



Jottings

Etz Hayyim Synagogue

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Editorial

More than three months since Nikos P. Stavroulakis' passing, Etz Hayyim is still receiving condolence letters and emails from people and friends whom Nikos had, in one way or the other, touched dearly throughout his long life.

Some are writing articles, sending photos, making films, sharing interviews and stories that together, build a complex portrait of a man with many diverse interests: a man asking more questions than finding answers; inviting people in, but keeping a distance; opening up on conventional matters, but always hiding a personal secret; spicing up life with Anatolian aromas, but never forgetting his



Νικόλαος Ντανιέλ Χαννάν-Σταυρουλάκης (ז"ל)

Nicholas Daniel Hannan-Stavroulakis (ZT"l)

20 June 1932 - 19 May 2017

16 Sivan 5692 - 23 Iyyar 5777

mother's English kidney pie; teaching about the world's religions, while in the end working hard on becoming a reasonable Jew.

Many people righteously loved Nikos for his all in human behaviour. They admired his artwork and embraced his teachings, writings, building ability and enlightened knowledge on many historical matters. We have dedicated this issue of *Jottings* to Nikos, sharing with you a selection of all of the memories which we have received and we hope that you will enjoy them as we have. More eulogies will be later featured on our website where it's never too late to share a thought or to make a donation. As Nikos would have said with a twinkle in his deep blue eyes: L'Shanah Tovah and Happy Rosh Hashanah.

Marianna Vinther and the Etz Hayyim staff

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Eulogies for Nikos Stavroulakis

Dear friends of Nikos,

In the early morning hours of Friday, May 19th, Nikos Peter Stavroulakis passed away quietly in his own house. Surrounded by his close family, friends and a nurse, he had lately suffered from a string of minor strokes which, one by one, had closed down his general nerve system. In the end, there was not much that could be done for him and he finally found peace. He was honourably put to rest in the Jewish Cemetery of Nikia in Athens on May 22nd following a funeral worthy of a high Jewish spiritual leader.

Thanks to the thoughtful preparations of Rabbi Gabriel

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Negrin and our helpful friends from Athens and KIS, especially to Iossif Ventura and Victor Eliezer, both of whom I would never have been able to do my part without their deep consideration and empathy.

I closed his eyes. I stayed with him over the last years in order for his dear and concerned family to be able to keep him at his own house surrounded by his beloved animals, books, music, garden and beautiful balconies facing the old Venetian harbour of Hania. In this way, he could still welcome his friends in a decent manner and retain some of the quality of life he so much appreciated particularly delicious food, wine and thoughtful talks with friends and colleagues from a long, creative and respectful working life.

On the synagogue's part, we tried - Anja and I - to keep him involved as long as his concentration and health allowed. In spite of his serious decline, he still managed the editorial for our last newsletter and the layout for

our most recent Interfaith Calendar.

Today Nikos will be praised and honoured by colleagues, former students, new and old friends, by people who knew him a life-time, by people who simply crossed his path. June 20th was his birthday. Yet, the deepest and most lasting honour that we can give this talented, intelligent, free-thinking and, it might be said, sometimes difficult man who gave us so much to think about, is to keep this place [the synagogue], his last and most delicate work, alive as much as possible in ways that complement his unique and individual spirit. On behalf of a united staff and Board of Trustees of Etz Hayyim, I just want to add that this is what we will go on doing. Together with Nikos' close family, Dori and Karen Kanellos, both of whom have been life-long supporters of Nikos and his work, I want to thank all for coming today. It has been extraordinarily overwhelming. Thank you!

Marianna Vinther (President of the Board of Trustees)

He always had a big smile in the beginning of our meetings. He lit his pipe and the discussion started with "some French" for people who created obstacles against his work. We laughed, we discussed and then he moved on, skipping over the obstacles and insisting on what

he wanted to achieve which seemed impossible to the rest of us in many cases.

Nikos Stavroulakis was a citizen of the world, so today I will paraphrase his own words from an interview in a newspaper conducted some years ago (*Eleftherotypia*, 21/02/2010): "One of the reasons for feeling proud of being a Jew is that I belong everywhere. I can be French, English, Greek or Turkish, I can collect what I think is the best from the people of every country and, at the same time, I can keep my identity... The ability to adapt, this is a vital characteristic for people".

In July 1977, Nikos began the process of establishing the



At the funeral service for Nikos Stavroulakis, Athens, May 22nd, 2017, photo: Ken Ross

Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens and it was then that he said: "Suddenly one of those clocks started ticking. I brought in some more clocks, I wound some others and within half an hour all of the clocks were ticking to the same rhythm. I felt as if

I had brought back to life all of those personal objects of those people who were lost in 1943. I worked for many hours in this small room in Melidoni Street, the clocks started haunting me. Every night, before leaving, I wound all of them and when I came back in the morning I would wind them again where necessary. If I found a malfunctioning clock, I would send it for repair. This experience became my hoop with the Museum, my very personal experience that led me to a close connection with the Museum. It was this experience that helped me understand that this should not be a museum for the Holocaust, but a museum for Jewish life, for ordinary



people, their life and how they were trapped by terrible events. It should also be a bond with the totally destroyed past. That was the main idea in my mind for the years to come". Those thoughts were written in his report dated November 19th, 2008, when the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece bestowed upon him on the Medal of Honour for his services to Greek Jewry.

In 1993, Nikos resigned as Director of the Jewish Museum of Greece and returned to his father's house in Hania, Crete, where he focused on painting, an endeavor he loved very much. However, he could never remain still.

Following the devastating 1994 earthquake in Hania, he immediately went to the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece based in Athens, informing us that the long-abandoned Etz Hayyim Synagogue in that city was facing imminent collapse due to earthquake damage. Soon afterwards, Nikos travelled to New York and gave a lecture to the World Monuments Fund on endangered Jewish monuments in Greece with particular emphasis on Etz Hayyim that resulted in the synagogue being added to the list of the world's one hundred most endangered monuments of cultural concern. At the same time, the Jewish community of Salonica also asked him to set up a Jewish museum in that city and he became dedicated to that pursuit, as he would have done in any other case.

When he was asked "why did you want a synagogue in a place [Hania] with just one single Jewish resident?", he answered "I didn't want to create a museum, I had already worked in many museums in my life. However, I had never revived Etz Hayyim before! Some days after the re-opening, I found three typical Greek elderly women in black clothes, holding candles, who were standing in front of the main gate of Etz Hayyim. They asked me, "Mr. Nikos, could we light the candles in the syna-

agogue?". I replied "of course you can". They entered the synagogue, lit the candles and made the sign of the Cross. On leaving, they explained to me that when they were young, they were friends with some other young girls who were lost in 1944. They wanted to light a candle in their memory. This was the real bond with the past. I think that this is the only synagogue in Europe open to everybody; nobody is asking if you are a Christian, a Muslim or a Jew".

Nikos was a great teacher, giving his teaching flesh and blood every day through dialogue and common prayer. He gave context to the terms: "brotherhood", "mutual understanding" and "mutual respect". In the same interview, he stated that "traditionally, a synagogue is not a temple. It serves three purposes: first of all, it is a place where all people gather, Jews and non-Jews, to discuss their common problems. Secondly, it is a place to study the holy books. Thirdly, it is a place where the believers pray towards Jerusalem. When we first sat down, all together, and discussed what brings us all here together, in this synagogue, fifteen people here and almost five hundred who support us from abroad, we ended up defining the synagogue as a place of prayer, recollection and reconciliation. It would be the place where Christians, Jews and Muslims could share common values".

Nikos Stavroulakis was a cosmopolitan intellectual, a traditional Jew, a guardian of Jewish culture, the man who established the Jewish Museums in Athens and Salonica and the man who gave life to the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania.

We, the Central Board of the Jewish Communities in Greece, together with Marianna and Anja, and all those individuals who love and support Etz Hayyim, will continue to give life to the synagogue according to Nikos' legacy, his values and his wishes.

Victor Eliezer

(KISE Representative on the Board of Trustees)

BS"D

I don't know if I should or if I could say something today.

It is you who taught me that: "Whatever you talk about with your teacher and whatever treasures he gives to your soul, it is your mind they should form and give shape to. Therefore hide those hidden treasures well in your heart, create your own and after that, forge your own future."

But my pain is very deep, Niko, unbearable to endure on

my own; and maybe I will only be able to bear it if I share it.

About 10 years ago, in February 2007, having settled into my new life as a first-year student in Rethymnon, Crete, I set off to visit the synagogue of Hania. If I remember correctly, it was a Tuesday when, after searching several hours in the narrow streets of the old town, I eventually succeeded at dusk in locating the wooden door with the metal Mezuzah.



I was really disappointed. The synagogue was closed. With some hesitation, I touched the Mezuzah and began to recite the Shema. I hadn't quite finished when I saw a notice board next to the door announcing the time for the Kabbalat Shabbat service.

I was fascinated and even more enthusiastic! I counted the minutes until the time was announced on the weather-beaten notice board.

Friday came. I took the bus from Rethymnon to Hania. The moment the bus arrived, I got off in a hurry and I began to walk, almost running, to the synagogue. I pushed the half-closed door open and entered a small courtyard typical of a Romaniote-style synagogue. I was elated. The voices and the laughter which could be heard from the small office opposite the main entrance made me walk over there. I knocked and slowly opened the door. This was when I first met Mr. Stavroulakis.

An enigmatic smile, a half-extinguished pipe in his right hand and a glass of Tequila was the first image of a man I would later admire, esteem and venerate! I could not imagine then that he would be my first mentor on a deep journey into Judaism and the continued art of nurturing both soul and mind.

Special and precious were your gifts to our community; special and complex your personality. For me, however, you will be my teacher, my guide, the humble carer of my soul, the one who first taught me the power of silence, the strength needed for praying, the patience for cultivating the blessing Moses accepted on Mt. Sinai.

There, during the Shacharit prayers on a Sunday morning, immediately after the Shema, when you lit your pipe and were sitting outside the Mikveh, you made me commit to continuing your vision for your beloved creation, our synagogue, and that your Havurah would not change its course, but rather continue on the path you had outlined. And one more time, with all my strength, I reassure you of that! My first Smicha (ordination) thus came from you!

Antio (farewell) Niko,

I'm certain no matter how many years may pass, how many experiences may cover like dust the traces your lessons have left on my soul, I will continue to hear you whispering as I kiss your hand ... "Be a good boy, okay?"

Gabriel Negrin (Rabbi of Athens)



At the funeral service for Nikos Stavroulakis, Athens, May 22nd, 2017, photo: Ken Ross

Nikos had been a dear friend of the family for many years. Nikos was not only a distinguished artist – I treasure all his works which came my way – but, in addition, he cared passionately about so many causes, and with great determination, he developed and sustained the Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

His pride in his Jewish heritage and his dedication to sharing Jewish traditions and culture with others is a model to emulate. Over the years, I have been so pleased that our family was able to support Nikos' dreams: to welcome and encourage people to participate in educational programmes and cultural activities,



as well as to inspire research based on the archives housed in the synagogue. Jewish life in Crete owes a debt of gratitude to Nikos and while he had suffered so much over the last few years, we will always remember

his bravery and thoughtfulness. We are going to miss him enormously. There are few talents like his in the world today.

Lord Jacob Rothschild

The Angelou house became for many of us the monastir Stavroulakis.

While I joined a religious community, Nikos became one -- for so many!

His capacity for friends was prodigious, demanding we visit when we could.

Where his interests were embracing, his heart was even more so.

As he suffered decisive changes, we had to be there for him -- in person or spirit.

In fact, if work absorbed his life, friends constituted it. An amazing presence.

A life centered around animals and food, for himself and his friends.

And he shared so much that sharing could become a palpable burden.

Yet a list of accomplishments would be redundant, for each is a friend.

So many have been enriched, in turn to serve and enhance others.

David Burrell

My Dear Nikos,

It is an impossible mission to summarise the life you had, the things you have done, your friends, achievements and so on. I can only regret that I knew you for eight years. We had a special connection; you treated me as your son and my family as your family with much love and care. You and Dori are my family.

The synagogue you loved so much is and will ever be your biggest achievement and your true legacy. Every inch in it is your creation, crafting, painting, the books and endless knowledge: all you combined into the synagogue. Sure we cannot replace you in any way, but we all united can follow your way.

You were the biggest Jew I have ever met. Things you have done for the Jewish people are more than anyone can explain in words. Each one of your friends can write a book on your endless knowledge, deepness and creation.

Today, May 22nd is a unique day for me. On May 22nd, 1944, my great grandfather who fought with the British Army in Crete as a Jewish volunteer from Israel was killed fighting the Nazis (he was 38 as my age today) while at the same time, the Jews of Crete were being deported.

On May 22nd, 2009, my son, Ofir was born and today, May 22nd, 2017, here in Athens, life and death are again inextricably linked for me on this special date.

Three years ago when I came to you on Yom Kippur, in one of our talks before we left for the synagogue, you gave me your necklace/amulet and you told me, "Lior, it

is yours now wear it and remember."

Then you explained to me that it was given to you by a Greek man after you re-opened the synagogue in 1999. This Greek man told you that the amulet was given to him by his Jewish neighbour in May, 1944, when the Nazis began deporting the Jews of Crete.

His Jewish neighbour told him to keep it until the Jews returned to Hania and then to give it to them. He waited for more than 50 years until you, Nikos, the angel of Hania, the rebuilder of the synagogue of Etz Hayyim had arrived. Nikos told me that he put soil from Jerusalem from one of his visits to Israel inside the amulet.

He told me, "Lior, it is yours now to wear and to keep and always know in your heart and mind that this amulet story is the true meaning of the phrase AM ISRAEL HAI!!!"





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Dear Nikos, I will wear it and keep it in my heart and soul until my day will come to pass it on to my son, Ofir, to pass on your legacy and story that is part of the history of the Jews of Hania and Crete.

By rebuilding Etz-Hayyim Synagogue, you have shown to the world that AM ISRAEL HAI!!

Rest in peace my dear Nikos, from now until my last day,

I will keep your legacy and story. I know deep in my heart that only because of angels like you that are gods little helpers on the face of the earth, the Jewish legacy will be solid as a rock and will last forever.

With endless love and longing, Lior

Lior Asher

Shalom Dearest Niko,

You have touched hundreds of lives worldwide, and your LIGHT will shine brightly in our hearts, and in the hearts of every tree you have planted, every flower, every creature in your pond, and in your home menagerie, forever.

Nikos and I had a lifelong friendship from near and far. Some years ago, my children gave me a special birthday gift on disc. Messages sent by friends from many parts of the world.

Here is Nikos' message:

"Dearest Louisa, we've had a long life together and lots of ups and downs and turns and corners, and G-d knows what ... wish I was with you and hope that next year we get together."

When Etz Hayyim opened its doors in Hania, Nikos sent out a wish list. Torah binders were needed. They were made in memory of my husband Alan Klein, and I was delighted to find a permanent home for them (after our



small conservative synagogue had closed its doors in North Carolina.) The Torah binders were delivered to Nikos by my niece who travelled to Greece from the US.

In 2002, my eldest daughter, Aviva, announced her engagement to Alan Silverstein in Washington, DC. They asked me for ideas as to where to have the wedding. Etz Hayyim was our first choice, and from that moment Nikos took over. The wedding was scheduled for September 1st with over 100 guests filling up hotels, resorts and guest houses. Word had reached Heraklion and our cousins from Israel were asked if they were heading for "the wedding" in Hania! Since that memorable celebration, those who missed the wedding made special trips to Hania from the US and South Africa.

Upon hearing the sad announcement of Nikos' passing on Friday, May 19th, I received many calls and emails of sympathy from friends and family. These messages express the love, respect and appreciation for the rich legacy that Nikos has given us all forever.

Louisa Klein

THOUGHTS ABOUT NIKOS STAVROULAKIS

In my last email to Nikos, I referred to our friendship going back over sixty years. We met as undergraduates in Notre Dame University in 1954. I had barely joined the University a few months earlier having arrived fresh from Dhaka. I had gone to a get-together for students from South Asia where I spotted a lanky man who was not South Asian. When he learned that I was from Bengal, he showed a special interest and told me that he was planning to go to Shantineketan after his graduation the next year. He also mentioned his close relationship to a physicist from Bengal who had told him about the unique character of Shantineketan – an institution founded by Rabindranath Tagore -- which offered a distinctive curriculum aiming to develop every aspect of a person, intel-

lectual, moral and spiritual.

Peter Stavis, as he was known then, told me he was in his final year at University in a special programme known as the 'Great Books Programme' that involved reading the "classics" ranging from Aristotle and Plato to Newton, Shakespeare and Einstein. At the time of our meeting, he was 18 and I was 16 years old. He must have realised that having left home for the first time, I was faced with the challenge of adjusting to life in an American university, living in a large dorm with other students. That he himself was different from the average American undergraduate became evident as he explained that his father had migrated from Greece and his mother was British. He had attended a Catholic school in Wisconsin and that is where he had been attracted to the Universi-



ty of Notre Dame, a leading Catholic University in the States, although neither of his parents were Catholic. I was struck by Peter's strong individuality. He had chosen not to stay in a residential hall, but had instead found accommodation in exchange for work in a professor's home. He had a car that he would drive to work and then back to class. He was also working as a staff artist for a religious journal published by the University. His illustrations included those of biblical prophets for the journal.

As our friendship grew, our conversations reflected his serious interest in religion. Although not born Catholic, he used to attend church and had a deep interest in all other religions. His interest in Shantiniketan and travelling to India had led him to read about Hinduism and Buddhism. Our growing friendship led to his interest in Islam. This interest led him to enrol in a post-graduate program in Islamic and New Eastern studies, and he wrote his dissertation on the origins of the Islamic mosque, earning his Master's degree from the University of Michigan.

Before leaving for Oxford, we shared a journey across the US in a new Ford car from Detroit to San Diego in California. This enabled us to see a dozen states from Illinois to Colorado within three weeks. A memorable experience during that journey was when Peter, who loved animals, saw a small kitten shivering in the cold in the Rocky Mountains. What were we to do with the kitten? As we discussed this question, we drove past a convent. We saw this convent as a solution to our problem. Peter urged me to drive in. We then met the Mother Superior, who listened to our appeals and agreed to shelter the kitten. Peter was to rescue many kittens and other animals later in life. His love for animals continued – dogs, cats, birds – and they later occupied the best room in his home in Hania.

One of Peter's major concerns when he left Hania for trips abroad was to find someone to look after his me-

nagerie of animals. This concern arose whenever we discussed his proposed visit to Bangladesh during his last year. Sadly, this visit never materialised.

Among Peter's many achievements, and the one that was the most meaningful to him, was the rebuilding and restoration of Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania. This was one of his two permanent contributions which resulted from his links with Judaism; the other contribution was the Jewish Museum in Athens. He had also played a major part in restoring the

Jewish Museum in Salonika.

Peter visualised the synagogue as a meeting place for people of all religions to interact with each other. We had talked many times about his idea of holding a global event to promote inter-faith harmony in our world which was then and is now witnessing extremist violence centering around religion.

For me, the most significant event in which Peter played a key role, and one reflected in the practice of inter-faith harmony,

was my daughter Sara's wedding to David. Our friends and families from several continents came to Hania for the event. As it turned out, this multi-cultural event became a major attraction for tourists who came to the synagogue and supplemented our numbers. There was much feasting, and I am amused to remember Nikos' insistence that the menu for the wedding feast should include the Cretan delicacy of boiled lamb, over-riding our hopes for the more delicious meals that we were used to eating at his home or around Hania! In the twenty or so years since, we, our children and grandchildren have all had the good fortune to be regular visitors to Hania, and they have been lucky to have become extremely close to him.

Nikos' quest for a distinctive identity led him from Oxford to Athens and could be seen as a desire to return to





his roots. Since his father's family was from Crete, he began visiting the island while teaching university students in Athens at an institute for American students. Our friendship continued to grow to the point where we regarded ourselves as brothers. He expressed an interest in joining me in Dhaka after I returned in 1959. However, this was not to be. He became more attracted to Crete, especially after he acquired what were the remains of his family property, after which he decided to settle down in Hania. Here, he restored the property and made it into a beautiful and special home until he passed away.

During the sixties and early seventies while teaching in Athens, Peter began to discover that he had connections with Judaism on his mother's side. Characteristically, his interest began to deepen as he discovered there were valuable Jewish antiquities lying in and around Athens. He felt what was needed was to house these antiquities and thus he became the designer and founder of the Jewish Museum of Athens.

In Athens, Peter resumed his family name of Nikos

Stavroulakis. I continued to call him Peter and visited him in Athens almost every year. He was remarkably successful in re-discovering his roots, despite having spent the first twenty years of his life in the US. In Athens, he gained sufficient knowledge about Greek history to become a respected teacher and enviable guide around Athens and the rest of Greece.

Nikos will be remembered for his many extraordinary gifts as scholar, historian, creative artist whose paintings and woodcuts are widely admired, and of course, as a brilliant cook. Yet, for those of us who were close to him, his most important quality was to make people of all different ages and backgrounds feel that he could truly make their problems his own and do everything he could to provide meaningful help. I personally feel one of the greatest gifts I have had in life was to have him as a friend for more than 60 years, and his loss leaves an irreparable void.

Kamal Hossain, Dhaka, June 20th, 2017.

I miss you and I have been missing you. We met you in Crete so long ago when I had no expectation of returning to the States with a friendship. I was just interested in going on a family trip, seeing what we see, enjoying what we enjoy, learning about another place.

We thank "Michael" Roka, who wove the rug in our family room, for introducing us to you. In its weft and weave are the wonderful memories of discovering old Hania.

I remember when I first saw you. You were watering the plants around what was to become Etz Hayyim. I think you had to take a cat to the vet and we had to hurry to meet you before you left. You and Michael were two guys who knew to save history, craft, art, knowledge, culture.

Thankfully the internet enabled our conversation to continue, and you were an amazing support for me, as I was struggling with my own art development, while returning to my career amid my responsibilities to a growing family and community. You fostered my growing awareness of the breadth and depth of Jewish history, Islamic art and calligraphy, as I was seeking a place of inclusive Judaism with a focus on social justice and spirituality. You helped me give deeper meaning to my own art. Etz Hayyim was a beacon of light.

Niko, those conversations meant so much to me. I re-

member the delightful emails in which you described the sea being up, the view, the food you'd make from the garden and I'd be in Hania again, while looking out on snow-covered hay fields.

I have saved every card, every Jottings, every drawing and with every one that arrived in the post, it also gave me hope and connection: you were making art too. I was overjoyed when you wrote that my mezuzahs would be used in the rebuilt synagogue. Maybe they were destroyed in the fire? I never wanted to ask; there were more important things of concern. However, I remember my joy in your response as if it were yesterday.

I use your cookbook regularly, and I always feel you are in the kitchen with me when I do. It's a bit food-stained from use, but that's ok too! Like my mother's Settlement cookbook from 1939!

You were always a teacher and a friend. Your devotion to rebuilding the synagogue and to the museums of Salonika and Athens inspired me. I remember when we met you in NYC for the day. I always thought we would see more of each other in person. But you know, you will always be there because you mattered so much and that lasts forever.

SaruN, thank you, love, Jo

Jo Margolis



I do not remember when I first met Nikos, but it must have been in the mid-1990s when the World Monuments Fund put Etz Hayyim Synagogue on the Jewish Heritage Fund's endangered Monuments list, and Nikos started to collect money for its restoration. My wife had relatives in Heraklion and I decided to extend our visit by going to Hania to meet Nikos.

It turned out to be the first of many visits to Hania and a friendship I treasured for a quarter of a century. We stayed in a hotel within easy walking distance of Nikos' house and got to know the old port of Hania and the old city well. We were also visited by Nikos in New York and delighted in his extensive talents which included painting, cooking and writing on many subjects, both scholarly and worldly. He was also a museum designer and curator, theatrical costume designer and had many other gifts.

He had found his life's mission: to rebuild a synagogue in the city in which he inherited a house from his father, and to make it a centre of cultural activity in no way limited to the original function of the synagogue. He sought to rebuild the synagogue as it was, with the Mikveh, library, the graves and their grave stones, and everything else as close to what it must have once been in the 17th century.

When I met Nikos, my first question was to ask what function the synagogue would have given that there were no Jews then living in Hania. He said that it would serve as a synagogue for Jews when they visited the island from time to time, as well as a cultural centre for people of all beliefs. As Antony Lerman of the Observer quoting Kafka stated: "It turned out to be a cage in search of a bird".

Nikos' enthusiasm was contagious and he built a support organisation around the synagogue which will continue to preserve his work and mission. He was one of the most charming and caring persons I have ever met, and a man who had the gift of friendship. Unfortunately, the last couple of years of his life were difficult; old age was not kind to his body. Yet, whenever I called him, he was full of optimism and hope for recovery.

I will miss him. At my age, we lose our dearest friends and though we think of them often, it is not the same thing as talking to them.

I hope that Etz Hayyim will continue forever as a monument to Nikos. Who among us can say that we made our dreams come true?

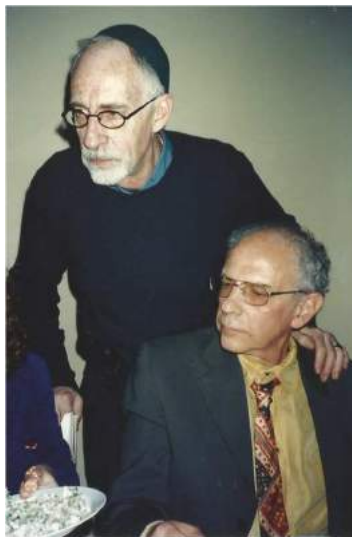
Peter Sichel

Goodbye to our Great Teacher and Friend Nikos Stavroulakis

On May 19th, a very special person departed, leaving a void among the Greek and Cretan Jewish communities that will be difficult to fill. He was a dedicated and tireless scholar of Jewish culture and history. We owe him so very much; and now, as we say good bye, it is time to also thank him for all he so openheartedly offered us throughout these years.

I first met Nikos in 1983 when he had just founded the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens on Amalias Street. It was the time I was returning to Greece to take up my position at the University of Crete after a long absence abroad. Since that time, I started admiring his work and accomplishments, not knowing that fifteen years later, he would begin his remarkable effort of singlehandedly restoring and reviving Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania.

He was a great teacher to us all and had the power of



motivating and inspiring by his example and vision. It was then that I first divined my deep bond to my Jewish heritage and values, and I thank him for this.

I now realise that this man had the power of affecting, at an emotional level, and influencing many more people whom he had met the world over: in Britain, the United States, Israel, or Istanbul throughout the years. With the multifaceted accomplishments he left us, he is also bound to continue influencing and inspiring us for many years to come. All these people can now form a valuable capital and can help ascertain, promote and support the future of Etz

Hayyim Synagogue.

It is now our duty and obligation to continue his work by strengthening the activities and standing of this remarkable synagogue in Hania. Nikos will be standing with us in this effort.

Joseph Ventura



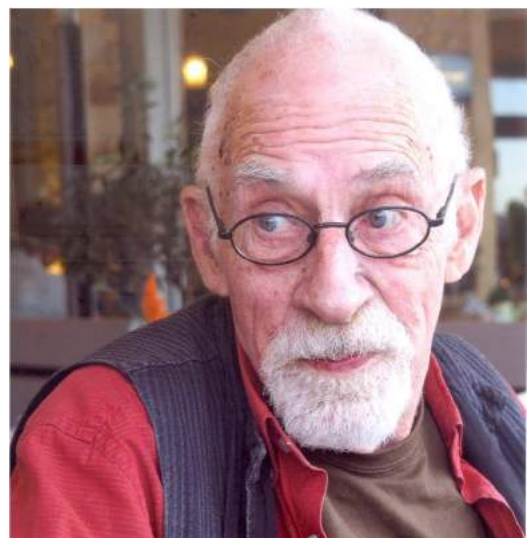
Remembering Nikos

Joseph and I first met Nikos through Judith Humphrey. Judith had come to Crete for her research, saw a poem of mine published in a C.I.C. (Chania International Community) newsletter, rightly assumed from my name that I was Jewish, and wanted to meet me. Sunday dinner at our house: we talked of many things. Did we know Nikos Stavroulakis in Hania- a colleague and friend, artist, historian, designer of Ottoman gardens, collector of Greek Judaica? He'd recently moved from Athens to Crete and was now turning his talents to restoring the badly damaged and abandoned synagogue in Hania. The next time we drove west (possibly there was a conference at Kolimbari we planned to attend), we looked Nikos up, which in those days meant "called him at his house". This was in the late 1980s or early 90s before the invasion of the Internet and mobile phones. He invited us to come by. Most likely he offered us coffee in his amazing kitchen. What I do remember is that he showed us his books. They filled an entire room and it was the first time I'd seen a home library of that magnitude! I was also struck on that first visit by the aura of art, culture and creativity that clung to him (and, on a more mundane level, his resonant voice and deep-throated laugh). He was open and gracious and eager to let us into his world. This was someone I wanted to stay in touch with. When my cousin Susie was visiting from Israel in 1997, we made a special trip to Hania so that she could meet Nikos and hear first-hand about his project to restore the old synagogue. Nikos took us to the premises where work was ongoing. The roof, which had collapsed during the 1995 earthquake, must have already been fixed and at least one of the semi-circular windows cleared of debris. It was still fairly dark inside the building; the state of disrepair was obvious to the visitor. However, more important were the finds that Nikos showed us which he had salvaged from the razed Jewish Cemetery in Hania and the treasures he had collected when he had worked at the Jewish Museum in Athens! His enthusiasm and excitement were infectious. Although we couldn't have known at that point the extent to which Nikos' visionary plans would succeed, there was never any doubt that succeed they would. This success was dependent on whether the financial challenge could be met. Nikos was already on the road both figuratively and literally. He'd gotten Etz Hayyim on the World Monuments List which

brought international recognition and importantly, funding.

I remember that Nikos and Susie talked about fundraising at that visit, a topic that was obviously very much on his mind then (and later). Susie herself had been a successful fundraiser in relation to a Masorti Synagogue in Kfar Saba that she and a group of friends had founded. Twenty years down the road, the fact is that a Jewish presence, together with Jewish life, has been reasserted on Crete. Nikos not only restored the historic building, but breathed new life into it. If anyone from the last Cretan-Jewish community could return from their watery grave to see Etz Hayyim today, my guess is that they would be astounded. By its existence. By its beauty. How it has evolved since their day. How it reaches out to the wider community through cultural and religious events. How they themselves- members of the last Cretan-Jewish community- are remembered. Truly, Etz Hayyim is a place of prayer, recollection, and reconciliation. Nikos, we will not forget you. Thank you for everything you did for Greek Jewry, and for us, single-handedly, with determination and dedication. Your legacy is huge. We pledge to uphold and further it. You are among us, your spirit palpable every time we step through the Rothschild Gate into the north courtyard, every time the grandfather clock in the main sanctuary chimes the hour, every time one of the synagogue cats curls up next to us on a teakwood bench during Shabbat services. Goodbye, Nikos. Rest in peace.

Natalie Ventura, Heraklion, Crete





In Memory of Nikos Stavroulakis

It is so difficult to express words of condolence about a friend whose personality was so powerful and vivid during all of the years in which I knew him. I met Nikos about fifty years ago when Teddy Kollek, then Mayor of Jerusalem, asked him to renovate the Byzantine church in East Jerusalem.

At that time, Nikos was a tall, young and handsome man who used to smile and laugh a lot. I knew that he was a very talented artist and a great scholar, one of the best in the field of Byzantine art. He left Israel after a few years and after that, I only saw him a few times in person. From then on, most of our communication was by letter. About nine years ago I visited Hania with my family and I saw his life-long project, the renewal of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue there, as well as the immense effort to com-

memorate the Jews of Hania who were killed by the Nazis. I saw then that his health was already failing. Still, his eyes were bright, his mind was sharp, and from time to time, he roared with laughter.

When his letters became scarce, I knew that it was not a good sign. In his letter dated October 10th, 2016, he wished me a 'Shanah Tovah' and asked me to write to him about my love of life. I felt that this might be our last exchange. On May 19th, 2017, I received the message announcing his death.

To all who loved and cared about Nikos, I send my deepest condolences. He was a unique person. I hope that Etz Hayyim will thrive and will continue in Nikos' spirit to be a place for both Jews and non-Jews who share common values as the children of Abraham.

Eti Amit, Jerusalem

Finding a true friend in this cluster of a world is difficult enough. Yet, in this day and age and in the weirdest of circumstances, you can still succeed.

This is a true story, my story, after moving to Crete to be with my family in what at first seemed like a perpetual vacation would actually be the place that I would find my true footing in this world....and a cherished friend.

After a long road of disenchantment, incompleteness and a war, I found a true friend who helped me grow, spiritually and intellectually. Even now, I still think of the things we talked about, the moments we shared, words and advice that I look back on and think what would he have said in this situation. That is the true mark he left on me. I learnt many a thing about life, about the deep passion one can have, about the laughter and how important it is to laugh every day. He was more than a mentor, more than a guide, more than family.



When that part of your life is gone, you feel an emptiness. In this case, I don't feel that though; I feel because of the experiences we had that he will live on in my heart and this is what's most important. No amount of time or distance can take that away.

I believe Nikos would not have wanted us to be sad, no not at all. He understood that this part of life will come as well and it was more about reflection and renewal even in these moments. For all the quirks he had, and he had many, this is the best way to remember him; the best way of remembering those moments

which you can't forget; the best way to remember what he did for this community and the foundation he set in not only stone, but in our hearts, he will live on....

Every time I think, every time I reflect, every time I laugh and every time I cry, I feel his warm embrace.

Nikos Stavroulakis (לצ"ל)Baruch Dayan Ha'Emet

Lorenzo Garcia



Nikos' Legacy at Etz Hayyim

As expressed in the eulogies and reiterated at the most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, we will remain committed to continuing the work of Etz Hayyim Synagogue as Nikos had envisaged it. Etz Hayyim will remain a place of prayer, recollection and reconciliation as Nikos defined it. **Memorial services** will also be held in Nikos' memory both in Israel and New York (updates on specific dates will be posted on our website and Facebook page). The video of the 30-day memorial service at Etz Hayyim is accessible here: <https://youtu.be/huaTIRK6Cic>. We will also commemorate Nikos' Yartzit on 23 Iyar 5778 (May 8th, 2018) with a ceremony at Etz Hayyim. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (**KISE**) dedicated the front page and an extensive article in the latest issue of its journal **Chronika** to Nikos and his work. Their **5778 calendar** will equally be dedicated to Etz Hayyim in honour of Nikos.

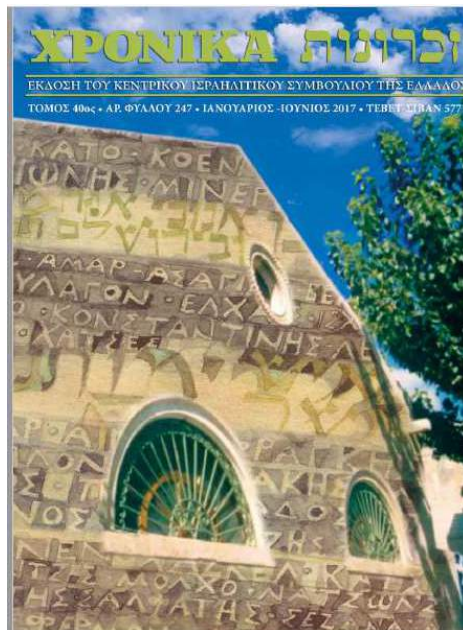
You are also still welcome to share your **stories** about how you met Nikos and the ways in which he impacted

your life. Your stories will be collected for a memorial section on the **Etz Hayyim website**. This will also include an extensive biography, as well as information about Nikos' art, writing and publications, along with a collection of media reports and documents.

The **exhibition** documenting Nikos' project of restoring Etz Hayyim Synagogue will remain on display as it was one of the last endeavours which the Etz Hayyim staff worked on in collaboration with Nikos. It allows visitors to appreciate Nikos' achievements and his life's work. Booklets of the exhibition will soon be published in both English and Greek. We will also continue the tradition - established by Nikos - of publishing an **Interfaith Calendar**.

A major part of maintaining Nikos' legacy is also the maintenance and **preservation of the building** of Etz Hayyim Synagogue itself, and of

keeping it open to the public. Therefore, we welcome your support and any donations in Nikos' memory.



News from the International Havurah of Etz Hayyim

Last year, my husband Luis turned 55 years old and I turned 50, and for that reason we gave each other a gift. That gift included a visit to Crete.

I have always been curious about Jewish synagogues around the world and even more curious about historic ones; places that you identify with and feel a sense of fullness in your soul just by visiting them.

As we arrived in Crete, I heard that there was this synagogue called 'Etz Hayyim' which I insisted to Luis that we visit and this personal wish suddenly became a group wish.

After almost two hours of walking around the Old Town and fighting against fatigue, we found this marvelous, magic and small synagogue, a hidden place that left me speechless (it is hard to leave me speechless, well, at least my husband and three kids think so) just by seeing the Hebrew letters above the entrance.

Even though my family is Ashkenazi, we had arrived at a Romaniote/Sephardic community synagogue and we immediately felt at home.

Allow me to confess that there are numerous questions that I have asked myself about Judaism and about my Jewish identity. Yet, as we arrived at this beautiful place filled with light, for a moment those doubts dissipated.

Inside this synagogue was a man giving an explanation of the history of the place. My husband and I, holding hands, walked to the back of the sanctuary and our excitement kept growing. As we finished the tour, we heard a woman speaking Hebrew and we engaged in conversation which made us understand that without the distinction of birth place, genre or customs to adapt to the Diaspora, we are Jews and that being Jewish is simply a way of life.

Excitedly, we signed the visitors' book and Luis told me



“they deserve our help and it’ll be our privilege to help them”.

That day, we talked by phone with our children (they did not travel with us) and told them the story of how we were so touched by this visit. The one who encouraged us to give ‘tsedaka’ was our middle child, Nathan, and since the day of that discussion, he did not forget about it until we made our first donation. According to the Jewish tradition, by giving tsedaka, we are not simply giving absolutely anything, but we are, in fact, learning and receiving and that is exactly what happened to my husband

and myself. By some means, our children saw it reflected and now they feel an affinity with Etz Hayyim without even knowing it.

So after all this time, we feel a part of the Etz Hayyim family, the ‘Havurah’, and Luis, our kids (Itamar, Nathan, Ilann) and I feel truly blessed and grateful for this magical place.

On behalf of my family and myself, we thank you and hope that we can keep supporting you.

We send you a big hug from Mexico.

Monica Vigderovich

I had the opportunity to visit Etz Hayyim Synagogue [in July 2017] while traveling in Crete. I was greatly touched by the story of the Crete’s Jews, as well as the history of the synagogue and its reconstruction in the late 1990s. As a forty-four year old Jewish man living in the United States, I thought I knew a great deal about the struggles of the Jewish people throughout the world. However, the fate of the Jews in Greece, let alone Crete, was not something that I had ever contemplated and was certainly not expecting to come across during my visit to Crete, a land dominated by churches and monasteries. Yet, what really moved me about Etz Hayyim was what the synagogue represents to the people of Crete today. While I am sure it is important to the remaining Jews of Crete, it appears that the synagogue is mainly supported and attended by many members of the community who are not Jews. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate Jewish culture than to educate those unfamiliar with it to its customs and values. Jews are so few in this world and

there is so much antisemitism out there that any organization which exists to help non Jews see Jews in a positive light should be celebrated and supported.

As a result of the foregoing, I am making a donation to Etz Hayyim Synagogue in the sum of \$5000 (US). My family and I have supported Jewish causes for many years. While there are many great national causes, sometimes the more local ones get ignored even though they can be just as important to the Jewish community, if not more so. I believe that Etz Hayyim is important to Jews and to the entire island of Crete for what it represents to the world: a celebration of Jewish life and values. I am glad to be able to support it.

Daniel Stuzin, Florida, USA

On behalf of Etz Hayyim Synagogue we would like to sincerely thank the Vigderovich family and Daniel Stuzin for their support and the generous donations they have made to Etz Hayyim.

Cultural Life at Etz Hayyim

In the spring and summer of 2017, Etz Hayyim hosted a series of cultural events which were very well-received and attended by locals and visitors alike. The events included poetry readings (see articles on pp. 14 and 16), two concerts and a lecture by Etz Hayyim’s Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange.

In June, renowned soprano, Sonia Theodoridou and maestro, Theodoros Orfanidis, performed their ‘Orchestra Mobile’ songs that represented a rich Jewish musical tradition from various places and periods including traditional Sephardic and Ashkenasi, as well as Israeli songs, and the performance concluding with Theodorakis’/Kabanellis’

“Asma

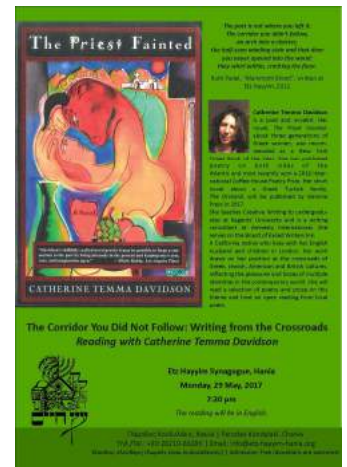
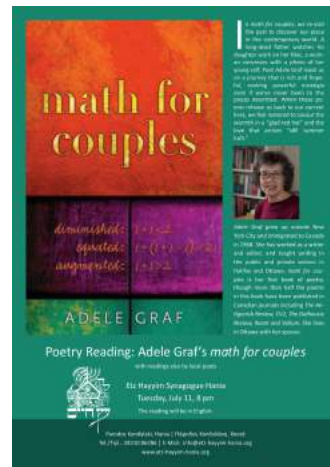
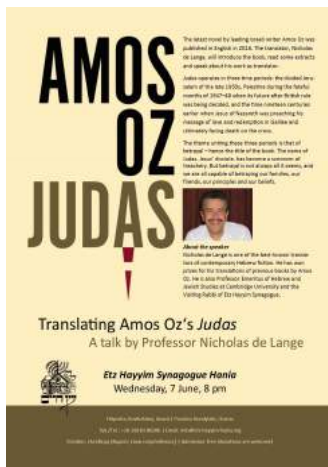




Asmaton.” The concert was made possible with funds from the German Embassy in Athens and we would like to particularly thank Ms Monika Frank, Head of the Press and Culture Department, for bringing this event to Etz Hayyim.

In July, Alevtina Parland (trumpet) and Carmela Lönnqvist (violin), two young Klezmer musicians from Finland, performed at Etz Hayyim. Alevtina had played

the trumpet for Nikos Stavroulakis inside Etz Hayyim Synagogue the year before when he invited her to give a concert. For both concerts, Etz Hayyim was filled to the last seat with an enthusiastic and appreciative audience. Nicholas de Lange read from his most recent translation of Amos Oz’ “Judas”, for which he was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize 2017, and spoke about his work and experience as a translator.



Poetry Reading with Catherine T. Davidson: The Tree of Life: A Story About Repair

The Tree of Life can be found in a maze of backstreets in the ancient port of Hania, Crete. How I found it, and how a moment of my life came to hang like fruit in its branches is a story about how the world sometimes works in surprising ways — toward connection, hope and repair and against chaos, separation and despair.

One root of the story begins with my husband. His father was born into a prosperous Jewish family in Germany; he escaped as a baby in his mother's arms; they came to England as refugees and began a new story, one which eventually led my husband to California and to me, and our blended Greek Jewish German American English family in London.

The other part begins with an organisation called Exiled Writers Ink: a group dedicated to promoting the voices of refugee writers in the UK. I came to the UK as a willing immigrant — certainly not a refugee. Yet, one evening shortly after the US election in November, they asked me to read as they sought an American response to what felt like a mutual disaster.

The reading was hosted by a Jewish English poet named David Clark. At the end of the evening, he asked me if I would ever consider reading in Hania, Crete. He used to

be on the board of a local synagogue and thought that my voice might fit.

Normally of course, I would have said maybe, one day, but as it turned out, I was already planning to go to Hania.

My husband is a member of an association of English lawyers specialising in European law who meet annually at some beauty spot in Europe, often tied to the school holidays. I think he chose his area of law knowing that his own story is rooted in the time of terrible destruction that ended in the peace and democracies of post-war Europe. Until now, European law has been rewarding and interesting, if sometimes frustrating. The conferences have all been great — for our family. With the Bar European group, we have been to Iceland, Italy, Malta and Cyprus. This year's meeting had just been set for Hania. I said yes.

David put me in touch with Anja, the administrator at Etz Hayyim. Etz Hayyim (“Tree of Life”) turned out to be an extraordinary place.

Synagogues on the island of Crete once served a Jewish population who had been there since the Hellenistic era in the 3rd century BCE. By the beginning of the Second



World War, only three were left — one in Iraklion and two in the north-western city of Hania: Beth Shalom and Etz Hayyim, both built in the Middle Ages and places of worship for hundreds of years.

Etz Hayyim survived until 1944 when its entire congregation of 263 people was arrested by the Nazis. They were herded onto a ship that was then torpedoed by the British who saw it sailing under a German flag. The synagogue fell into disrepair and was almost lost; locals used the location as a dumping ground as post-war tourist Hania developed around it. Then it was rescued by the remarkable Nicholas Stavroulakis.

Stavroulakis' mother was Jewish from Istanbul; his father was Greek from Hania. He grew up in the States and the UK. He lived and worked in Greece, Turkey and Israel, eventually becoming the director of the Jewish Museum in Athens. He discovered the ruins of Etz Hayyim, and became determined to resurrect it. He raised funds and got the site recognised as an important piece of Jewish heritage. In 1999, Etz Hayyim was officially re-opened and re-consecrated as a place of worship. In the years since, it has become both a living synagogue, serving the Jews of Crete and visitors, alike and an historical monument and cultural centre.

We found it in the maze of backstreets of what is now the heart of touristed Old Hania. The doors were wooden, tall and heavy, and we pushed through into an inner courtyard full of life, greenery and light. We met Anja, who turned out to be a soft-spoken and good-humoured woman whose perfect English bore a trace of German. She had written to me only a week before to say that Nicholas Stavroulakis had died after a long illness.

I felt I had missed the chance to meet someone who would have been a kindred spirit. Later, I wondered if I had met him, as I remembered an animated conversation I had when I lived in Athens in 1986 with the head of the Jewish Museum there. He had stopped me on the street because I looked Jewish and we had talked about my Greek mother and Jewish father, and my mother's

village in Thessaly where a local Jewish family had been hidden in a tree trunk during the occupation. He was not alive to tell me if my hunch was correct, and yet, somehow, in his absence, I felt this strange link.

Stavroulakis was a man of the crossroads, in his life and in his ethos. He was determined to make Etz Hayyim — rooted in the past and branching into the future — hospitable to those who cross borders. As a place of worship, it is interdenominational and open to all who care to come: men, women, Jews, non-Jews. As a cultural centre, it has hosted artists and writers from around the world.

One of them was Ruth Patel, the English poet. She had done a residency two years before and found a network of local poets, some of whom came to read with me in Hania. They were Natalie Ventura, an American who married a Greek and lived nearby; Karen Olsen, who was married to one of Stavroulakis' relatives; Vangelis Rouso, a Greek artist with roots in Hania, and Konstantinos Fischer, a local resident who had grown up in Hamburg.

As we talked, Konstantinos' two foster sons played loudly in the courtyard, energetic boys whom he spoke to in calm and fluent Greek. Later, I discovered this was his own form of repair, having taken on their care after a troubled early start. His poems were passionate, angry, voicing the voiceless in powerful words. Later, he scooped one

sleeping boy in his arms and I reflected on how lucky they had been, small, tossed and troubled ships, to have found themselves in his safe harbour.

The barristers sat on the benches, arranged like a star around the central table, where we read under hanging lamps. The men wore colourful kippas, and I enjoyed seeing those I knew in other circumstances — senior QCs and judges, looking the part. Some, like my husband, were Jewish or part Jewish, most were not, but as the rows filled with bodies, listening carefully to our poems about identity, time, love and loss, the place felt full of spirit — the ghosts of the past and the ghosts of the future, as yet to be determined.





Poetry at Etz Hayyim

Etz Hayyim has become a popular venue for poetry readings in recent months! Three took place in the period between the end of May and mid-July (the time of this writing).

On May 29th, Catherine Temma Davidson, an American who lives in London with her family, read a selection of her poetry and prose centring on the crossroads of Greek, Jewish, American and British cultures. She also hosted an open reading by local poets: Konstantine Fischer, Karen Olsen, Vangelis Roussos and Natalie Ventura. Catherine teaches creative writing at Regents' University and is a writing consultant at Amnesty International, while serving on the Board of Exiled Writers Ink.

On June 10th, Iossif Venturas from Athens, the last surviving Jewish male born in Hania, read from his long poem, *Tanais*, dedicated to the last Chaniote Jewish community that drowned at sea in June, 1944. *Tanais* was the name of the ship on which they were sailing; their destination, which they never reached, had been Piraeus, the port of Athens, and then most likely, the Nazi death camps. Iossif's poems were read in their original Greek, and in English translation for international attendees. The reading took place one day before the annual Memorial Service for the community.

On July 11th, Canadian poet Adele Graf read from her new book of poems, *math for couples*, as well as from a set of poems based in Greece. Adele has worked as a writer and editor, and taught creative writing in the public and private sectors in Halifax and Ottawa. An open reading followed, as at the May 29th presentation, with local poets reciting their own work: Konstantine Fischer, Zoe Kolarou, Karen Olsen and Natalie Ventura. Looking back over the years, there has been a slew of other poetry readings as well in this inspiring venue. One would have to check the pages of past issues of *Jottings* for a complete listing. Yet some that stand out in my mind:

a reading by Ruth Padel, well-known British poet and writer, friend of Nikos Stavroulakis. She read from her then-new book (2009), *A Life in Poems*, about her great-great-grandfather, Charles Darwin;

a reading of the poems of Paul Celan (1920 - 1970), a Romanian-born German language poet and translator, deeply marked by WWII. Chaniote Philologist, Giorgos Kartakis translated Celan's poems into Greek and pre-

sented them in December, 2016, along with research he had undertaken on the poet's work;

and, back in 2002, a reading by members of the Hania International Writers Group in the north courtyard of Etz Hayyim.

Who's next?

I leave you with two favorite quotes, both by American poets:

All poems are in praise of God.

—Robert Frost

It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.

—William Carlos Williams

Natalie Ventura



Adele Graf (l.), featured poet at July 11th reading, with sister Natalie Ventura, a member of the Etz Hayyim Havurah. Photo by R Edward Overstreet.



Festivals and Liturgical Life at Etz Hayyim

Etz Hayyim's Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange led services for Pesah including the community Seder with about 70 participants, and Shavuot. He will join us again for the High Holidays (see holiday schedule on p. 20). Kabbalat Shabbat services have been held every Friday evening with a considerable number of visitors every week. Members of the Havurah prepare the Challot and share the reading of the prayers. On July 22nd, a special Kabbalat Shabbat with Piyutim from around the Jewish world was led by Hazan Yair Harel. The annual Memorial Service, led by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, for the victims of the Tanais took place at the municipal monument in Hania on June 11th and was followed by a

Hashkava service at Etz Hayyim; the names of the community members who perished on June 9th, 1944 were read and a candle was lit for each individual.



Republished: A Cretan Romaniote Haggadah

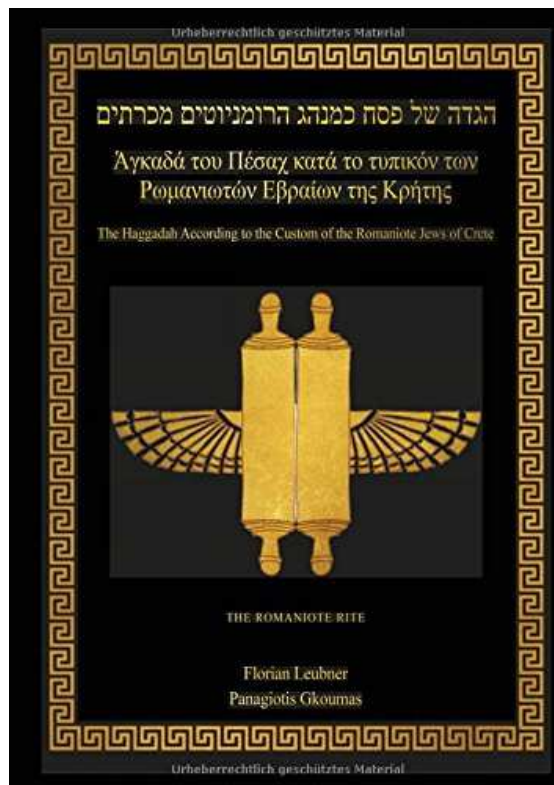
In February, Panagiotis Gkoumas contacted Etz Hayyim Synagogue and donated a modern edition of a 16th century Romaniote Haggadah from Crete which he had just published in collaboration with German theologian Florian Leubner. Panagiotis had learnt about this Haggadah from a recent academic publication about this majestically illustrated manuscript from 16th century Irakleion. For the new edition, the original text was transcribed by Dr Gerold Necker, professor for Jewish Studies at University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany.

Panagiotis Gkoumas, a young Greek educator living in Germany with a keen interest in philology and history, explained: "Even though I have no personal connection to Romaniote Judaism, at some point I discovered this part of our Greek history and culture and realized that the old texts like the Mahzor, Haggadah and Piyutim have been almost completely lost. In order to help preserve this heritage, I felt it necessary to republish those liturgical texts based on original manuscripts [...] as in my view one way to preserve this unique heritage is to

preserve the Romaniote liturgy."

With the Haggadah published this spring, the second step of this project is the publication of a Romaniote Siddur. Preparing the text for printing, as well as fundraising has so far rested completely on Panagiotis' shoulders and he has been trying to bring his publication project to the attention of the few remaining Romaniote communities worldwide in order to garner support. He also published a "Bibliography on the Romaniote Jewry" and, pending the necessary funding, hopes to publish in the near future a Romaniote Mahzor (prayer book for High Holidays) from 17th century Constantinople/Istanbul and collections of Piyutim (liturgical poems) and Selichot (penitential poems and prayers) which became a major part of the Romaniote liturgy, the Minhag Romania.

Panagiotis Gkoumas hopes that his initiative will further research into the Romaniote tradition, including recordings of liturgies, and that the republished liturgical texts will be used again by Romaniote communities.





Gedenkdienst at Etz Hayyim

I came to Hania more than a year ago without having been to Crete before. I actually did not know what to expect, but I was certain that it was a good decision and now I can firmly say that I do not regret spending a year in Hania.

I spent much of the number of months doing graphic work for the synagogue by designing posters for different events, as well as a programme for one of our concerts. The student exchange between a Greek and German school and also the educational trip with the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB) was one of the most interesting weeks I've had. I learnt many new aspects about Cretan history including Crete during WWII and the German Occupation. By regularly talking to visitors and giving them guided tours through the synagogue, I've gotten to meet a lot of really interesting people. German-speaking tourists are always very happy to speak with someone in their native language. As German and Austrian schools do not include in their curricula the subject of Greece in WW II, as a result, a few of them only know something about the German occupation in Crete. On the other hand, we also sometimes have Jewish visitors to the synagogue who had family in Hania before the war. It is always equally sad and interesting to hear their stories and I hope that our knowledge about the Jewish pre-war community will continue to expand. One local newspaper from my hometown called "Klagenfurter" also published an article about my work in the synagogue. In addition to my regular duties, I wrote an interview piece with other *Gedenkdiener*s in other places for a student newspaper.

Besides working in the synagogue over the past year, I still had enough time to enjoy Crete to the fullest extent. I travelled around the island, ate a lot (sometimes too much) of Greek food and relaxed on many different beaches.

In mid-September, I will leave Crete and move to Vienna where I plan to study architecture on the Technical University Vienna. On the side, I would like to take a Greek language class in order to continue to improve my skills. I am very much looking forward to living in Vienna, to enjoy my first experiences at the university and to learn something new. This is why I am not too sad to leave Crete, even though I will miss it very much. I am also very excited about the experiences that the new *Gedenkdiener*, Christoph, will make in Hania, especially in the synagogue. I hope that Christoph will have a good time in Crete, in spite of the fact that the funding situation of the *Gedenkdienst* by the Austrian State has progressively gotten worse this year. This year has so far seen a few big changes. It was an honour for me to meet Nikos and it is very sad that I am the last *Gedenkdiener* who could meet and talk to



him. Nikos's death was a big loss for the community, but I am sure that Etz Hayyim Synagogue will continue to expand and promote Nikos's vision. I am very glad to have been a part of such a great team with so many nice colleagues.

Daniel Jordan



My name is Christoph Steinberger, I am 18 years old and grew up in the Viennese suburbs. For the following year, I will be the new Austrian volunteer who works at Etz Hayyim Synagogue. Just like every single one of my predecessors, I just have to mention that it will be my first time living on my own, in my own flat, paying my own bills and taking care of myself. However, be assured that even I will master the high arts of cooking. Sooner or later.

It is a pleasure that I've gotten this unique opportunity to be part of this special place and I sincerely hope that I can do my bit so that the synagogue keeps flourishing. It is an irrefutable allegory for revival and resurrection. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to meet Nikos, but I am convinced that together, we will continue to preserve the synagogue's historical, cultural and spiritual heritage.

Christoph Steinberger

German War Crimes and Debt in Greece - Seminar with Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB)

Who owes what to whom – this was the question at the centre of a week-long educational trip to Crete in May, 2017 that was organised by the Federation of German Trade Unions. The specific topic was the German war debt and the culture of remembrance seventy years later. The destination of the educational trip was the beautiful port city of Hania in West Crete. For the seminar sessions, we met at the library of Etz Hayyim Synagogue where Anja Zuckmantel, the administrative director, introduced us to the complexities of Greek and Cretan history and thus provided us with a valuable context for the events of the 1940s. Popular resistance against the German occupiers was particularly fierce on Crete which may be due to the centuries-long experience of foreign rule on the island.

A visit to the memorial for the massacre at Ano Viannos in south Crete, together with the documentary, "A Song for Argyris" and a guided tour of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, confronted the participants with the crimes committed by the German occupiers. Referring to the massacre in and around Ano Viannos, Ulrike Eifler, who had organised the educational trip for the DGB regional group, summarised the events of 1943: "One of the villages was completely destroyed, the population was rounded up and murdered. No distinction was made between men, women and children. It is unfathomable to hear this."

"Visiting the military cemetery at Maleme, maintained by the German War Graves Commission, provided a completely different perspective," explains Eifler. "On the site, 4,465 German soldiers are buried, some of them

unknown." The fact that most of them were hardly older than nineteen [years of age] "leaves the visitor stunned", says Eifler. However, much more disturbing is the uncritical portrayal of the historical events in an exhibition on the site: "The exhibition suggests that the soldiers died in



regular combat between two opposing armies, which was not the case at all. The German Wehrmacht, in fact, led an unequal war against the civilian population of the island. They were not just soldiers, but occupiers," Eifler continues. The atrocities committed by these German occupiers are not mentioned which is incomprehensible.

For the members of the DGB, German war crimes cannot be made up for with money. After World War II, Greece – along with other states, in view of major war-time destruction in Germany – did not insist on immediate reparations from Germany and thus faced a relative disadvantage in post-war rebuilding of a country devastated by war and German occupation. "Germany, however, never felt obliged to repay a forced loan equaling then a three-digit million amount or even reparations," explains Eifler. It was thus even more mortifying to realise the extent to which the German government nowadays forces more and more austerity measures on the Greek population, says Eifler.

"Past and present cannot be discussed separately. They are connected. Whoever talks about Greek debt must not be silent about the debt Germany owes to Greece," Eifler summarised the topic of the one-week educational trip and the consensus within the study group.



Calendar for Upcoming Holidays

Holiday Schedule

Έρεβ Ρόσ Ασανά – Erev Rosh Hashanah
20 Σεπτεμβρίου 7 μμ – 20 September 7 pm

Ρόσ Ασανά – Rosh Hashanah Morning Service
21 Σεπτεμβρίου 10 πμ – 21 September 10 am

Κιπούρ – Kippur
Κολ Νιντρέ – Kol Nidre Service
29 Σεπτεμβρίου 6:30 μμ – 29 September 6:30 pm

Γιομ Κιπούρ – Yom Kippur Service
30 Σεπτεμβρίου 10 πμ – 12 October 10 am
Μινχά 5 μμ - Minha 5 pm
Νεϊλά 6:30 μμ – Neilah 6:30pm

*Fast ends 30 September at 7:47 pm.
Snacks will be served at the Synagogue for breaking the fast.*

Σουκότ – Sukkot

Έρεβ Σουκότ – Erev Sukkot Service
4 Οκτωβρίου 6:30 μμ – 4 October 6:30 pm
Potluck dinner - please bring a contribution.

*Sukkah will be up until 11 October.
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:

FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds
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New York, NY 10018

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.

News from 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 or ideas. The next *Jottings* will be published for Pessah 5778. Please send contributions by March 1, 2018.

Weekly Services at Etz Hayyim

Kabbalat Shabbat Services every Friday.

Candle lighting times are posted on our website:
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.

Synagogue Opening Hours

May to late October: Mon-Thurs: 10 am - 6pm, Fridays: 10 am - 3 pm, reopening in evenings for Kabbalat Shabbat; Sundays 11 am - 4 pm

November to April: Mon-Thurs 10 am - 5pm, Fridays 10 am - 3 pm; and again 30 minutes before Kabbalat Shabbat service; closed weekends

Contact us and stay in touch

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Web: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org

Facebook: Synagogue Etz Hayyim



Jottings

Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

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