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The Newsletter of  
Etz Hayyim Synagogue

Η εξαμηνιαία ενημερωτική έκδοση  
της Συναγωγής Εtz Χαγίμ

Pesah 5779/2019  
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## Editorial

In October this year, Etz Hayyim will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of its rededication. The synagogue will host a series of events taking the visitor through a period of past history into a multi-cultural awareness in the present. Twenty years ago, when Nikos Stavroulakis had just rebuilt the abandoned and half-demolished synagogue over three years, Etz Hayyim reopened its doors to Jewish faith, history and culture - he could not have foreseen how important this place would be one day. With its educational outreach programmes, historical research projects, daily tours and weekly services, we have the pleasure to welcome more than 25,000 visitors annually. Thanks to Nikos Stavroulakis' stubborn insistence, Jewish history and culture are again a part of the society of Hania. From the outset, all by himself, later surrounded by like-minded people, he created a place of meeting, a place for the exchange of knowledge and a place of worship. All of us working at Etz Hayyim today carry this seed of hope. Each day we do our best to improve and add yet another facet to Etz Hayyim. When the question of Etz Hayyim's proper identity arises, in view of the lack of a fully-fledged Jewish community, I have to admit that to me this no longer seems to be a problem. The scope of activities taking place at Etz Hayyim, as well as the shared lectures, memories and input from friends both in Greece and abroad, clearly shows that our synagogue has fully established itself for quite some time now.



In a world where racist attacks happen suddenly and without warning, it is important that there exists a place like Etz Hayyim. A place of diversity, a place that teaches the history as a form of inclusive collective memory, a place we can meet in and also commemorate the lives tragically lost in the shooting that took place in our name-sake synagogue, the "Tree of Life" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in October last year together with those lives tragically lost in the racist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand more recently. A welcoming, kind and compassionate place where people can meet without fear, remembering the common human values at the basis of Judaism only represents the very best in all of us.

Our Pesah newsletter is again full of dedicated contributions which you

hopefully will enjoy. It is with pleasure that we present this variety of intelligent and enthusiastically written articles, stories and letters which we have received from many contributors to whom we are sincerely grateful. We whole-heartedly thank them and our generous donors, without whom Etz Hayyim's very existence would not be possible. And thinking of friends and daily visitors, we thank you for your moral and inspiring support.

Without all of you, our work at Etz Hayyim would never have been such a success - we feel we are together, a community. Thank you.

Wishing you a blessed and happy Pesah.  
Marianna Vinther and the staff of Etz Hayyim

Our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this edition of Jottings.

**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 Hashnah 5780**. Please send contributions by **1 September 2019**.

## Jottings

Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

Co-editors of Jottings

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Cover illustration: George Sfougaras; cover layout: Nikos Afentakis



## Holidays and Havurah

### 'A Tree of Life'

עץ-חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר

She is a tree of life to those who hold fast to her, and those who cling to her are happy. (Proverbs 3:18)

The festival of Passover is full of symbolism. For Philo of Alexandria (whose works constitute the fullest surviving expression of ancient Greek Judaism) the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt symbolises abandoning the irrationality of the physical passions (πάθη) and crossing over to a life of reason and virtue. There is an important lesson here that survives the centuries.

We read in the biblical account, immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea:

Moses led the Israelites from the Red Sea and they went out into the Desert of Shur, and they walked in the desert for three days without finding any water. And when they reached Marah they could not drink the water, because it was bitter (which is why he called it Marah, 'bitter'). And the people complained to Moses and said, What shall we drink? He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a certain tree, and when he threw it into the water it became sweet. There he made rules and laws for him, and he tested him there. (Exodus 15:22–25)

Philo comments on this:

...They filled their water vessels and then resumed their journey, feeling as though they had risen from a banquet and merry-making, and intoxicated, not with wine, but with sober celebration pledged by the piety of their leader. (Philo, *Moses*, I.187)

Although we celebrate Passover by feasting, with food and wine and singing, the feast is also, like the ancient *symposium*, an opportunity to consider and discuss the serious lessons of life.

Philo draws from the story of the bitter water of Marah the following lesson: the bitterness symbolizes the *difficulty* of making the transition from a life ruled by the bodily passions to a life of virtue ruled by reason. The tree that sweetens the bitter water is a love of hard work (φιλοπονία): by means of the tree we are enabled to consider hard work not bitter but very sweet (ῥῆδιστον ἀντὶ πικροῦ ὑπολαβεῖν) (*Posterity of Cain*, 158).

Passover is the festival of unleavened bread (חג המצות, ἄζυμα). We call the unleavened bread 'bread of affliction' (לחמא עניא, ἄρτον κακώσεως). Why?, Philo asks, when we know that the festivals are joyful times, not occasions for affliction. 'Affliction' refers to the hard work of improving our lives by pursuing virtue instead of the bodily passions. This work is painful and bitter for those who are still attached to 'Egypt', but to those who have begun to move on it is joyful and sweet. That is why the Bible says 'he tested him there' (*Preliminary Studies*, 161–167).

This is Philo's interpretation of the water of Marah, but another group of ancient Jewish allegorists, known as *Dorshei Reshumot*, offer a different interpretation. We know that 'water' in the Bible often refers to the divine teachings embodied in the Torah. (For example when Prophet Isaiah says 'O you who are thirsty, come to the water' (55:1) he is referring to the word of God.) Thus, when the text says that 'they walked in the desert for three days without finding any water', the meaning is that they began to forget and abandon the teachings of the Torah. That is why today the Torah is read in synagogues on Shabbat, on Monday and on Thursday: in this way the people of Israel never go for three days without hearing the word of God.

And what of the tree that sweetened the water? 'Tree' is also a symbol of the word of God, as in the saying 'She is a tree of life to those who hold fast to her' (Proverbs 3:18). 'She' here is wisdom (חכמה, σοφία), which the Rabbis associate with the teachings of the Torah. We need wisdom if we are to understand and benefit from the words of Torah. That is the tree that God showed Moses at Marah.

In our prayers, we say of the words of Torah 'for they are our life and the length of our days' (כי חיינו ואורך ימינו) When we gather for the Passover *seder*, let us take this teaching specially to heart. The exodus from Egypt leads directly to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The sweetening of the bitter water of Marah gives a foretaste of this wonderful event (which we shall celebrate at Shavuot). The word of God is a Tree of Life, in Hebrew *Etz Hayyim*. It is a living tree which is also life-giving tree: it gives meaning to our life, for as long as we live.

I wish the whole community of *Etz Hayyim* a very joyful Pesach, enriched by the love of Torah!

Nicholas de Lange





## Yom Kippur at Etz Hayyim and the Travels of an Etrog from Etz Hayyim to Israel

An aura pervades the Etz Hayyim synagogue in Chania. That sounds ominous, but it is not meant to be. Albeit, the souls of the Jews that populated the two adjoining Jewish streets permeate the atmosphere, one feels their beneficent happiness which once again the synagogue exists and is being used to celebrate Jewish holy days.

Last September, we spent our third Yom Kippur there. Together with Professor Rabbi Nicholas de Lange, Gershon led the community in prayer from Kol Nidre on the eve of Yom Kippur to the final blowing of the shofar at the end of Ne'ilah the following evening.

We live in Israel and yet why do we leave our home and our beloved Bet Yoel synagogue to spend the holiest day of the year in Crete, where the permanent Jewish population can be counted on the fingers of one hand? Most of our lives we have lived in trepidation of the intensity of the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tishri. A day of the soul - searching and reckoning as well as the physical stress created by fasting for 25 hours. Yet in Etz Hayyim, the hours slip by almost unnoticed and we experience a memorable heartwarming and uplifting of our spirits.

In order to fulfill the requirements for prayer, a minyan

(a quorum of ten Jews) is necessary. In Chania, the congregation is multinational. Jewish men and women, whatever their religious affiliation, who feel the need to touch base and recognize their roots, wend their way to this tiny sanctuary. Amazingly by the end of the day they are all singing in unison and harmony with Gershon's ancient melodies delivered in his sweet and melodious voice. (I admit that I am not objective.) The lengthy service is punctuated by enlightened thoughts and explanations and words of wisdom delightfully delivered by Nicholas. This combination is an absolute winner.

The day after the services brought Gershon an unexpected reward. An Etrog tree, a true sign of the rebirth of the Etz Hayyim synagogue now flowers and bears fruit in the courtyard. Despite the sign "DO NOT TOUCH", Gershon was allowed to pick one of the three etrogim on the tree and bring it back to Israel to use on Sukkot. (Please don't squeal to the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel!)

I hope we're there again next year.

Josanne Coren



## Community Events

For the High Holidays of 5779/2018 we were again fortunate enough to be joined by our Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange and for Yom Kippur in particular Gershon Coren joined us again. The services and the Erev Rosh Hashanah community dinner, which once more included a symbolic Seder Rosh Hashnah, as well as the fast breaking at the end of Yom Kippur saw a very good turnout of local Havurah members and friends from abroad and visitors.

The Sukkah was set up and decorated by the Havurah. After a community service on Erev Sukkot, many visitors sat and ate in the Sukkah throughout the week of the festival.

The Havurah also got together to celebrate the lighting of the first and last Hanukkah candle, as well as for celebrating Tu B'Shevat with traditional food like the Ashure from Nikos' *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*.



At Purim, the Havurah members and guests read the Megillat Ester in Hebrew, English, Greek, French and Italian. For the reading and the community dinner, we were joined both by poet Iossif Ventura (see report on Yad Vashem ceremony, p. 11 ff.) and artist George Sfougaras (see report on his exhibition and joint project, p. 14 ff.). The delicious food offered at the community dinner included ears of Haman and Ahouva's delicious poppy-seed cake.

image: community dinner at Erev Purim



## International Holocaust Remembrance Day at Etz Hayyim

On Monday, 28 January, the members of the Etz Hayyim Havurah met at the Synagogue to observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day. For the Hashkavah (memorial prayer), a video of Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, recorded in Athens during the official commemorative ceremony the day before, was played.

We continued with the first section of a presentation that forms part of the synagogue's educational outreach programme. This was also presented in several local schools on and shortly after the official observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day at Greek schools in January.

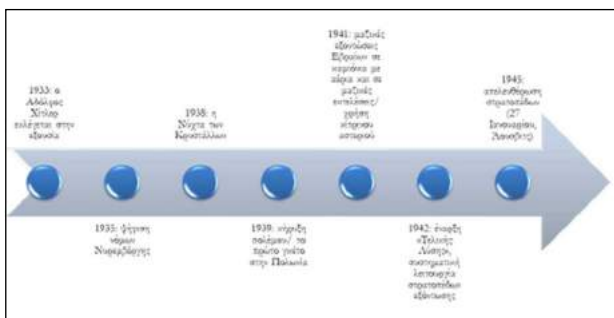
This was a good opportunity to share with the Havurah some of the educational work carried out by the Synagogue staff. The presentation starts with a photograph of a Jewish scouts group from Thessaloniki in 1933 and is contrasted with another photograph of the monument at

Yad Vashem to child victims of the Holocaust and their teacher from the Warsaw Ghetto. The discussion with students then begins by inviting them to think about what happened "between" those pictures, i.e. the early 1930s and the post-war period. The presentation continues with a brief general overview about the main events leading up to the Holocaust in Europe and Greece. In the second major part, students are introduced to primary source material illustrating those major events.

At the synagogue on that evening, the attending Havurah members closely followed the presentation and emphasized how important they feel it is to educate local high school students about the Holocaust and its implications. Afterwards the Havurah engaged not only in a discussion, but also shared personal experiences and views connected to the topic: family stories of loss and survival, how the Holocaust is commemorated in their countries of

Διεθνής Ημέρα μνήμης των  
θυμάτων του Ολοκαυτώματος

Εκπαιδευτικό πρόγραμμα  
Συναγωγής Χαλίων Έτζς Χάιμ



origin, stories about growing up in Nazi-Germany, information about Jewish communities whose history is little known and neglected as well as concerns about rising nationalism and racism, etc.

Generally, Etz Hayyim's educational outreach is first and foremost a project aimed at local students and teachers. Therefore reaching out to the Havurah was not the initial idea when creating this presentation but the engagement





with the material turned out very well and even concluded in helpful feedback on the presentation and some of the sources and pictures used for it. (See the general report on the Etz Hayyim educational outreach on p. 20 ff.). While we usually remember and honour the Cretan Jewish community lost in the Shoa during the annual memo-

rial service in June, when their names are read to commemorate their arrest and subsequent death during the sinking of the Tanais on 9 June 1944, the Havurah feels that we should also start observing International Holocaust Remembrance Day and invite the general public to participate. The Havurah will prepare a programme.

## Memorial for Greek Jews at Bat Yam Cemetery

In February, I visited family in Israel and while there we went to the Holon Cemetery in Bat Yam. To my amazement I saw the Holocaust monument for the Greek communities, which also mentions Hania and Irakleion as places where Jewish communities perished. As I found out later, at Holon Cemetery, there are more than 800 tomb stones commemorating vanished communities that

were destroyed during the Shoah. On Yom Hashoah, memorial services are held there every year.

It was especially moving for me to see the lost Cretan communities mentioned as I have lived now for a number of years in Crete. In this time, I have become a dedicated member of the Etz Hayyim Havurah and feel connected to the local Jewish history.

Roger Yayon



## Holiday Calendar

### Pesah

Erev Pesah Service, 19 April, 7 pm

Pesah Seder, 19 April, 8 pm  
(please RSVP by April 15)

Morning Service, 20 April, 10 am

Mimouna, 27 April, 8:30 pm

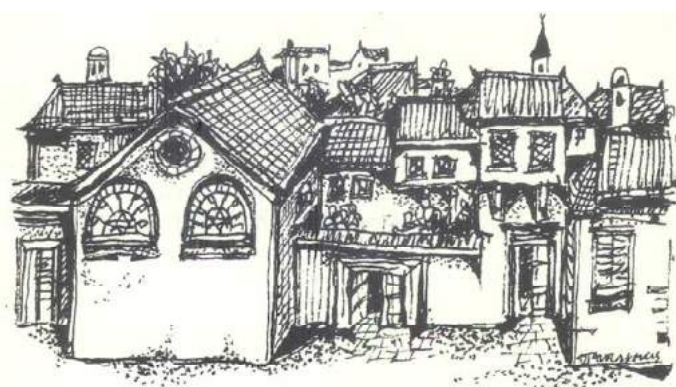
Annual Memorial Service for Nikos Stavroulakis  
26 May, 12 noon

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

2 June, 7:30 pm at Monument; 8:30 pm at Synagogue  
(led by Gabriel Negrin, Rabbi of Athens)

### Shavuot

See complete Shavuot Program on p. 9



## 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.



## Upcoming Events

### Memorial Service for Nikos Stavroulakis 26 May 2019

The annual memorial service for Nikos Stavroulakis will take place at Etz Hayyim Synagogue on **26 May at 12 noon**.

The service will be led by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin. This year we celebrate 20 years since the reopening of Etz Hayyim and Nikos is particularly missed. We hope that many friends can join us for this event.



### Shavuot and Visit by Oxford Jewish Congregation

*In October 2018, Sally Roland, a member of the Oxford Jewish Congregation visited Etz Hayyim and has since been actively promoting interest in Etz Hayyim within her community.*

*In February, she invited Etz Hayyim Board Member Tony Lerman to give a talk about Nikos and Etz Hayyim. We reprint below a report about the event by Louise Gordon, which will be published in the May 2019 edition of the Oxford Jewish Congregation's "Menorah" magazine.*

*Members of the Oxford Jewish Congregation will be visiting Etz Hayyim over Shabbat and Shavuot from 7 to 11 June 2019. There will be an eclectic mix in the group: artists, architects, photographers, a poet, writers, academics and Hebrew scholars amongst the group. As they tell us, they all look forward to meeting new friends at Etz Hayyim whilst engaging with their Jewish identity.*

*We would like to sincerely thank Sally Roland for her kind support and look forward to spending Shavuot together.*

#### **Antony Lerman: "Against the Odds: The Story of the Re-birth of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Chania, Crete"**

Survival can owe as much to stubbornness as to serendipity, and in the story which Antony Lerman shared with his Mosaic audience, the unswerving determination of one man loomed large. But long pre-dating that lay the glorious but little known saga of 2300 richly expansive years of Jewish presence on Crete, and this British writer and founding Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research guided us through the eras: Hellenic, Andalusian, Islamic, Byzantine, Venetian, Ottoman, 19th Century, up to the elimination of the community under Nazi occupation. There were "ups", and more often "downs" along the historic route, with entire Jewish communities massacred at times, caught up between Cretans clashing with Venetians, then Muslims with Christians, periods residing within ghettos and without, surviving and even thriving by dint of trade and money-lending, and recurrent targeting by blood libels, one legacy of which are rabbinic remains still buried beneath the synagogue precinct from occasions when venturing to the cemetery beyond the walls would have imperiled their mourners own lives.

When the Nazis arrived in 1941, the 15th century building constructed as a Catholic church had been in vibrant

functioning as a synagogue for 300 years. The agonising decimation of the Cretan Jewish community culminated on one awful day in May 1944, when Chania's remnant



of some 270 men, women and children were arrested and imprisoned, transported to the unimaginable terror of a vault in Herakleion, then loaded onto the ship "Tanais", bound for Auschwitz but sunk by a British torpedo, with all lives lost even more certainly than had they reached the intended destination.

The end of the War saw the synagogue structure still standing, but vandalised, desecrated, in squalor and with





three of its four rabbinic tombs looted. Though it became in 1957 the property of the Greek Jewish Board, it continued a "dumping ground" within its inhospitable local environs. Earthquake damage brought it to the point of structural collapse, the precarious sole but unmarked relic of a lost community, almost two and a half millennia erased from historic memory.

Then, as Antony Lerman announced it: Enter Nikos. Nicholas Peter Stavroulakis, born in Wisconsin USA to Greek and Turkish parents, educated in the USA, then at SOAS in London, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, painter and engraver as well as academic and lecturer. Antony described to us a true "Renaissance man", charismatic, inspirational, spiritually questing, his boundless capacity for rapport equaled only by his stubbornness. All these qualities were harnessed in his mission to restore and rededicate Chania's synagogue, in Nikos' own words, to "reconstruct an absence" for the twin aims of bearing witness to what had been, and breathing life into a reborn spiritual entity.

Through his efforts, Chania's synagogue was placed on the World Monument Fund list of endangered cultural monuments and from there captured the attention of a Rothschild charitable fund headed up by one Antony Lerman. So began Antony's own involvement with the restoration project, first as assessor for funding, later as



President of the synagogue board. Photos shown at his Mosaic talk evidenced a decade of remarkable restoration work, leading to the 1999 rededication ceremony of an exquisite space, traditional and fresh and lushly green, with library, exhibition space and mikveh bringing a renewed Jewish presence in Greek society and new seeds for interfaith relations with community Seder and Sukkot buffet. Barely a decade of promise was harshly

## Program for Shavuot 5779 (2019)

All services will be led by Etz Hayyim's Visiting Rabbi  
Nicholas de Lange

**Friday, 7 June**

8:19 pm Kabbalat Shabbat service

**Shabbat, 8 June**

10 am Shacharit (Morning Service)

9:15 pm Havdalah and Erev Shavuot service and  
study session with community potluck dinner  
(contributions welcome)

**Sunday, 9 June**

10 am Shavuot Service, with reading of the  
Ten Commandments

interrupted by two arson attacks, the second only a day after the ceremonial reopening celebrating recovery from the first. But Nikos "refused to be defined by anti-Semitism", and these physical ravages were countered by a great wave of public local and international support, and the nurturing of much more deeply rooted interfaith relations.

Today, Etz Hayyim synagogue is a living place of prayer, recollection and reconciliation. In place of a congregation, there is a "Chavurah", a community of its own making, with transient attendees and interconnected worldwide network, comprising people of all Jewish denominations, of other faiths and none. There are services for Shabbat and the Festivals, weddings, B'nei Mitzvot, and also lectures, music, interfaith, newsletter and other publications, shop, educational outreach and school visits, a year-long programme for Austrian volunteers and an annual public memorial service on the anniversary of the sinking of the Tanais. For OJC members, there are many points of familiarity and connection: the synagogue's Judith Humphrey Garden carries the name of Jonathan Webber's late sister, our own Dalya Moss has been a volunteer, and this Shavuot a Mosaic-organised trip will share in the life of this remarkable testament to presence out of absence, to remembrance, renewal and Life.



## Concert with Ulrich von Wrochem

On 29 May, 7:30 pm, violist Ulrich von Wrochem will play a tribute concert at Etz Hayyim Synagogue commemorating the 75th anniversary of the loss of the Cretan Jewish community during the Shoa. Ulrich von Wrochem contacted Etz Hayyim and kindly offered to perform on this occasion. He is the former principal violist of Berlin Opera and La Scala in Milan. The programme of the concert will be announced shortly.



## Annual Memorial Service for Cretan Jewish Community on 2 June 2019

2019 marks the 75th anniversary of the loss of the Cretan Jewish community in the Shoa. The annual memorial service for the community will take place on 2 June. At 7:30 pm, the event will begin with a commemoration for all victims of the sinking of the Tanais at the monument in Koum Kapi. The ceremony will be followed by a memorial service at Etz Hayyim Synagogue led by Gabriel Negrin, Rabbi of Athens. During the ceremony the names of the lost community will be read and memorial candles lit.



## 20th Anniversary of Reopening of Etz Hayyim

October 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of the rededication of Etz Hayyim on 10 October 1999 (30th of Tishrei 5760). We will celebrate this occasion with a series of events between Sunday, 13 October (Erev Sukkot) and a main commemorative event on 27 October (as close as possible to 30th of Tishrei 5780 which corresponds to 29 October 2019).

These events will highlight Etz Hayyim as a place of prayer, recollection and reconciliation as Nikos Stavroulakis' had defined it at the time of its rededication. We hope that these events will provide an opportunity to once more open the doors of Etz Hayyim to visitors, local visitors in particular, and strengthen the presence of the synagogue as an integral part of the wider local community of Hania.

Below we present a draft programme with an outline for individual events highlighting the various activities and achievements of Etz Hayyim Syna-

gogue. The final programme with exact dates and times will be circulated as soon as possible so that friends and supporters can plan their possible visits accordingly.

The 14-day festival will begin with the Erev Sukkot service led by Etz Hayyim's Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange and the opening of the **Photo Exhibition: 20 Years of Etz Hayyim**, which will take visitors on a visual journey through the past 20 years and present one photo for each year. (Due to the loss of much archival material in the 2010 arson attacks, we would appreciate indeed if friends and supporters could **share any photographs** they feel might be interesting for the exhibition. Please contact the office!)

**Etz Hayyim on Screen** will highlight the varied production of visual and acoustic material of and about Etz Hayyim, i.e. documentary films and other visual mate-

rial as well as sound recordings and compositions. A concert of Sephardi and – ideally – Romaniote music is





planned as a **Sounding Etz Hayyim** event.

Another event will present **Etz Hayyim as a House of Learning** and showcase Etz Hayyim's educational outreach programme and some results of student projects about Cretan Jewish history and culture. During the day, the Synagogue staff will offer walking tours of the historic Jewish quarter of Hania (Ovraiki) based on the walking-tour map which is currently being prepared (see p. 16 f.).

The event **Culinary Etz Hayyim** will combine a presentation of the customs and traditions of the main Jewish holidays with a sampling of Greek Jewish cooking based on Nikos Stavroulakis' *Cookbook*

*of the Jews of Greece*, which has become the indispensable basis for holiday cooking at Etz Hayyim.

A presentation of **Etz Hayyim as Makom** will highlight the Synagogue's role as a religious and historical site in (local) society. The event will be followed by an **Open Erev Shabbat** on 25 October. An accompanying event will be the exhibition "Parallel Points of View" during the two festive weeks (see report on the Heritage Contact Zone partnership on p. 18), which engages Etz Hayyim Syna-

gogue with the wider Cretan heritage.

During a literary event **Etz Hayyim in Poetry and Prose**, award-winning British poet, novelist and non-fiction writer Ruth Padel will read from various literary works relating to the Jews of Crete and Etz Hayyim in particular.

On 27 October, the **main commemorative event** will take place under the title "20 Years of Etz Hayyim - The Living Tree of Life". It will include a commemorative service led by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, and a keynote speech. Friends and supporters of Etz Hayyim, local officials, representatives of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KISE), representatives

of institutions which have supported the Etz Hayyim project as well as members of the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim will be invited.

It is our hope that this two-week festival will bring together long-term friends of Etz Hayyim and guests who can discover the scope of our activities which continue Nikos Stavroulakis' legacy and at the same time embark on new projects to strengthen Etz Hayyim's role as a place of prayer, recollection and reconciliation.



## Recent Events

### Yad Vashem Award ceremony Hania, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018

*Yad Vashem is an important institution for the memory of the Holocaust and for its educational significance. Among other things, Yad Vashem has established the Award of the Righteous Among the Nations, a title given to non-Jewish people who saved persecuted Jews during the Second World War.*

*In Crete, until today, the honorary title of Righteous Among the Nations has been awarded on three occasions by Yad Vashem: on 12 December 1972, the Petrakis family (Manolis and Antigoni Petraki) from Hania were honoured. Manolis Petrakis – already deceased in 1972 – was the man who saved one of the few survivors from the Hania Jewish population: Iossif Konen. On 21 January*

*1999, the Xirouhakis and the Paitakis families from Kasteli (Kisamos, Hania) were honoured. Those families, and especially Stylianos and Damaskini Xirouhaki and Manolis Paitakis, gave shelter to the family of Salvador and Carolla Avram, who had stopped in Crete during their effort to find a way to escape to Egypt.*

*On 25 October 2018, the honorary title was awarded, posthumously, to Athena Varvataki. Athena came from the village of Kournas (Apokoronas, Hania) and was the person who lived with young Iossif Ventura, hidden in a house in Athens throughout the German occupation. Today the honour of Righteous Among the Nations is considered as a valuable educational opportunity. This is the*





reason why the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in Greece takes advantage of this ceremony to teach an important lesson to the students of Greek schools. Therefore the ceremonies are organized by school students, who must take care of the whole presentation. This ceremony for Athena Varvatakis was a real gift

to her relatives, as well as to Iossif Ventura himself, by the students of the 1st High School of Hania. The Ambassador of Israel was present and gave the following speech. We thank the Embassy of Israel in Athens for the permission to reprint. (See also the article "Culture of Remembrance in Greece" on p. 27f.)

## Address by Israeli Ambassador to Greece Irit Ben-Abba

I am excited to be present here this morning in Hania during this ceremony commemorating the rescue story of Mr. Iossif Ventura, a very well known poet, who came from a family with roots back in Zakynthos. The family was already settled for decades in Crete and, in their effort to escape from the Germans, fled to Athens. Young Iossif was then saved by a noble woman, Athena Varvatakis, from the village of Kournas, not so far from Hania, who at that time was working as a maid for a family in Athens.

Athena took care of young Iossif for four years and everybody assumed that he was her son. This was a very

the lives of Jews. So far more than 26,000 people were awarded around the world, among them are 335 Greeks. Among the honoured were diplomats of foreign countries, from Japan, Sweden, Spain, Austria, the Philippines and others that gave visas to Jews escaping from the Nazis and by this saved their lives, there are bishops, mayors, police and military people who rescued Jews all over Europe and there are ordinary people like Athena that saved their neighbors, their friends.

These are all sweet souls as for them it did not matter who these people were, what religion they had, for them these were simply human beings who were chased by others just because they were from a different religion which the Nazis believed had to be exterminated from earth.

Since I arrived in Greece, four years ago, I have participated in numerous such ceremonies all over Greece, granting awards to family members, usually due to the time that has passed, of those who saved Jews everywhere around Greece either in Thessaloniki, Athens, Volos and many other places and the story is the same everywhere: wonderful humane gestures by noble human beings who believed in saving the lives of others who are in misery and despair.

You should all be proud that this country has great personalities like the bishop and the mayor of Zakynthos who saved the lives of 250 Jews, the whole Jewish community of Zakynthos, like the Bishop of Volos who saved the lives of most of the Jewish community of Volos, of the chief of police of Athens who saved the lives of hundreds of Jews from Athens and those who managed to escape from other parts of Greece to Athens. These are the heroes from Greece who were all awarded with the Righteous Among Nations Award of Yad Vashem.

The Jewish community of Greece is an ancient one. The Jews lived in Greece already in the first century CE. They were in Ioannina, Sparta, Chios, Rhodes, and other places. The majority of the Jewish community arrived in Greece in the 15th century after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain by Queen Isabella. Those settled mainly



Image of Athena Varvatakis screened during the presentation

unique and humane behaviour by a young woman who acted like this because she realized that this is her duty: to save the life of those that are in danger of persecution and death. She acted like this because she grew up believing that saving the life of one person is like saving the life of the whole universe - as the Jewish proverb says.

For this, she will be honoured today, in her village in Kournas, with the special award that is granted to non-Jews who risked their life to save Jews during the Holocaust. The award is granted by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Institute in Jerusalem. Yad Vashem is the only institute worldwide that officially grants this Righteous Among Nations Award to non-Jews who saved



in Salonica and in other parts of the then Ottoman Empire. In Greece there were big communities since the 15th century in Corfu, in Volos, in Larissa in Ioannina, Rhodes, Corfu, Zakynthos, Athens and Hania as well. For hundreds of years the Greek Jews lived in great friendliness with their Greek Orthodox friends and shared their lives together. The Jews of Greece are Greeks first and foremost, despite the fact that they practice a different religion. The Jews contributed to the culture, the philosophy, the economy of this country for many generations, they were traders, farmers, merchants and port workers in Salonica and they enjoyed a brotherly-like friendship with the Greek Orthodox for many generations. The Greek Jewish community is considered the jewel of the Balkan's Jewish communities.

But this very old and special community was brutally expelled in 1943 by the Nazis to Auschwitz and Bergen Belzen concentration camps and 90 percent of the over

Jews.

Chancellor Angela Merkel who visited Israel a few days ago and paid yet another visit to the Yad Vashem Museum of the Holocaust repeated once again: "Nearly 80 years ago, during the Kristallnacht pogroms on the 9th of November, the Jewish people of Germany were confronted with hate and violence in an unprecedented manner. What followed was the unparalleled crime that ruptured civilization, the Shoa. It is from this point that Germany's everlasting responsibility to remember this crime and oppose anti-Semitism, xenophobia, hate and violence arises."

The Jews of Hania, a very old Jewish community of centuries whose synagogue is still open till today, were taken by the Nazis aboard the ship Tanais. The ship was bombarded by the allied forces and sunk in the sea on its way to Athens. They were expelled by the Nazis and had



*Ambassador Ben-Abba (left), mayor of Hania Tasos Vamvoukas (2nd left) and Archbishop of Crete Irinaios (centre) during the award ceremony*



*Ambassador Ben-Abba (left) with Athena Varvatakis's nephew and niece, Iossif Ventura (right)*

100,000 Jews who lived in Greece just before the Second World War were brutally murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. And why? Just because they were persecuted by the Nazis for being Jews. Hitler's mission was to kill all Jews in Europe. His systematic slaughter machine managed to kill six million Jews, among them one million children. Very few survived the concentration camps and some were rescued by good non-Jews. The very few survivors went to Israel after the war and established the State of Israel.

In a few days, on 9 November, we will commemorate the Kristallnacht, that night in 1938 when synagogues and Jewish property were destroyed and Jews attacked all over Germany. This was the beginning of the systematic murder of anything that was Jewish in Germany and then in Europe and the systematic murdering of all the

they reached Athens, they would have been taken straight to Auschwitz camp as well.

Our mission as the generation after the Holocaust, the Shoah, is to remember and never forget. To educate the youngsters to believe in liberal values of tolerance, anti-racism, anti-Semitism and accepting everyone for what they are as human beings. We should cry out loud against anti-Semitic statements and actions, we should enact laws against those who call for hatred and anti-Semitism and xenophobia. In this world of open social media, especially you, the young generation that is so much exposed to Facebook and Instagram, you have to be very alert to racist statements and to hate slogans. Hitler got to power through democratic means. He paved his way to power using democracy as a tool but managed then easily to proceed with his Nazi ideology very fast.



No one stopped him. Millions collaborated with him in his ideas of getting the world clean from Jews. You, as the young generation of the world, should learn about this part of the history of Europe that took place only less than 80 years back, understand the roots of hatred, and learn how to fight bravely against hate and cruelty around you. This way the world might be a better place



for all of us no matter what religion, faith, color and belief we represent.

I would like to thank once again the Minister and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, who are doing their utmost to introduce the Holocaust as a compulsory chapter in the Greek curricula, who encourage students in high schools to participate in intensive discourse about the Holocaust, who send teachers and educators to Yad Vashem to be trained on how to teach about the Holocaust in Greek schools, and arrange for youngsters around Greece to visit Auschwitz every year.

Remembrance and education are the most crucial. Ignorance is the enemy. I hope that today's event will encourage you all to go back home and read and study at length the Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust and be proud that there were wonderful people here in Greece, like Athena, that saved wonderful people, like Iossif Ventura.

Thank you.

## Ongoing Projects

### Exhibition "Tales from an Old Fort Town"

The exhibition "Tales from an Old Fort Town", Cretan-British artist George Sfougaras' artistic response to the fate of the Jewish community in Crete, commenced on 24 October 2018 in the presence of Irit Ben-Abba, Israeli Ambassador to Greece, and several members of Etz Hayyim's Board of Trustees. The exhibition will remain on display at least throughout this summer to reach a wider audience among the up to 25,000 visitors we expect again this year.

Throughout the winter, the exhibition has already impressed our visitors as numerous entries in the guestbook show (see box on p. 15).

Equally, George's book, which Etz Hayyim Synagogue published with Lycabettus Press, Athens for the exhibition opening, has proved to be a favorite with visitors and we hope to soon publish a second edition. The book includes a brief overview of Cretan Jewish history and reproduces the ten drawings of the exhibition alongside reflections by the artist on the themes of the drawings. George's artwork is enhanced by the evocative poems of Shelly Tracey, a South African poet with Latvian and Lithuanian Jewish roots.

George also kindly donated prints of several of the drawings of the exhibition on heritage archival paper. The first print was purchased, even before the actual exhibition opening, by an Austrian Jewish couple and has

(hopefully) found a lovely place hanging on a Viennese wall by now. Whenever they are in Hania, Etz Hayyim is among the first places the couple visits – so they have been to the synagogue a couple of times and feel drawn to the place itself as well as its quietness. They also expressed their appreciation of the building's good state of preservation. On being asked what made them buy the artwork, they simply said: 'It's kind of dark, regarding the content as well as the used artistic technique', so in their eyes the disappearance of Cretan Jewish communities







during the Second World War was depicted absolutely accurately in the artworks. Initially, both of them just wanted to take a quick look at the mikveh, but after entering they were immediately impressed by George's artwork which was just being installed. So it was a spontaneous purchase followed by quite an interesting conversation and background story. What made them return to Etz Hayyim so many times? They say that there's something new to discover every time.

Some of the special prints are still available and can be obtained by contacting the synagogue office; all proceeds will support the work of Etz Hayyim. We also created greeting cards with the images of those prints.

During George's visit for the exhibition opening, we were also fortunate to learn more about the impressive scope of his work in which he explores themes like human migration and cultural heritage. He is the coordinator of *Focus on Identity*, a group of 19 artists from 12 countries. In some of his most recent work he created a book about the Andalusian Emirate of Crete (recently published by Mehri Publications, London, as "Tales from the Castle of the Moat. The Forgotten Conquerors"). Another focus of



his work are creative maps with a (trans)historical and/or personal focus. This luckily coincided with one of our ongoing projects at Etz Hayyim (see p. 16 ff.)

## From the visitors' book

"So very moving – and exceptional art." Evan Scott, USA

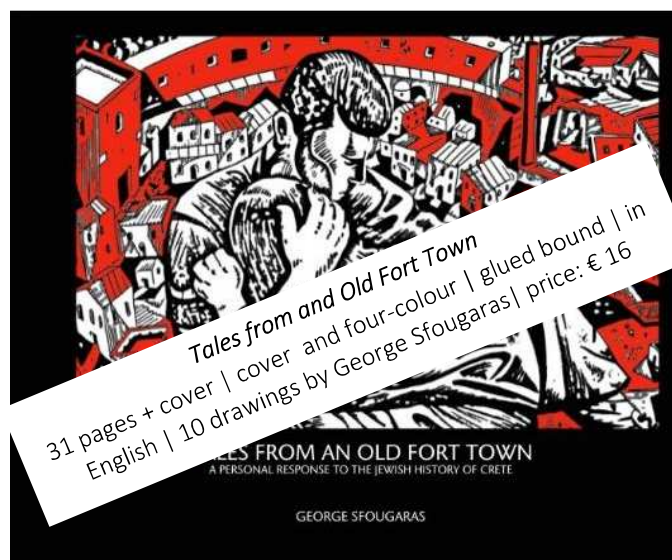
"Haunting and thought provoking art, but lovely atmosphere here of peace and hope." L. & T. Hegarty, UK

"What you have shared with all of us who enter this extraordinary place representative of past and present is truly very very special. Thank you. Very moving."

A. & D. Bernhard, Virginia

"I feel proud for the people who promote the truth about the Greek Jews who were lost unfairly, due to racism. The place here is wonderful and brings lots of memories on surface. Thank you for preserving and keeping the place alive. PS. From Xanthi where 500 Jews were settled, we also had a synagogue but they didn't respect it. However, the Jewish cemeteries still exist and are taken care of by ΠΑΚΕΘΡΑ [cultural and developmental center of Thrace]."

Ekaterina Stavropoulou-Vlachou





## Map for Self-Guided Tour of Hania Jewish Quarter

During guided tours of Etz Hayyim Synagogue our visitors quite often also ask for information about the historic Jewish neighborhood and until now we had to reply: There is not much to be seen if you don't know what to look for. But for quite some time we had considered creating a map for a self-guided tour for visitors. We had first put together the information we have about the Ovraiki, the historic Jewish quarter of Hania, for a guided tour when the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, asked us to show the historic Jewish quarter to members of the Athens community during their visit to Etz Hayyim in October 2017.

We realised then that quite a bit of information was

bourhood. For instance, initially, George had based the reconstruction of the now non-existent Beth Shalom Synagogue "on the Etz Hayyim design but orientated the garden differently." This challenge and the general feeling that it would be best to put the draft map to the test together made us invite George for a one-week artistic residency in mid-March.

On the first day of George's stay, we started with a work-lunch (with some dishes Nikos used to serve for weekend dinners at his house) and we agreed on the schedule for the week. The next day, George spent sketching and drawing in the Ovraiki. On Monday, 18 March, the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, happened to be in Hania and



available and could be put into a compelling narrative. But we lacked a suitable map of Ovraiki. Our wonderful collaboration with the Cretan-British artist George Sfougaras, who previously worked on various kinds of artistic maps, has now given us the opportunity to have a map created of Ovraiki for this specific walking tour.

The process started earlier this year with Gedenkdienst volunteer Maïke taking a lot of photographs of all the houses in the Ovraiki, which together with a selection of historic and modern maps allowed George to study and understand the layout of the neighbourhood. After creating a footprint of the area, George "construct(ed) the 3D buildings, basically raising them up from the 'footprints'. This is a tricky bit, as I am using a tilt factor that allows me to show the facades as far as possible," as he explains on his blog (<https://georgesfougaras.blogspot.com/2019/02/map-hania-crete.html>).

One challenge has been of course the decision which "reality" the map should depict: on the one hand it should be accurate enough to help visitors to navigate through the neighborhood but on the other it should also be a means for re-imagining the historic Jewish neigh-

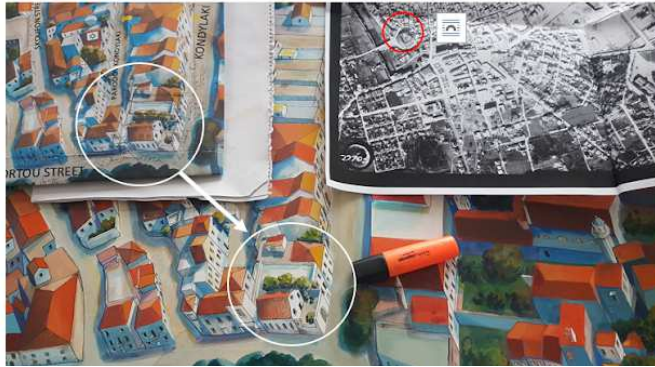
joined George and the synagogue staff for a tour of the Ovraiki during which we tried to determine the location and dimensions of the destroyed Beth Shalom synagogue based on historic photographs. We followed the route for the self-guided tour on the map to make sure that all the stops, which will be included in the final map, are appropriately depicted.

The next day, we took George to a meeting with local hobby historian



Exploring the route through Ovraiki with Rabbi Negrin, George Sfougaras and Board of Trustees President Marianna Vinther.





Manolis Manousakas, who has a large collection of historical photographs and previously published about both Etz Hayyim and Beth Shalom synagogues in the local newspaper. Our findings from the previous day and Mr.

Manousakas' information allowed a revision of the location and layout of Beth Shalom on George's draft map (see image to the left). We eventually also agreed to include a distinguishable "ghost" building in the map at the end of Kondylaki street as the street, contrary to today, used to be cut off from the sea.

On Wednesday, 20 March, we walked to the four stops for the map that are located outside the Jewish quarter, among them the former Jewish cemetery in the Nea Hora neighbourhood west of the old town, the former family home of Iossif Ventura and the Historical Archive of Crete, which is located in a former Jewish family home close to the public gardens. In the evening, George attended the Etz Hayyim event for Erev Purim and read from the Megillat Esther in Greek.

George spent the last day of his residency trying to capture more visual material from the Ovraiki to take back home to the UK in order to complete the map. At the end of March, he presented us with the final version of the map and we are now working on completing the narrative and additional illustrations for the stops on the tour. George also generously donated all his work on the project for us to use in whatever way will benefit Etz Hayyim. Giving him several copies of our new Interfaith Calendar for 2019/20 will just be a very small way to thank him for his dedication and loving support. We very much look forward to continuing this wonderful collaboration and hope to welcome George again at Etz Hayyim very soon.

## Etz Hayyim's Interfaith Calendar 2019/20

We continue a by now well-established tradition and publish the latest edition of the Etz Hayyim Interfaith Calendar. As usual, the calendar includes Jewish, Christian and Muslim holidays, meticulously researched by our Gedenkdienst volunteer Maïke. This edition covers September 2019 to December 2020. The calendar layout is done again by Nikos Afentakis.

The illustrations, drawings by George Sfougaras, invite you to a stroll through Ovraiki, the historic Jewish quarter of Hania and thus bring Etz Hayyim closer to your own doorstep. The calendar can be ordered from the Synagogue office. **All proceeds from the Calendar directly support the maintenance and work of Etz Hayyim Synagogue.** In 5780 (2019/20), we also hope to implement an idea of one of our Havurah members to further put into practice the interfaith approach promoted with this calendar. We will keep you updated about this project under the working title "Hania 5780-1441-2019/20".



**Your copy of the Interfaith Calendar is available for a donation of 15 Euro (plus shipping; Greece € 2, Europe € 3, world € 3.30) from the Synagogue office.**





## Heritage Contact Zone: Budapest Partner Meeting and Cretan Parallel Points of View

Since the launch of the cooperative project Heritage Contact Zone (HCZ) in September 2018, our local activities have started taking shape. In the Heritage Contact Zone project, Etz Hayyim is working with six partner organisations from across Europe: Castrum Peregrini, Amsterdam (NL), Goethe Institut Lyon (DE), Human Platform Budapest (HU), Timisoara European Capital of Culture (RO), European University Institute Florence (IT) and Culture Action Europe Brussels (BE). The project focuses on neglected and contested European heritage and engages communities and citizens in building new approaches to European heritage which will be showcased in exhibitions in five partner countries and a transnational online exhibition to celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

For the local exhibition, Etz Hayyim is cooperating with the Hania educational not-for-profit association Young Citizens of the World and the curating artist Konstantin

bers of the public in the creation of the exhibition. Since February, several workshops with participants from various backgrounds have taken place. The artist describes the aim of the workshop as follows: "Our workshops are designed in a way that allows the participants to experience the insight that all narratives are constructed ones, be it the mainstream narrative, be it any additional/parallel narrative, be it the self-perspective or the excluding view from outside. Based on this insight, the participants discuss to which degree they personally ascribe to 'their' additional narrative, ask themselves whether they consider it a homogenous narrative, re-evaluate why and to which point and in which ways they feel excluded. Eventually, they decide what they want to tell the public about themselves through a specific object and a story that puts the object into context."

Four of the other project partners are also hosting exhibitions in the framework of the Heritage Contact Zone project and first objects and stories are now online on the project website: [www.heritagecontactzone.com](http://www.heritagecontactzone.com).

The Hania exhibition will be open to the public during the second half of October, specifically the two weeks of festive events commemorating the 20th anniversary of the rededication of Etz Hayyim (see p. 10f.). According to the curating artist: "It is our goal to show the richness of the existing cultural diversity in our specific, as well as wider, area, and to present this rich cultural diversity to the general public as an opportunity for, and strength of, Hania, Crete and Greece. We aim to build bridges, where currently cultural stereotypes tend to divide the population. This construction of bridges already starts within the workshops." The exhibition will be on display in the Sabbionara exhibition space (image below, left: layout of planned exhibition), a former gate house in the historic



Logos of the cooperation partners for the Hania exhibition

Fischer, himself a long-term member of the Etz Hayyim Havurah. Under the title "Parallel points of view. heritage and intercultural dialogue. Heritage Contact Zone, Hania", this exhibition will look at Cretan history and heritage from ten different angles, i.e. perspectives that are usually not part of the mainstream narrative. In keeping with the framework of the project, the artist involves mem-





Hania city walls.

On 4 and 5 February, our cooperation partner Human Platform, an umbrella organization of Hungarian NGOs, hosted the second Heritage Contact Zone partner meeting in Budapest. The HCZ project works in particular with activists of the Living Memorial initiative (Eleven Emlékmű), which is part of Human Platform.

The partner meeting took place in the Institute for Political History (Politikátörténeti Intézet), a symbolic location just across from the Hungarian Parliament. While it served as the Institute of Party History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party from 1957 to 1989, it has now developed into a private research institute, archive and



Logo of the Living Memorial

think-tank focusing on historical and societal issues in stark opposition to the right-wing Fidesz government of Victor Orbán, which is attempting to confiscate both the majority of the materials of the archives and the headquarters building. The somewhat Kafkaesque atmosphere of the building – with huge empty shelves and wide empty floors – reflects this lingering conflict.

The Living Memorial activists share the opposition to the right-wing Orbán government, in fact their movement started in response to plans of that very government for a highly controversial memorial dedicated to the victims of the German invasion of Hungary during the Second

World War. The planned memorial uncritically and in disregard of history suggested that all Hungarians were victims, while neglecting that many Hungarian Jews fell not only victim to the German occupation but to Hungarian perpetrators as well. This outraged numerous Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians, who expressed their views during a flash mob organised on 23 March 2014 at Szabadság tér (Liberty Square), the site designated for the official monument. They lit candles and placed stones and personal objects (like photographs, letters, pens, books etc.) in memory of the victims of the Shoa, which resulted in the "Living Memorial", a public installation, that gave the movement its name.

Since that day in 2014, activists of Living Memorial regularly gather to protect and maintain the site. They also meet there and in other locations throughout the city for discussion circles during which people from all kinds of backgrounds tell their personal and family stories in an attempt to deal with the multifaceted and complex history and memory of the Second World War. The two opposing chairs in the Living Memorial logo symbolise the important role of dialogue in their approach. In the end, the Orbán government did build the contested monument – it goes without saying that they did so without any public dialogue. But as András Rényi, one of the founding members of Living Memorial, emphasised during a visit to the monument with the HCZ partners: "The government monument was never officially inaugurated and is not used for public events. So, as a monument it is dead, it does not exist."

The next partner meeting will take place in Marseille in June. The partners will visit Hania for a meeting in the second half of October during our festivities for the 20th anniversary of Etz Hayyim's rededication (see p. 10f.)



Detail of the Living Memorial counter-monument



Living Memorial activist András Rényi explaining the memorial



## Educational Outreach

### Report on Etz Hayyim's Educational Programmes

In the last few months, Etz Hayyim's educational outreach expanded with several new programmes and much success. The important contribution of last year's seminar which was organized in Hania by the Jewish Museum of Greece in cooperation with Etz Hayyim – a seminar addressed to the teachers of Crete – brought its first fruits this academic year as Etz Hayyim as an educational venue is now much wider known. Fifteen schools have already either visited the Synagogue or have asked us to visit them; students have attended various programmes of educational activities. Some of these programmes are connected to Holocaust education, while others focus on Cretan Jewish history. The common background of them all, and their goal, is to speak about the reality, the meaning and the practices of co-existence and diversity. The programmes used are not ready-made. The Etz Hayyim staff is currently involved in an ongoing process of creating a range of educational activities and thematic packages taking into consideration the following: the and school grade of the attending students, the possible input that they have already received earlier in school, the reason of their dealing with the specific topic and the

bers of its Jewish population before the war, are used for outlining the presence of this community and giving it its rightful place in the local history, with which the students are familiar to some extent.

- Visits by primary schools, which have included the Synagogue in a general plan of students getting to know the 'other', the 'not-very-well-known': the majority of those children have no idea whatsoever about the historical or the religious aspects of the Jewish presence in Crete during the previous centuries. Anti-Jewish stereotypes have occasionally come up. The main goal in those cases on our part is to make the children develop some sense of familiarity and experience a visit that will make them feel comfortable with the place. One example of the type of activities used during such visits is making good use of a list of photographs with objects from Christianity and Judaism. Children are asked to wander around the Synagogue premises, look for the objects on the list and then meet again inside the Synagogue, where we discuss which of the objects they found are from the synagogue and which photographs show objects from churches. We address the symbolism of each object and



best possible method for pupils' active involvement during the teaching sessions.

Thus, up to now, the various programmes with the schools can be summarized as follows:

- Visits of general interest from schools which come by the Synagogue for a quick look: the most effective approach in those cases is achieved through items, replicas of Judaica, which compose an easy-access educational kit and give a general idea how a synagogue functions. Moreover, a collection of photographs of the Jewish neighbourhood of Hania, as well as of some mem-



talk about commonalities and differences of objects in the two religions. Emphasis is also put on non-religious items one comes across at the Etz Hayyim, like the fish ponds. The orientation of this material is mainly sensory.

- Visits by schools as part of religious studies classes: in those cases, the teachers have usually prepared the class regarding the various religious ceremonies and traditions. Part of the above mentioned material is used selectively for those students and a comprehensive discussion takes place inside the synagogue, since the place offers many chances for questions and





- Visits by schools with a focus on local or general history: in those cases there is a range of material to be used, according to the time available and the previous knowledge of the students. We use a variety of sources and materials for the activities with student on such topics: an interior photograph of the Beth Shalom Synagogue of Hania – the second synagogue, which does not exist today – on the day of the arrival of King Konstantinos in Crete in 1913 (illustrating that the local Jewish community was regarded as an integral part of the local society); some pages from a local registry of 1906 with the Christian, Muslim and Jewish names of the voters of Hania (illustrating the multi-faith society of Hania at the time); a series of documents referring to the Jewish cemetery of the town until the late 1940's (illustrating the rootedness and subsequent loss and neglect of the local Jewish community).

- not strike them and shock them. One main target is that the children know exactly what they will see in Auschwitz. Secondly, students must be encouraged to express their feelings and claim their personal space during the camp visit, if necessary. In order to achieve this, part of the preparation on our side is focused on spending time on discussing their feelings and expectations already before the visit, with guided methods.

- Currently, our staff is preparing a project on the “Diary of Anne Frank”, which will be first introduced during a one-day seminar in a school in the south of Hania Prefecture, which requested this specific programme. And most recently, we started consultations with a local school on the concept of an educational programme on “Interfaith Perspectives” which will introduce pupils to Judaism, Islam and Christianity from a comparative perspective emphasising commonalities and common roots of the three religious traditions.

The feedback on the educational activities of the Synagogue has already been very positive and we are happy to be able to contribute to the education of young students in getting to know 'the other', in today's Greece meaning the non-white or the non-Christian orthodox or the non-born-in-Greece descendant.

The teaching materials and a description of the seminar topics will also be made available on our Greek website. We would also like to thank our Gedenkdienst volunteer Maike Heinrich for her invaluable support in developing these teaching packages.

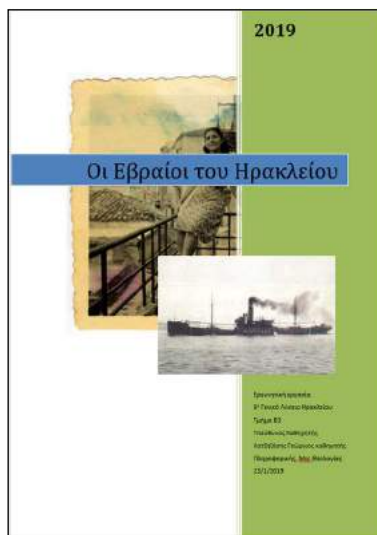




## The Jews of Iraklion: School Research Project of the 6<sup>th</sup> High School of Iraklion

On 23 January, a programme on “The Jewish Community of Iraklion” was presented at the Kalokairinos Community Center in Iraklion by students of the 6<sup>th</sup> High School.

During the previous school year, these students were involved in a project which dealt with the historical presence of various religious communities in Iraklion. As the students themselves explain in the preface of the presentation “we knew about the existence of Catholics, Muslims, but we were totally ignorant about the existence of Jews.



It was curiosity that led us to study the history of the Jews.”

The teacher in charge of the project was Georgios Hatzizisis, teacher of Computer Science with a Theology Master Degree. The project was presented in Iraklion in January 2019 in an event organized by the Association of Philologists of Heraklion.

The presentation was followed by the screening of a documentary related to the story of the survivor Ovadiah Baruch, a Jew from Salonica. The whole event was organized within the context of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

## Tribute to Iossif Ventura and his Poem Tanais Iraklion, Gazi High School – Municipality of Malevizi

On 1 March 2019, the High School of Gazi, in Iraklion, organized two consecutive events to honour the Cretan Jewish poet Iossif Ventura. The first event took place in the school, as an educational activity addressed to the students. The poet himself presented *Tanais*, the poem which he wrote commemorating the Holocaust of the Jewish community of Crete. The meeting was beyond our best expectations. 125 students attended his presentation. 75 of them had already worked on the poem within the limits of the Literature class, while the rest had studied the historical background of the poem in the History class. The meeting lasted two hours. The children were magnetised by Mr. Venturas’ presentation. Even those individuals who had declared their indifference earlier,

Mr. Ventura, apart from being a man with an extremely important personal history on his shoulders, is also a ‘teenager’; the students grasped this immediately and kept commenting on it even the following days in class.

The afternoon event was co-organized with the Municipality of Malevizi, that is the municipality to which the school belongs. The event was open to the public. Students, parents and teachers attended. Colleagues from the High School of Hersonissos, Iraklion, accompanied some of their students to the event. An important input was that of the student Aggelos Maragkakakis, who composed music for the *Tanais* poem and presented a part of it at the event with his lute.

We would like to thank all the people who contributed to the events.

Maria Varoucha & Anastasia Bouli,  
teachers at Gazi High School



stayed up to the very end of the discussion that followed the presentation. Afterwards, around twenty students approached the poet and either bombarded him with extra questions or asked him to take selfies or sign autographs! Even us, the teachers in charge of the event, did not expect this great success!





## Treasure Hunting in Hania

On 10 March 2019, the last Sunday of the carnival season, a treasure hunting game was organized by the radio station SUPER FM for the 23rd consecutive time. Through 14 puzzle questions, the participants had to locate different spots in the city of Hania and after solving each puzzle, they had to go on to the next spot.

The treasure hunt is organised every year by the team that won it the previous year. The main focus of the organisers is that the participants get to know spots of the city that are not well known to the majority of the local population. This year, one of the puzzles was referring to the monument of the shipwreck of the Tanais. We, as organizers, chose the monument in order to “force” the participants to locate it, see it and even for some minutes search the history behind it. It was important for us to attach to the monument a different kind of use, in addition to the touching memorial service that takes place there every year.

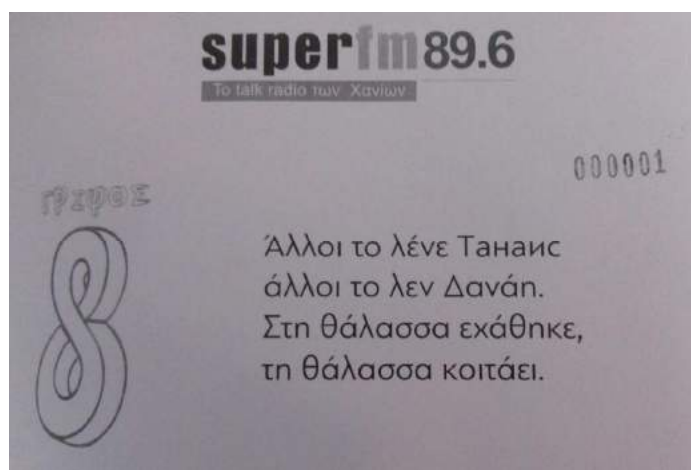
The weather was perfect and it was a delightful experience for us to wait for each team to solve the puzzle and go on to the next spot of the treasure hunt. People of

every age came to the monument location and a lot of them told us that they have not paid any attention so far to the monument, even though it is located in a visible spot. So, through fun and competition we tried to encourage the people of Hania to look again carefully at the monument of Tanais. The riddle that the participants had to solve was:

*Some call it Ταναϊς,  
Some call it Danae  
It was lost in the sea  
but still views over the sea.*

The riddle refers to the name of the ship in Russian and in Greek. Then the puzzle implies the wreck of the ship and the location of the monument on the seaside of Koum Kapi.

The team that created the riddles included: Giannakakis Giannis, Kokolaki Tasoula, Kaminakis Nikos, Vouraki Elena, Vourou Dora, Sfakiotakis Stavros



## 1st Hania High School Event on International Poetry Day

On 21 March 2019, the 1<sup>st</sup> High School of Hania organised a school event for International Poetry Day. Bridging the students' previous experience while preparing the *Righteous Among the Nations* ceremony (see p. 11-14), with the celebration of the power of poetry, the school invited Iossif Ventura, the poet of *Tanais*, which is commemorating the Holocaust in Crete. The teachers in charge were E. Kartsonaki, M. Vernardou, N. Xanthoudakis and G. Kyriakaki.







## Cretan Jewish History

### Elijah Del Medigo

Although he spent most of his adult life in various cities of northern Italy, the Jewish philosopher Elijah Del Medigo (ca. 1458–1493) was born in Crete, and is one of the finest examples of the multi-cultural nature of the island during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. My recent monograph on Del Medigo's philosophical work (*Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelianism*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017) is only one among several recent studies dedicated to his life and work, and the following passages are aimed at introducing the unique figure and activity of this important Cretan Jewish thinker.



Del Medigo was born in Candia (Iraklio) around 1458. His origin is reflected in references to his name in both Latin and Hebrew sources, which refer to him as Elijah Cretensis or אליהו מקנדיא. His family, which originated in Germany, settled in Crete in the early fourteenth century. A descendant of Del Medigo is the famous 17<sup>th</sup>-century

Kabbalist Joseph Del Medigo, who, like Elijah, was born in Candia yet spent most his mature life travelling in distant lands. Elijah himself spent his early years in Candia at a time when the island was a melting pot of various cultural influences from both east and west: Venice, Byzantium, and from a Jewish perspective Spain, North Africa and Germany. As will be shown presently, this multitude of influences is reflected in Del Medigo's own intellectual formation.

As Crete had been under Venetian rule since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Del Medigo, like other inhabitants of the island, could travel to *La Serenissima* and to other cities in its zone of influence, and so he did. From 1480 onwards we find him travelling back and forth between Venice and Padua – the famous university city of the Veneto region – as well as to other cities in northern and central Italy. His occupation during these years clearly reflects his multicultural early formation. While in Italy, Del Medigo served as both a translator of philosophical works from Hebrew into Latin and as the composer of

original philosophical works in both languages. His philosophical works and translation were all composed under the heavy influence of the 12<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Averroes, whose philosophical legacy had a strong impact on scholarly circles in Venice and Padua at the time. In short, Del Medigo served as an intellectual intermediary, active on the university scene of Padua. He was translating texts that were preserved in Hebrew, influenced by a Muslim philosopher, at the request of his Christian friends and scholars (most notably Pico della Mirandola). Del Medigo, one should note, was but one of many Cretans, both Jews

and gentiles, who participated in the intellectual and scholarly life of that university during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and who contributed to its international character.

Del Medigo's Cretan affiliation is reflected not only in his cultural and intellectual activity but also by the fact that while in Italy he did not stop dreaming of his homeland. Del Medigo was not fond of



the Jews he met in northern Italy, who were much more oriented towards Kabbalah than towards rational philosophy. In one of his philosophical treatises he laments that he had to leave his beloved Candia and to live among foolish and wicked people (בין אנשים סכלים ורעים), he employs medieval climatology in order to claim that people who live up north have a wicked nature, as compare to people who reside in more moderate climates and he ridicules the Ashkenazi custom of *tashlikh*, which he perceives as superstitious and irrational. And indeed, towards the end of his short life Del Medigo returned to Candia. Around 1490 he wrote his last work, *The Examination of Religion* (בחינת הדת), a work in which he sets out to demonstrate the rational foundation of authentic



Jewish belief, as opposed to its perverted manifestations – i.e. radical mysticism – as well as to other, irrational religions, namely Christianity. This again exemplifies Del Medigo's version of Judaism – a religion which is essentially rational and moderate.

Del Medigo died prematurely in 1493, most likely due to a complication during a medical procedure. Joseph Del Medigo, mentioned above, wrote that his funeral was attended not only by members of the Jewish community, but also by members of the Christian elite of Candia. If the testimony is true, it again exemplifies Del Medigo as

a true son of Crete: a cosmopolitan figure and a cultural intermediary, who at the same time was deeply attached to his home island, to which he eventually returned and where he was finally laid to rest.

*Dr Michael Engel, a researcher at the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at Hamburg University, studies the thought of Elijah Del Medigo and of other Jewish philosophers from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.*

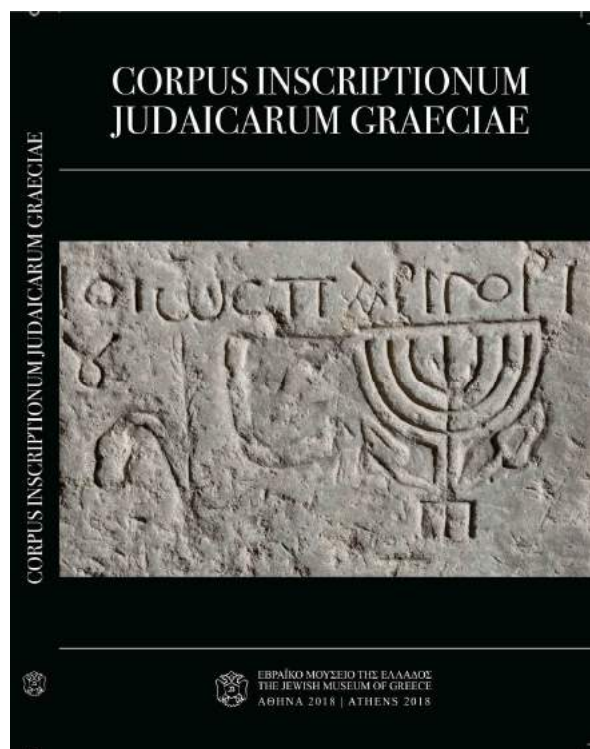
## Jewish Museum of Greece Publication: Jewish and Hebrew Inscriptions from Greece

On October 8, 2018 the Jewish Museum of Greece (JMG) presented at the Archaeological Society, Athens, its new academic publication, entitled, "*Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae (CIJG): Corpus of Jewish and Hebrew Inscriptions from Mainland and Island Greece (late 4th c. BCE–15th century)*". The compilation of Jewish and Hebrew inscriptions is part of the research programs of the Jewish Museum of Greece, which focus on the recording, study and publication of tangible and intangible evidence of the archaeological and historical past of the Greek Jews.

The publication gathers all the epigraphic material of Jewish interest or content located in the Greek geo-

graphical area dating from the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE until the 15<sup>th</sup> c. The geographical distribution and division of the corpus of Jewish and Hebrew inscriptions generally follows the current location of the inscriptions, with the aim of facilitating researchers and scholars. Each inscription is accompanied, in addition to a photographic image, by an entry, divided into individual recording fields.

Aimed at the general public as well as the specialist audience of archaeologists, historians, educators, academics and researchers, the publication serves the historical record and documentation of the long-standing presence, as well as the distribution of Jewish settlements in the Greek lands.



A 0252 – Funerary plaque of Rabbi Shemaria Agapouli Malafti, 1494,  
© Collection of the Society of Cretan Historical Studies, Historical  
Museum of Crete



The completion of the research and the publication of the book were made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of Ms. Alik and Ms. Nora Benrubi as well as of Mr. Samuel (Makis) Matsas, President of the Board of Directors of the JMG, respectively. The ultimate aim is to publish the Corpus in digital format, giving it the flexibility of intangible cultural goods, while the JMG is planning to organise an exhibition of selected inscriptions in the near future, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture.

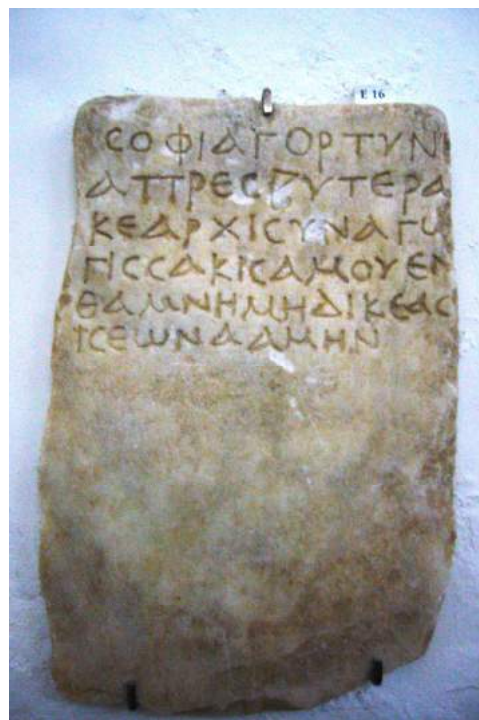
© The Jewish Museum of Greece, Athens, April 2019

We would like to thank Zanet Batinou, the Director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, for kindly providing a copy of the publication for the Etz Hayyim library.

The publication includes six inscriptions from Crete; from the holdings of the Archaeological Museum of Irakleion, the Historical Museum of Crete and the Archaeological Museum of Kissamos.

- A marble funerary stele in Greek from Kassanon, south of Irakleion, a location also known as Evraioi (Jews) from the 3rd or 4th century C.E. It marked the grave of a one-year old child named loudas.
- A limestone fragment of a funerary stele in Greek from the same location and period which marked the grave of a woman named Berenike, set up by a man named Eiosephos.
- A limestone funerary plaque in Hebrew from Irakleion for a Rabbi Shemaria Agapouli Malafti (illustration p. 25) dated to 1494.
- A marble funerary plaque in Hebrew from Irakleion for a woman named Mano, wife of Rabbi Eliezer Masriti from 1492.
- A marble funerary plaque in Hebrew from Irakleion for Eliyahu, son of the rabbi David Khouli, and his daughter Anastasu, who might have been victims of the plague in the 1480s.
- The much-quoted marble funerary plaque from Kasteli, Kissamos, from the 4th or 5th century C.E. for a Sophia from Gortyn, mentioned as a presbytera and archisynagogissa (see image above). The inscription attests to the existence of a Jewish community with a synagogue in Kissamos and suggests that Sophia either had a leading role in the synagogue administration or as an affluent and influential woman received certain honorific titles.

While the publication "Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae" includes two photographs of Etz Hayyim before its renovation, the inscriptions in situ at the synagogue



E 16 – Funerary plaque of Sophia from Gortyn bearing the titles of archisynagogissa and presbytera, Kissamos, 4th – 5th c. CE © Archaeological Museum of Kissamos

are not included. These are recorded and analysed by Professor Nicholas de Lange in his article "The Inscriptions of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue" which is published in Etz Hayyim's "The Jews of Crete" series and is available from the Synagogue office.

## The Jews of Crete

Selected articles and essays



Etz Hayyim Synagogue  
Hania 2002





## Still available: Mobile App “Etz Hayyim and Jewish Legacy in Crete”

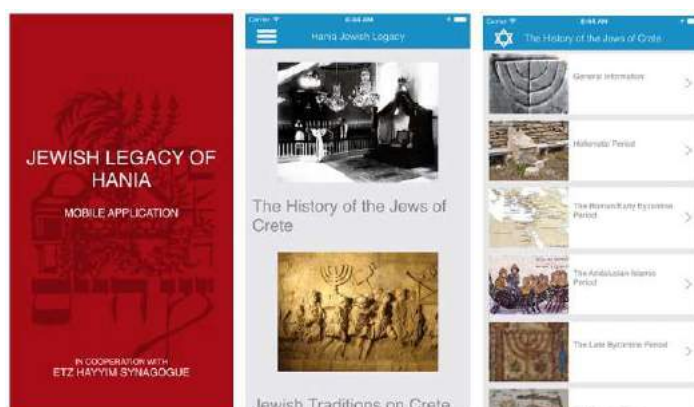
Another available resource with plenty of information about Cretan Jewish history and the story of Etz Hayyim is the mobile application “Etz Hayyim and Jewish Legacy in Crete.”

The section “Jewish History” covers all periods of Cretan Jewish history from the Hellenistic period to the Second World War. Romaniote and Sephardi traditions are explained in their specific Cretan context in the section “Jewish Traditions.” A third section includes the history and a virtual tour of Etz Hayyim.

The app was launched in June 2016. The project was initiated by then Ambassador of Canada to Greece, Robert Peck. The Embassy of Canada funded the technical implementation of the app by Ready Labs Inc. The content

of the app was prepared by the Etz Hayyim staff.

The app is available in English in the AppStore and on the website [www.greekjewishlegacy.org/hania/index.html](http://www.greekjewishlegacy.org/hania/index.html).



## Culture of Remembrance in Greece: A Question of Identity?

“Remembrance and education are most crucial. Ignorance is the enemy.” The Israeli Ambassador finished her speech on 25 October 2018 in Hania with this call for an active and inclusive culture of remembrance. It was the day of the ceremony honouring Athena Varvataki as a “Righteous among the Nations” for taking the risk of pretending to be the mother of Iossif Venturas during the Nazi-occupation of Greece in order to protect him and save his life.

Iossif Ventura was born in 1938 in Hania as the second child of a relatively affluent Jewish family with Venetian roots. The Jewish community of the city numbered approximately 330 people at that time. Three years later, Nazi Germany occupied Crete after a 10-day battle between 20 May and 1 June 1941. They immediately prohibited the practice of ritual Jewish slaughter of animals (according to Jewish religious dietary laws) and Jewish shops had to be labelled as such with a sign. After the Gestapo started to register the Jewish population of the city, the Venturas decided to leave for Athens where their Jewish background did not stay secret for long after all. When local collaborators began blackmailing them the family decided to split up and go into hiding. Iossif went with his nanny Athena Varvataki to a friend of the family in the North of Athens, effectively adopted her as a mother and stayed with her until the end of the war. When the family reunited, he could no longer remember his real parents and had doubts about them for years.

Today he lives in Athens, has two grown-up daughters in Israel and the USA, is a well-known poet and travels a lot. Athena’s niece and nephew accepted on her behalf the honourific title “Righteous among the Nations” awarded by Yad Vashem during the ceremony in Hania. A local school was responsible for the festive programme of the event, which included an overview of the Shoah with pictures and music. Subsequently they told Iossif’s and Athena’s story. Speeches were given by the mayor of Hania, the Israeli Ambassador, a representative of the Ministry of Education, the director of the school and the bishop of Crete.

Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, is basing its work on remembrance, research, documentation and education. The fundament for this is the “Yad Vashem Law” which was established in 1953 by the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Paragraph 1.9 of this law is focusing on the commemoration of “the high-minded Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews” – the so called “Righteous Among the Nations.”

Some might interpret the numbers of “Righteous” in a country in relation to the general publication of that specific country and the number of victims of the Shoah. In Greece, 347 persons were honoured for saving Jewish people so far. Before the Nazi-occupation the Jewish population of Greece counted 77,000 people, most of them living in Thessaloniki. When the Axis Powers started occupying Greece, Athens became a place of refuge for many



Jews from all over the country, as chances to survive there seemed better given the anonymity of the large city and because the national resistance was well-organized there and some Greek authorities helped with fake ID cards. Deportations commenced in 1943 in Thessaloniki, but soon afterwards Jews were being deported from all over the mainland and the islands as well. 60,000 Greek Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Until today the history of the Jewish population in Greece, as well as their systematic extermination during the Second World War, are not fully part of the general collective memory. Especially in Greece, for linguistic and historical reasons, the term “Holocaust” describes a spectrum of different catastrophes and is not initially connected to the Shoah.



To avoid terminological confusion, one must refer to the Holocaust of the Greek Jews. Academic research in Greece on the Holocaust began to develop in the mid-1990s and did not become part of the school curriculum until 2005. Insufficient, belated research on the Shoah is not a specifically Greek phenomenon but can be found in the rest of the involved countries as well. Still it is crucial to analyse and understand why neither academics nor the public had dealt with that topic for such a long time. Generally speaking, Greek identity was and still is built on the Greek language and being Greek-Orthodox Christian. If a group or a person cannot identify with one of these attributes they are not immediately included in the concept and confines of Greek identity and are hardly represented in the mainstream narrative of the country. With the establishment of the Greek State in 1830, the question of its citizens' identity came up for the first time and became more and more relevant with the constant expansion of its territory. Many of the “new” citizens were practicing different religions or speaking other languages. This did not only cause an insecurity in the definition and materialisation of national identity, but also a certain increase of nationalistic tendencies in order to ward off challenges to the established national identity; again, a fairly common phenomenon. Until 1924 Greece was a monarchy and after that faced the ups-and-downs

of various consecutive democratic and dictatorial rule. By 1941, parts of it became German-occupied territory and by 1943 the entire country as well.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the Greek Civil War started between the political left and right. The two characteristics of a proper Greek person (in terms of national identity) mentioned above were supplemented with the political attitude. When the Civil War ended in 1949, the majority of the communists had to leave the country, which led to a nationalist narrative of that event dominating the collective memory without any opposition. Subsequently, Greece identified as a western-capitalistic country and differentiated itself from the USSR and the communist Balkan countries. This development caused a huge lack not only of critical historical research, but also of historical reappraisal. For example: If one talked about the Second World War, the resistance movements were glorified as heroic without mentioning the communist participation and leading role in it. Victims of the German occupation apart from the “ideal” Greeks were hardly talked about – for instance the Jews of Greece.

In the 1980s, the conservative government was replaced by a leftist one. For the first time the political separation within the population was critically discussed and many of the communists, that had left Greece after the Civil War, returned to the country. The conservative, one-sided narrative was challenged by a different perspective for the first time, which had a huge impact on historical research. This change started among academics but has also influenced public memory until today. One could argue that the population's political fragmentation would have to be overcome at first in order to attempt an inclusive narrative and remembering culture.

The Yad Vashem ceremony in Hania was one of the first larger public events in Crete that created awareness of the Shoah without being initiated by the Etz Hayyim Synagogue. One could interpret this as a general increase in the awareness of neglected narratives in Greek history, but also as a change in the nationalist narrow perception of Greek identity. To a certain degree the slowness of this process might be connected to the national pride of the country which still is hardly questioned and considered as positive by many. The Israeli Ambassador emphasized in her speech that “the Jews of Greece are Greeks first and foremost despite the fact that they practice a different religion”... an acknowledgement that there is no obligatory connection between Greek identity and Greek Orthodoxy ... her statement was followed by applause.

*First published in Gedenkdienst Zeitung No. 19/1*



## Poetry and Prose

### Human Rights Day Athens

By the Keramaikos

-Burial place and city gate-

Close to the Acropolis

Two concrete slabs

Drifted with leaves

Under the mist-dripping trees

With a simple inscription

Tell of the deported Jews

Without bitterness or blame

Just an exhortation

That it never happen again:

*"Remember them, their anguish*

*And their death.*

*Do not recoil at such a horror,*

*Do not descend into despair*

*At man's inhumanity to man."*

By the Keramaikos

On this Day of Human Rights

Someone has taken a knife

And slashed at these words

With two jagged strokes,

Scrawling "Lies!" across them.

By the Keramaikos

Where the great and noble Greeks

Who gave their lives not to be slaves

In their beautiful, sculpted graves lie.

*"For, by remembering we honour their deaths,  
and we save them from dying again, in oblivion."*

### Note

The words of the quoted text are taken from an inscription written by Elie Wiesel for the monument to the 60,000 Greek Jews rounded up near here and sent to their deaths in concentration camps.

Since being erected in 2010 the monument has been repeatedly vandalized, most notably in 2014 and in December 2017. What I saw on Human Rights Day

(10 December 2018) may have been the result of another, more recent attack.

It seems to me that action must be taken against the perpetrators and to restore the monument.

Cliff Cook

13th December 2018 and January 2019



Holocaust Memorials in Athens (Keramaikos) and Thessaloniki (on the right)





*Dedicated to the memory of Nicholas Stavroulakis*

## "The Blind"



*by Ioanna Galanaki*

Many centuries ago the Megarians went to Delphi and asked the opinion of the Oracle as to where they should found their new colony. The Oracle replied: "Opposite the city of the blind". The Chalcedonians, who themselves were also a Megarian colony, were considered "blind" because they had chosen to build their city opposite (rather than upon) the peninsula with the seven hills. But of course, the Chalcedonians weren't blind at all...

This is what actually happened:

On a clear morning a Megarian ship reached the stretch of sea between the seven hills and the Asian coast. The leader and his fellow settlers gathered in the bows. They all gazed as they rounded the point of the big peninsula on their left, where Byzas was to found Byzantium a few years later. It was then that they saw the sea suddenly transformed into a long river flanked by green hills on either side. Without giving it further thought, the settlers immediately dropped anchor in one of the bays of this long river-like sea and disembarked to see the place from close up. Hills, valleys, trees, rivers with crystal-clear water and waterfalls, forests so dense that you could barely make your way through them. They went back to their ship in bewilderment. How could such a place exist and no one be living there, some of them wondered? Most

seemed to be in a dream and their eyes held the brilliance of a delicious intoxication. Even the most cynical who were only interested in profit had forgotten themselves over the last hours. "Fortune is on our side, the gods have listened to us", somebody shouted. "Here everything will be easy, even work!" However, one of their number was an old seaman. At some point he had lost an arm on some long journey to the ends of the earth, when an enormous fish suddenly leapt out of the sea and tore it off as easily as if it were a ripe fruit hanging on a tree. Well, this sailor started talking to them: "Listen closely to me, Megarians, my eyes have seen many things. I have sailed as far as the Pillars of Hercules, to the limit of this world. But never have I seen such beauty! This beauty belongs to the Gods. They alone must be allowed to enjoy it. Otherwise, if we dare to take what belongs to them, then great disasters will certainly come upon us."

The Megarians, who deeply respected this old man with the missing arm and considered him not just lucky to have gone to the ends of the world and to have come back alive, but also believed that for some special reason the gods had rescued him and sent him along with them, followed his advice – in spite of the objections, it must be said, of some amongst them.

So they founded their new city, Chalcedon, on the oppo-



site coast. And it didn't worry them in the least that they were nicknamed "The blind" and that a few years later were mocked even by their fellow-Megarians who came after them and founded Byzantium on that very same paradisaal peninsula on the other side.

The old seaman with the missing arm had in the meantime died and they had buried him in a spot where his tomb faced Byzas's city. "Never mind," said the other old men, who had now taken the place which the old sailor used to have among the Chalcedonians, "While one is alive it is better to be facing paradise..."

*First published in Greek in the literary journal 'Planodion'- Bonsai Stories on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2013. <https://bonsaistoriesflashfiction.wordpress.com/2013/07/08/ioanna-galanaki-i-tufloi/>*

Credits for illustrations: © George Sfougaras, p. 30: *Giali Tzami*, oil on panel, 2018; p. 31: *The Wisdom of Old Age*, acrylic on cotton, 2017.

*Ioanna Galanaki is completing her PhD at Southampton University, writing about the revival of the Etz Hayyim synagogue and community in the old Venetian city of Hania, Crete. The (working) title of her dissertation is "The Etz Hayyim Synagogue, from dilapidated building to shared sacred site – A biography of survival." Her project is funded by the Germanacos Foundation. Her short story "The Blind" is dedicated to the memory of Nikos Stavroulakis who was a key figure in her research. She has published one book of poems, and has translated poetry from English into Greek. Short stories as well as other literary work of hers have appeared in several literary journals and newspapers including the national award-winning journal "to Dentro".*

## Nikos Stavroulakis (נצ"ל)

### Reflections on Nikos from a Former Student

*by Micah D. Kiel*

In August 1996 I flew from the flat plains of the central United States to Athens, where a brusque man with a pipe led me through the labyrinthine streets of Athens. This man, Nikos Stavroulakis, would be my teacher for the next 8 weeks. He changed my life.

Nikos had no patience for shallow thinking or uncurious minds. He forced me and my fellow students to examine our most cherished views. After Nikos and Greece, my life has never been the same. I changed my faith and I had a new vocational goal to be a teacher like Nikos. With some hard work and some good fortune, I myself

became a professor, and in 2010 I stumbled into the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania and renewed my friendship with Nikos. I returned twice with my own students (26 of them), so that Nikos could pass on to them the wisdom I myself had gained almost 20 years earlier. Nikos

was a generous man, but not always gentle. I was worried how this conversation might go, but it was amazing. As I have reflected over the years on what Nikos taught me, and has also now taught my own students, there are three things in particular that stand out.



Micah Kiel (r.) with Nikos and Beznik, 2016

First, Nikos taught me about the importance of comity among people of different faiths. He was fond of an image: all people of faith are climbing the same mountain. There are many paths to the top of this mountain and we need to respect and try to understand the individual path that each world religion offers. When I first learned this as a 20 year old, I did not like it. I

had always been taught that Christianity was the only true way to God. Nikos helped me see — and in a week-long trip to Istanbul to experience — the beauty of faiths different than my own. In their final papers, many of my students wrote about Nikos' mountain metaphor. It clearly impacted their religious imaginations as much as



my own.

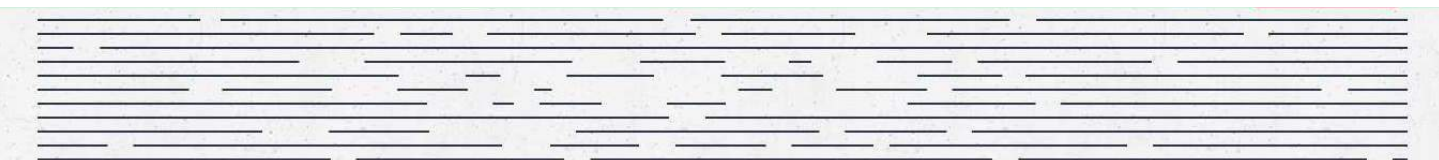
Second, Nikos taught me the importance of getting outside your comfort zone. He used the image from Tarot cards of “Le Pendu,” a man hanging upside down from his foot. Nikos liked to hang his students upside down so they could get a new perspective on life and to, as he said to me in an email, “wake them up a bit.” He claimed he would always let them down gently afterward.

Third, Nikos used a phrase when I was a student that says: “The body learns what the mind forgets.” This has become a mantra for me, even though I’m not sure exactly what it means. I think what he meant is that a life of faith is not just an intellectual pursuit. Liturgies and rituals matter, such as incense, ceremonial washings, singing,

and visual art. Worship of God encompasses all of our senses. Nikos had experiences with many different religions: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, but in the end, especially with his work at Etz Hayyim, he came back to Judaism. He knew the importance of placing one’s self within a religious tradition and exploring the depth of that individual faith.

With his throaty laugh, ever-present pipe, and twinkling eyes, Nikos changed those people who knew him, including me. This past January (2019) I returned again with students to Hania. This time, Nikos was not with us. He was greatly missed, but he lives on in his ideas and through his presence which infuses the synagogue.

## Gedenkdienst



### Gedenkdienst: My Semi-annual Review

It’s weird how time was not passing by at all when I first arrived in Hania and now more than half of my year at Etz Hayyim is already over. My life here turned out way better than I had expected it to. I found a bunch of lovely friends, people to make music and arts with, made lots of trips around Crete and for the first time really enjoy the work I am doing. There are those weird moments when I already feel sad about leaving even though it’s another five months to go. There has never been the “I don’t want to go to work, please stop” feeling towards my alarm clock and if it happens then only because of the previous evening and not because of work itself. Being at Etz Hayyim five days a week started giving me a feeling of home and comfort over the last few months with lots of lovely people around. I felt challenged to question many of my ideas especially through the interaction with visitors. I love the fact that people are coming in and out of the Synagogue all the time – not only visitors but friends of the place to share an office coffee with and interesting conversations.

Besides taking care of the visitors by giving guided tours and answering their questions, in the last few months I have been occupied with archive work, translations and research. Even though I really enjoy all of this, I do no longer have the feeling that History is the right field of

study for me. So I decided not to continue my studies at Vienna University. I was thinking about this for a while before I arrived in Hania so the thought has been there already and did not occur here. (One can guess that I feel a tiny little need to explain myself here while being surrounded by historians.) I will change my field to social work and social science and I am in the middle of the application process right now.

After many discussions and membership meetings of the Gedenkdienst, in December 2018 it was finally decided to continue sending people abroad. The next volunteer for Etz Hayyim has already been chosen and will arrive in the middle of August. No spoilers here – stay tuned!

At first I had the feeling that leaving Vienna for a year to live and work here is like a break from my “real” life. But it turned out that being here feels more real than the last two years in Austria did. A couple of weeks ago Christoph, the previous Gedenkdienst volunteer, asked me if I had the feeling that I developed my intellectual abilities while being here. This question really got stuck in my thoughts and I have to admit that even though I did grow on an intellectual level, first of all I realise a massive change in who I am as a person – and I’m really grateful for that.

Maike Heinrich





## Gedenkdienst: One Year Later

Six months have passed by since I left last August; it is February 2019 and I am already sitting again in Etz Hayyim's office. Being asked to write this article is challenging. But going into retrospective for writing articles is something that I am used to by now.

The past few months have been quite exciting, it was all about settling in and getting used to university. As was to be expected I have started studying History and life



Christoph at the Gedenkdienst newspaper editorial board meeting



Title page of the Gedenkdienst newspaper

in Vienna turns out to be quite alright. I am now also on the board of Gedenkdienst and chief editor of the organization's newspaper. My perspective on Gedenkdienst has definitely changed as I am now more involved in the organization's

activities in Austria itself. Even though sending out the 20 volunteers is one of our main activities there is much more to it. For example, we are organizing workshops that include topics concerning the Second World War but also on issues like sexism, racism and homophobia.

Each semester we organize

around four lectures at the university in cooperation with the Austrian Student Council. Next semester, lectures will focus on „Peace & War“. The newspaper, where I am most involved, gives a chance to young academics to write about their topics of research and perspectives on National Socialism, not exclusively in Austria. There is also a group which conducts student excursions to former concentration camps and Holocaust memorials. Those are guided by people who were trained by Gedenkdienst.

Furthermore, Gedenkdienst participates in regular demonstrations against the current right-wing Austrian government. Recently, a statement has been released on the organization's website stating that Gedenkdienst is boycotting all memorial ceremonies in which one of the governing parties, the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party), is taking an active part in, as we do not want to serve as a "fig leaf" for the party's xenophobic resentments.

For me personally, it was important to continue at least a form of political activism in addition to university and work. This is why I decided to continue participating in Gedenkdienst, as I still firmly believe that remembering the Holocaust is essential when it comes to reminiscing what xenophobia and exclusion can lead to.

Christoph Steinberger



*Returning from the Heritage Contact Zone partner meeting in Budapest, Etz Hayyim's Administrative Director, Anja Zuckmantel, made a short stop in Vienna ... and all our former Gedenkdienst members, who now live in Vienna, got together for a reunion at Café Espresso.*

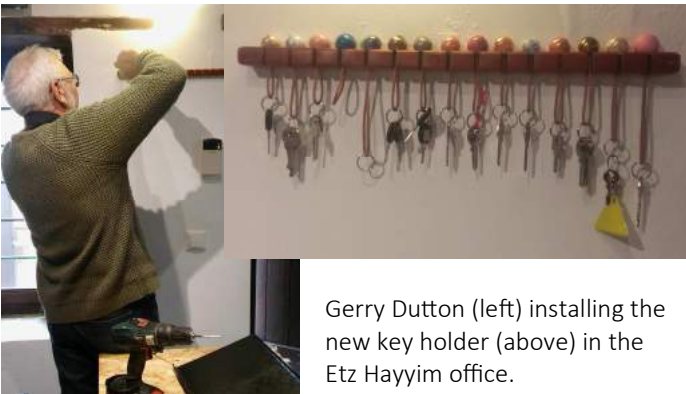


## From the Etz Hayyim Office

### *Little Projects, Correspondence and New Ideas*

In December 2018, various works were completed to improve the **fire and flood protection** for the synagogue building. The works very were kindly funded by the German Embassy in Athens.

The synagogue office has now a unique **key holder** for the keys to the numerous doors and locks on the premises. The key holder was handcrafted by Gerry Dutton. He has been a volunteer at Etz Hayyim for many years and joins our team every year from April through October once a week to give tours to visitors. He has also left his mark at Etz Hayyim when he built the shelves in the Ezrat Nashim (Nikos Stavroulakis' former office) and in the main library.



Gerry Dutton (left) installing the new key holder (above) in the Etz Hayyim office.

A new project we are considering is a **colouring book** with images from Etz Hayyim like the Rothschild Gate and the Ehal but also liturgical items like a Menorah and a Yad. Short texts that will accompany the images will add up to a brief introduction to Etz Hayyim and Judaism alike. While we have school classes in mind as a target group, we might also address another demand in view of the increasing popularity of colouring books for adults. We will let you know with which group the book will be more popular.

For the new season, a series of **notepads and notebooks** with images from around the Etz Hayyim and also a series of **new postcards** will be available.

We welcome our **new volunteer** Fernando Klabin from São Paulo, Brazil, who has been living in Hania since February. As a polyglot and translator, with family roots from Lithuania to Italy, he is a valuable addition to our team and will not only assist with guided tours for visitors ... in one of the many languages he speaks, but has already started to transcribe and translate an interview in Portuguese from USC Shoah Foundation Archive with Fofo Kon-

stantini, a Shoah survivor from Hania. Fernando has also suggested to expand our outreach to South America.

**In our correspondence**, we have news from Sandra Barty and Ken Ross, the film makers working on the **documentary "The Art of Repair"** about Nikos Stavroulakis and Etz Hayyim. After reviewing the immense footage they have accumulated, they have now brought on a professional fundraiser to help secure funds for post-production and finishing. See the trailer and additional info on the **website**: [www.artofrepairfilm.com](http://www.artofrepairfilm.com). We are exploring possibilities how footage from the documentary can be included in the "Etz Hayyim on Screen" event during the celebration of 20th anniversary of the Rededication of Etz Hayyim in October 2019 (see p. 10f.)



Shortly before the editorial deadline of this edition of *Jottings*, we learned about the opening on 15 April of **a new showcase at the Jewish Museum of Greece** in Athens, which is **dedicated to the Jews of Crete**. It includes photographs, written documents, jewelry and religious artefacts from the period between the late 19th century and the German occupation. More information in a later edition of *Jottings*.







In 2010, on the initiative of Nikos Stavroulakis, the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim was established in order to ensure the long-term future of Etz Hayyim Synagogue as a place of “prayer, recollection and reconciliation.” As a registered charity, Etz Hayyim relies on donations for implementing its tasks and goals.

### *Help us maintain Etz Hayyim Synagogue*

The structural maintenance of the historic building of Etz Hayyim is an ongoing project. After major renovation works in Spring 2018, in a next step wooden installations like the Ehal, Bima and doors need repair and an air-condition has to be installed to reduce humidity in the building. In Spring 2019, we are still trying to raise the necessary funds.

### *Help us expand our educational programs*

A solid educational program requires thorough research, development and printing of appropriate materials and qualified staff for implementation. Donations supporting operating costs like staff salaries, acquisition of books

and printing are therefore very much needed and welcome.

### *Immediate fundraising needs*

In addition to the **maintenance** works, a **large touch-screen** is needed for the educational outreach program to make the digital map of the Hania Jewish quarter available on site to visiting students and tourists. For seminars with students a **small set of affordable tablet computers** would allow us to integrate digital sources in the educational seminars.

You might even consider sponsoring the **food and vet costs** for the synagogue cats which Nikos loved so much.

**Ways to give ...** You can send **donations** to the Etz Hayyim bank account at Piraeus Bank (Greece) and will receive a donation receipt from the Synagogue office. There is also the possibility of making tax-deductible donations in the USA (see info below).

You can also make **purchases by way of donation** from our special publications (Interfaith Calendar, Etz Hayyim Haggadah etc.), our collection of Judaica (locally made Kiddush and Sarena cups, handmade kippoth etc.) or books on Greek Jewish topics including Nikos Stavroulakis' *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*.

... and you are of course always welcome to **visit** Etz Hayyim and leave a donation in the Tzedakah bottle.



### **Bank Information for Donations**

Acc. Name: Civil Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim  
IBAN: GR 9401 7163 5000 6635 1095 59315  
SWIFT/BIC: PIRBGRAA  
Bank: Piraeus Bank (1635), Agia Marina, Hania

### **Tax-deductible Donations in the USA**

Etz Hayyim also accepts 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  
520 8th Avenue, 20th Floor  
New York, NY 10018

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



# *Jottings*

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