



# Jottings

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**Editorial** As our community Seder will soon bring together our Havurah, friends and visitors, this Pesah edition of *Jottings* will provide you with some seasonal impressions on the one hand and updates on the latest developments at Etz Hayyim on the other.

Our visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange elaborates on the biblical context and meaning of the festival, while Havurah member Natalie Ventura shares her poem "Elegy" about her memories of a family Pesah Seder.

Dozis Ventura, David Perl and George Sfougaras describe their personal experiences with Etz Hayyim and the various responses these have prompted. George has created an impressive collection of artwork in order to raise awareness about the role of the Jewish community in the history of Crete.

We also tell the story of one of Etz



Hayyim's Torah Scrolls: Memorial Scroll No. 1227, on loan from the Scrolls Memorial Trust in London since 2000.

Greek historians Katerina Anagnostaki and Daphne Lappa introduce their current research project on the Hania Jewish community as part of our ongoing research activities. We continue to learn more about individual members of Etz Hayyim's original community, like Leon Betsikas, whose biography is also included here.

Our current *Gedenkdienst* volunteer Daniel Jordan describes the various projects he has been involved in during his stay at Etz Hayyim.

All of us at Etz Hayyim wish you a Chag Pesah Sameach and thank you for your continued support.

Drawing: *Elijah* by Nikos Stavroulakis

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**Passover — ΠΑΣΧΑ — Πάσχα**  
**Some thoughts**

*by Rabbi Nicholas de Lange*

Passover is one of the three pilgrim festivals, when in ancient times, when the temple still stood, Jews streamed to Jerusalem to give thanks to God for their harvests. Today the temple no longer stands and the God of Israel is no longer worshipped by means of animal sacrifices. To quote a biblical prophet, 'now we offer as bullocks the offering of our lips' (Hosea 14:2): in other words we offer our prayers instead of sacrifices.

The special sacrifice of this festival, however, was different from the others, because it was seen as a private, family sacrifice, and so it could be performed anywhere,

... continued on page 2



## Passover (continued from page 1)

not just in Jerusalem. Even after the temple was destroyed, some Jews continued to kill and eat a lamb (as our Orthodox Christian neighbours still do). The name of the offering was *Pesah* in Hebrew, *Pascha* in Greek. The offering gave its name to the festival.

Actually the Bible speaks of three distinct festivals, called in Greek *Pascha*, *Azuma* (Unleavened Bread) and *Dragma* (Sheaf) (Leviticus 23:5–14). *Pascha* was observed by killing a lamb, a kid or possibly a calf, roasting it, and eating it on the night of the 14th of Nisan, together with unleavened bread and green herbs. *Azuma* was a seven-day festival marked by eating unleavened bread (bread made without yeast). Both these festivals commemorate the exodus from Egypt. The *Dragma* has the character of a harvest festival: a sheaf, representing the first fruit of the harvest, is handed to the priest, who waves it in the air. At some time after the destruction of the temple, the waving of the sheaf was abandoned, and the exodus commemorations were merged into a single festival, as we celebrate them to this day.

We no longer kill the sacrifice, but a symbolic roasted lamb's shank bone is placed on the Passover plate, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, as well as some other symbolic foods: a roasted egg, a vegetable (*karpas*), a red paste (*haroset*) and some salt water.

The English name 'Passover' reflects a usual interpretation of a sentence from the biblical story of the Exodus. It says: 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses' (Exodus 12:27). (A different interpretation, also very old, is that the verb means 'shelter' or 'protect'.) Passover is a spring festival. In fact the Jewish calendar, which is essentially based on lunar months, like the Muslim calendar, is adjusted by a complex system of intercalated (added) months, precisely to ensure that

the festival always falls at the time of the Spring equinox. (The Christian calendar follows the Jewish one, so that Easter always falls after the equinox. In the early church some Christians insisted on celebrating Easter on the 14th of Nisan, whatever day of the week it was.)



Cover illustration of Etz Hayyim Haggadah by N. Stavroulakis

As a springtime festival it carries joyful overtones of renewal. Some of the foods associated with the Seder meal – lamb, green herbs, eggs – remind us of the spring.

According to the Torah, the exodus from Egypt took place in the spring month of Nisan. For this reason the Torah says, 'This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you' (Exodus 12:2). (Today Nisan is considered to be the seventh month.) The commemoration of the exodus remains central to the character of the festival. At the Seder meal, on the 14th of Nisan, we retell the story of exodus and reflect on its meaning. The title of the prayer book for the Seder, '*Haggadah*', literally means 'telling a story'.

Although the exodus occurred so many centuries ago, its message of redemption and liberation continues throughout the generations.

The Haggadah states: 'In every generation everyone should see themselves as if they personally came out of Egypt.' And indeed we all experience exodus from our own particular Egypt, in so many different ways.

The festival is not only concerned with past and present, it also looks forward to the future, when, according to Jewish teaching, the whole world will be redeemed and liberated at the end of history. That is the true meaning of the closing words of the Haggadah:

"Next year in Jerusalem!"

*Rabbi Nicholas de Lange is Emeritus Professor of Hebrew Jewish Studies at the University of Cambridge. He is a long-term friend of Etz Hayyim Synagogue and has been conducting numerous festival services here. Among his latest publication is "Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Greek Bible Translations in Byzantine Judaism" (2015).*



## ELEGY

Passover. He towers  
at the head of the table; I sit to his  
left, just beyond the rounded  
edge, where width and length meet –

my fork hand farthest, knife hand  
nearest him, *Left and Right*, imprinted  
into memory: he  
is my reference point.

Six of us at the wide oak table,  
Grandma's cross-stitched, white-linen tablecloth,  
silverware gleaming, Seder plate  
with shank bone, roasted egg and horseradish.

The *afikomon*, wrapped and hidden –  
which one of us children will find it  
and get a gift? My father blesses the wine,  
we empty our glasses

– sweet, watered-down red for the little ones –  
four different times, as prescribed.  
A goblet set aside, the front door ajar  
for Prophet Elijah.

Outside – only the myrtle, the front path  
and Wayne Avenue.

One day my father's gone –  
no hammer pounds at his workbench, his

harmonica sits in the Dutch cabinet drawer,  
"Baby's Boat's a Silver Moon," the lullaby  
he sang each night, stuck in our throats.  
Outdoors, snow mounts unshovelled.

*Natalie Ventura, Heraklion, Crete*



Drawing: *Elijah* by Nikos Stavroulakis



Etz Hayyim Seder at ELA restaurant, 2014



## Festivals and Liturgical Life at Etz Hayyim

Rabbi Nicholas de Lange joined us again for Rosh Hashanah 2016/5777. Festivities started with a Shabbat Morning Service on 1 October and continued with a Erev Rosh Hashanah Service attended by ca. 60 people. This was followed by a community dinner at ELA restaurant. The Rosh Hashanah Morning Service was again lead by Rabbi de Lange and attended by 15 congregants. For Yom Kippur, Lior Asher from Israel joined us again to lead the services for the festival. There were 45 participants for Kol Nidre and 30 for Neila; for the Yom Kippur day service there was a Minyan for most of the time. On Erev Sukkot, prayers and blessings were said in our Sukkah by long-term Etz Hayyim Havurah member Roger Yayon. The 45 participants contributed to a communal potluck dinner in the Sukkah. For the event we were also joined by several members of the Synagogue's Board of Trustees who were in Hania for their bi-annual meeting. Throughout the week of Sukkot, the Sukkah was frequently used by visitors from all over the world.

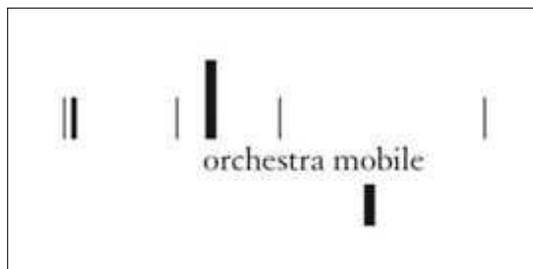
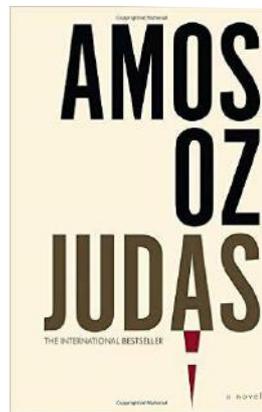
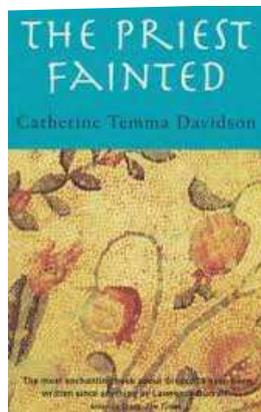


Erev Rosh Hashanah Service at Etz Hayyim led by Rabbi N. de Lange

Rabbi Nicholas de Lange will visit Etz Hayyim again this year several times and will lead services for Pesah and the High Holidays and, for the first time, also for a full Shavuot service.

## Upcoming Events

Our summer season of cultural events will begin with a reading on 29 May of poetry and prose by Catherine Temma Davidson, a prize-winning poet and author of a New York Times Book of the Year, *The Priest Fainted*. Her work draws on her position at the crossroads of belonging: a Greek, Jewish, American, British writer who often reflects on the pleasures and losses of multiple identities in the contemporary world. In early June, Nicholas de Lange will give a lecture about his work as a translator from Hebrew into English based on his latest translation of Amos Oz' novel *Judas*. On 11 and 12 June, Chief Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, will offer



seminars for the Havurah and the interested public on Romaniote traditions and festival observance. On 25 June, Etz Hayyim will participate again in the European Music Day in Hania with a concert at the synagogue. Orchestra mobile under the direction of Theodoros Orphanidis will perform Mediterranean music. In early October, Martin Borysek (University of York) will give a lecture about the Takkanot Candia (mediaeval communal statutes of the Iraklion Jewish community). In late October, Stavros Sfakiotakis (University of Crete) will talk about the history of the Jewish community in Crete as reflected in Ottoman court records.

## News from from Etz Hayyim — We would also love to hear from you.

Our sincere thanks to the friends and members of the Etz Hayyim Havurah who contributed to this newsletter. We would also love to hear from **you**. Please contact the synagogue if you would like to contribute an article, share information or ideas. The next *Jottings* will be published for Rosh Hashanah 5778. Please send contributions by August 1, 2017.



## Ioannina Event and the Hania Synagogue

by Dozis Ventura

21 September 2016, my wife and I are on business in Athens and, having been notified about an interesting event (organized jointly by the Ioannina Jewish Community, the Municipality of Ioannina, and the Embassy of the Czech Republic) dedicated to Franz Kafka and the Czech Jewish community, we spontaneously decide to take the morning bus to Ioannina in order to attend. It was an interesting coincidence for us, since just a few months earlier we had been visiting Prague, Kafka's birthplace, and what is left of its old Jewish quarter near the town center. This once populous and thriving Jewish Community was practically decimated following the Nazi onslaught.

The four hours on the bus that had initially worried us turned out to be quite comfortable and enjoyable due to the unparalleled beauty of the changing landscape during the ride. Arriving in Ioannina, and after leaving our luggage at the hotel, we initially visited a gallery where there was an exhibition of photographs by Czech artists, and later in the evening we went to the Municipal Cultural Center to

follow the interesting presentations. Among the speakers were Prof. Moses Elisaf (Head of the local Jewish Community, and director of the Pathology Division of the University Hospital), Dr. Jan Bondy, Ambassador of the Czech Republic, Dr. Thomas Kraus, Executive Director of the Jewish Council of the Czech Republic, who talked about Jewish Prague before the war. Subsequently three women (two philologists and a historian) came to the podium and talked about the published work of Kafka, and about Kafka's family relations and the internal contradictions of his life. The program of this evening was ended with an exquisite musical trio interpreting works by Smetana. We were quite impressed by the excellent publicity this event had had, as it was indeed very well

attended. It was a very successful evening with strong outreach to the town.

Among the people we met was a woman from Ioannina we had met earlier during a Pesah celebration at the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania. She was very helpful and supportive to us. She also said she had rather negative impressions from the Hania Synagogue, mentioning that it lacks a truly Jewish character, and is even administered and supported by individuals who are not Jewish. On the other hand I got a favorable and upbeat view when I introduced myself to Professor Elisaf mentioning that I am on the governing board of the Hania Synagogue.



Interior view of Ioannina Synagogue, towards the Torah Shrine (Ehal)

He proclaimed: "A miracle! There is no community there, nevertheless it is functioning and quite active, constituting a living cell and Jewish center in Hania". As a member of KIS (the Central Jewish Council) he was well informed on the operation and activities at Etz Hayyim.

This latter observation offers us one more reason to celebrate and honor

the inspired and inspiring work of Nikos Stavroulakis, who, twenty years ago was not discouraged by the small detail of the lack of a living Jewish Community. He insisted on not letting Hitler's plan for the extinction of the Jewish presence come to fruition. He thus worked, researched, and turned to reality this miracle of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue as a place of worship, recollection, and reconciliation. A place where one can enter and remain aloof from the noisy city outside, zeroing in on the values that unite us all making us more human, and separating us from the external loud mob. He was able to achieve this by envisioning the notion of the "Havurah", a circle of interested and dedicated friends, often members of different religions, who help and sup-



port its operation, and volunteer on the premises, helping to further the daily functioning of the Synagogue.

Apart from its function as a religious center, Etz Hayyim also serves as a cultural center. Through its library and through historical research conducted at the adjoining Evlagon Institute, it promotes the memory of the rich, millennia-long history of Jewish presence and life on the island of Crete.

I personally cherish this Synagogue, and view its operation as a unique worldwide Jewish institution promoting intercultural cooperation and understanding. I consider the presence and support by non-Jews an important advantage. Outreach is a valuable and important aspect of this operation, and it is realized in an exemplary way as

anyone can witness by logging on to its website. I am not alone in this view since, in fact most of its funding comes from foreign donors and institutions. This incredible vision, which may initially have seemed to be an unattainable illusion, is now a reality and, perhaps, an example to be followed. It now benefits the support of numerous donors and organizations the world over and let us not forget that it had been included in the list of 100 Most Endangered Sites by the World Monuments Fund, which was essential for its initial reconstruction and operation.

Let us then once again thank Nikos for this invaluable gift he has offered to us, as well as to the city and people of Hania.

## Greetings and *filia* from Melbourne, Australia

Greetings and *filia* from Melbourne, Australia. It is with great pleasure that I am writing this piece for the Etz Hayyim newsletter on my experience being the *ba'al ko-reh* there last October.

It all started with me wondering if I could continue my tradition of laining on my bar mitzvah anniversary (Parashat Nitzavim) at the place that I would find myself during my vacation in Greece. My girlfriend Elli, who is from Thessaloniki, was taking me on a tour of Greece and her love of Crete meant that we spent a lot of time there. She found Etz Hayyim online first, and then with Anja's help, we organised for me to read my Parasha there. I was touched to see how open everyone was to make this happen, since it was outside of the Synagogue's scheduled services.

Upon walking through the gates of the synagogue, I was mesmerised by its beauty and atmosphere. When inside, I could sense its rich history. I took a moment to connect with the space and I felt echoes of the past, echoes of human connection, of spirituality. After a short while, the service got under way. Rabbi Nicholas de Lange had a warm and friendly style and he kept the service casual and inclusive. He often paused the service to comment on the Parasha, the service, or the synagogue itself which added much to my and my girlfriend's experience. He even had a beautiful *d'var torah* on my favourite *pasuk* which I had not heard before, and am so grateful to have learned. The congregation was an intimate and endearing mix of locals and visitors. As we neared the Torah service, I began to feel nervous about how I would

perform in a foreign environment, in front of strangers. The feeling continued through the first aliyah, but something happened during the second that made my nervousness disappear. Something sparked me to feel present, almost meditative. My thoughts slipped away and I was filled with the joy of the moment, and the beauty of these people, coming to this place, to share in this experience. I felt honoured to be the congregation's conduit of spirituality in that moment, and to play a part in rekindling the flame of Etz Hayyim, helping it to function as a place of worship again.

Since my bar mitzvah, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading from the Torah every year, but I think that my experience at Etz Hayyim was the most profound and enjoyable. I feel much love and gratitude for Anja, Rabbi de Lange, all who attended the service that day, and all that have contributed to the synagogue's revival. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Much love and *filia*,  
David Perl

אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלֶכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבֹטֵיכֶם  
וְקִנְיֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You stand this day, all of you, before the LORD your God—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel,

טַפְּכֶם נְשִׂיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ מִחֹטֵב עֵצִיד עַד שֹׂאֵב מִיַּמֵּיד:

your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—



## A personal response to the Jewish History of Crete

We recently received the following email from George Sfougaras, which we would like to share with you as an example of Etz Hayyim's impact on its visitors. We hope to eventually show George's art work at Etz Hayyim. Below, you find one text and one illustration from his book "Tales from an Old Fort Town. A personal response to the Jewish History of Crete" inspired by his visit to Etz Hayyim.

Dear all, Mr Stavroulaki and volunteers, I hope this finds you well.

Some years ago I had the memorable experience of visiting the Etz Hayyim Synagogue whilst in Hania with my partner. It is impossible not to be moved by your work and the history of the community in Crete. I am from Heraklion but have lived in the UK since I was very

young. Needless to say, I was told very little about the Jewish History of Crete when I was growing up.

Recently I spoke briefly about your work to the congregation of the local reform Synagogue, who were kind enough to invite us for lunch to discuss one of my paintings which I wanted to display there. The Rabi, Mark, knew of your work and had conducted a wedding ceremony there. It is a small world.

I am an ex-head teacher and a practicing artist. I have created a small book as a very personal response to the Jewish community and their plight. I send you a link and a pdf of this humble work. [...] I would be very grateful if you could let me know what you think.

With the greatest respect,  
George Sfougaras

One of my childhood memories is about the meeting with a Jewish family in Crete. The father was an engineer who was working on the island and happened to be a blood donor. He was registered with the local authorities and as it happened was able to be called upon to give blood in a medical emergency involving a close relative. In essence, he saved his life.

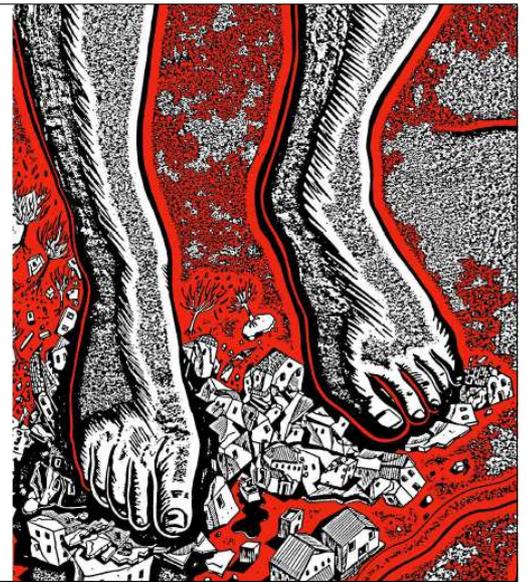
### 'Ignorance'

I wanted to show the ignorance amongst some of the local people. I needed an image that was strong graphically, and I was inspired by the work of a graphic novel illustrator, Charles Burns. I put my own stamp on the picture, both in the drawing and the way that the light and dark areas are treated.

My father invited them over to our house for a visit. I do not recall all the details, as I was around 7 or 8 years old, I believe. What I remember, however, that I had no idea what these people were and where their culture originated, what they believed or indeed that people of the same religious persuasion once lived here on the island among us.

The feet, ignorant and bare, are crushing a community. It seemed somewhat literal, but I could not stop. The image emerged thus, the first of this bold style, merging my previous works on 'Personal Maps' with overt reference to Soviet-era political propaganda posters.

My mother had told me of the horror she felt when some Jewish girls of the same age as her were arrested in Heraklion in 1944. I had heard anti-Semitic jokes and allusions to such stereotypes, that even as a child, I found embarrassing and hateful. Ignorance was rife, and sadly in some quarters it still is.



## Renovation of Synagogue Kitchen

In December 2016, we could thoroughly renovate the kitchen of Etz Hayyim Synagogue with the help of a generous donation by the German Embassy in Athens. Our sincere thanks for this valuable support.

The kitchen is now more spacious and has a stove which will allow us to cater more conveniently for our community events and bake our own Challah for Kabblat Shabbat services. One of the first dishes cooked in the new kitchen was the Ashure for this year's celebration of Tu BiSh'vat.



## The Story of Memorial Scroll No. 1227 at Etz Hayyim Synagogue

by Daniel Jordan & Anja Zuckmantel

When Etz Hayyim Synagogue was reopened in 1999 as a place of prayer it was in need of a Torah Scroll. – Containing the five Books of Moses written by hand on parchment a Torah Scroll includes the basic laws and tenets of Judaism and is central to the synagogue service. In February 2000, Etz Hayyim received Memorial Scroll No. 1227 from the Memorial Scrolls Trust (MST) of Westminster Synagogue London on permanent loan. The Memorial Scroll is being regularly used for festival services and Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.



**Memorial  
Scrolls  
Trust**

### Memorial Scrolls Trust

The Memorial Scrolls Trust was established in 1980 to care for and restore 1,564 Torah Scrolls which had arrived from Prague in 1964. Since then, some 1,400 Torah scrolls have been allocated to over 1,000 commu-

nities and organizations around the world.

### The Story of the Czech Torah Scrolls

The MST holds and cares for a collection of scrolls, which were collected from communities in Bohemia and Moravia and saved from destruction by members of Prague’s Jewish community during the Second World War. These Scrolls are thus survivors and witnesses of the Shoah.

For more than a thousand years Jews had lived in Bohemia and Moravia and developed a rich Jewish culture. After the German invasion in 1939, the historical congregations were closed down and their synagogues were destroyed or deserted. In 1942 members of Prague’s Jewish community decided to gather the religious treasures from the destroyed synagogues. They persuaded the German occupants to accept their plan and so they collected more than 100,000 artefacts and brought them to the Jewish Museum of Prague. Among the artefacts were about 1,800 Torah scrolls, which were labelled in Czech and German with a description of the place it came from. Except for one survivor, all the curators and cataloguers of the museum were eventually deported to Terezin and Auschwitz. After the war the scrolls were transferred to the abandoned synagogue at Michle outside Prague. In 1964, the Memorial Scrolls Committee of Westminster

Synagogue in London arranged the shipment of 1,546 Torah Scrolls to London, where they were catalogued, restored and repaired, to be eventually sent to synagogues and organizations all over the world for religious and educational purposes to synagogues in need.

Since September 2008, the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum at Kent House, the home of Westminster Synagogue, tells the story of the Scrolls and their odyssey from Bohemia and Moravia to Westminster Synagogue in London and then on to new homes throughout the world.



Shelf in the Memorial Scrolls Trust archive

### Memorial Scroll No. 1227 at Etz Hayyim

In 2000, Etz Hayyim received Memorial Scroll No. 1227 through the assistance of Mrs Ruth Shaffer (1910-2006), then Director of the Memorial Scrolls Trust. This Memorial Scroll is currently the only Memorial Scroll in Greece and it is designated as an orphan scroll: 216 out of the 1,546 Czech MST Scrolls are designated as “orphan scrolls”, which means that when the Torah Scrolls arrived in 1942 at the Jewish Museum in Prague from the communities in Bohemia or Moravia, it was no longer possible to identify these scrolls’ origin.

Nikos Stravroulakis, founding director of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, described his first encounter with the Memorial Scroll No. 1227 and its installation into Etz Hayyim Synagogue in a letter to the MST:

*“As I am the sole Jew here I was in a bit of a quandary – to lead it into the synagogue alone – or to wait until such time as one could do traditional honours with perhaps some visiting Jews attending. In the end I decided that I would simply pray that all of the 263 victims of our community would be with me in some spirit. Lacking the tradition that we have of showering a new Sepher with*



sweets and flowers as it is taken up to the Ehal I wrapped it in a tallet, put around a quite exquisite Torah binder set with a silver clasp with the Shema on it and hung over one of the etzim a silver yad (both gifts that were recently sent) and placed it in the Ehal – along with a chocolate bar! I had recently pruned one of the olive trees and so I put the branches in a vase in front of the Ehal. It was a very powerful and moving experience for me and I am deeply grateful that the Sepher was given a new home here in Hania. I pray that for many years it

will be the companion of our other Sepher.”

Since then, the Memorial Scroll No. 1227 has been used for festival services and for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. In July 2016, Vadim Wulfsohn read from the Memorial Scroll during his Bar Mitzvah service. His father, Jason Wulfsohn, had grown up associated with Westminster Synagogue so that Vadim’s reading from the Memorial Scroll “added yet another dimension of significance to an already sacred and magical time” for the Wulfsohn family.

Below: Locations of Memorial Scroll Holders



## School Visits and Educational Outreach Program

In 2016, more than 600 high school students from Crete and mainland Greece visited Etz Hayyim Synagogue. In March 2017 alone we welcomed more than 200 high school students from Iraklion, Rethymnon, Vamos and Drama (northern Greece). In a guided tour of the Synagogue by its staff, the students are introduced to the history of the Jewish community on Crete and are generally astonished that this history goes back to the 3rd millennium BCE. The students learn about Judaism in general, its commonalities with and differences from other monotheistic religions and also about the functioning of a synagogue service. Furthermore they hear about personal stories of former community members who perished in or survived the Holocaust. The guided tours are supplemented with images, photographs and specific items to illustrate the topics.

As these guided tours respond to an increased demand from local schools for opportunities to learn about (Cretan) Jewish history and traditions we aim to expand our collaboration with local teachers and develop an activity book which will be used for seminars to be offered for local schools. The activity book/seminars will cover Cretan/Greek Jewish history, an introduction to

Judaism and the history of the Shoa. All three areas receive only little attention in the current curriculum at Greek schools and teachers have expressed sincere interest in an opportunity for their students to learn more about these topics.

This educational outreach program is supported by the Germanacos foundation. The program will be supplemented by a closer cooperation with Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens in offering seminars for teachers on how to teach about the Holocaust in Greek schools.





## Research Project: “Reconstructing an absence, Narrating a presence: the Jews of Hania”

by Katerina Anagnostaki & Daphne Lappa

Small Greek-Jewish communities have rarely found their way into modern historical studies. With the exception of Salonica, the biggest Jewish community in the Greek state, the rest, which in fact are numerous, have not yet become the object of an in-depth historical analysis. Jewish Crete is such a case. If the circumstances of the destruction of the Cretan communities, which perished in the *Tanais* shipwreck in June 1944, have been reconstructed to a significant extent, our knowledge regarding these communities in the preceding years remains rather fragmented and sporadic.

The on-going project “Reconstructing an absence, Narrating a presence: the Jews of Hania, Crete” wishes to fill this gap. It focuses on the Jews of Hania, the largest Jewish community on Crete in the 20th century, and seeks to reconstruct the community’s life in the troubled decades before the war. The project, which is supported by the Germanacos Foundation and conducted under the aegis of Etz Hayyim Synagogue of Hania, Crete is directed by Vassiliki Yiakoumaki, Assistant Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Thessaly, Greece. The project’s researchers are Daphne Lappa, Postdoctoral History Researcher at the University of Crete, and Katerina Anagnostaki, PhD Candidate of History at the

University of Crete.

The current research intends also to be an invitation to descendants of the Jewish-Cretan families to approach the Synagogue and seek information on their ancestors. They have the opportunity to learn more about their families by filling in a questionnaire on the Etz Hayyim website (<http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/research-library/>) and mail it to the Etz Hayyim Synagogue or to the researchers. As researchers we will then try to locate more information among the family histories that we are now reconstructing.

Αριθμ. (Αριθμ.)	Επωνυμία	Όνομα	Όνομα Πατρός	Επαγγελμα	Όνομα Οικογένειας
1	Αβραάμ	Σισίβιος	Ματθαίος	Εμποροπλοηγός	Χανιά
2	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Ναΐμ	Οικονομ	“
3	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
4	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
5	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
6	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
7	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
8	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
9	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
10	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
11	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
12	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
13	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“
14	“	Αβραάμ	Αβραάμ	“	“

Excerpt from the 1941 Hania Community List © Historical Archive of Crete

### Sample Biography

#### Leon Betsikas / Λέων Μπέτσικας (1917-1944)

The following information was compiled based on results of the ongoing research project and with the assistance of our current Gedenkdiener (Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service volunteer) Daniel Jordan.

Leon Betsikas was born on 3 March 1917 in Hania and he lived with his parents (Raphael and Perla) and his four sisters (Hrysoula, Anna, Sterina und Sara) near the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in the old town of Hania. Even before the whole Jewish community of Hania was arrested and deported in June 1944, the Betsikas family and their relatives, the Trevezas family, saved themselves to Athens. However, in early April 1944 Leon was arrested because he was Jewish and was deported to Auschwitz/Oświęcim, where he arrived on 18 April 1944. From there he was eventually brought to Mauthausen on 25 January 1945.

Leon Betsikas died on 24 April 1945 in Ebensee, a sub camp of Mauthausen, less than two weeks before the liberation by US-American troops.

Among his surviving family members his death is remembered as having been caused by him eating a large amount of food which his starved stomach could not digest – a cause of death for numerous concentration camp inmates at the time of liberation.



© Jewish Museum of Greece

The files of Mauthausen concentration camp, on the other hand, list Leon Betsikas’ date of death before the liberation. This would make it rather unlikely that he received that much food at the time and therefore the circumstances of his death might have to be further investigated.



## Gedenkdienst at Etz Hayyim

by Daniel Jordan

It is almost unbelievable to see how fast the time goes by. I first came to Crete seven months ago and it took me some time to get to know Hania, to find my way around and to find out where to buy specific things. By this time it feels very normal to live here and I am very glad to be in this beautiful city. In the past months I also worked on a lot of different projects and some of them I want to mention here.

Editing our website and adding new subpages to our website was one of our bigger projects in the last months. As a so-called "digital native", I wrote parts of the texts and did a lot of the technical work. This is how we added pages about the collaboration with the organisation GEDENKDIENTST, our Czech Memorial Scroll



and about our Research Projects.

With the subpage about the GEDENKDIENTST cooperation we wanted to raise awareness about the important work that volunteers do in different Holocaust Memorials all over the world. Since last year it is also possible for women to be a *Gedenkdienst* volunteer

due to some legal changes. Nevertheless there are still some financial problems since the government aid has not increased for many years and a lot of new regulations are making the administrative work even more difficult and time-consuming. The organisation "Niemals Vergessen" ("Never Forget"), which is one of the three Austrian organisations doing Holocaust Memorial Service stopped sending volunteers for the coming years because of the administrative expense and the precarious funding situation.

In any case, something is for sure: There will be a *Gedenkdiener* at Etz Hayyim next year and his name is Christoph. He will start his year in September and he is

already very interested in our work at the synagogue.

One of my favourite projects in the last months was our research project on Leon Betsikas, which was also a good opportunity to contact my *Gedenkdienst* colleagues in other countries. With the help of a historian working for the Mauthausen Memorial and the *Gedenkdienerin* in YadVashem we gathered some new information to reconstruct the biography of Leon Betsikas (which can be seen on page 12). For me this research was particularly interesting as Leon Betsikas was killed in the concentration camp Ebensee in Upper Austria and it is also one of very few biographies we have about members of the Jewish community who died in the Shoah. As part of the preparation for this year's *Gedenkdienst*, I participated in a visit to the concentration camp Mauthausen and its subcamp Ebensee. Having seen the walls of the former concentration camp in which Leon Betsikas died made this project even more interesting and touching.

Finally, I want to mention my very own project: the paper craft model of the synagogue. The idea to this projects came up when Daniel, the son of our caretaker Beznik, on his many visits to the synagogue office, wanted us to build different (and sometimes very difficult) things out of paper and cardboard. Our new paper craft model is in the size of a greeting card and it allows everyone take home a mini-version of Etz Hayyim.



I am very excited to see how the synagogue will change in the next months through the increasing number of visitors. Even though I will have to focus a lot more on giving guided tours I hope to find some new information for our research projects and to be able to help with any upcoming event or project.



## Calendar for Upcoming Holidays

### Pesah

**Erev Pesah Service**, 10 April, 7:30 pm

**Pesah Seder**, 10 April, 8 pm

(please RSVP by April 7)

**Morning Service**, 11 April, 10 am

**Evening Service** (End of Pessah), 16 April, 7:30 pm

**Morning Service**, 17 April, 9:30 pm

### Shavuot

**Shavuot Evening Service**, 30 May, 8 pm

**Shavuot Morning Service**, 31 May, 10 am

## Date for Hashkabah (Memorial Service) 2017

The Hashkabah (Memorial Service) will take place on **11 June 2017**. A public ceremony with representatives of the municipality of Hania and the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KISE) will be held at the monument for the Cretan Jewish victims of the Shoa. Following this, there will be a Hashkabah service at Etz Hayyim Synagogue led by Gabriel Negrin, Chief Rabbi of Athens.

## Tax-deductible Donations in the USA

Etz Hayyim can now accept tax-deductible donations in the USA through a collective giving account at *FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds*. Any check should be made out to FJC, with "Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim" in the memo line and mailed to FJC's office at:

FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds  
520 8th Avenue, 20th Floor  
New York, NY 10018

Donors will receive a donation receipt from FJC; the funds will be made available to Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

## Bank Information for Donations

Acc. Name: Civil Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim  
IBAN: GR 9401 7163 5000 6635 1095 59315  
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Bank: Piraeus Bank (1635), Agia Marina, Hania

***We very much appreciate your continued support of our work at Etz Hayyim Synagogue. Donation receipts provided.***



## Still available: *The Etz Hayyim Haggadah*

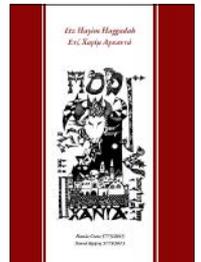
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e-mail: redpoint@otenet.gr

**Orders can also be sent to Etz Hayyim.**



## Weekly Services at Etz Hayyim

**Kabbalat Shabbat Services** are held every Friday; service starts at sunset.

**Candle lighting times are posted on our website:**

<http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/events>

(click on the relevant dates in the calendar).

**Other Holy Days will be announced on our website, by email and on our Facebook page.**

## Synagogue Opening Hours

May to October the synagogue is open to visitors **Monday to Thursday 10 am to 6 pm, Friday 10 to 3 pm**; and again 30 minutes before Kabbalat Shabbat service.

## Contact us and stay in touch

**Phone:** 0030-28210-86286

**Email:** [info@etz-hayyim-hania.org](mailto:info@etz-hayyim-hania.org)

**Web:** [www.etz-hayyim-hania.org](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org)

**Facebook:** Synagogue Etz Hayyim



# Jottings

Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

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Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis

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