at Sukkot. It was in response to this that very general questionnaire was sent out concerning the real meaning of what we were doing.

We now have quite a collection of these testimonies and Dr. Bandt had some of the participants weave into her own work the multiple meanings that this lone Synagogue has evoked. We hope that eventually we will be able to find the means to publish these accounts with the CD.

N.S.



So You Get a lot of People?????

If not the most common question posed by visitors to the Synagogue, it probably ranks in the top ten.

My answer always had been: "Yes, you'd be surprised how many people seek out and find the Synagogue".

But little did I know how surprised I would be as well.

Let me explain...

A couple of months back our Librarian, Anja, was going to Germany for a presentation (see page 3), and asked if I would like her to bring something back. And although I was tempted to have her bring a case of some delicious wheat beer, I asked for a tally counter instead. Now, a tally counter is one of those clickers you may have seen people using on the airplane or sporting event to count how many people there are, and that was precisely what I wanted it for, too. This incredibly simple, yet precise, mechanical contraption is now rarely more than an arm's length away from me. It has become my companion, maybe even a little bit of an obsession. My fingers itching to press its chromed, stamped steel button, and hear the crisp "Tick" as the numbers add up, with every visitor that walks through the gate.

And what has this device told us? Well, for one thing, there are more visitors than even I had thought! For example in the last 44 days (since my obsession began), we have had 6582 visitors. Which translates to 149.59 people on average per day. (Now, I have to admit, that I have not actually seen the .59 people enter, as they must have come in and out while I was talking with others.) Our record for most visits in one day is over 300 people.... not bad for a Synagogue tucked away in a little dead end street.

So now when people ask me, "Do you get a lot of visitors?", I just smile and look at my trusty clicker; 123, 124, 125...

A.P.

Visit of German High School Students

As part of their summer camp on Crete, a group of about fifty high school students from Germany visited the Synagogue on 11 August. The Protestant parish of Ehrenkirchen-Bollschweil in southwest Germany organizes a biannual summer camp which is integrated in the History and Religious Studies curriculum at the students' high school and allows them to explore the history, culture and nature of Crete.

After a first visit in 2009, parish minister and high school teacher for Religious Studies Ulrich Greder brought also this year's participants of the summer camp to Etz Hayyim Synagogue to hear a presentation about the history of the Synagogue and the Jews of Crete as well as some general information about Judaism and Jewish holidays as they are observed here.

The next visit of participants of the summer camp to Etz Hayyim Synagogue is already planned for next year, when parish priest Adela Strobel will take on the organization of the summer camp. – Etz Hayyim Synagogue regularly welcomes groups of high school and university students either from Hania, Greece or abroad.

A.Z.

Cats and Bananas

Mention has been made on occasion about the Synagogue cat, Chico, and the propriety of his attendance at all Synagogue functions, including Erev Shabbat when after kiddush he gets his own morsel of Hallah. We have had some form of rabbinical approval for this in a quite wonderful illustrated book 'Le Chat du Rabbin' which is about a Tunisian rabbi and his grey cat. He also had his own work warding off mice, rats and other vermin from the Synagogue. Our 'chat' Chico was born in the courtyard during the early days of reconstruction in 1997 and has been a faithful presence during all Synagogue functions – even Yom Kippour ever since. He survived both fires with great dignity and aplomb and though of an age, is well and still with us. Recently, as is the case with cats, we were adopted by a coal black, very elegant queen that we named Melanie who produced quite quickly two kittens, one black and the other grey, the former has been named Karacin and his brother Bozcin and though Melanie has gone off somewhere to find peace from them we have decided to keep her two kittens as Chico has become quite indifferent to the various vermin that are found throughout the neighborhood. We are happy to say that the banana that we inherited in a tight fitting pot from the Konaki Restaurant when it closed has produced progeny. For two years it sat quite miserable, though in a larger pot, in the front garden until last year we planted it in the south courtyard. It grew vigorously and produced a number of banana shoots and this summer, a great cluster of bananas, a metre or so of them, that are now ripening.

N.S.



Our caretaker Beznik with Karacin, Chico and Bozcin.

Synagogue Opening Hours

In fall and winter the Synagogue is open to visitors
Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5pm.

Jottings. Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

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