



Jottings

K'K' Etz Hayyim
P.O. Box 251
73000 Hania, Crete, Greece
Tel. +30 28210 86286
E-mail: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org
Web site: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org

Etz Hayyim, Hania - and the 'Crunch'

Crete has a complicated economic life insofar as it is still quite emphatically divided by regions in terms of natural produce – the mountains and highlands where goats and sheep provide dietary needs in terms of milk products (cheeses, yogurt and to a lesser degree meat) and the lowlands where olive, orange, avocado and lemon groves as well as small farms for vegetables and even in some areas, grains. The produce of the mountain regions and lowlands have outlets through the main towns, Herakleion, Hania, Rethymno, Kissamo etc., from which exports are made to the Greek mainland. These same towns function as well as the hubs that in turn distribute imports to the interior villages and smaller towns. Historically, Crete has seen its economic life dominated and oriented according to occupying powers. Under the Venetians (from the 13th to the 17th c.) its ports were directed toward Venice on the Adriatic. Later, under the Ottomans (17th to 19th c.) the Island was central to an economic sphere of contacts that included Constantinople, Izmir, Beirut, Alexandria, Bengazi and later Marseilles. Overlapping these, and increasingly so in the course of the late 19th c., the Greek Mainland (Greece as a political phenomenon came into existence in 1832) became more and more important and after the union of Crete with Greece in 1912 the nationalistic centralization of economic life determined that Crete's economic life be solely directed via Athens. Without any doubt a certain stagnation was the result and it has only been in the past 15 years or so that Crete was introduced to and learned the manner of exploiting a quite new economic source of income – tourism and land sales to foreigners. This has entailed an exploitation of areas of Crete that were formerly considered to be somewhat unproductive. Indicative of this is the somewhat interesting family infighting that has ensued as a consequence of preferential treatment of sons as opposed to daughters in matters concerning inheritance of land.

Land closer to the sea was considered of lesser importance while land where olive and citrus groves were located meant that females inherited the former whereas males inherited the latter. The exploitation of Cretan agricultural produce has never been paralleled by the near manic and mindless consequences of tourist 'development' and it is ironic that for a period of time it was the women of Crete who found themselves the object of family near feuds over re-evaluation of land potential. Beaches and low lying areas

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or high rocky vistas with expansive views of the sea or the White Mountains, both formerly un-productive, suddenly became priority sites.

Only after Greece became a member of the European Union has it been possible for non-Greek citizens to legally own property on Crete and a number of other islands. Today, enclaves of ex-pats and retirees have acquired land and coastal areas that are central to this new economic endeavour. In the towns it has resulted in a proliferation of hotels, pensions, cafes, bars, tourist shops and restaurants with no concern for zoning and as a consequence urban life has been obviated and this year already the consequences of the glut of tourist exploitation has been deeply felt.

Since the 'crunch' began last year it has become increasingly obvious that tourism is a highly delicate luxury – as is perhaps living away from one's native land and source of income. All of the services offered to attract tourism have been affected and there are increasing signs of deep anxiety. The laissez-faire approach to tourism is being put to the proof in an especially harsh experience that has an unforeseen outcome – to date.

Some years ago the late Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou inaugurated an ad hoc stimulus to the new tourist future of Crete when he advocated the introduction of 'Quality Tourism' which meant increasing the numbers of tour groups coming from Europe. A bizarre situation has now unfolded in which tourist companies operating out of Germany, Sweden and Denmark etc. own hotels in Crete as well as coaches and take every opportunity to insure that visitors eat in their hotels and use their services that include charter flights operating out of their home countries. A dramatic consequence of this can be seen in our Covered Market that once was the hub of economic as well as social life of Hania. Essentially it was a super-market with its four enormous wings offering meat and poultry, vegetable and produce from villages as well as fish and seafood. All normal



activity for locals became impossible given the choking of its passageways by enormous groups of guided tours ... and it has very rapidly become a tourist attraction of questionable interest as the fishmongers, vegetable vendors and the like are replaced by shops selling leather goods, jewelry, packaged spices of questionable quality and origin.

Etz Hayyim is both a historical monument as well as a religious establishment. Located as it is in a most important area of the old city of Hania it naturally is the focal point of interest to visiting Jews as well as non-Jews and this year we have already seen a decided drop in visitors. Fortunately its bifurcated identity insures its continued life, though one wonders what will happen to a neighborhood mosque that was last year stripped of its inscriptions, its former wall paintings (it was church prior to its conversion to Islam) and the interior filled with every conceivable form of cheap tourist nick-knacks and absurdities.

Alas the renovation of Etz Hayyim and its presence as witness, place of recollection, study and prayer is quite an exception in Hania. The aforementioned mosque is more typical as is the Hasan Pasa Mosque on the harbour or the minaret of Aga Mosque and its interior. This building was once a Venetian convent church (now a knitting factory) and its cloister is still vaguely to be discerned in what has been transformed into a tasteless and quite incomprehensibly coffee shop-exhibit area and barber shop! The entire Venetian front of the harbour (with additions and extensions made during the Ottoman period) has been obliterated not only from view but also from any urban relevance by having been completely swallowed up by restaurants and tourist bric-a-brac from Thailand, Indonesia etc. Over-pricing is the rule and avaricious advances of personnel from restaurants who attempt to funnel one into one or the other makes a comfortable stroll impossible - 'No stress - no press!' is the motto of one is only matched by bizarre spelling on signs: 'Souphlaký', 'Young veal lamb', 'Lamb Cassrole' and 'Moussacka', being others.

Somewhat like the tale of the 'Goose that Laid the Golden Egg' - the present economic dependence on tourism and ensuing indifference to what attracts tourists to Hania would seem to be self-contradictory. Only by carefully and intelligently picking up the tangled threads of this quite wonderful city on its own terms can it be saved from denial of its distinctly Cretan identity and hence its integrity. The 'Great Island' reduced today to being 'a Greek island' is a consequence of denying its singular history of multi-ethnicity, multi-religious and multi-cultural overlay and interaction. The ultimate consequences of 'denial' are well known - the first is a loss of contact with the present once the past has been re-worked ... the second is madness in various forms. We in Hania and perhaps in Crete have lost our sense of the present and what and how we should be living in it.

Nikos Stavroulakis

Ezrath Nashim.

Setting of Mezuzah and Dedication as Jennifer Stein Memorial Library

Prior to World War II, the women's gallery at Etz Hayyim flanked the exterior south wall of the Synagogue occupying the site of an original belfry. A former doorway from the outer street dating to the time of the construction of the synagogue structure doubled as an entrance to the stair leading to the Ezrath Nashim as well as to the mikveh. Visual access to the synagogue proper was through grills set in the Venetian arch of the building. In the mid-Nineteenth century an additional small gallery was built against the north-west wall of the building above the shamash's (caretaker's lodge), today's office.

The older structure was completely destroyed during the bombing and strafing of Hania in 1941 though evidence of its proportions and stair were discerned when an autopsy was done of the building in 1996. Though certainly essential to the balance and authenticity of the site as a Jewish synagogue it was not deemed of immediate concern to rebuild it when work began on the renovation in that year. This decision was based primarily on economic reasons further supported by the fact that we did not have a kehilah (community) that would require the women to sit separate from the men. At times when it was necessary to separate the men from the women we had recourse to a mehitsa (screen).

Apart from being an important last part of the project of reconstructing Etz Hayyim Synagogue, the decision to



Exterior view of Ezrath Nashim – Jennifer Stein Memorial Library



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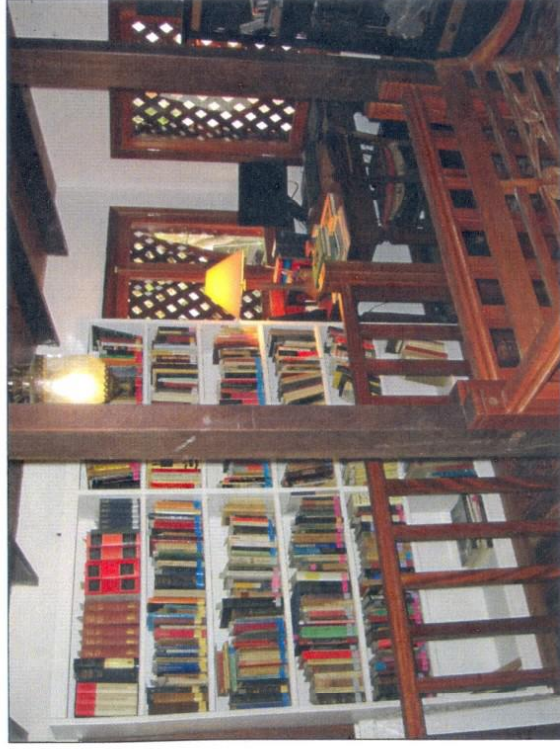
reconstruct the women's gallery was taken after considering the problem of space. The 'new' women's gallery (constructed in the mid-19th century) was allocated some time ago to being the library of the Synagogue. However, in the course of several years it is now quite filled with books.

In April 2008 work began on the Ezrath Nashim after careful plans had been set and the elevation designed. It was at the most opportune moment as the 'crunch' began not long after. We were fortunate to eventually receive a substantial donation from Mr. Michael Stein who wished to take on the project in memory of his daughter.

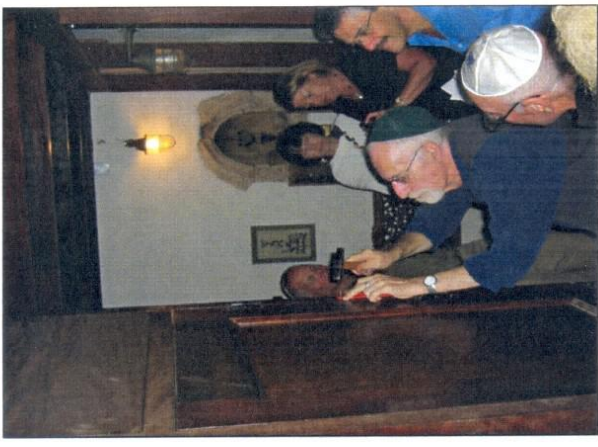
The setting of the mezuzah took place on Erev Rosh Hashanah with the blessing said by Rabbi Nicholas de Lange. During an event for the first night of Hanukkah last December the Ezrath Nashim was dedicated as the 'Jennifer Stein Memorial Library'. The late Ms. Stein had visited Etz Hayyim several times when in Hania and felt a special attachment to it and the presence that it represents.

The upper floor of the Ezrath Nashim gives visual access to the interior of the Synagogue through the same Venetian arch that afforded it prior to WWII. It has been fitted with fine bookshelves the work being donated by Mr. Jerry Dutton. Nikos Stavroulakis has donated his library of books on Byzantine, Ottoman, and Jewish art and architecture. These are mainly specialized works as part of the now extended library of Etz Hayyim. A special section contains some 800 books on Ancient, Medieval and Modern history as well as a special section on Crete and Hania.

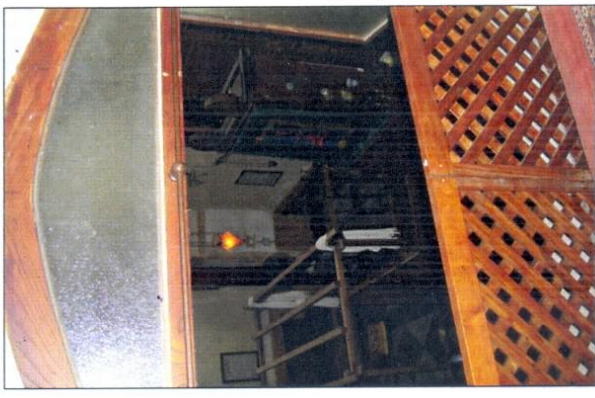
Nikos Stavroulakis



Interior of Ezrath Nashim — Jennifer Stein Memorial Library



Setting of Mezuzah



View into the Synagogue





Honour of Nikos Stavroulakis by KIS for Contribution to Jewish Life in Greece

A special evening was held in Athens in February by the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece to honour the Director of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Mr. Nikos Stavroulakis.

David Arar, the son of the Chief Rabbi of Athens, introduced the evening by a good overview of his memories and friendship with Mr. Stavroulakis ... it was done with good humour and personal recollections that were shared by many of the some 300 people who attended the evening.

Mr Moise Constantini, the President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece, gave an outline of the involvement that Mr. Stavroulakis has had in the Jewish Community of Athens since the 1970's when he began the collections of what would eventually become the core of the Jewish Museum of Greece, of which he was the director from 1977 until 1993. Mr Constantini also noted participation by Mr. Stavroulakis in the Museum of Salonika as Curatorial Advisor and that of Rhodes, as well as, of course, the on-going work in Hania.

At the close of the formalities Mr. Stavroulakis was presented with a medal the central image of which is a calligraphic image in Aramaic that is a rendition of the phrase 'Blessed art though O Lord.....who has bidden us to lift up our hands'. The Hebrew 'natila' is usually translated as 'to wash' though in the Aramaic use the phrase had the meaning of helping others.

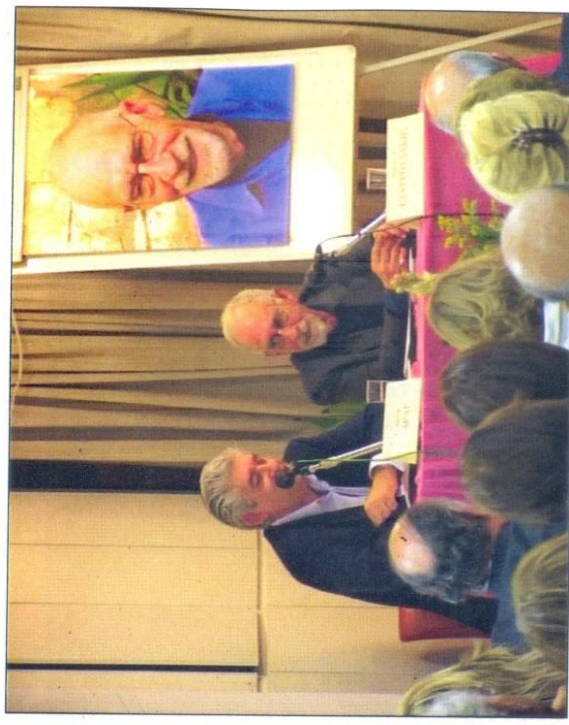


Commemorative medal designed by N. Stavroulakis

As far back as 1975 the director of Etz Hayyim has had a close involvement in the Community of Salonika. At that time the city and its surviving Jewish Community was still numbed by the tragic loss of some 60,000 Jews who perished in World War II. It has been through the courage and foresight of several presidents and highly motivated individuals such as Andrea Sephiha, David Saltiel and Albertos Nar that the Community has kept memory of its past as 'Madre di Israel' but also has aimed its sights to a creative future. A recently renovated 19th c. 'stoa' has become the home of the new Jewish Museum. This building is one of the few Jewish structures that survived the Fire of 1917 that ravaged the central core of Salonika as well as most of the Jewish Quarter.

The Director of the Museum, which is highly 'didactic', is Mrs. Erika Zeymour-Perahia. The exhibits include funerary monuments from the destroyed Jewish necropolis of the city (some 500,000 interments!) as well as religious and secular Jewish art reflecting the vibrant Sephardi tradition as transplanted from Spain in the 15th century Much like the former Jewish Museum of Greece, its exhibits are designed in a narrative manner so as to provide the visitor with an even introduction to the history, origins, development, and even present activities of this great Jewish Community. Mr. Stavroulakis, of Etz Hayyim, has been acting as the museum's curatorial advisor.

Alex Phoundoulakis & Anja Zückmantel



David Arar and Nikos Stavroulakis during the ceremony



Holidays at Etz Hayyim

For the **High Holidays** we were fortunate enough to welcome once more Rabbi Nicholas de Lange at Etz Hayyim Synagogue. He led the services on Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur, which were attended by a small but steady number of people.

On the first night of **Hanukkah** the general public was invited to join the lighting of the first light and the dedication of the Ezrath Nashim as the Jennifer Stein Memorial Library (see article on *Ezrath Nashim* on page 2). On this occasion, Nikos Stavroulakis exhibited some of his latest painting in the Synagogue and the Ezrath Nashim. The participants of the lecture series on Ottoman Cookery (see article on page 6) put their acquired knowledge to the test and provided a rich assortment of delicious food.



Hanukkah at Etz Hayyim

In early February we celebrated **Tu Be'Shvat** (New Year of the Trees). After a general introduction to the meaning and tradition of the holiday for the present visitors we had a small Seder saying the main blessings together. Afterwards we had, again thanks to the dedicated attendees of the Ottoman Cooking lectures, a delicious feast including Assure, the traditional Greek Jewish food for Tu Be'Shvat.

On **Purim** we initially read parts of the Book of Esther but had decided that because of the events in Israel and Gaza earlier this year it was an occasion to put on something that would generate a more serious discussion. Therefore we read together "Seven Jewish Children. A Play for Gaza", a play written by the British playwright Caryl Churchill. The play, "a ten minute history of Israel, ending with the bombing of Gaza" has caused a controversial debate especially in Britain after its premier at the Royal Court Theater in London in early February. It consists of seven scenes in which events in Jewish and Israeli history

are being explained to an unnamed young Jewish girl at different points in time. The play has been criticized for generating anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli sentiment on the one hand and commended for presenting a keen criticism of Israeli society on the other. In our discussion we recognized that the play certainly has shortcomings, especially in disregarding critical parts of Israeli society. On the other hand we discussed it as representing some kind of case



Tu Be'Shvat Feast in the Synagogue

study of how nations and individuals alike struggle with communicating their history and identity to the next generation.

Anja Zückmantel

Religious Services at Etz Hayyim

Every morning

Shahrit (Morning Prayers) at 9am

Every Friday

Kabbalat Shabbat service followed by refreshments.

Service starts at sunset; around 7:30 pm in spring. Check with Synagogue for exact times.

Every Saturday

Havdalah service starts after sunset; around 8:30 pm in summer. Check with Synagogue for exact times.



Lecture Series on Ottoman Cookery and Ottoman Gardens

Wednesday evenings through the winter were occasions for a group of about 20 who were initially interested in an introduction to one of the great 'international' cuisines of the world – that of the Ottomans – to attend a lecture series presented by Nikos Stavroulakis. After two initial lectures on Ottoman court customs and the role of food and cooking within this setting requests were made that specific recipes be discussed and what evolved was a somewhat strange cookery class in which there was no kitchen but which nonetheless proved to be very popular.

What turned out to be a series began in October and was more or less completed by March. The recipes began with 'mezes' (hors d'oeuvres) and ended with sweets; the recipes were put into their cultural context, e.g. occasions or circumstances of their preparation or consumption were discussed. A booklet with all the covered recipes will be put together for distribution.

For the dedication of the Ezrath Nashim members of the 'cooking class' made special preparations taken from the recipes discussed. They were quite excellent and despite the fact that the recipes were not demonstrated in a kitchen ambiance – authentic.

In the course of, and as an outcome of the Ottoman Cookery lectures it was discovered that Nikos Stavroulakis had been the historical and architectural consultant for the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis. The specific project that he

worked on was initially to be the creation of an Islamic Garden which in the end became an Ottoman Garden of a type that was common in the late 17th century. The exact number of lectures is to be determined but they will include history, symbolism, over-view of the major Islamic gardens that have a distinct character (Iran, Spain, North Africa, Afghanistan and India) and plants (trees, flowers, shrubs etc.) as well as their symbolism and propriety. As many of the ex-pat community are gardeners there has been great interest in this proposed series.

Kabak Mucveri – Zucchini croquettes

1 kg small zucchini, ½ cup spring onions, 3 eggs, 1 cup of finely grated cheese (Feta is suitable but best soaked overnight to lessen its salinity), 1 ½ cup of flour, 1 tbs. sweet paprika, 1 cup of finely chopped mix herbs – mint, dill and parsley or lacking these 2 tbs. dried mint, Salt and freshly ground black pepper, 1 cup or more olive oil

After grating the zucchinis put them in a deep sieve or colander and salt well. Let it sit for ½ an hour to draw out the excess water. After this press out as much liquid as you can manage and put the zucchini in a mixing bowl. Add the finely chopped onions, beaten eggs, paprika, cheese, herbs, flour, salt and pepper. Mix thoroughly.

In a deep frying pan heat the olive oil until fairly hot then lower the temperature. Using a large soup spoon take out well filled spoonfuls of the mixture and gently slip them into the oil – (do not crowd them). Fry well on one side until golden brown and turn over to cook the other sides. Remove as they are cooked, drain well on absorbent paper and arrange on a serving dish. These are best served at room temperature with a sauce made of beaten yogurt, a crushed clove of garlic, and a tbs. of finely chopped parsley and dill and a pinch of salt.

New Visitors' Shop of Etz Hayyim

Until recently, the books, post-cards and mementos that are for sale were kept inside the Synagogue proper – a rather inadequate situation. Therefore plans were formalized for moving the shop out of the Synagogue.

The storage shed in the north courtyard is in the process of being converted into a small visitors' shop and kitchen area. Mr. Jerry Dutton volunteered to fit the room with shelves as well as a partition behind which will be a sink and small boiler, a fridge and coffee maker.

We have no intention of opening a café but, on the other hand, it is not unknown that libraries provide places for people to sit and have coffee or refreshments while reading. Our courtyards are very amenable to this and as we do not lend out books the opportunity to sit and read – and have refreshments – is an added extension of our facilities. There will be a donation box for suggested but voluntary contributions.



Storage shed that will house the new store/ kitchen area



School Visits to Etz Hayyim

Sitting in the Synagogue office I have often heard the sound of a group of school kids as they are herded down Kondylaki street by their teachers on their way to another "field trip" on the harbor, the sound cresting and then ebbing.

But in the recent past I have been pleasantly surprised as I hear the gaggle of voices get louder and louder, till there is a small crowd of excited faces peering into the Synagogue courtyard. What has surprised me is not that the kids are brought to the Synagogue on a field trip, after all we have had school visits in the past, but the frequency in the last few months.

We are now averaging about two school visits a month, which may not sound like much, but when you compare that number with three school visits for all of 2008, then you start to understand the significance.

What has brought about this change? Maybe it's the recent emphasis in the school curriculum in "Religion Class" to talk about other faiths rather than just the "National" religion. Maybe, its younger teachers who are still enthusiastic about teaching, and not just from a textbook. Maybe it's that after ten years since the Synagogue was rededicated it is finally starting to gain some acceptance by a bigger part of the local community.

Whatever the answer, the fact that young Haniote kids are coming to the Synagogue and are willing and - dare I say - even interested in being exposed to another culture at a time when nationalism and isolationism are spreading throughout Europe and the world, is very encouraging.

But it also points out the need for the Synagogue to exist,

"My Hania" - an Intercultural Workshop

Over the last four years Etz Hayyim Synagogue and the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, Poland have participated in various intercultural programs, primarily in Northern Europe and the Balkans.

Now, the two organizations are partnering up once more to create an intercultural workshop in Hania for the first time.

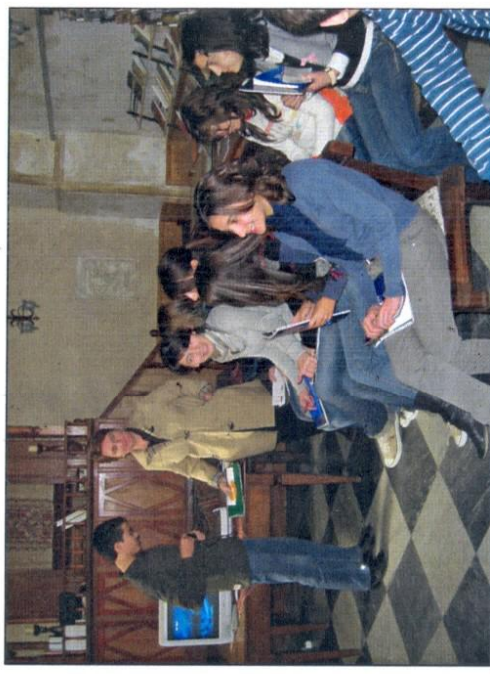
The program titled "My Hania" is in conjunction with "Laundry", a group of cultural animators based out of Birmingham, England, and the "New Culture Foundation" of Bulgaria, and is part of the European Union "Year of Intercultural Dialogue".

The aim of the program is to work with local schools and students to address modern issues of tolerance and understanding between various cultural groups found in

and to continue to exist. As this is the only chance for many of these kids to be exposed to Judaism, and to maybe drop the cloak of the stereotypes that they have been carrying. And to think that if Nikos Stavroulakis hadn't made that speech in New York a little over a decade ago, the only thing these kids would have to see would be the sorry ruins of a forgotten Synagogue as they made their way to the harbor for another field trip.

So, as I sit, awaiting the arrival of the tourists and other visitors that inevitably start to trickle in this time of the year, my ears are also listening for the yelling and laughter that announces the arrival of the next school visit, with the hope that with the help of the Synagogue a new generation of Haniotes will look past the "xenos" and relearn the meaning of "philoxenos".

Alex Phoundoulakis



Hania today, by examining its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic past.

The program will run for ten days (27 April till 6 May) with students working alongside the artist and animators from "Laundry" to investigate and learn about Hania's diverse history, through interviews, examining local landmarks and monuments, as well as presentations by historians and sociologists. After the initial fact gathering phase the students will be asked to present what they found in an artistic and creative manner culminating in an exhibition of their work, which will be open to the public.

We hope that in this way we will not only make the students more sensitive to other cultures that they may come across but to also gain a better knowledge and appreciation of the city they live in, as well as to inspire the continuation of programs like this in the future.

Alex Phoundoulakis



Upcoming Events Summer / Autumn 2009

Saltiel Family Reunion



This June Etz Hayyim will be hosting the Saltiel Family Reunion.

The Saltiel family was originally a prominent Venetian Jewish Family from Heraklio. Visitors to the Synagogue may recall seeing a copy of the family crest, found on the Western wall of the Synagogue (the original is found in the Historical Museum of Crete in Heraklio).

The family which has over 150 members throughout the world will be holding their biannual reunion in Crete, with many of the family members scheduled to attend.

Board of Trustees Meeting in June

The legally framed constitution of the proposed Board of Trustees has finally been drawn up by the lawyer after some minor changes and additions. Mr. Rupert Nabarro, who is the acting chairperson of the Board has scheduled a meeting to take place in early June for the purpose of ratifying it and also putting it into effect.

10th Anniversary of Rededication

This October we will mark the 10th anniversary of the rededication of Etz Hayyim Synagogue on 10th October 1999. We are currently planning a public event on this occasion for October. Further information will be put on the website and circulated via email in due time.

Throughout the summer a small exhibition in the Synagogue will retell the story of the reconstruction and rededication. Visitors usually express a keen interest in the state of the Synagogue building before the reconstruction the story of the reconstruction itself as well as the current life at Etz Hayyim. The 10th anniversary of the rededication provides a good opportunity to document these issues with our collection of photographs, newspaper clippings and eyewitness accounts. Furthermore, the dedication of the Ezrath Nashim in December of last year, marks the completion of the general reconstruction project.

Weddings at Etz Hayyim

While there is usually not more than one wedding a year at Etz Hayyim, this summer there will be three weddings with couples from Greece, the Czech Republic and the US.

Concerts in Summer 2009

The Hague based *Me la Amargates tu* and Bernhard Lang of Klangforum Wien are scheduled to perform at Etz Hayyim Synagogue this summer.

Synagogue Opening Hours

In Spring and Summer the Synagogue is open to visitors
Monday to Friday, 10 am to 6 pm.

We are always looking for volunteers to help us **extend our opening hours during the summer** as many visitors come in during the evening. If you are in Hania during the summer and feel like helping out **please contact us**.

Jottings. Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

Director of Etz Hayyim and Editor of Jottings
Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis

Administrative Secretary
Alexander Phoundoulakis

Librarian
Anja Zückmantel

Rabbinical Adviser
Prof. Nicholas de Lange