

# Jottings

The Etz Hayyim Magazine

Issue 29 | 2022 | 5782/3



*Jottings*

The Etz Hayyim Magazine  
Issue 29 | 2022 | 5782/83






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Jottings

Magazine of Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Hania, Crete

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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,

Shana Tovah and greetings from Hania where we have experienced a very busy summer tourist season. Despite the surge in visitor numbers this year, however, we are still struggling with **serious funding shortages** due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic like many other not-for-profit institutions. We therefore kindly ask you to take particular note of our **fundraising appeal on p. 39**. You are reading the No. 29 edition of *Jottings* which was started by Nikos Stavroulakis over twenty years ago as Etz Hayyim Synagogue’s regular newsletter. It has since expanded – along with the projects and impact of Etz Hayyim’s work – into a magazine. Nikos’ legacy lives on and will be especially honoured in 2023 with the **installation of our new Sefer Torah** dedicated in his memory on **27 May, 2023** (see the safe-the-date note on p. 23). In this issue of *Jottings*, our Visiting Rabbi, Professor Nicholas de Lange, reflects on “The Voice of the Shofar” (p. 4) and the meaning of “The Brass Tray” on the Seder table (p. 8). We also have recollections by staff and Havurah members about the past liturgical year and our preparations for Sukkot that included an excursion to find the **last Etrog orchard on Crete** (p. 10). We bring you reports about the observance of **Holocaust Memorial Day** in Hania and Leicester (UK) where in Leicester, the Cretan Jewish community was also commemorated thanks to Cretan-British artist, George Sfougaras (p. 12 and 15ff.) We document teacher and scholar **Stavros Sfakiotakis’** impressive speech made during the annual memorial service for the Tanais victims at the Makasi Fortress in Heraklion as well (p. 14). In early September, musicians Yael Levy and Nikos Kokolakis staged three performances of their **composition-installation, Relocations: Polyphony and Identity** at Etz Hayyim within the broader **Anoikta Pania (Open Sails) 2022 Contemporary Art Festival** in Hania. We conducted interviews with the musicians and choir master Giorgos Kaloutsis (p. 18ff.) about this special event at the synagogue.

In the section on Cretan Jewish history, we have included an article by Nicholas de Lange about the **“Romaniots: the Jews of Greece during the Middle Ages”** (p. 24), plus a few glimpses from our ongoing research into the local Jewish history (p. 31) and an interview with acclaimed poet Iossif Ventura about his recent **translation of the *Song of Songs* into Greek** (p. 28). Our former volunteers, Carleen and Theo document a major project undertaken during their year with us: a **youth exchange project** dealing with the impact of the German Occupation of Crete during the Second World War (p. 34). Theo also tells the story about an abandoned synagogue in his Austrian hometown (p. 30). Our **new volunteers**, Flora and Thora, joined us in September for the coming year. They have already mastered the art of giving tours to our many visitors and are currently developing projects that they hope to pursue over the winter months ranging from exhibitions to biographical research on four Jewish soldiers buried at the Souda Bay War Cemetery.

We are also very excited to welcome **Jason Francisco**, our second **Fulbright Scholar in Residence**, who will spend the next twelve months at Etz Hayyim. For now, his arrival is listed only as a short notice in the “News from the Office” (p. 38), but we are very much looking forward to a fruitful and creative collaboration to make Hania’s Jewish history more visible, to explore new ways of artistic engagement and to conceptualise Etz Hayyim’s future work.

As we are recalibrating our channels of communication, **Jottings** will now become an annual publication, with the next edition published in September, 2023. Until then, we will keep you updated with regular electronic newsletters and more news on our website.

Your support is crucial for the continued operation of Etz Hayyim as a place of community, memory, education and research. Please consider responding to our fundraising appeal on page 39.

With sincere thanks and all the best wishes from Hania,

Anja Zuckmantel,  
Administrative Director

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 in September 2023. Please send contributions by **1 August 2023**.



## The Voice of the Shofar

Autumn comes with a flurry of festivals following each other in quick succession. In ancient times, when the Temple in Jerusalem was still the religious focus for Jews both inside and outside the Land of Israel, this was a season of mass pilgrimage, announced by the unique sound of the blowing of the *shofar*, a ram's horn, at the autumn new moon.

The Torah calls this awe-inspiring sound *teru'ah*. The Israelites are commanded to do no work on the first day of the seventh month: 'it shall be a day of *teru'ah* for you' (Numbers 29:1). It is not easy to translate the term *teru'ah*. The Septuagint offers an enigmatic Greek translation, *hemera semasias*, 'Day of the Signal'. In another place (Leviticus 23:24), a different expression is used: in Hebrew *zikhron teru'ah*, 'a memorial of *teru'ah*', in Greek *mnemosynon salpingon*, 'a memorial of trumpets'. This term 'memorial' is also used when silver trumpets are sounded on days of gladness or rejoicing (such as after a victory in battle), or on new moons and festivals (Numbers 10:10). The silver trumpets are also blown when the Israelites go to war: the Torah says 'and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies' (Numbers 10:9). Thus it seems that the meaning of 'memorial' is not only a reminder for us, but also a way of attracting God's attention.

The ancient rabbis have left us many beautiful and thought-provoking teachings about the shofar, the *teru'ah*, and the importance of this date, the first day of the seventh month. One of the most prominent early rabbis, Rabbi Eliezer, taught that it was on this date that God completed the work of creation by making the first man, who then disobeyed his creator by eating the forbidden fruit, was judged, and (according to the rabbi) was pardoned. "'This,' said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Adam, 'will be a sign to your children. As you stood in judgement before me on this day and came out with a free pardon, so will your children in the future stand in judgement before Me on this day and will come out from My presence with a free pardon.' When will that be? *In the seventh month, in the first day of the month.*" (Leviticus Rabbah 29.1)

The sound of the shofar on this day is thus a reminder to us that we must be judged for our failures and transgressions, but it is equally a reminder to the Holy One, blessed be He, to be a lenient and merciful judge to us, as he was for the first humans.

The relationship between God and Israel (and indeed all the people who inhabit our planet) is marked by three moments of contact: the creation of our world, the revelation at Mount Sinai, and the final redemption that is still to come. The voice of the shofar reminds us of the

first of these, creation, in connection with divine judgement. An unknown poet has left us a hymn (*Hayom harat 'olam*) which all Jewish congregations sing on this day at the moment when we hear the awesome voice of the shofar:

This day the world is pregnant  
Today He will make all the created beings in the  
world stand in judgement,  
Whether as children or as slaves  
If as children have compassion on us as a father has  
compassion upon his children  
If as slaves our eyes are fixed on You  
Until You have pity on us  
And You bring to light our judgement  
Holy One

The voice of the shofar also reminds us of the revelation at Sinai. We read in the Torah, about that occasion: 'And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a shofar exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp trembled... And when the voice of the shofar waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice' (Exodus 19: 16, 19).

The voice of the shofar also reminds us of the future redemption, in connection with which the prophet Zechariah (whose name, incidentally, means 'God remembers') writes poetically: 'And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord God shall blow the shofar, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.'

Philo of Alexandria has important things to say about our festival (which he calls *hieromenia*, 'sacred month'), and his words still resonate today after two thousand years. He explains that it has two symbolic meanings, one directed to the Jews particularly, the other addressed to the whole of humankind.

For the Jews, he says, it is a reminder of the revelation at Sinai, when the voice of the shofar sounded forth, striking terror even into people far away, at the ends of the world, so they would understand that something momentous was taking place. 'And indeed what could people receive that is mightier or more profitable than the general laws which came from the mouth of God?'

The other meaning refers to the trumpets that are sounded to announce a war. After mentioning conflicts within communities and invasions by foreign armies, he comments, remarkably, that

there is another kind of war, not of human agency, when nature is in conflict with itself, and her parts attack each other, and her law-abiding sense of equality is overcome by a greed for inequality. Both these wars wreak havoc on the earth. The enemy cuts down fruit trees, ravages the countryside, and sets fire to food and the ripening corn,

while the forces of nature use drought, rainstorms, violent moisture-laden winds, scorching sun-rays, intense cold accompanied by snow, and the regular harmonious alternations of the seasons are turned into disharmony.

Sadly, we have become all too familiar with both kinds of war. Philo blames the second kind on an upsurge of *asebeia*, lack of piety or respect, and he says that the Torah instituted our festival as a mark of gratitude to God the peacemaker, who favours peace among people and also creates plenty and fertility and abundance (Philo, *Special Laws* 2: 188–92).

Our autumn festivals are a time for serious reflection. I think that Philo's words give us much food for thought, particularly at this time of war both between nations and within nature itself. The voice of the shofar calls us to reflect on the meaning of our lives, and particularly on ways we can improve and enrich them. And so, in conclusion, I would like to build on the teachings of Philo and the rabbis and suggest the following topics for reflection:

- What lessons can we draw from the biblical teaching that our universe was deliberately created and did not come into being randomly? Can we reconcile theology and science? In what ways can faith in a Creator enrich our lives?
- According to our tradition Adam and Eve and their descendants are the crown of creation: we have power over the other created beings – animate and inanimate – and we also have responsibility for them and for our world. How can we – individually and collectively – best discharge this responsibility?
- Our scripture teaches that at Sinai a crowd of runaway slaves became a holy nation, and received a code of laws and ethical teachings. What do these laws and teachings mean to us, and, again, how can they enrich our lives (whether we are Jews or gentiles)?
- When we survey our imperfect world, with its cruelty and injustice, its wars and famines, we surely feel that it is in urgent need of healing. The Jewish theologians call this healing 'redemption', and we pray daily for it to come soon. How do we understand redemption, and what can we do to hasten its coming?

These are my questions: it is for each of us to find our own personal answers.

I send you my sincere wishes for a better year ahead and many years to come.

*Tizku leshanim rabbot! Anyos muchos i buenos! Hronia polla!*

Nicholas de Lange, Etz Hayyim's Visiting Rabbi



## Looking Back at 2021 at Etz Hayyim

As we all remember, 2021 was another year marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed to combat its spread that have affected us all in so many ways. Having reopened at the end of May 2021 after a long five-month lockdown, once again Etz Hayyim began to host regular Kabbalat Shabbat services on Fridays mostly for its local Havurah members, although numbers were strictly limited to five people inside and five people outside in the courtyard throughout most of the year. It was the first time since the synagogue's reopening 21 years ago that we had to turn visitors away who wanted to join us on Fridays for Kabbalat Shabbat, and also for the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot in September/October and Channukah in December. As an inclusive place of worship, as well as a vibrant community and cultural centre, Etz Hayyim welcomes everybody through its doors, and therefore the task of telling people that they couldn't attend was especially difficult for us. Just like the year before, we knew the holiday season at Etz Hayyim was going to be a little different than usual; socially-distanced services with very few attendees compared to normal times and, moreover, no community Seder for Rosh Hashanah at nearby Ela Taverna. However, unlike 2020, we were lucky to have our Visiting Rabbi Nicholas de Lange on hand to lead our holiday services and provide a much-needed morale boost among our Havurah members some of whom occasionally despaired at our ever-dwindling numbers.

We held the 5782/2021 Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) services as we do every year at the synagogue in early September with just a few of our Havurah members. After a fairly sombre Erev Rosh Hashanah service, about fifteen of us reconvened in the synagogue's north courtyard where, like the year before, we set up a few socially-distanced tables and chairs with help from To Xani restaurant and all sat down to enjoy our communal Seder meal at candlelit tables seating four. Apples dipped in honey, pomegranates, dates, Persian rice, apple pie, spinach pie, mushroom pie, challah, couscous and fish were consumed, most of the smaller dishes prepared by Havurah members like Ahouva, and the fish by Maggie at To Xani. Many of these dishes were favourites of Nikos and are featured in his *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*. It felt very intimate and atmospheric compared to Ela Taverna, our usual venue for community Seder meals. The next day, Nicholas again led the Rosh Hashanah morning service inside the synagogue, with a few of us standing outside in the courtyard.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) was a typically quiet and subdued occasion with about ten of us present for the first prayer service, Kol Nidre (All Vows) which takes place before sunset on the evening of Yom Kippur.

There were fewer people in attendance for the following morning prayer service which I always personally enjoy because of the light that streams through the windows on the synagogue's north façade illuminating all of the white silk prayer shawls which are worn by the men in attendance. I also like the blowing of the Shofar normally performed by Havurah member, Dennis, who unfortunately couldn't join us last year. Instead, our new Havurah member, Mike, blew the ram's horn which was more like a bleat than a blow. Nicholas held his customary informal discussion during the daytime Yom Kippur service about the themes of repentance and forgiveness, among other topics. Yom Kippur ended with the Neilah ('closing') evening service and the final blowing of the Shofar by which time all of those members who had prayed and fasted all day were ready to snack at our communal table which had been especially laid out in the north courtyard to mark the end of Yom Kippur.

Not long afterwards, Beznik, our caretaker, built the Sukkah (hut) in the north courtyard for the holiday of Sukkot (Festival of Tabernacles) celebrated over the last week of September/early October when we remember the wandering of the Jews in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. We at Etz Hayyim, along with our visitors, always like to sit inside the Sukkah and eat our breakfast and lunch under the canopy of hanging fruit, and the lulav. Visitors often express their surprise walking through the Rothchild Gate and seeing our Sukkah for the first time, not to mention our Etrog tree, both of which provide, it seems, a quintessential Instagram moment! With Nicholas, we held the morning Shachrit prayer service that included a reading from Kohelet and then a final service at the end of the week of Sukkot.

Our last holiday of 2021 was Chanukkah (Festival of Lights) which commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem and the rededication of the Second Temple at the start of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE. Taking place at the end of November, Chanukkah was very quiet with only a few Havurah members present including Theo, Carleen, Ahouva and David Ben Ivgi who is often responsible for leading prayers at our services where necessary and baking his delicious Challah and other dishes, along with Ahouva, for our community events and meals.

Pesach (Passover) took place in mid-April when we were finally able to invite about forty-five participants, both local and international, to our service and the community Seder dinner afterwards. We would have invited more guests as in past years except that Greece still then had in place Covid-19 restrictions until early May and we were having to turn visitors away. Nevertheless, Etz Hayyim was full for the first time in two years, everyone sitting side by side, talking, praying, singing, laughing and



it represented the shift that we'd all been waiting for: a return to pre-pandemic synagogue life of sorts. We decided to hold our Seder dinner inside the synagogue and the northern courtyard because our usual venue was not able to accommodate us this year. With Nicholas as our Visiting Rabbi, we listened to the story of the Exodus from Egypt, drank four cups of wine, and partook in the symbolic foods placed on our Seder plates such as boiled eggs, bitter herbs and charoset (prepared by Ahouva) and then celebrated the freedom of the Jews by enjoying a buffet dinner for which Havurah and staff members, most notably Theo, Carleen and Anja, provided different dishes. It was a truly communal effort this year and thank you to everyone who came together to make it a real success. As a result, we've decided to hold our future Seder meals inside the synagogue which was something that Nikos had done almost twenty years earlier. Finally, we celebrated Shavuot in May when we commemorate the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and the grain harvest for the summer, again a small affair with only about ten people, although Shavuot in 2023 will be held on a much larger scale as we hope to celebrate the installation at Etz Hayyim of a new Sefer Torah.

Alexandra Ariotti

## Pesach and Mimunah

In 2022 (5782), Pesach unusually started and ended with two *Shabbatot* (15 to 23 April). Rabbi Nicholas de Lange conducted the services and the Seder which, for the first time in over twenty years, took place inside the synagogue. It was a very inspiring Seder, full of joy, gratitude for having gotten over the pandemic (so far) and last but not least, delicious food and wine that had been prepared by the volunteers, Carleen Rehlinger (ASF) and Theodor Wihrhein (Gedenkdienst). Konstantin had made *Haminados* and To Xani restaurant provided tables, glasses, plates and cutlery needed for such a big meal. Ever so busy were Theo and Carleen. Their enthusiasm and keen interest in the rituals of the *chag* were impressive and they sometimes made us think about standard set topics in a new and fresh way with all of their questions.

In previous years (before the pandemic began), the Seder had taken place in restaurants, but it turned out to be a very good decision to hold it inside the synagogue as it was akin to celebrating in the more intimate surroundings of the congregation's living room. The benches had been rearranged along tables, beautifully set by Anja and Alex, with the focus on the Rabbi's table from which he led the Seder. Coming from the Rhineland myself, I always have in mind the Seder mentioned in Heinrich Heine's novella, "The Rabbi of Bacharach", in which a pogrom is described, as so often initiated on Pesach. However, the ever-peaceful atmosphere of Hania and the feeling of Spring pushed away such sombre thoughts and made it possible to fully focus on the Pe-

sach message of freedom – now being especially relevant given Russia's attack on Ukraine and Erdogan's threats to Greece.

On Saturday night, the Eighth Day, the congregation was joined by Rabbi Chaim Moscovitch and his wife, Denise, who were visiting Hania for the first time. Chaim was born in Sunderland and lives now in Gateshead, North

... continued on page 9.



Carleen and Theo preparing the Seder meal.





## The Brass Tray

by Rabbi Nicholas de Lange

Prominent on our Seder table is a large round brass tray. On the tray are three *matsot* (round pieces of unleavened bread) and four little brass bowls, containing, respectively: a roasted lamb shank bone, some lettuce, a roasted egg and *haroset* (a brown sweet paste). These are all symbolic foods, and derive from very old tradition.

In the University Library in Cambridge we have an old prayer book containing the Haggadah (the seder service); it was probably written in Crete in the 15th or 16th century. In this manuscript we read (in Hebrew):

וצריך להיות בקערה ג' מצות וב' מיני תבשילין בצה וצלי וכרפס  
וחרוסת וחםא ומרור ומלח

‘And there should be on the tray 3 matsot and 2 kinds of cooked dish, an egg and roasted meat, and karpas (green herbs) and haroset and lettuce and maror (bitter herbs) and salt’

In a much older fragment of manuscript, found in the Cairo Genizah, and probably written in the 11th or 12th century, we read (in Greek, with some words missing):

קנאישין איש טו קנישקין אופשריאה קאבגא קאלש (...) קריאש אופטון

‘And there should be on the basket (kaniski) fish and eggs and salt (...) and roasted meat’

The word *kaniski* signifies a wide, shallow basket, perhaps more like a wicker tray. The same word can also mean an offering or gift, and maybe that is why it was used in this case. *Kaniski* is similar to the term *kanistri* or *kanistra* which is used by Romanians today for the Passover tray (compare modern Greek *kánistra*, a basket). In another Genizah fragment it is called *pinaki* (in ancient Greek *pinax* can mean a wooden dish or a platter, and the Aramaic equivalent *pinakh* is used in this meaning in the Talmud). From these old manuscripts, we can see that the traditions about the contents of the tray are quite fluid, but there are a few essential items, notably the *matsot*, the roasted meat and the *maror*. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10.3) lists *matsa*, lettuce and *haroset*, but there is disagreement about whether *haroset* is obligatory. Some manuscripts add ‘and two cooked dishes’. The Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 115b) mentions *matsa*, *maror* and *haroset*. The

egg is also a consistent presence – *presumably* because, like the green leaves, it symbolises the springtime. However, the egg is often considered (like the lamb) to be a symbol of the animal sacrifices which were once a part of Jewish worship.

After we have said the first series of blessings we lift the tray and pass it round the room over the heads of the participants. According to the Cretan prayer book I mentioned earlier, ‘He [the leader of the Seder] takes the tray containing the cooked dishes [the egg and roasted meat] and they put it on their heads, and he begins the Seder...’. After this we recite the prayer ‘Ha lahma...’: ‘This is the bread of poverty, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt...’.

What is the origin of this curious custom? We read in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 115b): ‘Rav Simi ben Rav Ashi said: We remove the table before him who recites the Haggadah...’ The Talmud continues: ‘Why do we remove the table? The School of Rabbi Yannai say: So that the children notice it and ask about it.’ The 11th-century Romaniot synagogue poet Benjamin ben Samuel writes this idea into one of his poems:

What is the reason that the table is removed from its place?  
In order that the young people should ask, ‘Why is this night different?’

A contemporary early north French synagogue poet, Joseph ben Samuel Bonfils (Tov Elem) has an identical

couplet, except that he replaces ‘table’ by ‘plate’. This leads me to my closing thoughts about the brass tray. When the Talmud talks about a table being removed, it undoubtedly has in mind a large tray, which can stand on a low stand. Such tables are still common in the Middle East. It is easy to lift and remove or raise the tray. While the tray is commonly made of brass, it can be woven like a basket, as in our Genizah fragment. In north France and other places the Seder was conducted over a massive wooden table, as we can see in some illustrated *haggadot*. Obviously there was no question of removing or raising such a heavy piece of furniture, so this practice was discontinued (as the north French commentator Rashi remarks on the passage in the Talmud) and the ritual foods were placed upon a plate instead.

Our brass tray is a relic and reminder of the older Middle Eastern and Byzantine practice. And we place on it the ritual foods mentioned in the Mishnah, according to some manuscripts: *matsa*, lettuce, *haroset*, and two ‘cooked dishes’, the egg and the roasted meat.

I hope you have enjoyed this little trip with me through some of the byways of our Pesach traditions.

I hope we are all found worthy to celebrate the Seder and the festival of Pesach in joy and peace, mindful of the sufferings of all those in today’s world who are uprooted into the unknown wanderings of exile, and with our eyes firmly fixed on the glorious redemption which is promised to us all.

*This text was published online for Pesach 5782/2022; we document it here for the readers of Jottings.*

*Pesach and Mimunah | continued from page 7 ...*

England. Besides being a Rabbi, Chaim is also a talented cantor (with a poignant Ashkenazi Nusach), a *sofer* and an expert in *Halacha*. With his beautiful voice, he led the last services of the *chag* and his fascinating conversation with Rabbi de Lange and us was altogether an enriching experience which continued throughout *Mimunah*. Celebrating Mimunah, the night when Pesach ends, is a tradition that derives from the Jews of Morocco. The origins of this tradition seem to be somewhat uncertain, but it is first mentioned in a 19<sup>th</sup> century text. For me, it was the first Mimunah I experienced and I now realise I should have said *Shehecheyanu*.

After *Arvit* and *Havadala*, we gathered in the synagogue’s courtyard where a light supper was arranged, full of delicious *Chametz*, which we had left out during the last week. Particularly memorable were the tasty kalitsounia and fresh bread! Sitting down, we at first discussed the different theories about the origins of Mimunah. Some people assume that it reminds us of the day of the death of Rabbi Maimon Ben Josef who lived in the Moroccan city of Fès and who died on the last day of Pesach in 1170. More popular is a connection between Mimunah and Rabbi Maimon’s son, the Rambam, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), the most important Jewish religious philosopher of the Middle Ages.

Central to his works are the so called “Thirteen Principles of Faith” under the headline, *Ani Ma’amim*, or in Arabic, *Ma’amin Ana* which in the local Moroccan dialect turned into *Maimuna*. The return of the Messiah - may he come soon – is one of these principles. A theory now says that *Maimuna* was the greeting that the local Jews said to cheer themselves up over the disappointment that the Messiah once again had not turned up during Pesach. Yet, *Maimuna* also can derive from *Emuna*, that is, the belief in the past salvation from Egyptian bondage and the future Messianic Age. Others connect the term to *Ma’amun* meaning ‘wealth’ in Arabic and *Mazel* or *Mammon* in Hebrew for ‘money’.

As the evening progressed and the sounds from outside the synagogue’s courtyard became quieter, thoughts about the history of Hania’s Jews came to the forefront of our minds. Sitting below the remains of the former Talmud-Thora School that faces the synagogue’s northern courtyard, we realised how important it is that this ruined and desecrated building (it’s a bar now) also becomes part of Etz Hayyim – as an archive and once more as a place of learning and studying. May we be able to raise enough *zedakka* for this project; may it happen soon!

Joachim G. Jacobs





## Finding Etrogim on Crete

One of the lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic is that we cannot rely on the shipments of *Lulav* and *Etrog* from Israel which, until recently, was the usual way to obtain these items essential for the holiday of Sukkot. Only a few years earlier, we had planted a myrtle and willow in the Etz Hayyim courtyard because we found that the myrtle and willow twigs in the ready-made *Lulav* sets were almost always withered and moldy by the time they arrived for Sukkot. Then in 2020, we didn't receive a *Lulav* from Israel due to the Covid restrictions so we improvised and fitted the *Lulav* from the year before with freshly cut twigs of myrtle and willow. We were also probably the only community in Greece which had a real *Etrog* for Sukkot as we simply picked our *Etrog* from the tree planted by Nikos in the early 2000s in the Etz Hayyim courtyard. This year, the *Etrog* tree sadly did not bear any fruit and we could not be sure if the *Lulav* shipment from Israel would arrive on time. We faced a conundrum.

Then I remembered Nikos telling me that *Etrogim*, or *kitra* as they are called in Greek, were grown on the island in large numbers until the early 1990s. Of course, we also have historical sources informing us that in the Middle Ages, *Etrogim* were exported from Crete along with kosher cheese and wine. In order to avoid the awkward position of not having an *Etrog* for Sukkot which we faced in 2021 when our tree bore no fruit, we began researching whether *kitra* might still be grown somewhere on Crete. Wikipedia told us that the village of Garazo in the Milopotamo region, southeast of Rethymnon, holds a *kitra* festival every year which got our

hopes up; surely there must be *kitra* available if there is an annual festival! It turned out that supply was not quite as abundant as we had initially anticipated, but with a few phone calls, we then located one of the last two growers of *kitra*/*Etrogim* on Crete. We arranged to go on a little staff excursion to Garazo and meet Vassilis Klados to secure an *Etrog* for this year's Sukkot. On the phone, he asked us how many kilos of *kitra* we would need and when we told him that we needed just one or maybe a couple, he was quite surprised that we would travel halfway across the island for one or two fruit.

We set out on our journey in late August with the intent on speaking with Vassilis about the liturgical use of the *Etrog* at Sukkot and to query him about the history of *Etrogim* production on Crete; maybe he had heard about the Cretan Jewish *Etrogim* production during the Middle Ages. Vassilis met us at the agricultural cooperative at Milopotamos, but since the *kitra* he had already picked for us were gigantic and none had a *pitom*, which makes an *Etrog* particularly valuable for Sukkot, we asked him if we could perhaps see his orchard for ourselves and look for *Etrogim* with a *pitom*. We got into his pickup truck for the last couple of hundred metres on a bumpy dirt road until we arrived at the orchard with about thirty fairly short *Etrog* trees full of fruit of all sizes – and with very long and pointy thorns that were almost invisible given that they were just as green as the tops of the twigs.

We quickly noticed that none of the *Etrogim* on the trees had a *pitom*, so we were probably looking at a variety that naturally shed their *pitom*. As Vassilis let us pick any *Etrogim* we wanted, we had the opportunity to also pick

one that would fit the small wooden box that we use for Sukkot. On the way to the orchard in the car, we had told Vassilis about the festival of Sukkot and the important role of the *Etrog* in the festival rituals. While he did not know anything about the medieval *Etrogim* production on Crete, he spoke about the demise of the local *kitra* production in the early 1990s. As we were leaving the orchard, he also said – quite to my surprise – that until 1990, the entire production of *kitra* from the local cooperative was exported to East Germany for “some Christmas cake that they make there.” As I am myself from Dresden, the very city which is famous for this Christmas cake called *Stollen*, I have repeatedly told visitors who do not know what an *Etrog* is that they might know it as the candied citron skin which is a main ingredient in *Stollen* and other cakes. Listening now to Vassilis' story about the *kitra* being exported to East Germany gave me pause for thought as it means that very likely as a child I had already eaten this fruit from Crete without even knowing it. However, German reunification effectively ruined the *kitra* production on Crete because the East German *Stollen* producers no longer ordered the fruit from this island after 1990 and the local cooperative went bankrupt.

Today, there is no market for Cretan *kitra*/*Etrogim* and Vassilis maintains the trees in his orchard apparently only for infusing *tsigoudia*, the Cretan trester spirit, with the flavour of the fruit. We concluded our visit with a tasting of this special spirit and with the assurance from Vassilis that he would be happy to supply us with *kitra*/



*Etrogim* whenever we needed and that he would also visit Etz Hayyim Synagogue during his next trip to Hania. The small *Etrog* we picked that day was used during the Erev Sukkot service as the *Lulav* arrived from Israel once again late.  
Anja Zuckmantel



## A letter from Adele Graf

Dear Natalie's friends,  
I can hardly believe that we're already approaching the first anniversary of Natalie's death.  
To mark the date, I've put together a short book of poems Natalie wrote after she published *Orange Tree* in 2018. My thanks to Giorgos Androulaki and Francesca Sweeney-Androulaki for the wonderful photos in the book.  
In Jewish tradition, close relatives burn a memorial candle on the anniversary of a death. Natalie herself lit candles for family members. This poetry collection is my candle for her — her own words burning on.  
I know Natalie would have wanted to share the last versions of her poems with you, her friends. This gift, through me, is from her. [...]  
Compiling and sharing these poems is the last thing I'll ever be able to do for Natalie: my sister, our poet and friend.  
Wishing you all the best,  
Natalie's sister, Adele.

Earlier this year, we received the above message from Adele Graf, sister of our late Havurah member Natalie Ventura (z"l). Adele has offered to send copies of the book to anyone who would like a copy (as long stock lasts). She can be contacted at [adele.graf1@gmail.com](mailto:adele.graf1@gmail.com).



## Holocaust Memorial Day 2022 at Etz Hayyim

On 6 January, the Prefecture of Hania and the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim co-hosted an event on the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day. Due to the Covid-19 measures in place at the time, the event was by invitation only and attended only by public officials: Victor Eliezer (General Secretary of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece), Panagiotis Simandirakis (Mayor of Hania), Dimitris Michelogiannis (representative of the Prefecture of Hania). Greetings were sent by Manousos Voloudakis (Member of Parliament for Hania, Nea Dimokratia) and Ahmed Kasimi, the Imam of the mosque in Hania.

The event began with an introduction by the President of the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim, Vassiliki Yiakoumaki (Professor of Anthropology, University of Thessaly), who discussed the rationale and historical circumstances for the establish-

ment of Holocaust Memorial Day and its implementation in Greece a year before the United Nations established the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

The public officials reiterated in their speeches the importance of commemorating the victims of the Holocaust also on the local level.

The event concluded with a guided tour for the participants through the former Jewish Quarter of Hania. This initiative by the Etz Hayyim staff aims to raise awareness about the pre-war Cretan Jewish community in the public memory of the town through personal stories of former Jewish community members and historical documents. A digital version of the tour is also available in English and Greek on the Etz Hayyim website. ([www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/the-jews-of-crete/hania-jewish-quarter-virtual-tour/](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org/the-jews-of-crete/hania-jewish-quarter-virtual-tour/))



## 2022 Annual Memorial for the Victims of the Tanais Sinking and Hashkabah

For the first time since 2020, the annual memorial service for the victims of the sinking of the Tanais took place at the monument in Hania's Koum Kapi neighbourhood on 10 July this year. Just like in 2020, the memorial prayers for the three groups of victims – the Jewish community of Crete, the Greek Orthodox Christian members of the Cretan Resistance and Italian prisoners of war – were conducted by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Kydonia & Apokoronas, Damaskinos, and Father Lucas Romani of the Catholic church in Hania.

Memorial addresses were given by the Mayor of Hania, Panagiotis Simandirakis, a representative of the Prefect of Hania and Victor Eliezer, Secretary General of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece. Also among the seventy or so attendees were the former Greek Foreign Minister, Dora Bakogianni, several members of the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Company and some descendants of the Cretan Jewish community.

The official memorial event at the monument was followed by the *Hashkabah* (memorial service) for the Cretan Jewish community at Etz Hayyim Synagogue led by Rabbi Gabriel Negrin. As has become our tradition, the poem “Memorial Service” composed by our much-missed Havurah member, Natalie Ventura (z”l) was read; the English version was recited by our young summer intern, Alexandros Yiakoumakis. Poet Maia Evrona, our then Fulbright Scholar in residence, also read several of her own poems. Eventually, the names of the victims of the Cretan Jewish community were read aloud and candles lit in their memory by all of the participants.

On 23 July, the local newspaper, *Haniotika Nea* published a two-page article by Etz Hayyim’s President of the Board of Trustees, Vassiliki Yiakoumaki, and Administrative Director Anja Zuckmantel about the sinking of the Tanais, the loss of the Cretan Jewish community and its repercussions for the social and cultural life in Hania. (see image below).

At Etz Hayyim, we are now planning for the 80th anniversary of the sinking of the Tanais ship to be held in 2024. With the involvement of a group of international and local artists, researchers, as well as descendants of the Cretan Jewish community, we hope to organise a series of events throughout the year including art exhibitions, musical performances, readings, school projects, and an historical exhibition, among others. As we are still in the planning process, we welcome ideas and suggestions.



Photo top © Manoël Pénicaut; above © Haniotika Nea

Εκδήλωση προς τιμήν της Διεθνούς Ημέρας Μνήμης για τα Θύματα του Ολοκαυτώματος πραγματοποιήθηκε χθες, Κυριακή στην Εβραϊκή Συναγωγή Ετε Χαγίμ, στην παλιά πόλη των Χανίων.

ΣΤΗΝ ΕΒΡΑΪΚΗ ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ ΧΑΝΙΩΝ

## Εκδήλωση μνήμης για τα θύματα του Ολοκαυτώματος



Η εκδήλωση άρχισε με χορευτικό-καλωσόρισμα της Βασιλικής Υπηρεσίας Προέδρου του Δ.Σ. της Συνεργασίας Χανίων, η οποία αναμείχθηκε εν συντομία στο δραματικά γεγονότα εκείνης της θλιβερής περιόδου επισημαίνοντας τα έτη: “Η 27η Ιανουαρίου έχει αρυθεί ως “Διεθνής Ημέρα Μνήμης για τα Θύματα του Ολοκαυτώματος”. Επιλέχθηκε η συγκεκριμένη ημερομηνία, επειδή κατά την ημέρα αυτή, το 1945, απελευθερώθηκε από τα εστίμια, τα φρεζιάρια το μεγαλύτερο στρατόπεδο συγκέντρωσης κι εξόντωσης του ναζιστικού ιαθιστώσας, “Λαουβίτς - Μπίρκενau”. Στο παραπάνω στρατόπεδο μεταφέρθηκαν κι έλασαν τη ζωή τους κατά τον Β’ Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο οι περισσότεροι Έλληνες Εβραίοι. Στο ίδιο στρατόπεδο συγκεντρώθηκαν (Αρσούρι) εβραίοι πιθανότατα να καταλήξει και το σύνολο των Εβραίων της Κρήτης οι οποίοι βρισκόταν μέσα και υπό ναζιστική σιγή, αλλά και οι Τάναϊς. Μετά τους σταθμούς του Τεταρτού στην εγκαταστάση Ιταλίας επιβλήθηκε πόλεμο και πλήθος χριστιανών αρθροδόχων αντιστάσιμων του ναζισμού. Το πλοίο απέβηκε από το Ηράκλειο το βράδυ της 10ης Ιουνίου 1944. Άφησε άρρη μετά των απόβλητων και πορτογαλικών από βρετανικό ιππικό και όλοι οι εργαζόμενοι εγκαταλείφθηκαν στο ναυαγίο...”. Η εκδήλωση πραγματοποιείται ετησίως, εξαιτίας της πανδημίας.

Ομιλήτης στην εκδήλωση ήταν ο Γενικός Γραμματέας του Κεντρικού Ισραηλτικού Συμβουλίου Ελλάδος κ. Βίκτωρ Ισαάκ Ελνέζερ, ο οποίος μεταξύ άλλων υπογράμμισε τα λόγια: «Σε τέτοιες μέρες γεννιόμαστε πάντα ένα ερώτημα εάν τελικά μπορούμε να επιβιώσουμε την ανθρωπότητα. Σίκαται αυτή η παλιό αξιολογία λεωφόρος των Αισίων Εβραίων στο Παντ Ρασάι, στην Ιερουσαλήμ. Επειδή είναι οι δέκα τελευταίοι αιώνες, άνθρωποι τους οποίους θα επιπαισίσταν ο κάθε ένας από εμάς, γιατί έθεσαν τη ζωή τους σε κίνδυνο για να σώσουν τις ζωές των γειτόνων τους και σε αρμόνικες περιπτώσεις αγνώστων συμπατριωτών τους. Έξι εκατομμύρια Εβραίοι, ενάμισο τους εβραίοι από τα δέκα Έλληνες Εβραίοι, οι 80% του Ελληνικού Εβραϊσμού έχανονταν στα ναζιστικά στρατόπεδα θανάτου με την κτηνότητα της καταστροφής αλλά και άλλες Εβραϊκές κοινότητες όπως αυτή των Χανίων να εμφανίζονται σπασμένα ολοκληρωτικά». Ο ίδιος συνεχίζοντας επισήμανε ότι “εμείς, όμως, καταλάβαμε μαζί μας όλα τα τραύματα και παρελθόντες των ανθρώπων μας, τις χαμένες ζωές, τους φρεζιάρους θα-

ναυαγιστές, Αιγυπτίους, Μισσηλγόνους, ενώ χαρμυρισμό απέβηκε και ο βουλενός της Νέας Δημοκρατίας κ. Μαρινούσης Βολουδάκης.

Όπως επισήμανε ο Αιγυπτίος Χανίων κ. Παναγιώτης Σημαντιράκης: «Με πολύ σεβασμό, παραμυριάσεις σήμερα στην εκδήλωση μνήμης για το ολοκαύτωμα το οποίο αποτέλεσε και την Ολυμπιάδα στην παγκόσμια ιστορία. Στην προσπάθειά μας να μην χθίσουμε ξανά στο μέλλον ποτέ ξανά, όλους κατατάσεις οφείλουμε όλοι να ανασύρουμε τις μνήμες, να δείξουμε το παρόν, όλων όσων αντιτάθηκαν αλλά και να μπορούμε να βάλουμε φέρενο σε κάθε συζήτηση με πολυπολική και μέσους.

Η εκδήλωση ολοκληρώθηκε σύντομο περίοδο στην ιστορία Εβραϊκή Συνέλευση της πόλης μας.

Xaniotika Nea article

Jottings 2?

Jottings 2?



## We Must Remember All Victims of the Tanais Sinking

### Speech by Scholar Stavros Sfakiotakis at the Annual Memorial Service at Makasi Fortress

*This event takes place every year on 15 June and commemorates the anniversary of the arrest and the imprisonment of 300 Cretans in 1943 in the Makasi fortress as retaliation for the kidnapping of German General Kreipe by the Resistance organisations. The Cretan Jewish community was imprisoned in June 1944 in the same spot before its members were finally murdered in the shipwreck of the Tanais some days later. This second event has been totally ignored by all the memorial ceremonies that took place at the Makasi over the last few years. There are memorial plaques bearing the names of the 300 Christians, but there is not a single reference to the captivity of the Jews in that same space one year later. I am participating for a second time in this ceremony (the first time was in 2019 and my speech subsequently published in Jottings 25) as a representative of the high school teachers of Heraklion. Given the systematic ignorance of the Jewish presence from the city authorities, I chose to present the following speech:*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and joy to be here again in this holy place which is watered by the tears and blood of our ancestors. We gather each year on the 15 June to honour the memory of those people who lived through moments of martyrdom in this prison. Young and old people, men, women and children, Christian (Orthodox and Catholic) and almost all the Jews of Crete were incarcerated here under miserable conditions, some of the last days of their lives. Most of them were unaware of how long they would stay in the Makasi fortress or what their future would be, and how their end would come. For sure, they endured moments of great psychological and physical hardship unimaginable to most of us. However, this is not our purpose here today. We cannot put ourselves in the shoes of these people, even those people who have family or kinship ties with the Makasi fortress prisoners. Most of the prisoners perished either here or in the concentration camps of the Third Reich or in the shipwreck of the Tanais. A few returned and continued on with their lives carrying the burden of the experiences they had lived through.

Today's residents of our city have lived a different life. We haven't had to face such life and death dilemmas, thankfully. Yet, the global situation does not allow us to forget and be complacent. War, disease, poverty and uncertainty about the future exist more than ever before, affecting our daily lives. Coming to this place, as reverential pilgrims, let's keep in mind this thought: the people who were imprisoned here were not supernatural heroes, but ordinary everyday people who became heroes by facing indescribable- for us- situations. The former Mayor of Thessaloniki, G. Boutaris, speaking about the Jews of his city at a similar memorial ceremony, said that "these people did not consciously choose to sacrifice their lives for a higher ideal, their religious faith or their ideology. They did not choose death, quite simply because they did not even have the right to that choice. And for this reason, they do not deserve to be treated as saints today by any of us. They were human and that's what they wanted to be."

So what are we doing here today? What is the role of such a ceremony taking place every year with the same

monotonous and repetitive routine? Do we, today's residents of the city, have an awareness of where we are when we take our walk along the walls, admiring the beautiful view and enjoying the landscape of the city? Are the city authorities doing something to stimulate the historical consciousness of our fellow citizens? The Makasi memorial was erected as a result of the personal initiative and research undertaken by Mr. Eleftherios Foinitsis otherwise the place would have been forgotten like so many other sites in the city. Yet, even today when I visit this place (alone or accompanying students from my school), I recall in my memory the lines of Sophocles from the prologue of Antigone where the heroine says:

"Look—what's Creon doing with our two brothers? He's honouring one with a full funeral and treating the other one disgracefully! Eteocles, they say, has had his burial according to our customary rites, to win him honour with the dead below. But as for Polyneices, who perished so miserably, an order has gone out throughout the city—that's what people say. He's to have no funeral or lament, but to be left unburied and unwept, a sweet treasure for the birds to look at, for them to feed on to their heart's content".

(Translation by Ian Johnston, Vancouver Island University, Canada, 2005.)

The memorial and today's ceremony in Makasi brings to my mind exactly that sentiment. The Greek Christian members of the Resistance groups have found a place in our collective memory. Their names (at least most of them) are included on the memorial plaques around us. However, our Jewish fellow citizens who were martyred in the same place and for the same ideals have been conspicuously ignored for years by the official historical memory. The city still functions today as another Creon, honouring one dead, but continuing to ignore the other. Not paying burial honours to the dead was a mortal sin from ancient times, a tradition that continued uninterrupted throughout the Christian era until today. Yet, in Makasi, the sin continues. Some of the dead are more important than others. I clearly don't believe that this was done on purpose. It's just that the Christian dead

*continued on page 17.*

*Jottings 29*



### Holocaust Memorial Commemoration 2022 at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, UK

*In Jottings 28, we reported on George Sfougaras' Light in the Darkness installation project which the Cretan-British artist created for Holocaust Memorial Day 2022, using photographs of members from the lost Cretan Jewish community. On the following pages, we hear about the project from Linda Harding (Community Engagement Officer of Leicester Arts and Museums), Claire Jackson (member of the Leicester Holocaust Memorial Day Committee) and artist George Sfougaras himself.*

For the past ten years, Leicester Museums & Galleries have been working towards creating a sense of inclusion for all at our museum sites. We aim to ensure that our exhibitions and objects are relevant to all of our city's diverse communities and that key community festivals and events are remembered or celebrated within our museums. Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, our flagship museum, is one of the first Museums of Sanctuary within the UK. The museum explicitly welcomes asylum seekers and refugees and challenges both prejudice and myths about new arrivals and other forms of hatred and discrimination. Leicester Museums & Galleries have celebrated Refugee Week for many years and since 2017, we have held regular Holocaust Memorial events to remember those murdered and displaced during the Holocaust. We have linked these events of remembrance with present-day genocides and conflicts which have killed and which have made refugees of so many people from across the world today. Leicester is home to large numbers of refugees and those seeking asylum, as well as communities of many faiths, so we seek to do our part to make sure that our city remembers and learns from the past and fosters a sense of humanity and acceptance to all.

Leicester Museums & Galleries have been fortunate to have built an ongoing partnership with local artist,

*Jottings 29*

George Sfougaras. In previous issues of *Jottings*, you may have read about his installation *Light in the Darkness* which was commissioned as a response to 'Thou Shall Not Kill'. This artwork consists of fragments of a triptych by Johannes Matthaeus Koelz. Koelz was forced to cut his anti-war masterpiece into many pieces and send it to supporters around the world when he escaped from Nazi Germany. George's work, focusing on hope and remembrance, was shown in Leicester Museum and Art Gallery for two months and in other local venues. In 2020, a Sanctuary Wall of hundreds of birds flying tiny people to freedom and safety was made by groups of refugees. The installation was accompanied by George's moving drawing inspired by the works of Käthe Kollwitz from the museum's world class German Expressionism art collection. This exhibition commemorated both refugees and those escaping from the Holocaust. At the Holocaust Memorial event alongside the exhibition, Jews who escaped to the UK as children on the *Kindertransport* spoke of their experiences and the Wiener Library *Kindertransport* exhibition was displayed. Leicester Museums and Galleries are part of Leicester City Council which has been working with partners to mark Holocaust Memorial Day for many years.

The COVID-19 restrictions prevented the hosting of 'live' events over the past two years, but this year, we have





the opportunity to work again with George Sfougaras and Claire Jackson. Claire, a member of Leicester's Neve Shalom community, helped to develop a really impactful Holocaust Memorial Commemoration event. The installation created by George for the museum service is explained more fully in Claire's article. It was exhibited in the German Expressionism Gallery at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery for three months, as well as being shown to the public on a giant screen in Leicester city centre and in other venues in the UK and across the world. The event itself featured an introductory talk by the renowned academic, Professor Newman followed by readings of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and of the family story of Claire's father. Although we had hoped to include talks by Holocaust survivors themselves, the new Omicron variant arrived in the UK and so these

talks had to be replaced by moving filmed footage of their stories. The Wiener Library again loaned an exhibition recounting the origins and history of the organisation from its formation in response to the Holocaust to its current educational role. The national Foundation Stones project took part in the event, running workshops for adults and children. Participants were invited to decorate stones to remember Holocaust victims and those lost in recent genocides and seeking sanctuary from persecution and conflict today. The photo shows stones decorated by local Jewish participants to remember those murdered in the Holocaust. All of the stones will become part of the foundations of the new Holocaust Memorial in London which is currently in progress.

Linda Harding

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2022 in Leicester

I was honoured when asked to create something that would commemorate the tragic events of the Holocaust for Holocaust Memorial Day in January, 2022. As I love literature and reading, I wanted to recreate a large book that could be read by visitors so I reworked two books in a form that would be projected as a filmed version of one large book entitled 'In Remembrance'. The pages turned by themselves and thus 'guided' the audience through the text. The animated book presentation comprises *Tales from the Old Fort Town* and *One Winter's Night in Prague* both of which are based on the eponymous books.

The first book remembers and laments the loss of the Greek Jewish Romaniote and Sephardi communities of Crete during WWII. It was originally made as a book and sent to Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania which kindly published it in 2018. It is a tribute to the Jewish community of my fellow Cretans whose existence was revealed to me by my mother's recollections of the German occu-

pation of the island. The second book pays homage to the rich Ashkenazi heritage and storytelling tradition of Eastern Europe as a simple children's story. I was moved to write it after my visit to Europe's oldest active synagogue, the Old New Synagogue (Czech: *Staronová Synagoga*), also called the Altneuschul, situated in Josefov in Prague. It was an attempt to capture something of the melancholy beauty of the building and of that city's Jewish community. The poetry that accompanies the first book is by renowned Jewish South African poet, Shelley Tracy. The haunting composition in oud and clarinet that accompanies the presentation is by the talented Israeli composer, Gal Hever. I asked Gal to create a piece that reflected both Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions and his haunting composition seemed to perfectly fit the film and its messages of loss and hope. The film can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/657007907>

George Sfougaras



## HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 27/1

I am a member of the Leicester Holocaust Memorial Day Committee and unfortunately, we have not been able to hold our usual commemorative events for two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We were therefore very grateful to Linda Harding at the Leicester Museum for organising a number of HMD events in 2021 and 2022 that included film showings, as well as readings of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. I enjoyed seeing the exhibition on loan from the Wiener Library describing its own story. There was also a room where visitors could inscribe large stones. The organisation *Foundation Stones* invites people to paint a stone in remembrance of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust and all other victims of Nazi persecution. We could also choose to dedicate our stones to those murdered in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. I am planning to produce 17 stones in memory of my own family members who perished and I'll then send them to the organisers in London. In due course, the stones will form the foundations of the new Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in London.

We in Leicester are fortunate to have George Sfougaras living in our city. He supports a wide range of Leicester organisations involved in the arts, along with supporting projects about refugees and people in need. In addition to exhibiting internationally, George also finds time to exhibit locally in Leicester. He prepared an installation for the Leicester Museum's HMD event which was based around the pictures, tales and poems he had created about the history of the Jewish population of Crete. The particular tale exhibited in the slides in the museum's German Expressionist gallery referred to George's excellent book, *Tales from an Old Fort Town*, together with images not featured in the book. Through vivid images and stories, George tells us of the Jews who lived on the island, of their fate, and of course he inspires us with tales of his own family members. I have not yet visited Crete, but through George and his creations, I have begun to understand what had happened on the island and I now have a sense of how the events of the past in

## A Message from Leicester

by Claire Jackson

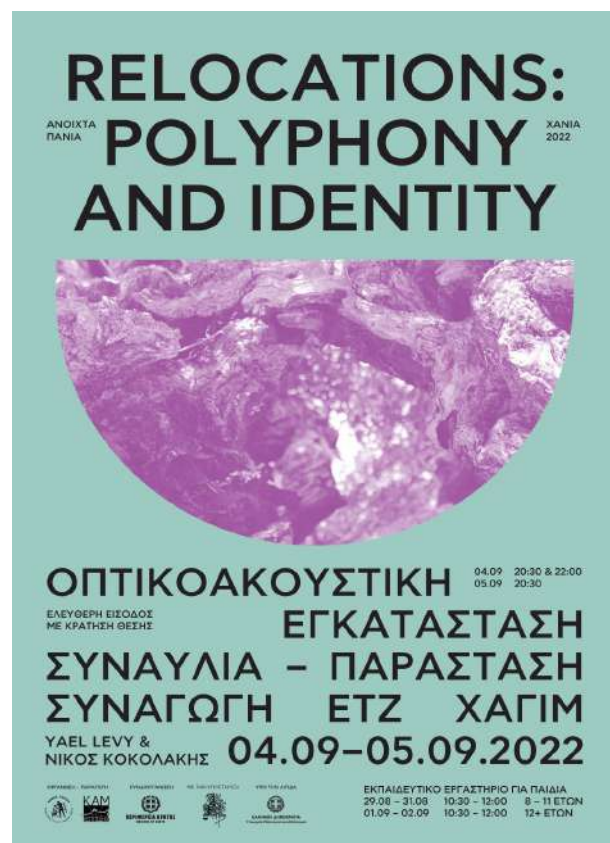
a way endure today.

For one of the testimonials, I gave a reading from my book about my father's escape from a part of Czechoslovakia which is now Ukraine: Uzghorod. In order to board a train from Czechoslovakia - there were long queues at the station - Dad decided to pretend to be a German citizen and march confidently to the front of the queue. He did this so effectively that he wasn't asked to show his papers. This was fortunate as his papers were stamped with the Star of David. Dad had many adventures on his flight including joining the French Foreign Legion and seeing active service in France. Finally, he was stationed near Leicester as a soldier in the Czech Army in Exile and was sent to France on a clean-up mission the day after D-Day.

Incidentally, the Leicester Museum is being recognised for its community work. BBC Radio 4 is presenting 20 programmes about the community work carried out by UK museums. There will be one programme on the Leicester Museum and its work relating to refugees and the Holocaust. Listeners in Greece can tune into the programmes through BBC Sounds. The 15-minute programmes are called *The Museums that Make Us*.

*Sfakiotakis Speech | continued from p. 14:* had descendants who made sure to preserve their memory even in the politically turbulent times through which our country lived. The Jewish Cretans unfortunately almost all perished, so there was no Jewish Antigone to offer them the funeral honours and recite the funeral prayers. This discussion might have been unthinkable a few years ago and no one, even if they wanted to, would have dared to raise such a topic. Fortunately today, however, breathing the air of freedom that the sacrifices of our ancestors offer us, we can talk about these issues. The city, the authorities and all of us more widely must remember all of our dead without making selective distinctions of origin or religion because we want younger generations to live in an even freer society which will know how to honour and recognise the sacrifices of our ancestors".





## A Conversation with Yael Levy and Nikos Kokolakis

*This conversation was recorded on 5 September 2022, before the third of three sold-out concerts performed at Etz Hayyim by Yael Levy and Nikos Kokolakis, together with Giorgos Samoilis (violin), Katerina Orfanoudaki (harpsichord) and the Cantilena Choir directed by Giorgos Kaloutsis.*

*Yael Levy and Nikos Kokolakis are sound artists and composers from Israel and Crete respectively who are based in Heraklion. In September, they undertook a series of children's music and art workshops at Etz Hayyim as part of their composition-installation Relocations: Polyphony and Identity featuring live electronics, videos, choir, as well as violin and harpsichord performances. All three concerts were sold-out.*

*This work formed part of the "Anoikta Pania" (Open Sails) 2022 Contemporary Art Festival hosted by the Municipality of Hania that involves dance, theatre, visual arts, music, cinema, and educational workshops taking place at various venues across the city between August and December 2022.*

**Etz Hayyim:** *Let's start with you telling us a bit about yourselves and your connection with Etz Hayyim.*

Yael: We're both composers who like to do things, not only with instrumental music composition, but also with various media. We like to organically combine live instruments, electronics, field recordings, video, visual art, and performance art. We began working together about seven years ago in the Netherlands where we lived until recently. We work as a duo and with our ensemble, focusing on multimedia performances. This year we moved to Crete and this is our first project here. We are very happy to be here at Etz Hayyim! We first visited the synagogue a few years ago as tourists and we were impressed by the history, architecture, and the spiritual atmosphere. When we heard about the Open Sails Festival in Hania, we thought that this might be a good opportunity for us to do a project here, especially since the organisers were looking for new artists. When we approached you, you were so welcoming, and we then

discovered that the synagogue was also a cultural centre and so all the pieces came together. Ever since that first meeting, we visited Etz Hayyim several times and we always felt so welcomed and inspired too! It was nice to have this connection with you and this place while creating this project. We felt at home. Now we're just about to perform the last concert and we can say that we feel this was a good collaboration.

*Can we talk a little about your project Polyphony and Identity? How did you come up with this project and what are the ideas behind it?*

Nikos: *Relocations: Polyphony and Identity* is the second of a series of pieces around the idea of relocation. It has to do with relocating sounds, ideas, and images from places that belong to different contexts and observing and working with the interaction with one another. We feel that Etz Hayyim has a unique identity within a culturally rich environment. Through this piece, we ask



ourselves several questions. We wonder what constitutes the uniqueness of Etz Hayyim. How does this place interact with its environment? What does it take and what does it give? How does it maintain its identity within such a diverse environment? What makes it Etz Hayyim? What brings the multi-cultural polyphonic community of Etz Hayyim together? How can polyphony and identity coexist in one body?

*Can you tell us about how you chose the material for the composition? What would a visitor experience when they attend the concert?*

Nikos: The piece consists of live instrumental and vocal music – Baroque violin, harpsichord, and a mixed choir – electronic and processed recorded sounds, and videos with processed images.

The instrumental music is inspired by three different elements: the song *Shalom Aleichem*, the choral rendition of *Al Naharot Bavel* (By the Rivers of Babylon) by the early Baroque Jewish composer Salamone Rossi, and the name of Etz Hayyim, which means the 'Tree of Life'. *Shalom Aleichem* is a very well-known Jewish song. You can hear and sing it at the Friday evening festive table and in the synagogue during the Kabbalat Shabbat services.

I composed a solo violin piece called *Six Variations of Shalom Aleichem* which is now published by Donemus Publishing in the Netherlands, and based on the main theme of the song which was composed in 1918. The variations of a piece seamlessly connected with the Jewish identity reflect the theme of *Relocations*: What is identity? What makes this music remain the same despite all the changes?

*Al Naharot Bavel* (By the Rivers of Babylon) carries a key question within our project: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" How do we preserve our identity in a place not connected to it? The original piece was composed by Rossi who was a contemporary of

Claudio Monteverdi, one of the most famous composers who fundamentally changed music in his time. Rossi was a pioneer himself during this period. He was one of the first composers to use Hebrew in choral music. A big part of his music is written in Hebrew and the style of the Late Renaissance/Early Baroque. This was, of course, unique for European music at the time. We are presenting the original *Al Naharot Bavel* in our program alongside a newly composed piece that draws material from it.

Yael: The name 'Etz Hayyim, The Tree of Life' gave us the inspiration of thinking about trees. During our research, we found out that around the Hania area, there are many ancient trees still standing. We visited those trees and took photos and made recordings around them. We observed the differences between those trees and reflected on them. We thought of it as a metaphor: how does one relate to their environment, and how does one adapt? We saw how some trees are thick and very closed, maybe they have very long branches that are spreading far. Some trees are so open that they spread all over the field and have other plants growing inside them. We saw how the trees are so different from each other and how they react to the environment. This metaphor inspired our work on the video and some parts of the music: how the trees stand and retract is reflected within the music, how the music progresses, and how we build the chords and the musical lines. We show the different types of trees, representing different people, different cultures and communities around Hania. How are all these people, cultures, and communities interacting with the environment? So metaphorically, '*Etz Hayyim, The Tree of Life*', is one of those old trees that are part of the cultural identity of the island.

Nikos: The element of water is very present in the video images, as well as in the electronic sounds from our processed field recordings around the ancient trees of Ha-





nia. It's a source of life always present around those trees. Next to it, there is also a memorial prayer for the victims of the sinking of the Tanaïs and the tragic loss of the Jewish community of Crete during the Second World War. We wanted it to be there, but more abstractly. We included the element of water and prayer, and we merged the sounds with various sound techniques. So, this prayer for the victims' souls is still pulsating within the electronic sounds of the piece.

*We've been talking about the artistic implementation. Did you face any challenges or was it surprisingly easy with everything coming together effortlessly? How did the project evolve for you?*

Yael: The project had its challenges. Some things came more naturally because this is our practice, and some things were more challenging. One very challenging element was the broad topic of identity that we chose. It was difficult to capture it because the topic is very wide. We had to pick the things that we wanted to focus on, and we had to do it quite quickly due to time constraints. I think we made the whole piece in two months. It was very intense work. That was a challenge because when you must do something very fast, you don't have the time to reflect on it. However, we undertook the process of reflection during the time of composing. In the end, I am quite happy with the material that we used and that it's speaking about the points that we wanted to express.

Nikos: During the process, there were a lot of matters to deal with that had less to do with the ideas and more with practical things concerning the organization, the communication, and the production side. Because of our very short time, we needed to be fast. And the project also involved many people. Of course, we worked

with very good musicians, Giorgos Samoilis and Katerina Orfanoudaki, and the Cantilena Choir under Giorgos Kaloutsis. Everybody was enthusiastic about the project and that helped a lot. The repertoire was of course very new for the musicians and the choir, but it all worked out because everyone was in the same mindset and focused on the project.

*Did the choir sing in Hebrew for the first time?*

Nikos: Yes, indeed. There's one piece they sing in Greek and three pieces in Hebrew. Yael helped with the pronunciation and the meaning of the Hebrew texts of course.

*When you thought of the project, did you also think about what you wanted to achieve with it? Or did you just focus on the art and see where it leads you?*

Nikos: For me, I, first, thought that it was amazing being in this place and being able to do this project, especially because of Yael's background. I remember when we first came here, Yael said: 'This is a nice place, and we could maybe do something here.' So, it's already a good feeling that we had the chance to realize that here and before this audience. Before I was introduced to Jewish culture by Yael, I had a different perception of it. It was much more distant for me then because I didn't know anything about it. When I first encountered it, I felt that it was something so interesting and I wanted this to be communicated to the world. What is so interesting for me is the human approach to it, and how people are together. I think it is something very valuable that can be incorporated elsewhere so, I wanted this to be shown.

*Maybe you can also talk about the workshops for children which you offered inside Etz Hayyim Synagogue*



*in the week before the concerts?*

Yael: Doing workshops is very natural for us because we have been working with kids of different ages for many years and we like it very much. If we do a large project, we always like to do workshops for kids which share an aspect of the project. This time, we introduced the techniques we used for making the videos for this project. We made some drawings with colorful paper, put them on a light panel, and took photos of them; it was the whole process of how I made the video for the performance. We also showed the children how to record and process sounds. We presented a short introduction to the equipment used: the computer, how we develop the recordings, how we play with them, and how we use various effects. We also did some listening exercises. I think if you find a nice way how to convey those otherwise complex subjects and find a way to communicate them with kids, then they will enjoy it a lot because it is something unique and interesting for them as well. All the children who attended the workshops were very curious about everything, in both age groups. We enjoyed it a lot working with the kids. I think they did too because they wanted to attend the workshop more than once during the week!

Nikos: Besides the techniques that we showed, we focused on what each child brought with them. The workshop wasn't all planned through. While we had a basic structure for the workshops, we could also adjust it and if the children brought ideas, we could just go for it. Of course, it was organized, but we placed much importance on the participants, themselves. Therefore, each workshop was different, depending on who was taking part.

Yael: We also saw that the children could relate very well to the concept of identity. For example, when we

sang a song from Australia, they immediately said: "Ah, my grandmother is from there," or: "We also speak two languages because my father is from Albania". It came up naturally. We didn't ask them where they were from. When they saw the diversity of the different voices, they started talking about it. I think that it is also nice and very important.

We would like to thank everyone here at Etz Hayyim – Vassiliki, Anja, Alexandra, Besnik, Flora and Theo – because you were so helpful from the beginning to the end, and so encouraging. Things were happening here and there, but we always felt that the synagogue was a safe and reliable environment and that gave us the confidence to be able to implement the project.

Transcription and translation: Etz Hayyim staff



Yael's and Nikos' 3-year old son Yakinthos was inspired to create and participate in the project in different forms - he was recording, drawing, playing the instruments, making sounds on the computer with Nikos, and attended some of the rehearsals. He also made this model of Etz Hayyim (including Mikveh, Bimah and Janitor Besnik, top left) as part of his process.





## Interview with Choir Master Giorgos Kaloutsis

*Etz Hayyim: What is your relationship with composer and visual artist Nikos Kokolakis? How did you get involved in the Relocations project?*

Giorgos Kaloutsis: I met Nikos Kokolakis in Heraklion when directed a choir there called Thallitas. It was a mixed choir, a cappella, without instrumental accompaniment. One day, Nikos came to my choir and ended up staying for two years. He was very good. Later, he told me that he had to leave as he was going to the Netherlands to study. I was sad on hearing this because I was losing a really good voice. Then we lost touch but last year he called me again from Heraklion and told me that he had returned, that he had married an Israeli woman, Yael, and that they are thinking of forming a small choir for a concert project in Hania. Despite my initial hesitation, I finally agreed to participate for two reasons: firstly, because I was impressed by the fact that the concert would take place in a synagogue largely unknown to *Haniotes* and secondly, because I wanted to support Nikos' work. The event was ultimately a great success and it was something new for the residents of Hania.

*Could you imagine your choir to sing also at the annual memorial service for the victims of Tanais sinking?*

I think the choir members would like that. They sang with great joy and enthusiasm. I also personally think that the place here is nice. Also, congratulations to the Municipality of Hania for promoting this event at Etz

Hayyim.

*What was your relationship with Nikos Stavroulakis?*

I was, for a time, studying and working in Oxford. One day, it must have been between 1958 and 1960, I heard about an exhibition of art work by a certain Nikos Stavroulakis. Because of the surname, I immediately knew that he was Greek, but I didn't actually realize that Nikos was a Cretan artist. So, I went to the exhibition and suddenly saw the Hania lighthouse painted in front of my eyes! I approached him and we talked, and he told me that he was from Hania! When he eventually returned to Hania, many years later, Nikos and I met again and got to know each other better.

*Let's get back to the concert: How were the choir rehearsals?*

The rehearsals were quite difficult, particularly the unfamiliar language. But it was nice that Nikos Kokolakis chose a Renaissance piece written by a Jewish musician in typical Renaissance form and harmony. In fact, I am thinking of completing it and using it in one of my upcoming concerts. Although classical in form, the work was very innovative. It is a nice, elegant composition.

*You mentioned that Etz Hayyim is an unknown place for the residents of Hania. However, with the concerts you performed, this place was filled with people. What do*

*you think attracted people here?*

First of all, I happen to be fairly well-known in Hania, for better or for worse. Also, the choir itself attracts an audience because everyone in the choir has their relatives and friends especially when choir members perform in their hometown. It must be said however, when they heard that the concert was being performed in the syna-

agogue, many thought that it would take place in the next-door bar which is also called the Synagogue. Most had already visited the Synagogue bar, but few had come to the actual synagogue. In the end, everyone was delighted with the result and some even told me that it was a real transformative experience!

Transcription and translation: Etz Hayyim staff

Upcoming Events

## Save the date - 27 May 2023: Installation of *Sefer Torah* in Memory of Nikos Stavroulakis

We would like to invite you to Etz Hayyim Synagogue to attend the installation of a new *Sefer Torah* in loving memory of Nikos Stavroulakis. The event will take place on **Saturday, 27 May 2023** (the second day of the festival of Shavuot) in the presence of representatives of the Jewish communities in Greece and of the Central Board and, we hope, many of Nikos' friends and supporters of Etz Hayyim.

We will also be holding the **annual memorial for the Cretan Jewish community** which perished on the Tanais ship on 9 June 1944, on **Sunday, 28 May. 2023**.

These two events will be part of a **wider program of cultural events** planned for the weekend of 27-28 May 2023. A more **detailed schedule of events** will be circulated closer to the date.

The annual memorial service for Nikos will take place on Sunday, 14 May 2023 (23 Iyyar 5783).

We hope that many of you can join us for those events. Please contact the synagogue office should you have any questions,

Your Etz Hayyim Staff.



## Call for Materials Complementing the *Nikos Stavroulakis Collection*. A Repository for Research and Heritage Preservation

The staff of Etz Hayyim has been compiling the Nikos Stavroulakis Collection which includes personal papers and correspondence relating to Nikos' academic and artistic work that reflect his philosophical, historical and spiritual views; meticulously kept diaries from several decades; prose and academic manuscripts, many of them unpublished; books and off-prints of academic articles from fields as varied as Jewish studies and religion, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, European, as well as Asian history and philosophy; personal and work-related photographs and slides, and artefacts, liturgical and personal items.

In order to complement the holdings, we are calling on his former friends, collaborators and acquaintances to share with us material linked to or produced by Nikos Stavroulakis. This can be original material, but copies/images of the items would also be very welcome. In particular, we very much welcome materials that might shed light on his work, his interests and his professional and personal connections and networks. These materials may include:

- various forms of correspondence (letters, postcards, notes, email etc.)
- manuscripts

- photographs
- audio-visual material
- art work
- personal artefacts, etc.

The provenance of all donations will be recorded in the Collection catalogue and there is the possibility for contractual agreements with individual donors should they request it. All material will be treated according to professional standards regarding intellectual property rights and privacy concerns.







## Romaniots: the Jews of Greece in the Middle Ages

by Nicholas de Lange

First let me say a word or two about the term ‘Romaniots’, which is often used today to refer to the Jews of the Byzantine empire and their modern descendants. Actually, there never was such a thing as the ‘Byzantine empire’. This misleading term came into use in western Europe around the time that the thing it referred to ceased to exist. The Christian empire centred on Constantinople was known to its inhabitants as *Romania*, and they referred to themselves as *Romaioi*, because they saw themselves, with some truth, as the successors of the ancient Roman empire. The Jews referred to their communities as ‘*kehillot Romania*’. Their language, which we call Greek, they called ‘*leshon Romi*’, the language of Rome. When we use the term ‘Romaniot’ we mean, literally, someone from *Romania*, a Roman, just as a Cypriot is someone from Cyprus. Not all Romaniots were literally descended from the Jewish inhabitants of the ancient Roman empire, but the important thing is that they lived in *Romania*, or, in the case of modern Romaniots, that they are the heirs of the Jews of *Romania*.

I think we must all be impressed by the resilience of the communities of *Romania*, and their ability to survive not only the ravages of time but also repeated deliberate attempts to destroy them.

When I speak of destruction I am not talking about physical attacks on the Jewish communities of Byzantium. There are a few stories of mob violence against Jews, but in the Middle Ages these are few and far between, and cannot be seen as having official state sanction, even if they were ultimately caused by the preaching of the state church.

The main threat to the survival of the Jewish communities came from assimilation and conversion to the domi-

nant religion, Greek Orthodox Christianity. It was this that was responsible for the change from the large-scale presence of Jews in the ancient Roman empire to the relatively tiny presence in the later Middle Ages. While it would be wrong to discount the attraction of the Christian message as a motive, there were other factors that could have served to support an inclination to convert, including marriage, career, or financial advantage.

From the very beginning of the Christian empire, in the 4th century, the law was used as a tool to limit the careers and economic activities of Jews, and to offer them advantages if they became Christians.

Forced baptisms were rare, but we know of several imperial edicts ordering the wholesale conversion of Jews. The first of these was in 632, under emperor Herakleios I, victorious after a desperate war against the Persians. This edict was a very extreme step on the part of the Roman state. Despite a mass of anti-Jewish legislation, the Jews were still protected under Roman law, and to threaten them with death if they did not accept Christian baptism marked a break with long-established legal tradition. It also constituted a dangerous precedent. Subsequent edicts were issued by Leo III (721/2), Basil I (873/4), Leo VI (ca 894), and Romanos I (shortly before 932). All these edicts failed, however, in their aim of eradicating Judaism from the empire. They may have resulted in some temporary or permanent emigration, but not in any long-term interruption in the history of Greek Jewry.

A different kind of threat came from within Judaism. In antiquity, Greek Judaism had its own distinctive beliefs and practices. The language of worship in synagogues was Greek, the scriptures were read and studied in Greek, and the religious culture, so far as we can tell,

was strongly influenced by Hellenistic culture. The way of life of Greek Jews seems to have resembled in many ways that of other Greeks.

The Rabbinic movement arose in Palestine around the time of the wars against the Romans, and gradually grew and spread. Rabbinism (sometimes called Rabbanism) is characterised by the authority of learned men, rabbis, and by a belief that they had access to a body of teachings directly revealed by God outside the written Torah. The rabbis also had a strong attachment to the Hebrew language, and promoted its use in worship, Bible study, and in religious study generally.

We do not know exactly when Rabbinism reached Greece: it was probably a long and gradual process. A legal decree published by emperor Justinian in the year 553 begins with an introduction that speaks of a division among the Jews:

From the pleas (in Greek *proseleúseis*) that were laid before us we learned that, while one party only accept the Hebrew language and wish to use it in the reading of the holy books, the other party also consider it proper to use Greek, and that they have been in conflict about this for a long time. We rule in favour of those who also wish to use the Greek language... or any language whatsoever that the location renders more appropriate and more familiar to the audience. [Justinian, Novella 146]

In my view the opening words here, ‘From the pleas that were laid before us’, are the key to interpreting this text. The pleas submitted by the rival claimants were ultimately the basis on which the reply was drafted. Much of their actual wording is therefore contained in the final text. As the emperor has ruled in favour of the Greek side, his text naturally contains phrases copied from the *proséleusis* of this faction. It is my contention that this legal text represents the views, and the words, of the Greek Jews confronted by a militant Rabbinism which was attempting to subvert their traditions and take over their synagogues. The text continues with these words (I have omitted some phrases):

We therefore ordain that... the Jews (*Evrarioi*) who so wish shall have licence to read the holy books in their synagogues to the congregation through the medium of the Greek language... and their exegetes shall not have the freedom, by using Hebrew alone, to abuse this at their will, making the ignorance of the public into a cloak for their own malice... But we absolutely forbid what they call the *deutérosis*, as it is neither contained in the holy books nor handed down by tradition from the Prophets, but is an invention of men speaking from the earth alone, and having nothing divine in them.

The word *deutérosis* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term *mishná*. In this context it clearly refers to the Oral Torah of the Rabbis. The charge that the rabbinic exegetes ‘make the ignorance of the public into a cloak for their own malice’ and that the *deutérosis* is a human invention, having nothing divine in it, clearly comes straight from the plea of the Hellenist party: it is not plausible to imagine that it was inserted by some Christian official in the imperial chancery.

I have lingered on this document, because it is like a window that opens for a moment and then closes, offering us a momentary glimpse into the minds of the Greek Jews confronted by the spread of Rabbinism. They won this battle, but ultimately they lost the war. In time, Rabbinic Judaism took over all the Jewish communities of the empire. There was something of a backlash in the 11th century, when a movement called Karaism, coming from the Middle East, found fertile ground in Byzantium, no doubt taking advantage of the lingering hostility to Rabbinism. The Karaites endorsed the accusation that the ‘Oral Torah’ of the rabbis was, in the words of Justinian’s edict, ‘neither contained in the holy books nor handed down by tradition from the Prophets’. However, Karaism remained a minority dissident movement, and was unable to dislodge Rabbinism from its hold on the Greek communities.

The victory of Rabbinism, however traumatic it must have been at the time, had one very significant effect: it made the Jews of Greece and the Byzantine empire an integral part of a Jewish world stretching from the Atlantic to Iran. A Jewish traveller arriving from Spain, Germany, Egypt or Iraq would feel at home in a Greek synagogue and would be able to follow most of the prayers. This global effect is illustrated by the numerous Hebrew manuscripts that were copied in Byzantium. Some of these were clearly written by scribes who had been trained in other countries, and travelled to Byzantium. We also find manuscripts copied in other parts of the world in the possession of Byzantine Jews. We have copies of works made in Byzantium within a few years of their original composition elsewhere. The manuscripts cover the full range of Jewish scholarly activities, from theology and biblical study to mathematics and medicine.

In this way the Greek Jews were integrated in a scholarly world which transcended national frontiers. And yet they retained something distinctive and peculiar to them. For example, thanks to Rabbinism they replaced their old forms of synagogue worship in Greek language and based on the old Greek translation of the holy scriptures (the ‘Septuagint’) by a service in Hebrew close to the ones in use in synagogues around the world, then and now. This form of service came to Greece from the Land of Israel and spread from Greece westwards to Italy, and from there to Ashkenaz (the Rhineland), from where it spread further to Tzarefat (Northern France) and to England, and also eastwards to Poland and cen-





Septuagint manuscript (Leviticus), late 2nd century CE

tral Europe. Byzantium was the gateway to Europe for Rabbinic culture. And yet the Romaniot forms of prayer were not identical to those found elsewhere. There was a distinctive synagogue ritual, known as the ‘rite of Romanía’, which had a number of offshoots, such as the rites of Corfu, Castoria, and Crete. One of the unique features of the Romaniot prayer books is the presence of some prayers in Greek. One of these states that God revealed the Torah not only to Israel (at Mt Sinai), but also to the sages at the Pharos – an allusion to the island in Alexandria where it was believed that the old Greek translation of the Torah was made. This is a relic of the old Romaniot attachment to the Septuagint. There are also some indications that the biblical readings were performed in Greek. For example, here in Crete there was an old custom of reading the Book of Jonah in Greek in the afternoon service of Kippur.

Another distinctive feature of the Romaniot prayer-books is the inclusion of hymns composed by local synagogue poets. There are large numbers of these poetic compositions, which reveal remarkable expertise in the Hebrew language as well as expert knowledge of Jewish law and theology. Their authors were probably the synagogue cantors themselves, who were clearly highly educated scholars. We are particularly well informed about Crete, and we can see that the authors of the hymns were members of the most prominent families, such as Anatoli Kazani, Moshe Delmedigo and Malkiel Ashkenazi.

The existence of these elaborate Hebrew poetic compositions, most of which are found exclusively in Romaniot prayer books, testify to the very high standard of Hebrew education that was available in medieval Greece. Not everyone had the leisure or the motivation to take full advantage of the opportunities, but Hebrew literacy

was very widespread, as we can see from letters by merchants and other individuals that have survived in the famous Cairo Genizáh. Some of these letters are by women; unfortunately, we cannot know if they were written by the women themselves or dictated in Greek to professional letter-writers. Interestingly, in a letter written in Egypt a young man writes to a friend that he is planning to emigrate to Byzantium, because there are regular schools there: the high standard of Hebrew education apparently attracted immigration.

If I were to try to enumerate all the interesting medieval Jewish scholars who lived and wrote in Greece it would take a very long time. Let me just mention Shemariah ben Elia, known as ‘Shemariah the Cretan’. Shemariah was a member of one of the most prominent and wealthy Jewish families in Venetian-ruled Crete. He was born around 1260, and in 1279 he was married to Helena the daughter of David Kalomiti, a scholar and one of the wealthiest Jews in Negroponte (Halkida), where Shemariah spent the rest of his life. In a letter listing his writings he says he wrote commentaries (now lost) on most of the books of the Hebrew Bible, concentrating on the grammar and the literal meaning. He also says that he has translated many philosophical works, presumably from Greek. He also composed some Hebrew poems.

Scholarship was a major occupation of the Romaniots. Pure scholarship was not necessarily a full-time occupation: many of the scholars we know of were also physicians, businessmen or farmers. But they also gave employment to those who practised other professions and trades, such as scribes and teachers. These were not the only distinctively Jewish occupations. In Crete the wealthy Jews of Candia (Iraklio) owned farms in the fertile Messará Plain where they produced kosher meat, wine and cheese. This was mainly sold in the Jewish

community, but the surplus was sold to Christians, or exported to Jewish communities around the eastern Mediterranean. The cheese was particularly valued. (The name of the Greek cheese *kaseri* probably comes from Hebrew *kasher*.) It is striking that, whereas in the Latin West Jews were prohibited from owning land at this time, in Greece many Jews were farmers farming their own land.

Many Jews were employed in the production of fabrics, notably of the most precious and highly-prized of all fabrics, silk, which played an important role in the ceremonial of the Christian churches, and was a status symbol in Byzantine society. Jewish involvement in silk production goes back to the 4th century, and is also associated with the production and use of the costly purple dye. In Greece it was particularly centred on Salonica, Thebes and Corinth. Thebes had a large and prosperous Jewish community. A Spanish traveller in the mid-12th century, Benjamin of Tudela, writes: ‘Thebes: a large city with about two thousand Jews. They are the best in the land of Greece at making garments of silk and purple cloth. There are among them great scholars... There are none like them in all the lands of Greece, except for the city of Constantinople.’ A Hebrew inscription in Thebes, which refers to it as ‘a great city of scholars and scribes’, applies to Thebes the Biblical name ‘the land of Moriah’, punning on the Greek name of the mulberry trees (Greek *moréa*, Mod Gk *mouriá*) on which the silk-worms fed. On a visit to Thebes recently I was shown in the area of the medieval Jewish quarter what was apparently a cloth-dyeing factory, with a watercourse running down the hillside through a succession of stone vats. Corinth was one of the main centres for extracting the purple dye. A Hebrew tombstone here, probably from the 10th century, commemorates a certain ‘Eliakim, known as Caleb, the dyer’.

Skill in purple dyeing was not the only tradition that connected the medieval Greek Jews to their ancient forebears. For example they used public baths, even used for Jewish ritual purposes, contrary to rabbinic law. Another example concern the dowry: following Roman and Byzantine law, a woman’s dowry was her own possession, and if she died childless it reverted to her own family, rather than passing to her husband. Again, this is contrary to rabbinic law and practice. It was hard for the Romaniots to maintain their distinctive traditions in the face of a sort of aggressive Orthodoxy from foreign rabbinic authorities: it is really surprising that traces remain of a few of these, and probably there were once many more.

After the end of the Middle Ages the Romaniots faced other challenges, very different in nature. The first of these came from the Ottoman Turks, who conquered the Greek lands in stages during the 14th and 15th centuries. The Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453 symbolically marks the end of the Byzantine empire. On hearing the news of the conquest, one of the foremost Jews of Venetian-ruled Crete, Michael ben Shabbetai Ha-Kohen Balbo, wrote a lament, composed entirely of phrases

taken from the Hebrew Bible. It includes biblical phrases such as: ‘My people is captive in a great captivity...’, ‘Those who were brought up in the purple are at their wits’ end’, ‘The heavens above have become black...’, ‘Who surrendered Israel to the robbers...’ He sees the capture as a catastrophe for the Greeks and the Jews. Soon afterwards the conqueror, Sultan Mehmet II, ordered a great transfer of populations (*sürgün*) to the depopulated city, including whole Jewish communities from many cities and smaller towns of Greece. The Romaniot communities of Greece were devastated by these transfers. They help to explain in part how easy it was for the exiles from Spain and Portugal who arrived from the end of the 15th century to establish themselves as the dominant Jewish presence in the area. The Romaniots had previously welcomed and absorbed numbers of Jewish immigrants, from the middle East, from Italy, from Central Europe and indeed from Spain after the persecutions of 1391. The immigration that began in 1492 was far larger, and the new arrivals had various advantages which helped them to establish themselves under Ottoman rule. Only in a few locations in Greece did the Romaniots succeed in holding their own: we may think particularly of Ioannina and Halkida. Here in Crete the refugees were welcomed by the Condestabulo, the head of the Jewish community in Candia, Elkanah Capsali. Romaniots and Sepharadim lived side by side here in harmony. In Hania, as you probably know, there were two synagogues: the Sefaradi Bet Shalom in Kondylaki Street (which was destroyed) and our own dear Etz Hayyim, which was the Romaniot synagogue.

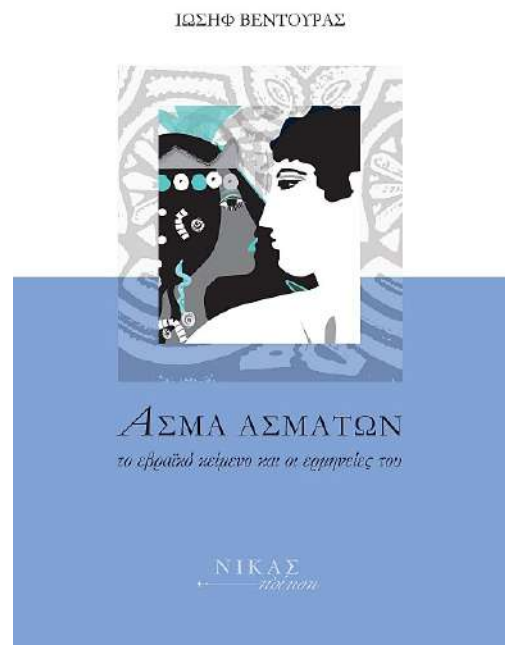
The latest challenge was also the most violent and brutal. The deportation and murder of most of Greek Jewry by the German occupiers during the Second World War did not only affect the Romaniots. Inevitably the Sepharadim suffered in much greater numbers, because there were far more of them. But the little Romaniot minority suffered great losses, in proportion to their smaller numbers. How can we not weep as we recall the fate of the Jews of Crete, rounded up and imprisoned with the most savage and inhuman cruelty, and subsequently drowned at sea as a result of a tragic mistake?

I do not want to dwell on the nightmare of the Holocaust in Greece, but I should like to conclude by returning to what I wrote earlier about the amazing resilience of the Romaniots. Although the Romaniots are much reduced in numbers, they are still a presence on the Greek scene. To take just one example, our dear friend the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin, is a great enthusiast for his Romaniot tradition, especially the musical tradition, on which he is an authority. Let us then honour the long history of the Romaniot Jews, their rich religious culture, and their distinctive identity.

Nicholas de Lange

*The above text is based on a webinar-lecture organized on 24 February 2022 by the Embassy of Greece in Stockholm on the occasion of Greece’s presidency of IHRA.*





## Asma Asmaton. An Interview with Iossif Ventura on his Translation of the *Song of Songs*

*What distinguishes your translation of the "Song of Songs" from any other translations that have preceded it?*

Iossif Ventura: Many books have been published in Greek on the *Song of Songs* starting with the *Translation of the Seventy*, the so-called *Septuagint*, in which the translation of the *Song of Songs* can be found. However, with the exception of the *Septuagint*, all of the other editions do not include an actual translation of the *Song of Songs*. They are instead essentially poetic transcriptions. In fact, many writers later based their poetic transcriptions on the text of the *Septuagint*. That is the difference. I translated the *Song of Songs* from the text itself, *verbatim*. The only liberty I have taken is to change the position of the words on the syntactic axis; that is, I did not keep the order of the words as they are in the Hebrew text firstly because the syntax is different in Hebrew than in Greek, but I did this also to make the translation more poetic. Yet, it remains a translation. Where the poetic fact had to be sacrificed for the original translation, the poetic fact was undeniably sacrificed. So, I included in my book the original Hebrew text because the reader of the Hebrew text (who does not know Hebrew) can read it and hear something of the music, if you like. I also included the Greek phonetic rendering of the Hebrew text.

*What were the difficulties/challenges that you faced during the translation process?*

First of all, I should make it clear that my knowledge of Hebrew, although I have been taking private lessons for 14 years, is not sufficient. I always find it difficult when I go to Israel to communicate in a way that proves my sufficiency in the language. However, in this work, I used a bibliography which I already had in my personal library. A key guide to my translation, for example, was the book by Marvin Pope who created an encyclopedia of the

*Song of Songs* and who also attempted a word-for-word translation of the *Song of Songs* into English. I was, of course, also helped in the translation by my Hebrew teacher who does not want her name mentioned, and by my relatives in Israel as well.

*Of the various approaches and interpretations that have been given to the Song of Songs from time to time (realistic, allegorical, theological, mystical etc.), which one is closer to your own perception?*

My personal view is that this text was inspired by dream and fantasy. That's the only way to explain everything because, for example, in Jewish tradition, the groom always appeared in allegories as a king and even as the super-bright Solomon. Furthermore, in the *Song of Songs*, the female speech, that is, the speech of Sulamita dominates. And that is not all. It's also apparent that the way in which the *Song of Songs* is written, the way in which the writer's various thoughts are expressed, through similes and metaphors, conveys the erotic fantasy of a woman or, to put it differently, the dreams of a woman who fantasizes in her sleep about her beloved.

*You state the view in the epilogue of your book that the author of the Song of Songs is a woman who hides her true identity behind the face of King Solomon. Do you adopt this view?*

I adopt it, of course with some reservation. I don't want to be dogmatic, but I see this suggestion or theory as a great possibility.

*Of all the non-Jewish cultural traditions that possibly influenced the creation of the Song of Songs (Pagan, Aramaic, Egyptian, ancient Greek), which tradition do you think had the strongest influence?*



*Iossif Ventura is a renowned Greek poet and the President of the Hellenic Authors' Society. His elegy "Tanais" commemorates the loss of the Cretan Jewish community. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Etz Hayyim Synagogue.*

*Interview and translation by Etz Hayyim staff.*

Certainly, the *Song of Songs* was influenced by Jewish culture, but the Jews also inherited a great deal from other cultural and religious traditions particularly from Mesopotamia with the Sumerians and later, the Babylonians. Abraham brought the Sumerian tradition to the Promised Land. The Sumerians had developed an important civilization as early as the third millennium BCE. Let us also not forget that King Solomon had a large harem with women from Egypt, Mesopotamia and elsewhere who continued to worship their own gods. It was expected that the traditions of both Sumerians and Egyptians, and of all the other surrounding peoples, would have an influence on Hebrew poetry. Yet, if we accept the view that the *Song of Songs* was written (regardless of who wrote it) during the Hellenistic period, it is then reasonable to assume that it should have been influenced not only by the bucolic poetry of Theocritus, but also by the ancient Greek love poets such as Sappho. I myself believe that the *Song of Songs* was written during the Hellenistic period and that it was written by a woman.

*Could we describe the Song of Songs as a feminist text and why?*

I would say that the *Song of Songs* agrees with the modern mentality, according to which both sexes are equal and have equal rights and obligations in their intercourse, in their sexual intercourse. Since the author of the *Song of Songs* could not at that time speak openly about what the subjects or themes expressed in this work, she was forced to hide herself behind this pseudo-poem, that is, behind King Solomon. She could not do anything else. In a way, the *Song of Songs* is a woman's protest in rhyme through a cipher.

*Has your book been received positively so far by readers in Greece?*

The book has received excellent reviews. There were two major articles published by Pantelis Boukalas in two

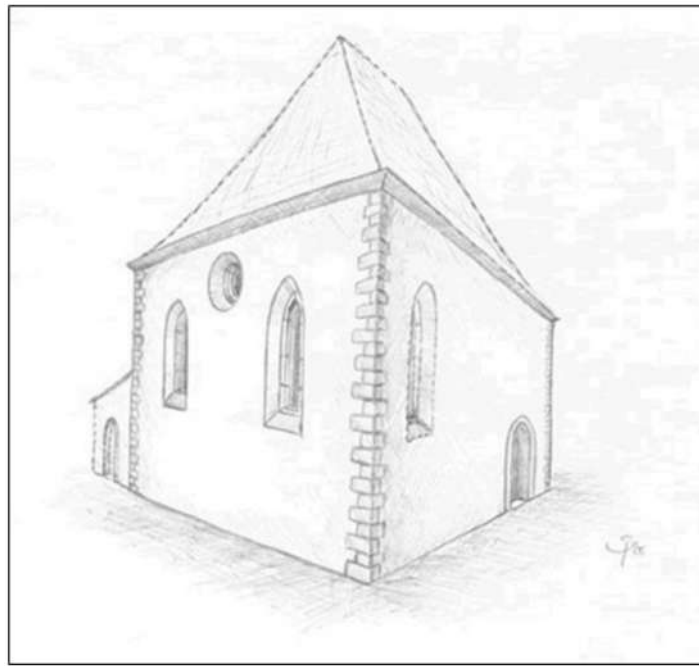
consecutive editions of *Kathimerini tis Kyriakis*. There have also been other critics who have written about the book including Anthoula Daniel and Circe Kefalea, a professor of religious literature at the University of Athens who introduced the book. I have given copies to the library of the University of Athens and to the faculty of theology because the book is of much interest to theologians. I have presented the book at three different venues in Crete and also in Athens, as well as Thessaloniki for the *International Book Fair* of the city. I will also presenting the book in Patras, Volos, Larissa and Thessaloniki as soon as the weather and other conditions allow.

*You say in your preface that you are adding the book to the cannon of Greek-Jewish literature. How exactly do you define this type of literature and do you think that Greek audiences are, in general, receptive to specifically Greek-Jewish texts?*

As far as the expression 'Greek-Jewish literature' is concerned, I refer to the texts of the Old Testament, the 'Tanakh' as we call it in Hebrew, that have been translated into Greek. The *Song of Songs* was not translated into Greek until now. When verses of the *Song of Songs* are recited, the believer can read them in the text and recite them in Hebrew as well, reading the Greek phonetic rendering. As for how receptive the book has become, I will tell you this; there are two distinct attitudes of readers in Greece. Many readers are intellectually stimulated when they read or hear something is Hebrew, but this is linked to stereotypes. Thus, it does not have as much real value. Rather, it is a curiosity that begins with false stereotypes. Yet, there are other Greek readers who are interested in biblical texts generally, not speaking necessarily about theologians. They too will read the book because they are interested. However, those primarily interested in the book are theologians who are concerned about theology and the Bible, and Jews who are concerned with their faith.

Transcription and translation: Etz Hayyim staff





## The Lost Synagogue of Korneuburg, Austria

My small hometown of Korneuburg, Austria is located on the banks of the Danube, just a little upstream of Vienna. In its centre, which was once surrounded by a city wall, near the main square, there is a small alley called Rossmühlgasse. On one corner there is a restaurant, a pizzeria, behind it lies its garden and if you go a bit further down you can see a bulky old building, made of quarry stone, overgrown, weathered and with partially walled-up openings. It used to be a synagogue - a house of prayer and the center of a Jewish community. Today it is a ruin, provisionally roofed and used as a private garage. This building is one of the most remarkable and important testimonies to medieval synagogue architecture in German-speaking countries. It is the oldest and largest former synagogue in what is now Austria and in Korneuburg it is the oldest building surviving in its entirety.

I myself was not aware of the existence of this synagogue until my father showed it to me last summer, when we were talking about my own upcoming placement at the Etz Hayyim Synagogue as part of the *Gedenkdienst* program. I was surprised that I had never heard of it before, given its historical significance, but the building is hardly recognizable as a synagogue to the untrained eye.

The Jewish community who built the synagogue emerged in the early 13th century. In a pogrom in 1305, ten Jews were killed on charges of desecrating the communion wafer. This was a fraudulent staging to drive them away. In the decades that followed, the Jews settled again and built said synagogue. For maybe 70, at most 100 years it served as an active synagogue, but in

1421 the Jews were expelled from Vienna and Lower Austria. The building then had multiple other uses throughout the centuries, as a granary, a pottery store, a warehouse and a horse mill. In 1646, during the Thirty Years' War, the house was largely destroyed during the siege to liberate Korneuburg from the Swedes. It remained in ruins until it was rebuilt as a storage facility and passed into private ownership in 1766. A storm destroyed the roof in 1942, and since then the building has been a ruin again. In 1980, the former synagogue was placed under monument protection and is now awaiting restoration. This project has a good chance of being realized. The municipality of Korneuburg is willing to buy it, restore it and dedicate it as a cultural center, as a place for artists to work and exhibit. It is also supposed to be made accessible to the general public and contain a small exhibition about the history of the building and the history of the two Jewish communities. The Covid pandemic is unfortunately currently still delaying this project.

So while around a decade ago, the Jewish history and the existence of this medieval synagogue in the heart of Korneuburg were on the verge of being forgotten, things have gotten better since then. A book was published in 2013 by a local historian on the history of the Jews of Korneuburg and in 2015 the city museum of Korneuburg held an exhibition about the former synagogue, which caused an increased interest by many, and as mentioned above, efforts have begun to acquire and restore the building.

Theodor Wihrheim

Images above, left: Drawing of the reconstructed medieval building, from the northeast (© S. Paulus 2005); right: Photo of building today, from the same perspective as in the drawing (© Uwe Wihrheim)



Miranda

In August 2020, we received a pleasant visit to the Synagogue from a lady who, from the moment she walked through the Synagogue's front door, moved around the premises with great respect and with a discreet familiarity. She greeted us and explained that she had brought two of her friends to visit the synagogue and get to know this unique Jewish monument of our city. They kindly asked me to show them around the synagogue grounds and despite the fact that this lady informed us that she had visited Etz Hayyim many times before, she listened attentively to my tour. When I finished what I had to say, I felt that this lady did not feel satisfied with a formal tour of the site, but wanted to share some of her experiences with us.

So, after a while she revealed to us that in her parents' house in Hania there is a photo of a young Jewish woman with the mysterious name "Miranda" on the wall. Miranda, (until that moment this was the supposed and probably Hellenized name of the young Jewess for security reasons) was a neighbour and French teacher for the three sisters of our visitor's father and uncle. Mrs. Maria Fountedaki lives in Athens and is an economist; she wanted to do her own research to find more information about the unfortunate Miranda. So she contacted her uncle, who was born and raised in Topanas (a nearby neighbourhood of the Jewish quarter) but lives in Athens and is the youngest of seven siblings in his family and the only one still alive. At that time he was about 10-12 years old.

Through a very clever tele-guided tour, Mr. Foudedakis pointed his niece to Miranda's house, which was next door to his own, at 13 Theophanous Street, a house that has been linked to the Franco family. In a further conversation that Mrs. Fountedaki had with her uncle, she found out that this girl, according to her uncle, was

called either Nanda Sabatah or Miranda Elhai Franco. This girl apparently died either in the wreck of the Tanais or under unclear circumstances during the turbulent years of the war.

Thus, after the war, the only evidence Mrs. Fountedakis' family had of Miranda was her photograph. This unique heirloom, Mrs. Fountedakis donated it to us along with the original frame.

Although we have little information about the person depicted, we can imagine the life of this girl in pre-war Hania, creating representations in our minds. The images we have of members of the Jewish community in Hania are scarce, so this unexpected picture-information gave us strength to continue our research work. Moreover, this move by Mrs. Fountedaki reveals that even today there are people who show interest in the history of our fellow human beings, bringing back to our memory all those 'unsung' people whom history has forgotten.

Giorgos Psaroudakis



CRETE JEWISH DESCENDANTS & RESEARCH

Our Facebook group "Crete Jewish descendants & research" aims to connect (with) the world-wide 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.





## The Janitor

In August 2020, I had the good fortune to meet a resident of Hania, whose family was closely connected to the fate of the Jewish community. An authentic local from the neighbourhood of Nea Chora, who, together with his kind wife, welcomed me with joy in his home when a friend and neighbour of mine asked him to give us further information about the Jewish cemetery of Nea Chora. Mr. Stavros Leventakis, on that August afternoon, spoke to us at length about his memories of the Jewish community of Hania, as he revealed to us, he had been born in the Israeli cemetery! While eating sweets and drinking coffee, my friend and I listened with great interest to Mr. Stavros' narrative and experiences. Mr. Leventakis was born in the house-ward of his father-custodian of the Jewish cemetery, which until the period of the German occupation was located in the neighbourhood of Nea Chora. Parts of the cemetery's stone entrance are still part of Mr. Leventakis' home today, as

the house-guardian was not destroyed. Of particular historical interest is the information that the old police identity card of Mr. Leventakis listed his birthplace as "Israelite Cemetery of Hania"! Although he was very young during the pre-occupation period, he clearly remembered various religious and burial rituals that took place in the cemetery. Also, his father was a close friend of a well-known Jewish family of Hania, the Minervo family. Like thousands of our fellow citizens, Mr. Leventakis was left fatherless during the war, as his father was arrested by the Nazi occupiers and died during his transfer to a detention centre. Mr. Leventakis' experience, his narrative and the fact that he agreed to have his narrative recorded, contribute substantially to the historical research of the Jewish community of Hania, which after the war was in danger of passing forever into oblivion.

Giorgos Psaroudakis

## The Jewish Cemetery of Hania

As part of our preparation for the 80th anniversary of the loss of the Cretan Jewish community in 2024, we are in talks with the Municipality of Hania for the implementation of a public history project to make the former Jewish community cemetery more visible and a part of the memorial landscape of the city.

The cemetery is already mentioned in our walking tour of the historic Jewish Quarter and we have implemented several projects with schools in the Nea Chora neighbourhood, where the cemetery was located. For the ongoing project, we will combine artistic elements with our ongoing research into the history of the cemetery.



## First "Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste" Volunteers in Greece

*In September 2021, 80 years after Germany's invasion of Greece and the German crimes committed during the occupation, the first five volunteers of the German organisation "Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste" (ASF) (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace) have begun their work in Greece.*

We are happy to count Etz Hayyim Synagogue among our first partners. We have a shared interest in historical and political issues, our commitment to democracy, diversity and equality and the commitment against anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of human rights' violations. With the help of our volunteer, Carleen, we would like to support this work, to strengthen the dialogue with our Jewish partners and to learn from each other.

During the German Occupation (1941-44), the Germans caused the Greek civilians immeasurable suffering and the country was brutally plundered by them. Almost 90% of the Greek Jews were deported and murdered and centuries of Greek Jewish culture was largely destroyed. Looking back at these crimes of our ancestors, we feel shame and sorrow.

In order to acknowledge German war guilt and to ensure that what happened will not be forgotten, ASF has been organising several workshops and encounter programmes in Greece during the last decades. The focus is on meeting people who are still suffering from the consequences of the cruel occupation, both economically and psychologically. Between 1960 and 1967, groups came together to do voluntary work in the martyr's village of Servia (Western Macedonia) and in Kandanos and Livadas in west Crete. Moreover, a cooperation began with the Orthodox Academy of Crete in 1990.

Since January 2019, ASF has been supporting the campaign of the association, "Respect for Greece" about "German war guilt and obligations towards Greece". Together, we call on the German government to legally clarify Greece's claim of repayment of a forced credit which the German Reich demanded from the Greek government in 1942. Further demands concern the reimbursement of the extorted ransom for Jewish forced labourers from Thessaloniki, as well as the establishment of a fund for the sustainable development of rural areas especially the martyr's villages. More information in Greek and German can be found here:

[www.asf-ev.de/respekt-fuer-griechenland](http://www.asf-ev.de/respekt-fuer-griechenland)

In March 2021 on the anniversary of the invasion of Greece 80 years ago, the German Federal Parliament held a debate. Although the proposals made by Parliamentary groups were rejected, the discussion attracted wide public attention once more. So far, no German government has taken responsibility for clarifying reparation claims. However, the federal parliament's scientific services have confirmed in a report that Greek claims have not been clearly settled under international law.

We cannot wait for the German government to take action. As representatives of civil society, we want to set an example that the crimes have not been forgotten.

The first five volunteers in Greece are involved in social tasks and work linked to memorial culture in the martyr's villages of Kalavryta and Ligiades, and in Kryoneri Korinthias where Jewish refugees from Athens were hidden with the help of the villagers during the German Occupation. Furthermore, they support the Orthodox Academy of Crete and the Jewish communities in Hania and Ioannina. In Ioannina, one volunteer also supports refugees at an intercultural centre. In the following years, the programme will be further expanded with the help of our Greek partner organisation, FILOXENIA, which is located in the Peloponnese.

We are deeply grateful to our partners in Greece for their openness and hospitality. We hope that our volunteers will actively support them and gain much understanding both about the consequences of the occupation and the current situation of people living in Greece. After their return to Germany, thanks to their experiences and their broader knowledge, they will promote solidarity and understanding for people in Greece and will keep the memory of unpaid debts alive.

*Thomas Heldt is the Director of ASF's voluntary program; he is responsible for ASF's volunteer work programme in Greece.*





## How do we want to remember? A Greek-German youth exchange

Our Greek-German youth exchange started out with a warm welcome – a joint dinner at a restaurant next to the Etz Hayyim Synagogue, characterized by delicious food and a lively atmosphere.

On Friday, October 22nd four German students and their supervisors, a representative of the Volksbund and the curator of the Maleme exhibition from Berlin arrived in Hania to spend one week together with young Greek adults to talk about the German occupation of Crete and its commemoration. However, before dealing with the heavy history, we had the chance to get to know each other and the old town of Hania through a small city rally. By having to solve interactive tasks in competing groups, the historical sights and the history of the town were easily introduced. We were especially lucky to have an insight by one of our Greek participants into Rosa Nera, a squatted building in Hania.

One main occasion was the opening of the new exhibition at the German war cemetery in Maleme, which the former Gedenkdienst volunteer Tobias Schmitzberger already wrote about in the last Jottings. Now the exhibition introduces visitors to the historical context of the German occupation of Crete and emphasises war crimes and victims instead of the fate of German soldiers. Despite the improvements and clarifying that the war cemetery shouldn't be a place for honouring dead soldiers, the opening ceremony was preceded by a lay-

ing of wreaths for the dead German soldiers by representatives of the German embassy as well as the Volksbund. An act which to us seemed highly inappropriate at a place where war criminals like the German army General Bruno Bräuer are buried.

The question "How do we want to remember?" played an important role throughout the whole week. We discussed it at the Maleme war cemetery, not only during the opening ceremony, but also in different workshops, which the German students had prepared in advance. The focus was on commemoration, war crimes, the war cemetery itself and how it is dealt with nowadays. The workshops were made as educational material for youth groups visiting the site in the future. We tried them out and spent a whole day going through their well-made material to discuss and improve it, gaining a lot of new perspectives and ideas from each other along the way. Hopefully, these workshops can soon be held with actual youth groups, considering that working with young people from different backgrounds is an important step for improving commemoration culture in the future. Then, later in the week we participated in another workshop held by Anja Zückmantel and the German theatre director Jürgen Zielinski, about contemporary commemoration practices.

Apart from that, we also had the opportunity to visit various other historical sites related to the German occupa-



Images: workshop in the Etz Hayyim courtyard (left); meeting with Vangelis Despotakis in the martyred village of Kakapetros. Images below: workshop at Maleme War Cemetery (left); view of the Maleme battle field through the "time window"

tion and war crimes in western Crete. We went to war memorials in various villages such as Kondomari, Floria, Kandanos and Kakopetros, which commemorate massacres of civilians committed by German soldiers. Moreover, we gained a lot of new knowledge during a guided tour to an execution site in Golgothas and to the prison in Agia, which the Germans used during the occupation. Finally, we were at the now derelict paratroopers' monument outside of Hania, which was erected by the Germans shortly after the invasion.

We had one of the most memorable moments in Kakopetros, where we met a local who was willing to tell us about the tragic history of his village and his family. His father was arrested and tortured by the Germans to an extent that after he was released his own mother didn't recognise him anymore because his face was so disfigured. However, when in the 1970s German tourists stopped by his village, he offered them Tsikoudia as a sign of peace. It was quite emotionally moving for all

participants and we were glad to be able to discuss these topics in a constructive and open-minded group.

A workshop which really helped us deal with everything that we had experienced and learned was "An Open Wound" by Konstantin Fischer. It aimed at writing short paragraphs about our thoughts and feelings that we had during the week, evoked by dealing with this difficult part of the past. Needless to say, we also included a workshop about the Cretan Jewish community for the participants to learn a bit more about that aspect of history.

Of course, there was some time left for less heavy topics and more delightful conversations. Almost every day after the programme had ended, we spent the evening together and even in one week we became good friends. That is why the farewell dinner was not only a time for goodbyes but for making plans to see each other again soon.

Carleen Rehlinger and Theodor Wihreim



Carleen Rehlinger (ASF) and Theodor Wihreim (Gedenkdienst) worked as volunteers at Etz Hayyim Synagogue from September 2021 to August 2022.





## From Ancient Greek lessons at school to real life volunteering in Greece

When I first walked through the wooden gate of the synagogue last week, I thought “What a beautiful and comforting place”. So far, it’s been three days of watching my colleagues give tours, talking to visitors, reading about the history of Cretan Jews and the synagogue and attending the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday and I couldn’t be more excited to learn more about this place, its community and history this year.

I have long had a connection to Greece through my school as Ancient Greek was one of my main subjects for the last five years. Although we spent most of our time in class talking about the ancient world and its language, we had an *excursus* on modern Greece and its history. From that point onwards, I was intrigued to learn more about this country.

My journey to Greece and in particular to Etz Hayyim Synagogue started almost a year ago when I applied to a volunteer program abroad with the organisation “Aktion Sühnezeichen” (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace). I have always been interested in history and could identify with the cause of this organisation which deals with the crimes of the Holocaust and raises awareness of modern Antisemitism. In January, I took part in a seminar where the applicants could get to know the countries and their projects. In the seminar about Greece, the “Etz Hayyim Synagogue & Young Citizens of the World” project stood out to me because on the one hand, I had been to Hania five years ago and really enjoyed its landscape, the narrow streets, the harbour and its proximity to the ocean and on the other hand, because I really liked the description of the synagogue and could picture myself working and living there. When I got the word that I was going, I was more than happy. A few weeks later, Carleen, the previous German volunteer, told me more about the synagogue and Hania and I couldn’t wait to go.

Now, just a few months later, I’ve had five wonderful first days and I’m so grateful that I get to spend one whole year at this beautiful place!

Thora-Marit Bilz

Thora and Flora in the Etz Hayyim courtyard.

## Bridging Past and Present. Looking ahead to my volunteer service in Hania

Hello I’m Flora and I’m this year’s GEDENKDIENTST volunteer from Austria. I’m 18 years old and have just finished school back home in Vienna. As I’m writing this, I’m starting my fourth week of living in Crete and working at Etz Hayyim. So far, I have had the chance to discover and get to know the island a little. I am already fascinated with the layers of history that you can find by just walking down the old town streets and looking around.

Before I came here, before I applied for my memorial service and learned that one can volunteer at Etz Hayyim, I knew almost nothing about the Jewish community of Crete and its history. I have found that the Holocaust in Austria, Greece and, more specifically, Crete remains little understood or even mentioned. That gap in my own knowledge sparked my interest in applying to volunteer at Etz Hayyim. That is a big part of why I am here; it is the opportunity to learn about a history that I didn’t even know existed. Of course, I’m not only here because of Crete’s past, but also because of its present. I am excited to get to know the community in Hania, its members and for the next year to become a part of it. I am hoping to help maintain the history of this place, but also take part in its enriching present today.

Flora Gürth



*Jottings 2?*



*Jottings 2?*

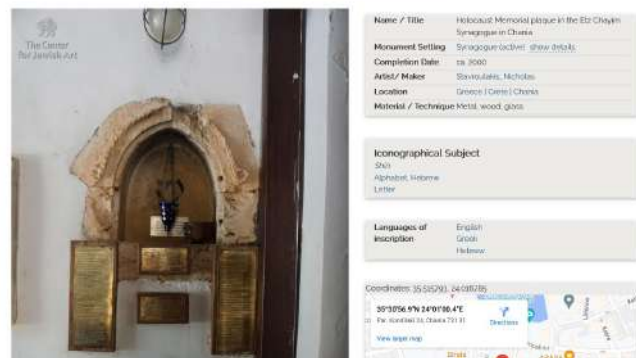


## News from the Etz Hayyim Office

In May this year, architectural historian and historic preservationist, **Samuel Gruber** visited Etz Hayyim for the first time. With his organisation, **International Survey of Jewish Monuments** (ISJM), he was instrumental in securing the funds for the reconstruction of Etz Hayyim in the 1990s. Sam kindly agreed to share his extensive correspondence with Nikos Stavroulakis and material on the rebuilding of Etz Hayyim for the Nikos Stavroulakis Collection which is being compiled by the Etz Hayyim staff. This spring, Sam was visiting Jewish sites all across Greece as part of his endeavor to expand the digital database, *Holocaust Memorial Monuments* that forms part of the *Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art*



One of 4487 Holocaust Memorial plaque in the Etz Chayim Synagogue in Chania, Greece, ca. 2000



at Hebrew University.

In July, the Board of Trustees of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim signed a **Memorandum of Cooperation with the Jewish Museum of Greece** (JMG) making Etz Hayyim an official partner institution of the JMG. As a result, we can now implement our educational outreach programme in official cooperation with this leading institution on the Jewish history of Greece.

In August, former Gedenkdiens volunteer, **Chris Steinberger**, who has by now completed a B.A. degree in History and Romance Languages, gave the lecture entitled “*Mos semonos los otros - The de/construction of Sephardi Otherness*”. Chris has just started his MA studies at

## Mos semonos los otros

The de/construction of Sephardi otherness

Sephardim are an integral part of Ottoman and North African history. Despite this fact, they are often left out of the general Jewish discourse, historically and contemporarily. North African Jews, many of them Sephardim, were affected by the Nazi North African Campaign, but are still not officially recognized as victims of the Shoah. While the Yiddish language has been experiencing a revival in the past few decades, only recently is Ladino being brought to a wider public. Sephardim ritually, as well as ethnically, are often exoticized and historically marked as the other frequently by Ashkenazim themselves. This lecture attempts to reconstruct orientalist discourses about Sephardim throughout history and from different perspectives.

Thursday, 18th of August, 8pm, Etz Hayyim Synagogue



Lecture by Christoph Steinberger, former GEDENKDIENT volunteer & historian



the new Sephardi Studies Programme at the University of Vienna.

In September, we welcomed **Jason Francisco** as our second Fulbright Scholar in residence. During his twelve-month stay, Jason will implement a series of projects to make Cretan Jewish history and the history of other local minority communities more tangible in Hania. In collaboration with Jason, the staff of Etz Hayyim has embarked on a series of seminars to explore museological and artistic methods in an effort to rethink Etz Hayyim’s educational and research approaches.

In October, British author **Ruth Padel** presented her recently published novel *Daughters of the Labyrinth* in



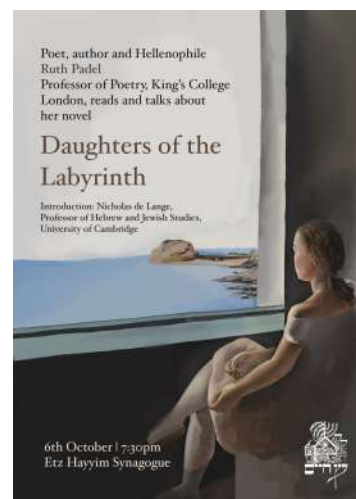
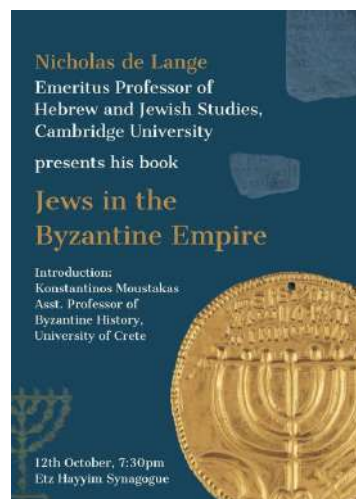
Jason Francisco  
Emory University, Atlanta, GA  
Etz Hayyim Synagogue, Chania, Crete  
Photography/Jewish Studies

Jason Francisco (born 1967, California) is an artist and essayist. Joining documentary and conceptual art, his photoworks and writings focus on the complications of historical memory, and new directions in the art of witness. Much of his work concerns the inheritance of trauma, specifically concerning Jewish experience in eastern Europe. Francisco’s large-scale projects include *Alive and Destroyed: A Meditation on the Holocaust in Time* (Daylight Books, 2021), *The Camp in its Afterlives* (2010-2018), *An Unfinished Memory* (2014-2018), *After the American Century* (2002-2018), *Big City* (1989-2022), *Far from Zion: Jews, Diaspora, Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2006), and *The Villages: Rural India at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1990-1997). He is also the author of numerous limited edition photobooks, web-based installations, experimental films, hybrid photo-text writings, reportages, essays, and poems in translation. This website contains some 200 of his works made between 1990 and 2022. Francisco co-founded *FestivALT*, an annual festival of experimental Jewish art, performance and activism in Kraków, Poland, and served as co-director in its first years. At Emory University, Francisco is a member of the Film and Media department. He received his education at Columbia University, King’s College London, and Stanford University. His Fulbright project in Greece concerns intercultural history in Chania.

which she explores the fate of the Cretan Jewish community (see feature in *Jottings* 28). And Etz Hayyim’s Visiting Rabbi **Nicholas de Lange** presented his new book *Jews in the Byzantine Empire* that summarises his extensive scholarship on the subject.

For 2023, we already have **four weddings, two Bat and one Bar Mitzvah** scheduled to take place at Etz Hayyim.

As well, we have also been reaching out to potential international sister communities. We have also begun planning a series of events for **2024** that will be the **commemorative year on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the sinking of the Tanais ship**.



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## Jottings

### Fundraising Appeal



## Help us maintain and grow Etz Hayyim

Dear Friends of Etz Hayyim,

Etz Hayyim is a **monument to 2,300 years of Jewish history and tradition in Crete**, fulfilling an important educational cultural and religious role for both locals and visitors to the island. The Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim has been operating the synagogue since 2010. As we do not receive any Greek government support, we depend on the financial generosity of our supporters.

**Funds are needed** for our liturgical services particularly for the High Holidays when we require a Visiting Rabbi, but also the maintenance of the historic building and support for our staff who keep the synagogue open for visitors and prepare and implement educational programs, cultural events and publications, while continuing with our ongoing research into the history of the Cretan Jewish community.

### Donations by Bank Transfer

Account Name: Civil Not-for-Profit Corporation Etz Hayyim  
IBAN: **GR94 0171 6350 0066 3510 9559 315**

SWIFT/BIC: PIRBGRAA

**Please list your contact information when making a transfer.**

If you believe in Etz Hayyim’s work and values, please consider your long-term commitment as *the Friends of Etz Hayyim* and support us and make a donation so that we can continue to operate as a place of prayer, study, recollection and reconciliation. Donations of all amounts are crucial to our future.

### Please consider making a donation today!

#### 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 can also receive tax-deductible donations in the USA through a collective giving account at *FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds*.

Please see their website for details:

<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.

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