

Tottings

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“Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practice in Mediterranean Cities”

Anthropological research and documentary film
on the Etz Hayyim Synagogue

by Vassiliki Yiakoumaki

Vassiliki Yiakoumaki is an anthropologist and teaches at the Dept. of Social Anthropology at Panteion University, Athens. She received her PhD at the New School for Social Research, New York. She is working on issues of official politics of multiculturalism and politics of heritage in Europe. She is currently conducting research for the University of Crete, Dept. of Sociology, in the context of the program “Mediterranean Voices”, funded by the European Union’s Euromed Heritage II.

The Etz Hayyim Synagogue and, by extension, the Jewish history of Hania, are becoming the object of ethnographic research in the context of “Mediterranean Voices”, a major research programme funded by the European Union. “Mediterranean Voices” is a research partnership between London Metropolitan University and 13 research institutions in Mediterranean countries. It consists of a three-year (2002-5) research on oral history and cultural practice in Mediterranean urban spaces.

The cities studied are: Alexandria, Ancona, Beirut, Bethlehem, Hania, Ciutat de Mallorca, Granada, Istanbul, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Marseille, Nicosia North, Nicosia South, Valletta.

The local partner-institution carrying out research on Hania is the University of Crete (Rethimno Campus).

“Mediterranean Voices” is funded by the European Union’s EUROMED HERITAGE II programme (www.euromedheritage.net), under the auspices of EUROPEAID Co-operation Office (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid>).

This is a digital media project, which means that the researcher is expected to collect and record ethnographic data (interviews, events, performances, etc.) in the form of audio-visual material (image, video, etc.) to be uploaded on the programme’s web site. The web site is currently under construction. Its upcoming launching means that there will be an oral history data base available to the (academic or general) public, with the dual purpose a) to promote awareness of local identities and cultures and b) to contribute to urban heritage management and policy.

We approach Hania as a cultural palimpsest, historically made up of Greek, Roman, Arab, Venetian, Jewish and

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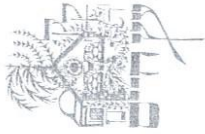
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Tu BeShevat

Though not a Jewish Holiday in the Halachic sense of the word, Tu BeShevat is one event that we celebrate as best we can in Hania as it offers us an opportunity to share quite deeply our common dependence on the continued well-being of the world, if not the Universe with our non-Jewish friends and neighbors. This year, as in other years, we had the Seder in the Synagogue though we made some slight changes in the service itself. We had a small olive tree set up in the centre of the Synagogue and around it lit small candles in between which were receptacles that held various symbolic fruits – a Jaffa orange (a fruit from Eretz), a coconut (a symbol of our hard and demonic egos) pistachio and walnuts (the latter from our own tree and symbolic of the riches that can be found once we find a way to open our ego casings), and soft fruits such as dates, raisins and especially dried apricots that leave, as should we in performing good acts, nothing behind save what they give us nurturing food.

Unfortunately bad weather, a somewhat virulent flu epidemic in Hania plus the absence of several members of our community meant that we were very few – but we said the blessings in common and had long periods of thought and meditation on trees and the riches that they give us. We were fortunate in finding a single green etrog on the tree in the garden and this, as symbolic of the heart, we passed from hand to hand at the termination of the service.

* The entire text of the introduction to the service that was made by Mr Stavroulakis can be found on the ‘Events’ link on our site at: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org.



“Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practice in Mediterranean Cities”

(→ page 1)

Ottoman-Turkish layers, and presently being enriched by communities of immigrants of various ethnic/national backgrounds who have settled in the city during the last couple of decades. The city is studied in terms of 1) its *multi-ethnic character* as a Mediterranean city, by means of tracing past and present experiences of inhabiting an urban Mediterranean locale as an *ethnic* subject, and 2) the *urban neighbourhood* today, in the many different ways it can reveal the nuances of urban life in the Mediterranean, e.g., via the memory and/or experience of individuals or household groups as components of the city's everyday life, or via the activities of groups, associations, or other collectivities of local inhabitants promoting a local “cultural” cause.

One history we have heavily focused on is the city's Jewish cultural heritage, particularly as it revolves, in the present, around the restoration project of the historic *Ez Haryim* Synagogue, in the (formerly) Jewish quarter of the Hania harbour. Thanks to a devoted collectivity of people, and an inspiring project leader, Nicholas Hannan Stavroulakis, the Synagogue is a living multi-cultural microcosm today, which functions not only as a cultural centre for the city, but also as a place for religious worship.

The researcher is involved in two kinds of tasks: collecting material on the Synagogue for uploading on the web page, and selecting material for a documentary film on the Synagogue, which is now in the making.

What does this material consist of? Moments of everyday life in the Synagogue (gatherings, feasts, services, rituals) and interviews of individuals (local Chaniots or non-locals, Jews or non-Jews) supporting, or working for, the project, individuals who are neighbours or long-time inhabitants in the area, individuals who (e.g., as survivors' children) have roots in the neighbourhood, or individuals articulating an official discourse vis-à-vis the Synagogue, e.g., city officials.

We are concerned with both the past and the present: we are gathering memories of the past where Jews, Christians and Muslims shared their life in this part of the city; we are interested in finding out how the individuals surrounding the Synagogue today acquire a sense of belonging to the city and a sense of attachment to place, via relating themselves with this history; we are interested in how the restoration project, hence the visibility of the Synagogue after years of silence, affects local life; we are interested in tracing conflicting views and/or acts of tolerance among the local population/local establishment vis-à-vis the project; finally we are interested in the viability of a project such as the Synagogue, in the context, or as a result of, the country's integration in the EU and a necessary conformity with an official politics of multiculturalism in Europe. The restoration is a politically significant act, and we mean “politically” in the broader sense: the case-study of the Synagogue is a very appropriate example for exploring issues such as in what ways history is being “recovered”, or “invented”, or “negotiated”, and for exploring identity politics at local level in Europe today.

As far as dissemination is concerned, our primary target audiences are university students, tourists/visitors of

the Synagogue, local residents of Hania, and a larger Greek audience, e.g., through public television.

For further information on the Hania project of “Mediterranean Voices”, the contact persons are: Vassiliki Yiakoumaki, Social Anthropologist (main researcher), viakoumaki@otenet.gr Maria Kousis, Sociologist, University of Crete (co-ordinator), kousis@social.soc.uoc.gr

What follows is an introductory text to the Mediterranean Voices Programme, as it will be found on the future web site.

University of Crete



Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practice in Mediterranean Cities

The principal aim of the *Mediterranean Voices* project is to reverse the customary emphasis given to monumental heritage and to promote an awareness of the intangible cultural heritage of Mediterranean urban landscapes amongst as wide an audience as possible: academics, policy-makers, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and the general public, particularly members of the ‘Mediterranean diaspora’.

The project was developed from the work of three social anthropologists (Scott, Selwyn, Bianchi) working in the International Institute for Culture Tourism and Development [1] at London Metropolitan University and is based on a partnership with a number of different institutions, including universities, non-governmental organisations and independent research agencies, in the cities of Alexandria, Ancona, Beirut, Bethlehem, Hania, Ciutat de Mallorca, Granada, Istanbul, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Marseille, Nicosia North, Nicosia South, Valletta.

In each city a team of researchers and IT/digital media specialists are collecting and recording the memories and perceptions of neighbourhood residents. These oral histories embrace a variety of themes including family histories; memories of places and important events; experiences of mobility and displacement; local folklore, rituals and customs; festivals and holidays; as well as a number of daily practices which are part and parcel of everyday life, working and socialising in these cities and neighbourhoods.

Through its focus on a variety of neighbourhood-based interactions and experiences which are played out in and through story-telling, personal recollections of historic



events, everyday social interactions and cultural practices, this project illuminates the diverse, yet often fragile, fabric of memories and relationships which help to shape the meaning and character of Mediterranean urban quarters. The cities and neighbourhoods which form part of the consortium and arenas of activity are not intended to be in any way representative of a Mediterranean urban 'archetype'. However, they do share a number of traits or 'cultures of urbanism', typical of Mediterranean urban quarters and environments, for example, the dense co-presence of an ethnically and socially-mixed population. In addition, these attributes cannot be understood without reference to the trans-Mediterranean ties of trade and mobility which have historically nourished these fluid and cosmopolitan urban social ecologies.

The ever-present challenge of sharing space and living together constitutes one of the many aspects of personal and collective memory in the Mediterranean city. Mediterranean shores and Mediterranean cities have experienced the presence and movement of populations as a result of social, economic and cultural exchange on the one hand, conflicts, crises and transitions, on the other. However, whilst the Mediterranean sea itself looms large in the life of these cities, having played such a central role in bringing the peoples of the northern, southern, eastern and western shores together - including the archipelagos of the Mediterranean Atlantic' which lie beyond the 'Pillars of Hercules' - their populations have periodically turned inwards to face the hinterland. Out of this tension between the sea and the land, comes a unique set of histories and ways of life embodied in the oral histories which have been collected and stored in this unique archive.

Nor, however, have these cities and their urban cultures been immune to the destabilising effects of capitalist restructuring, globalisation, ethno-cultural nationalism, religious conflict, territorial expansion, racism and xenophobia. Fragile inter-communal ties, often forged over generations, and the co-existence of different ethnic groups and religions, have periodically lapsed into division and violence. Thus, although many of the oral histories presented in this database are testimony to the ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism of the Mediterranean basin, they also offer an honest portrayal of the routine difficulties and periodic conflicts encountered by residents of these neighbourhoods.

The protection of heritage and the celebration of cultural identity have also become of increasing concern for various state and non-state institutions alike. Indeed cultural heritage, both monumental and non-monumental - as evidenced by the recent adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO[4] - is increasingly envisaged as an integral component in a series of strategies which bring together actors and institutions in the arenas of economic development, heritage conservation and urban cultural tourism. However, these strategies often privilege the monumental, or indeed, élite visions of culture and heritage, thus ignoring the presence of popular oral traditions and cultural practices. There are few if any monuments to these aspects of neighbourhood based interactions which give rise to specific urban identities and modes of belonging. Nor is it

likely that they would be either feasible or desirable. Thus, informed by the principles of ethnographic investigation and oral history techniques, the Mediterranean Voices project seeks to create a space for the expression of less frequently heard voices which for a variety of reasons are often absent or effaced in monumental aspects of urban cultural heritage.

Working in collaboration with certain target groups in each city, including local authorities, neighbourhood associations, cultural and heritage institutions, musicians and artistic associations, museums, non-government organisations, tour guides, schools, and university departments, the collected material is also being used to develop a series of events across the Mediterranean region, including seminars, workshops, conferences, documentary films, and exhibitions, each of which deal with one or more of the principal themes of the project. Whilst each city will host their own exhibition, dealing with issues and themes specific to that locality, a roving exhibition (*Shared Spaces in Times of Crises: Memories of Alexandria, Ancona, Beirut, Bethlehem and Split*) is planned for the end of 2004/early 2005, which will explore a number of wider themes which illuminate a number of shared experiences in these five cities, including, *mobility, nostalgia, boundaries and shared spaces, cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism, globalisation, rupture and the creation of new borders, perceptions of security, identity, perceptions of others, tradition and modernity, ethnicity and citizenship*.

In 2005, the project consortium will host an academic conference in Alexandria, entitled *Turning Back to the Mediterranean*. The principal theme and purpose of this gathering will be to explore the challenge of sharing space and living together in Mediterranean cities, in the context of the ever-present challenges and threats to the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan character of Mediterranean urban life presented by contemporary geo-political and ideological realities.

Links

[1] <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/iictd>

[4] http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php@URL_ID=2225&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

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ÉTZ HAYYIM SYNAGOGUE

Opening Times

In winter and spring the Synagogue is open to visitors from 10 am to 1pm on Mondays to Fridays. An extensive reference library of religious and historical titles is also open. All are warmly welcome to attend Synagogue events, services and festivals.



Bar Mitzvah

In mid-November another Bar Mitzvah was celebrated in the Synagogue. This is the second Bar Mitzvah that we have provided space and amenities for. The parents of the young man, Mr and Mrs Sam and Dorothy Abrams are now living in Boston though are Salonika rooted, and their son Daniel had set his mind on Etz Hayyim as the locus for celebration in this important rite of passage. He received his preparation in Boston and arrived in Hania several days prior to the event. We were very fortunate in having managed to have Rabbi Isaak Mizan from Athens act as officiant and he arrived in good time to lay tephillin on the Thursday and on the Shabbath the service and reading of the Torah took place quietly with a small gathering of friends and family.



High Holidays

The community of Etz Hayyim was joined by friends from Greece, Israel, USA, Canada, the Netherlands, France and the UK for the celebration of Rosh Hashanah. More than 60 people attended the Erev Rosh Hashanah service and we maintained a minyan throughout the day of Rosh Hashanah itself. The services were conducted by Haim Ischakis, assisted by his wife Eva. One of the highlights of the day was when Haim blew the splendid Yemeni shofar, waking the entire neighbourhood.

For Yom Kippur we also had guests who were able to use the 'Cretan book of Jonah', a Greek/Hebrew text used by Romaniote (Greek speaking) Jews. There was an interesting tradition, late into the 16th in Greece, of reading certain texts in Greek though written in the Hebrew alphabet. There are two manuscripts from the 16th that contain such texts of the Book of Jonah written in Crete. One of these is in the Bodleian library, Oxford. This year we used the text of this manuscript edited by Professor Nicholas de Lange, and reinstated the tradition of reading the Book of Jonah for the afternoon of Yom Kippur. Next year we hope to provide all members of the community with copies of this, illustrated by Nikos Stavroulakis.

Visit by Greek Jews to Etz-Hayyim

In Fall 2004, 85 Jews from mainland Greece visited Hania as part of a general programme of visits by mainland Jews to Jewish Communities in Greece and was organised by Mr Haim Ischakis who is a Hazzan and who conducted our Rosh HaShannah Services this year. This is a personal account of the experience by Anne Delargy, Administrative Secretary of the Synagogue

It was for me an amazing experience: the visit of 85 Jews from the mainland of Greece to the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Crete, the only Jewish building on the island and the only monument to a Jewish presence here of more than 2,400 years.

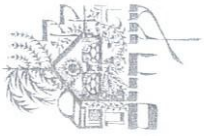
I had been involved with Etz Hayyim Synagogue for about nine months as a volunteer and part of the Havurah, the brotherhood of Jews and non-Jews (like myself) who support the Synagogue take part in services here. Often during Kabbalat Shabbat, the Friday evening service that all volunteers attend, I felt part of a much larger spiritual community, with the same words being said by millions of people at the same time all over the world.

But this was the first time I had felt part of that community in the flesh. They were Greeks and they were Jews – a devastating combination! Full of life and fun, never still, welcoming, warm, open, curious and friendly to 'strangers' like me; eating, drinking, singing, telling outrageous jokes and sad stories (sometimes in the same breath!), and talking, always talking.... My Greek is pretty

Poetry Evening

On 27 February 2005 Etz Hayyim held a multi-lingual Poetry Evening when the Synagogue celebrated some of the languages used by members of the Havurah by reading poems in nine languages (English translations were provided). Ten readers read poems on the theme of 'God in everything' from Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions, as well as readings from Homer in ancient Greek. As a result of the success of this evening, Etz Hayyim organised a reading of short stories by Nikos Stavroulakis and Gideon Telpaz, the Israeli writer (temporarily) resident in Hania on 9 March and further literary events will be announced.





basic, but they managed to communicate all kinds of things to me anyway.

They reminded me of the trips my mother went on with the Catholic Women's Confraternity when I was a child; everyone had had their hair done, all the women wearing their best earrings. But whereas the Catholic church services were quiet and quite sombre, enlivened by occasional hymns, these were noisy, full of song and movement. People were talking to one another, waving to friends, greeting and kissing, sometimes going outside for a breath of air/smoke/gossip. This made the solemn moments, such as the silent prayer, Amidah, much more profound.

For the first time in the Synagogue I was among a fully engaged, participating community. We have about 300 visitors a week here in the tourist season, and, although we are always very clear that Etz Hayyim is NOT a museum, they still tend to look round as if it were. Our little community here comprises a handful of Jews (there are only seven Jews in Hania) and about the same number of non-Jews, most of whom struggle to participate in the services.

For the Festivals and High Holidays we often have a large congregation, for instance 73 people came to the Pesach seder this year; and we have had weddings and Bar Mitzvahs here, but these are usually temporary communities, from all over the world, with all kinds of different traditions, who are here (by accident or design) but are mostly passing through. Many of them stay in touch with us through email, phone etc; but it was new to me to be with a Jewish community that was much more like a family: people who'd known one another, and one another's families, all their lives.

They had some terrible stories about the past, of course – 94% of Greek Jews were annihilated in WWII, and some of our guests had been through the camps or had seen their entire families wiped out – and some very sad stories about present-day religious homogeneous policy in Greece – for instance, that Jewish schools are banned by the Minister of Education, who is also the Minister for Religion, from accepting Jewish children who have been baptised as a result of mixed marriages.

But my overwhelming experience of them was of warmth, cheerfulness, strength, and energy. And for the first time I really felt 'the joy of Torah' when the scrolls were read.

Their Hazzan, Haim Ishakis, who organised the trip, was fantastic; indefatigable energy, always doing four things at once, putting his whole body into praying, looking after people, making sure no-one lost their place in the (very long) services, waving people to empty seats, bringing water for readers.

At the end of Shabbat, after we had heard about the history of the Cretan Jews, the Director of Etz Hayyim, Dr Nikos Stavroulakis, spoke passionately about the need for the community to acknowledge the past but to move on – to make Judaism live.

Quoting the Prophet Isaiah, he said 'The people of God should be a light to the nations', and the light of world should not be hidden. 'We cannot be a light to the world', Dr Stavroulakis said, 'if we hide ourselves away, lock up our

Synagogues, dwell in the past'. Every day in Etz Hayyim Nikos prays Shahrut (morning prayers) with Konstantino, a member of the Etz Hayyim Havurah and a Christian. 'We are alive', Nikos said, 'and this Synagogue is here because we are alive, not because the Cretan Jews died.'

Some visitors left with cuttings from the trees in our Biblical garden, so that the Tree of Life that is Etz Hayyim will in future be growing in Jewish gardens throughout Greece.

For me, it was the first time I had fully experienced this deeply human religion at work. It is noisy, argumentative, emotional, funny. Full of fire and sweetness, and most of all,

Visit of Fr. David Burrell



For the past several years Fr. David Burrell has been an annual visitor to Etz Hayyim. He is a life long friend of the Director of the Synagogue and his stay with us is a sign of a well tested friendship but also reflects his deep commitment to inter-faith dialogue. For many years he was the Chairman of the Theology Dept., at the University of Notre Dame and at the termination of that post he assumed a quite different role as Rector of Tanur Ecumenical Centre in Jerusalem not far from Beth Jalla. Tanur was founded by Pope John Paul I a good number of years ago and initially was in the care of Benedictine monks from Montserrat Abbey in Spain. The Centre has played an important role in providing visiting scholars with the means to carry out research and pursue other scholarly activities. As a point where Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars interact, the Centre has played an important role in seeking understanding and more importantly comprehension.

Parallel to this role Fr. Burrell has actively been translating many of the classics of Islamic spirituality, specially of Ghazzali (The 99 Names of God) and is at present working on a translation of a mystic who was in the line of the great Muslim saint al-Arabi who had a quite important influence on some Jewish mystics in North Africa.



Lectures on Islam and Hinduism

We recently completed the third series of lectures on Great Religions of the World. These are held on every Saturday evening at the end of Shabbat and have had good success in attendance. Each series of 12 lectures are on video cassettes and we began with Judaism and then Christianity.

We have now begun the series on Hinduism which will be followed in the late Spring by 12 lectures on Buddhism.

Lectures in the coming months

Three lectures will be given in Spring by Stavroulakis on Ottoman themes. Hania still has traces of the rich multi-ethnic and multi-religious life that the town had a century ago. Muslims, Christians and Jews all played an important role in the evolution of the distinctive character of Ottoman Civilization. These lectures are to act as introductions to the little known riches of the Ottoman Empire – in architecture, tiles and even costume. Especially the latter had a far reaching influence on styles of dress and fashions in France and Germany from the 16th through the 18th centuries. Each lecture will be presented with slides and afterwards refreshments and discussion session.

Dates are:

27 March – Ottoman costume
17 April – Ottoman and Turkish architecture
29 June – The evolution of Ottoman tiles (14th-17th cent.)

Music events

The classical music CD concerts continue at the Synagogue on the first Wednesday of every month. The next two concerts will be on

6 April
4 May

at 7.30pm in the Synagogue

Religious Services

Every morning

Shahrit (Morning Prayers) at 9am

Every Friday

Kabbalat Shabbat service followed by refreshments. Service starts at sunset; 7pm in early spring. Check with Synagogue for times later in the year.

Every Saturday

Havdalah service. The service starts after sunset; 7pm in winter/early spring. Check with Synagogue for times later in the year.

Grants

1) We are happy to announce that the HANADIV FOUNDATION in London has renewed our Grant application that will be applicable for two years. We wish to especially thank Mr Anthony Lerman the Director of the Foundation in London and Miriam Bencherit one of the chief administrators for their help in assisting us in expanding our work.

2) Last year, through the efforts of Peter and Doris Naylor, we were recipients of funds to cover the salary and living expenses of a scholar in residence. The grant was awarded by the Leventis Foundation based in Cyprus-London and we have been informed by Mr and Mrs Naylor that it will be renewed for the coming year.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank the extended family of Etz Hayyim who so generously responded to our request for membership fees in the Friends. This has made feasible an additional issue to Jottings....among other things.

Changes in Staff

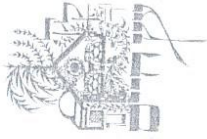
Desi van der Berg, our administrative secretary, has had to leave for France-Holland along with her fiancé. She was an invaluable help over the past two years in keeping track of our web site and managing it as well as running the office and daily affairs. She will be missed but she also managed to make the transition much easier by working with her successor, Ms. Anne Delargy, for several months prior to her departure – which is by no means final as the internet being what it is we still depend on her feed back and help on matters related to it.

Anne Delargy is an Oxford Graduate and worked for several months as a docent in the Synagogue and was invaluable in preparing the grant proposals that we made in the Fall. We are happy to say that this transition was made without any pause in the life of Etz Hayyim.



Holocaust Memorial

The European commemoration of the Holocaust took place on the 27th January. It has assumed a quite justifiably important place as a pan-European event. Apparently in Hania this European aspect of the commemoration has fallen on deaf ears as nothing was done by either the governor or the mayor to mark the event – which is somewhat bizarre considering that our Hania community was completely destroyed - though not unexpected as Hania remains the sole city in Greece that saw Jewish loss of life that has not erected a monument in their memory. In Greece the event was marked by a somewhat involved commemoration in Salonika to which the Minister of the Exterior of Germany and his Greek counterpart were invited, though it is worth noting that neither the President nor the Prime Minister of Greece saw fit



to attend it. This was especially uncomfortable for some of us since only recently Mr. Le Pen was in Greece and his voice was readily picked up by Mr Katsaferis who has been somewhat excessively virulent in his anti-semitism recently along with his organization the Golden Dawn. The Helsinki Monitor was quick to pick up on their recent activities and what perhaps was even more uncomfortable was a defense of the custom of the burning of the Judas on the Saturday night of Holy Week by the primate of the Greek Orthodox Church. The confusion of the word Judas with Judaeos and the deep rooted anti-Jewish tradition of Orthodoxy (cf. St. John Chrysostom and St. Cyril of Alexandria made this traditional event of such notoriety that Sultan Abdul Aziz forbade the practice in the 19th cent.. and its revival, while probably intrinsically insignificant, is nonetheless a sign of a certain inability to come to terms with the possibility of a certain religious society such as we had a century ago. In Hania our Muslims were lent a football field to say their prayers for Eid (the end of the Hajj) celebrations when there are two abandoned mosques that could well be given to their use.

Sven Lindqvist in a remarkable book entitled 'Exterminate all the Beasts' makes apt reading for anyone who wishes to see into the deep underlying currents that still affect our understanding of genocide. This small book traces, via Joseph Conrad's – *Heart of Darkness*, the almost diabolic involvement of all peoples in Europe in the extermination of the 'other' – whether it be the Belgians in the Congo, the Federal forces in the US 'wild west', the Cambodians, Bosnians or Sudanese. The common heritage of Europeans is not only Western Christian Civilization that saw the creation of Chartres or the writings of Goethe and the music of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. It also has woven into it a quite despicable tale of genocide in the fulfillment to which the great experiments and achievements of the industrial revolution were fully applied.

The New Europe that is in the process of evolving has certainly been correct in placing the Jewish Holocaust central to the modern European experience. That President Bush would not participate save through the vice-president Mr Cheney who appeared to be preoccupied mainly in pressuring the Poles to continue their presence in Iraq, is a sad tale in itself.

We are going to take this opportunity to put severe pressure on the Mayor and civil authorities in having a public monument set up to the Greek Jewish victims of racism. If any of our readers wish to make a comment we would appreciate a copy of what is sent as initially we will have to have some sort of demand by non-nationals in the form of an appeal.

Memorial Service for the Cretan Jews

The memorial for the Cretan Jews who died in 1944 will be held on Wednesday 8 June 2005 at 6pm. This will be a simple service of remembrance, recalling the names of the dead and lighting a candle in the gardens for each of them.

All are welcome to attend.

Borderland Foundation and Centre for Arts, Cultures, Nations in Sejny, Poland

The following notes by Anne Delargy, who is the present secretary of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, were taken down after an informal meeting with Dr Krzysztof Czyzewsk of the Borderland Foundation and Centre for Arts, Cultures, Nations in Sejny, Poland. This centre has attracted a great deal of interest as it has evolved out of the remnants of a Jewish community that perished in 1942 in the violence of the Shoah and, though it has no ostensible Jewish life as such, nonetheless bears witness at one and the same time to a past when religious and cultural plurality characterised much of European life – with, in some cases, tragic consequences. Nonetheless the possibility of such interaction within the scope of the creative and performing arts has been successful in bringing together in the Centre Poles, Bosnians, Croats, Lithuanians and others.

I met Dr Czyzewsk in the spring of 2004 at the international Jewish conference in Prague and out of our meeting emerged a visit to Hania and as a result we have begun to investigate means whereby we can perhaps interact together in the future. The conditions in which Etz Hayyim functions are quite different than those in Poland but it is hoped that we can open up avenues of co-operation and interaction in the future.

Nikos Stavroulakis

Stavroulakis introduced Kryś by saying that the Borderland centre is in a village of only 6,000 people, all Christians, who embrace their Jewish history as part of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic culture of their area which has been lost to them since World War II. In Hania, however, the possibilities presented by the Synagogue to the entire community have not been taken up and the Jewish presence has been met with indifference and even hostility. There are many opportunities to use the Synagogue as a venue for multi-cultural events, but at the moment it remains an 'espace (space)' where things can happen rather than a 'centre'. He hoped that in the future we could develop the Synagogue along the lines that the Borderland Centre has developed.

Kryś said that the area where he is working had been a 'stetl' in North East Poland, abandoned after the 2nd World War when all the Jews were deported or killed. The Jewish area had been completely neglected under Communism. In 1989 the collapse of the Communist regime gave new birth to Poland and an opportunity to create something new. Kryś was a Theatre Director and writer and together with other artist friends decided to leave the city and move to a province where there is still a diverse culture. They moved to the abandoned Jewish quarter, which was one among others: abandoned and overgrown buildings and cemeteries, Polish, Lithuanian etc; some were recognisably Catholic or Jewish; with others it was difficult to identify to which community they had belonged.

The area is a borderland, where different borders meet; the border is relatively recent, being cut in the 20th century.

The Jewish quarter had the ruins of a Talmudic School, a



Borderland Foundation

Jewish Gymnasium (High School) and a Synagogue. The Jews had made up 80% of the population in the 19th century and 50% in the early 20th century.

When Kryz and his group came to the area they 'became Jews'. The local people had seen other sites reclaimed by the Catholic church and different ethnic communities and thought that Kryz' group were Jews returning to revive the Jewish sites. There are different ways of becoming a Jew!

He thought that in a more homogeneous society it would have been more difficult to be accepted; and as outsiders they were not implicated in all the local conflicts that continued there. They found that there were diverse communities, but that they were very separated from each other; they each lived in their own 'ghetto' and had no forum for discussion with each other. Schools and the church did not create links since the church had also been split by former inter-community struggles and history was taught from a mono-cultural standpoint.

The word 'borderland' is very significant in Polish. It means a region of different people living together; a 'borderlander' is someone who builds bridges between different cultures, while remaining rooted in their own history and tradition. The Borderland Centre wanted to revive the ethos of being a borderlander, and felt there was much to learn from the Jews.

The Jews were the first cosmopolites – cultured, interested in their neighbours' traditions. So their example was very significant in creating a new level of intercultural understanding. The Jews were also the first people to experience the collapse of multi-cultural living, because they had been so open, and because the rise of nationalism put them in the most difficult of all situations.

It is understandable that Jews today are reluctant to

participate in multicultural ideas because they suffered the worst from the collapse of multiculturalism. But there is no other way in the future than building this ethos of 'Borderland' and it is especially important for young people to grown up within this ethos.

The Centre set out to recreate a language of communication between the different groups, and to re-establish an *agora*, a discussion place, which is missing both locally and on an international level; there is no international 'agora' where different cultures and traditions can exchange their points of view.

Slowly, over 13 years, they have revitalised the culture and language. They are now organising education from kindergarten; they have a Borderlands school, a music group, a publishing house and a magazine.

The story wasn't always without difficulties, and there was a need to deal with painful and difficult things from the past; for instance, the Poles had an image of themselves as victims or heroes and found it difficult when this image was challenged, for instance by a book published by Borderlands showing the Polish people as predators, for example there were incidents of Jews being murdered by Poles without any German intervention.

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 Creto-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.

Dear Friend of Etz Hayyim

We are in the process of trying to straighten out our mailing list, which has become quite large. Due to the high cost of postage and printing, it has been necessary to make *Jottings* bi-annual and it is sent automatically to everyone on the mailing list who has indicated either by donations or other that they wish to keep in touch with what we are doing at Etz Hayyim. We realise the enthusiasm over a visit to the Synagogue does not represent a commitment to its work – though it is through this that the mailing list has become as large as it is.

If you have made a membership contribution for 2004/5 (our membership year runs from September 2004 to August 2005) please ignore this – but should you not have and wish to continue sharing this work with us, albeit from a distance, we would appreciate having notice from you.

Annual subscription fee: \$55 or 45 Euro.

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