



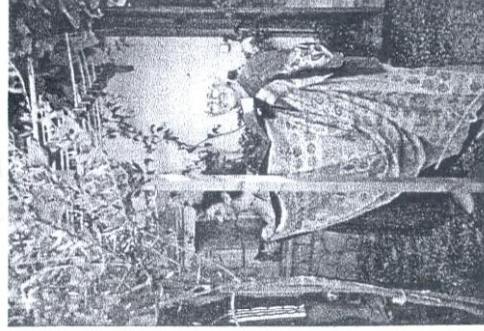
Jottings

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The High Holidays at Etz Hayyim Synagogue Hania

Every Jewish Holiday is a very special challenge to us as we seldom have any idea as to how many people will attend and what special needs might be felt necessary for Jews of various affiliations all of which are, for the most part unknown to us in Greece. There is no Reform, Conservative, Liberal or Re-constructionist movement and Greek Jewry on the whole is identified as simply 'Orthodox' and Sephardi though even this is unclear to some extent. Certainly the Lubavitcher 'contact' in Athens, Rabbi Mendel Hendel is an important opportunity for us to relate to an alternative facet of Judaism. So often we tend to think of Judaism as somewhat monolithic when in fact it is not and even within the various defined interpretations of Judaism

→ page 3



Preparing the Sukkah
at Etz Hayyim

The Jewish Community of 16th-century Candia was shaped both by the experience of distinctiveness and separation from the Greek Orthodox majority by which it was surrounded, and by the sense that it was, at the same time, connected to – if not a part of – that greater community.

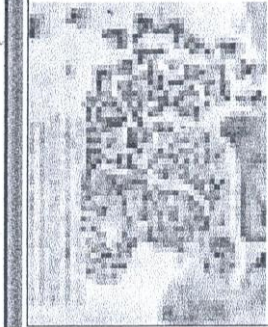
Candia's Jews, while in the period living within a walled, separate quarter, understood this condition as emblematic of their purity as much as of their confinement. Simultaneously, while living beneath a constant Christian gaze, Candia's Jews felt as much motivated by that gaze to constantly refine their piety, as they did persecuted by it. Jewish-Christian interaction was thus configured by Candia's Jews as an opportunity to consolidate, and reflect upon, the meaning of Jewish identity – an identity which they wished to endorse in the Jewish and the Christian realms alike. To be sure, the Jewish community of the period did not experience life in Crete as easy; like most other Jews of the period many hardships were experienced at the hands of Christian overlords. Nevertheless, in the Cretan instance, Jews were able to find in their circumstances not merely abjection or oppression. They were able also to draw from their Christian surroundings a potent sense of their own community as being a model of purity and piety.

In 1571 there were approximately 800 Jews living in Candia (1). The island of Crete as a whole had twice that number (2). We know of chronic difficulties in the community's four synagogues in managing to gather together the quorum of ten men (the *minyán*) required by Jewish law for proper services. It is unclear whether this difficulty was due to the reduced size of the community, or the laxity of its observance; likely it was a combination of the two.

The one major extant internal source (3) for Jewish life in Candia during the sixteenth century is the *takanot kandia vezichronoteha*, a collection of civic documents

compiled by the Cretan Rabbi Eliyahu Kapsali in the mid-sixteenth century. Many of the statutes it contains were issued by him, but the collection also includes important rulings made by his predecessors (4). Kapsali, of both Romanote and Sephardic heritage, was a Greek-speaking Jew, and came to be one of the most important Rabbinic figures of the region.

A recurrent theme of the documents of the *takanot kandia vezichronoteha* is the small size of the community. Despite its modest dimensions, however, the community in Candia centered around four



Venetian Herakleion – from the *Liber Insularum Archipelagi of Christoforo Buonalmonti* (Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, Cod. Plut. XXIX, 42, fol.)

different congregations: *beit hakneset hagadol* ("the great synagogue"), *beit hakneset shel kohanim* ("the synagogue of the Cohanim"), *beit hakneset shel ashkenazim* ("the synagogue of the European [Jews]"), and *beit hakneset hagavoha* ("the upper synagogue"; that is, the one located on the city's higher ground) (5). The *beit hakneset shel ashkenazim* was Ashkenazic only in title; the accepted liturgy of all four of Candia's synagogues in Kapsali's day was that of the Romanotes, or "indigenous," Greek-speaking Jews.

Candia's four synagogues were all located fairly close to one another, a function of the Venetians' policy that Jews live in segregated ghettos, or, to use the Venetian term, *zudeccas*. (Following the Ottoman conquest of the island in the seventeenth century, this stricture was lifted, and the urban geography of the Jewish community

became relatively more dispersed) (6). They were all in the heart of the *zudecca*, a neighborhood that the Greeks referred to as the *evraiki* (*Yevraiki*) (7). The neighborhood was located against the walls of the old city (the *città vecchia*), extant since the Arab conquest of the 9th century.

Significantly, the Jews themselves often referred to their neighborhood as the *kahal*, a distinctive usage of a term that in most other Jewish contexts designates not a geographical space but a conceptual one, referring to the congregation of Jews as a whole and designating something that, roughly, can be translated as "community." Candiot *takanot* and rabbinic writings of the sixteenth century, however, often used the term *kahal* in reference to the physical space in which that community lived (8).

The physically-bounded space of the *kahal* clearly influenced the Jewish community's understanding of itself, and the physical unity it enforced also fostered unity of a communal and religious sort. The usage of the term *kahal* to signify both a physical and a conceptual sphere shows that the two – communal self-perception and physical space – worked hand in hand. Particularly significant in this regard is the use of the term *homa*, which means "wall"; specifically, the boundary wall common to ancient and medieval cities. All three of Crete's cities – Hania, Rethymon, and Iraklion (Candia) – are walled cities. The looming presence of the city walls, along with the demarcated space of the *kahal* is reflected in numerous Jewish Candiot texts. The centuries-long experience of boundedness and demarcation, combined with the relative homogeneity of the (largely Romanote) Jewish population, is reflected in rabbinic and civic writings of the period.

A recurrent theme in Cretan *responso* and *takanot* of the period is the *homa* – the city wall – and its role as protector of the entirety of the Jewish community. The *homa*,



"Walls" around the Torah: The 16th Century Candia - Kahal

then, was not perceived so much as something that locked the Jews outside of society, as a barrier that protected the Jews from outside dangers to the unity and integrity of the community. The introduction to *takana* twenty-one (Candia, 1363) uses the term *homa* no less than six times in its opening paragraph (9). Although significant portions of the text are missing or obscured, we can nevertheless ascertain its basic gist:

In the year 5123 of the creation, the third day of the month of Nisan, in the island of Crete, the congregation of Israel, headed by our esteemed president Rabbi David son of the esteemed Rabbi Yehuda.

The *condostabolo* (10) [addressed the congregations and all the] synagogues with one heart and one agreement and as one person said: "...we shall build fences around the torah in order to distance [missing from text]. [And we shall be] guarded and we shall build an army and a wall...to guard the torah; we shall build a glorious wall...from the stone of Solomon we shall build, in order to prevent violators from throwing in trouble; and all the congregation answered and said: I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers that guard and protect the mitzvot as they are told from Sinai; there we shall appoint and assign guards on the walls of the torah...and the *condostabolo* answered: upon your walls, Jerusalem, I appoint guards." (11)

The text is rich in multiple meanings that interweave elements drawn from the Bible, from the immediate physical space of Venetian Candia, and from the ubiquitous image of sacred Jerusalem. The dominant interplay is between the "fences" established around the torah – the "extra" laws created by Rabbinic oral tradition to protect the core laws of the torah – and the physical "fence" – the *homa* that surrounded the Jewish community of Candia. A second is the equation of Candia and Jerusalem, walled cities both. Finally, the *homa*, far from being regarded as a confining or punitive boundary, is compared instead to the protection of Jerusalem (Psalms, 122, 144, 147) and the towers of the *Song of Songs* (8:10), and its very rock (read here as "the stone of Solomon") is endowed with special meaning. Thus the specific physical circumstances of Jewish life in sixteenth century Candia were woven into the community's self-perception as pure, protected, and keepers of the torah, and the immediate conditions of

numbers, in part because what records exist record number of households rather than number of individuals.

2. In addition to the 800 in Candia (Kandiye), there were 300 in Hania (Hanya), an unknown (but tiny number) in Rethimmon (Resmo), and a small but unknown number scattered throughout the rural areas of the island. Rivlin, p. 155 (Hania), p. 407 (Rethimmon); Ankori, *Jews in the History of Medieval Crete* (on Jews in rural Crete).

3. That is, generated by the Jewish community itself. While Venetian documents give some idea of the juridical and administrative history of the Jews, only the *takanot* (communal ordinances) give us any glimpse into their social and cultural history. They are the central source for the material in this chapter.

4. Elias S. Artom, Humbertus M.D. Cassuto, eds., *sefer takanot kandia: Statuta Iudaeorum Candiae. Eorumque Memorabilia*. Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1943.

5. Benayahu, *rabi eliyahu kapsali, ish kandia*, p. 92; *takanot kandia*, p. 107.

6. Zvi Ankori, *Jews and the Jewish Community*, p. 314; Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 86; Zvi Ankori, "From Zudecha to Yahudi Mahallesi: The Jewish Quarter of Candia in the Seventeenth Century." In Saul Lieberman, ed., *Salò Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume* (Vol. 1). Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974, pp. 63-127 (cited also in Greene, p. 86).

7. Venetian documents use the terms *zudecca*, *giudecca*, *judeyca*, and *iudaica*. Greek terms include *ioudaikh*, *ioudaita*, and *ebraikh* (or *orbakh*, as the late Byzantine Candiot local usage had it). Turkish documents refer to the *yahudi mahallesi* ("the Jewish district").

8. Zvi Ankori argues that the term was used *exclusively* to denote a physical space, until the arrival of Sephardim "introduce[d] into Cretan

(→ page 1)

society, too, a congregational connotation of the term *kahal*" (p.315). It seems, though, that *both* usages – the conceptual and the purely physical – were from early on common in Crete. Indeed, as early as 1463 we see *takanot* from Crete that use *kahal* in the sense of "community." See, for example, *takanot kandia*, number 25, p. 14.

9.

Only fifteen lines of the *takana*'s first paragraph are extant. *takanot kandia*, pp. 13-14.

10.

That is, civic leader of the Jewish community.

11.

The phraseology invokes both the *Song of Songs* (8:10, "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers") and the 122nd psalm ("Upon your walls, Jerusalem, I appoint guards"). Psalm 147, for instance, reads "praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!...For he strengthens the bars of your gates...He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances." See Ioanna Steriotou, "Le fortzze del regno di Candia.

L'organizzazione, I progetti, la costruzione," in Gherardo Ortalli, ed., *Venezia e Creta. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Iraklion-Chania, 30 settembre – 5 ottobre 1997*. Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1998, pp. 283-302. The

psychological circumstances attendant upon the closed-in Jewish ghettos of northeastern European cities were quite different. While in Crete the walls reminded Jews to keep their faith pure by keeping the *mitzvot* and not falling into laxity of practice, Vital has argued that the state of being enclosed underscored the distinctions between the Jewish world and the non-Jewish world. See *A People Apart. The Jews of Europe, 1789-1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 22. Candia's walls were protection not so much from the outside world as from the possibilities for failure inherent in all people. At the same time, however, they were a reminder of the impending arrival of the Ottomans – an eagerly awaited reality.



NOTES

1. Bracha Rivlin, ed., *Pinkas Hakehillot Yavan*, p. 97. It is difficult to obtain fully accurate



The High Holidays at Etz Hayyim Synagogue - Hania

(→ page 1)

there are variations and experiments at coming to grips with our century which is so different essentially from the age that saw the formation of Rabbinate or Talmudic Judaism.

In some ways we are fortunate at Etz Hayyim as we define our liturgy against the traditional Sephardic Siddur and Mahzorim though, we are also sensitive to the fact that for many Jews - especially those who are only visiting Hania and, as a rule only discover the Synagogue by chance - what and how we do things can come as a surprise. Using our minhag as a stable point of reference we work around it in order to accommodate not only our Jews but also non Jews who attend.

Rosh HaShannah - for the opening of the High Holidays we had a surprising attendance of about 30 people. The core was made up of members of our Havurah - from Israel, England, Turkey, Herakleion, and Hania. Fortunately we had Prof. Nicholas de Lange from Cambridge here who is a rabbi and the entire service for Erev Rosh HaShannah was led by him and myself. We had a wonderful surprise when Jacob Stroumza, one of the violinists who played at Auschwitz and an old friend who was a support in those days when I had begun the Jewish Museum of Greece, appeared with some members of his family. We all gathered for Kiddush in the courtyard of the Synagogue and then had a traditional community meal - apples soaked in honey were followed by fish, bourekas, salads, wine, tsikoudhia and fruit.

For the Ten Penitential Days members of the Havurah were given several pages of material for self-examination aimed at directing one's preparation for Kippour. Subjects covered were personal spiritual growth and endeavours, relations with one's spouse and members of

the family, relations where one worked and with people with whom one had close contact... even relations with animals and the environment. One most important question was how and if we attempted to really seek for a spiritual root for our lives.

The liturgy for the High Holidays is very complicated and we took our experience from other years in order to prepare well for Yom Kippour when we had an attendance of over 40 people. We had texts from the mahzor prepared in photostat form for Kol Nidre and similar texts for the entire Neilah service. These were taken from the English Reform Siddur which is based on the Catalan Siddur used at the Portuguese and Spanish Synagogue of London (Bevis Marks). Just prior to Kol Nidre we all assembled for a light meal at the Komaki Restaurant and then made our way to the Synagogue together.

On the Day of Kippour many mahzorim were laid out in the Kal along with books with meditations and self-examination. Rabbi de Lange had also brought along the entire text of the Book of Jonah in Greek with photocopies of the actual 16th century text that is in Hebrew characters. This was to be read in the afternoon as was the custom amongst Rumanote Jews in Greece during the Medieval period. The morning Service lasted until almost 1:30.

Most people who attended remained for the afternoon when we had a shiur on the Book of Jonah by R. de Lange in which we all participated. Some took walks along the harbour and then re-assembled for Neilah that began at 6:00. After Neilah and the last sounds from the Shofar we broke the Fast in the courtyard of the Synagogue with soumada (made from almond milk) and fruit and most gathered at the Konaki restaurant for a community dinner.

Sukkoth

Erecting the Sukkah in the Synagogue began on the day after Kippour when we brought the supports out of storage. On the second day there was some heavy pruning of the palm tree, willow, myrtle and pomegranate trees as well as the fragrant herbs in the garden. By the third day most of the branched roof had been laid as the side hangings and Brouria Peterzell made new paper cuts with appropriate berathoth on them that were used for

decorations as well as a mizrah for the East wall. We did not have a minyan for the Hag but there were a large number of people who said prayers individually (we have mahzorim) and as the Lulav and Etrog had arrived in time - for the subsequent days we had things arranged (along with fruit and biscuits) so that visiting Jews could fulfil their mitzvot in the Sukkah. On Erev Sukkot, after Arvith had been said we all assembled under the Sukkah to say the blessings for

Service Books

As both Kabbalat Shabbath and Havdalah are performed on Shabbat we have felt the need for more participation by people who might attend. The main problem has been in having service books in Hebrew and English for people who attend. Another problem has been that many people who do not read Hebrew have found the Havurah and Leha Dodi impossible to follow. One of the members of our havurah, Konstantine Fischer has now provided us with a small compact text with the Hebrew and English text as well as a transliteration of the hymns that we sing. The basic text is the Arvith service from the Catalan Siddur of the Portuguese and Spanish rite. We are now going to have this translated into good demotic Greek as well.

(Note: Prof. De Lange has offered to be our 'rabbi in absentia' which means that for the major festivals we will most likely have a rabbi here in Hania.)

The Volunteer Programme

We were fortunate this year in having the help of Alex Singer from Manchester who bore the brunt of the high tourist season from August until the end of Sept. As we feel that it is imperative that the Synagogue be open as much as possible her presence enabled us to keep the synagogue available to people for visits or for prayer and recollection. Anyone interested in participating in this important activity of the Synagogue should contact the director.

Erev Shabbat as well as for the Sukkah. Well in advance members of the Havurah had prepared a buffet that was set up in the courtyard. Natalie Ventura, Papatya Papadopoulos, Elizabeth Outram and Brouria Peterzell had prepared masses of food and the Synagogue provided drinks - wine, ouzo and tsikoudhia. It was a joyous evening that went on quite late.

The Wedding of

Alan and Avivah SILVERSTEIN

In early Sept. we had our third wedding at Etz Hayyim since the rededication of the Synagogue in 1999. The bride's mother, Louisa Kelin, has been a strong supporter of the Synagogue and some time ago dedicated two silver Torah binders in memory of her husband the late Dr. Alan Klein. The wedding party was quite mixed and arrived from New York, Johannesburg, Israel and London. There were some 150 persons attending and the Synagogue was filled with flowers and new hangings for the Huppah. Some were the gift of the first bride to celebrate her marriage at Etz Hayyim (Sarah Hossain-Bergman) in the form of gift silks from India. The back of the Huppah was hung with a silk and gold Bursa brocade that had been dedicated by the Athens Community at the time of the opening in 1999. Along the border of the Huppah was set a long belt of gold and scarlet silk. This was the gift of the director of the synagogue and is an important component of the wedding costume of Jewish brides from Morocco.

As we had a minyan we were able to have a full Shabbat service and the actual wedding was well organized in advance. The bride was brought to the Synagogue in a horse and buggy and met at the entrance by the director. After that the groom was taken to the door of the synagogue and he led her to the Huppah where the rite of making circuits was performed after which they exchanged rings. Seven friends of both bride and groom then gathered around them to recite the Seven Blessings, the ketubah was then read out loud and presented by the groom to the bride. Immediately after the glass was broken both were showered with rose and jasmine flowers by the congregation.

A reception followed later in the evening at the Miro Volo Restaurant that went on with dancing and singing until after 4:00 in the morning.



Jewish Historical Seminar

On the 9th and 10th of October the synagogue played host to a group of 46 participants in the Jewish Historical Seminar led by Profs. Yom Tov Assis and Shalom Shabar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The guide and local advisor was Mrs Dolly Asher of Athens who has long been associated with the Seminars that are held annually and are always concerned with the history of our communities in Greece.

Prof. Assis is well known as a scholar in Judaic studies and has been very active in tracing the Shabbataean movement and many of its leaders. Prof. Shabar is probably the only acknowledged expert on the subject of Keuboth and both have been close colleagues and friends of the director of the synagogue since the days of his work as director of the Jewish Museum of Greece.

In Hania the participants used the Synagogue as a point of venue for lectures but also, and appropriately many wished to pray in it and we were fortunate in being able to have a minyan for services on the Thursday morning and the Torah reading was done from our 'Sephardi' Sepher in its 'tik' which was an experience in itself for many of them as it entails reading the parshah with the Sepher in an upright position in its container. (In actual fact the custom of housing a Sepher Torah in a tik is Romanian and by extension into the East, 'Oriental' and not Sephardic at all. The Spanish and Portuguese custom is much like that of the Ashkenazim.)

On the first day of the Seminar after an introduction by Prof. Assis the director of the Synagogue gave a lecture (broken by a coffee break) that was an over-view of the history of the Jews of Crete and after the break it continued in some detail on the events that saw the end of the last Jewish community in Crete in 1944. On the second day a special time was set aside for question and answers and discussion.

This is the first 'academic' seminar to be held in the Synagogue and we feel that it was not only successful but also enriched by the surroundings. Considerable interest was exhibited in having future seminars of this nature at the Synagogue.

New Publications from Etz Hayyim

1)

The Jews of Crete. This book is the first of what we intend to be a series in identical format concerning the Jews of Crete. The first that has come out contains several articles on the Jews of Hania and Crete in general. The proceeds from this and forthcoming publications will go towards the upkeep of the Synagogue. 8 E / roughly \$8 (including postage).

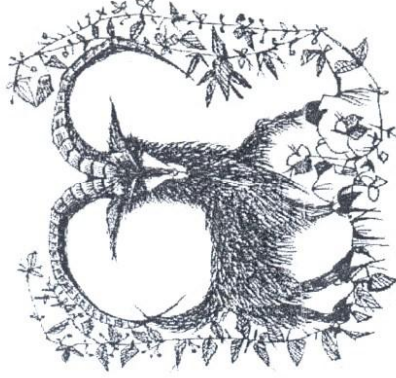
2)

The second publication in this series is dedicated to the last Community of Hania that perished in 1944. It will have a lead article concerning the entire Nazi action as well as detailed information on the convoy and the ship, (the Tanais) that was to transport them to Athens and hence to Auschwitz. All of the British Foreign Office correspondence recording the sinking of the Tanais is included in the bibliography. Accompanying articles and chapters contain an eyewitness account of the Community as it was in 1941 and others. A complete list of the names and addresses of the 265 members of the Community of Hania will be included. This particular publication is dedicated to the memory of the late Judith Humphrey who activated interest and concern over the last Community (11.00 \$ + postage).

Havurah News

The 'family' atmosphere of the Havurah has become more pronounced during the past year. With considerable sacrifice of time and energy several members (Peter and Doris Naylor, Yosie and Natalie Ventura, Giorgio and Papatya Papadopoulos and Constantine Papadopoulos) make it to most of the events – driving to and from Herakleion. Members here in Hania fill in for volunteers as needed in order to keep the synagogue open most of the time. Some of our members come from Israel and Giray Ertas arrives for all for the Haggim from Istanbul. Usually we take advantage of getting together to discuss interior matters – such as the matter of our services and more especially the on-going need to define ourselves more firmly as a community.

Western Cretan Cookbook by Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis



Western Cretan

Cookbook

An English edition of the Western Cretan Cookbook will be published in October. The diet of Cretans was, until the introduction of Fast Food and eating habits stimulated by more affluent incomes, was low in fat, rich in vegetables and fruits as well as legumes. This cookery book was inspired by a wish to record the diet as it was prior to 1955 as well as to record recipes and variants that were prepared by the Muslims and Jews of the island.

Yaourtopita—Yoghurt Cake

- 4 tablespoons cognac
- 1 1/2 teaspoons soda
- 1 1/2 cups yoghurt
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 1/4 cups fine semolina
- 3/4 cup milk

1-2 cup walnuts and almonds, finely chopped

- Confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon and ground cloves

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix the cognac and soda together in a small glass. Mix the yoghurt, sugar, semolina, milk, and nuts together in a large bowl. Add the cognac and soda and stir in well.

Butter or oil the bottom and sides of a baking pan, approximately 9x13 inches, that will bring the batter to a depth of about 3 inches. Bake at 350° for about 45 minutes, or until golden brown on top. Remove from oven, sprinkle first with confectioners' sugar, and then with cloves and cinnamon.

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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