



# Jottings

Etz Hayyim Synagogue

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## Editorial

When Nikos Stavroulakis started the renovation of Etz Hayyim here in Hania more than twenty years ago, he could not have foreseen what a success this recreation of an abandoned synagogue on Crete would turn out to be.

Often Nikos would express his frustrations about the fact that he had restored and refilled a long lost synagogue with its appropriate religious artifacts - but still could not gain an appropriate Jewish congregation, forming a new Jewish community here in Hania. He often doubted that this strange synagogue - supported mostly by a non-Jewish Havurah - without a clear leadership would survive and create a well-respected place in the Jewish history of this country. His sense of Etz Hayyim ending up as one of Kafka's paradoxes - as he would proclaim, a cage in search of a bird - haunted the synagogue's staff for years.



In his own humble awareness, Nikos did not consider himself a leader but his strong personality certainly attracted and fascinated countless people, many of whom became good friends. Nikos would come up with the ideas for projects and contributed his knowledge and charisma but clearly left it up to those surrounding him or working for him to put his thoughts and ideas into practice. Not that the final work done was ever accepted without a huge discussion ... it nevertheless left people with a deep impression that "I would not have been able to have done this without you." A cordial inclusion, which has carried the synagogue forward to this day.

Nikos never fully realized that the root of Etz Hayyim's assured future actually lay in this very inclusion. Anyone who shares the common values of the Abrahamic

religions, or the "children of Abraham" as Nikos called it, is welcome at Etz Hayyim and given the opportunity to contribute to its identity - together with those already there and those who will still arrive.

The numbers of almost 30,000 annual visitors and well-attended services for the High Holidays speak for themselves. This edition of Jottings, with a variety of exceptionally well-written contributions, tells the ongoing story of this special place. We hope you enjoy reading in this edition about the latest endeavors at Etz Hayyim.

It's an honor to say, that in Nikos Stavroulakis' ever-present spirit, we would not be able to carry Etz Hayyim forward without the help and support of all of you.

Wishing you a happy Pesah - Hag Pesah Sameah, Marianna Vinther and the staff of Etz Hayyim.

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## The Cretan 'Moses'

Almost nothing is known about the presence of Jews on the island of Crete in ancient times. Special interest therefore attaches to an episode recounted by the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus (ca. 380 – ca. 439), writing in the middle of the 5th century. He tells how a Jewish fraudster arrived in Crete and claimed to be Moses. He said that God had sent him to lead the Cretan Jews on dry land through the sea to the promised land, and he persuaded them to hand over their money and possessions and follow him. He led them to a headland and told them to jump into the sea. Some were dashed

promised land; the other story ended in catastrophe. But who are we to praise the Israelites and mock the Cretans as gullible fools? Can we be sure how we would have responded to the leader's call? A great teacher, Hillel, said: 'Do not judge your fellow man until you stand in his place' (Mishnah, Avot, 2:5).

We are told about Abraham: 'He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's form of righteousness was *emunah*, belief or trust. It is important to cultivate an attitude of trust, but the trust needs to be accompa-



to pieces on the rocks and others were drowned. Those who survived tried to apprehend him but were unable to find him – he seemed to have vanished into thin air. So some said he was a demon who had taken human form. The Christian chronicler concludes: 'As a result of that experience many of the Cretan Jews said goodbye to Judaism and joined the faith of Christianity.' (Socrates, Ecclesiastical History, 7:38)

It is interesting to reflect on this story as we prepare to celebrate the festival of Pesah, which commemorates the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of the genuine and original Moses. What an enormous act of faith it was for the Israelites in Egypt to follow Moses into the wilderness! They left their homes and everything they knew because they believed his claim that he would take them to a new land where they would live in freedom. We may reflect on the difference between the trust the Israelites placed in the true Moses and the misplaced trust of the Cretan Jews in the false Moses. Both groups were longing for redemption, and willing to trust their destiny to a charismatic leader. One story ended, after trials and hardships, in arrival at the



Section of *Historia Ecclesiastica* recounting the story of Moses of Crete

nied by discernment. We might say that the Cretan Jews had too much trust. (The proof of that is that after their trust in the false Moses was proved to be false, instead of reflecting on their folly and learning to be more prudent in the future, they looked instead for something new to believe in: they 'joined the faith of Christianity.')

Or, better, we might say that their trust was misdirected. It says in the psalm that we read in synagogue at Pesah: 'It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man' (Psalm 118:8).

What we celebrate at Pesah, when we read and discuss the story of the exodus from Egypt, is not the trust that the Israelites placed in the man Moses, but the trust they placed in the Lord. Like Abraham, they trusted in the Lord, and he led them through the wilderness to the promised land. As it says in the same psalm (118:23-4):

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

I wish all our readers a very joyful Pesah!

Nicholas de Lange



## High Holy Days Services 5778 at Etz Hayyim

The autumn festivals of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Kippur (Day of Atonement) are always the high point of the liturgical life of our synagogue, and this year was no exception.

The synagogue was well and truly packed for the evening service on 20 September to welcome in the new year, and the attendance at the communal meal afterwards at the ELA restaurant was probably the biggest we have ever had. A wonderful group of friends from our regular Havurah and from many parts of the world

gathered to celebrate the arrival of 5778.

This year there was an innovation at the meal: after saying the usual blessings over wine and bread, and the special New Year blessing over apple and honey, we recited the Seder of Rosh Hashanah, a Sephardi custom involving seven different foods:

leek  
beet leaves  
dates  
vegetable marrow  
pomegranate  
little fish  
a fish head.

Each of these foods is accompanied by an appropriate blessing for the year to come. For example, the last blessing, which we recited over the magnificent head of a dentex (*sinagrida*), translates as: 'May it be your will O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that we should be the head and not the tail'.

After the festive meal (for which many thanks to our friends at ELA) we joined together in singing the *zemirah* (table song) *tsur mishelo akhalnu*, in which we give thanks for the food we have eaten, and look forward to the redemption of our world from its present-day sorrows. In this connection it is interesting that this year has the number תשע"ח ([5]778), which can be considered as the abbreviation of the Hebrew phrase 'May it be the year of the time designated for our redemption'. Surely the world we are living in is seriously

in need of God's redemption!

The following morning we had an excellent service in the synagogue, with many visitors, some of whom read from the Torah without any preparation. A highlight of the service was Dennis Weinberg's brilliant blowing of the shofar. On the second day we had a shortened service, and then read the story of the Akedah (the 'Binding of Isaac', Genesis 22) and discussed its meaning. Why was this reading chosen for this solemn festive period? How can it be right for a father to agree to kill his son? How can we identify an authentic command from God? And what of the contemporary resonance of the story? We thought about the Parable of the Old Man and the Young, by Wilfred Owen, who was killed in action in 1918:

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
and builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

In a similar vein, in Israel today hundreds of poems have been written accusing the old men (the politicians) of sending the young into battle to die as sacrifices.

There is a lesson in the story, too, for inter-religious understanding. In Christianity, the story is about God's love: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16). In Islamic teaching, Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael is a powerful lesson in submission (which is the meaning of 'Islam'). What is the lesson of the Akedah for us Jews? Maybe this: that God does not demand inhuman sacrifices.

There is value in all the many interpretations. This





is a discussion that must continue.

The Days of Awe that begin with Rosh Hashanah come to a climax and conclusion with the fast day of Kippur. We were blessed to have once again the presence of Gershon Coren, who came from Israel with his wife Josanne to help us with our services. Gershon's passion and devotion made the services unforgettable. It also turned out that among the large congregation there were two visiting rabbis, who both made their contribution to the services, as did other visitors. After Dennis

sounded the final blast on the shofar we all made Havdala in the courtyard, and enjoyed a lavish spread, courtesy of To Hani restaurant.

To round off the festive season we celebrated Sukkot. The sukkah looked beautiful, and a good number of members and visitors attended the services.

I cannot begin to thank all those who put so much effort into making these celebrations such a resounding success!

Nicholas de Lange

## Holidays and Liturgical Life at Etz Hayyim

Joined by quite a number of visitors, we celebrated **Simhat Torah**. We took out the Torah from the Ehal, showered it with candy, and danced with it in the synagogue and the courtyard.

For **Hanukkah**, we lit the first candle and sang a series of festival songs after a short service in the synagogue, followed by a community dinner including *sufganiot* and other festival dishes. Equally, on the last day of the festival we met again to light the eighth candle, again followed by a community dinner.

On 30 January, we gathered to celebrate **Tu B'Shevat**. Around twenty people joined the annual festival during which G-d is praised for making the trees blossom and for the fertility given to nature. As usual, all members of the Havurah brought dishes made of fruit and vegetables for a shared dinner after the service. Furthermore, as every year, with the help of Nikos' *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*, the staff cooked Ashuré, a Sephardi dish traditionally eaten by many Jewish communities all over Greece. The sentence "Let's cook Assure!" was initially confusing for me ... as one of our cats has that same name. However, we can happily announce that our cat was not eaten up, which can't be said for the dish.

While the synagogue was still a temporary construction site as the final stage of the renovation works hadn't been completed yet, we celebrated **Purim** after the Erev Shabbat service on 2 March and were joined by many visitors, some from as far as Scandinavia, and friends. Marios Polakis, a long-term friend of Nikos, who attended the ceremony, observed: "This was certainly the most multicultural religious festivity I ever attended." We spoke about Nikos and remembered how he didn't like the holiday of Purim very much but adored Vashti and often rather spoke about her and her story than reading the Megilat Esther.

## Etz Hayyim's 'Mini-Boss'

Kabbalat Shabbat services are now led by Roger Yayon, even though he does not really like the term "to lead." Born in France to Egyptian Jewish parents, he decided to move to Crete several years ago and soon became a dedicated member of the Etz Hayyim havurah. In the last few years, he assisted Nikos in conducting services and was fondly called by him the "mini-boss" - a nickname happily picked up by the havurah. On Fridays, Roger now distributes the various sections of the service among the attendees for reading and thus continues a practice introduced by Nikos.



## Weekly Services at Etz Hayyim

**Kabbalat Shabbat Services** are held every Friday.

**Candle lighting times are posted on our website:**

[www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/events](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/events)

(click on the relevant dates in the calendar).

**Other Holidays will be announced on our website, by email and on our Facebook page.**

**See calendar for upcoming holidays on page 20.**



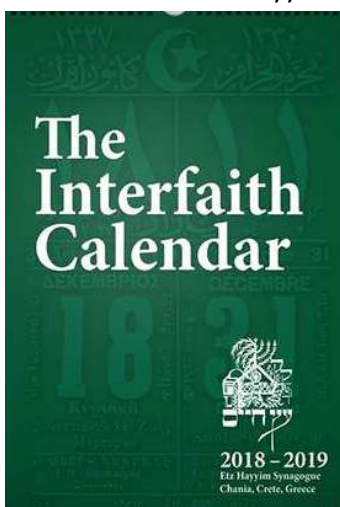


## Upcoming Event: Memorial Service for Nikos Stavroulakis

The memorial service for Nikos will take place at Etz Hayyim Synagogue on 29 April at 12 noon. The service will be led by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin; it will be recorded and the video made available online for those friends of Nikos who will not be able to join us for the event.

On the occasion of Nikos' memorial we will publish a new edition of Etz Hayyim's Interfaith Calendar and are thus continuing a tradition established by Nikos.

As usual, the calendar includes Jewish, Christian and Muslim holidays. This edition covers May 2018 to December 2019 and is illustrated with a rich collection of Nikos' wonderful art work. The calendar can be ordered from the Synagogue office; price and shipping costs will be announced online.



Νικόλαος Ντανιέλ Χαννάν-Σταυρουλάκης ל"צ

Nicholas Daniel Hannan-Stavroulakis ל"צ

20 June 1932 - 19 May 2017

16 Sivan 5692 - 23 Iyyar 5777

### Memorial Service

The memorial service (Nahalat/Yahrzeit) for Nikos will take place on 29 April 2018 at 12 noon.

### ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝΟ

Το μνημόσυνο για τον Νίκο θα γίνει στις

29 Απριλίου 2018, στις 12 μ.μ.

## Jewish Museum of Greece and Etz Hayyim: Seminar in Honor of Nikos Stavroulakis

On 3 and 4 May 2018, Etz Hayyim will co-host with the Jewish Museum of Greece (JMG) a seminar on the topic "Teaching about the Holocaust in Greece." The JMG has held this seminar in various cities in Greece; this spring it will take place in Hania for teachers from all over Crete. The seminar will take place in honor of Nikos Stavroulakis, an initiative for which we sincerely thank in particular Mrs. Zanet Batinou, the director of the JMG.

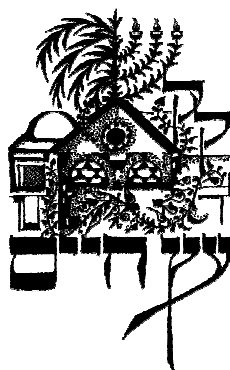
The seminar will introduce teachers to the long history of Jewish presence in Greece, the history of the Holocaust with a particular emphasis on Greece and various teaching methods and materials available for use in the classroom.

Iossif Ventura, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Company Etz Hayyim, who, as a poet, has memorialized the Cretan Jewish community that per-

ished in the Holocaust in his poem *Tanaïs* (see p. 14 for a report about the *Cantata Tanaïs* based on his poem), will be speaking at the event about his experience as a Holocaust survivor from Hania.

Based on research it has conducted and its experience in educating visitors, including school classes, about the fate of the Cretan Jewish community, the synagogue staff will contribute a Cretan perspective on the topic in lectures and during a guided tour

through the synagogue and the former Jewish quarter. The interactive map of the Jewish quarter in Hania, which is currently being prepared based on research by Katerina Anagnostaki and Daphne Lappa, will be introduced to the teachers as an educational tool in addition to the resources in the Etz Hayyim library and guided tours for school classes at the synagogue.





## Lectures at Etz Hayyim

In October 2017, Etz Hayyim hosted two lectures on Cretan Jewish history. We thank Martin Borýsek (Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Media-

val Literature, University of York, UK) and Stavros Sfakiotakis (philologist and turkologist) for providing abridged versions of their lectures for this edition of Jottings.

## Jews in Ottoman Heraklio, 1670-1760: a Community in Mobility

### Heraklio

The data that we have about the Jewish neighbourhood of Heraklio comes from written descriptions. Today there are no remnants of Jewish presence in the city. No synagogue, no public or private building survives. From the written sources, we know that the Jewish neighbourhood was located next to the sea, south of the Dermatas Bay, already since the ninth century. The area became part of the walled town some centuries later and a 'Jewish gate' towards the sea was in use.

### Jews at the Islamic court

During the Ottoman period, the Jews of Heraklio turned to the Islamic courts in order to reinforce the decisions of a rabbinic court, to prove their rights regarding money or property transactions, or to use Islamic law in their favour when Jewish law was against them. The Kadi – the judge who presided over matters in accordance to the Islamic law – could ensure property titles for Jews of the Ottoman Empire, could prove the existence of legal heirs of an Ottoman Jew, so that the government would stay out of those matters. Quite often the Jews of Heraklio used the possibility of turning to the Islamic court as a threat towards their disputants, so that they would end up solving their matters within their religious community.

### The cases in the Islamic court

During my research, I located 75 cases in the archives of Heraklion's Islamic court involving Jews. However, it is not easy to estimate the percentage of those cases in comparison to the total number of cases brought before the religious court in that period.

The very first case is recorded on 27 August 1670 and the last one on 09 October 1763, which means that almost

one century is covered through this archive. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there are quite a number of 'Jewish' cases in the Islamic court, while during the 18<sup>th</sup> century there are fewer.

It is quite interesting to note the regions mentioned in the archive: in most cases Handakas (today Heraklio) is written down as a reference location (34 cases). In some other cases there is only a general reference to the Jewish neighbourhood (18 cases). However, we can also find references to villages outside the city of Heraklio, as well as to other locations on Crete, like Rethimnon, Margarites or Monastiraki Amariou. The village Houmeriakos Mirabellou is mentioned in one case that has to do with a murder. The town of Hania is mentioned only in three

cases.

Moreover, there are locations outside Crete involved in the cases of Jews in the Islamic court of law. Those places can give us an idea of the routes and contacts of the Cretan Jews with other regions, outside the island. What is also revealed is the range of the Ottoman legal system, which allows to put people on trial in Heraklio who are visitors in the town and

end up in disputes with the locals. The places outside Crete mentioned in the archive are Rhodes, Milos, Chios, Nafplion, Ioannina, Alexandria, Egypt, Smyrna, Bosnia, Venice and Salonica.

Regarding the gender, a total of 21 women are mentioned in those court cases: 13 Jews, 4 Muslims, 3 Christians and 1 of unknown religion. Up to the year 1671, male Jews were written down with their surnames, e.g. Gaetanis, Samuel, Martzos, Menahem, Kalats, Pres, Mozel, Kapuyia, Nasouma, Haftos etc.

The religion of the people involved with Jews in those





court cases are as follows: 27 cases were raised between a Jew and a Muslim, while 14 cases were raised between a Jew and the Ottoman administration. 13 cases have to do with Jews who directly address themselves to the Islamic court. In 9 cases the disputants are Jews and Christians. One can also find 6 cases of Muslims or Christians who lived in the Jewish neighbourhood and end up in the Islamic court. There are also 2 more cases between Muslims and Christians who lived in the Jewish neighbourhood. In 2 cases the Jews involved have French citizenship. Some more cases have to do with an English, a French and a Greek Jew or a Jew and an Armenian.

Those cases can be categorised according to their content as follows: 24 cases regard economic matters, that is, either debt arrangements, payoffs or lending money. 18 cases deal with property matters. Property can be either buildings in the town or agricultural fields. In most cases the buildings are under sale or transmission and the fields need to be accurately bordered. In 16 cases the matter that arises is the relations between the Jewish community and the Ottoman administration. These relations are illustrated by various kinds of problems that those cases try to deal with, e.g. the tax policy towards the religious communities or requests for the decrease of those taxes. These relations can also be noted in the fines that are imposed on the community for various reasons, disagreements regarding rents in the neighbourhood (*vakuf*), the way that water is distributed in the town or that wheat is distributed to the bakeries, the location of the Jewish cemetery etc.

In 3 documents, the court is to decide on the cases of

Jews who went to eastern Crete to sell products and were murdered there. In 3 other documents the plaintiff was Muslim and accuses Jews of stealing objects from different houses. There are also 2 cases regarding female slavery: in the first case, a Christian woman was legally sold from a Muslim to a Jewish man. In the second one a Muslim woman was illegally sold from a Jewish to a Muslim man.

Other cases have to do with forced conversion to Islam, with the records of Jews with French nationality who lived in Heraklio, with pre-surgery agreements in the case of malfunctions during the surgery, with expulsions from other cities for breaking trade agreements, with accusations against Jews for immoral life, sexual exploitation of women and wine consumption. Last but not least, there is a case of a Jew who turns to the Islamic court because some Muslims used the term 'Jew' against him as an offensive description.

One could support a theory regarding the mobility of the Jews of Heraklio based on this archive: that this community was a community without a steady residence. They moved around the Mediterranean, as well as within the town borders, following the limits given by the administration. As a minority they tried to be discreet and not to provoke the major religious groups. They also tried to co-operate with the Ottoman authorities since it was in their best interest. Local as well as distant trading networks are the reason for their moving around the Ottoman territories, but also the eastern Mediterranean and northern Europe.

Stavros Sfakiotakis

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## Legislating Jewish Candia – *Takkanot Kandiyyah* as a Statement on Authority and Continuity in a Venetian-era Cretan Jewish Community

In 1583, Crete had been a part of the Venetian dominion in the Eastern Mediterranean for over 370 years and although the Republic's power was gradually declining, it would not be until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century until the extremely valuable island would be lost to the Ottomans. Nevertheless, in an almost accidental way 1583 marks the end of one era in the Jewish history of Crete, since it was in October of that year that the last entry in the collection of Jewish communal byelaws now known as *Takkanot Kandiyyah* was written.

*Takkanot Kandiyyah* (תקנות קנדיא) is a corpus of legislative decrees concerning the administration of the

Jewish community in Candia and everyday life in it, issued over several centuries by the community's leading officials and first copied as a unified collection in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Cretan Jewish historian, Rabbi and communal leader Elijah Capsali (ca. 1485–1550).

The oldest documents contained in *Takkanot Kandiyyah* were written in 1228 and the latest were still being added to the collection for several decades after Capsali's death, until the early 1580s. *Takkanot Kandiyyah* therefore documents the life of the Candiot Jews for much of the Venetian era (1211–1669) and does so through the



eyes of the men whose responsibility it was to ensure the community's prosperity, proper adherence to its religious duties as well as a smooth coexistence with the Venetian government.

I will attempt to draw a sketch of *Takkanot Kandiyyah* which will put it into its historical context and present it as both a historical source on the lives of the Jews in Venetian Crete and as a highly interesting work of Jewish legal literature. In a highly original way, the collection informs us about events and incidents in Candiot Jewish community and also proposals of solutions to practical problems, and contains many comments in which the many authors of the various statutes express their opinions about life in the community and its position in Venetian-dominated Crete.

After a short introduction to the history of Jewish Candia, I will demonstrate the many interesting facets of *Takkanot Kandiyyah* based on a selection of texts from various stages of the Venetian era. The sample texts will allow us to appreciate the range of problems the community's leaders faced, the possible solutions that were at their disposal, and, most importantly, will give us a glimpse into the atmosphere that shaped the life in the community.

The Jews lived in Crete at least since late Antiquity, but the earliest reliable sources are documenting their presence here come from the beginning of the Venetian period, when the most important Cretan city and the seat of its principal Jewish community was in Candia (today's Iraklio). Both the island's administrative capital and its largest Jewish settlement later relocated to Canea/Chania in the Ottoman era.

The Cretan Jewish population was diverse, both in terms of the area of their origin and of their cultural and religious habits. The Greek-speaking Romaniot Jews, settled in Greece since late Antiquity, seem to have been the core segment of Candiot Jewry. Alongside this oldest layer of the Jewish population lived Jews who had come to Crete later, from various areas of Europe and the

Near East, including the Jews of Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Italian traditions.

The Candiot communal *takkanot* or internal byelaws collected in *Takkanot Kandiyyah* are written predominantly in Hebrew with relatively few Greek and Venetian loanwords and several passages in Aramaic. They concern a wide range of topics, from matters of religious law and ceremonies to more practical problems of everyday life.

To illustrate how the former could intervene with the latter, we can quote one of the earliest *takkanot*, issued in August 1228 and addressing the lack of respect many members of the community showed for the ritual purity of the *mikveh*:


“Let it be known that the house of immersion is built to fulfil a splendid commandment, oh how noble and great it is, just like G-d commanded us in our Torah [...]”

After this ceremonious introduction, the decree warns that: “if a woman immerses herself in a *mikveh* which is not ritually pure, the children she may conceive would be born as *mamzerim*, and therefore ... we decided that no-one from the Jewish people shall enter the *mikveh* to wash their clothes, veils, shawls and fineries there. No-one shall use it in such a way, so that the bath be not defamed and spoilt. Lest the sons of those who immerse

themselves there be born *mamzerim*, let all uphold this law.” (lit. התורה [TK XII, 2–3; 9–13 ])


From this excerpt we see that the Jews of Candia could have a remarkably practical view of what the *mikveh* can be good for, but also that in the eyes of the Jewish leaders, the communal enactments were nothing short of the law, *ha-torah*.

In *Takkanot Kandiyyah*, there are many more instances of less-than-appropriate approaches to religious institutions and ceremonies from later periods as well. Perhaps the most colourful account comes from February 1545 and was issued on the initiative of Elijah Capsali on the Eve of Purim of that year. The matter at hand was the



**Legislating Jewish Candia -  
*Takkanot Kandiyyah* as a statement on authority and continuity  
in a Venetian-era Cretan Jewish community**

In the context of medieval and early modern Jewish legal literature, *Takkanot Kandiyyah* is a unique historical source and literary work. This collection of communal byelaws and other legal documents written in Hebrew records more than 300 years in the history of the Jewish community in Candia (Heraklion) during the time when it was the capital of Venetian Crete and offers us an unprecedented insight into the social and everyday life of Cretan Jews.



A lecture by **Martin Borysek** (Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Medieval Literature, University of York, United Kingdom)

Introduction: **Nicholas de Lange** (Emeritus Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the University of Cambridge and Visiting Rabbi at Etz Hayyim Synagogue)

**Tuesday | 3 October | 8 PM**

**ETZ HAYYIM  
SYNAGOGUE**

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www.etz-hayyim-hania.org





rather unruly manner in which the youngsters of Jewish Candia used to celebrate the joyful feast of Purim, or more precisely, how they tried to produce the traditional noise needed to make Haman's name inaudible during the reading from the book of Esther.

From Capsali's account we learn that some young men practised this tradition rather too enthusiastically, so much so that the community's leaders (urged on vehemently by Capsali) saw it necessary to forbid firing small rockets and firecrackers during the service (called *roketa we-skopyeta*, a nice example of Venetian loanwords denoting modern devices connected to the Venetian cultural milieu).

To quote Capsali himself:

"I, the undersigned, saw the evil habit, recently spread among the youngsters during the days of Purim, namely that they throw fiery devices, *rocketas* and *skopyetas* in the synagogue when the Megillah is read and scare the reader, burying him in flames, so that he is most often forced to stop the reading and sometimes has to run for fear that his clothes or even his face may catch fire. Likewise, the whole congregation rises, each from his seat and run, this man hither and that man thither, fearing the fire-crackers [...] so that mighty chaos arises in the synagogue and no-one can hear or understand the reading." [TK CI, 2–8]

The author then goes on to inform us that "in his ardent love of God, greatly angered", he summoned a communal assembly which pronounced a ban on firing any pyrotechnical devices in any of the community's four synagogues (incidentally informing us that in 1535, there were four active houses of worship in Candia) on the Eve of Purim and on the feast day itself. However, the decree also explicitly states that outside in open public spaces, everyone is free to act as he sees fit, in the spirit of festive joy. Those who should fail to obey the decree would be publicly called transgressors of the communal law, but beyond naming and shaming (and Capsali's pleas that the Lord may not forgive the culprits), the statute calls for no further punishment. This decree thus shows great concern for public piety in the community, but at the same time attempts to achieve a manageable compromise that would be acceptable to both sides of the conflict.

The third excerpt from *Takkanot Kandiyah* was likewise written by Elijah Capsali, but reports a much more serious event, where the physical safety of the community was potentially at great risk. Capsali's account of this

event also offers us a great deal of information about relations between the Jewish community and their Christian neighbours, the authority of the community's head in the eyes of Venetian officials and about the role of collective memory and remembering in the spiritual life of Candia's Jewish community.

This text was written in June 1541, but the event which it describes had taken place three years before, in the midst of the Venetian Republic's third war against the Ottoman Empire (1537–40). During the conflict, the Turks invaded Venetian colonial possessions, not least Crete herself, in a brief but fierce demonstration of power. Capsali's reminiscence of the war events shows persuasively the deep impact this conflict had on the society of Venetian-ruled Crete.

However, the author is not concerned with the war campaign itself, but with a sudden outbreak of panic that the danger of Turkish invasion caused among the Candiot population in June 1538, a panic which threatened to escalate into a massive anti-Jewish pogrom. Capsali recounts how, in the panicked atmosphere of mounting fear of the Turkish invasion, a rumour spread in Candia that "people who looked like Turks" had been given shelter in the Jewish quarter (cf. TK XCIX, 83–4). This allegation provoked an explosion of anti-Jewish rage and an armed mob entered the quarter, where only women, children and the elderly remained, demanding that the spies be handed over and threatening the remaining Jews with death, should they fail to comply.

An angry mob of Candiot Greeks entered the Jewish quarter and demanded that the Turkish spies be given to them. When the Jews denied that they knew of any such spies, the situation became critical and some of the Christians started plundering Jewish homes. However, Capsali, who was present, recognised one of the Greeks as his friend and through him, sent a message to the Venetian military governor, asking for help. To quote the text:

"But the Lord summoned to my help one Gentile who was dear to me. Through him I sent a message to the *provedidor* [i.e. the military governor], saying 'Help, my lord, for *the waters compassed me about, even to the soul* [Jonah 2:6]. Unless you come in haste, know that we shall all be dead, and yours will be the guilt.'" (ibid., 110–12)

The governor came swiftly and with Capsali's help was able to calm the tensions. The "thanksgiving and praises to the Lord" that followed, celebrating the "glorious sal-



vation” of the community were a natural reaction to an incident which the Jews, with justification, regarded as an existential threat, although it passed speedily and caused unexpectedly little damage to the community.

Characteristically for *Takkanot Kandyah*, this account is not included in order to bear witness to a dramatic historical event, but with the purpose of establishing a communal day of celebration and rejoicing on which the Jews of Candia were to commemorate their miraculous deliverance from imminent catastrophe. Such “local Purims”, or annual celebrations of the community’s miraculous escape from imminent disaster, are a common phenomenon in the life of medieval and early modern Jewish communities.

Very interestingly, there are sources that confirm that this memorial day was still celebrated in the Jewish community in Chania in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is important proof that some traditions established in the Venetian era in the city of Candia had very deep roots and survived the transplantation of the Jewish centre of Crete to Chania, as well as the more general changes in living conditions that came with the Ottoman rule.

This narrative is essentially a moral story whose task is to celebrate that even in the face of great danger, the Candiot Jews could safely rely on the protection of their God. In this story, the Greeks are depicted as an anonymous, threatening mob, whereas both the wise Jewish

communal elder in his role as leader and advocate of his people, and the Venetian *proveditor*, as the embodiment of the secular law, are ultimately instruments of Divine providence, protecting the Jewish community. Capsali’s account of the narrowly averted pogrom provides a superb example of the depth of detail and immediacy with which *Takkanot Kandyah* depicts the communal and social life of the Jews in the capital of Venetian Crete.

In this brief overview, I could do hardly more than scratch the surface of our topic, which is the richness of life of the Jewish community in Candia during the Venetian period. Due to time constraints, I had to omit mention of many interesting topics addressed by *Takkanot Kandyah*, perhaps most interesting among them the difficulties which surrounded the integration of the Sephardic and *converso* immigrants into the Candiot community. Nevertheless, it was my hope to at least lift the veil from the treasure that is *Takkanot Kandyah*. We are very fortunate to have at our disposal a corpus of text which not only tells us with such richness of detail what was going on in the Jewish community of Venetian Candia, but which also gives us the chance to appreciate how the people of those times saw their world, what values they held dear, and in what ways they strived to keep such values alive.

Martin Borýsek

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## On the Occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day

*The thick, white loose-leaf binder where I keep relevant clippings, posters, invitations, articles, newsletters and cards relating to the Chania synagogue, was filled to overflowing, stacks of unsorted items spilling from its covers. (Early) spring cleaning brought its rewards! What follows is one of them, (extracts from) the script of a talk given by Lorenzo Garcia, first at the American Base in Souda Bay where he was stationed from February 2005*

### *A Talk Given by Lorenzo Ovadiah Garcia*

Good morning, my name is Lorenzo Garcia. My Hebrew name is Ovadiah, which means “Servant or Worshipper of G-d.”[...] I was asked to speak to you for the NSA Souda Bay Base Holocaust Remembrance Day. I would like to thank you for the opportunity of speaking with

*to December 2012, and then at Etz Hayyim in May or so of 2012. It is reprinted with Lorenzo’s permission, to tie in with this year’s observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27th. Lorenzo, American by birth, was a regular at Etz Hayyim services and functions and a member of the Havurah until his transfer to Italy. We look forward to seeing him again, and meanwhile wish him all the best!*

Natalie Ventura

you all today. This is always a hard subject to talk about. I thought long and hard about what I should say. My intent ... is not to reiterate what you may possibly [already] know but to leave you with something more that will make you look within yourselves where you can learn more than I can teach you. ...

Do we ever think in our day and age, the heavy burden

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of pain and scars that can last a lifetime from a racial epithet or insult? No matter whom it is against? Even in joking? ... the Holocaust was not only verbal [of course] but [also] physical. First and foremost: yes, the Holocaust did happen, and yes, not just to the Jewish people. Many others suffered persecution and murder at the hands of the Nazis but Jews were primarily targeted. The extent of the Nazi terror is usually broken down as follows:

Jews	6 million
Freemasons	80,000
Soviet POWs	3 million
Slovenes	25,000
Ethnic Poles	2 million
Homosexuals	15,000
Romani	1,500,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	5,000
Disabled	250,000

*The Holocaust was not so much the overthrow of reason as its triumph over morality. It allowed a scientific ultrarationality - what Hitler called "ice cold logic" - to provide murder with rational justification.*

— William Tucker, *The Science and Politics of Racial Research*

What does this word 'Holocaust' make you feel now? How often have we used a word without thinking of its effect, no matter how racist or anti-Semitic it is? How important it is to understand the words we use in our everyday vocabulary.... There is power in what we say and as it is said can cut deeper than a knife.

What really happened during the Holocaust came down to one thing... genocide. Genocide is defined as "the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or part, of an ethnic, racial, religious or national group."... The term

genocide was coined in 1944, [it] comes from the Greek root *-yenos* (birth, race, stock, kind), secondly from the Latin *-cidium* (cutting, killing) via the French *-cide*.

How does a word get overused, lose its meaning or how can it change your perception? Yes, there was genocide before the Second World War and after, but it was not clearly defined until the Holocaust.

What does that mean to us sitting here? ... What I am

most concerned about is how our modern world has desensitized its true meaning. You hear this word and it does not scare you as it should. ...

Do we feel anything now about what happened then? Ask yourself that. We cannot really know or feel because it is a distant memory to us. ... Our grandparents though lived through this era and knew first-hand. ... the 20th and 21st centuries saw the most atrocious treatment of man against man ever. ... We forget too quickly. ...

Let me give you a personal example. In the country you are residing in now [Greece], there was at one time a large and prosperous population of Jews. Communities that had existed since antiquity. Even before the Christian era. ...

Every time I sit in the synagogue in Chania on Sabbaths or for prayers, it feels like there is ... an emptiness. ... at one time this ... building was bustling with families and people, there was a life here. The Jewish Quarter in Chania is in the area of El Mondos [*locals know where this is.*] You know that in [Greece] 85% of the Jewish population was murdered in the Second World War?

What do I think when I sit [in the synagogue] and contemplate what we lost? We lost many generations, old people, adults and young people. In old people we lost their wisdom, history and traditions. In adults we lost their contributions to continuing life, and in children lost their hope of a future and new generations. The 276

Jews of Chania were rounded up and arrested on the morning of the 20th May 1944. They were taken to Iraklio on trucks and put on a boat along with Greek Christian and Italian prisoners bound for the mainland of Greece and from there were to be taken to the camps. Being a time of

war, while their boat was en route it was sunk and all the prisoners aboard, including the Jews, drowned.

The persecution of the Jews of Greece by the Nazis began in 1943. This included deportations to the death camps. The Archbishop of Athens and Greece at the time, Archbishop Damaskinos, submitted a letter signed by prominent Greek citizens in defense of Jews who were being persecuted.





# Jottings

According to The Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, the appeal of Damaskinos and his fellow Greeks is unique, as no document similar to the protest against the Nazis during World War II has come to light in any other European country.

Part of the letter reads:

*The Greek Orthodox Church and the Academic World of Greek People Protest against the Persecution [sic]... The Greek people were...deeply grieved to learn that the German Occupation Authorities have already started to put into effect a program of gradual deportation of the Greek Jewish community... and that the first groups of deportees are already on their way to Poland.*

*According to the terms of the armistice, all Greek citizens, without distinction of race or religion, were to be treated equally by the Occupation Authorities. The Greek Jews have proven themselves...valuable contributors to the economic growth of the country [and] law-abiding citizens who fully understand their duties as Greeks. They have made sacrifices for the Greek country, and were always on the front lines of the struggle of the Greek nation to defend its inalienable historical rights...*

*In our national consciousness, all the children of Mother Greece are an inseparable unity: they are equal members of the national body irrespective of religion... Our holy religion does not recognize superior or inferior qualities based on race or religion, as it is stated: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek' and thus condemns any attempt to discriminate or create racial or religious differences. Our common fate both in days of glory and in periods of national misfortune forged inseparable bonds between all Greek citizens, without exemption, irrespective of race... Today we are ... deeply concerned with the fate of our fellow citizens who are Jews...we have lived together in both slavery and freedom, and we have come to appreciate their feelings, their brotherly attitude, their economic activity, and most important, their indefectible patriotism...*

Damaskinos went on to publish this letter, even though the local SS commander, Jürgen Stroop, responsible for putting down the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, threatened to execute him by firing squad. Does anyone know his reply?

Damaskinos' famous response to him was:

*According to the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, priests are hung, not shot. Please respect our traditions.*

Above all we lost what could have been possibly a better world, but we will never know.

How was genocide defined before then? Maybe it is something deeper. I think maybe with pre-historic man this [was] written in our DNA. Think about it, our fear and distrust of anything foreign or different. A long time ago different tribes with different war paint or scars on their faces could be subject to this type of treatment. This is something uniquely human ... animals do not do this, do not seek out another animal with a different color fur or horns of a different shape and attempt to destroy them. One community destroying another, that is human or humanity or lack thereof, slipping from reason.

You can ask yourself then, how did

this happen? ... several factors contributed to this. The 19th and early 20th centuries gave rise to the Industrial Revolution, which contributed machines to enrich and elongate life, but also machines of war and destruction. Mass communication brought things like telephones, movies to spread propaganda, railways which the Nazis used for the transport of people. Efficient ways to live and efficient ways to take lives. ...

[Hand] in hand with industrialization, nationalism [was] a contributing factor. This was big in Europe and in the United States at that time: one people, one religion, one language, one country. ... Ask yourself again, would I have said something? ...

Genocide can be [set] off by many factors that can



Archbishop Theophilos Damaskinos; on May 27, 1969, Yad Vashem recognized him as Righteous Among the Nations.





# Jottings

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"justify" it, but in our deepest being we know this is unbearable. Have we learned anything? We can say No, because it [has] happened even in our own history and continues to happen even now. ...

I want to bring to your attention a few, very few examples of genocide. Some known and some not. My apologies to those not named, but I ask after today [that we] remember these and all other people who have ever been affected by genocide ...

The Holocaust and all its victims  
Dafur, Sudan  
The Soviet famine of 1932-33 affecting Ukraine, Kazakhstan and some densely-populated regions of Russia  
The Dominican Republic during the Parsley Massacre  
Rwanda  
The Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians in the Ottoman

Empire  
Burundi  
The Filipino Moros in the Philippine-American War  
East Timor  
Herero and Namaqua Genocide in German South-West Africa  
The Irish during the Great Famine  
Bosnia  
Cambodia  
Guatemala  
The Partition of India  
The Aborigines of Australia and Tasmania  
The American Indians

So, I ask once more, what have we learned? ...

## Now Available Online: Archive of *Jottings* Back Issues

Since October 2000, Etz Hayyim's newsletter *Jottings* has been published and has reported on community life, cultural events and various projects at the synagogue, and has also provided information about Cretan Jewish history and traditions. In its own way, *Jottings* reflects the development of Etz Hayyim since its reopening and Nikos' role and impact on its unique inclusive character. For everyone who wants to take a look (back) at Etz Hayyim's story, all back issues of *Jottings* are now available online on the synagogue's website:

[www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/research-library/](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/research-library/) (there, click on the link "Jottings - Etz Hayyim Newsletter").

We will also upload future issues. We thank our *Gedenkdienster* Christoph Steinberger for meticulously scanning all back issues.

**News from Etz Hayyim —  
We would also love to hear from you.**

Our sincere thanks to the friends and members of the Etz Hayyim Havurah who contributed to this newsletter.

**We would also love to hear from you.**

Contact the synagogue if you would like to contribute an article, share information, ideas, feedback or criticism.

The next *Jottings* will be published for Rosh Hashanah 5779. Please send contributions by **August 15, 2018**.





## Cantata Tanais

*In June 2017, Etz Hayyim hosted the reading of the poem Tanais which commemorates the Cretan Jewish community who perished in World War II. This poem by Iossif Ventura has now been set to music as the "Cantata Tanais." In the text below, Iossif Ventura recounts the story of his creation of the cantata.*

"In my neighbourhood, next to our house, the Minervo family lived. It was the Samouel Minervo family, with two daughters, Julia and Jenny...

We were sleeping, when we heard car noises, loud voices and a general uproar. The German who lived in our house (ed. one of the house rooms was occupied by Nazis) advised us not to pay any attention and to step away from the windows. A woman was shouting 'they are taking us away, they are taking us away, farewell.' It was Julia's and Jenny's mother. It was a horrible, such a horrible thing. The trucks were outside, already loaded. They forced them into the trucks and then left and we never saw them again."

(abstract from the account by Mrs. Lili Fiotaki, included in my book IBBUR/ Οι Εβραίοι της Κρήτης 1900-1950, to be published by Melani Publications, in September 2018).

By the end of 2016, I was still working on my book, which deals with the history of the Jews of Crete. I visited Marielli Sfakianaki for the purposes of the book, since her father, Kostas Sfakianakis (Director of the Cretan Conservatorium and my mother's music teacher) had hidden my parents in his house during the German occupation in World War II. Marielli and I talked about our

childhood and I gave her two elegies I had written and published, 'Tanais' and 'Kiklonio', telling her that my grief for the loss of the Cretan Jewish community was written down in those works.

One month later Marielli told me how moved she was by the elegies. My poems had inspired her to set them to

music. She composed and orchestrated 11 poems for small orchestra/ ensemble. Marielli also added chorus parts from a previous work of hers on "The Psalms of David" and thus created a liturgy for those who were lost. With the support of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, we created a demo disc for five of the Kantata poems.

On the 29 January, Babis Kavrohorianos, the editor, producer and host of the radio show «Πέντε Γραμμών Γράμματα» ['Letters in Five Lines'] broadcasted a presentation of a part of the works on the Third Programme of ERT, with the following contributors:

Soprano: Victoria Manolidou  
Alto: Katerina Roussou  
Tenor: Antonis Koronaios  
String Quintet under Raphael Pylarinos

1st Violin: Odysseas Korelis  
2nd Violin: Anastasios Gratsias  
Viola: Antonis Manias  
Cello: Vaggelis Nina  
Contrabass: Theodoros Lignos  
Voice: Iossif Ventura  
Sound engineer: Kostas Katsantonis


"The Psalms of David" were sound-recorded in Heraklio, Crete in 1983, performed by the soloist Kiki Morfoniou and the ERT Chorus, under Antonios Kontogeorgiou.

Both Marielli and I hope that the Cantata will be presented live in the future.

Iossif Ventura

### TANAIΣ

Παρουσίαση του ποιητικού βιβλίου του Ιωσήφ Βεντούρα  
Presentation of poetry book "Tanais" by Iossif Ventura




Παρουσίαση βιβλίου – ποιητής Λεωνίδας Κακάρωγλου	Book Presentation – poet Leonidas Kakaroglou
Ανάγνωση Ποιμάτων – Ιωσήφ Βεντούρας	Poetry Reading (in English) – Natalie Ventura
Σάββατο, 10 Ιουνίου 2017, 8 μμ	Saturday, 10 June 2017, 8 pm
Συναγωγή Ετζ Χαγίμ, Πάροδος Κονδυλάκη, Χανιά	Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Parodos Kondylaki, Hania

Στο δίγλωσσο (Ελληνικά-Αγγλικά) ποιητικό του βιβλίο ο Ιωσήφ Βεντούρας έχει αναφερθεί στο δράμα της εξόντωσης των Εβραίων της Κρήτης από τους Γερμανούς κατακτητές και γενικότερα στο ιστορικό γεγονός της εθολόθρευσης των Εβραίων της Ευρώπης στα στρατόπεδα θανάτου των Ναζι.

Ανάμεσα στους ελάχιστους Εβραίους της Κρήτης που γλύτωσαν από τους Γερμανούς ήταν και η οικογένεια του ποιητή. Ο Ιωσήφ Βεντούρας γεννήθηκε στα Χανιά της Κρήτης και ζει στην Αθήνα. Ποιήματα του έχουν μεταφραστεί στα Αγγλικά, Γαλλικά, Εβραϊκά, Ισπανικά, Αραβικά και Σερβικά.

In the bilingual (Greek-English) edition of his poetry book Iossif Ventura captures the drama of the annihilation of the Cretan Jewish community during the German occupation and, more generally, the destruction of the Jews of Europe in the Nazi death camps.

The poet's family is among the very few Cretan Jews who escaped the Nazi onslaught on Crete. Iossif Ventura was born in Hania and now lives in Athens. His poetry has been translated into English, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Arabic and Serbo-Croatian.



Etz Hayyim Synagogue | Συναγωγή Ετζ Χαγίμ  
Parodos Kondylaki, Hania | Πάροδος Κονδυλάκη, Χανιά  
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www.etz-hayyim-hania.org





## Major Renovation Works at Etz Hayyim

Since its reopening in 1999, Etz Hayyim has seen several layers of new paint, a partial replacement of roof tiles and substantial renovation works after the arson attacks in 2010. Being a historic building in a sea-side town, Etz Hayyim has faced, in addition to the usual wear and tear, major problems with humidity in the walls of the building. In October last year, extreme rainfall even caused the synagogue and office to be flooded with about 50 cm of water.

Even without this last extreme event, major renovation works had become urgently necessary and were carried out in the past months: the electrical system was renewed and additional lighting installed; the roof was completely retiled and the building insulated against humidity; the interior walls were cleaned and painted with breathable materials; the exterior walls repainted.

Over the last two years we raised funds for this much-needed renovation and would like to particularly thank

the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the German Embassy in Athens, Michael Stein and Daniel Stuzin as well as an anonymous donor for their generous support which made possible these much-needed works.

In a next step, parts of the Ehal and Bimah as well as several doors in the synagogue and adjacent buildings need to be renewed, and we plan to install an air-condition - not only to cool the synagogue during events in the summer (though this will of course be very much welcomed by attendees), but much more importantly to reduce humidity during winter months and thus maintain if not improve the condition of the building.

**Preserving Nikos' legacy** also includes maintaining the building of Etz Hayyim, which is an ongoing process that requires substantial funds. We therefore very much need and appreciate your continued support. Please see p. 20 in this edition for information on how to make a **donation** to Etz Hayyim.





## Visit by class of students from Lauder Pierce Jewish Studies Program, Athens

Visits from local school classes have by now become quite a regular occurrence at Etz Hayyim. On 3 January 2018, however, a class of 12- to 14-year-old Jewish students from the Lauder Pierce Jewish Studies Program in Athens with their teacher Rivkah Carl visited Etz Hayyim. At the synagogue we talked about Romaniote and Sephardi traditions and Cretan Jewish history. The students contributed short presentations they had prepared. During a walk through the former Jewish quarter we traced the presence of the local Jewish community. At the end, we met at the seminar room of the Catholic

Church, which Pater Lukas had generously given to us, to talk about Nikos and his work. We also watched a video in which Nikos talks about Etz Hayyim. After their visit, the students sent us notes about what impressed them most during their visit. Below we share their observations.

We would like to thank the students, Rivkah Carl, the Jewish Community of Athens, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and Pierce College for this visit. It gave us the chance to pass on to the young students the core of the Etz Hayyim spirit and Nikos' faith in the meaning of keeping alive the memory of the Cretan community. As one of the students put it "thanks for explaining to us that this synagogue is not abandoned, that there is somebody who cares".

Dear Synagogue of Hania,

I really want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to be able to explore such an interesting history of Jewish people. I learned many things from our trip but some of them surprised me more than the others. For example I got surprised by the fact that the synagogue was welcoming not only Jews, but other religions too. I also got impressed by the fact that the Romaniote Synagogue was really different than all the others. I really want to visit and learn more about religions and about different synagogues.

Some observations by the students ...

Ευχαριστώ πολύ για την ευκαιρία που είχατε να επισκεφθώ την Ειδική Συναγωγή των Ρομανιότων. Επίσης για όλα τα σημαντικά πράγματα που έμαθα, όπως τις διαφορές των Ρομανιότων και των Σεφαρδιτών. Η για του Νίκου και της Νίκο. Τέλος και για την καλή υποδοχή που είχατε. !!

I liked the Romaniote stories.

I learnt a lot on the differences between different kinds of Synagogues.

I was surprised by the fact that the synagogue was welcoming not only Jews, but other religions, too.

I was impressed by the earthquake that destroyed the building.

The most impressive thing was the Mikveh.

Thanks for explaining to us that this synagogue is not abandoned, which means that you care for it. Probably this is the reason why you renovate it.

Thanks for telling us about the differences between a Sephardi and a Romaniote synagogue and about Nikos and for helping me understand why it is important to learn what you told us.

Impressed by the differences between Romaniots and Sephardis.

I will remember for the rest of my life that people who are not Jews come in this synagogue.





## GEDENKDIENST News

### Time is passing by. And guess what, I still can't cook.

Half a year ago I arrived on Crete and if I look back, I simply can't believe how much I've changed. I am aware that this whole „Going abroad and becoming mature“-stuff is a horrible cliché. But like every other cliché it bears a hidden truth. I realised how differently I see things now when I visited Austria for two weeks in December, to enjoy some time comforted by parental care and to participate in choosing my successor during *Gedenkdienst's* annual *Auswahlseminar*, which turned out to be quite successful. I am more than delighted to announce that the next Gedenkdienster will be a girl as due to a new law the Holocaust Memorial Service is not only a substitute for military service but can also be a social voluntary year. Most of you probably know that I am way too politically socialized for holding back on a commentary on the political situation in Austria. Our new government is about to cut off welfare benefits and to start a polemic chivvy against those in our society who are depending on our help the most, refugees and immigrants. But as far as I can judge the situation, many Austrians will not remain silent and will not let populism win.

It seems unbelievable to me that half of my time at the Etz Hayyim Synagogue is already over. And I couldn't be more grateful for all the experiences I have been fortunate enough to make. Some were delicate pleasures, others just obscure challenges. I have met so many different people during this time and each of them has had a different lesson to teach me. I'm so thankful for all the love and support my colleagues have showed me in order to ease the difficult beginning. There were so many laughs we shared and so often we rolled our eyes synchronizably in shared disapproval. You were the very first to make me feel at home.

Apart from guiding myriads of visitors around and answering the magical three questions (How many Jews? Are you Jewish? Have you got a toilet? ... and very often in reverse order), we have been working on some extremely interesting projects, such as the expansion of our exhibition, which will soon show also Judith Humphrey's life, a friend and collaborator of Nikos Stavroulakis', whose work contributed irrefutably invaluable knowledge about Cretan Jewry.

Some workshops are still to take place and a collection of essays about *Etz Hayyim's Identity* to be published.

The idea for this project is mainly rooted in the fact that Nikos passed away and we are dedicated to preserving Nikos' heritage. I will ask several people who are connected to the synagogue to write some lines about what Etz Hayyim means to them, as this place manages to make everyone, no matter what their background is, to feel at home. Please consider this as a minor prewarning. It might be possible that I will contact you for this matter. Surprisingly enough, I found my passion for cataloguing books aka “yoga for the lazy”.

For me personally, some of the most significant days were raising the *Sukka*, which made me realise how connected and bonded the core of the Havurah truly is. There was a sense of community and companionship in the air that was hard to grasp but still undeniably existent.

In February, I went to Israel and bought some toy Judaica for use in our educational outreach program. And I must say that it was kind of amusing to visit “Chabad Village”. I bought two toy sets: one called “Shabbos Mommy”, the other one called „Shabbos Daddy“ and in view of those all my knowledge about gender studies threatened to dissolve my brain into magical, glitter powder. But the plush torah was definitely worth the trip, finally a Sefer to show to the tourists ...

All in all, I am so filled with gratitude that I've got the chance to be a volunteer in this honestly intriguing place. There are another 6 months to go, and this time I won't promise that I will be able to cook.

Christoph Steinberger





## News from previous *Gedenkdieners* ... life after Etz Hayyim

*Since 2013, we have been very fortunate to welcome young Austrian Gedenkdienst volunteers who have all been very apt and highly motivated and have significantly contributed to our work at Etz Hayyim. During their year*

*at Etz Hayyim they have become part of our Havurah and we love to hear how they have been doing after the end of their stay with us. Below we share the messages they sent for publication in Jottings.*

### **Jakob Hartmann (2013/14)**

Just after my wonderful community service at the Synagogue in Hania ended, I was already on my way towards the next step on my journey: The beautiful city of Innsbruck, located between the high mountains of the Alps, where I was going to study. My schedule was tight since it already started just 2 days after I left Chania and I hadn't even found a place to stay. But nonetheless, in the end after 2 weeks of commuting for more than 4 hours a day I finally was lucky and found a suitable place. A location change of the extreme: From the warm city by the sea to the high and snowy mountains. So over the course of the next year I was busy studying. After I managed to pass all the exams – first try – I decided it was time to take a bit of time off.

I visited friends in Germany, Sweden, and all over Europe. It was an amazing experience. I met all different kinds of interesting people but at the same time I don't think I ever came to a place like Chania with such an amazing mix of people from all over the world. In the end my journey took me back to Austria where I started a job as a network engineer, the profession I learned before coming to Hania, at a big international company.

My path to where I am now was and still is influenced by the time I spent at Etz Hayyim and by all the people I met and learned from along the way.



### **Moritz Plattner (2014/15)**

It has been a long time since I wrote some lines for the newsletter. Since then I have visited Crete twice, and every visit feels different and a bit like returning to a second home.

So, I still live in Vienna and I still study political science without much haste.

Besides studying, in the last one and a half years my second constant occupation became traditional printing. I really enjoy learning about the different techniques that I can use to create an image. Since October, I have been assisting in an alternative school-programme called "Prosa", where young refugees can get a compulsory Austrian school degree. I assist in teaching art there, and even though it can be challenging sometimes, I feel like I fit in, because the lessons take place in a traditional printing workshop and because I like the people that I meet there.

As mentioned above, I'm still studying, and I am very happy that for the coming semester I will continue my studies in Bologna. I think that my time on Crete showed me that living alone in a foreign country can be quite an experience. Also, Bologna is super for me because my mother is from Italy and I speak Italian, and this next half-year will be the first time that I will live in Italy for a longer period.

In April I will travel from Bologna to Vienna and then to Poland, because for the second time I will be part of "MoRaH", an Austrian organisation that enables Austrian school groups to take part in the "March of the Living" in Auschwitz. My work there consists of being responsible for the organisational aspects of one tour bus (punctuality, breaks, announcements to the students, etc..) and of course I will also take part in the March. In my last contribution to the newsletter in 2016, I wrote that I hope that the values and ideas that I got from Etz Hayyim will help me in finding an answer to what I want to do in the future. Now I think that there is not one answer to that question, and that it is more important that I involve these values and ideas in my day-to-day decision-making.

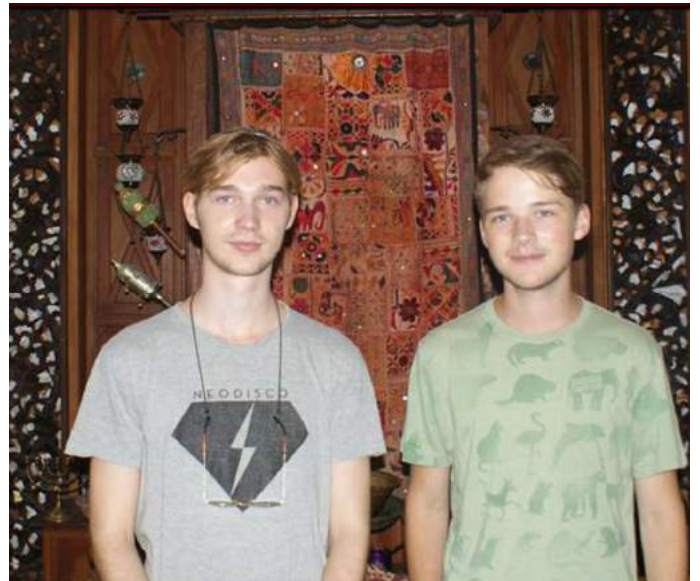


## Nino Gamsjäger (2015/16)

It has already been a year and a half since my "Gedenkdienst" at the Synagogue ended but still today I connect many fond memories and people to that time. Like Maria, whom I met in the Synagogue when she was volunteering there and who was my first friend in Chania. In Vienna, we still meet often because she moved to my hometown after she fell in love with another good friend of mine.

Now, I am studying environmental and bioresource-management which is a terribly broad field of studies, but it has also introduced me to some nice people with a similar mind-set. From time to time I meet people from the Gedenkdienst organisation at protests against the new right-wing government or at interesting lectures and workshops Gedenkdienst is hosting. (I really hope that the funds for Gedenkdienst won't be cut even more so young men and women (finally!) will still be able to do the service abroad in the future. In my opinion, the service is very important for our society in its way of fighting separation and manipulation of people and the harm that was caused by it in the past.)

Also, I want to thank Nikos Stavroulakis, due to his revival of the Synagogue I was able to do Gedenkdienst there. I am looking forward to visiting Chania again in May this year for the wedding of my good friend Dor and his fiancé Hila at Etz Hayyim.



## Daniel Jordan (2016/17)

Leaving Crete and coming back to Austria was not very easy for me, but living in Vienna immediately seemed like I had never lived anywhere else before. I just started my second semester at the Technical University in Vienna studying architecture and additionally I am also taking Greek classes. Even though I am mainly focusing on my studies I have also given some workshops for an Austrian high school student organization and attend the weekly meetings of Gedenkdienst. I follow most of the synagogue's activities and the projects Christoph is doing via the Internet and I can be very proud of the whole team and I hope to visit Crete again soon.

You can find more information about our partnership with Gedenkdienst on our website: [www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/the-synagogue/gedenkdienst-partnership](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/the-synagogue/gedenkdienst-partnership).

**Farewell, Alberto!** For three years you've been beloved company in the office on cold winter days and charmed every tourist in the courtyard on sunny summer days. You waited for us in the morning at the corner of Parodos Kondylaki and then led the way to the Synagogue gate. You took a nap literally everywhere and not even the computer keyboard was safe from your intensive need for comfort. You were particularly loved by our Gedenkdiener, one of whom even gave you your name. You were a cat of unique beauty beyond comparison and of such gentle character. We miss you very much!





## Calendar for Upcoming Holidays

### Erev Pesah

30 March, 7:30 pm Evening Service, 8 pm Seder

### Pesah Morning Service

31 March, 10 am

### Mimouna

7 April, 8:30 pm

Community potluck dinner - please bring a contribution.

### Memorial for Nikos Stavroulakis

29 April, 12 noon

### Erev Shavuot

19 May, 8 pm

### Shavuot Morning Service

20 May, 10 am

### Annual Memorial Service for Victims of Tanais and Jewish Community of Crete

17 June, 7 pm at Memorial

8 pm at Synagogue

(led by Gabriel Negrin, Rabbi of Athens)

### Erev Rosh Hashanah

9 September, 7 pm Evening Service, 8 pm Seder

### Rosh Hashanah Morning Service

10 September, 10 am

### Kol Nidre Service

18 September 6:30 pm

### Yom Kippur Service

19 September 10 am

Minha 5 pm

Neilah 6:30pm

### Erev Sukkot Service

23 September 6:30 pm

Community potluck dinner - please bring a contribution.

*Sukkah will be up until 30 September.*

### Simhat Torah

1 October 6:30 pm

**Services will be led by Etz Hayyim's Visiting Rabbi Nicholas des Lange.**

## Tax-deductible Donations in the USA

Etz Hayyim can now accept tax-deductible donations in the USA through a collective giving account at *FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds*. Any check should be made out to FJC, with "Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim" in the memo line and mailed to FJC's office at:

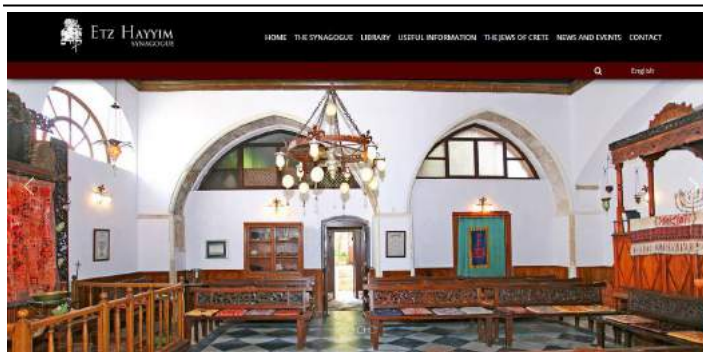
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Donors will receive a donation receipt from FJC; the funds will be made available to Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

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*We very much appreciate your continued support of our work at Etz Hayyim Synagogue. Donation receipts provided.*



## Contact us and stay in touch

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**Facebook:** Synagogue Etz Hayyim



## Jottings

**Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete**

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**Many thanks to Natalie Ventura for proofreading;  
any remaining errors are our, of course.**

*Cover illustration: Nikos Stavroulakis © Etz Hayyim Synagogue*