



Jottings

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Mayyim Hayyim, the Waters of Life

On the Monday following Pesah an exhibit was opened in the Mikveh of the synagogue. The artist-sculptor was a young Israeli of Salonikan origins, David Behar-Perahia. Last year he and his wife Adi visited the Synagogue on their way to England and in the course of seeing the mikveh and the beautiful space that it delineates, he asked if he could put on an exhibit in it and I agreed.

Like many of our rituals and traditions the meaning of the mikveh has been lost to us. For most women it is a sign of patriarchal domination and the under-tones, due to mistranslation of terms and lack of understanding the inner meaning of the ritual, has resulted in it either not being practised or if so under duress. We have even forgot that a mikveh in a Jewish community takes precedence over a synagogue!

Ours is the only remaining traditional mikveh in Greece. New ones have been built in Athens and Thessaloniki but the mikveh of Hania is complete and still fed by spring water. The steps that lead it have been used for several hundreds of years and are well worn and shine darkly in the shimmering water of the immersion tank at the bottom that affords the means for a triple submersion.

Seen from one point of view – and a very limited one at that – the mikveh is for the purpose of cleansing a woman who through menstruation

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Etz Hayyim Synagogue during the Seder of April 7th



The Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki can be rightly proud of its new Jewish Museum located at 13 Agios Minas St. in what was once the heart of the city's Jewish Quarter. Unlike Athens that never boasted a Jewish community of any size until recently, Thessaloniki prior to the 2nd World War had the greatest concentration of Sephardi Jews in the Near East, if not the world. As possibly the most 'urban' of all the Balkan cities insofar as it could boast and multilingual and multi-ethnic population, Thessaloniki had been for centuries a haven for Jews fleeing persecution either in Europe or the consequence of the expulsion of all non-Christians from Spain. Today the city, through its surviving monuments, is a witness to an unbroken urban history that reaches back into antiquity. The new Jewish Museum of the city is a cele-

bration of one of the threads of this rich historical tapestry.

The Museum has evolved through a number of experiments over the past twenty years though only in fairly recent times, subsequent to concentrating on the more immediate needs of the Community, has it been possible to set sights on a professionally oriented Museum that is open to the greater community, Christian as well as Jewish, of the city.

Housed in one of the few buildings that survived the great fire of 1917, the Museum has a number of integrated exhibits that have been designed so as to provide the visitor with a well balanced and documented historical background to the Jewish presence in the city from the 3rd century BC until the 2nd World War when the community was all but destroyed

through deportations and annihilation in the death camps of Poland.

The building itself, an arcade of two stories, lends itself perfectly to the needs of the new Museum. The entrance and ground floor are dominated by monumental stele and epigraphical material that was salvaged either from one or the other of the city's 32 synagogues destroyed in the 2nd World War, or from the great Jewish Cemetery that covered several hectares of land immediately east of the city's ancient walls. Until its demolition in 1942 this cemetery was the largest Jewish burial field in the Near East with over 300,000 entombments. This introductory entrance is also well articulated by a series of photographs taken in 1911 of the

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Passover at Etz Hayyim Synagogue

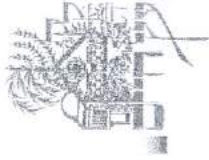
Preparations for Passover at Etz Hayyim began, as they should, just after Purim. Invitations were designed, announcements were made and sent out and we began work on making a Haggadah that would be useful for our participants. We had several texts to work from and finally settled on using an edition that had been sent to us from Israel last year and then inserted in to it appropriate texts in Greek.

We were sent 'shmurah' Matzahs from Israel by a Friend of the Synagogue and several other gifts of suitable food also arrived and we designed a menu for the dinner with some care. It was decided that we would have a vegetarian kosher meal as many of us are vegetarians and both the Rashi as well as Maimonides assert that the intention of HaShem was that we not kill animals for food. We did include fish, however. During the week prior to Pesah the synagogue was cleaned in preparation, all traces of hametz were removed from the offices, our wine and additional matzoth arrived from Athens and we were actually prepared by the 5th – Erev Shabbath. Since the collusion of Shabbath and Pesah made the dinner somewhat difficult the menu was constructed around this with huevos haminados, marouli salad, various olives and pickles and stuffed vine leaves. The main courses were of Pastel de Kveso (Salonika) and Spanakopitta (Ioannina). Dolmades were made from a recipe from Komotini and after that there was fish in walnut sauce followed by fruit and 'bounwellos'. All the of food was prepared by the ladies associated with the synagogue in Hania.

The synagogue interior was rearranged so that we could celebrate the Seder in it. The dinner was planned so that we could all leave the synagogue after the 'Afikoman' and then go to the Konaki restaurant. All of their dishes had been 'kashered' and what could not be heated as required were taken to the mikveh and dipped in its water. Four long tables were set up in the Kal and the benches arranged to seat at least 75 people. Each place had its plastic dish, cup, matzah and wine as well as the other symbolic foods. The main table had a large 'sini' with the shank-one of the lamb, burnt egg and other symbols... and the cup of Elijah was prominently displayed.

People began to gather by 8:00 and at 8:20 – just after we began by having 'Havdalah'. By that time

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The Jewish Museum of Tessaaloniki

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cemetery as it was at that time.

The first floor of the Museum is divided into a number of quite distinct spaces. A panoramic history of Jewish Tessaaloniki dominates most of the upper gallery and was created at Lohemai HaGetaoth in Israel and funded through the Simon Marks Foundation in London. The connecting exhibition areas provide the means to visually elaborate on this historical introduction. At the moment the Museum is playing host to a visiting exhibit of Tessaalonikan Judaica that was collected and researched at Bar Ilan University in Israel. In the future, however, these areas will provide the visitor with an overview of religious and secular life of the Jews of the city. A special exhibition area has been set aside for the Holocaust and concentrates on the main events and incidents that led to the near destruction of the city's Jews between 1941-1944.

An audio-visual space has been provided for in the library which is in the process of being developed. It is envisaged that in the near future this library will become the nerve center of the Museum and will serve as a resource center on the Sephardic Jews in general and those of Tessaaloniki in particular. Already books and music in Ladino are being collected. As a means of making public the 'heart' of the Museum a web site is at presently being created that will have links throughout the world. This site will be divided into specific topics covering music, literature, history and community. At the present bibliographical entries are being collated so as to make this specific component of the base as complete as possible.

Passover at Etz Hayyim Synagogue

(from page 1)

some 85 people had arrived and by 8:30 we began the Seder.

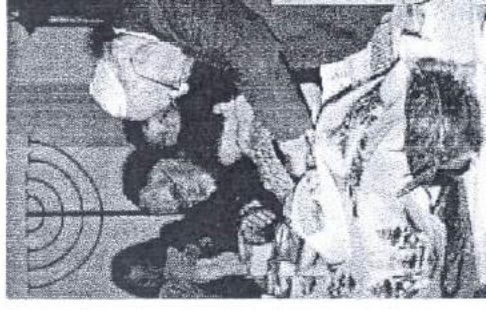
We made a few small changes in the beginning of the ceremony. Stavroulakis began by mentioning that Pesah is a deeply serious annual event and that its message is of great important in our understanding of why and how we are Jews. He spoke about slavery and how we fall into becoming slaves as well to egotism and how it sometimes blinds us and he mentioned how the 'matsah' the bread of affliction is not only symbolic of that night that our ancestors fled Egypt in haste but that it also symbolizes how we must work to remove the activities of our selfish egos enslave us. Matsah symbolizes the Jew who has removed hametz from his home and from his heart. He then spoke about 'kavannah' and the need for intention in beginning

such a serious story as is the story of the Flight from Egypt. Of how the Lord is said to have wept when the Egyptians were killed as they were also His creatures.

All of the lights in the synagogue were put out and for a few minutes we sat in darkness thinking of the people who are suffering in this world or seeking homelands and justice. It was on this note that the seder then began by passing the 'sini' over everyone's head while "Este el pan de la afrisyon..." was sung in Ladino.

By 10:00 the seder was finished and we all walked down the street to the Konaki restaurant where the dinner was served. (The Konaki is built on the site of the old Synagogue of Beth Shalom). There were altogether some 86 participants in the seder and dinner which lasted until 1:00 in the morning when some returned to the synagogue to recite the Hallel.

We from Etz Hayyim wish you many blessings for the Season.



Left
Reading the Haggadah

Down

Mr Stavroulakis explaining the meaning of Passover to a variegated audience



A Hebrew Lament from Venetian Crete on the Fall of Constantinople

by Michael ben Shabbetai Cohen Balbo (1420-?1484) translated by Avi Sharon

Behold the noise of the bruit is come,
A great commotion out of the North
Country,
Between Migdol and the sea,
A great captivity;
The daughter of my people of my ban.
They have destroyed my vineyard
And the multitude of my people.

The day star, son of morning,
Has fallen from heaven
Like a thing of no light,
The quiver rattles against it,
For He dissolves the bonds of kings.
They made long their furrows,
The glittering spear and shield
While those brought up in scarlet
Are now at their wits end,
Their souls slung out like the pouch of a sling,
And Bela died.

In the desolate valleys
They are embracing dunghills,
As the earth herself laments.
There shall be a consumption in the midst of the land,
For the earth is utterly broken down.

There went a proclamation throughout the host:
"Woe unto us! For the day goeth away."
And the voice said: "Cry!"
And he said: "What shall I cry? All flesh is grass
As the gleaming grapes when the vintage is done."
The heavens above are black.
He has drunk at the hand of the Lord
A cup of trembling,
And the stars of heaven and night's constellations

Shall not give their light,
Their visage is blacker than coal.
The sun shall be darkened
And the moon as black
As the tents of Kedar,
With neither from nor comeliness.

Behold their valiant ones cry without!
Behold you fast for strife and debate!
The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly,
They shall set up a great sign beside him.

Therefore I said - "Look away from me
For I shall weep bitterly,
Labor not to comfort me,
For with the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt.
I am black."

Astonishment has taken hold of me
And trembling there
Like the pangs of a woman that travails,
And my knees strike one against the other,
Therefore are my loins filled with pain.
He has trodden under foot my mighty men

In the midst of me,
For it is a day of trouble and of treading down and of perplexity.
Who has given Israel up to the robbers,
Whose height was like the height of cedars,
A great eagle, with great wings, long-winged,
Full of feathers of many colours.

Riphat and Togarmah,
Those that dwell on high, the lofty city,
the host and the stars, now cast down to the ground,
Unto those that peep and mutter.
Woe is me now, for my soul is made weary by murderers.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The taking of Constantinople in May 1453 was lamented by more hands than any other historical event and in more tongues, among them Greek, Armenian, Latin, Italian, and Hebrew. A single extant Hebrew lament is the only contemporary record in Byzantine Jewish literature of the great tragedy of Eastern Christendom. Written in Venetian-ruled Crete after the news of Constantinople's capture had reached the island, this poem is an important and enigmatic register of Jewish sympathy for the fall of Byzantium.

The Jews of Venetian Crete occupied a typically uncomfortable position between the oppressed Greek Orthodox inhabitants of the island and the largely Catholic oppressors. For example, in 1450 an important Venetian official, Ludovico Foscarini, dedicated himself to a perpetual bellum against the island's Jews. Only three years later, in March of 1453, six high-ranking members of the Jewish community of Candia (modern Herakleion) were found guilty of desecrating the host in a suit brought by the wife of a

Passover in Greece: some culinary hints

The echo of our wonderful convivial Passover did not tone down yet, and we had many friends coming to the Synagogue asking for the traditional Greek-Jewish recipes they enjoyed that night. And since sharing food is strongly symbolic, we decided to insert in this issue some Passover recipes to share with our friends all over the world the experience that our variegated community had this year. Let's start with:

Kefides de poyo or chicken croquettes

Salonika
4 large chicken breasts
1 medium onion, finely chopped
1/2 lb. ground beef
1/2 cup matzah meal
3 eggs
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh dill
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper

Poach the chicken breasts in a very little water until the meat is very tender and can be easily removed from the bones. Pass the chicken and the onion through a coarse grinder and mix with the beef, matzah meal, eggs, dill, and salt and pepper in a large bowl.

Break off egg-sized pieces of the mixture and shape into round, slightly flattened croquettes. Sauté gently in olive oil until well browned on both sides. Serve hot or cold. Makes 15-20 croquettes.

Tyropita or cheese and dill pie

Hania
This, and the following *pastel de kwezo* from Salonika, are very similar. In Salonika, sesame seeds replace the dill and mint. In Crete this was made with Mezithra, an unsalted goat cheese which is one of the glories of the island. Failing Mezithra, the cheese commonly used is a combination of equal parts of Feta and grated Parmesan. Farmers' cheese, unsalted and mild, can also be used.

1 lb. Mezithra, or 1/2 lb. Each crumbled Feta and grated Parmesan
1/4 cup olive oil
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh dill, and/or
4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint

3 eggs, separated
Matsoth, pre-soaked, enough to line in a baking pan with 4 layers
Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375°. Mix the cheese in a large bowl. Mix in the olive oil, dill, and/or mint. Separate the eggs. Beat the yolks until creamy and the whites until very firm, but not forming peaks. Mix the yolks into the cheese and then fold in the whites.

Line the bottom of a deep baking pan, 10x14 inches, with 2 layers of the matsoth, sprinkling some olive oil

between the layers. Pour the cheese mixture over this and lay another 2 layers of matsoth on top, sprinkling each layer with olive oil. Bake at 375° for 30-45 minutes, or until well browned. Serve warm or cold. Serves 4-6.

That's also very tasteful:

Kefides de prassa or leek croquettes
Rhodes, Salonika, and most Sephardic communities

2 large leek
1 cup ground beef
2 eggs, beaten
1 hard-boiled egg
1 tablespoon matzah meal
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh dill
Salt and pepper
Olive oil for frying

Clean the leeks carefully and chop fine, including much of the green stalk. Simmer in a saucepan with just enough water to cover for 20 minutes.

When tender, drain and put the leeks in a large mixing bowl. Add the meat, eggs, hard-boiled egg, matzah meal, dill, and salt and pepper, and mix well.

Take egg-sized amounts of this mixture and shape into flatish croquettes. Serve warm or cold. Serves 4.

And for dessert:

Manzapades or lemon marzipan

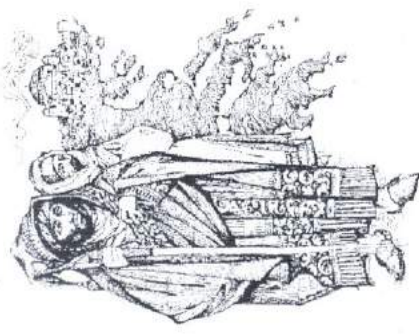
Volos

Lemon marzipan, a Passover favorite, can be made in large quantities and served any time of the year. In Greece, where lemons are used constantly, housewives save up the peels before making the sweet.

Peels of 10 or more lemons
1 cup almonds, blanched and finely ground
2 cups sugar
1 cup confectioners' sugar

Put all lemon peels in a large bowl and cover them completely with water. For two days, change the water every 3-4 hours. On the third day, rinse the peels well and put them in a large saucepan with enough water to cover. Simmer over low heat until they are very soft. Remove and drain, and then mash them into a fine pulp.

In a large saucepan put the lemon pulp, almonds, and sugar in the following proportions: to every cup of lemon pulp add 1 cup ground almonds and 2 cups sugar. Mix well and simmer over low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. When the mixture begins to thicken well and pull away from the sides of the saucepan, remove from the heat and pour onto a marble slab or glass sheet. When cool, knead the mixture for a few minutes, then break off small pieces and roll them into balls. As you make them,



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or birth has become 'middah' and is in a state of 'tummah'. Usually this term is translated as 'un-clean' when in fact it alludes more to state of being separate. For many contemporary rabbis the ritual of the mikveh is understood to have been given a negative connotation due to a one-sided interpretation based on the rituals of the Temple. They are careful to point out that the rules governing the High Priest and his performances of the mikveh are only one aspect of the rite. It certainly cannot be said that he was 'tumma' or unclean. His ritual in fact set him apart, made him kadosh or holy which is the spirit in which we lower dishes into the mikveh in order to make them part of our Jewish lives as 'kosher'. It is the ritual that assists the Shofar, the person who transcribes the Sepher Torah, in making *kervamah* or an act of intention.

The waters of the mikveh are understood by some kabbalists as being symbolic of death and resurrection. A woman at the termination of her menstrual period symbolically dies in the waters of the mikveh and then rises to new life - monthly. Her menstrual period sets her apart and from a feminist point of view gives her a special status - she is not longer an object of sexual satisfaction and is confirmed in her femininity as distinct from being simply an adjunct to man. She lives in a state of potentiality as the giver of life itself. It is in the waters of the mikveh that what has been made separate is brought symbolically into death and then into life.

The use of water as a symbolic element through which we are cleansed and then made whole is rooted in some of the earliest religious experiences of mankind. Amongst Hindus, Buddhists, even, apparently the ancient Minons and Egyptians water and ritual immersion is a rite of deep significance. For converts to Judaism it certainly symbolizes rebirth within the Jewish Community as such - as does it for Christians who in fact absorbed the ritual in its Jewish infancy. In Judaism the heavy patriarchal (and purely cultural) domination of women by men within the community is possibly an abuse - and one

roll each in confectioners' sugar and put on a large dish. When finished, dust them with additional confectioners' sugar. Set in a cool place for at least 24 hours before serving. They can be stored in well-sealed jars in the refrigerator for later use. Makes approximately 20.

Boumwelos Rhodes

Traditionally, these were made in special pans resembling egg poachers. Each depression was almost filled with oil and heated. Then the spoonfuls of dough were dropped in and cooked.

6 matsoth
Milk to soak matsoth
3 eggs, beaten
Pinch of salt
3 cups olive oil for frying
A well-chilled syrup*
Almonds or walnuts and cinnamon

Soak the matsoth overnight in enough milk to cover completely. The next day, break up the matsoth and, using your hands, squeeze out as much of milk as you can. Put the pulp in a large bowl and mash it until fairly smooth. Beat the eggs and stir them in with a pinch of salt. Beat the mixture until smooth and set aside while the oil is heating.

Heat 3 cups olive oil in a heavy saucepan. When it has almost reached the smoking point, take out tablespoons of the dough and, using your finger, push them off into the hot oil. Fry on both sides until golden brown.

As the *boumwelos* are cooked, drop them one by one into the syrup for a few minutes, then put them on a large dish. Before serving, sprinkle with chopped almonds or walnuts and cinnamon. Makes 20-30.

* How to make syrup:

1 cup water
1/4 cup honey
1/2 cup sugar
Juice of 1 lemon (optional)

Boil together until you have a syrup that will coat the back of a wooden spoon. If you wish, you may add juice of 1 lemon shortly before removing from the heat. Chill well.

Excerpts from the book:

Cookbook
of the Jews of Greece

by

Nicholas Stavroulakis

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Mayyim Hayyim

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that we might examine. The silence of Eve, of Lot's wife, of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel is not natural and perhaps hides a side of Judaism that has been obfuscated through cultural accretions over the centuries. In the Kabala it is taught that the feminine side of God – the Shekhinah – is in exile and that the greatest act of *'tikun'* of re-unification, is the manner in which we assist in making God whole again – the male and female united in oneness. Certainly ordinary understanding of God is one determined from a perspective that sees only His male aspect and we are told that His Mercy, Love, Beauty and Care for His creatures is what issues from His female aspect.

The exhibit of Behar-Perahia was in essence an installation and brought almost every aspect of the synagogue into play and certainly brought many questions to mind. The exterior walls of the building were lit by projections of pictures – scenes of flight, from the Holocaust, of community events and celebrations. The sounds of water could be heard filtering through the synagogue itself and in the mikveh there was light only from one mysterious shimmering image – cast in water and reflected on the arched ceiling accompanied by the ringing sound of single drops of water falling into the immersion pool.

You can visit
Mr. Perahia web-site at:

<http://www.perahiasculpture.com/>



Artworks by David Behar-Perahia



A Hebrew Lament

local Greek priest. But beyond this provincial turbulence, many Jews of the period and the larger region must have seen Constantinople, the successor of Rome, as the heir of Biblical Edom, and therefore a city whose fall, in spite of the suffering incumbent upon its large Jewish community, could usher in the redemption of their coreligionists. The web of feeling behind this Hebrew document from Venetian Crete lamenting that Greek city's capture and destruction is therefore both intriguing and complex.

Its complexity is compounded by a curiously "modernist" method of quotation and allusion. The lament (*'Qinah'* in Hebrew) was written by the Candiot Rabbi and scholar Michael ben Shabbetai Cohen Balbo (1420-?1484) and is made up of a pastiche of scripture drawn largely from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Lamentation. The resulting patchwork of biblical quotes tells its story by means of ellipsis and allusion. For example, the phrase "Between Migdol and the sea" is a reference to the town or tower (*migdol*) where the Jews fleeing Egypt camped before their crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:2). Geographically the reference seems astray, but it opens up other interesting pathways of interpretation. Even more suggestive is the phrase, "And Bela died" which comes from Chronicles (2:16) and equates Constantin-

ople, the central city of Byzantine Christendom with Bela, the first king of the Gentiles and the first city of enemy Edom. Mention of "Riphat and Togarmah" (Genesis 10:3), grandsons of Noah, must have represent respectively the tribe of the Riphacians (the ancient Paphlagonians) and the Armenians (*loka-arma*) people, the "modern" inhabitants of Constantinople. More emphatic, however, even if at times unspoken, is the poet's insistence on the unswayable hand of God behind Constantinople's demise. For the poem's final question, "Who has given Israel to the robbers?" is only answered by seeking out the biblical context from which it was taken, and that answer is unequivocal: "Did not the Lord?" (Isaiah 42:24). A careful reading might reveal more of the strange pity that does not stand in the words of this lament but is nevertheless conveyed.

NOTE:

For a wider discussion of this poem, its historical context and a more literal translation see Steven Bowman, The Jew of Byzantium (University of Alabama Press 1983). The lament has been carefully edited by Leon J. Weinberger in his Jewish Poets in Crete (University of Alabama Press 1997).

Jewish Communities in Greece and Culinary Traditions

"Cookbook of the Jews of Greece" by Nicholas Stavroulakis

This cookbook is not simple a collection of recipes. It is also a record of some aspects of a rapidly vanishing tradition in Greece. Assimilation, modernism, indifference, and the mediocrity of the co-called international cuisine have taken a toll of the traditional foods eaten by all Greeks, Christians as well as Jews. In an age of short-cut recipes, labor saving devices, and ready-mixes, it is difficult to find a Jewish home in Greece where the delight of Sabbath is still an elegant *sulach*. All these recipes, however, are still used, and at least one traditional dish, if not more, can be found on any Jewish holiday table in Greece.

Apart from their culinary value, the recipes provide an important clue to the movements and origins of many Greek Jewish communities. They reflect in some ways the social, political, and economic upheavals of the past two centuries, as Jews re-settling in other areas tended to take their culinary traditions with them. As almost all the recipes here have been recorded from people who grew up before World War II, they reflect that earlier period and the continuation of traditions through two or three generations. To simplify, and to avoid a pedantic repetition of detail, I have tried to choose recipes that are charac-

teristic of certain regions of Greece. At the same time, I have indicated, where possible. The links made by certain recipes with areas in which there are no longer Jewish communities. For example, Volos has recipes that resemble very closely some used by Greeks in the Peloponnese. The link is strengthened by the fact that the family name Tovil, common among Jews of Volos, is found on a tombstone in Mistras in the Peloponnese. The Jewish community in Mistras ceased to exist in 1822. The differences between Romanote and Sephardic cooking provide clues to the dispersal and links between Jewish communities in Greece before World War II.

The major Romanote communities in Greece were Ioannina, Preveza, and Arta. All three had an almost unbroken tradition going back many hundreds years. They were linked by marriage to Trikala, Patras, and Halkis. For example, Trikalites tended to take wives from Ioannina, which of course resulted in a strong Ioannina influence on the cooking of Trikala. The Ionian islands of Corfu, Zakynthos, and Lefkada formed a group of communities with strong ties to Italy. In Greece these communities maintained ties with Crete, where in Hania there was a Zakynthinite syna-

The Greek spoken in many areas by the Jews of Greece had peculiarities in dialect. In Ioannina, for example, these peculiarities indicate that the community has been in Ioannina longer than its Greek Christian neighbors. In other areas, such as Crete, the Jews spoke the same dialect spoken throughout the island.

The Spanish spoken by the Sephardim of Greece is known as Ladino, Judaeo-Espagnol, or Judezmo. Essentially, it is 15th century Spanish with heavy accretions of Greek, Turkish, and Arabic, with some Bulgarian and Slavic additions.

WEB SITE and DATA BASE

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

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