

Jottings

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A Year ago

By Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis (→ page 4)

Almost a year has passed since the formal rededication of Etz Hayyim that took place on 10 Oct. 1999. The 'event' attracted some 300 people – mostly from the Mainland and many from abroad who came to share in what was certainly an important and significant moment. A synagogue that has been desecrated, had lain abandoned for fifty years – a prey to squatters and subsequent vandalism, a depository for neighborhood rubbish, a chicken run and makeshift kennel – had been rebuilt in a town 'that could boast only one 'official' Jew'. A joking response to a query about possible 'Jewish problem' in Hania was offered when I was still the Director of the Jewish Museum in Athens and my visits to Hania were mensural at best: "Jewish problem? We only have one and he only come once a month!". On the very eve of the rededication the governor of our nomos (prefecture) found fit to reiterate the remark in more ominous tones: "Think, if one Jew could rebuild the synagogue in Hania what happen when 'they' all start coming back?". He even went so far as to hint that the Nazis had in fact been sloppy in letting a few of 'them' survive as perpetrators of a virulent Zionism that was aimed at taking over Crete. This public statement by a responsible government official plus the cautious, defensive and inaccurate statement made by a leading cleric about whether or not

the synagogue could be more than a museum set a tone for the opening for me. In order to make his quite personal definition of what the synagogue could be this cleric went on to say that Etz Hayyim would be a provocative venue for public violence. I anticipated possible real problems of a nature much different from those that had been posed by the pressures of fund raising, construction work and the sense of my own unworthiness that naturally accompanied much of what I was doing. The synagogue was the last visible evidence of our 2400 year old presence in Crete. It was the only memorial that could bear witness to the senseless deaths of our community in 1945. What was going to happen when the excitement of the opening had diminished? In short, what was this building going to be?

It was not long after this that I was in Thessaloniki and, during a normal enough visit, Rabbi Dayan, who had come to the opening, asked me how I saw the future of the synagogue, was it going to be a museum? a cultural center? I had a quick answer that had been formulated already in my mind to the effect that it had to be a synagogue, a place of prayer and recollection. I later decided that I had let the building be a venue rather than to define a future strategy or plan. On that day Rabbi Dayan gave me a sidur and a simple enough answer – 'It will have to be you who prays in it.'

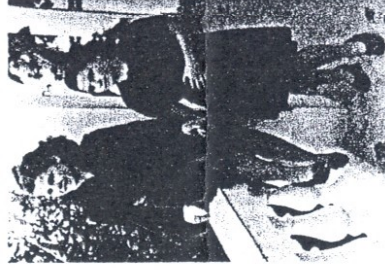
The history of Cretan Jews during the long period of Venetian domination (1204-1669) has been the subject of numerous learned publications. Venetian Crete (Candia) was one of the privileged centers of Jewish life which left a considerable amount of source material, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The fortunate rescue of the archives of the Venetian administration of Candia after the loss of the island to the Ottoman in 1669 preserved a large body of evidence on Crete in general and its Jewish communities in particular. However, little of this huge amount of documentation has come to light until now. Although it was not the main seat of the Venetian colonial administration on Crete, Candia (now Chania), built by Venice in 1252 as the center of the island's western province, was a rela-

The List of Able-Bodied Jews in the Cretan Town of Chania (Canea), 1536

by Benjamin Arbel (→ page 2)

tively important port town; it had its own governor and administrative institutions. Jews were residing in Candia as early as the 13th century. By 1325, their presence must have been palpable; that year, the Venetian Senate allowed the local governor and council to concentrate the Jews in a separate section of the town. Joshua Starr located the *Giudecca* (in the Venetian dialect, *Zudecha*), or Jewish quarter, outside the town walls, against the rampart to the northwest. According to Ankori, however, Candia's *Zudecha* was located in the Venetian precincts outside the Byzantine citadel. What may seem to be a discordance between the two scholars derives from their disregard for the progress of Candia's suburbs, including the Jewish quarter, had already been surrounded by new fortifica-

Faces (→ page 3)



Sara and Ioudita Kounio

As many of you know from visits, we have a set of bronze tablets and a commemorative plaque in memory of the Hania victims of the Holocaust in the south courtyard – the Laurer Garden. On the tablets are recorded all of the patronyms as well as first names of the 276 Jews who were arrested in May of '44' and then lost their lives in the sinking of the Tanais in early June of that year. All of the Jews save for one young woman, Victoria Feronon, the daughter of the Hebrew teacher Moïsis Feronon, had perished. I knew Victoria well. Somewhat like the synagogue and the ravaged Jewish quarter she bore only the scars of her experience. As sole survivor – by a strange accident – she was the living witness

The Wedding

A most special event will take place in mid-October when David Bergman and Sara Hossain of London will be married at Etz Hayyim. This is the first wedding that has taken place at the synagogue since at least 1942 and we expect a quite large gathering of guests – from New York, London, Dakhia, etc. Rabbi Guy Hall from London will witness the marriage. If we can manage it we will have a traditional henna party in the mikvah. Parties such as this took place on the eve of the wedding when the bride was bathed in the mikvah to much singing. It was essentially a 'hen' party and many of the songs were traditionally quite bawdy, accompanied by some jokes as well that were all intended to loosen up an understandably nervous bride. The high point was when the bride's mother and the groom's mother, accompanied by sisters, cousins and female friends would approach her on a special dais with small dishes of henna and a burning candle set in the middle. Each would carefully daub henna on the forehead, or hands and feet as a sign of good luck. The wedding dinner will be held at a nearby restaurant accompanied by Cretan music.

Hania is a perfect venue for such weddings as well as for bar mitzvot. And should anyone be interested in arranging one here, please, contact the synagogue.

Yom Kippur

Last year this time the synagogue was completely empty of furniture. There were only six of us – Mr and Mrs Peter and Doris Naylor and Mr and Mrs Joseph and Deirdre Honick. Benjamin Naylor had given himself to the synagogue for three months and so was also present at this important event which we spent, for the most part, wrapped in talloth and seated on the floor (we had only two chairs). Only one part of the long services was made aloud and that was then Joe Honick suddenly began to hum the Kol Nidre hymn in the growing darkness. When he ended we all sat in silence absorbing the power of the hymn, the mystery of the Day – and it was in this spirit that we passed Yom Kippur the following day – each settled into their own reading of the service. It is hard to anticipate what this year will be like but both the Naylor and Honicks are returning to Hania to celebrate it with us again.



The List of Able-Bodied Jews in the Cretan Town of Chania (Canea), 1536 (→ page 3)

persons bearing Venetian names) of this administrative and military center. With regard to the town and district, however, the census was the basis for recruiting men not only for fighting, but also for roving in the galleys, guarding the walls, and working on the fortifications.

The two groups reflected a social hierarchy that separated those who were expected only to fight or command and those who were expected to perform manual labor as well. The Venetian term for the latter was *huomini da fatti* or *da fattioni*, which, in essence, means able-bodied men. In 1536 Venice was on the verge of war with the Ottoman Empire; although the census was, in principle, part of Venetian administrative routine, this particular census could have been related to the imminent military crisis.

The able-bodied males are listed in the census in groups of 8 to 40 (but mostly around 30-350 individuals, presumably corresponding to some administrative or military division. They are recorded in geographical order, beginning from the castle, and proceeding through the two sections of the towns, the Jewish quarter (*Zudecha*) and the villages in Canea's territory. We focus on the section dealing with the *Zudecha*.

The 83 names of Jews on the list, like the rest of the names, are only those of males between 18 and 50 who were considered fit for service, not "all inhabitants of Khaniole *Zudecha*," as claimed by Ankori. The inclusion of Jews in this category is noteworthy. In spite of their special status, their segregation and their special fiscal obligations, Jews apparently were also considered fit for other services, including the burdensome military obligations. In fact, there is evidence that able-bodied Cretan Jews were recruited on various occasions for tasks such as night guard on the walls adjacent to the Jewish quarter in 1392, and for guarding and digging trenches in anticipation of a Turkish invasion in 1538. Naturally, avoidance of such a service entailed paying a pecuniary substitute.

Here then is the section of Bernardo's *relazione* listing the names of 83 able-bodied Jews in Canea, appearing under the heading *Zudecha*, and arranged in three groups of 40, 22 and 21 persons. It has been compiled on the basis of the original archival manuscript. Wherever my reading does not conform to the one appearing in Ploumidis's publication, the latter's version is given in brackets preceded by a "p". The original spelling has been respected, except, in some cases, for capitalization according to modern usage. I added the numbers in brackets to facilitate references to the names. A question mark in brackets signifies that the reading is

not indubitable.

- 1536 Die XV novembris
Presentata per virem nobilem ser
Marcum Antonium Bernardum,
reversum rectorem Caneae...
Discretion della città della Cania et
tutto el suo destrutto, videlicet deli
homeni da anni 18 a 50...
1. Frati Balaza
2. Slamachi de Lasaro
3. Savatuli de Zadia
4. Samaria de Vracha
5. Maratha Coroneo
6. Mosse Geniatti (P: Gemati)
7. Salomo de Lacho (P: Delachos)
8. Lia de Zadia
9. Lassaro de Crusso
10. Liza de Salomo
11. Meiri Mavrogonato
12. Salomo de Jacob
13. Ligia Milopotamiti
14. Davi Mavrogonato
15. Lazaro Astru
16. Ligia Mavrogonato
17. Manoe de Sabathia
18. Mosse Billi
19. Iaco suo fio
20. Imoli Verzo
21. Ligia Caisara (?)
22. Crusso Corchidi
23. Michae Drila
24. Mossami Barbeta
25. Jamoli Glitio
26. Samaria Corchidi
27. Liacho de Michae
28. Salomo Zaathia
29. Davi Xato Zazardotto
30. Afetida Zeroycho (P: Ziroicho)
31. Auracha Susin
32. Salachaia Mande (Maude ?)
33. Legia Astru
34. Gesti Coe Zazardotto
35. Acaro Geniati (P: Gemati)
36. Jona de Michae
37. Legia (P: Lega) Astru
38. Mosse dal Medego
39. Lasaro (P: Zeste) de Michae
40. —
41. Meire de Michae
42. Liza (P: Lixa) de Xatho
43. Salomo suo fra[del]lo
44. Missauli Frango
45. Aba dal Medego
46. Casani Salomo
47. Meire Astru
48. Rafael Franchio
49. Iosef de Lia
50. Elia Balaza
51. Mosse Mande
52. Burdachai (P: Bardachai)
Ciroycho
53. Mossuni (?) Geniati (P: Gemati)
54. Samaria (P: Samarica) suo fio
55. Lazaro Astru
56. Lazari Sacerdotto
57. Mizo Balliaza
58. Ialacaza de Lazaro
59. Ligia da Modon
60. Mathathia Lago
61. Jacob Sacerdotto
62. Mosse Sacerdotto
- No. 22 -
63. Lazaro Sacerdotto
64. Michael Zazardotto
65. Limelle suo fio

66. Isolonio Sacerdotto
67. Lazaro de Michae
68. Burdachai Mande
69. Lia de Nachu
70. Michael de Nachu
71. Auraa (?) Rebuli
72. Gesti Faeri
73. Lia Papa
74. Crusso Milopotamiti
75. Diaco Milopotamiti
76. Crusso suo fio
77. Liachi suo fio
78. Salomo Balliaza
79. Saltan (?) Astin
80. Zacharia Sacerdotto
81. Elia Cassam
82. Cana Milopotamiti
83. Jesti Barbeta
- No. 21 -

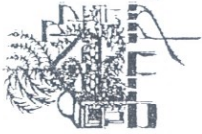
The list raises a number of questions. It appears to be a copy prepared by a scribe who was not very familiar with Hebrew and Jewish names. Thus, several Hebrew names, such as Nachu, Micahe, Davi, Manoe and Astru seem truncated, presumably because the copyist omitted abbreviations. Other names, such as Vracha or Auracha, Auraa, Burdachai, Lacho, Liacho or Liachi, seem to have been recorded on the basis of oral evidence by someone unfamiliar with names such as Avraham, Mordechai or Eliyahu. Likewise, the first letter (sometimes in addition to the last letter) of several names has been omitted, as in the cases of Frai (=Ephraim), Lia, Liza, Lisa, Ligia or Legia (=Eliya, Eliyahu or probably Elisha), or Limelle (=Elimelech). Ankori claims that this was an accepted procedure in Venetian transcriptions of Hebrew names. Yet it may well be that we are dealing, at least in some cases, with dialectical forms used by Jews of Crete (and probably elsewhere as well), which were recorded phonetically by the scribes. This hypothesis may be substantiated by the Latinized form *Ligiacinus*, which appears in fourteenth-century Cretan sources; by Jewish testaments from Crete drafted in Greek, where one encounters names such as *Λιάγος* and *Αβραχας* and the existence in Crete of the name *Δαβιη*, a Hellenized form of David, which in the genitive, dative and vocative cases was transformed into *Δαβι*. It should be noted, however, that the truncated form "Davi" also appears in a list of Jews compiled in Barcelona in 1392. Several types of surnames appear in the list. A considerable number of surnames are simply patronymics, such as de Lazaro, de Zadia, de Vracha, de Sabathia, de Michae, de Nachu, de Salomo or Salomo. Other surnames denote professions, such as Zeroycho, Ziroycho or Ciroycho («surgeon») and Dal Medego («physician»). Another type is based on toponymic surnames, derived both from Cretan localities such as Milopotamiti and foreign localities or countries such as da Modon or Spagnuol.

Still another type includes surnames which apparently derived from a person's appearance, such as Barbeta. Other surnames, such as Geniati and Corchidi, seem to derive from Greek nicknames. We also encounter Italianized or Venetianized Hebrew names such as Sacerdotto, Zazardotto or Zazerdotto (=Cohen). By 1536, in most cases, these appellations had become customary and had lost their pristine significance.

The list also enables us to become better acquainted with the provenance of Jewish families in Canea at that time. Cretan Jewry has been characterized as being predominantly Greek, or "Romanior", but scholars have also pointed out repeated waves of immigration into Crete from the Muslim and Byzantine east (even before the Venetian domination), and later from Italy, the Iberian peninsula, France and Germany. Jews bearing a first name followed by a patronymic were, most probably, Romanioi. The same can be said about surnames which originally seem to have been Greek nicknames, such as Geniati and Corchidi, or Milopotamiti, deriving from the Cretan toponym. Other surnames reveal foreign provenance. The name Astru, generally associated with Catalan or Provençal provenance, had appeared among Cretan Jews since the fourteenth century. The surname Spagnuol speaks for itself. The surname Franco, or Franchio points to a Sephardi origin. The surname da Modon clearly indicates its bearer's provenance in the Venetian colony in the southern Peloponnese. It is also known that the founder of the Cretan Delmedigo (Dal Medigo) family arrived from Germany toward the end of the fourteenth century.

Considering the traditional association with the medical profession of Jews in general and of Cretan Jews in particular, it is noteworthy that none of the names on the list is followed by the title *fisico* or *istacua*. He name Dal Medego does not prove any direct association with the medical profession. Only three persons are described as surgeons (Zeroycho, Ziroycho, Ciroycho). Most likely, physicians were exempted from the obligation to serve on the galleys or to work on the fortifications; on the other hand, surgeons, having a more lowly position, were obliged to serve. The list of able-bodied Jews may therefore be somewhat incomplete.

Two family names on the list enjoyed considerable fame, the most famous being Dal Medigo (Delmedigo). Eliyahu Delmedigo (c. 1460-1497) was not only a physician, but also an Aristotelian and Jewish scholar; he was the author, *inter alia*, of *Behinat ha-Dat* ("The Examination of Religion"), a book on the relationship between religion and philosophy. His fame is also related to his writings on Spinoza. Other members of this Cretan family were distinguished rabbis, such as Eli'ezer, son of Abba Dal Medigo, who was active in the sixteenth century, and Yoseph Shlomo



Rosh Hashana in Hania

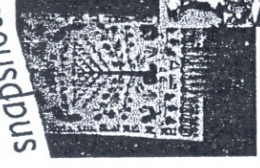
Quite a number of foreign visitors are coming to Hania to celebrate the Hag with us. We will not, I expect, have a minyan and I have already warned people that I have not mastered blowing the shofar and yet they are coming and some are planning to extend their visit to Yom Kippur. On Friday night there will be Arvith prayers for Shabbath and the Hag at about 8:00 PM and after that there will be a New Year's celebration in the north courtyard. The organization of this is in the hands of several people who have shared in our holidays before – at Hannouka last year and for Pesah this spring so they already know some of the ropes. Knowing that there is a problem about

the amount of food to be prepared as the Hag coincides with Shabbath they are making sure that the supply of foods and sweets is sufficient for the days ahead.

Most of the recipes are Judaic-Greek and include fish in walnut sauce, fish done with pickled lemons and olives as well as fresh sardines and anchovies which are running now. There will also be leeks and peas cooked with much dill, salads and sweets made from quince and apples – cooked in honey or petmez (the reduction of boiling grape juice). We also will harvest the abundant fruit from our pomegranate tree that has been bent almost down to the earth under its weight.



snapshots



Photos by Manoussos Daskaloianis

Sukkoth

The supports for a sukkah are being made now. The sukkah will be covered with bamboo and cuttings from the willow in the south courtyard that has been left to grow at will in anticipation of its special participation. We will have another 'open house' for the first night of the Hag and plan to invite all of the Christians who live in the neighborhood for a short thanksgiving service Arvith prayers and then move to the Sukkah where food will be laid out appropriate to the Hag.



The List of Able-Bodied Jews in the Cretan Town of Chania (Canea), 1536

ben Eliyahu Delmedigo, physician and Jewish scholar, who was famous in the first half of the seventeenth century as a philosopher, mathematician and astronomer. It is presently impossible to establish in what way, if at all, Mosse and Aba Dal Medigo were related to these celebrities.

Another surname of some fame is Mavrogonato. David Mavrogonato of Crete played a central role in the suppression of a Cretan rebellion in 1461, was subsequently employed by Venice as a secret agent in Istanbul during the war with the Ottomans in 1465, and was involved in peace negotiations between Venice and Sultan Mehmet II in 1466. He was rewarded by Venice which granted several privileges to him and his descendants. A collection of documents related to the family's inherited privileges has survived and has been recently described by M. Manoussakas. Unfortunately, I have been unable to examine this collection which, according to Manoussakas, includes a genealogical tree of the family, so I can only raise some suggestions regarding the relation between the three family members on our list and the persons mentioned in Manoussakas's short survey. David Mavrogonato's grandchild, Meir, son of Elie Mavrogonato, is described by Manoussakas as the most remarkable personality among David Mavrogonato's descendants. In 1532 Meir succeeded in obtaining all of his grandfather's privileges, and in 1532-3, the right to act as a broker. In 1539, during the war with the Ottomans, he was sent, like his grandfather, on a secret mission to Istanbul. The governors of Canea entrusted him, on two occasions – in 1543 and in 1553 – with the restoration of order in the Jewish quarter of that town. He died in 1556. His son, Elie, was later authorized to keep shops outside the Jewish quarter of Canea. The association of Meir

Mavrogonato and his son in Canea and the dating of the above-mentioned testimonies may indicate that we are dealing with the same Meir Mavrogonato figuring on our list. Could we also identify this name with Meir Mavrogonato, accused of rapping a Jewess of Canea sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century? If so, this could be part of a power struggle within the local Jewish community. Ligia Mavrogonato might be his son Elie, whereas David Mavrogonato could probably be identified with David, son of Levi Mavrogonato of Canea, another descendant of the more famous David.

A few individuals on the list, though belonging to less illustrious families, can also be identified to some extent. Jona de Michae is most probably the one who served in 1525 as *contestabulo*, i.e. head of the Jewish community in Canea. It is also tempting to identify Mosse Geniati with Moshe ben Michael Geni(a), whose name appears on a 1521 dedicatory inscription at the old synagogue of Canea.

Other family names on the list are encountered (in some cases quite often) in various sources related to the Cretan Jewry. This is true for names such as Salomo(n), or de Salomon, Corchidi, Balaza (Ballaza, Ballaza), Nachu(m), or de Nachum, Cassam, which probably stands for Casani, or Cassani, Da Modon, Coroneo, Susin, Billi, Spagnuol, not to speak of Sacerdotto (=Cohen) and its variants which appears nearly in every Jewish community.

Is it possible to estimate Canea's Jewish population in 1536 on the basis of our document? A rough estimation would be possible, provided we could establish a ratio between the able-bodied men and the total number of Jews, including women, children and old men – bearing in mind the uncertain character of the statistical

data supplied by the sixteenth-century sources concerning the population of Crete. Antonio Barbarigo, governor of Canea, reported in 1549 that the town's population numbered 9,992 persons. Canea's rural territory, according to the same report, had 46,600 inhabitants, of whom 11,031 men were obliged to perform public works on the fortifications (*angaria delle fabbriche*). Assuming that the last number refers to the same category of able-bodied men appearing in the census of 1536, the ratio between this group and the entire rural population in the district of Canea would be 1:4.22. A somewhat smaller ratio may be deduced from numerical evidence pertaining to the entire island, included in the report of 1586 presented by Giulio Garzoni. According to this document, Crete had 176,433 inhabitants, of whom 54,787 were men capable of bearing arms. Supposing that we are dealing with the same category as in the census of 1536, the ratio in this case would be merely 1:3.22. Thus, assuming that Jewish families were more or less of the same size as other Cretan families, we may apply ratios of 1:3.22 and 1:4.22 to the number of able-bodied Jews in 1536 in order to reach an estimated range of the total Jewish population in Canea at that moment. This results in between 267 and 438 souls. Considering the report of a Venetian magistrate about some 300 Jews living at Canea in 1571, we may conclude that in 1536, the number of Jews in that town was probably closer to the lower figure in our estimation.

We may also try to assess the relative demographic weight of the Jewish population of Canea in 1536 in relation to the non-Jewish population. According to the same census of 1536, there were 1,576 able-bodied men in the town and castle of Canea, and together with the 83 able-bodied Jews, 1659. The able-bodied Jews

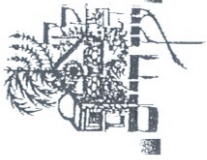
constituted some 5 per cent of this number (ignoring the small distortion due to the slight difference between the age span of the men registered in the citadel and in town). I believe that this proportion also reflected the size of the Jewish population in town in relation to the total number of inhabitants within the walls of Canea.

A list of 83 persons which may look, at first glance, to be simply a registry of faceless and strange-looking names has proved to be a rather illuminating document for the history of a community which has not attracted much attention until now. Hopefully, a more comprehensive work based on the documentary treasures of the Venetian State Archives, in widening and deepening our understanding of the history of the Jewish community of Canea, will further reveal the value of our list of able-bodied Jews of this town.

Faces (→ page 4)

for me of what a horrible mark, a livid scar, in fact, the death of a community can make on a surviving member. To make things worse, Victoria was almost an embarrassment to the Hamite Jews who had survived in Athens by hiding in the War years – not to mention the official Jewish Community in Athens. She in a sense shared the fate of the synagogue though in Victoria a case what rebirth there may be is known only on some other plane of existence. I often thought that it was strange that I would look in her face to make some contact with the community – to get some sense of what cast of features Rika Depas or Hayyim Cohen may have had. They remained a hidden mystery for me. A blank wall of irresolute death.

Recently I found a quite aged woman sitting in the north courtyard. She was only half seated, slightly ill



Faces

at ease, and held in her hand an envelope. She asked if I could help her and so I sat down next to her and she began to tell why she had come. She had lived in the 'lesser' Jewish Quarter during the year of 1943. We once had two sections of the Jewish Quarter – the 'greater' and the 'lesser'. The former was Kondylakis Street parallel to which is the cul de sac in which Etz Hayyim stands and the latter was Skouphou Street that runs along the back of the synagogue to the west. She told me that during that summer

she had become almost inseparable from two young Jewish girls – Sara and Loudita but that early in 1944 her family had fled Hania and made their way to the mountains and eventually had been able to flee Crete for the Peloponnese where she reached her maturity and then moved to Athens and married. She had never returned to Crete. This summer she had been given a trip 'home' by her children and in preparation for coming she had gone through some of her papers and found an old photograph of her two friends. When she heard about the synagogue she came, hoping that I might be able to tell her if they survived and where. The photograph

A Year Ago

Dayan's words ensured that every day since then, save for those when I am called away, Shahrut, Minha and Arvith prayers are offered in the Kal. Kabala Shabbath and the formal Kiddush, and Havdalah on the going out of the Shabbath, mark the rhythm of the renewed life of Etz Hayyim.

The weeks and months have gone by and slowly the Kal has begun to assert its quiet presence in Hania most powerfully and with little if any publicity. It has begun to define its role not only as a place of prayer in a town that has only one 'official' Jew. The few others who, while perhaps less official, and who are perhaps less inclined to prayer, appear to have begun to sense the role of the classic synagogue as not only a Beth haMidrash, but as a Beth haKnesset – a place of assembling, of meeting and sharing.

Early one evening this summer I came out of the Kal from Minha prayers and found a woman in the courtyard. She was obviously not Greek. About 35, she was also not recognizably a tourist and was well dressed in a long skirt, with a scarf around her shoulders. She had her back to me and when I said 'Shalom' she turned around and I could see that she had been crying though she managed a smile and a 'Shalom' and then abruptly left. The next morning I looked out of my office door at midday and found her again though this time she was standing, obviously waiting to say something to me. I got this story: She was not Jewish, in fact she was a practicing Christian, her grandfather had been in the German Army during the War, but as she had grown up she had one constant wish and that was to see a synagogue. She said that in Germany and elsewhere whenever she had found a synagogue that presented an opportunity to visit she had been frustrated by the customary police, guards, the heavily locked doors and the endless queries about why she wanted to visit. The previous evening she had taken a walk and suddenly saw the sign for

Etz Hayyim and wandered down the short lane that leads to it. The gate was wide open, the courtyard empty and when she looked in she could see me in a corner with my back to the door – alone. Where in Europe some vestigial remnants of the events that let up to the horror of the last WW seemed to still dictate Jewish life she said that to see the open doors, a normal enough silence surrounding a place of prayer, a lack of guards and police surveillance had been a complete shock to her. She spent quite a bit of time sitting in the synagogue after that and when she left came to say that she would never forget the experience that she had had in Hania – in our silent and powerful synagogue.

Recently two young Haniotes appeared in the courtyard. In the manner of 20 year olds in Hania they were dressed in tight-fitting black jeans, white T-shirts and well gelled-back hair. One of them was eating an ice-cream cone and as I was in the office I could not be seen easily due to the reflection in the window glass. I asked myself if I was going to say anything if they ventured in with the ice-cream, but suddenly one of them handed his cone to his friend and went into the Kal. After about five minutes he came out and took his cone and his friend went in. When he emerged they made for the gate, but abruptly the first of the young men turned around and returned to the door of the Kal where we keep a guest book, took the pen and began to write. I was by this time quite intrigued and my curiosity was further aroused when I could see that he was writing something that took some thought as he would stop every minute or so, obviously thinking about exactly what he wanted to write. I was intrigued enough to keep track of the time – it took him seven minutes to write the short paragraph that follows in translation: "Even it were that all Jews had been killed, this place must remain as a witness to intolerance and as a means of teaching people who in fact the Fathers of Jesus were and gave the truths that Christians believe in."

There is a hidden method in my recounting these incidents so I will fill

accompanies this text and from the inscription on the back it says simply as one might expect on a snapshot 'From your dear friends Sara and Loudita'. They are in black as their father had died shortly before. Sara had injured her hand that day and wears a makeshift bandage around it but their faces, young, fresh, expectant – looking off into the distance. This was the first contacts that I had with the victims. Their friends told me that she couldn't remember their last name but she thought that they had another younger sister, named Boulissa. There is a complete list of the victims and their addresses in the office, so I took her inside and we sat

them out with a third. A month ago a young couple came to visit. They spent long time in the synagogue. They sat for a good period of time reading the brochure that we have for visitors and then sat in silence. There is a sign posted at the gate that indicates the time of Shahrut and Minha and as it was almost 6:00 when the latter is said I was just about to go to my corner when they came up to speak to me. He was Turkish, a Muslim, she was German, a Christian.

They were on holiday in Hania and had stumbled on Etz Hayyim by accident. They had a request. Could they pray in the synagogue? I said of course – that's what the place in

about. So there we were. A Jew in one corner, a Muslim in another and a Christian in yet another and the opening words of the Amidah that afternoon were full of power and meaning. 'Blessed art Thou Lord God, God of our Father Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob.' Afterwards I thought long on what had taken place and remembered a query that was once made about these 'gods'. Were there in fact four gods – one for each of the Patriarchs and then one all alone? The answer of a wise rabbi had been 'Yes' and 'no'. There is but One God but each of the Patriarchs, as do each of us, experience God in our own particular manner and that all of these experiences are partial and to a degree limited. I suppose that we would say that they are limited and defined by time and space. The One God is hidden, unknown and only manifest in how we experience this Absolute through the relativity of our personal existences. A Jew, a Muslim and a Christian – all Children of Abraham.

I have cited these experiences that Etz Hayyim has made possible for me and for many of the visitors over the past year as they, amongst many others, have been an assertion of the quite mysterious ongoing self definition that continues to manifest itself. Our Kal will not be for many years, if ever, a 'normal' Synagogue or Beth haMidrash. It has no Kehila save for these people who from Europe, Asia, the Americas have visited it and have maintained a contact with it through mail. There is no

together, this aged woman holding the photograph and I. I knew she was hoping that we were not going to find their names – but we did. Sara, Judith, Boulissa and the widow Rachel, the daughters of Leon Kounio. They had vanished with the others. I sat a long time in silence with the woman and when she got up to go I asked her if I could make a copy of the photograph. Late that afternoon I walked over to Skouphou St. and there was the house – no. 18 – a narrow three-story house with one room on each level – the sort of dwelling quite common in the poorer neighborhoods of Hania. Nothing more can be said really.

minyuan. There are only the prayers that are offered by those who sense the loss, the power and the silently conveyed message of this Beth haKnesset – this House of Meeting.

All of you who get these jottings share in this holy and meaningful place. Some of you are Jews, some more or less observant, some are Christians, some are even Muslims and a good many probably quite agnostic, yet something brought us all together and it was certainly the united efforts that have linked us together in a Kehila of Etz Hayyim's making.

WEB SITE and DATA BASE

In the future the web site will be changed more frequently and in addition we are preparing a data base. The latter will evolve as material and time dictate. At the moment we are concentrating on specific subjects such as: a) Bibliography on Cretan Jewry, b) Articles on Cretan-Judaean history, c) Photographs, d) Membership lists, e) Recent events, e) Related material from other Jewish centers in Greece, f) Family trees and lineages of Cretan Jews as well as names and addresses of persons who come from families originating in Crete.

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