

Jottings

K'K' Etz Hayyim
P.O. Box 251
73001 Hania, Crete, Greece
Tel. +30 28210 86286
E-mail: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org
Web site: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org

On the Occasion of the New Year

Several factors have hampered and somewhat complicated the sending of a more intimate Newsletter than what perhaps is desirable. Since its re-dedication the Synagogue has had a very convoluted and not always too consistent growth. Lacking a proper community it has been a challenge in itself to keep the synagogue functioning as it was defined at the time of its dedication: as a place of commemoration, prayer, recollection and reconciliation. Inevitably at various times over the past several years the synagogue has elaborated these roles in variant ways and to that end the website at www.info-etz-hayyim-hania.org proved to be of great use and value as it permitted us to share information and news and also to link the work of the synagogue to other communities around the world. We hope in the future to be able to send a Newsletter by 'snail mail' more frequently than in the recent past.

It is somehow very fitting that this letter to wish you Shanna Tovah also accompanies the new calendar for the year 5769 (2008-9). The new calendar – as have been the preceding two – is mainly concerned with Hania from the point of view of its rich history of multi-ethnic, religious and cultural interaction until recent time (since 1912). This is reflected in the surviving architecture of Hania in the synagogue, mosques and churches, both Orthodox and Catholic, and this year we chose to commemorate the very people who walked the streets of our city. The contrast to contemporary Hania as a tourist centre is noteworthy and of great interest and we hope that these faces from the past of Hania will help to keep in mind the people who gave our city its active vitality.

New project: The Ezrat Nashim

The Synagogue of Etz Hayyim was one of two synagogues in Hania, the other being Beth Shalom. Both shared a common courtyard that gave access to the community mikveh. Most of the Jewish houses in the Zudecca (Jewish Quarter) had family mikvot and the community mikveh was used primarily for ritual needs according to event and time of the year. Beth Shalom Synagogue was destroyed in 1941 and the site is now

Also in this issue:

First Meeting of Etz Hayyim Board of Trustees	3
Intercultural Workshop - "The Glass Beads Game"	3
Commemorative Week for Cretan Jews	4
Lecture Series	5
Holidays at Etz Hayyim	5
Etz Hayyim's Library. Present and Future	5
My Summer at Etz Hayyim.....	6
Meet the Staff	6
From Hania to Israel and Canada, respectively.	
A Survivors'' Story	7
From the Visitors' Book	8
Upcoming Events 2008/09	8

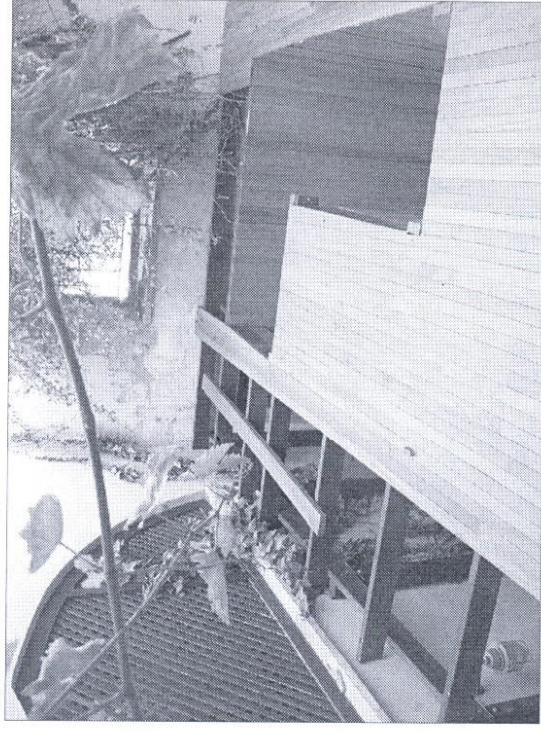
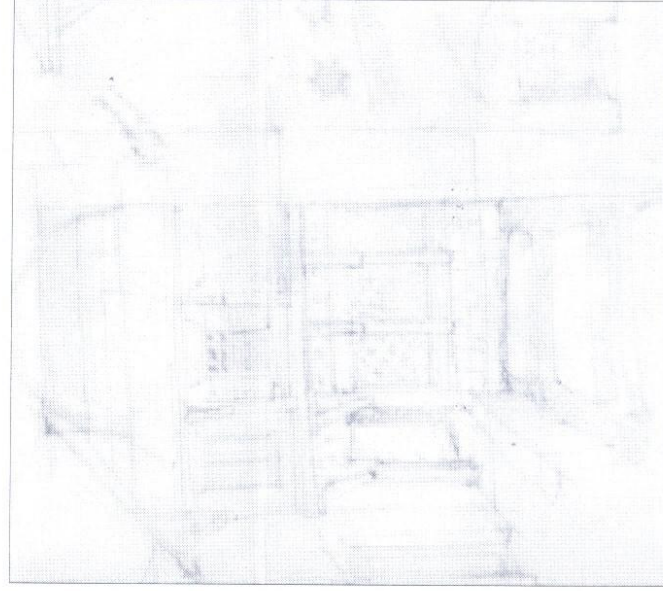
occupied by the Konaki Restaurant. The site of Etz Hayyim had four distinct areas: Two courtyards flanked the synagogue proper. That to the north was the men's court and that to the south gave access to the women's section (the Ezrat Nashim) and mikveh. The former occupied an upper story that gave visual access to the synagogue proper through one of the Venetian arches. In this area as well were the graves of four rabbis who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the course of setting out the approach to renovating Etz Hayyim our initial intention was to insure that the main parts of the site were restored and the women's section was not included in the initial work as its function was of less importance today. However, it has remained an important and much needed last part of the project.

The entire project of renovating the Synagogue, its courtyards and mikveh was carried out under the aegis of the World Monuments Fund (our synagogue was listed among the 100 monuments for 1996 that were considered worthy of international interest and concern). Funding was provided by the Rothschild Foundation (the former Hanadiv Foundation), the Lauder Foundation and Lloyd Cotsen and Murray Pepper and several others. Since the



renovation was completed, the Synagogue has evolved with many roles that it must be sensitive to in terms of needs in the city of Hania. It also has attracted the attention of not only relatives of members of the former community who now live scattered around the globe but also has invited special interest on the part of scholars who have begun to see the peculiar history of Cretan Jewry as more than a matter of Jewish 'exotica'. Quite naturally this interest has been responded to on the part of the Synagogue and its staff in making more complete the web site (we get over 1000 hits a day) but also in expanding the library and creating a data base for the study of Cretan Jewry. Inevitably the problem of space became a vital concern and it was with this in mind that a firm decision was made last year to reconstruct the Ezrat Nashim, not as a silent venue for women to follow the services of the Synagogue but as an extension of the library and also the installation of equipment that will facilitate individuals - scholars as well as interested laymen - to study and read.

The new addition to the Synagogue occupies exactly the site of the destroyed women's section. As an initial aid we had a brief description of the site what was made by the Arch-rabbi of Crete Abraham Evlagon in 1932 in a memoir that he wrote shortly before his death. We also were given an anonymous gift of a water-color that was made of the south courtyard and upper story of the Ezrat Nashim that was apparently done in 1917. In making the plan of the new structure we took pains to follow not only the description but also the painting and had many



good examples of late 17th cent. Cretan Ottoman architecture in Hania to help us. The lower floor has been kept open to the graves and courtyard (south) and has direct access from the street by means of a door to the east. This open area, grilled, gives access as well to the mikveh and has an exit from the Synagogue proper. As would have been the case prior to WW II it also has direct access to the large gate that opened at one time to Beth Shalom Synagogue's courtyard.

An enclosed stair leads to the upper floor which is where the women would have been provided with benches and adequate space to look into the Synagogue through the 'mehitza' or grill that was set in a Venetian arch. In keeping with contemporary Ottoman style of the period this area is quite a bit larger than the lower floor as wooden supports extend it floor well beyond a meter.

To date we have completed the lower portion and enclosed stair all of which have been covered by a grant from World Monuments Fund but, as the floor and stair are all of wood it is essential that we complete the upper portion prior to the winter rains that will possibly damage much of it. At the moment of writing this we have erected the roof with its lead covering but are somewhat in dire and anxious need of funds to cover the construction of the walls and windows. It is estimated that the total cost of this final part of the project will come to \$35,000. Those who contribute to the completion of the Ezrat Nashim will be honored with their names etched in a bronze plate which will be added by the entrance. Donors will be able to dedicate their offerings in the names of loved ones etc.

Nikos Stavroulakis



First Meeting of the Etz Hayyim Board of Trustees

On April 12-13, 2008 Etz Hayyim Synagogue hosted the inaugural meeting of its prospective Board of Trustees. Eleven nominated Board members were present, among them as acting chairman Rupert Nabarro from London (a long-term benefactor of Etz Hayyim who is also closely connected to Hania where he owns property), Professor Rabbi Nicholas de Lange (Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Cambridge University, editor of the Bulletin of Judeo-Greek Studies and our semi-resident rabbi in Hania), Mr. Moisis Konstantinis (President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece and representative of the Athens Jewish community) and Mr. Joseph Ventura (well published writer and poet and one of the last Jews born in Hania prior to the Second World War). Furthermore, the director of the Synagogue, Nikos Stavroulakis, the secretary Alexander Phoundoulakis as well as several guests were present.

The Board of Trustees is intended to be the future governing body of Etz Hayyim Synagogue to ensure its long-term existence and administrative needs such as management, religious and cultural activities, fundraising, and the appointing of future directors as well as to formalise its relations to the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS). Everyone present agreed that since its rededication in 1998 Etz Hayyim Synagogue has become a very special place of worship, a place of historical and cultural significance as well as a place for meeting and the open exchange of ideas. Everything possible should be done to preserve and develop this capacity.

During the first part of the meeting, a draft constitution for Etz Hayyim Synagogue as a Not-for-profit organization was discussed which also mentions a set of guidelines for future objectives of the Synagogue. Among the resolutions of the meeting was the stipulation that Nikos Stavroulakis would serve as director for his life and that any future director should be Jewish and once appointed will have to take residence in Hania or nearby.

During the second part attendees discussed the financial plan and fundraising activities. On the latter issue discussion focused on tourism/sales, membership and general fundraising and several suggestions were agreed upon: Among other points, it was decided that the newsletter "Jottings" would be resumed and the stock of items provided for visitors be developed. To attract prospective donors packages presenting particular projects will be

developed.

Currently, a Greek lawyer adjusts the draft constitution and the Etz Hayyim Not-for-profit organization is about to be set up. Board of Trustees Meetings will be held annually in the future.

A. Z.

Intercultural Workshop – "The Glass Beads Game"

Last spring Etz Hayyim Synagogue joined with the Borderland Foundation of Poland, "Laundry" from the UK and the New Culture Foundation of Bulgaria as a member of the "Glass Beads Game", an intercultural workshop part of the European Union Culture 2007-2013 program.

This cooperative program consists of three intercultural workshops that will be developed by the teams in the UK, Poland and Bulgaria and will then be presented in Hania and Baku, Azerbaijan.

To this end Alexander Phoundoulakis recently traveled to Bulgaria to participate in the Bell project of Bela Rechka, and to meet with Brendan Jackson of "Laundry" to plan the traveling workshop in Hania.

The idea is for a group of artist from the UK to travel to Hania next spring in order to create a multicultural project that will be run through the Synagogue involving various local youth based groups.

The hope is to create interest in the local youth of Hania to learn about the rich multicultural background of the city and to stimulate future initiatives by other local groups, in a fun and fresh new way. As a result the Synagogue will host the "Young Citizens of the World" as well as other organizations working in this field in Hania to participate in the artist workshops. In conjunction with representatives from the other two groups, we will be given the opportunity to learn from experienced cultural animators, so that we can continue this type of work in Crete.

The Glass Beads Game is an initiative of the Borderland Foundation and takes its name from the Herman Hesse novel of the same name (1943).

A. P.



Activities past year

Commemorative Week for Cretan Jews

From June 16 to June 23 the Synagogue held a commemorative week for the Cretan Jews who perished in the Holocaust. The central theme was provided by a striking exhibition by Haniote artist Velli Vandoulaki, who lives and works in Vienna. Her exhibition "Anatomy of Memory" included Sumi-e calligraphic drawings reflecting on the destiny of the Cretan Jews. In the artist's words: "The drawings represent pages torn from a book of life and history. Moments of agony, fear and shadows echo an attempt to approach history." The second part of the exhibition consisted of four paper scrolls which were prominently unrolled hanging in front of the Ehal with the individual names of the perished community written in white ink on white Chinese paper along with the Kazantzakis quote: "I cast a final glance around me, to whom shall I say farewell?" As Velli Vandulaki puts it: "The paper is fragile but withstands time ... like memory."

Art Installation and Modern Music

During the exhibition a recorded composition by Michalis Lapidakis, professor for Composition at the

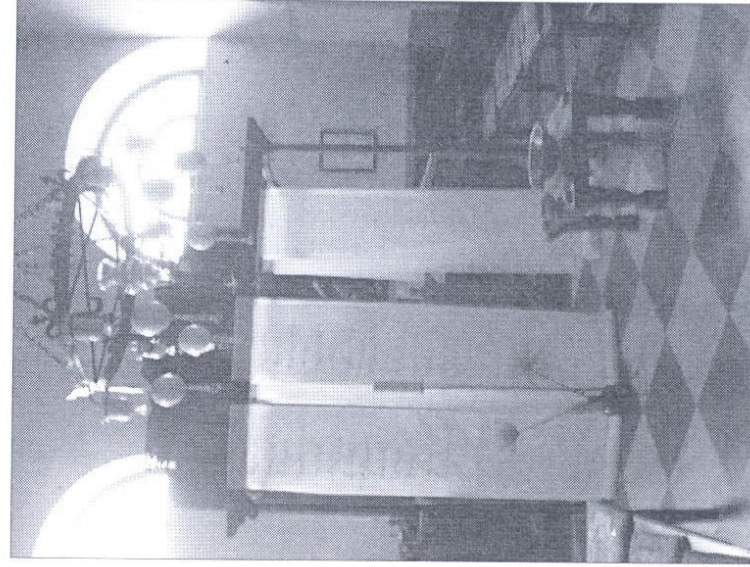
Department of Musical Studies at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, was played inside the Synagogue. The modern music composition "Die Niemandrose" (The No-One's Rose) is at the same time a musical/poetic commentary on the phenomenon of fascism and racism, and a musical narration based on the poetry of one of the most important European poets, Paul Celan. The title is derived from a collection of Celan's poems.

Based on this exhibit and the response to it, Velli Vandoulaki suggested prominent composers and musicians of the *Klangforum Wien*, a soloist ensemble for contemporary music founded in 1985, to come to Hania and perform at Etz Hayyim. So far their responses have been very positive. We are looking forward to welcoming them here and be hosting the very first performance of *Klangforum Wien* in Greece.

Memorial Service

On June 22nd was held the annual memorial service for the members of the Jewish community of Crete that were lost on the Tanais in 1944. During the service there was a prayer said for the victims and their names were read and candles lit for each one. The ceremony was attended by visitors as well as friends of the Synagogue from the Haniote community.

A. Z., A. P.



Adío Querida at Etz Hayyim

Me la Amargates tu, the group of young musicians of various backgrounds who assemble in The Hague, performed again at Etz Hayyim Synagogue on June 18, 2008 as part of the Commemorative Week for Cretan Jews. The full cast of six – Esteban Manzano (tenor), Doret Florentin (recorders), Tulio Rondón (viola da gamba), Sarah Ridy (baroque harp), Cristian Guitierrez (vihuela) and Juan Martínez (percussions), brought the wonderful acoustics of the Synagogue to sound.

Just as for their well received concert last summer, every seat in the Synagogue was taken as the group performed a selection of Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) songs from Salonika, Smyrna, Rhodes, Sarajevo and Constantinople telling the audience also about the meaning and history of the songs and how they became part of the repertoire of the group. Among many other songs, they also performed "Adío Querida" (Farewell my beloved), the love song that was sung at the departure of Salonika Jews to Auschwitz. *Me la Amargates tu* will perform again at Etz Hayyim Synagogue next year.



Lecture Series Winter/Spring 2008

Under the title "Threads of Influence" Nikos Stavroulakis presented a series of weekly music evenings in February/March 2008. Examples of music from various cultures, religions and time periods from around the world included early Gregorian and Carthusian liturgical music up to the birth of polyphony, Jewish music from Morocco, Algeria, Yemen and Turkey and religious music of Islam representative of several Sufi orders which were active in Hania until the early 20th century.

In March/April the lecture series "The World of Byzantium" was presented. In this DVD lecture series Prof. Kenneth W. Harl of Tulane University presented an account of the political, religious and cultural history of the Byzantine Empire. After several sessions discussion developed and Nikos Stavroulakis provided additional information especially on the socio-cultural and artistic history of the period. From these discussions the plan of an excursion to Byzantine churches from the 12th to the 14th centuries in the Selino area south of Hania evolved to study the heritage of Byzantine art on Crete together.

Holidays at Etz Hayyim

In January, Etz Hayyim's small local community celebrated **Tu Be'Shvat** (New Year of the Trees) again with a small Seder in the Synagogue saying the main blessings together.

For **Pessah** we were fortunate enough to welcome Rabbi Nicholas de Lange who performed the Services at the Synagogue and, together with Nikos Stavroulakis, led the Seder for which we were joined by about 60 people from Crete and abroad. We had once more put much effort in improving our Haggadah booklet, illustrated by drawings by Nikos Stavroulakis.

Rabbi de Lange will join us again for the **High Holidays**. There will be Rosh Hashana, Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur services.



Etz Hayyim's Library. Present and Future

Over the years Etz Hayyim's Library has gathered quite a sizable number of books on various issues such as Judaism, Jewish Art, Greek Jewish History, World History as well as on Christianity, Islam and other religions. The library was started by donations by Nikos Stavroulakis. Just recently, he also donated his sizable collection of books on Byzantine and Ottoman Arts and Crafts, which will be housed in the rebuilt Ezrat Nashim.

We have started working towards the long-term goal of developing the Library into a genuine research Library and of establishing at some point an academic center for the study of Cretan Jewry. On the basis of the Recent Publications list of the Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies a comprehensive bibliography of the History of the Jews of Crete and Greece is being put together by the Librarian and can serve as a reference for any future acquisitions for the Library. If you would like to contribute to the development of the Library we would appreciate your donation.

The completion of the Library Catalogue has so far been hampered by the lack of the necessary hardware facilities ever since the Library computer broke down beyond repair. We would also like to make the catalogue or at least a list of the books of the Library available online to attract library users preferably from the local university and high schools. So far, books are mainly being checked out by people who regularly attend our events.

Another of the librarian's responsibilities will be the upkeep of the database of Cretan Jews, also an early contribution to the eventual establishment of a research center for the study of Cretan Jewry.

A. Z.

Religious Services at Etz Hayyim

Every morning

Shahrit (Morning Prayers) at 9am

Every Friday

Kabbalat Shabbat service followed by refreshments.

Service starts at sunset; 7pm in fall. Check with

Synagogue for times later in the year.

Every Saturday

Havdalah service. The service starts after sunset; 7pm in fall. Check with Synagogue for times later in the year.



My Summer at Etz Hayyim Synagogue

The following is an abstract of an article by Daniel Abrams to be published in the The Jewish Voice & Herald of Rhode Island.

This summer I had the opportunity to volunteer at the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania, Crete. [...] It is where four years ago I had my bar-mitzvah, a Sephardic service in a Greek synagogue setting. Now, four years later, I came back to the synagogue to help maintain it and continue its work. Many people have told me that there is a special feeling to this synagogue, that its history and tranquility creates a peaceful feeling that brings them closer to God. Coming back this time, I could feel that unique aura.

Etz Hayyim was designed in a Romaniote Jewish architectural style, which has roots from the Jews of the Hellenistic Period. The bema and the Ark are at opposite ends of the synagogue and the people face each other.

My job [at Etz Hayyim] was to give tours of the synagogue and answer visitors' questions. Israelis, French, Scandinavians, British, Danish, Germans, and Americans visited this summer. I told them about the history of the synagogue, [which] dates back to the Venetian times in the 15th century. [...]

Etz Hayyim has hosted numerous weddings and bar-mitzvahs. Services are held every week on Shabbat. People from other cities of Crete come to the synagogue to pray. Etz Hayyim has not only been a place of prayer, but also holds a key part in maintaining Jewish identity in Crete and Greece. It is remarkable how a place, once looted, damaged by an earthquake, and overgrown by vegetation for decades has now become a beautiful and fully functional place of worship. Thanks to the work, vision, and commitment of Nikos Stavroulakis, his staff and volunteers, the Jewish presence in Crete continues. For me, Etz Hayyim marked my bar-mitzvah a few years ago, and signals my on-going commitment to Judaism today.

Meet the Staff

Alexander Phoundoulakis, Administrative Secretary

Alexander joined Etz Hayyim having spent all of his professional life in Sales and Marketing; which in no way prepared him for his first Rosh Hashanah! Not knowing the difference between Kiddush and Kol Nidre, Alexander stumbled through his first High Holy Days. Now over three years later he is still learning the intricacies of the Holy Days, but gives a pretty good tour, and gets particularly excited when telling fellow Haniotes about the Synagogue. He is also working closely with the Borderland Foundation in Poland in creating intercultural programs for Hania. If you send an e-mail to the Synagogue, it's most likely that he will be answering you... unless it's about Kosher Ouzo, then it would be a question for Nikos.

Anja Zückmantel, M.A. studied History, Political Science and Philosophy in Göttingen, Germany, and Berkeley, CA and currently works on her Ph.D. in History on the perception of Eretz Israel/Palestine in German Zionism between 1897 and 1938. She worked as coordinator of a M.A. study program at Göttingen University and receives a scholarship from the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*. Last summer, Anja was a volunteer at Etz Hayyim and has since taken on responsibility for the library and membership services. She lives with her Haniote husband near Hania.

Daniel Abrams (Intern)

Daniel Abrams, a Junior at Barrington High School in Rhode Island, decided to spend part of his summer vacation volunteering at the Synagogue this August. Just four years prior Daniel had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Etz Hayyim, and wanted to give something back. He quickly took on the role of tour guide bringing to it his youthful energy and enthusiasm.

Internships at Etz Hayyim Synagogue

Etz Hayyim seeks self-motivated individuals with a strong interest in Jewish History to give guided tours of the Synagogue site primarily in English. Responsibilities may also include: assisting the administrative staff and helping to generate content for Etz Hayyim's website. Further responsibilities will depend upon the intern's skills and interests, and Etz Hayyim's current organizational needs.

To Apply and any further information please email us at: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org



A Survivors' Story

after their escape. Josef mentions that Yaacov did not stay but "sailed on some boat to Athens" and their ways parted at this point. Josef Cohen eventually joined the partisans and worked for them printing flyers and posters. After the war he stayed in Hania for some time answering among other things letters from American Jews inquiring through the Red Cross about the destiny of the Jews of Crete. When the Civil War broke out, Josef Cohen was drafted into the army, where he served for 3 years. In January 1950 he went to Israel and started a new life working as a carpenter.

So far this story of escape and survival has already been amazing, but as it happens just two days after Leah Cohen had visited Etz Hayyim Synagogue and told us about her father's story, that Esther and Avraham De Jetardinos from Canada passed by here and told us about Esther's family story. Her uncle, Yaacov Ischakis, was also originally from Hania and had escaped in 1944 just like his cousin, apparently the very Joseph Cohen we had just learned about. So, within a few days the descendants of two survivors from Hania had visited Etz Hayyim without being aware of it. Josef Cohen and Yaacov Ischakis had apparently met again during the late 1970s in Israel but the families lost touch. Their visit to Etz Hayyim did not only give us a chance to learn about the family history and the story of two survivors from the Jewish community of Hania, but brought the two branches of the extended family back in touch.

A. Z.

Josef Cohen (Conen) was born in Hania on December 22, 1920 and worked as a carpenter and also a mechanic in a printer's office. After his escape he was hidden by locals, first in Hania and later in mountain villages, and provided with papers that identified him as Christian. Manolis Petrakis, Josef's former employer at the printer's office, became his guardian after his escape, took care of him and tried to find a way for Josef to join the partisans. Josef Cohen learned from Petrakis that his cousin, Yaacov Ischakis, had also fled and they met once

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 מכתב: — 2833/41-ב
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From the Visitors' Book

Many tourists from abroad and also from Greece pay a visit to Etz Hayyim Synagogue, especially during the summer. Some of them join us for the Kabbalah Shabbath service on Friday night and many of them sign or visitors' book. We would like to share some of these entries with you, which speak very expressively about the visitors' experience of Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania. (Translations from Hebrew by Amalia Reuel)

It was a delight to visit this synagogue and be regaled of its history by the cordial and engaging Alex. Found it captivating. Best wishes with regard to the future development & preservation of the place. Many Thanks. Shokran, eucharisto from Yasser. Essex, England. (April 9, 2008)

A beautiful place – lovely restoration and preservation. I feel fortunate to have been able to attend Kabbalat Shabbat – a wonderful service. It's so inspiring to see people in the community from so many backgrounds contributing to keep Etz Hayyim alive.

Sharon Slodki, Brookline, Mass., USA. (July 21, 2008)

I thank you for your effort to rebuild and maintain the Synagogue. It's a contribution to the history and culture of Hania, and all of Crete.

Stella Pratondaridi (July 8, 2007)

We enjoyed every moment of the Kabbalat Shabbat service. It was very touching! Thank you for the experience.

Michael Simchon and Tali Gresanti, Israel

How wonderful it is to see the fruits of the efforts to keep up this important historical place. Our blessings for success in the future.

Gerta and Prof. Moshe Fisher, Hod-Hasharon, Israel

We thank you from the bottom of our heart for the wonderful hospitality and tour of the Synagogue and Jewish traditions.

From the students and their teacher, M. Soulouraki of the School of Second Chances of Hania. (May 20, 2008)

I was impressed, this was the first time I had been inside a Synagogue, and although I am from Hania I did not know that one existed (here). We thank you very much for the interesting things that we learned here.

T.G. (May 30, 2008)

As a daughter of a parent born in Hania it is a consolation to come and see this fantastic place. The tremendous work, the love and everything that was invested in this place should be gratefully remarked. [...] Thank you also in the name of my family, Viola Galah, Israel.

Upcoming Events, Fall and Winter 2008/09

Honor of Nikos Stavroulakis by KIS

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) will honour Nikos Stavroulakis for his lifetime contribution to the Jewish Community of Greece. At a ceremony to be held at the Jewish Community of Athens Cultural Center on Wednesday, November 19th at 18:30, a multimedia presentation will review Nikos Stavroulakis' multifaceted career.

Lecture Series on Ottoman Cooking

From Mid-October 2008, Nikos Stavroulakis will present a six-week lecture series on Ottoman Cooking on Wednesday evenings at 6 pm.

Synagogue Opening Hours

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

Concerts in Summer 2009

The Hague based *Me la Amargates tu* (See article "Adio" *Querida* at Etz Hayyim" on page 4) and **Bernhard Lang of Klangforum Wien** (See article "Memorial Week for Cretan Jews" on page 4) will perform at Etz Hayyim Synagogue in summer 2009.

Jottings. Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

Director of Etz Hayyim and Editor of Jottings

Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis

Administrative Secretary and Co-editor of Jottings

Alexander Phourdoulakis

Contributing Editor

Anja Zückmantel

Rabbinical Adviser

Prof. Nicholas de Lange