



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002

**August 2008 e-mail newsletter**

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

We, regretfully, share with you the news of the passing of Zino Kofinas (July 30, 2008) . Zino was the older brother of our beloved *shamas*, Solomon Kofinas. On hearing of his impending death, Sol had returned to Greece to spend the last days with his brother and his brother's family. Zino and Sol had survived as hidden children in Athens during the Occupation, losing their parents and two siblings to the Holocaust. We send our sincere sympathies to the families of Zino Kofinas and Sol Kofinas.

On a more joyful note, this month we celebrate the 95<sup>th</sup> birthday of Jean Saltzman (Colchamiro), one of the nine children of Elias and Nancy (Speranza) Colchamiro. Xronia Polla!)

This is the seventh of our increasingly popular e-newsletters. If you are on our e-mailing lists, you will receive our e-letter automatically. If for any reason you do not wish to receive the e-mail newsletter, please inform us.

## **UPCOMING MUSEUM EVENTS**

In preparation for our opening of the "Our Gang" exhibit highlighting the contributions of the Yanniote community here in the United States in World War II, audio-visual interviews are now taking place. Marvin and Andrew Marcus videotaped a fascinating interview with Ralph Battino, the recipient of numerous medals (including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart).

Future interviewees will (hopefully) include Manny Battino, Max Negrin, Isaac Cohen, Manny Levy and Morris Yomtov. If you would like to take part in this videotaping project, contact Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, at 516-456-9336.

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**We have acquired treasures for this exhibit (medals, uniforms, ration cards, discharge papers and numerous photos in uniform). If you wish to donate or loan your treasures for the "Our Gang" exhibit, please contact us as soon as possible. Time is running out!**



Lt. Ralph Battino

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## NEWS

### Kehila Kedosha Janina News

**One of the most rewarding aspects of our museum is the visit of members of our community, many of whom have never before set foot inside Kehila Kedosha Janina. It is always emotional to witness their re-connection. This past July, Marty Kern (the grandson of Besso Cohen) visited us for the first time. It was very emotional as we found his grandfather's name in the Brotherhood Exhibit. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, Jackie Cohen brought a group of 14 family members into the synagogue museum for a lunch tour. After initial emotional tears as older family members remembered worshipping there (two of the participants-Jack and Isaac Cohen-were barmitzvahed in the Kehila!) lunch and dancing followed. It was a marvelous, never-to-be-forgotten re-connection. If you wish to have a family gathering at the Kehila, please contact us.**



July 13<sup>th</sup> gathering

## NEWS FROM GREECE

### SALONIKA



Jewish women from Salonika in Jewish Cemetery (c. 1920' s)

#### **New Excavations for Subway Line Under Destroyed Thessaloniki Jewish Cemetery**

**Destruction Raise Concerns**

**by Samuel Gruber (reprinted with permission of Samuel Gruber)**

**(ISJM) More than sixty years after one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Europe was destroyed to make room for a university campus in Thessaloniki (Salonika), Greece; excavation at the Aristotle University for a subway line has spurred new interest in the site's history, new concerns about the fate of the thousands of Jewish graves, and calls for broader public recognition that the University is built on the site of tens of thousands of Jewish graves. The international community is also showing interest. U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust issues, Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy, recently visited Greece to discuss the matter, which has been raised by the Greek Jewish community.**

**Excavations for the university library in the 1960s apparently uncovered many graves. Though tunnels for the trains will run deeper than the level of the graves, there are legitimate concerns that excavations for a station and for access and airshafts will violate burials. Witnesses report that the new excavations have already disturbed Jewish graves – though to what extent remains unclear at this time.**

**While no one has suggested that the University be moved or that the cemetery be restored, there is a general sense among protestors that any new excavation must stop, the graves must be respected, and that there should be some sort of commemorative gesture. At the very least, all excavation work done on the site should be done under rabbinic supervision so that graves are protected and remains properly removed for reburial. Such care for graves is uncommon in Greece where it is the custom to excavate**

**and remove ancient burials, and where Christian burial is often only temporary – the bones being then gathered up and removed to ossuaries.**

**In recent years there has been improvement in the Greek response to the legacy of the Holocaust.... In March, Greek president Karolos Papoulias attended the Greek Jewish Martyrs Memory event on the national memory day for Greek Jewish Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust. This comes on the heels of Bulgaria's admitting responsibility for the deaths of 11,000 Greek Jews in the Holocaust, probably the major issue that has been pushed in recent years by American-Greek Jewish advocacy groups. While these issues are not specifically related, they speak to a more receptive attitude towards Holocaust history in the Balkans.**

**The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki has requested (again) commemoration of the cemetery and the community at the University. Moses Constantinis, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Greece (KIS) said in a recent interview of Agence France Presse "The entire area was once a Jewish cemetery. In-depth excavation is certain to hit upon graves and remains...We would not want the peace of the dead to be disturbed. In our religion, it is a sin to move the dead after burial...we would like the area studied and if excavation interferes with the cemetery, which we believe it does, then to avoid building (the station) or move it to a different location."**

**Bloggers have proposed solutions ranging from naming the new train station after the cemetery, or more constructively, creating a Sephardic Studies program at the University. The cemetery dates back to 1492 when Spain expelled its Jews and thousands found refuge in the small town of Thessaloniki, then under Ottoman rule. As the community grew to be the largest Sephardi center in Europe before the Holocaust – with a Jewish population of over 50,000 - the cemetery became one of Europe's largest, too, with more than 300,000 graves. Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece, now has a Jewish population of about 6,000 (correction: 1200) among its nearly 360,000 residents.**

**The future of the enormous Sephardi cemetery was already in doubt before the Second World War and the German occupation of Thessaloniki. Actions to expropriate the land for the University had already begun in the 1930s, before the Holocaust. This was not uncommon in the interwar period, as many European cities underwent major growth and tried to expand into "open" or "under-utilized" land. Usually Jewish cemeteries were spared because they were much further from the town centers, but not always. In Thessaloniki, it seems that after initial acquiescence, the Jewish community resisted, and that was the state of things when the war started. Then, with the killing of all the Jews, the problem was solved for the surviving populace, since there were few Jews left to protest the taking of the land.**

**Prof. Steven Bowman of the University of Cincinnati and an expert on the Holocaust in Greece (he edits the The Sephardi and Greek Holocaust Library published by Sephardic House) says there was no discussion of the graveyard during the postwar return of the heirless property of Greek Jewry to the survivors. He says that when the community "sold" its rights to the cemetery during the war, it was stripped of its marble and stone, which was recycled by contractors; and "the bones of ancestors were removed to Stavropolis on the other side of the city where the main Jewish graveyard exists today." But**

**Bowman says that only a few hundred families were able to move bones of their relatives to the new cemeteries granted by the city. Since it is estimated that the cemetery had more than 300,000 burials, many bones must remain buried, or scattered amongst the fragments of stones on the university campus and the environs beyond its border. Today one can see many fragments of stones from the cemetery decorating the gardens and entrances of buildings at the University.**

**For original source material on the Jewish Cemetery of Salonika during the Occupation see:**

**Steven Bowman, ed., *The Holocaust in Salonika, Eyewitness Account*, Translated with introductions and notes by Isaac Benmayor (New York: Sephardic House & Bloch Publishing Co., 2002): copies available through both The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry ([friends\\_greek\\_jewry@netzero.net](mailto:friends_greek_jewry@netzero.net)) and Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum ([kehila\\_kedosha\\_janina@netzero.net](mailto:kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net))**

**For more news and information about Jewish monuments go to [www.isjm.org](http://www.isjm.org)]**

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**Jews protest Salonika 'martyrs' decision**

**Published: 07/25/2008**

**Greek Jews are protesting Salonika's decision not to apply for status as a "martyred city."**



**Roundup of Jewish Men by Germans in Plateia Elefterios, Salonika (July 1942)**

**More than 50 places are on a Network of Martyred Cities and Villages of Greece 1940-1945. The list is being compiled to honor the victims of the Nazi era, regardless of religion, and for educational and historical purposes.**

**In a letter to the Salonika municipality, the Central Jewish Board of Greece wrote that the decision "was not only an insult to the memory of the Jews but a reminder of sad times of the occupation, which some want to forget because they were the victims and other want to forget for their own reasons."**

On July 17, the opposition party Salonika for its Citizens and Ecology tabled a bill that would include Salonika. The municipality's ruling faction, headed by Mayor George Papageorgopoulos, rejected the bill with the explanation that the murder of more than 90 percent of Salonika Jews during World War II were committed not in the city but in death camps, and that Jews have lived in the city only for 500 years.

The board's letter calls on Papageorgopoulos to reconsider his decision and have Salonika inducted in the network.

On the eve of World War II, more than 55,000 Jews lived in Salonika. The Germans entered the area in April 1941; the Jews of Salonika were deported to Poland nearly two years later.

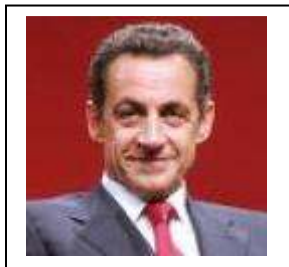
Local media criticized the decision as an abomination, an insult to the memory of the Jews and lacking in fundamental knowledge of history.

According to historians, Alexandrian Jews first arrived in Salonika in 140 B.C. During the 15th and 16th centuries many Jewish exiles from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Sicily and France, as well as refugees from North Africa, settled in Salonika. Today about 1,000 Jews live there.

<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/breaking/109609.html>

*Note from publishers of the Kehila Kedosha Janina e-newsletter: according to inside sources from the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, this insult will be remedied at the next City Council meeting and Thessaloniki will be included in the Network of Martyred Cities and Villages of Greece 1940-1945. This incident is only more evidence of how necessary mandated Holocaust education is in Greece. While there has been progress made in this regard and there are some teacher training seminars taking place, nothing has been finalized yet.*

### **Sarkozy, the President of France, a Salonikli**



Sarkozy's mother is a member of one of the oldest Jewish families of Salonika, the MALLAH (Hebrew: messenger or angel) family. The family escaped the Spanish Inquisition, settled in Provence, France and moved a century later to Salonika, where family members became prominent Zionist leaders and were active in all facets of life.

Sarkozy's great-grandfather was a jeweler in Salonika, had seven children and died in 1913. His eldest child, Sarkozy's grandfather Aron "Beniko" Mallah, was born in 1890.

The family included Uncle Moshe, a rabbi and Zionist who published and

edited, in 1898, *El Avenir*, the leading Greek paper for the Zionist movement. Cousin Asher was a Greek Senator who, in 1912, helped establish the Technion and served as the Greek Zionist Federation's first president. In the 1930s, he helped Jews immigrate to Israel, where he himself went in 1934.

A Jewish philanthropist, cousin Peppo Mallah also served in the Greek Parliament. In 1920, he was offered the post of Greek Minister of Finance, but he refused. According to the article, he was Israel's first ambassador to Greece.

A fire destroyed much of Salonika in 1917. Many Jewish properties, including those of the Mallah family, were confiscated by the government. Many Jews left Greece, and many relatives went to France, America and Israel.

When Beniko was 14, he and his mother moved to France where he studied medicine and served as a WWI French Army doctor, where he met his future wife, Adele Bouvieux or Bouvier, depending on the source. To marry her, he converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Benedict.

According to reports, Benedict remained very close to his Jewish family, and during World War II, he and his family (including daughters Susanne and Andree) hid, knowing he was still considered Jewish.

Of the Mallahs who stayed in Salonika or moved to France, 57 perished. According to the article, several revolted against the Nazis and Buena Malla underwent medical experiments in Birkenau.

His daughter Andree married Pal (later Paul) Nagy Bosca y Sarkozy, descendent of a Hungarian aristocratic family in 1950 and had three sons, including Nicolas. After a divorce, Andree raised the three children close to their grandfather. Nicolas was especially close to his grandfather and records this in his biography, according to the EJP story. Benedict died in 1972.

On a visit to Greece in July 2006, Sarkozy was honored with a plaque at the French Embassy in Athens by the Jewish Community of Salonika. It is inscribed "In memory of Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Greece from the Thessaloniki Jewish Community, the town of your ancestors, mother and city of Israel and Jerusalem of the Balkans."

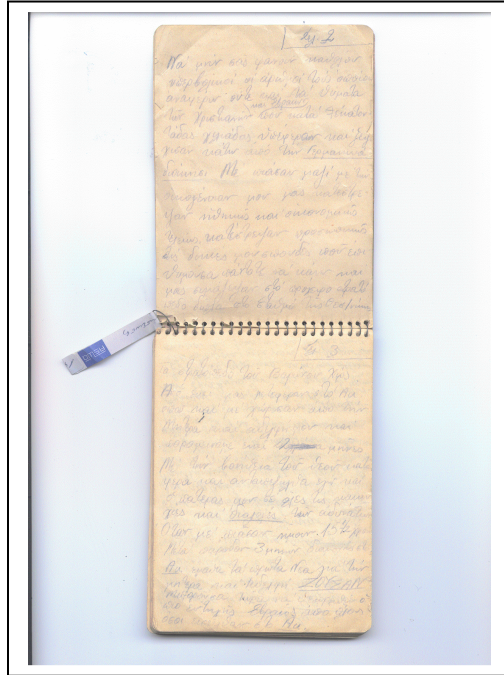
The community also gifted Sarkozy with his genealogical family tree back to his great-great-grandfather and pictures of his ancestors. Present at the event was community president David Saltiel's wife Lucy, who is also a Mallah descendent.

Sarkozy's wife Cecilia is identified in an EJP article as being of Jewish-Spanish ancestry.

Reprinted from the European Jewish Press

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Heinz Kounio, President of the Assembly of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and a personal friend of Kehila Kedosha Janina, has been named a "Person of the Year" by the Greek newspaper "Καθημερινή" (The Daily) for his continued work in searching for the names of victims of the Holocaust in

Greece. Heinz was a mere 14 years old when he was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and would be one of only 1200 survivors to return from the camps, out of over 50,000 who were deported (*see "I Lived Death," the English translation of Heinz Kounio's memoir, translated from Greek to English by Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos and available for sale through both The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry ([friends\\_greek\\_jewry@netzero.net](mailto:friends_greek_jewry@netzero.net)) and Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum ([kehila\\_kedosha\\_janina@netzero.net](mailto:kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net)).*



Actual pages from Heinz Kounio's original diary (written in the camps (1943-1945)). On display in the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki

Heinz has spent over 40 years gathering the names of the victims from Salonika and has over 40,000 names. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki is ready to publish his work. During his years of tedious and heart-breaking research, additional information on the fate of Greek Jewry has come to the attention of Mr. Kounio. He has always shared this information with other researchers. One such instance is his work with Dr. Hans Joachim Lang. Dr. Lang unearthed the names of 86 unfortunate victims of the Holocaust, all Jews, 46 of whom were from Salonika, who had been killed so that their skeletons could be used by the Medical School of Strasburg. A translation of Heinz Kounio's Greek (translated from the original German) will shortly appear on the website of Kehila Kedosha Janina ([www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)) in our archive section. For Dr. Lang's website: <http://www.die-namen-der-nummern.de> (website English translation by Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos by request of Dr. Lang). We publish these names in the hope that it will enable surviving family members to have a more accurate date on which to say *kaddish*.

### IOANNINA

Heinz Kounio was originally deported from Salonika to Auschwitz-Birkenau and, then, on the evacuation of Auschwitz in January of 1945, he, like many other Greek Jews, wound up at Mathausen and two of its subcamps (Melk and



**Ebensee). In a recent correspondence to our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Heinz revealed the following:**

*"Recently, and in the frame of my search for all the Jews of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, I received a list of Names of Jewish Hostages that were sent to the Concentration camp of Ebensee (sub camp of Mauthausen) where they died. As you know I was liberated by the American Army in May 5th of the year 1945.*

*In this list I found several inmates of this camp originating from Ioannina who were, most unhappily, unable to survive. Some of them I met them and knew.*

*I thought it is a good idea to send you a copy of the registration of the date of death and other information of all names, I found in the list of death, originating from Ioannina, who died, so lonely and unfortunately by such inhuman treatment as slave laborers, in this horrendous former concentration camp of Ebensee. Most probably you have these names registered, but to make sure please read each name of the attached copy of the official camp's registration, which I am sending you, where it states also the date of their death as registered in the sub camp of Mauthausen, i.e. Ebensee from which I was finally liberated. Conditions of living in this camp were horrible, as you know from my book."*

**The list of those 16 Yanniototes who perished at Ebensee will be on our website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org) (under Holocaust in Ioannina-link is the last link on the opening page).**

**We at Kehila Kedosha Janina are deeply indebted to Heinz Kounio for sharing this important information with us. It will enable many within our community here in the USA, and in Greece and Israel, to say *kaddish* on the actual date of the death of their loved one.**

**This year on Yom HaShoah, a special *kaddish* will be said in their memory.**



One of the few pictures we can print from Ebensee. The others are too upsetting to publish. Courtesy USHMM photo archives.

**Kehila Kedosha Janina e-newsletter: number 7: August 2008**  
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