



Jottings



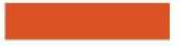
Issue 28



5782 / 2021



Rosh Hashanah



The newsletter
of Etz Hayyim
Synagogue

Etz Hayyim



| | | | |
|---|--|----|-----------------------------------|
| Editorial | Editorial | 3 | Anja Zuckmantel |
| Havurah and Holidays | The Sukkah of Peace | 4 | Nicholas de Lange |
| | Holidays at Etz Hayyim | 5 | Anja Zuckmantel |
| | In Memoriam Natalie Jean Ventura (נ"ט) | 6 | Adele Graf & Lea M. Ventura |
| Cretan Jewish History & Academic Trajectories | Closing the Circle: Returning to My Grandfather's Roots in Crete | 8 | Keren Sereno Fein |
| | Daughters of the Labyrinth: A Novel by Ruth Padel | 12 | Tobias Schmitzberger & Ruth Padel |
| | The Wehrmacht and the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Crete | 27 | Hans Safrian |
| | Ariye Katz' Memories from Greece and Crete | 31 | Gil Katz |
| | George Sfougaras: <i>Light in the Darkness</i> | 37 | Anja Zuckmantel |
| | No Honour in Dying for the Fatherland | 38 | Tobias Schmitzberger |
| | Fostering Connections Through Poetry | 42 | Maia Evrona |
| Gedenkdienst & Volunteers | My Year of Solidarity at Etz Hayyim | 44 | Tobias Schmitzberger |
| | A warm welcome | 46 | Theodor Wührheim |
| | New volunteer from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst | 46 | Carleen Rehlinger |
| | Cosmopolitanism. Reflections | 47 | Mille Vinther |
| News from the EH Office | Website-Update, books received etc. | 48 | Anja Zuckmantel |
| Fundraising | How to support Etz Hayyim | 49 | Etz Hayyim staff |

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 or share information, ideas, feedback or criticism.
The next *Jottings* will be published for **Pesah 2022/5782**. Please send contributions by **15 March 2022**.

Contact us and stay in touch



Phone: +30-28210-86286
Email: info@etz-hayyim-hania.org
Web: www.etz-hayyim-hania.org
Facebook: Synagogue Etz Hayyim

Jottings

Newsletter of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete
Co-editors of Jottings

Alex Ariotti, Giorgos Psaroudakis, Anja Zuckmantel

Disclaimer: Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or Etz Hayyim.

Editorial

Dear friends of Etz Hayyim,

In contrast to the two previous “Lockdown editions” of *Jottings*, this is the first edition in well over a year which was not produced during a Covid-19 lockdown. Etz Hayyim has been open to the public again since mid-May, but strict limits to the numbers of visitors and participants in our community events still apply: due to its relatively small size, only five persons are allowed inside the synagogue at the same time. However, luckily for us, visitor numbers are up considerably and our Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange was able to join us for the High Holidays services throughout the month of September. In this edition of *Jottings*, he shares with us an insightful article about the festival of Sukkot.

In the last *Jottings*, we had announced the sad news about the passing of Natalie Ventura; here, we publish the obituary for our much missed Havurah member.

This edition has a special focus on the history of the Cretan Jewish community as a series of articles look at that history from personal, artistic and academic perspectives. We are most excited to publish a feature about Ruth Padel’s newly published novel *Daughters of the Labyrinth* which focuses on the history and memory of the Cretan Jewish community. In an interview with her, as well as an essay and excerpts from her novel, we explore Ruth’s fascinating, multi-layered work of fiction. We hope to host Ruth for a presentation of her book in spring 2022 on the condition that holding larger events will be then possible again.

The personal stories by Keren Sereno about her grandfather’s Talet from Hania, and also by Gil Katz about his grandfather’s heroic escape from a POW camp near Hania during the Second World War, illustrate once more the importance of Etz Hayyim as a hub for research into the history of the local Jewish community. These stories are complemented by articles by two Austrian histori-

ans: Hans Safrian about the destruction of the Cretan Jewish community and Tobias Schmitzberger about the new exhibition at the German War Cemetery in Maleme on Crete.

Tobias is also our former Gedenkdienst volunteer whose farewell message we publish here along with welcome messages from our two new volunteers, Carleen and Theodor. While Theo is already the 9th volunteer from the Austrian organisation *Gedenkdienst*, Carleen is the first volunteer from the German volunteer organisation *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst*. We are very much looking forward to having them with us for the upcoming year. There are many interesting ongoing projects they will contribute to; for example, their first larger project is the preparation of a Greek-German youth exchange which Etz Hayyim is hosting this October.

In spring 2022, we will host Fulbright scholar, Maia Evrona. Here, she introduces herself in a brief message and we publish her translation of the poem “Storm Off the Waters of Crete” by Avrom Sutzkever.

We are truly grateful to graphic artist Joshua Unikel for creating the wonderful cover of this edition of *Jottings*. Joshua visited Etz Hayyim in 2018 when he was an artist in residence with The Lakkos Project in Heraklion. Since then, he has been captivated by the history of the Cretan community and particularly the story of the Tanais. We hope to work with him more closely in a joint project in the near future.

From all of us at Etz Hayyim, we are sending warm wishes for a happy 5782. May it bring more opportunities to travel and meet one another again. We are certainly looking forward to an eventful year at Etz Hayyim and will keep you informed about our latest projects.

Anja Zuckmantel (Administrative Director)

Joshua Unikel (US) works at the intersection of graphic design, printmaking and creative writing. His work often uses prints to examine how the present is haunted by the past. In 2018, he finished a print series as well as a mural in Heraklion on the colonial and linguistic history of Crete throughout its history. Currently, he’s working on a series about the Jews of Crete, the sinking of the Tanais and the historic record of the war on Crete.

Unikel has shown at Dubai Art Season 2020 (United Arab Emirates); Sofia Art Week 2019 (Bulgaria); CICA Museum (S Korea); Griffith University Art Gallery (Australia); Aether Gallery (Bulgaria); The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (US); DesignPhiladelphia (US); the Center for Contemporary Printmaking (US) and elsewhere. He is an assistant professor in the University of Houston School of Art (US).





The festival of Sukkot (חג הסוכות, *hag hasukkot*, in the Hebrew Bible, Leviticus 23:34; ἑορτὴ σκηνῶν in the Septuagint) was once considered the most important festival in the Jewish year. In ancient times if someone said ‘the festival (הַחַג)’ (they meant Sukkot: apparently it was considered the most favoured or most special of the three festivals (*hagim*). Why? Perhaps because it comes at the end of the solemn festive period which begins a month before Rosh Hashanah, and provides joyful relief at the end of it, or perhaps because (unlike Pesah and Shavuot) the farmers have now brought their harvest in and have no more worries.

The word *hag* means ‘pilgrimage’ or ‘pilgrim feast’: it is the same word as the Arabic *haj* – which for Muslims denotes the pilgrimage to Mecca. Our eyes, however, are turned towards Jerusalem during the *hagim*. In olden times Jerusalem was the goal of Jewish pilgrims, and it is to Zion that we look for the first signs of redemption.

The biblical prophets associate the *sukkah* with this glorious ending of our present painful historical era: ‘In that day will I raise up the tabernacle (*sukkah*) of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof,’ says Amos (9:11), while Isaiah prophesies: ‘The Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion... a tabernacle (*sukkah*) for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain’ (4:5–6).

The *sukkah* that the prophets envisage is obviously a more solid and permanent structure than the one we are used to; or rather it combines a shady tabernacle, to offer protection from the sun, and a stone-built tower for shelter from the rains of autumn and the storms of winter. Philo mentions this building:

The Sukkah of Peace

by Rabbi Nicholas de Lange

When all the fruits are being gathered in, come in yourself also to seek a more weather-proof mode of life and hope for rest in place of the toils which you endured when labouring on the land. (*Special Laws* 2:207)

The *sukkah* with which we are familiar is not designed to protect us against rain and storms: it is frail and temporary, and reminds us less of the future redemption than of the fragile and transient nature of our present existence. Our stay in this world is not long, and it is threatened by many dangers – war, disease, famine and many others. The Torah makes a connection between the *sukkah* and the Exodus from Egypt (Leviticus 23:43), because the first stop of the Israelites in the wilderness was called Sukkot (Exodus 12:37), and because they dwelt in tents in their forty years of wandering. To quote Philo again:

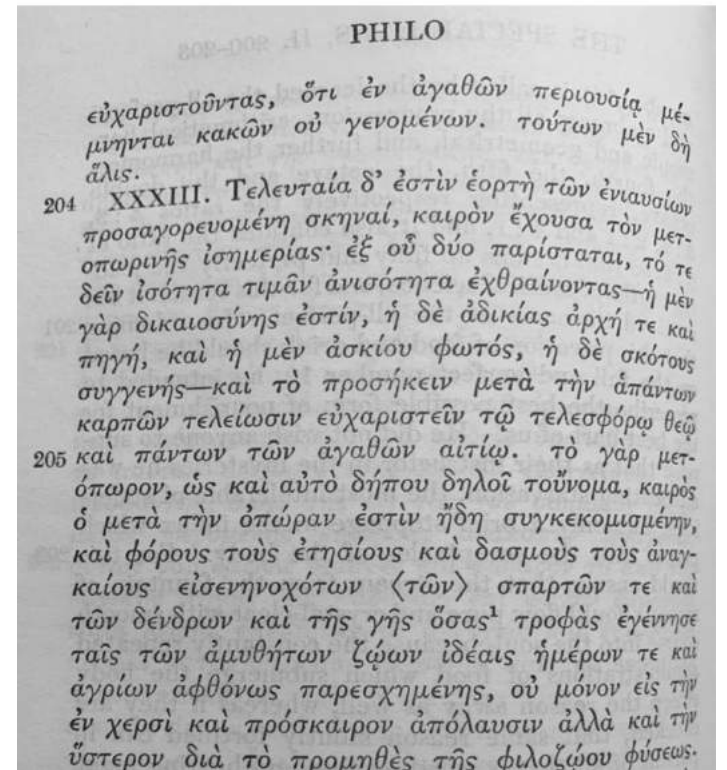
Another reason may be, that it should remind us of the long journeyings of our forefathers in the depths of the desert, when at every halting place they spent many a year in tents. And indeed it is well in wealth to remember your poverty, in distinction your insignificance, in high offices your position as a commoner, in peace your dangers in war, on land the storms on sea, in cities the life of loneliness. For there is no pleasure greater than in high prosperity to call to mind old misfortunes. (*Special Laws* 2:207–8)

The Torah instructs that we should live in the *sukkah* for seven days. Even if we do not eat our meals and sleep in the *sukkah*, we can still share Philo’s wise insight that this frail and temporary hut can serve to make us grateful for

the solidity and comforts of our homes, and remind us of the many other blessings we enjoy. And if we pursue this thought it can lead us to a sympathetic feeling for those around us who are less fortunate than we are, victims of illness, poverty, war and other afflictions. One of the loveliest of our regular evening prayers is the one that begins *Hashkivenu*: ‘Cause us, O Lord our God, to lie down in peace, and raise us up, O our king, to life...’ It is a prayer for peace under God’s benevolent protection. The prayer calls this protection ‘the *sukkah* of peace’: ‘spread over us your *sukkah* of peace,’ we pray; ‘be a shield about us; remove from us every enemy, pestilence, war, famine and sorrow.’

We are living in a world that is painfully afflicted with pestilence, war, famine and sorrow. May the *sukkah* remind us of God’s protective care and love. Just as he protected the Israelites as they journeyed from Sukkot through the wilderness, dwelling under the frail shelter of tents, so may he protect us now from pestilence, and from the other dangers that threaten us, and spread over us the *sukkah* of his peace. I wish you all a very peaceful and joyful festival, and may you be blessed with many years of life:

חג שמחה ותזכו לשנים רבות



Holidays at Etz Hayyim

Much like the previous year, 2021 was overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic which meant that for the second time in a row we could not hold a community Seder for Pesah.

In May, the end of the second countrywide lockdown in Greece allowed us to have small Havurah gatherings for the fourth annual memorial service for Nikos Stavroulakis and for the holiday of Shavuot.

In August, again due to Covid-19 restrictions, the annual memorial for the Cretan Jewish community could not be held publically at the Tanais monument, but only in the smallest circle at the synagogue. However, we were pleased that the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, could

join us on this occasion to commemorate the Cretan community which perished in the Shoah.

By September, official Covid-19 restrictions continue to limit the number of persons allowed inside the synagogue to just five (and an equally small number in the courtyard). Thus, we unfortunately had to turn away many visitors who wanted to join us for the festivals. However, we were fortunate enough that our Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange could spend the High Holidays with us and we celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Erev Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret.

We very much hope, of course, that the new year will allow us to welcome again everyone wishing to join us.



Memorial candles for Nikos Stavroulakis (right); Rabbi Negrin lighting a memorial candle for the Cretan Jewish community





In Memoriam Natalie Jean Ventura (נ"ל)

Natalie Jean Ventura passed away on February 16, 2021 following a courageous five-year battle with multiple myeloma. She is survived by her daughter Lea-Melissanthe, her sisters (and brothers in law) Florence Baturin (and Larry), Adele Graf (and Ed Overstreet,) and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins in the United States, Canada and Israel. She was predeceased in October 2020 by her husband Joseph; they would have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in May 2021. In addition, she was predeceased by her sister, Justine Hill, in August 2015.

Natalie was born on February 3, 1943 in Suffern, a small town near New York City. She grew up there and then earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History from Barnard College, now part of Columbia University in New York City. She also received a Master's degree in Education from Columbia University, and held several positions as a kindergarten teacher in the states of California and New York.

Natalie met her husband Joseph while they were both graduate students living in International House in New York City, a residence primarily for international students. Several years after they were married, they moved to Germany where Joseph had secured a position and where Lea, their daughter, was born. They moved to Heraklion in 1983 so Joseph could begin a professorship at the University of Crete. A few years later, Natalie began a long career teaching English for Specific Purposes at the University of Crete, firstly at the Department of Computer Science and lastly, at the UoC Medical School. One of the highlights of her career as an ESP teacher was when she co-organized a Rassias Methodology Workshop for teachers of English as a Second Language. Furthermore, she introduced poetry into the university classroom and in 2000, she spent a sabbatical year in Munich, Germany, undertaking research on the subject of Poetry in Medicine. She remained in her position teaching Medical English until her retirement in 2010. Her colleagues at the UoC parted from her with the following words:

"A friend, colleague, a sensitive poetess, a member of E.E.P. Special Teaching Staff for English and Terminology, Natalie won everyone over with her politeness, her poetic view of life and her humor."

Natalie had many talents and interests ranging from music and writing poetry and prose to editing and translating books and articles. Her long-held interest in music began as a youngster studying piano and flute. In her retirement years, she resumed piano lessons and became active in a local choir. Her greatest passion, however, was writing poetry. Her poetry has been published in Greek, British, American and Canadian publications. Her first book, *Three Women and a Lion* was published with two other Cretan poets in 1997; her second book, *Orange Tree* was released in 2018. Some of her writings were included in "International Women's Day 2003", a booklet of poetry, prose and drawings commemorating women, and in the Etz Hayyim Synagogue Jottings newsletters. Natalie was working on some new poems up to the time of her death.

One of the highlights of Natalie's life following her retirement was the trip she and her sister Adele took to Latvia in 2003. Their goal was to gather additional information about their family and visit the places where their relatives had lived in the early 1900s before Jews were forced to flee or were killed. A few of Natalie's poems, inspired by the trip, were included in a family history book that was written by her sister and published in 2005.

Besides writing poetry, Natalie edited Joseph's memoir, *Leaves in the Wind: Memoir of a Sephardi Family*, and translated from German to English a hand-written diary from 1870 through 1888 kept by a Latvian ancestor.

Along with Joseph, Natalie was one of the first and certainly one of the most dedicated members of the Etz Hayyim Havurah participating in the celebrations of the festivals and in cultural events, contributing articles to and volunteering as copy-editor for *Jottings*. Natalie was also a member of the Etz Hayyim poetry group for sever-

Memorial Service

Your absence
perfumes the air
like incense in a
house of prayer.

Through the evening service,
we listen still
for the music of your presence,

half expecting a miracle:
your voices
ringing in our ears.

~

Your names (at least) survive.
We say them one-by-one,
speak the being behind the name.

Whole families grouped
like sheaves of wheat –
Elchais : Chaim, Elvira, Rebecca, Leon.

Osmos: Solomon, Stella, Ketti, Mois.
A shower of names, unrelenting –
Avigades, Dientes, Depa, Evlagon, Ischakis,
Kounio.

A tide, a torrent, hailstones
hitting hard: Isaak. Zapheira. Matilda. Nisim.
Zilda. Salvador. Raphael. Rosa.

Arise, that we may know you!

~

We light candles
in your memory, carry them
to every corner of the courtyard –

set them on the steps,
the Hebrew-lettered stones,
the walls round the rabbis' tombs;

among the roses, potted palms
and jasmine; under the walnut,
under the pomegranate tree

until the courtyard's a sea
of light, shimmering with spirit –
yours and ours entwined.

Sorrow and joy,
absence and presence,
Then and Now cross borders,
join hands, are one.



© Photo: Sandra Barty and Ken Ross

al years. In summer 2017, she presented her book of poetry entitled *Orange Tree* to a large audience at the synagogue. One of her poems included in the book, 'Memorial Service', has since become an essential part of the annual memorial service for the Cretan Jewish Community at Etz Hayyim. As Natalie and Joseph used to read the English and Greek versions, their absence is now particularly felt during this annual ceremony, as well as during other community events.

Although Natalie was involved in numerous activities, always engaged and engaging, constantly immersed in one project or another, she always made time to spend with family and friends. She will be remembered for her

thoughtfulness, her ability to make everyone feel welcome, important and valued, for her optimism, her uplifting humour and for her cheerful disposition.

She was dearly loved by her friends and her family and will continue to live in their hearts and minds forever. May she rest in peace.

The family has requested that donations in Natalie's memory be sent to Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania, Greece. (info@etz-hayyim-hania.org)



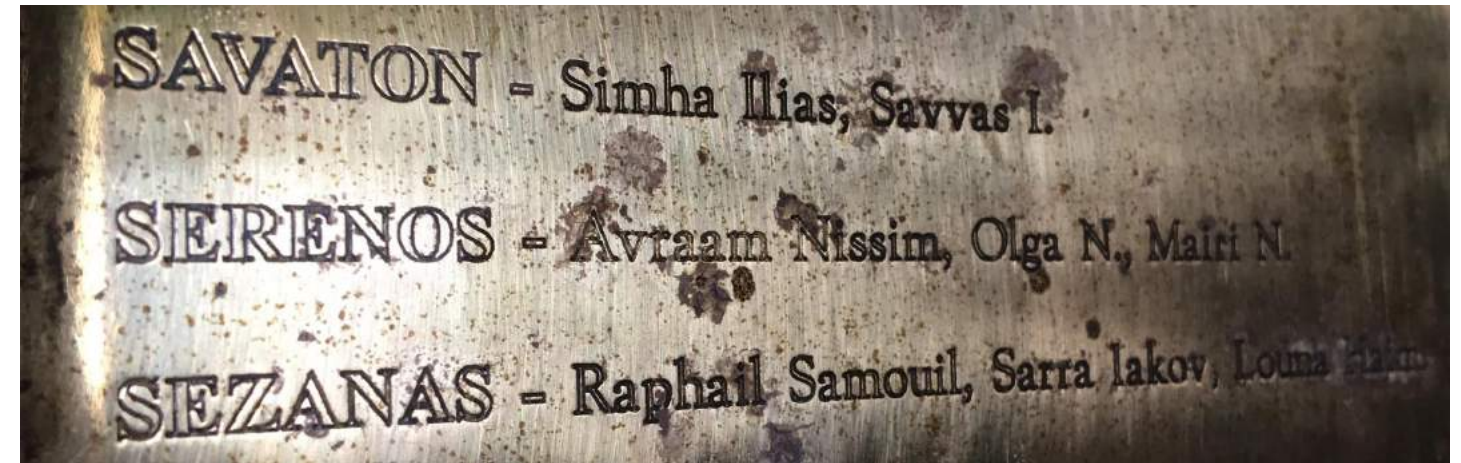
Closing the Circle: Returning to My Grandfather's Roots in Crete

by Keren Sereno Fein

A visit to Crete was the fulfillment of a longstanding dream of mine. This visit was about much more than sunbathing on a perfect beach, for example; it was about attaining closure for my family at long last. On Monday, 19 October 2020, a historic debt was closed during our visit to Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania, the hometown of my late grandfather.

When I stood in front of the gold memorial plaque embedded in one of the synagogue's walls, I wiped over the letters engraved on the cold copper with a warm hand, my throat choking and tears flooding my eyes. I passed my fingers over the three names from the Sereno family: Avraham, Olga and Miriam – the brother and sisters of my grandfather, Moshe Sereno (z"l).

Only a few months before the end of the Second World War in Greece, on 9 June 1944, all of the Jews of Crete including my own family members, as well as Italian prisoners of war and local resistance fighters were herded onto the steam ship, Tanais, by the occupying Germans, with their final destination being the extermination camps of Eastern Europe. Their tragic end happened not on Polish soil soaked in the blood of other Jews, but in the deep waters of Mediterranean Sea. The same sea that was an integral part of their lives on the island of Crete became their place of death. The sea became a mass grave when the ship was hit by torpedoes fired from the British submarine, Vivid, that had identified the Tanais as a German battle ship.



Over the years, my late father didn't tell me much about his family and unfortunately, I didn't have much information at my disposal. However, all that changed when we travelled to Crete last year and since then, I've been asking my aunt questions about the past. With every morsel of information she has given me, I've felt like I was adding another tiny piece to a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle.

At the end of the tour of the synagogue while wiping my tear-stained face and runny nose, my husband Elad Fein suggested we enter a tiny room off the main courtyard, the office of the synagogue, to tell the staff who we were and where we came from. What we thought would take a minute or two became an almost three-hour interview, part of an ongoing historical investigation. With immense curiosity, the historian of the synagogue jumped at the opportunity and performed two calculating tasks at the same time: on the one hand, she delved into the details of the story of the Sereno family spanning five generations (from my great grandfather to my own children, Peleg and Shalev-Yam) and on the other hand, she provided some fascinating details about the Jewish community in Hania and in Crete, as well as the Jewish communities throughout Greece during the entire period of Ottoman rule.

It was simply amazing to discover how the Sereno family story corresponds with the wider community story and like in a good movie, we found ourselves moving over and over between the different plots, between Zoom in and Zoom out.

I left the synagogue full of gratitude for this rare opportunity that I was given. Besides the painful feeling of missing my dear beloved father, standing here only with my husband and children, I felt simultaneously relief and pride. I had finally symbolically paid the debt and

my father, and maybe even my grandfather and all his family members, would be happy because now, after more than 80 years, there are still individuals like this historian who remember them and their actions, who say a good word about them, gaze at their picture and perhaps most of all, remember that someone once loved them very much and that they were once human and not just letters engraved on stone.

The Story of My Grandfather: From Hania to Eretz Israel

A young man in his mid-thirties decided to take a brave step: to walk away from everyone who knew and raised him, from everything he knew, and to go on his life's journey - to Eretz Israel. He knew he had to get a good job so he could send money to his parents and sisters in Hania. He studied at the Polytechnion in Heraklion, he became an engineer, he would get ahead in life. So what if he didn't know Hebrew or English. So what if he only spoke French, Italian, Greek and Latin; he would find something in the first city of Eretz Israel. His parents were already very old. His father had left Izmir at the end of the 19th century and arrived in Crete where he met his wife, Esther Minervo, who was likely born on the island and they had four children: Abraham, Olga, Miriam and Moshe. Deep in his parent's hearts, they must have understood their youngest child, the sorrows of separation, but his sisters, oh his sisters, rivers of tears flowed from their eyes in the weeks before the farewell. Olga and Miriam knew that their sweet Moishala was doing this for them so that they could have a dowry, a Mohar, and get married and have a family. They hated the thought that because of the money, he had to leave the whole life he built for himself in Crete. They had to give him a farewell gift that he would never forget in his life, a gift that would remind him of where he came from



From left: The Talet from Hania in the Sereno family ...

Keren's mother and father - Nissim Sereno and Tova Sereno (Alagem) - at their wedding in 1977.

Brit Milah of Keren's son Shalev Yam Fein, in 2017. In the photo: Keren and Elad Fein, their daughter Peleg and son Shalev Yam and his great-grandfather Yona Wiess, a Holocaust survivor, who was also his godfather.

*Keren Sereno Fein and Elad Fein
with the Talit at their wedding in
2011.*



and where he belonged: a Talet. A beautiful Talet embroidered with his initials in Hebrew and English: MS - Moshe Sereno.

On receiving this precious gift, he was brought to tears and promised that he would one day return to Crete. Moshe left the island sometime in the mid-1930s (and indeed, he did return more than a year later for a few years, and then left again in 1939 to Eretz Israel forever). He promised that he would look after the Talet and proudly tell everyone whom he met that his talented seamstress sisters with golden hands sewed it. And this cherished Talet continued to accompany, hug and caress the sweet Moisha even when the worst of all happened and his entire family drowned in the Mediterranean in June 1944 when a British submarine torpedoed the Tanais ship that was sailing under a German flag because they had identified the ship as an enemy target.

Moshe was wrapped in it when he married Rachel Gar-
gir, my grandmother, in Tel Aviv in early 1945.

Moshe was holding the Talet with trembling hands at the Brit Milah of his son, Nissim Avraham Sereno, in February 1949. He named his son after his father and brother, fully believing that life was stronger than anything and that this was the real revenge on the Nazis. Thirteen years later, Nissim went up to the Torah and celebrated his Bar Mitzvah and the Talet blessed and protected him.

Moshe Sereno died in Tel Aviv in 1971 before he got to meet his grandson who was born on 30 December, 1971 and named after him (Esther's son, his eldest daughter).

The Talet was wrapped around the baby Moshe during his Brit Milah with love and blessings, this shawl embodying everything which hurt too much to talk about out loud.

The years passed and Moshe's son, Nissim was also wrapped in the same special Talet during his wedding to Tova Alajem in December 1977 in Bat Yam. In 2000, the grandson Moshe was awarded the Chuppa and Kidushin and the Talet was with him, a silent testimony to the power of life, love and tradition.

On June 2011, another granddaughter of Moshe Sereno got married. Her husband, Elad embraced not only Nissim Sereno and the guests, but also all the previous generations, the family members for whom this Talet was likewise meaningful and special.

In July 2017, Moshe Sereno's great grandson, Shalev-Yam Fein was born in Haifa. Sweet Shalev, an eight-day old baby, was unaware of the gravity of history folded in the piece of blue and white cloth that his great grandfather, a Holocaust survivor himself, had brought to Eretz Israel.

Delicate threads connect souls, family members, humans. Sometimes it's DNA (same smile, same eyes), sometimes it's a delicate web of smells, flavors and sounds that create a mosaic of culture, history and family, and sometimes it's literally blue and white cloth threads, embroidered on a shawl made out of love, salty tears and intense longing for what was and for what could have been.

Facebook Group for Descendants of the Cretan Jewish Community

Etz Hayyim continues to receive visitors with family roots in Crete. In fact, we even put up a sign just outside the synagogue office calling on visitors with links to the historic local Jewish community to come and talk with the staff.

We can now also invite these visitors to join our Facebook group **“Crete Jewish descendants & research”** which aims to connect (with) the worldwide community of descendants of the Cretan Jewish community, assist them with family research and, at the same time, learn about their family stories in order to broaden our understanding of the history of the local community. We have been conducting this research in our attempt to make the history of the local Jewish community

more widely known as part of our ongoing educational outreach programme.

Keren Sereno, whose moving story about her grandfather's Talet from Hania is printed here, is also a member of the group and we are pleased to report that she has recently connected with a (not too distant) relative from Greece.

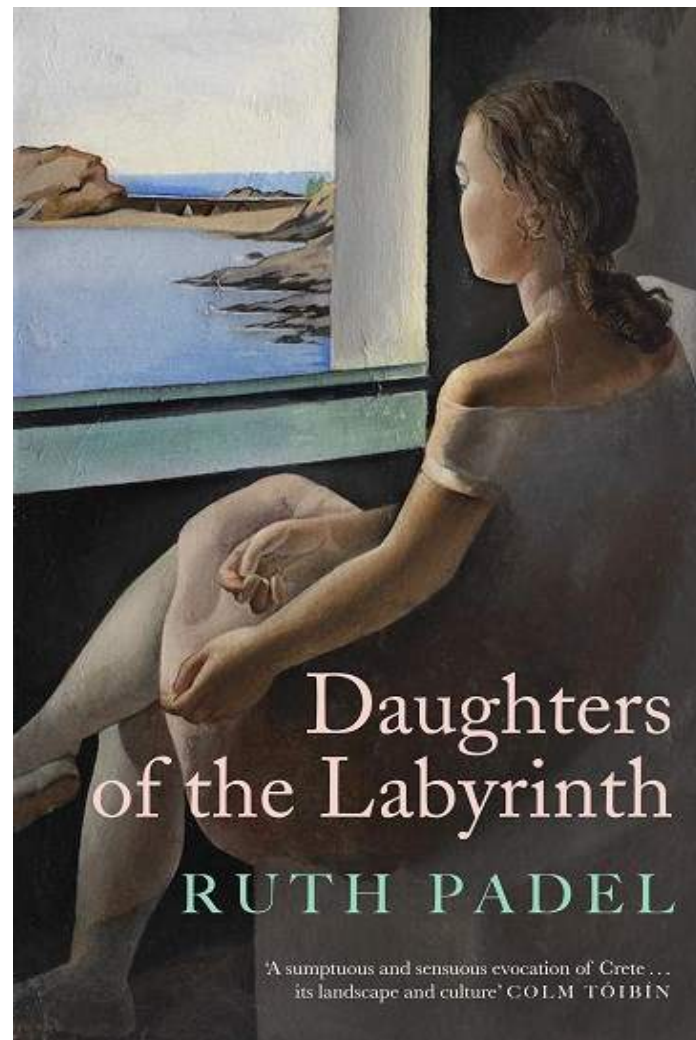
We hope, with the permission by descendants from the Cretan community, to soon bring you more captivating family stories.

As we would like to expand the reach and membership of the group, **please help us spread the word** about the group and, if you are a descendant from the Cretan community, **please join us!**



Daughters of the Labyrinth: A Novel by Ruth Padel

Based on her research into the pre-war Cretan Jewish community, Etz Hayyim's close friend, Ruth Padel, has just published her new novel and we are fortunate to be able to give our Jottings readers the unique and exclusive opportunity to take a first look at it. On the following pages, you'll read some selected passages from the book, as well as an essay and interview with the author.



The history of Crete's Jewish population has, for a long time, been a history full of myths. For example, there have been different rumours about the sinking of the steamship, Tanaïs, which was carrying the island's Jewish community to the Greek mainland in 1944. It is known that a British submarine torpedoed the ship which then sunk, carrying with it all of its onboard prisoners including Italian prisoners of war and Cretan resistance fighters. However, with little documentation and nearly no survivors, there has been a lot of room for speculation about what really happened. Rumours that the Germans sank the ship themselves proved wrong, but the numbers of those people who died are still contested. Some people claim it was 600 or 800, but research suggests there was probably not enough space for more than 400.¹

It's useful to remember this background before you start reading Ruth Padel's book, *Daughters of the Labyrinth*. In the novel, the award-winning British poet tells the multi-layered story of a Cretan woman called Ri. Ri is an artist living in London. After her mother Sophia has a heart attack, Ri travels to Hania to support her and the family. Under these dramatic circumstances, it is revealed that Sophia has hidden something from her children throughout her life: she is the daughter of a Cretan Jewish family and her real name is Sara.

Ruth Padel tells the story of Ri, her mother and their family which perished during the war and in doing so, she provides interesting insights into how the Jews of Crete likely experienced the war years between 1941 and 1944. Since these circumstances are not well-known, the author had to use her imagination, along with available historical sources. She also has an ongoing close connection with Etz Hayyim (see our interview with her on pp. 16f.) that altogether, helped her to achieve a realistic and vivid repre-

¹ Dimitris A. Mavrideros: Steamship Tanaïs: the Last Voyage – Sinking Point 35° 53' North - 25° 11' East. In: The Jews of Crete: Selected articles and essays. (The Jews of Hania: 1900-1944, Volume II), Etz Hayim Synagogue, 2002, pp. 26-58.



Ruth Padel giving a poetry workshop in the main library of Etz Hayyim.

sensation of that long-forgotten community. As freelance journalist and critic, Jenni Frazer, wrote in her review for *The Jewish Chronicle*:

"So many books of fiction that address the Jewish condition fail miserably because the author doesn't get the details right. Padel, however, succeeds triumphantly and the whiff of authenticity seeps from every page, even up to Ri's attendance at Muswell Hill Synagogue in the closing chapter. By the end of the book, I was willing the fictional Ri to re-establish the roots of Cretan Jewry, against all the odds. Padel has certainly supplied her with the string to lead her out of the labyrinth."

In the following pages, we present some passages from *Daughters of the Labyrinth*. The story switches between different periods and from different points of view of the characters. The first passage (pp. 13–15) describes events after the Jewish community was arrested and taken to Aghias prison in May 1944. Here, Ri tells us the story from the perspective of her father, Andonis, who, at long last, is informing her what happened as he saw it. After the interview with Ruth Padel, the second passage, in italics (pp. 18–19), delivers the story from the point of view of someone who experiences the arrest. Her identity shall not be revealed here. You will have to read the book to know more!

Some passages in *Daughters of the Labyrinth* will sound especially familiar to friends of Etz Hayyim and readers of *Jottings* will recognise the sharply and intimately de-

scribed details of the synagogue. Padel was a friend of Nikos and Etz Hayyim and has written an essay for us about her connections with Crete, Nikos and the synagogue over many years. She explains how these chance encounters influenced her life and finally brought her to the point of writing *Daughters of the Labyrinth* (pp 20–22).

Following the essay, the final passage recounts Ri's attendance at one of the memorial services held for the victims of the Tanaïs (pp 23–24) at Etz Hayyim every year. Much of the book is written in the present tense, depicting Hania today, right up to the start of the current pandemic. This last passage will give you the flavour of that part of the story and if you haven't visited to Etz Hayyim Synagogue for a while, it might make you feel a little nostalgic.

This is our feature about Ruth Padel's new novel. If the pandemic allows (fingers crossed!), she will be coming to Etz Hayyim in the spring of next year and will read selected parts from it, as well as answer questions from the audience. It would be nice if we could welcome a lot of friends of the synagogue too! Stay tuned.

Until then - we hope you enjoy reading these little appetisers.

Tobias Schmitzberger

A Short Bio of Ruth Padel



Ruth Padel is an award-winning British poet with close links to and interests in Greece, science, classical music and wildlife conservation.

She has published twelve poetry collections that have been shortlisted for all major UK prizes; a first novel about wildlife conservation; eight books of non-fiction on wild tiger conservation, mind and madness in Greek tragedy, the influence of Greek myth on rock music and books on reading poetry drawn from her newspaper column, *The Sunday Poem*. She is Professor of Poetry at King's College London and Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, as well as the Royal Society of Literature. Her poems have appeared in, among others, the *New York Review of Books*, *London Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *The White Review*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Guardian*. Awards include First Prize in the National Poetry Competition, a British Council Darwin Now Award, and a Cholmondeley Prize.

Her most recent book, published prior to *Daughters of the Labyrinth*, was *Beethoven Variations*. For more information, check out Ruth Padel's homepage: www.ruthpadel.com.



Jewish neighborhood (Evraiki) in Hania © Jewish Museum of Greece

Excerpt One:

The Arrest of the Jewish Community

Andonis, father of the narrator, is a Cretan Christian. He is in love with Sara, a Cretan Jewish girl. Before this chapter starts, they secretly spent one night together...

Andonis, May 1944

Papa woke in his shed with Sara's head on his chest and thought he was dreaming. But no, she was here, with him, both of them hot under a sheet he had found in a bombed house and carefully washed for this very occasion.

Then he saw a sparkle of light on the wall. Dawn was coming, he hadn't meant to fall asleep, he must get her back. He stroked the tangled hair. After years not daring to touch it, now he had to clear it from his mouth.

Don't move, she murmured.

It's nearly sunrise.

Her eyes flew open. How will I get in without anyone seeing?

She slithered out and stood in front of him, hair over her shoulders, breasts round as pomegranates. She was all songs he ever heard, all dreams he ever dreamed. She began to dress. Pale stripes fell through cracks in the wall over her round thighs. Often, afterwards, he

thought if only we could stay for ever in that moment.

No one was around when they stole out, but when they reached the top of Kondylaki they stopped and gasped. There were piles of furniture outside the houses. Many doors hung open but not all. Old Kyria Antigone was sweeping her steps.

Run, girl, she said. Or they'll take you too.

What's happened? said Papa, and Sara began to tremble.

Antigone told her the German soldiers had taken her people.

My people? said Sara.

The Jews, said Antigone. And they're coming back for the furniture.

In the growing light, Papa saw the street was littered with scraps of cloth, straps, pretzels, even a child's shoe.

Come away, he told Sara, before anyone sees.

He hustled her back to the shed and told her to stay put, he'd go and find out where her parents were. Did she want anything from the house? Food? Her embroi-

dery? He told her to lock the door and raced back to Kondylaki.

A large truck, with its engine running, now stood at the bottom of the street. Every now and then it rolled forward and stopped again for soldiers to carry furniture from another house and load it on. To his disgust, Papa saw some of Sara's neighbours smiling and chatting to the soldiers. Many people now knew words of German. Outside Sara's house a soldier guarded the glass-fronted cabinet and chest painted with red doves.

He saw Eleni outside her own house, terrified, and asked what had happened to Sara's family.

We woke up, Eleni said, when they banged on doors in the dark. They dragged people outside. Old people, some in their nightclothes. They pulled Sara's father out, he fell, they kicked him and laughed. Where's Sara?

I'm going into her house to get food, said Papa. He was not going to tell Eleni any more. Her cousin Thodoros was a policeman and the police worked with the Germans.

Come with me. Help me find her embroidery.

The truck rolled one house nearer. Papa looked at the guard.

You ask, they like girls. He's more likely to say yes to you.

Eleni looked petrified so Papa pulled her forward. *Bitte*, he said to the soldier. *Bitte?* He pointed into the hall and then at his mouth. *Essen. Yah?*

The soldier looked at him with cold grey eyes. A face that was hard and young but with watermelon lips, full

and oddly pink. Papa wanted to knife him. Instead, he looked sorrowfully at Eleni.

Schwester, he said, trying to remember other words. *Hungrig . . . Sehr hungrig. Bitte?*

The soldier glanced down the street. *Zwei minuten*, he said, jerking his head for them to enter.

Quick, said Papa. The hall was strewn with paper. In the store-room he found a cotton bag, rusks, a jar of lentils. Eleni found Sara's embroidery in her bedroom. Papa thought of the tools, Mois would hate to lose those, but there was no time. He darted to the empty front room, saw one book left on the floor, stuffed it under the rusks, grabbed Eleni's hand and approached the soldier.

Danke, he muttered, longing to poke a gun in that tailored belly.

The soldier nodded them through, Papa hurried Eleni up the street, looked back and saw the truck outside Sara's house. Soldiers carried out a wooden bed.

Sara's parents' bed, said Eleni, horrified. It belonged to her father's grandmother.

More soldiers carted out the workbench, on its back. The tools must be jumbled up inside. Then another bed, the sheet still on. Papa gave Eleni the lentils and told her to say nothing to anyone about him or Sara.

Her round face was blotchy with tears. I've got to go to school, she said. All my life I've gone to school with Sara. How can I tell them what's happened?

In the next alley he met little Dimitri who sold pistachios. Dimitri's monkey face stared in bewilderment.

They took the Jews out of their homes, he said. In ten

minutes, they lost everything.

Where did they take them? Papa asked.

They put them in trucks, said Dimitri. People say they took them to Aghias Prison.

Papa told Sara where they were. Why prison? she asked, shaking with fear.

No one knows – I'll find out what's happening, then take you to the mountains.

Mountains? she said. She made it sound like the moon.

Papa pictured the cave. Mr Michael would help, but he was often not around. And there was Kapetanios Kat and Georgios, Ionides, Christos . . . All busy, all covered with lice, and all men. He must take her further, up to the village where his mother's uncle and aunt lived, where he lived when he was little. He looked at her shoes. Good strong leather.

Can't I stay here? she said.

They'd find you. People will talk. Already people know I'm asking about the Jews.

The road to Aghias was the part of town the Germans entered first, three years before. Now it was full of tanks and barbed wire. By the turn to Vathypetro, three women sat sewing outside a wrecked cottage. Toddlers played and a hot wind blew grit into little dust devils. Across the road were soldiers, trucks, iron gates and a long low pale building.

Is that the prison? Papa asked. Why so many soldiers?

They locked up the Jews, one woman said.

Why? he asked.

They're not ours. They don't belong.

Did you see them? Papa said. How many people? He thought of Mois and poor confused Simcha, all his neighbours from the Ovraiki. Were they really all there in that silent building?

Hundreds, said the old woman.

They came in those trucks, said a little boy. Soldiers took them out of the trucks and pushed them in through the gates.

Behind the iron gates, Papa saw mulberry trees in an empty yard. There was nothing he could do.

Back in town, Sara's neighbours were joking with the soldiers, wheedling, hoping to enter the empty houses. Kyria Antigone staggered out of Kyria Esther's house carrying a spinning wheel. Children, women, old men, spilled out of houses brandishing what they'd found. One old man clutched a doll, a woman yelled with glee as she swung a bucket.

Aus! said an officer, as if he'd stopped finding it funny. Soldiers pushed everyone out of the street, smiling to see them laden. Someone started singing as if they were leaving a party. Soon all that was left on the street were crumpled photos. People must have taken the frames and tossed these away. Which came from Sara's house? There was no time to look, the soldiers were clearing the street.

He woke Sara before dawn. She barely understood where she was. When he led her out to the dark, her hand felt as if it had no bones.

This will be hard for you, he whispered, but we can rest on the way. He took her through blossoming orchards of almond and apricot, and heavy-scented orange trees.

I used to be scared walking here because of the dogs. I used to pray they wouldn't attack.

She looked round nervously.

Don't worry, there aren't any now.

Why? The first word she had uttered.

They've been eaten.

On a rocky path, she said her feet hurt. He sat her down and took off her shoes and socks.

Well done, he said. No blisters.

What do you mean? They're agony!

That indignation sounded more like her.

The skin's not broken. He massaged her toes. They're the most important part of you, in the mountains.

Hours passed. The sun blazed and sank, shadows lengthened. They tramped over roan-coloured slopes along sheep tracks, across dry riverbeds, up through thorn scrub. Sara sank down, he coaxed her on, made her drink water, nibble a rusk. They slept under the sheet. Next day the same. They hid from the road, saw no patrols. Tomorrow we'll eat properly, he said.

She fell asleep sobbing. He looked at white stars pasted across black sky and saw a shooting star sailing across them. Next morning, he poured a drop of water on the last rusk and gave it to her. Below, above and all round were loose grey stones and ginger earth showing through like a wound. Beyond were peaks threaded with shafts of light. A ravine, luminous blue at the edges, fell away to the left. This was the world he'd shared with his grandfather. To him it was home and freedom. It must seem savage wilderness to her.

He watched her chew as if every movement hurt. Her eyes were blank as if they couldn't let anything in. Step after step, hour after hour, he urged her on. At the foot of a cliff they saw a fallen sheep, neck twisted, legs folded under a slur of dirty fleece. The pecked out eyes were crusted maroon and she burst into tears. When they reached the knife-edge she stopped in horror.

We can't cross that.

I've done it hundreds of times. Pretend you're just walking through your hall. A straight line, five steps and we're there. Don't look down.

I can't! She looked round and saw only flinty mountainside, sheets of loose scree, a thousand peaks.

Look up and follow me.

He took her hand. One. He put his foot on the rock. Two. Her foot must be on the rock. *Three*. She dragged, he felt a thrill of horror and moved faster. Four. He felt a violent tug and leaped over, pulling her on top of him. She burst into wild sobs.

Who's there?

Papa looked up. His cousin Georgios was staring at them, holding a revolver.

Well, well! said Georgios.

Papa helped Sara up and saw envy, lust and curiosity chase each other through his cousin's eyes. Georgios leered into Sara's face and she flinched, then fainted. Papa caught her as she fell.

Help me carry her.

He put his hands under Sara's arms, Georgios took her knees and they carried her up the path. Georgios grinned as they went.

Good fuck?

Shut up, said Papa. To his relief he saw Mr Michael outside the cave, doing something to a transmitter.

Put her in the middle, said Georgios. We'll take turns.

But Mr Michael stood up and Papa relaxed.

Is she hurt? Mr Michael said.

Fainted, said Papa. She needs rest.

Put her in the shade. I'll get water.

Georgios stalked off to pee. Mr Michael said everyone had gone to ambush a patrol that had burned a village and killed five hundred men. He had stayed back to fix a transmitter for Georgios to take to Rethymno tonight.

If all that is happening here, thought Papa, the arrest of a few hundred people in town won't seem that important.

Is this your Jewish girl? said Mr Michael.

Georgios returned, ostentatiously buttoning his flies. Papa covered Sara with the sheet. She lay on her back under the pine tree.

I've got a stew going, Mr Michael said. She can have that when she wakes.

They ate looking out at the peaks. The slopes looked empty but every fold might hide a hundred Germans.

They heard a burst of distant gunfire.

Charos has his sword ready, said Georgios. He tossed back more wine and went into the cave to sleep.

Where will you take her? said Mr Michael.

My mother's relations. Further up.

Tomorrow. You sleep too now, you must be exhausted. I'll guard her.

In the cave, Papa felt how weary he was. Georgios was fast asleep, fingers curled as if asking for communion. Papa stretched beside him as he used to do when they slept on the floor as boys in Georgios's village at Easter. He shifted his spine to a smooth patch and closed his eyes.

When he woke, Georgios had gone. He looked out, recognized the butter-yellow moment of late afternoon before colours thickened into twilight, and walked to the cave entrance. Sara was sitting, with a plate, on the very rock where he had sat for years, thinking of her. He walked out of the cave and Mr Michael laughed.

You look so surprised.

You slept ages, said Sara. Kyrios Michael gave me food.

As she ate, light dwindled, and the mottled green and orange colours of the mountains were filmed with misty purple. Papa took her into the cave and made a nest for her.

No one's here but us. You're safe. I'll be beside you.

She closed her eyes like a child. When he came out, Mr Michael gave him a bag of coins.

For your relations, so they can feed her.

Mr Michael knew Crete all too well. Of course it would be easier to ask Stavros and Aspasia to look after Sara if he brought money. But he didn't like to take it.

Call it a loan, said Mr Michael.





Ruth Padel in Hania. © private

Interview: The Borders of Fiction and Non-fiction

There isn't much evidence for the Jewish presence in Crete since the last Cretan Jewish community died with the sinking of the Tanaïs ship in 1944. Ruth Padel's book attempts to reconstruct it, but there are limits. How can you bring back to life a culture that no longer exists and which has been forgotten for ages?

Tobias S.: How would you like readers of your book to remember the Jewish community?

Ruth Padel: Humanly! As Cretan as any other Cretans. Their experience is an important part of Cretan, and indeed Greek and Mediterranean, history.

TS: Why was it important to you to choose this specific topic? And writing a book about the Jews on Crete?

RP: It chose me. I have lived in Crete on and off since 1970 when I went to Athens as a PhD student and stayed at the British School of Archaeology. I was working on ancient

Greek poetry and tragedy, not something you hold in your hands, but the archaeologists kindly invited me to work on an excavation of the Royal Road at Knossos in Crete. Apart from learning a little about Minoan archaeology there, I learned modern Greek from the Cretan workmen who also taught me Cretan songs.

Ever since, I have lived on and off in Greece especially Crete, have lived through a year here or there, helped on excavations on the south coast at Mirtos, taught poetry at Loutro, sung in the Town Choir of Heraklion, and have visited dear friends regularly. One of my tracks in Desert Island Discs, 2009, was a Cretan mantinada. But when I came to

the synagogue at Hania, kindly invited by Nicholas de Lange in 2008 and met Nikos Stavroulakis, through Nikos, I gradually learned the stories around the synagogue, and I felt I had found the inward story that made sense of all my lived experience of Crete.

TS: In one passage (quoted after this interview), you describe a very specific moment when the Jews arrived at Aghias prison in 1944. There are no original records from Jewish people about these particular moments. How have you reconstructed such parts?

RP: Many aspects of Cretan Jewish life and what happened to the Jews is now known. This is the result of decades of research, articles published by Etz Hayyim and more recent research to which Anja Zuckmantel, a marvellous scholar, generously gave me access. But what happened in the prison at Aghias... yes, that, we know little about. There is no documentation. I went out to the prison and walked around it, the narrator's experience there is pretty similar to mine! (Note: in the book, the main protagonist, Ri, walks around the prison at one point) But what actually happened inside [the prison] with the Jewish people in 1944 was my own imagining.

TS: Have there been some moments when you said: "Well, it would be interesting to write about it – but I don't want to go that far?"

RP: When they boarded the Tanaïs, I had to stop. Some things it is better to leave to the imagination of the reader.

TS: There is a lot of historical literature which creates, so to speak, a quite clichéd picture about such historic events... But for many readers, perhaps your book will mark the first time that they learn about the fate of the Jewish community in Crete. When you wrote it, did you feel some kind of responsibility?

RP: Of course. There have been decades of Holocaust fiction. But I wanted to root this novel, and the Cretan Holocaust, specifically in Cretan experience. Which made the Holocaust here very different from that in Eastern Europe for a lot of reasons; even different from mainland Greece. So much writing about the German Occupation in English has been dominated by British memoirs of the Resistance. I wanted Cretan ones. For example, *The Leaden Sky Years, Diary-Notes of a Schoolboy in Occupied Crete* by Kostas Farantakis, is a really precious document, translated by P. David Seaman (Efstethiadis, Athens 2004).

I wanted the story and texture of those years from the whole Cretan society's perspective: children's, women's, people in the towns, as well as the countryside where the guerrillas were [fighting]. I wanted to embed the Jews' experience in all of that.

TS: A significant theme of your book concerns identity; for instance, the narrator called Ri, a British-Cretan woman, finds out that the Jewish part of her identity has been hid-

den from her throughout her life. Furthermore, she thinks she may have to leave Britain after Brexit and is very disappointed about events there. In a way, Ri becomes homeless and lonely on many levels. You are living in Britain yourself. How close is Ri to Ruth if it comes to this subject?

RP: Several people who know me have said that they identify me with Ri. It is true I have often turned to art and artists in my poetry as an indirect way of thinking about making poems. But I can't draw or paint! And that's crucial to her identity. (I had to ask artist friends what that was like.) Also essential to Ri's character is that she has lived most of her life outside her own country. Which is not true of me, even though I have lived a lot in Greece. Although many of my friends in the UK are people from other countries who are doing what she has done, living elsewhere, they [therefore] have divided identities, so maybe I identify with people whose identities are divided! Oddly, at least two people have said after reading it, 'That is my life! I only found out late that my mother was Jewish.' I think, in my generation, this experience is more common than we know. But yes, oh dear, Brexit - Ri's observations of that, and how it has brought out such nastiness in British life, are pretty much mine!

TS: From time to time, you create connection between experiences from different times- for example, Syrian refugees today and earlier Jewish refugees. To what extent have your perceptions of refugees in Greece today inspired you in writing this book? How can you compare the two?

RP: Well, a writer uses everything around her and in the last decade, I have also been writing about migration; since 2006, in fact, for a book that came out first in 2012 before the Syrian uprisings. Since 2016, I have worked with a Syrian artist on Syrian refugees in Lesbos...I went to Lesbos several times and wrote a poem about the Lesbos islanders and their interactions with the Syrian refugees which went into the second edition (2020) of that book, now called *We Are All from Somewhere Else*. We took my friend's artwork and my poetry to events in New York and the Venice Biennale, and the poem was translated into Arabic and Italian.

So, the events on Lesbos, and the appalling situation for refugees there and in the rest of Greece, but also Greek humanity in trying to help them, are very vivid to me. I modelled my picture of a refugee centre in Hania on one centre in Mytilene and another in Athens where I gave a poetry workshop to Syrian refugees. Mainly teenage girls.

TS: For yourself, what was your most interesting insight when you wrote *Daughters of the Labyrinth*?

RP: That for every scene you have to imagine, intensely, physically and vividly, every aspect of every moment. The experience of each character in all its implications: the place, the setting, what it looked and sounded like, smelt and felt like. But also the resonance of each word said and not said, how memory comes in to each word like the unheard harmonics of a note on the violin.

Tobias Schmitzberger

Excerpt Two:

Arrival at Aghias Prison

Sometimes short passages of lucid and clear experiences separate the chapters of Ruth Padel's book. These are the thoughts of a Jewish woman whose identity shall not be revealed here. The following passage describes the arrest of the Hania Jews and their arrival at Aghias prison.

she slides out of the truck, everyone slithers onto white dusty ground, all round are green hills and orange trees but the air smells of engine oil, orange blossom, diarrhoea

people are afraid, embarrassed and afraid

more trucks drive up, more neighbours tumble out, an old man wobbles when soldiers push him and his glasses fall off, they lie on the white ground like two lost eyes reflecting the sun and a soldier crushes them under his boot

soldiers push them through iron gates to a courtyard, barba rafael is here, he whispers where is sara,

she says with andonis, he says that's good

the soldiers herd them into a building, a room with a floor covered in black grass, no, hair, black hair grey hair white hair short tufts long hanks

they push barba rafael on a chair and scissor his head, his hair falls away like snow, blood trickles down his skull

mother says i can't, father says don't make a fuss or they'll hurt you

she closes her eyes and the blades graze her head like iron bees

another room, a top floor room, enormous, lit by windows so high you can't see out,

barba rafael says tell me when the sky goes red, we will say prayers when the sun is setting,

he makes people sit on the cement floor with paths between so nobody gets trodden on

two or three hundred of us, says father and almost a hundred children

father finds a place against a wall so they can lean on it, she sits between him and mother

rabbi osmos has a bit of wall too, he slumps his head on his knees, one of his eyes always stares in another direction as if it wants to be somewhere else, he says the officers know me, it is a mistake, they'll get me out



View on Aghia Prison nowadays. © Ruth Padel

she hears barba rafael ask him to lead the prayers but rabbi osmos shakes his head and bows his forehead to his knees as if shutting himself in a tin

twigs of light from the high windows scatter over them, there are flies everywhere, meaty black flies with silver wings, thickest in the corners marked for latrines, the smell is so strong you feel you can see it, but it is so hot the flies don't bother to buzz

what will goldie do without her, maybe eleni rescued him and set him free

there are knobby stones in her back and cramps in her tummy

mother says but where's sara, who'll look after sara she tells her sara is with eleni, eleni's mother will look after her and andonis looks after us too doesn't he, when the germans go, andonis will find us and take us to sara somewhere she says mama don't worry there is a garden where everything lost can be found

mother says you're a good girl you always make people feel better

she whispers i didn't know you thought that but mother is breathing deep as if she is asleep

and maybe didn't hear

On Writing *Daughters of the Labyrinth*.

An Essay by Ruth Padel

I first came to Crete to dig.

In 1970 I was living in Athens as a Classics student on a scholarship from Oxford, living at the British School of Archaeology and working for a PhD on Greek tragedy. Not something you can hold in your hands, but the archaeologists kindly invited me to help on an excavation in the Royal Road at Knossos. There, apart from learning a little about Minoan archaeology, I met people who became lifelong friends. It was May. We started work at sunrise, as farmers went out to the fields. I'd wake at 4.30, shuffle down the empty road in the dark (sometimes hungover, from dancing till two in the local nightclub, the *Ariadne*), glimpsing an amber glow where the sun was about to rise over the gentle Knossos valley. We slipped through a special gate, passed through the ruins of the oldest palace in Europe whose corridors are said to be the origins of the labyrinth, and had the whole thing to ourselves.

My job was to keep a notebook charting the levels in my 'trench', change the *zembili* (the black rubber basket in which you place sherds found in each level) and record any finds, in a trench I shared with Knossos workmen who told me what to do, were incredibly experienced and, once I understood enough Greek, very funny. They also taught me Cretan songs, and to speak Greek with a Cretan accent. Some could sing by heart, all night, the whole of the *Erotokritos*, the Cretan epic that goes back to the 17th century. When we stopped work at two, the morning glory flowers which only last a day were still deep blue with faint pink lines. When we walked down to the village for a drink in the evening, pink had taken over. Each blossom was shrivelled and rosy, like a cocktail sausage.

The breeze in the pine trees. Greek pop music from tavernas and souvenir shops. The extraordinary palace, the songs, dances and scents of thyme in a mythic landscape where Ariadne once waited for her lover, the wonderful rich language with its echoes of ancient Greek, the language I had studied all my life, the history, the myths and the jokes. I fell in love with this island midway between Europe, Africa and Asia, where eagles flew over White Mountains and wild Cretan tulips blossomed in spring. Whose caves which Zeus was said to have been born in, held ancient burials and had been used as hide-outs for resistance fighters - against Turks in the nineteenth century, against German platoons in World War II.

Above all, there were the people, their history, tragedies and survivals. The mysterious end of the Mi-

noans in a tsunami. Waves of invaders and occupiers, Myceneans, Dorians, Romans, Saracens, Turks and more recently the Germans. All the overlappings of myth, history and tragedy. But I did not know about the Jews.

Later on, living in Heraklion and writing my first book, I sang in the Heraklion Town Choir with my writer friend, Cheli Duran, then living with Heraklion artist, Thomas Fanourakis. The conductor of the choir had studied singing in Vienna and we all respected her deeply except when she told us to sing *pianissimo* and the men rebelled in good Cretan tradition. "Why, Kyria Katerina? Why should we sing *softly*?" At Rethymnon, we sang a concert in a mosque that had originally, like Etz Hayyim Synagogue, been a Venetian church. It acquired a beautiful minaret during Ottoman rule, and was now the Odeon. It was May again, and a heatwave, and the women's uniform was a long thick skirt plus long-sleeved blouse. This was the women's turn to rebel. I have never seen so many women tear their clothes off as fast as we did, after the last song. Later, I lived at Knossos again with my husband when our daughter was one. She learned to walk on the rock steps of the palace, and to pick tiny white dry snail shells off the wild fennel by the roadside, while I learned the Greek for 'playground' and to avoid playground slides, whose metal became a searing gridiron in the sun.

When I was interviewed on *Desert Island Discs*, one track I chose was a Cretan folksong (another was Melina Merkouri singing 'The Boys from Piraeus') and some poems in my first collection, *Summer Snow* (1990), and also in my later collection on the Middle East, *Learning to Make an Oud in Nazareth* (2014) which are set in Crete. But I did not dare to put much of what I felt about Crete into words until Rabbi Nicholas de Lange, an old and dear friend, invited me to Hania and I first saw, then learned, the story of Etz Hayyim Synagogue.

In nearly forty years of coming to Crete, living there sometimes a year at a time, working there, teaching and writing, I'd been to Hania only as a visitor. When I came to the synagogue, met Nikos Stavroulakis and heard the tragic story, both the overarching story of all the Jews of Crete, but also individual stories, mainly from Nikos, but also others in Hania, something clicked. As if I had found the key to setting free some of the feelings and thoughts about Crete that had gathered up in me, lifelong.

Many of the community Nikos had gathered around the synagogue became dear friends, and were also astonishingly helpful and inspirational. It is due to all



Nikos and Ruth at Etz Hayyim © private

of them, in many different ways, that I was able to write the novel that became, eventually, *Daughters of the Labyrinth*. Most of all, due to Nikos himself. The book is dedicated to his memory. Such an extraordinary legacy - to have rescued and rededicated the synagogue, set up a library, archive and research centre and established the place both in Crete and on the international map as a centre of prayer, remembrance and reconciliation, but also of scholarship, study and an increasing fund of knowledge about the deeply multicultural inner history of Crete.

In addition, let's not forget, even Nikos's cookbooks are works of history, erudition and art, as well as sophisticated cuisine!

I was and am enormously grateful to Rupert and Elizabeth Nabarro for years of generous hospitality in their flat above the Hania harbour, the most beautiful place anyone could ever write in. Over ten years of writing the book, I learned constantly from Nikos's friendship and erudition, his stories of Hania, his memories. Invited to teach a poetry workshop in the synagogue, I got to know better some of the Havurah, the community around the synagogue, Cretan, Greek and international, and also the many people who have worked tirelessly to take forward Nikos's vision of the synagogue. Especially Anja Zückmantel, I cannot thank her enough - she has advised, helped and made sugges-

tions and commented on my text with all her scrupulous scholarship and historical knowledge. Also to Marianna Vinther, who found a sketch Nikos did of a tree among his papers which we used for a frontispiece and seemed appropriate for a story twining round a synagogue called The Tree of Life. And to Nicholas de Lange for introducing me to Etz Hayyim and who generously gave inspirational comments from his wide-ranging scholarship.

When I began the novel, so much of Crete's history in WWII had been taken over by British accounts of the resistance. Important though this was, I wanted to hear Cretan voices, and what the occupation was like for ordinary Cretans including women and children. I drew on my own memories of what older Knossos workmen had told me back in the seventies. I haunted Hania bookshops and listened out for urban voices, as well as those from the countryside. I was very grateful to my friend, Cheli Duran, for showing me a vivid fragment of memoir by Thomas Fanourakis who had been drafted to Hania for clearance work as a boy after the Germans arrived in 1941 which gave a sharp picture of what Hania was like just after three weeks of bombing and the invasion. Also to Hania photographer, Manoussos Daskalogiannis, for sharing his memories of Victoria Fermon who spent her last years in his mother's home.

In my novel, the story of Sara is loosely based on Victoria's life which Nikos first told me about. Victoria

escaped to the mountains with a non-Jewish boyfriend who unfortunately died of pneumonia and came back alone to a broken life. I have entwined her story with another, of two sisters who lost their lives on the *Tanaïs* - Sara and Ioudita Kounio. Nikos wrote their story in *The Jews of Crete II 1900 - 1944* (Etz Hayyim Synagogue 2002), along with an eyewitness account of the arrest and a photo of the girls which I found heart-breaking. It is the only surviving photo I know of, from all who drowned on that ship. I have also drawn on other stories Nikos told me over the years. (He was such a wonderful story-teller, so interested in people, so observant of them.) My fictional portrait of two twins, for instance, is based on the story he discovered of two cousins who both escaped arrest and got to America, but separately. Their descendants visited the synagogue separately, a few weeks apart, and Nikos realised from that - tragically - neither ever knew the other had survived.

I tried to make my fictional account of the Cretan Jews' last years as accurate as possible according to research collected at the synagogue, and also by local Cretan historians drawing on oral memory, newspaper archives, the War Museum of Hania, and Historical Museum of Crete in Heraklion.

Until May 1944, German command gave orders that crippled Jewish daily life, but did not persecute them as in other places they occupied. Some of my characters suggest that they had their hands too full with the Cretans and their resistance to bother with the Jews – whose arrest and deportation, a month after the kidnapping of German commander General Kreipe, seem to have been almost an afterthought to the huge early deportations from Salonica and Athens. A photo from spring 1944 that was discovered by local historian, Manolis Manousakas, shows Rabbi Osmos with German officers at the German consul's funeral, suggesting that even two months before the arrest, he felt secure with



them and that most people in the Jewish community were unaware of impending danger.

But sometimes, at festivals over the last ten years in the synagogue, I met Kostas Papadopoulos who was born in 1942 and survived because his mother was aware. Extraordinarily, she witnessed Kristallnacht while studying art history in Berlin, returned immediately to Heraklion, married a non-Jew and had a baby. When the Germans came, she hid with the baby in a village - and survived. (I use her story too, tangentially.) Kostas, continuing her art history tradition, ran an upmarket antique shop in Heraklion. As a student, living there writing my first book, I used to look longingly at the beautiful ancient Cretan artefacts in the window, never dreaming I would meet the proprietor one day and learn his history.

I also went and looked at the prison in the fields at Aghias where the Jews were held for nine days. I left out, however, a detail that happened later which Anja recently told me: that the Jews were imprisoned *again*. In Heraklion, in a bastion of the old city wall - the Makasi arch where the Germans had held Cretan prisoners in 1943 before sending them off via Bulgaria to Mauthausen concentration camp. In June 1944, they held the Cretan Jews there for a few days, before embarking them on the *Tanaïs*.

One of my characters says, 'The Cretans had always been part of someone's empire, always torn. Between Turkey and Europe, Europe and Africa, German and British. But in the middle of all that, like the one solid figure in a nest of Russian dolls, were the Jews'.

Ruth Padel

London 2021



Excerpt Three:

The Memorial for Victims of the Tanaïs

The main story of Daughters of the Labyrinth takes place today when the narrator, Ri, a London-based and internationally successful painter whose two brothers have stayed in Crete, finds out about family roots, which had been hidden from them all by their parents. This final passage describes Ri's attendance at the annual memorial for victims of the Tanaïs sinking at Etz Hayyim.

The hotel bedroom is empty. This hour, just before evening, is very busy. People wake from siesta and want coffee, or drinks for twenty-five on the terrace. I prop it on the easel. *Portrait of a Summer Sea*. It has left the world it represents. It is alone.

Not a big canvas, thirty by twenty inches. Just an empty bay. But something in it feels immensely sad. Rembrandt said a painting is complete when it has shadows of a god. The colours here vibrate, but every ripple has a grin of dark. Even the cloudless sky has black in it. Cretan black, the black of knives, the black of loss. Like the song Nikos sings. *Heavy as iron are the black clothes I wear for people I loved*.

I've painted a memorial.

I feel a pang at parting with it, but I did it for Vasilis and maybe it wouldn't have worked if I hadn't. I move the easel into the bedroom and leave it there. Early next morning, I find a text from Irene. *What HAVE you done, paidi mou??? We got to bed at 3, Vasilis saw it and burst into tears. He adores it. Thank you, thank you xxxxx*

Then from Vasilis. *Thanks, Rioula mou. Beautiful. But you haven't signed it.*

Forgot, I text back. *I'll come tonight.*

I have a drink with them that evening. The strings of lights loop beside us on their terrace, the black sea rustles behind. I bring a brush and tube of citron, rest the

painting flat on the table and initial it, very small, bottom right. AG. The letters float over a dark bit of sea. ‘Will you come to the Memorial Service,’ I ask Vasilis, ‘in the synagogue?’ ‘*Synagogue?* Where? Why?’ ‘It’s the anniversary of the day that ship went down. They hold it every year.’ ‘We can’t get away,’ he says at once. Irene looks at the painting and says nothing.

Mama won’t come either. Wouldn’t she like to see the synagogue, meet the people? She shakes her head, and Papa stays with her. So on a warm June evening, against a sky as clear and pale as primroses, Nikos and Loukia come with me through that door in the wall. We step down into the little cobbled courtyard. To my surprise, it is full of people. The girl here said people who come to their weekly service are from many different faiths, but it still is a real Jewish service. Throughout the year, Jewish expatriates who live on Crete come often, and Jewish tourists drop in. For big festivals, people come from Europe and America. But tonight is different. Most of these people are local. Nikos and Loukia smile at people they recognize. Twilight falls, and we go into the building. People at the door hand *yarmulkes* to the men and give us all a service booklet in English, Greek and Hebrew. *Askava*, it says. *For the Jewish Community of Crete.*

We find seats on a bench. The place is packed, lit by an extraordinary chandelier I didn’t notice last time, a horizontal rim of iron whose inner struts are a six - point star. At each point hangs a lamp of white glass, blazing down on huge ostrich eggs the colour of raw wool. The bulbs shed a little mantle of extra light on the top of each egg, just the bit you’d slice off if you were going to eat it. The doors stay open, cats wander in and out, late-comers crowd by the door. Suddenly the glossy black moustache of Vasilis appears among them. And beside him, the top of Irene’s head. ‘She made him come,’ whispers Loukia.

I have been in synagogues before, but Nikos and Loukia haven’t. They watch what other people do. We don’t need to do much, just follow Hebrew prayers in Greek. *Shield us from the stroke of the enemy. From pestilence, sword, affliction, evil, famine, sorrow, destruction and plague.*

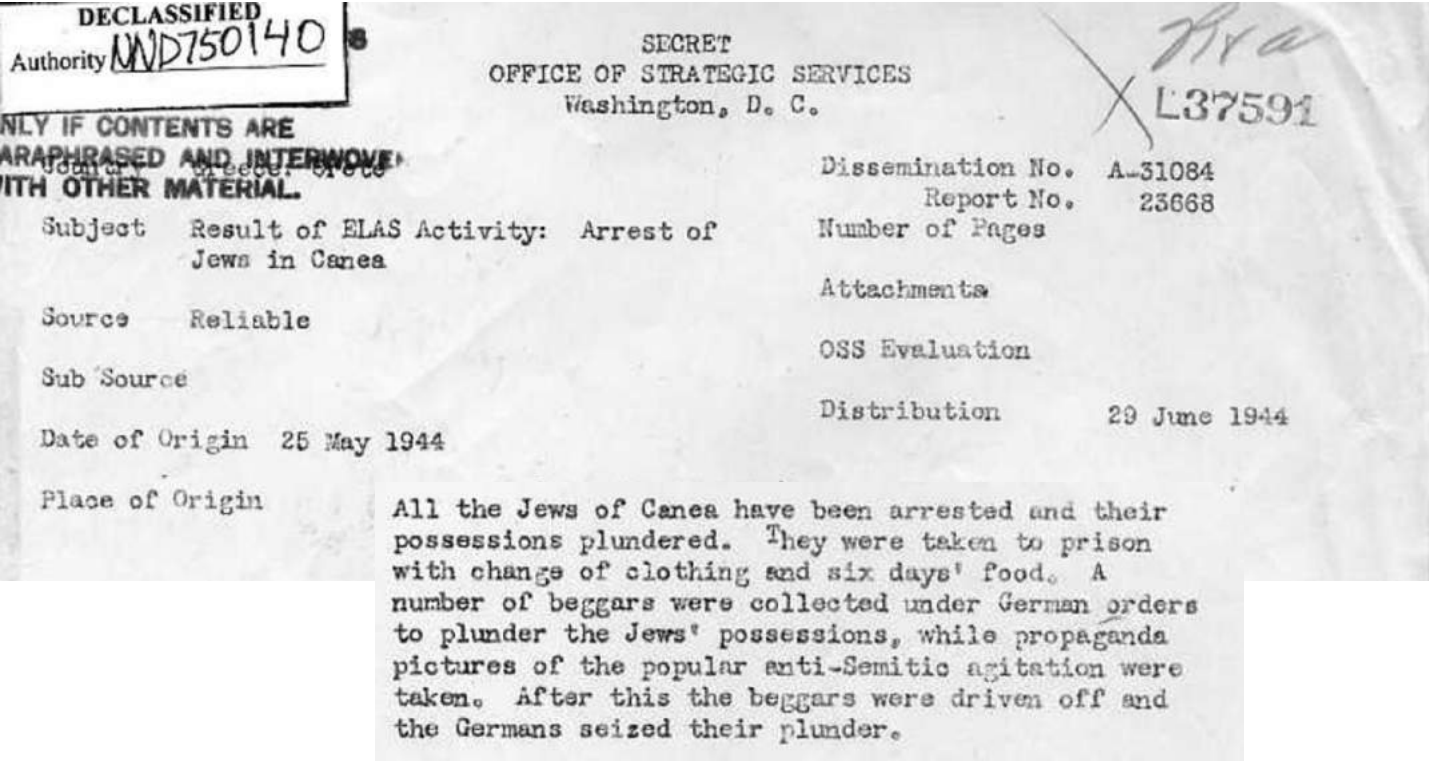
Then everyone begins to speak, like a forest rustling in sudden wind, reading out the names in the back of the booklet. The names of everybody taken from their homes here, imprisoned, then drowned. We hear

Trevezas, Mois, silver- worker. Trevezas, Simcha, house- wife. Trevezas, Sara, student. Trevezas, Elvira, student. Nikos takes my hand. It now seems mad we never knew Mama’s name. One of those things that happens in a family, the secret you don’t realize you are keeping. Let out of the bag by a heart event.

‘They must take her name off that list,’ Nikos whispers. Over heads of the crowd I see tears running down Vasilis’s face. Then silence. The rustling anguished silence of a hundred people. Finally, they recite *kaddish*. The Hebrew speakers say it properly, the rest of us follow the translation in silence. One way or another, Mama has been having it said for her all this time. The packed crowd loosens. People start lighting tea-lights, one for every name. We join in, placing them round the synagogue, in the courtyard, the olive tree, the *mikveh* and back garden, on the rabbis’ graves. Nearly three hundred candles, alight and alive in the dark.

Back home, Papa is on the patio, cigarette in one hand, *komboloi* in the other, chatting to a Danish couple. Indoors, Mama is watching TV. She looks up nervously as we come in with our eyes full of the night. ‘It was beautiful, Sophia,’ says Loukia. ‘It’s a wonderful place. You’d love it.’ She shows Mama the booklet, the service. Mama lingers over the Hebrew prayers. And then the names. It is a hot evening, I go to the kitchen to get chilled water from the fridge and when I come out Mama is crying. They are hugging her.

‘Maybe we’ll go there one day, Mama?’ ‘Maybe.’ I wash the glasses and leave them upside down on the draining-board. ***



© United States National Archives

The *Wehrmacht* and the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Crete

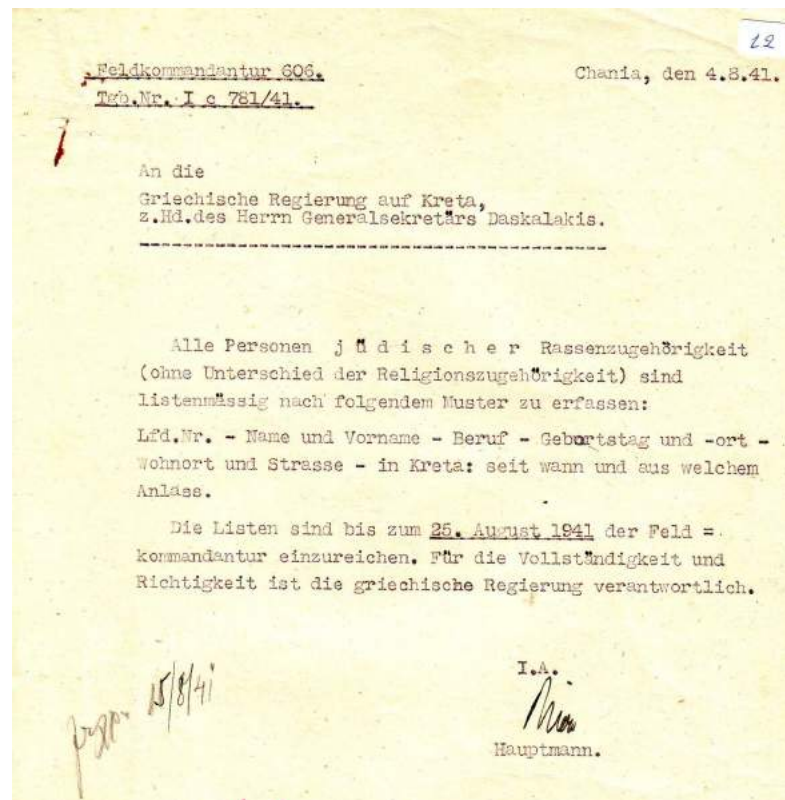
by Hans Safrian

If tourists visit Crete these days, they usually come to relax at the beaches and enjoy the Mediterranean Sea and sun. Visitors with cultural interests have the opportunity to admire reconstructions of Minoan palaces and other archaeological sites and to visit Greek-Orthodox monasteries.

However, only a minority of German-speaking tourists are aware of the fact that not “their mothers”, but some of “their fathers” and other male relatives left their traces on Crete as soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* between 1941 and 1945. As soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, they were jointly responsible for the bombardment of ports and a huge airborne landing operation which caused several thousand casualties among themselves. Furthermore, they engaged in combat with their military opponents and also fought (real or imagined) partisans, killed civilians and burned down entire villages as part of the so-

called “Sühnemaßnahmen” (“atonement measures”). They were also responsible for the destruction of the island’s Jewish community.

When the *Wehrmacht* first occupied Crete in May/June 1941, the Jewish community was able to look back on a long history lasting more than 2000 years. Between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE during the Hellenistic period, a Jewish community had established itself and had grown steadily within the Imperium Romanum. Moreover, this community maintained contacts with other Jewish communities across the Mediterranean. For example, a woman of a highly regarded West Cretan family married Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus (Yosef ben Matityahu), the author of The Jewish War. Greek-Jewish communities, the so-called Romaniotes, developed under the Eastern Roman and later, Byzantine reign until the island fell under Venetian dominion at around 1200



Order of 4 August 1941

All persons of Jewish race (without any distinction between race and religion) have to be registered in the following manner:

Sequential number – family name and given name – profession – date and place of birth – place of residence and street – in Crete: since when and for what reason.

The lists have to be submitted by 25 August 1941 to the Feldkommandantur. The Greek government is responsible for the completeness and accuracy.

© Historical Archive of Crete

First page of the 1941 Community List

© Historical Archive of Crete

CE. The construction of the Romaniote synagogue Etz hayyim in Hania and the establishment of a Jewish quarter in this city dates to the late Middle Ages.

Soon after the start of the military occupation of Crete, the *Feldkommandantur* (“Field Command Headquarters”) in Hania attempted to register all Jewish men and women in August 1941. As a department of the *Wehrmacht*, the *Feldkommandantur* was the highest executive authority for Greek civilians. An order was given to register all individuals affiliated with the “Jewish race (without any distinction between race and religion)” and “on the list”.¹ However, since the “affiliation to race” could not be identified without a recourse to the people’s religion, the *Geheime Feldpolizei* (abbreviated: GFP; “Secret Field Police”) only received a list of all Jewish community members from Hania. It was handed over by the Greek major of the city in February 1943.*

How the Deportation of the Greek Jews was Organised

According to national census data, 67,600 individuals of Jewish faith were living in Greece in 1940. Approximately 50,000 of them were residents of Salonika (Thessaloniki). Furthermore, 2,000 Jews from the Aegean archipelago of the Dodecanese, which was under Italian control at that time, can be added to that count. The deportation of the Greek Jews to concentration and death camps was carried out in three phases according to time and place:

At the beginning of March 1943, Bulgarian occupying forces arrested more than 4,000 Jewish inhabitants of Kavalla, Komotini, Drama and Serres in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. They were brought to the Bulgarian city of Lom on the Danube from where they were transported by ship to Vienna. Some of the ships were operated by the Austrian shipping company, Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft (DDSG). Supervised by Viennese members of the “Order police”, the Jewish people were then deported on trains to the Nazi-death camp Treblinka in Poland.

Between March 15th and May 9th 1943, most of Salonika’s Sephardic Jewish community was deported by sixteen railway trains to the concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. At that point in time, parts of northern Greece including Salonika were administered by the Wehrmacht.

In September 1943, Italy surrendered to Great Britain and the USA. Soon after that, Wehrmacht authorities took over areas which were formerly occupied by Italian forces. Further deportations from the Greek mainland were carried out from this time onwards. Jews residing on Greek islands such as Crete and Corfu were deported in March, April, June and August of 1944. These cases will be analysed later in this article.

The destruction of Salonika’s Jewish community was organised by SS-members under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner and Dieter Wisliceny. The deportations from Athens, Corfu and Rhodes in 1944

were carried out by Anton Burger. This fact raises a question: how could that small group of SS-members identify more than 50,000 people, seize their possessions, assemble them altogether and then transport them from the most southeastern country in Europe to the concentration and death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland?

Throughout the German-occupied continent, the SS depended on the cooperation of German civilian and military administrative bodies, as well as local collaborators. In the case of Greece, the role of the Wehrmacht must be highlighted. As an administrative body during the occupation, the Wehrmacht held executive power while the Wehrmacht’s commander of the South-East was the highest authority for civilians. This function was at first carried out by the Armeeoberkommando 12 (AOK 12; “army supreme command”) and from the beginning of 1943 by the Army Group E under the command of General Alexander Löhr. Moreover, the Wehrmacht’s department Ic/AO was responsible for cooperation with the SS.

In mid-May 1944, an official request from the SS-department regarding the arrest of Jews arrived at the command of the Army Group E. The army group E responded instantly by sending out a telex to the subordinated departments, one of them being the Wehrmacht’s commanding officer of the fortress Crete. In this message, the SS-department requested the “provision of ship transport capacity for the quick transportation of

350 Jews from Crete and 1600 Jews from Corfu”.² The request was approved; guards would be provided by the regional army commanders in charge.

The instructions regarding the deportation of Jewish men, women and children by the Army Group E were put to practice rapidly in Crete, more so than in Corfu. The full responsibility for the organisation of arrests and transports in Crete was given to Wehrmacht’s corps. Members of the *Feldgendarmarie* (“field gendarmerie”) and the GFP group 611 (“field police”) carried out the raid in Hania in May 1944. On the morning of 21 May, all streets with Jewish habitants were blocked. The Jews were forced to leave their houses and were pushed onto trucks prepared by the Wehrmacht.

Following their arrest, the men, women and children from Hania were taken to a local prison before being deported to Heraklion some days later. The plan was to ship them to the Greek mainland early in June, together with a few Jewish families from Heraklion and some other non-Jewish prisoners. From there, Hania’s Jews, along with the Jewish community of Corfu, would have been deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and death camp by train. On 8 June 1944, the cargo ship *Tánaïs* left the harbour of Heraklion bound for Piraeus. On board were 492 civilian prisoners and 14 others. According to the war diary of the Seetransportchef Ägäis (“Sea Transport Chief of the Aegean”), the *Tánaïs* was sunk by a torpedo from a British submarine on 9 June. Even if some of those people onboard the ship survived

that attack, we must assume that all Jewish prisoners died by drowning. An entry in the mentioned war diary, dated 16 June 1944, states that “37 Germans and 14 foreigners” could be saved from the cargo ship Tánais.³

After some delays, the members of Corfu’s Jewish community were shipped to the Greek mainland to the Haidari concentration camp in Athens. They were brought there by ferries under the supervision of the Austrian SS-member Anton Burger. On 21 July 1944, these Jews were deported to the concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Without the support of the Wehrmacht, Anton Burger and the few SS-men in Greece would not have been able to register and deport so many victims. Units of the Wehrmacht aided the SS during the process of rounding up, robbing, guarding and transporting these people. At the same time, these steps were carried out in Ioannina, Crete and Kos by the Wehrmacht without the presence of one single member of the SS.

Yet, the cooperation did not always go as smoothly as planned. Sometimes individual officers like Colonel Jäger in Corfu or General Kleemann in Rhodes expressed doubts about the deportation of Jews from their areas of responsibility, but even in these cases, the higher Wehrmacht departments commanded them to participate on all measures required by the SS. The officers reacted without raising further objections – open dissent was not expressed – and even where opportunities to prolong some of the actions existed, they were not seized upon by these individuals. For instance, such delaying measures would have been possible for low-ranking officers from the department Ic/AO which were responsible for the cooperation with the SS especially right before the Army Group E left Greece in July 1944.



Dr. Hans Safrian is Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna. He served as a Research Historian for the ground-breaking exhibition “War of Extermination: Crimes of the German Wehrmacht, 1941-1944”; an exhibition of historic photographs and documents that challenged the widely held notion that soldiers in the German army were not involved in Nazi crimes. His publications include *Expulsion and Extermination: The Fate of Austrian Jews, 1938-1945* and *Eichman’s Men*. In the latter, Safrian extensively analysed the destruction of the Jewish community in Greece.

In 2011, Hans Safrian, as part of a seminar at Vienna University, brought a group of students for an educational excursion to Crete which focused on the German Occupation of the island during the Second World War. After the students’ visit at Etz Hayyim Synagogue, we were approached by key members of the governing board of the association **Gedenkdienst** (Holocaust Memorial Service), who were among the students. The ensuing conversation marked the beginning of what is now a long-term successful collaboration between Etz Hayyim and **Gedenkdienst**.

To summarise, the Wehrmacht's co-responsibility for the deportation of approximately 9,000 Jews from Greece in 1944 was even larger than its co-responsibility for the destruction of the Jewish community of Salonika in 1943.

When Crete was liberated in 1945, the Jewish community no longer existed. The few survivors, who had not been in Hania when the arrests took place in 1944, lost all of their relatives and had to start a new life. After it was looted in May 1944, the synagogue fell into gradual ruin and reconstruction works did not begin until 1996. Nowadays, Etz Hayyim Synagogue has become an important place for the return of Jewish survivors from Crete and their descendants from around the world. Since 2013, the Austrian association, GEDENKDIENTST sends volunteers to Hania supporting the synagogue’s diverse activities.

1 Feldkommandatur 606, Tgb. Ic 781, Chania, 4. August 1941, with thanks to Hagen Fleischer who shared a copy of this document with me.

* Editor’s note: This list was submitted on 14 August 1941; an additional list was requested and submitted in February 1943.
2 German (Safrian): War Diary Army Group E, 12 May 1944, Abtransport von Juden (deportation of Jews), National Archives and Records Administrations (NAW), T 311/177/47.

3 *Kriegstagebuch des Seetransportchefs Ägäis vom 1. bis 30. Juni 1944*, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), Militärarchiv (MA), RM 35 III/193, 14.

The article was translated by Tobias Schmitzber. It was originally published in 2013 as “Die Wehrmacht und die Zerstörung der jüdischen Gemeinde Kretas” in the publication **GEDENKDIENTST**. We thank our long-term cooperation partner **Gedenkdienst** for permission to translate and reprint.



Ariye Katz’ Memories from Greece and Crete

Ariye Katz fought as a volunteer in the British Army during the Battle of Crete. As many of the Allied troops he was captured and interned at the POW camp in Galatas, west of Hania. In his post-war memoirs he described his escape both from the camp and, eventually, the island. The following text was kindly translated and adapted from Ariye’s memoirs by his grandson Gil Katz.

It was 14 April 1941. The German Wehrmacht was pushing the Allied armies south in Greece. On the slopes of Mount Olympus, near the Katerini Pass, a Royal Pioneers Sergeant from the 604th Company of Eretz Israel volunteers was standing thigh-high in a flooded ditch, holding a ‘Bren-Gun’ (automatic machine gun) aimed at a Luftwaffe bomber that was flying low on its way to bomb the nearby troops. Sergeant Katz emptied three armor piercing magazines into the fat belly of the bomber. Heavy black smoke started flowing from the bomber and it crashed to the ground.

The exhilaration and excitement did not last long. A squadron of enemy fighter planes were called in to “punish” the anti-aircraft position. They attacked the troops on the ground with vengeance, bombing and strafing. Once again, Sergeant Katz took the ‘Bren-Gun’ and shot magazine after magazine of ammunition at the attacking airplanes. To everyone’s amazement, Ariye hit and shot down another German plane.

For his bravery during this fight, Sergeant Ariye Katz was decorated with the Order of the British Empire medal after the war had ended. However, shooting down two German planes was not enough to stop the Wehrmacht from pushing the retreating British army southwards.

The troops on the ground were ordered to retreat to Athens where the Royal Pioneers regrouped and were ordered to go to Argos harbor by train; there they were supposed to be extricated by the Royal Navy. Yet, the German army did not wait and Greece surrendered. The remains of the retreating troops were left behind. The commanding officer suggested the survivors try to escape to Crete on small civilian boats under the assumption that Crete was still free.

Ariye Katz joined a New Zealanders company, and 43 of them took over three local fishing boats and sailed to Crete. The plan was simple, but executing it was a whole other story. On the first night, the sea started raging and two of the three boats were lost; the soldiers on them probably drowned. The surviving boat sailed south along the shoreline at night and hid from German planes and ground troops during the day. Eventually, after several days of life-threatening adventures, the nine survivors met a bigger boat manned with officers and seamen from the Greek Navy who were trying to escape to Crete as well. The two groups joined together. The good fortune was with them and a few hours later they saw a large triple mast sailboat. The Greek officers identified the crew as Greek Navy soldiers. The survivors from both



Ariye with his Royal Pioneers company (2nd row from the bottom, 2nd from the right).

smaller boats were accepted with open arms by the crew of the triple-mast sailboat, and later that day they all set sails south.

The next morning, the ship arrived at a small fishing harbour in Kythira. After some deliberations, the captain decided to anchor in a small secluded bay nearby that was protected by mountain ranges which could shield the boat from Luftwaffe airplanes attacking the island from time to time. They had already sank some vessels. The men got down to shore and hid in some caves from where they sent a delegation to purchase some food in a nearby village and spent the day resting. By the afternoon, they returned to the harbour to prepare for the next leg of the route to Crete. There, they found another refugee's vessel with some comrades from the Eretz Israel Royal pioneers. The excitement and celebrations were cut short by a German airplane that machine-gunned the crowd, killing and injuring some of the people. Among the injured soldiers was a guy named Klein, a brother in arms from Eretz Israel. He was shot in the thigh and lost a lot of blood. Ariye bandaged him and decided to stay with him in the event the sailboat decided to leave. The boat's captain decided not to leave until a doctor took care of the wounded man. Two hours later, a doctor arrived from a village nearby. There was not much he could do but try to stitch the wound and stop the blood loss. An hour before midnight, they set sails to Crete with Klein on board.

Around noon of 1 May 1941, the boat arrived at the Hania port. An ambulance was rushed to take Klein to the military hospital where he later died. The rest of the group was sent to a transit camp near Souda. When they asked for blankets to protect themselves from the cold, they were told that 48,000 troops who fled mainland Greece had arrived at Crete, and all of the supplies of blankets which the army possessed numbered only 11,000. That was an expression of what came next when tens of thousands of soldiers who were on the island

lacked military supplies such as weapons, ammunition and food and thus were helpless to fight the invading Germans.

Ariye found some of his company personnel and together they joined the 606th Company of the Royal Pioneers from Eretz Israel. They camped near Nerokourou village (close to Souda Bay). The coming days were a routine of unloading ships at Souda port, and running for shelter when the German air force struck and bombed again and again. They didn't have long to "enjoy" the new routine because on 20 May the Luftwaffe launched an attack and for two days the sky was filled with bombers and strike aircrafts that attacked and bombed undisturbed as the Allied air forces had been completely destroyed over a week earlier.

At the same time, German paratroopers raided the air field in Maleme. The battle around the airfield was fierce, but the Germans dropped more and more paratroopers everywhere. The troops on the ground and the brave citizens of Crete were fighting for their freedom and livelihood. As described by Ariye Katz in his own words, "Many Cretan civilian took part in the battle and fought with superb valour. The people of Crete are sturdy warriors, used to suffering and scarcity; they were willing to sacrifice their lives for freedom. They fought with old hunting guns, knives, sticks and bare fingernails. Men and women, old and young, fought with unbelievable bravery." However, the might of the German Wehrmacht was overpowering.

On the nightfall of 27 May, the 606th Company retreated to the mountains near Chiliomoudou (a village in the Apokoronou area, east of Hania). The next morning the Company split and Ariye with two others found themselves alone. They decided to try and get back to Souda to board a ship off the island, hopefully to Egypt. Yet, Souda port was already captured so they joined the 127th Battalion of Royal Engineers from Dorset, England. The 126th Battalion and a New Zealand army battalion

held the line from Souda to the mountains. They fought bravely, face to face with the heavily armed Germans. Ariye killed eight German infantry soldiers that day. Later came an order to retreat south and for three days, they fought a retreat battle all the way to Sfakia.

On the fourth day they were without food and with little water, exhausted from the continued fighting. On the morning of 31 May, they found themselves in a small valley, a few kilometres north of Sfakia, filled with thousands of Allied soldiers. White flags were raised around the valley and an order was issued to wait there until the Germans arrived to take the survivors as POWs.

Ariye saw a Jewish officer he knew, who didn't have any belongings that could identify him as a Jew including the dog tags that were engraved with the word 'Jew' on them. Ariye understood that being captured as a Jew by the Germans would be fatal and followed suite. He and a comrade from Eretz Israel discarded their dog tags and documentation. They decided to assume the false identities of South African soldiers because they knew English, and pretended to belong to the 12th Company of the Royal Engineers. They knew that this company was stationed in Gibraltar so no one could accidentally expose them. Sergeant Ariye Katz of the 604th Royal Pioneers from Erez Israel became James Brown of the 12th Royal Engineers from Cape Town, South Africa.

On the morning of 1 June, the small valley was overcrowded with thousands of Allied soldiers from England, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Eretz Israel and others. The valley was marked with white flags all around to signal the Germans that the troops had surrendered. At 7 am, five German aircrafts appeared in the sky above, circling like vultures, and then dove at the defenseless, defeated soldiers on the ground reaping them with machine gun fire and bombs. The valley was covered with piles of dead and wounded soldiers, blood flooded the ground and screams of wounded soldiers tore the air.

When the planes had emptied their ammunitions and had gone, Ariye crawled out from under a pile of ten dead soldiers where he survived by a miracle, but his relief did not last long. Soon afterwards, another three airplanes arrived and continued the massacre of "Sfakia Doom Valley". After the last attack, German soldiers appeared on the mountains around the valley and took the survivors as prisoners of war.

In the afternoon of that horrible day, the hungry, thirsty, defeated remains of the Allied armies started a three-day march to the Galatas POW camp near Hania. Many of the men were too exhausted and starved to withstand the march and were left to die on the roadside. The Cretan villagers waited along the road with water and some fruits for the defeated soldiers.

Upon arrival to the Galatas POW camp, which, until recently, had been populated with about 25,000 Italian POWs from the battle on the Albanian front, they were

released and the Allied soldiers took their place in the camp. The prisoners were sorted by rank and origin, and the camp ground was divided by barbed wire into sections. The volunteers from Eretz Israel counted about 120, but Ariye, now James Brown, was not with them as he disguised himself as South African.

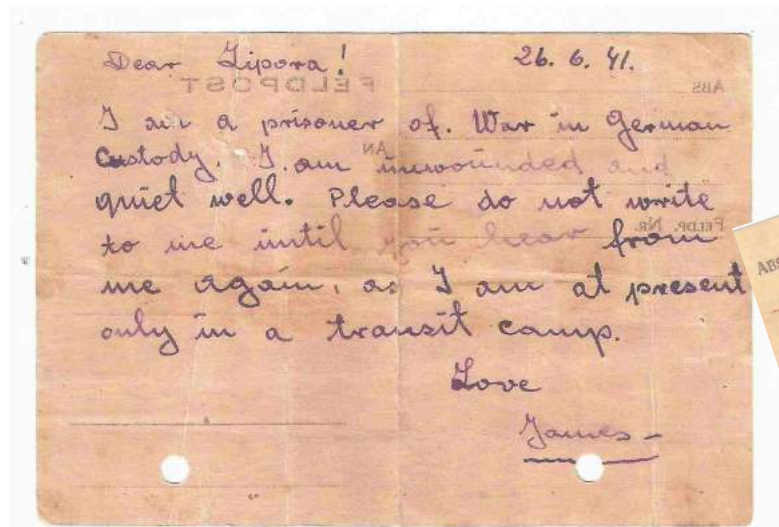
Life in the camp was horrible with poor sanitary conditions, lack of food and medical supplies and above all trigger-happy guards who often opened fire at helpless prisoners. Many prisoners perished from ailments and the guards' brutality. Some attempted to escape, but most of them were captured and killed by the Germans.

At the beginning of September, the Germans started transferring the POWs to Germany: first the officers and then the Jews and later the Cypriots, Australians, English and New-Zealanders. Ariye evaded the shipments knowing that if he was sent to Germany, all of his hopes to escape would disappear. Miraculously, he succeeded in remaining with the last group of 350 POWs that was due to be shipped on 30 December 1941.

Ariye was well-versed in German, a language close to Yiddish, and after a few weeks in Galatas Camp was assigned a position of translator as being a "South African" was a good enough explanation for his knowledge of the language. His role allowed him to move between different groups of POWs, carry messages and news and gather information. One of his tasks was to prepare a detailed list of the medical staff in the camp hospital. One of the physicians was named Gurevich, but as a Jew, he also hid under false name. Ariye and Dr. Gurevich became friends, a friendship that would last many years after the war; they started plotting their escape together.

It was essential to contact the Cretan resistance because to escape successfully one needed help from the locals to get food, shelter and guidance. A contact with the local resistance was established through a dentist in Hania who treated the POWs. His name was Dr. Georgakakis and it turned out he was an important leader in the local resistance. Ariye faked tooth problems and for six weeks visited the good dentist twice a week.

The escape plan was set and several friends including Dr. Gurevitch and another physician, two radio operators and few other sergeants were paired and scheduled to escape in turns over several nights and convene later along the planned escape route. First to escape were the physicians and over the next two weeks pair after pair escaped until it was Ariye's turn. He was the last one to escape. On 29 December, the night before the last shipment of POWs to Germany, under heavy rain, Ariye crawled to the wire fence and for an hour and a half cut the wires one by one with a wire cutter. After cutting the last wire, he couldn't hold his nerves any longer and stood up and started running for a distance of about 200 metres to a nearby vineyard. Luckily the darkness and rain obscured him from the German guards.



Postcard sent by Ariye from Galatas POW camp to his wife; signed with his "adopted" name "James Brown".



Down the Hania-Maleme road were the ruins of a small hut. Every night at 9pm, a Cretan resistance operative was waiting there for escapees to lead them to the safe hands of his comrades. He had to be at the hut every night because escaping was a matter of seizing the opportunity. He could not stay long for fear of being exposed and captured. Ariye found his way to the hut, but after a long walk, he realised that he was lost. His only option was to head for the mountains and attempt to find the pre-planned escape route that he had written in coded language, village by village.

In the morning, he arrived at the outskirts of a small village. Not knowing if there were Germans around, he decided to hide. After a few hours, a shepherd, 13-14 years old, found him. Ariye's appearance was scary – after seven months, long hair and beard, torn uniform, and covered in mud. The boy recovered from the initial shock and took Ariye to a nearby family home. The family got busy cleaning and feeding the poor refugee. They dressed him and cut his hair so he looked like a native Cretan. They equipped him with a *sakouli* (a traditional Cretan bag), a *sariki* (the traditional Cretan head scarf) and a *katsouna*, a traditional shepherds stick, curved of hardwood. The Katsouna served Ariye well along the escape route all the way home, and to this day it is kept as a memento with the Katz family in Israel.

The next day, Ariye departed and headed to the next village on his escape route list. For 18 days, he walked from village to village. The villagers along the route took him into their homes, sheltered and fed him with generosity, disregarding the risk. On the eighth day he arrived at a village named Mironas. With some difficulty, he found his resistance contact who took him to his home. Costa and his wife Ourania sheltered a wounded New-Zealander escapee. They shared the very little food they had with their guests. Costa sent Ariye off to the next destination, a village named Agios Miron, where he was to meet Papas Kyriakos Katsantonis, little did he know that the priest, Father Kyriakos, was one of the leaders

of the resistance. And after a rigorous interrogation by local men, he was brought in to meet the priest. It turned out that two of his fellow escapees from Galatas POW camp were there, and they all rejoined happily.

A rumor had been circulating already in the Galatas POW camp that a British submarine surfaced from time to time near the Cretan shore and picked up escaping POWs. Now the rumor had a date and place: the night of 16 January 1942. The rendezvous point was a secluded beach near a monastery on the other side of Tympaki in the Heraklion prefecture. The small group of survivors had to walk a long distance, hiding from German patrols to arrive there on time. They did get there on time only to learn from the resistance radio operators at the monastery that the submarine could not leave the port of Alexandria in Egypt due to bad weather conditions and a new pick-up date was not set. They had to depart the place in a hurry because word got to the Germans who were planning to soon raid the monastery with hundreds of soldiers.

Later, Ariye and his fellows learned that the Germans did raid the monastery and had slaughtered the monks. The frustrated Germans, who could not find a single escaping POW near the monastery, ordered the Cretan police to besiege villages in the area and search for runaways. Ariye and several more men found themselves surrounded by Cretan policemen. It was known that most of the Cretan policemen supported the resistance so the group decided to try to just walk through the roadblock. The policemen just moved aside and pretended not to see them!! The blockades did not yield even one POW or resistance operative. The Germans were so frustrated that they executed the Heraklion chief of police in retaliation.

As the dream to be extricated by the Royal Navy evaporated, the group set off in the direction of Kastelli. One of the men had a head injury that developed an infection. He could hardly walk so Ariye carried him most of the way. When they got closer to Kastelli, they decided to



Ariye with his wife and son (Gil's father) after the escape from Crete; note the OBE decoration ribbon on his shirt.

split. Most of the group went onward to scout Kastelli and try to contact the local resistance. Ariye and Bill Penny, the wounded man, were left behind near the village of Voni in a small cave. The Voni villagers supported them by giving them food, a little medical treatment and blankets.

After three weeks of waiting, Major Dr. Gurevitch, along with one of the sergeants, came back to take them. They joined the other eight men of the group in a large cave near Kastelli. People from the neighbouring villages supplied them with food and other necessities, always saying "little something, but a lot of love". Those villagers shared the very little they had and took deadly risk to help the escapees.

Over time, the villagers learned that there were two physicians in the group and every night an improvised infirmary treated patients from the villages around. The activity drew the attention of the Germans so they attempted to surround the group and capture the escapees again. The group left the cave and fortified themselves on a mountain top with a group of partisans. They embarked on a fire fight with German troops all day and by nightfall fled deeper and higher into the mountains.

For the next three months, the runaway gang fought alongside the Cretan partisans, doing their best to harass and hurt the Germans and flee from one place to another with the partisans. The thought of escaping the island and returning to the Allied lines never left them. To their aid came Dr. Pavlos Drandakis, a well-known scholar who had published the Great Greek Encyclopedia before the war, and a prominent figure in the resistance. Dr. Drandakis helped the group acquire a compass and a naval map. He located a secluded German coast guard post with a small patrol boat in a small bay that was approachable only from the sea side.

On 5 May 1942, the group parted from the Cretan freedom fighters. They left behind all of the weapons they had looted from the Germans during the months of

battle; those weapons were precious to the Cretan partisans. They took only one Parabellum handgun and sticks as weapons for the attack on the German soldiers in the coast guard post.

For fifteen days, they prepared for the attack, observing the guards routine, studying the strength of the German unit. They learned that there were fourteen soldiers manning the post. At night, two pairs of Germans patrolled the 220 by 60 metre beach in two hour shifts. The plan was to ambush the two patrols at the far ends of the bay simultaneously and silently so as not to alert the other ten soldiers who slept in a small cabin in the middle of the beach.

After nightfall on 20 May, they climbed silently down from the surrounding cliffs into the bay. They attacked the patrols and took over their weapons and with these weapons, raided the cabin. The group decided to take the Germans as prisoners and not kill them for two reasons: firstly they knew that if they killed the Germans, it meant an immediate death sentence if they were caught. Secondly, they didn't want to leave alive any Germans behind because they could alert other coast guard or army units.

They gathered all of the food, water and fuel and loaded the supplies onto the patrol boat, together with the German POWs, and started the 317 miles sail to the Libyan coast. The boat was laden with 25 people on board and sailed very slowly. The fear of being spotted from the air or from another vessel was nerve-racking. On the seventh day of sailing, they saw the Libyan shore near Bardia. A British torpedo boat intercepted them to enquire about their identity and when satisfied, escorted them to Bardia port and thus, freedom. A month later, Ariye returned home to his wife and first-born son. Two years later, in July of 1944, Ariye re-enlisted in the British army and fought with the Jewish Brigade in Italy.

Biography of Ariye Katz

Ariye was born in Jably, Serbia, on Yom Kippur of 1907. His father David was a Rabbi, a Shochet and a Chazan, and he received word about his new-born son in the middle of Kol Nidre prayers.

In January 1929, Ariye made Aliya to Eretz Israel. He devoted his life to Zionism and the security and freedom of Jews. He took part in organising the Armed Guards Association, and later the Hagana. He participated in the Second World War, first with the Royal Pioneers volunteers from Eretz Israel and later with the Jewish Brigade. He served in the IDF as a high-ranking officer until 1964 and retired in the age of 57 only to be called again as a reserve officer for the Six Days War.

Ariye died on 20 March 1970, leaving behind a wife, a son, three daughters and six grandchildren.

(right: Last photograph of Ariye in uniform with all his decorations from the British Army and the IDF. © for all photographs: Gil Katz)



From the Etz Hayyim courtyard to the pages of Jottings

The small wooden table in Etz Hayyim's courtyard has been the scene of many talks with visitors who have shared stories about their ancestors or their personal links with Crete. This June, we sat down with Sharon Katz from Israel who told us that her husband's grandfather had been in Crete during the Second World War. We were, of course, intrigued as we weren't initially sure if he was Cretan nor did our records mention any member of the pre-war Jewish community with the surname, Katz. As Sharon didn't know all the details, we were grateful that she conveyed our interest in this story to her husband, Gil Katz, who kindly got in touch with us and since then, an interesting correspondence has ensued. In his first email, Gil explained:

In his first email, Gil explained:

"My grandfather Sergeant Ariye Katz escaped, a heroic escape, from the POW camp in Galatas, and spent a few months with the Cretan resistance, and later, together with others, took over a German coastal guard boat and sailed to North Africa.

Prior to his capture he took part in the battle near Kalamata. He was decorated with the Order of the British Empire medal for his actions in this battle.

If you wish to know more details, please let me know, I'm very proud of him and happy to tell his story."

Of course, we wanted to know more details and were excited when Gil informed us that his grandfather had written a memoir in Hebrew that detailed his war experiences in Crete and elsewhere in Greece. Until then, we were only aware of one account of a Jewish soldier who had served in Crete in the British Army: Joseph Benkower. This account was published by Judith Humphrey, an avid researcher of Cretan Jewish history and editor of the Bulletin of Judeo-Greek Studies.¹

As 2021 marks the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Crete, we felt that it would be a suitable occasion to

publish Ariye Katz' story in this edition of Jottings and are particularly grateful to Gil for selecting and translating relevant parts from his grandfather's memoir for this purpose. As Gil told us, "The story starts with his birth in Serbia, and ends with Israel's War of Independence." After 1948, Ariye served in the military for many years, therefore "he did not write down anything for security reasons. But the part about WW2 is quite elaborate." Gil also mentioned that, incidentally, in the early 1950s, Ariye "asked a neighbour, who was a law student at the time, to type [the manuscript] on a typewriter for a fee. The law student later became a Supreme Court judge – Haddasa Ben-Itto."²

Years later, Ariye "saved money for periodic trips to Crete to visit his war-time friends." But since he "passed away in 1970 and visited his Cretan Resistance comrades by himself, [...] no-one in the family knows about their names or identities." As Gil's translation of the memoir includes some names of members of the Resistance which Ariye was in contact with, we hope to shed some more light on this in future research.

What we already know now through Gil's exploration of Ariye's memoir: "I could not hold my excitement and had to let you know immediately: today I got to the part of [the memoir discussing] my grandfather's arrival in Crete and as I was reading I found the name of Sergeant Benkower! Apparently they met each other in Crete and befriended. And actually Benkower helped my grandfather write down his war journey."

Anja Zuckmantel

¹ Judith Humphrey's article about Joseph Benkower's account was published in *The Jews of Crete: Selected articles and essays* (The Jews of Hania: 1900-1944, Volume II), Etz Hayyim Synagogue, 2002, pp. 17-24.

² Hadassa Ben-Itto (1926-2018) was an Israeli author and jurist. She was best known for her bestselling book *The Lie That Wouldn't Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.



George Sfougaras: *Light in the Darkness*

The *Light in the Darkness Installation*, one of the latest works by Cretan-British artist, George Sfougaras, was shown this summer both at the Leicester Museum & Art Galleries and the Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel Leicester (UK).

George's links with Etz Hayyim Synagogue go back to 2017. His series of drawings, *Tales from an Old Fort Town*, commemorating the lost Jewish community of Heraklion, has been on display at the synagogue since 2018 and he also created the map for the Hania Jewish Quarter Walking Tour that was produced by Etz Hayyim. This focus on the fate of the Jewish community of his native Crete prompted George to also include a reference to this lost community in the *Light in the Darkness Installation*.

George writes on his blog: "In March 2020, I was asked to create a response to the soon to be exhibited painting, 'Thou shall not Kill' and link it with the plight of refugees, past and present. In the painting, the artist shows us the horror and destruction of war, as he quotes one of the Holy Commandments. In this large work, cut up and hidden from the Nazi regime, Johannes Matthaeus Koeltz exposes the futility, hypocrisy, and violence of armed conflict."

In his artist's statement he further explains: "The *Light in the Darkness Installation* symbolises the fragility of life and the power of hope and remembrance. The tents

[...] speak of the common need for shelter by all exiled and displaced people and the duty to remember those that passed. The photographs depict murdered Jewish and displaced people. Amongst the loved ones are Africans, Armenians and Greek people from Turkey. (The latter are members of my family). In the installation, the photographs appear and then fade as a searchlight casts them into sharp relief against the tent walls. The revolving light which is housed inside a 'black box' record and exposes the sadness of the past, but also illuminates the way to a better, more just tomorrow. The soundscape replays the voices of past lives. The tents are the same as those used in refugee camps and are made specifically by the manufacturers for this installation. The hope is that after the exhibition, they will be used as intended as stores or shelters. They stand as symbols, monuments to lost homes and lives. They reaffirm our commitment to justice for the persecuted and the displaced."

The photographs from Hania (in view in the image above) are those of Leon Betzikas and Chrysoula Treveza. Leon was arrested in Athens in 1944, deported to Auschwitz and later to Mauthausen where he died a few weeks before its liberation, aged 28. Chrysoula Treveza perished on 9 June 1944, aged 21, alongside the entire Jewish population of Crete when the Tanais ship was sunk.



No Honour in Dying for the Fatherland

by Tobias Schmitzberger

Some exhibitions are designed to render a person speechless rather than smart or informed. One example is the German War Cemetery in Maleme which is located on the northwest coast of Crete. The bodies of nearly 4500 men are buried there on the top of a hill with views over the deep blue Mediterranean Sea. All these men were German soldiers who died in Crete during World War Two when the German Reich occupied the island from 1941 to 1945. This information is clearly stated in capital letters on a bronze plaque placed in the entrance area of the war cemetery. The text on the plaque further reads: “SIE GABEN IHR LEBEN FÜR IHR VATERLAND: They gave their life for their fatherland”. That’s irritating. How can one honour a soldier by claiming that he was “dying for his fatherland” even though he was killed during a criminal war of aggression, dying far from his home during an invasion of a Greek island?

These questions were also raised within the “Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge”. The Volksbund is a German organisation that maintains over 830 war cemeteries throughout Europe and Africa. Maleme is one of them with more than 50000 people visiting the cemetery every year. Currently, a new exhibition is being de-

signed for Maleme in part because the inscription of the so-called “Vaterlandstafel” (“Fatherlands-plaque”) is problematic. “Our cemeteries have to evolve from war memorials into places for reflection”, says Daniela Schily, the former Secretary-General of the Volksbund and the initiator of the relaunch. “We want to stimulate our visitors’ minds and be thought-provoking.” That’s why the Volksbund is redesigning the accompanying exhibitions of nineteen war cemeteries at the moment and Maleme is one of them.

In order to get to the cemetery, visitors must make their way up a hill through an idyllic olive grove. The burial site is situated on top of the hill where four neatly-designed rectangular areas are surrounded by granite walls. The site is strikingly well-maintained with no weeds nor rubbish anywhere to be seen. Within these granite enclosures are a mass of red flowers organised in delineated squares from which some granite crosses and trees stick out. Straight paths lead through the sea of red flowers. Between the flowers and paths are an endless series of square tomb stones, each of them bearing the names of two dead soldiers carved into the granite.

Most of these soldiers died in May 1941 when Crete was attacked and then occupied by the German Reich. This airborne operation was named after the ancient messenger of the Gods and called “Operation Merkur” by the Germans. During what is widely known as the Battle of Crete, large numbers of parachutists were deployed for the first time in military history. Furthermore, they were also supported by mountain troopers of whom many had Austrian origin. The hill, which nowadays accommodates the war cemetery, was a strongly disputed area during this battle. Thus, the Volksbund later constructed the war cemetery on the top of it: “Höhe 107” (“Hill 107”) became a symbol for the German victory in the spectacular “Operation Merkur” which was soon exploited for propaganda purposes in Germany.

The entrance area with the “Fatherland’s plaque” is further down the hill just below the olive grove. Next to the plaque stands a small building housing an exhibition. Here, visitors can read some basic information preparing them for their visit to the cemetery. In a small grey room measuring approximately 40 square metres are a few information boards fixed on a wall that explain some details about the Battle of Crete and the war cemetery. Visitors learn that more than 600 olive trees were planted in the area and that the Volksbund organises youth camps for young people all over the world. However, the core of the exhibition is formed by some biographies of young German soldiers who fought in the Battle of Crete. For example, the quote: “They fell on the same day” is an inadequate and frankly pathetic title of an information board describing the fate of three brothers. All of them died on May 21, 1941 during the German invasion of Crete.

Yet, there is a snag. Since this presentation is evidently one-sided, the German soldiers are portrayed only as victims of circumstances. “The current exhibitions are informing the visitors, but no context is given there”, asserts Schily from the Volksbund, “This is also rooted within the history of our association. In the past, we perceived ourselves mainly as a civilian organisation – and we didn’t want to be involved into political debates”. That’s why the Volksbund has tended to ignore controversial topics.

This policy is best reflected at Maleme War Cemetery by the example of Bruno Bräuer. He was the Commander-in-Chief on Crete from 1942 to 1944 and was buried in the cemetery some years after the war. One of the boards within the current exhibition mentions his fate tersely: “After the end of the war, he was handed over

by the British and executed in May 20, 1947 after a trial in Greece.” What isn’t stated is that Bräuer was executed in Athens because several war crimes were committed under his authority in Crete. As one of the Commanders-in-Chief, he was held primarily responsible for them.

The Wehrmacht had demonstrated particularly brutal behaviour after the start of the occupation of Crete in 1941; only the Slavic people of in Eastern Europe had to suffer similar atrocities before. For instance, an order of General Kurt Student, who was one of the important organisers of the airborne operation “Merkur”, gained questionable fame or more aptly put, infamy. Within this order, it was explained that the civilian population “took part in the fights on a large scale” and that German prisoners were murdered “in the cruellest manner”. He therefore ordered reprisals (“Vergeltungsmaßnahmen”): “1. Shootings”, “2. Contributions”, “3. Burning down villages [...]” and “4. [the] extermination of the male population in entire areas.”

Some of the victims of this order were the residents of the village of Kondomari to the west of Hania. The village was burnt down and at least 23 men were shot in an olive grove. Similar measures were taken by the German occupying power throughout the years of occupation; well over 3474 Cretans were executed. Forty villages were completely destroyed and another forty villages half demolished. In 1944, the entire Jewish community of Crete was deported and subsequently perished when the transport ship *Tánaïs* was sunk by a British submarine.

Stories like this one will now be referenced in the new exhibition of Maleme War Cemetery. “You cannot ignore the Jewish history, the martyr villages and the British war cemeteries in the exhibition. All these issues are connected”, explains Schily. Even if it is understandable that German parents were mourning their dead children after the war, “our exhibition has to take a stand. A soldier cannot ‘die for the Fatherland’, while he lands on Crete with a parachute on his back.”

On the other hand, all cases should not be lumped together. When Schily was in Maleme for the first time a few years ago, she met an old man who suddenly started crying and told her that all of his friends were laid to rest in the cemetery. “Everybody he had known when he was at the age of 17 was buried in Maleme...he was the only survivor”, says Schily. Young boys like the dead friends of that man are resting next to war criminals like Bruno Bräuer. She continues, “We don’t want to generalise and

talk only in strict categories of ‘either perpetrator or victim’” The new exhibition shall instead allow for nuances.

The Volksbund is building on the support of the German historian, Corinna Kuhr-Korolev to achieve this goal. Kuhr-Korolev is a researcher at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam whose main area of academic interest is the history of Russia and Eastern Europe. In order to redesign the exhibition in Maleme, she has worked closely alongside the exhibition office, “kursiv” in Dresden. She maintains that one element is clear: “The key issue of the new exhibition will be the cemetery.” This is because the history of the cemetery complex strongly reflects the German culture of remembrance and the Volksbund, itself, throughout the last decades.

“An alternation of generations is happening within the Volksbund”, explains Kuhr-Korolev. That’s an important development because even decades after the end of the war, the main task of the organisation was perceived as incontestable: to support relatives of dead soldiers and maintain their graves. Yet nowadays, this approach isn’t relevant anymore. As Kuhr-Korolev contends, “The time is passing and the events are fading away, so the generation directly affected by the war will not exist for much longer. That’s why the question becomes pressing, how the Volksbund should deal with their cemeteries in the future.” In this light, to transform spots like Maleme from memorials into places for reflection seems to be a logical conclusion.

This change of *raison d’être* is also obvious in the case of Maleme. This becomes clear if one reads the initial draft for the redesign of the exhibition. Karl Student, at that time, the Chairman of the German Paratrooper’s Association, was considerably involved in the construction of the cemetery. It was the same Student who ordered the brutal reprisals (“Vergeltungsmaßnahmen”) in 1941. Although Student was arrested by the Allies after the end of the war and put on trial, the custodial sentence was lenient. In 1947, he was sentenced to five years of imprisonment, although he didn’t have to serve the sentence and was soon released.

After his release, Student started lobbying for the construction of a central war cemetery in Crete. This was because many small burial sites were spread all over the island and maintaining all of them seemed to be impossible on a long-term basis after 1945. Student’s achievements were two-fold: the corpse of the war criminal,

Bruno Bräuer was transferred from Athens to Maleme and reburied; Student then handed over 16000 German marks to the Volksbund and motivated members of the Paratroopers Association to lend a hand on the construction site in Maleme.

The war cemetery was inaugurated on October 6, 1974 – 20 years after the end of the war. The initial draft of the new exhibition sums it up: “Basically the traditional club of the paratroopers established a cemetery of honour for its fallen comrades on Crete and used the place to glorify the military actions on Crete [...]”. Now, the upcoming new exhibition will not only provide such background information, but will challenge these old-fashioned interpretations that have characterised the place for a long time.

Furthermore, Kuhr-Korolev perceives one thing as important: “We don’t want to create the impression that ‘the Germans’ are coming to Crete to design an exhibition for themselves.” So, the curator travelled all over the island for two weeks last September and met many different individuals including collectors of weapons, local historians and representatives of Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania. She even undertook some research in a number of Cretan museums and archives. Now, more diverse war experiences will be represented through various biographies and stories within the exhibition in Maleme; for instance, short biographies of dead Germans will appear alongside a summarising text about the fate of the Cretan Jewish community or the short biography of the well-known British soldier, John Pendlebury.

The opening for the new exhibition will take place in October 2021. This year marks the 80th anniversary of “Operation Merkur” and therefore it was and still is the overarching goal to reopen the exhibition this year. One thing seems to be sure: the bronze plaque at the entrance area will still hang on the wall in the future. The initial exhibition draft explains why: “The ‘Vaterlandstafel’ will be recontextualised in terms of content and design, and therefore transformed into the first ‘exhibit’ of the exhibition.”

This example demonstrates that even problematic relics of the past can acquire or attain a new meaning and symbolism with the help of some creativity.

Remark: The former Secretary-General of the Volksbund, Daniela Schily, also contacted Etz Hayyim to discuss the redesign of the exhibition in Maleme. Since then, the staff (in their capacity as historians) has been closely involved in the transformation process. Furthermore, the coopera-



tion became part of the project, “Heritage Contact Zone”, which was financed by the European Union. One of the outcomes of this project is a written Tool Kit that offers some advice on how one can deal with controversial memorial places in a responsible and creative way. For this purpose, the issue of the exhibition in Maleme was debated between members of the Volksbund, Etz Hayyim and the exhibitions agency “kursiv” from Dresden.

¹Xylander, M. V. (1986). Die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft auf Kreta 1941-1945 (Band 32, Einzelgeschichten zur Militärgeschichte, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt). Freiburg, Deutschland: Verlag Rombach, S. 139.

²Xylander, Die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft auf Kreta, S. 139.

³Klein, R., Mentner, R., & Stracke, S. (2004). Mörder unterm Edelweiss: Dokumentation des Hearings zu den Kriegsverbrechen der Gebirgsjäger. Köln, Deutschland: PapyRossa Verlag, S. 39.

⁴Kursiv (2020). Grobkonzept zur Neukonzeption der Dauerausstellung auf der Deutschen Kriegsgräberstätte Maleme (Kreta). Dresden, Deutschland: Ausstellungsagentur kursiv, S. 7, unpublished.

⁵See online: https://www.kreta-wiki.de/wiki/Student-Befehl_31.5.1941

⁶Yada-Mc Neal, S. D. (2018). Franz-Peter Weixler: Die Invasion von Griechenland und Kreta durch die Kamera eines Propagandafotografen. Norderstedt, Deutschland: Books ON DEMAND, S. 47.

Greek-German Youth exchange focusing on Impact of German Occupation of Crete



In October 2021, Etz Hayyim Synagogue is co-hosting a Greek-German youth exchange under the aegis of the Greek-German Youth Office (<https://agorayouth.com>). The exchange will coincide with the official opening of the new exhibition at the German War Cemetery in Maleme. Etz Hayyim staff consulted and contributed content for the new exhibition which now gives a fuller picture of the devastating impact of the German occupation of Crete during the Second World War including the fate of the local Jewish

community.

Participants are students from Crete and Berlin. The programme of the youth exchange will focus on the events during the Second World War, but also on how they have been remembered and become part of the national narratives in Greece and Germany. The teaching content for the seminars and excursions has been developed by Etz Hayyim staff including our two volunteers (see p. 44), and two lecturers from Free University Berlin.

Fostering Connections Through Poetry

by Maia Evrona



My name is Maia Evrona. I am an American poet, prose writer and translator of Yiddish literature. During this coming year, I will be splitting my time between Spain and Greece on a special dual-country Fulbright Scholar Award. Pandemic permitting, my grant will first take me to Barcelona and Sevilla in the fall and winter, and then to Greece where Etz Hayyim Synagogue will serve as my Greek host institution in the spring of 2022.

I first became interested in Crete in my early twenties when, living in Jerusalem, I spent time with the poet and translator, Harold Schimmel. He and his wife, Varda, usually spent a month in Crete every summer. Prior to hearing tales of their travels, I had thought of Greece as a place that had offered outsize inspiration to poets in the past—including the recent past of the sixties and seventies when the country drew the likes of Leonard Cohen—but which had become inundated with mass tourism in more recent times. Talking with Harold and Varda, however, I came to think of Greece as a place

that might still hold inspiration for me, and I grew increasingly fascinated with not only its history, but also its modern realities including its Jewish communities.

My interest in both Greece and Spain may seem incongruous given my work as a translator of Yiddish poetry. Yet, one could argue that the Jewish poetic tradition can be traced back to the Hellenistic period in the Mediterranean when the “Song of Songs” is believed to have been composed. This tradition was then further developed during the Golden Age of Hebrew poetry in medieval Spain and continued through the Yiddish poetry which I translate. A number of Yiddish poets who survived the Holocaust eventually became poets of the Mediterranean, among them Avrom Sutzkever, who, after surviving the Vilna Ghetto, opted to illegally emigrate to Mandatory Palestine just before the establishment of the State of Israel. This migration took him past Crete, an island whose history of resistance may have made him feel at home after having served in a partisan unit in the Polish-Lithuanian forests. I recently published a translation of a poem he wrote about his journey past Crete on the Yiddish Book Center’s website, and it is reprinted here.

During my time in Spain and Greece, I plan to further the Jewish poetic tradition through my own poetry and in doing so, I hope to foster more connections between modern Jewish, Greek and Spanish societies, as well as between their Jewish communities. I also look forward to sharing my work with the community at Etz Hayyim.

Storm off the Waters of Crete

By Avrom Sutzkever, Translated by Maia Evrona

Written at a crossroads in Avrom Sutzkever’s life, “Storm Off the Waters of Crete” presents a rich confluence of myth and literary and cultural traditions. Sutzkever boarded the *Patria* ship illegally, after initial post-war attempts to settle in Warsaw and Paris, and it would take him to Palestine just before Israel’s founding and the subsequent war.

Describing a voyage through the Mediterranean to Israel, Sutzkever recalls the journey of Yehuda Halevi. The poem is a reminder that Sutzkever wrote within a tradition that can be traced back to the Sephardic Hebrew poets, as well as the Polish poets he had been so influenced by in his early years. This is the closing poem in the first volume of his *Collected Work*, and it marks a major shift in Sutzkever’s life and poetry: the period when Sutzkever, so in touch with the nature surrounding him, becomes a poet of the Mediterranean.

While Sutzkever drew strength from Halevi’s spirit, this “Storm Off the Waters of Crete” also calls to mind another famous poetic figure: Odysseus. It is thought that Gavdos, a small island off the coast of Crete, may have been where Odysseus washed ashore after his ship was destroyed by Zeus, and where he lived for seven years with Calypso.

Odysseus’ journey was eventually one of homecoming. While Sutzkever’s poem ends triumphantly, he never stopped referring to Vilna as his hometown. Decades later he would describe the storks migrating over the land of Israel, from Africa back to *Lite* (Lithuania), and write of wishing that he, too, could complete his migration.

The island of Crete was home to a Jewish community for 2,300 years. During the Second World War, most Cretan Jews perished on another ship, called the *Tanais*. Intended to transport these Jews—along with Cretan resistance fighters and Italian prisoners of war—to the Greek mainland and then to Auschwitz, the ship was assumed by the British to be a German warship. On June 9, 1944, the *Tanais* was torpedoed near Santorini.

© www.yiddishbookcenter.org



Storm off the waters of Crete, as if my little *Patria* were at war with the sea. My swaying fatherland! I will decrypt its secrets with gematria before it smashes on the crags!

The storm scoffs: Boy that you are, you have yet to see my teeth, your hope has been kindled in vain – Storm off the waters of Crete!

Lava gushes forth from a volcanic abyss. Dressed in white, the dark captain flees – Above me leaping sharks and flying fish. Another captain steers his ship-bound destiny.

And a wave strips my flesh and clothes away from me: —The time has come, confess your last! Tomorrow your child plays with pearls of the seas.

I answer the storm-king: On this same sea Halevi fled his Spanish home for Zion and his longing, whose flame I breathe, will subdue your kingdom, you volcanic sovereign!

Shatter me on craggy shores with your waves, or swallow me in foaming clefts, I’ve come nearly the first half of the way I am bound with the second half.

Like the stilled knife in Abraham’s hand — the storm above me. And my *Patria* rolls, her neck straightened, in a golden garland, away from the rocks with rainbow-sails.

And the waves grow bright and serene the ruined temples bow once more. Until before me floats the Galilee — six million suns in every drop of that sea.

On the *Patria* ship, September 1947

שטורעם אויף די וואסערן בײַ קרעטע, ווי עס וואלט מיטן גאנצן ים אצינד געקעמפט מיין קליינע “פאטריא”. ס’וואלקט זיך דאס פאטערלאנד! אן פעלדזן ווערט צעמאלט וויל איך אויסגעפֿינען זײַנע סודות בגימטריא.

לאכט דער שטורעם: ייִנגל וואָס דו ביסט, מײַנע צײַנער זענען אומגעזעטע, האָסט געצונדן האָפֿענונג אומזיסט — שטורעם אויף די וואסערן פֿון קרעטע!

פֿון די תהומען שיסט ארויף מיט לאָווע אַ וולקאַן. איבער מיר אַ שפּרינגעניש פֿון הייפּישן מיט פֿליפּישן. אַנגעטאַן אין וויסן לויפֿט דער שוואַרצער קאַפיטאַן, — ס’קערעוועט אַ צווייטער מיט זײַן גורל מיט זײַן שיפּישן.

און אַראָפּגעשוונדן האָט אַן אינד מײַנע קליידער מיט דער הויט צוזאַמען: צײַט פֿאַר ווידוי! מאָרגן וועט דײַן קינד שפּילן זיך מיט פערל פֿון די ימען.

ענטפֿער איך דעם שטורעם־קיניג: אויפֿן זעלבן ים האָט הלוי זיך געלאָזן פֿון זײַן היים דער שפּאַנישער, און זײַן ציון־בענקשאַפֿט, וואָס איך אַטעם־אײַן איר פֿלאַם, וועט דײַן קיניגרייך באַהערשן, הערשער דו וואַלקאַנישער!

קענסט מײַך פּיצלען אַנעם פֿעלדז פֿון ברעג, אָדער שלײַנגען אין צעשוימטע שלונדן. קוים דערצויגן כ’האַב אַ האַלבן וועג, מיטן צווייטן בין סײַ ווי פֿאַרבונדן.

ווי דער חלף אַ געלײַמטער אין אַברהםס האַנט — איבער מיר דער שטורעם. און מײַן “פאטריא” די בויגיקע, אויסגעגלייכט דעם נאַקן, אין אַ גילדענעם גירלאַנד, הוידעט פֿונעם פֿעלדז אַוועק מיט זעגלען רעגן־בויגיקע.

און די כוואליעס נעמען זוניק־שטיל די צעהאַקטע טעמפלען ווידער בויען. ביז אַנטקעגן שוועבט מיר דער גליל — זונען זעקס מיליאָן אין זײַנע טויען.

שיף “פאטריא” סעפטעמבער 1947

My Year of Solidarity at Etz Hayyim

by Tobias Schmitzberger

I am writing this piece on the 31st August. It's my last day at Etz Hayyim Synagogue and I guess this is a good opportunity for some reflections of my time here. My year in Crete is coming to an end, and even if the end feels sudden, it has also been a very long, but special year. It feels like ages since I left Vienna and my friends and family back home and walked through the Rothschild Gate for the very first time.

Well, obviously I'm feeling sad today. That's a good sign. It would be worse if I felt happy to leave right now; the sadness means that my time here has meant something to me and that's why I feel some appreciation for this feeling. Being sad is not too bad a thing right now. To get here in the first place, I did some things right, and Etz Hayyim was the right place for me. Especially because of the people.

My year was a pretty stormy one for obvious reasons. For the past year or more, the pandemic has altered or affected most people's realities or day-to-day lives and as such, the situation also influenced my GEDENKDIENT year in a few negative ways. It would take too much space and time to explain all the difficulties in detail so I will only provide some glimpses.

Six months of winter lockdown earlier this year, plus the current wave of daily Covid cases in Hania in these summer months, even in my close personal environment, were a huge challenge. The Covid restrictions made it difficult to settle in as a newcomer and even at the end of my stay, I had to cancel a long-planned trip with my two Austrian best friends because of my close contact with a Covid-infected friend of a friend that resulted in me having to self-quarantine for five days. I learnt all of this only twelve hours before my friends would have arrived, a trip which I was looking forward to for many weeks. It's still hurting me and I have to confess, this episode made me feel especially homesick and to some extent, it still does. It was one of the biggest disappointments of my year in Hania.

The Covid virus is harming all of us in these times, both the healthy and the sick. That's the annoying thing about it. No matter what you are doing, it influences your life in so many ways and there's nothing much you

can do to escape the situation. You can only try to make the best out of it.

I was privileged to grow up in a country and culture where I never had to suffer any kind of government-imposed restrictions. To have lost some of my freedom now feels quite difficult and it is still exhausting. Even if I'm aware that I'm in a very privileged position – spending one year in Crete is clearly not the worst thing which can happen to you – I have my ongoing struggles with this situation. It would be nice to have a break from it after all.

Perhaps to some people, all of this can sound a little melodramatic. I have not experienced any personal losses or existential problems. A rich kid in Crete is complaining about life, sitting under an olive tree in a beautiful courtyard and munching cookies all the time. I consider this to be true. I have enough irony to not take myself too seriously all the time; I think that the Etz Hayyim staff will confirm that! In spite of the pandemic, I still enjoyed my year at Etz Hayyim. I still think that it was right for me to remain in Crete during the lockdowns, to dive through this wave of a pandemic. I don't regret any of it and there are many experiences which I wouldn't like to have missed at all.

So, given all of these Covid-related issues, why did I stay? Well, first comes the weakest argument. To be honest, I think that life wouldn't have been much better or easier for me in Vienna. I had just finished my history studies last summer and would have been jobless afterwards. During the lockdown, it would have been difficult to find a job in my sector. Furthermore, back then, we had a cold, long-lasting winter and sitting in a Viennese flat during a winter in lockdown could be, I'd imagine, quite depressing. In Hania, I could go out for daily walks in December and January, usually taking a good book with me which I'd read, sitting next to the lighthouse with the noise of the waves hitting rocks in my ear. Meanwhile, my friends back home were sending me photos via WhatsApp of rainy skies and grey house-fronts. "It's not extremely bad here": that's what I thought back then.

Yet, of course there is one problem: you can be staying

in at the nicest place on earth and still be miserable if you feel really lonely after a while. And this is where Etz Hayyim, especially the staff, enters the frame.

I had some Greek friends who were not associated with the synagogue at all, but I think that the support I received from the people who worked at Etz Hayyim was extraordinary. I imagine that it's something you will not experience at every place and especially not in every working place. At Etz Hayyim, the staff are not only working colleagues, but also friends who demonstrated solidarity in many ways.

I can provide some anecdotes to describe a feeling which is very hard to put into words. For example, when Christmas was approaching, it became clear in December that the pandemic meant I wouldn't be able to travel home easily. I would have had to enter two quarantines, at first back in Austria and then again after my return to Greece. So, I decided to return home for Easter instead (which didn't work out either at the end) and meanwhile, remain in Crete. However, it was difficult celebrating Christmas alone since the government restrictions and the general situation made it impossible for me to celebrate the event with another family.

Giorgos was the person who cheered me up at that day. He stood in front of my door and brought me some special Cretan pork and Christmas sweets; I still remember how delicious these delicacies were. Anja also stopped by at a certain point in December and brought me some books to read which were a welcome distraction during that weird lockdown period even if I couldn't read all of the thirty or so books! And this list of nice little gestures continued: during my more recent self-quarantine, Alex offered to do the shopping for me, Giorgos helped me out with poison when I got a cockroach plague at my flat and Anja took me to get my first vaccination in the car so I didn't need to take the bus to the hospital outside the city.

Perhaps these were only little gestures, but I really appreciated all of them. It was just a good, strengthening

feeling to see how my colleagues looked out for me and tried to support me not only at that time, but also throughout the entire year from the start until the end in many kinds of ways.

I think that this kind of solidarity is one of the most important things which I've become aware of; it is the most important value that I've experienced at Etz Hayyim. It made it easy for me to show some solidarity too: helping out friends of the synagogue in case they needed somewhere to sleep in my little flat (I am thinking about you, Fernando) or taking care for Alex's dog, Floxi for a few days which also took a part of my heart in spite of not being a big dog lover before I came to Crete.

I don't think I would have stayed in Crete under different conditions. If I wouldn't have felt that there was this 'backup net' of kindness and support, I'm quite sure that I would have left for home at a certain point. As I wrote earlier, even the sunniest and most friendly place can appear dark and dangerous if you feel lonely for too long. Etz Hayyim Synagogue was my oasis, my place for retreat. Not because of the building, which is beautiful, but because of the people who work there, who are part of the life of the synagogue. I still know that if something happens, there are people who will support me and try to help me out if they can no matter what.

Let me make one last, more general point. I guess that this can be something for us all to learn from this entire Covid situation on a larger scale: if we find ourselves in difficult times, solidarity is hugely important. You can see it on a small scale, but even on a larger one.

It would be nice to know that this approach is widely acknowledged. Wearing masks, getting vaccinated and generally being careful are not the only protective measures for ourselves – there is also the act of solidarity. The staff at Etz Hayyim are conscious about wearing masks and are mindful about protecting themselves against this virus as much as possible as well. We are all vaccinated not only to protect ourselves, but also others – the members of our Havurah, as well as visitors who



Tobias and Theo at Etz Hayyim

are coming every day. I think the key to getting through this pandemic is for all of us to show solidarity, together doing what is necessary such as being careful, getting the vaccination and so on.

Etz Hayyim proved to me just how strong the power of solidarity can be. Only this experience made it worthwhile for me to stay in Crete for one year even under quite difficult circumstances. Of course, there were also a lot of other pleasant experiences, alongside more un-

pleasant ones and you cannot include all of them in one article. However, I wouldn't want to miss it at all. And this will be a main reason for me to return to Etz Hayyim again in the future, hopefully in more relaxed times. See you then!

P.S.: I also want to wish my successor Theo all the best for his year at Etz Hayyim! I really think that the GEDENKDIENTST has chosen a good successor and I obviously know he will be in good hands as well.

A warm welcome

When I first discovered the *Gedenkdienst* (holocaust memorial service) program, it seemed unlikely to me that it would actually become reality for me one day, but I immediately liked the idea. I thought it was an interesting way to spend a year, as well as being a good and meaningful cause, so I decided to apply. Then, eight months ago, I was more than happy when I received the message that I had been accepted to volunteer at Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania. I graduated high school in May and enjoyed my vacation before the day finally arrived when I had to say goodbye to my friends and family and take off to Hania. At the airport, Anja and Tobias were already waiting to pick me up and take me first to my new apartment and then to the synagogue where I was warmly received by everyone there. It felt really great to finally arrive and it was honestly hard for me to believe that I was going to be living and working here for the next 12 and a half months.

Theodor Wihrhein

New Volunteer from *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst*

While writing this article, I am sitting in our garden in a small suburb near Berlin, Germany. However, in a few weeks I will (hopefully) be carrying out my first tasks at Etz Hayyim Synagogue where I am going to spend a year volunteering there.

It all started last November when I applied for a voluntary service with the German organisation *Aktion*



Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (it's called "Action Reconciliation Service for Peace" in English). I wanted (and still want) to deal with National Socialism, to get to know a new culture, to meet new people...

In our first seminar, I found out that this year would be the first time to have the opportunity to undertake voluntary service in Greece. I guess in Germany there is a knowledge gap about the Holocaust in Greece and I found it really important to take a stand against this lack of knowledge and understanding because for me being German comes with a historical responsibility.

You can't imagine how happy I was when I received word that I was to do my voluntary service at Etz Hayyim Synagogue! Not only could I spend a year in one of the most beautiful places on earth, but also do productive work.

After talking with Theo and Tobias, who are part of *Gedenkdienst*, I learnt a little about their work and now I am more excited than ever and can't wait to become part of the team of Etz Hayyim Synagogue!

I hope to see you in Hania soon!
Carleen Rehlinger

Cosmopolitanism

Reflections by Mille Vinther

It was a day in early spring, the university was in lock-down so the students weren't allowed on campus. Instead, the lecture was conducted online in Microsoft Teams and today's topic was "cosmopolitanism" based on the German sociologist Ulrich Beck's account. I found the lecture fascinating, but as the semester continued, I put it in the back of my mind. It wasn't until this summer in Etz Hayyim Synagogue that I thought about it again. We were having lunch in the northern courtyard with some friends of the synagogue, as well as my friend from Denmark, Frederikke. I overheard a conversation between Frederikke and a Jewish art professor named Jason. Jason was talking about how his ancestors were originally from Poland, but had moved to San Francisco and Frederikke said, "oh so you and your family are cosmopolitans?". Jason responded, "no and you probably don't know this, but back in the day, it was actually considered to be fairly antisemitic if you called the Jews cosmopolitans". I found this interesting, and it made me think about the term, "cosmopolitan" and how we apply this term to ourselves and whether there is such thing as a cosmopolitan identity today.

In his account, Ulrich Beck proposes that cosmopolitan sociology imposes fundamental questions of redefinition, reinvention and reorganization. The challenges are related to two fundamental processes: globalization and individualisation (Beck, 2002). Methodological cosmopolitanism assembles the this-as-well-as-that principle. To understand this principle, one must know that cosmopolitanism isn't a question of "either I have this nationality or that nationality". The cosmopolitan won't be clinging on to one nationality nor one nation. When a person identifies themselves as a cosmopolitan, the national is no longer the national. The national must be rediscovered as the internalised global. Cosmopolitanism signifies its living and thinking terms of inclusive oppositions. This may sound more complex than it is; I'll provide an example of a friend of mine. Back in 2005, my friend's parents decided to move to Denmark from Poland. Their reason for this move was because of the job opportunities that Denmark could offer my friend's father. In other words, the family moved because of socio-economic reasons. My friend has mentioned many times that he feels Polish given his social inheritance, but he still feels a sense of belonging to Denmark. I asked him if he felt more at "home" when he's back in Poland. He answered, "Not necessarily. I was raised with

Polish values, but in school I learnt all the Danish values. Sometimes I have a hard time understanding these Danish principles. It's irritating. On the one hand, I feel like my many years spent living in Denmark has made it easier to accept the country's values. Yet, on the other hand, the last time I visited Poland, I noticed that I somehow acted according to these Danish values even though I was presently located in the country I grew up in". My friend had internalised the Danish socio-cultural code of behaviour, but also kept his Polish values close to his heart. It's possible that my friend identifies himself as being cosmopolitan because he isn't clinging onto a nationality or nation nor is he nationless. The social setting has a lot to say as well. When he's with his Danish friends, he tends to feel more Danish, but when he's with his international friends and Polish family, he feels more global than local. I once asked him if Poland and Denmark were in a soccer competition, who would he root for. He told me he would champion the Polish because of his social inheritance, but if the Danes won the competition, he wouldn't be mad either; he would be just as happy. My friend is a good example of cosmopolitanism. The sense of belonging is more global than local.

After talking to my friend, I asked the president of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Vasiliki, who's also a professor of anthropology, to offer her views about cosmopolitanism. I asked Vasiliki about when it's appropriate to call someone a cosmopolitan. Vasiliki believed that it's up to the individual case whether it's appropriate to describe someone as cosmopolitan. As we were discussing cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon in the synagogue courtyard, some visitors approached us. They were a Jewish couple from Belgium whose ancestors originated from Poland, but during WWII had to flee and start a new life elsewhere in order to survive. After this conversation with the visitors, Vasiliki and I continued our discussion with the question, "are these visitors cosmopolitans as well?". The couple from Belgium could today be considered cosmopolitan, but in their ancestors' case, calling them cosmopolitans would be considered antisemitic because they were forced to drag up their roots and adjust to a different nation and nationality. Referring to Jews as cosmopolitans is ambivalent. On one hand, yes they could be considered cosmopolitan because their globalised culture and on the other hand, no because cosmopolitans must be universal and inclusive in terms of living and thinking

which is not the case with the religion, itself. Back in the days, Jews were forced to segregate, and they were being segregated, which makes it equivocal or questionable to refer to them as cosmopolitans. This brings us back to Jason who told me that calling him and his family cosmopolitans could be thought of as antisemitic. The reason behind this notion must be realised before addressing someone as a cosmopolitan. As Vasiliki told me, "The reason behind is very important. The history must take a central place, as well as the socio-economic status. You and I can be considered cosmopolitans. We chose to live life with erased borders in between nations. The Belgium couple's ancestors didn't."

To put this into a broader perspective, it's a 2021 complex. Today we're all cosmopolitans given our increasing interdependency. Of course, it's important to stress that there are exceptions; there'll always be exceptions. If we take a look at metropolises, there's a

News from the Etz Hayyim Office

We continue to **update our website**, which now includes more information about our ongoing projects and collaborations; a possibility to make donations via credit card will also soon be available.

Our long-term and successful collaboration with the Austrian association **Gedenkdienst** (Holocaust Memorial Service) continues: we just welcomed our ninth annual volunteer. Our new collaboration with the German volunteer organisation **Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst** (ASF) officially began with the arrival of the first volunteer in September. This volunteer programme takes place in the framework of the **European Solidarity Corps** for which Etz Hayyim has officially been accredited by the European Union as a host organisation. The ASF volunteer will work both at Etz Hayyim Synagogue and at the "Documentation Center Impact of the German Occupation on Crete" which is operated by the association Young Citizens of the World Hania.

rising incidence of a cosmopolitan culture due to a variety of reasons: war, wealth, modern reflexivity and modern opportunities and postmodernity, among others. The interdependency has never been this relevant as it is today. We are willing to cooperate across country borders in the sense of creating a common ground of knowledge to which everyone contributes, so everyone evolves. Postmodernity plays a central role in this because it forces people to be more dynamic and less static which in itself encourages or promotes cosmopolitanism, cosmopolisation and cosmopolitans. Maybe it's like Kafka! Society developing into something that can seem a bit utopian, but over time the social norms will adjust into it.

Mille Vinther studies Sociology at Aarhus University Denmark. In the summer of 2020 she was a volunteer at Etz Hayyim Synagogue and we were particularly excited that she joined us yet again in August 2021.

Two descendants from the Cretan community have recently published books: **Lilian Kapon** published "To Ainigma" (The Enigma) about her family history, with a major part of the book focusing on her family history linked to Crete. **Iossif Ventura**, renowned poet and Etz Hayyim Board member, published a translation of the *Song of Songs*. We plan to publish features books in the next edition of Jottings.

Since the end of the second country-wide lockdown in May, we have had many interesting visitors and new exciting possibilities for **collaborations** with researchers, artists and like-minded synagogue communities have arisen. We have also applied, with a number of partner institutions, for two European Commission programmes which will allow us to implement innovative projects relating to memorial culture. We will of course keep you updated about our new endeavours.

Anja Zuckmantel



Jottings

Fundraising



Help us maintain Etz Hayyim and Nikos Stavroulakis' work and legacy

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.

We understand that this is a difficult time to ask for your support and we sincerely thank you for taking a moment to consider our immediate fundraising needs.

Help us maintain Etz Hayyim Synagogue

The structural maintenance of the historic building of Etz Hayyim is an ongoing project. In 2020, we had to stem over EUR 7,000 for urgent maintenance works on the Ehal and Bima. In 2022, we hope to install an air-condition to limit the high level of humidity in order to preserve the historic building and artefacts.

Indispensable to the maintenance, upkeep and security of Etz Hayyim are our janitor Beznik Seiti and cleaning lady



New, solid wood, basis of Ehal after repair works in March/April 2020.

Donations by Bank Transfer

Account Name: Civil Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim

IBAN: GR94 0171 6350 0066 3510 9559 315

SWIFT/BIC: PIRBGRAA

Bank: Piraeus Bank (1635), Agia Marina, Hania

Please list your contact information when making a transfer.

Garoufalia Stavrou, who have both been with us since the reopening of the synagogue in 1999. Support toward their salaries is also a major support for Etz Hayyim.

Help us expand our educational programme

More than ever, we will need your help to cover operating costs. A solid educational programme requires thorough research, development and publication of appropriate materials as well as qualified staff for implementation. Donations towards operating costs like staff salaries, acquisition of books and printing are therefore much needed and welcome.

Help us upgrade our technical equipment

The synagogue office is in urgent need of a new computer as the current one is rather old and has repeatedly crashed, causing considerable delays and repair costs.

All help counts and is appreciated. 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); you 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).

The possibility to **donate by credit card** directly through our website will soon be available.

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**.

Please note that **FJC no longer accept checks**, see their website for **other options**: <https://fjc.org/donate-now>.

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