



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

## Synagogue and Museum

### July 2018 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

June has been another busy month, with our Museum Director visiting both Washington DC and Israel, forging new connections for our Greek-Jewish community. This newsletter is dedicated to Anna Benjamin Asser and Esther Stone, both of whom left us recently, Anna in May and Esther in June. Obituaries will follow in this issue. In July we remember the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, a date that is painful for all Jews, as we mourn the destruction of both the First Temple by the Babylonians and the Second Temple by the Romans. Other calamities befell the Jewish world on or close to the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, including the expulsion of the Jews of Spain on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Av.



This newsletter, our 112<sup>th</sup> will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org).

We now reach over 9,000 households worldwide, with our community of 'friends' continually growing with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up by emailing [info@kkjsm.org](mailto:info@kkjsm.org) so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.

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### Passings

We mourn the passing of Anna Benjamin Asser on May 6<sup>th</sup> at the age of 96. Anna was born in NYC and grew up on the Lower East Side, the daughter of Max and Esther Benjamin, both born in Ioannina. She was the widow of Jessoula Asser. Anna is survived by loving family and friends.



It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Esther Stone, a member of both the Ganis and Mathios families. Esther passed on June 13th, just before her 90th birthday. Esther was the granddaughter of Lulu (Lucy) Moise and Menahem Moise. Lulu was an early immigrant from Ioannina who married her daughters into some of the most prominent early Yanniote families (Yomtov, Ganis, Barouch and Negrin). Esther (8/9/29-June 13, 2018) was the daughter of Leah Ganis and David Mathios, the granddaughter of Julia Moise and Jacob Ganis, the great-granddaughter of Lula Levy and Menahem Moise and the great Great-granddaughter of Mazalto Battino and Moses Levy (parents of Lula Levy). She will be missed by many.



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### **Simchas**

We joyously celebrate the 97<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dora Cohen, a survivor of the Holocaust.





We celebrate the 95<sup>th</sup> birthday of Esta Varon. Esta's mother, Sophie Dalian Hazan, was the daughter of Esther Colchamiro Dalian (Dalven) and Israel Dalian, making Esta the great-granddaughter of Jessoula and Rachel Colchamiro of Ioannina. Esta's son, Joseph Varon, pictured below, is a loving son and proud Greek-Jew.



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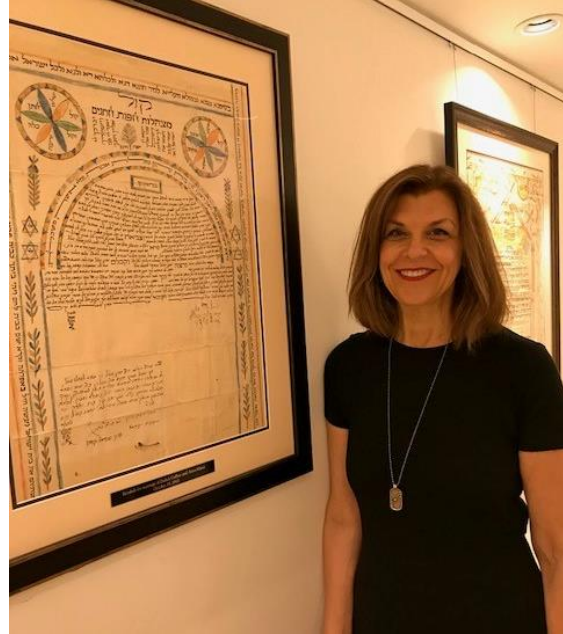
We are so proud of Ethan Marcus, the youngest son of our President Marvin Marcus, who just graduated from Princeton University.



## ΔΙΚΟΙ ΜΑΣ – Dikoi Mas – Los Muestros

Our synagogue is more than just a place of worship, and a place of study and learning, with our museum and extensive library. It is also a place to preserve traditions and customs and a living memorial to those Greek-Jews who perished in the Holocaust. In addition, it is a place to welcome "Our Own." Each month, Greek Jews, both Romaniote and Sephardic, come to visit the center of Greek Jewry in the United States, often the place their own ancestors worshipped.

Ivy Sher (daughter of Miriam Askinazi and Benjamin Levine, stands by the ketubah of Zadick Coffino and Anna Mazza, her great grandparents. The ketubah is, now, a cherished artifact of Kehila Kedosha Janina.

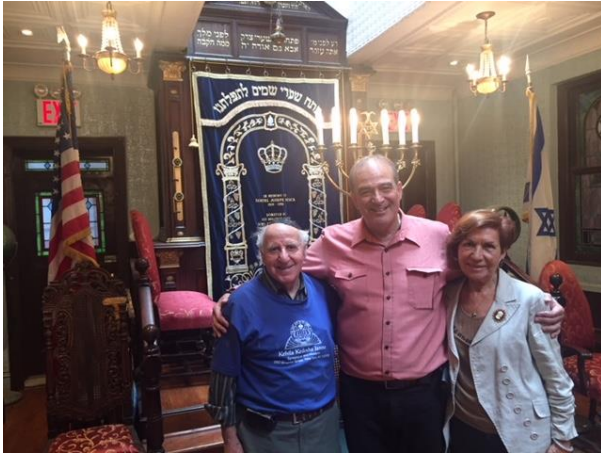


Ivy was joined by others from our extended Greek-Jewish world at a reunion of the 2017 Tour to Jewish Greece, Cyprus and Israel. We were overjoyed to welcome Esther and Stan Morhaim (Esther with family from Rhodes and Stan with family from Kastoria) Liz and Eric Alderman (Liz with family from Ioannina), Mark and Hope Eliasof (Mark with family from Ioannina), Aaron Hasson (with family from Salonika and Veroia), and Ivy Sher, also a Yanniot.



## Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

This past June visitors continued to flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina. Many are Greek-Orthodox Christians who want to learn more about us.



John Xanthopoulos with Sol and Stella



Alexandros Papachristos



Adem Mutluer from Austria & his friend, Shoreh



## Special Visit by the Board of Trustees of Cornell Hillel

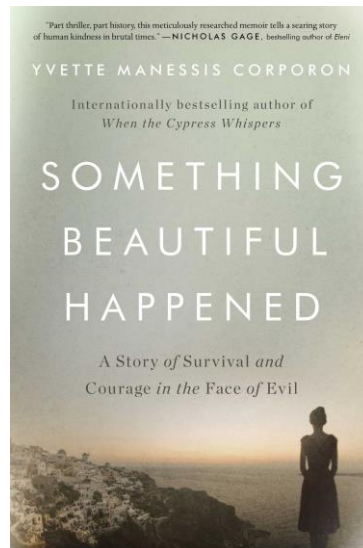
In April, we welcomed the Board of Trustees of Cornell Hillel to KKJ to learn about Romaniote Jewish history and to share a traditional Greek meal. The Co-chair of the Board, Eric Alderman, is the husband of Liz Meller Alderman, granddaughter of Samuel Ovadia Solomon and great-granddaughter of Solomon and Chanusha Ovadia of Ioannina.



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## Past Events of Interest at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On June 3<sup>rd</sup> we were honored with the presence of Yvette Manassis Corporon who presented her latest book, "Something Beautiful Happened," along with showing us the trailer of her documentary film (with the same name).



## **New Exhibit in Development**

Our Associate Museum Curator Isaac Choua and Rabbi Nissim Elnecape have been hard at work developing a new museum exhibit that will feature rare siddurim from our community as well as a collection of Shaddayot.



As our Museum Director heads for Greece (from June 26-July 29), our Museum will still be open but there will be no planned programming until autumn. As we plan our annual schedule, do let us know if there are any programs that you would like to see.

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## **Past Events of Interest in the New York City Area**

Our congratulations to the recipients of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America's Scholarship Awards.





**Events of Interest in the Greek Jewish World**

**July 23<sup>rd</sup> in Seattle**

**THE RHODES/COS MEMORIAL COMMITTEE PRESENTS**

## **DIPLOMATIC RESCUERS: RHODES AND BEYOND**

**“The Rescuers,” a film excerpt by director Michael King**

### **Panel Presentations**

**Dee Simon, Baral Family Executive Director  
Holocaust Center for Humanity**

**“Diplomatic Rescuers during the Holocaust”**

**Dr. Roberto Dondisch-Glowinski, Consul General of Mexico  
“Challenges and Opportunities Facing Diplomats Today”**

**A kosher reception will follow the program.**

**MONDAY, JULY 23 | 7:00–9:00 PM**

**CONGREGATION EZRA BESSAROTH  
5217 S BRANDON ST • SEATTLE, WA 98118**

**RSVP: 206.582.300 OR  
[HTTPS://2018RHODESCOSMEMORIALEVENTBRITE.COM](https://2018RHODESCOSMEMORIALEVENTBRITE.COM)**

**This annual program is generously supported by: CONGREGATION EZRA BESSAROTH | LELA AND HARLEY FRANCO | HOLOCAUST CENTER FOR HUMANITY | KLINE GALLAND | SEPHARDIC STUDIES PROGRAM – UW | SEATTLE SEPHARDIC NETWORK | SEPHARDIC BIKUR HOLIM**

## Ladino

### **Losing Ladino: A lone academic bids to salvage the legacy of an historic Sephardi language**

Full article from the Times of Israel [here](#)

While Yiddish has more than 3 million speakers worldwide, fewer than 150,000 people still speak Ladino. A new grassroots organization is gathering Ladino source materials -- before they are lost forever.

Isaac Azose knew he had a treasure in his hands — a nearly century-old booklet for Ladino-speaking Jews immigrating to the United States that featured English, Ladino and Yiddish expressions to help them acculturate into their new communities.

"I thought to myself, I've got a real find here," said Azose, the cantor at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle, Washington, whose family came from Turkey. So he became one of many people in Seattle to share a Ladino artifact with Devin Naar, an assistant professor in Jewish studies at the University of Washington who is trying to uncover, collect, preserve and digitize the rich heritage of Sephardi Jews.



While small collections of Ladino books and documents can be found at the Library of Congress, the American Sephardi Federation and Yeshiva University, Naar says his project, the Seattle Sephardic Treasures, is the first community-based initiative to gather Ladino source materials in one place.

"More than 10,000 Yiddish books are readily accessible and digitized through the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass., but no equivalent exists for Ladino and virtually no original Ladino books can be accessed online," said Naar, whose effort is part of the larger Sephardic Studies Initiative of the University of Washington's Stroum Jewish Studies Program.

Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish, was the language of Sephardi Jews whose ancestors were expelled from Spain in 1492 and then settled throughout the Mediterranean basin of the Ottoman Empire. Its Ashkenazi counterpart, Yiddish, continues to survive through Yiddish-speaking haredi Orthodox communities and some secular advocates of the language. Ladino, however, has faced a steep decline in the past century. While Yiddish has more than 3 million speakers worldwide, UNESCO estimates that fewer than 150,000 people still speak Ladino.

Gloria Ascher, co-director of Judaic Studies at Tufts University, offers several reasons for the language's precipitous dropoff: 90 percent of Ladino speakers, particularly in places such as Bulgaria and Greece, were murdered during the Holocaust; with the rise of Zionism, Hebrew is emphasized as the central Jewish language; and Ladino-speaking immigrant parents encourage their children to speak the native language of their new countries, such as English.

After New York and Los Angeles, Seattle has the third largest Sephardi community in the United States. According to a 2000 study by the Jewish Federation of Seattle, there are 2,700 Sephardi households in the community's total 22,490 Jewish households.

Naar started collecting materials at Ezra Bessaroth, a Sephardi synagogue, at the annual Purim bazaar in March. He already has gathered dozens of documents, including a rare Ladino textbook published in Salonika, Greece, in 1929. He even found a set of letters from the 1930s written by a 9-year old girl from the Island of Rhodes to her family members in Seattle. "She was able to correspond her way and her family's way off the island of Rhodes to evade Nazi persecution and to find safety in the US," Naar said. "The entire story is preserved in the set of letters. It's really an amazing story."

The value of the objects should not be underestimated, says Noam Pianko, chair of the Stroum Jewish Studies Program. "It's the stories and the past of the Sephardic Jewish community of Seattle, so it has tremendous communal value," he said. "These documents are important on a scholarly level as well. They tell an untold and yet incredibly important story of the Sephardic Jewish experience in America."

Many of the documents, he says, have been buried in basements or closets and breathe an authenticity that can never be captured in academic works.

"I want to make the materials available in their original form so you can see the handwriting, the coffee stains and the lived lives of the owners," Naar said.

Lynne Winters, former director of the American Sephardi Federation, says it is remarkable that Naar has gained so many original documents.

"When you can touch something that someone's hands touched however many years ago, whether it is 20, 25 or 100 years ago, there's something unique about that than just seeing it in a book," she said. "You are touching history and making a physical connection with someone who's passed." Naar hopes to use his effort as a pilot program to be replicated with Sephardi communities elsewhere in the United States.

"Ladino source materials, although in smaller amounts to begin with, are not easily accessible and there's been no project until now to make Ladino materials widely accessible over the Internet," he said.

Unlike Yiddish documents, which have been catalogued through the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and other archives, Ladino documents have no such home.

"I have a few Ladino books and they are in pretty rough condition, and there are not going to be anymore coming out," said Randall Belinfante, librarian and archivist at the National Sephardic Library. "People are writing about Ladino culture, but they are not writing Ladino materials."

Lyudmila Sholokhova, the head librarian at the YIVO Institute, says there is no clear estimate of how many Ladino books still exist. However, there are an estimated 600 Ladino works at Yeshiva University, 200 more at YIVO, 200 at the Library of Congress and about 170 at the National Sephardic Library.

"Digitization will bring huge possibilities for people to get access to their heritage and also huge possibilities for libraries around the world to collaborate because at the moment, we don't have a clear idea of what other libraries have," Sholokhova said.

There is a level of interest in preserving the language. Ladino Komunita, an online Ladino forum started by Rachel Bortnick in 1999, tries to unite the Ladino-speaking community. The forum now has 1,400 people from more than 42 countries.

"The language was the rope that tied our culture together," Sholokhova said. "Without the language and without the communities that spoke the language, all we can do is to pick up the pieces and rescue them from oblivion — the food, the sayings, the customs related to our Jewishness in the Sephardic form."

Azose is hoping that Naar's effort will have an impact not just on scholars but on today's descendants of Ladino speakers.

"I think the younger generation will take more of an interest than the current generation," he said. "They will want to know more about their history and where they came from, and their parents may not be able to tell them."





## **News from Jewish Greece**

### **Larissa**

Plans have been initiated to create a Jewish Museum in Larissa within an historical building in the city on the corner Palastini Street and Farmakidou. The building was owned by the Mousson family and dates back to the interwar period.



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### **Trikala**

Greek-Jewish Israeli Architect, Elias Messinas, has started on the restoration of the synagogue in Trikala. Moneys have been raised by interested parties throughout the world, including Kehila Kedosha Janina and The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry.



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### **Hania**

The Chania Synagogue organized on Sunday, June 17, 2018 at 19:30 a memorial ceremony for victims of the Tanais ship. The memorial service was held at Memorial of the Victims Tanais, Miaoulis Coast (Koum Kapi). At the start of the event there was a memorial service by the Rabbi of Athens, Gabriel Negrin. The memorial service was followed by a representative of the Holy Metropolis of Kydonia and Apokoronas and a representative of the Catholic Church of Chania. Then, Victor I. Eliezer, a representative of the Central Jewish Council of Greece addressed the audience. The keynote speech was made by the author Rita Kamhi. The ceremony concluded with a memorial service at Etz Hayyim Synagogue.



Southern coast of Crete in June 1943

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## **News of Interest from Around the World**

### **Serbia**

#### **Serbia: Magnificent Subotica synagogue officially reopened** Full article [here](#)

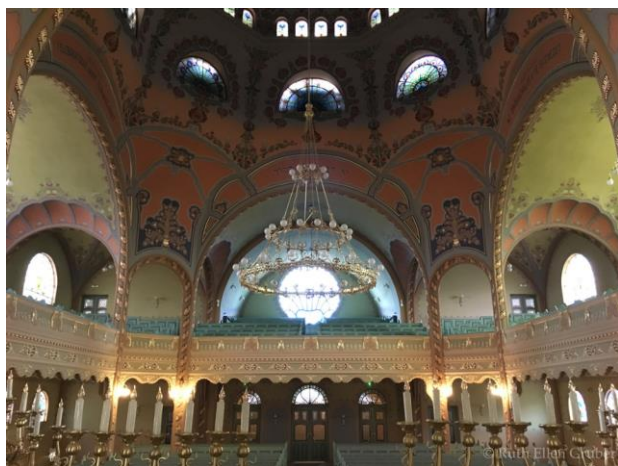
After decades of fitful starts and setbacks, the magnificent art nouveau synagogue in Subotica, Serbia has been officially reopened with a high-profile ceremony attended by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. (A second dedication ceremony organized by the Jewish community is planned for April, when Torah scrolls will be reinstalled in the Ark.)

Some 900 invited guests attended the event on Sunday (March 26). They included representatives of Jewish communities in Serbia and Hungary, as well as diplomats, representatives of the church, and other



VIPs. Orban and Vučić both said the restored synagogue symbolized cooperation among Serbs, Hungarians, and Jews.

Hungary allocated significant funding to the restoration, particularly for the restoration of the interior, which was completed in December. In his speech Orban noted that in 2014, the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, the Hungarian government had launched “a synagogue renovation program, with a budget of around 10 billion forints (€32 million).” Within this program, he said, “many buildings – from Budapest to Vynohradiv/ Nagyszőlős, and from Berehove/ Beregszász to Subotica/ Szabadka – have been renovated and saved from destruction.” Robert Sabados, president of the Jewish community of Subotica and the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia, told JHE that the rededication represented “the end of 40 years of suffering for this wonderful building.”



Owned by the municipality, the synagogue will be managed as a tourist attraction and concert venue — but it will also be used by the small local Jewish community, when they wish, for services and on other occasions. According to Sabadoš, the Jewish community will be able to veto concerts or other events deemed inappropriate. There are also plans to install a permanent Jewish exhibition. Known in Hungarian as Szabadka, Subotica was part of Austro-Hungary at the time the synagogue, dedicated in 1902, was built, and it was designed by the Budapest-based architects Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor, who also designed the town hall and the buildings of the park in Palić, outside of town.

The long saga of the synagogue’s restoration began in the mid-1970s. Viktorija Aladžić has prepared a report, available online, detailing the decades of successes and setbacks. (Rudi Klein, author of an award-winning book on the synagogue, has also detailed this.)

In 2001 JHE Coordinator Ruth Ellen Gruber served on a foundation, SOS Synagogue that had, with little success, attempted to promote the restoration of the building.

You can already see an online exhibit [here](#) about the synagogue put together by the World Monuments Fund.



## Turkey

### Turkey's Jewish community hosts interfaith Iftar dinner for Muslim neighbors in Edirne

Full article [here](#)

Members of the Jewish Community of Turkey and the Chief Rabbi Foundation held an iftar (Muslim fast-breaking) dinner in the northwestern province of Edirne on Monday.

Around 1,100 people attended the dinner, which was held near Edirne's landmark Selimiye Mosque. Speaking at the dinner, Edirne Governor Günay Özdemir called the dinner a good example of how people from different faiths can live together in peace.

Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, the president of the Jewish Community of Turkey, said this is the fourth such interfaith iftar dinner. Ibrahimzadeh said he was happy to see that every year the people of Edirne show more interest in the special dinner.



Turkey, home to many members of faiths other than Islam, is enlivened with street iftars every Ramadan, the sacred Muslim month where every Muslim is obliged to abstain from eating and drinking from anything from dawn to sunset. On tables set up all along the streets, locals in most neighborhoods break their fast with water, dates or pide, a local flat bread consumed the most in Ramadan. Regardless of their religion, dinners funded by local municipalities, are open to anyone.

Churches also occasionally organize iftar dinners for Muslim neighbors. Panayia Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul's Beşiktaş district made the headlines in 2016 when it hosted an iftar dinner in the church's courtyard.

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## Albania

### Jews in Albania

I owe my life to King Zog in particular and to Albania in general.

As a young 15 year old girl in Vienna I was subjected to the horrible treatment that was leashed out against the Austrian Jewish population after Austria became part of Germany in March 1938. I was thrown out of the High School I had attended and had to join a catchment school for Jewish youngsters and like all other Austrian Jews I was subjected to extreme measures of anti-Semitic persecution. As a result I was catapulted into adulthood and managed in July 1938 to get tourist visas for three months from the Vienna Yugoslav Consulate for my parents and myself.

We stayed in Zagreb with my mother's sister but once our three months were up the Yugoslav Authorities told us that we had to leave. Unless we could go to another country they would put us back to the German border and we knew that this would mean next stop concentration camp. My parents were suicidal but I was still young and wanted to live. Thus I went to all the different Western Consulates in Zagreb trying to get visas for us. Though these various countries claim with hindsight that they cared for us persecuted Jews but none of them was prepared to offer us visas in October 1938 when they saw our passports with the big red "J" that

indicated we were Jewish. I was almost giving up too. No country was prepared to offer us asylum until my uncle told me to try the Albanian Consulate.

I knew precious little about Albania and was not aware that King Zog had instructed Albanian Embassies and Consulates to offer visas to Jewish Refugees disregarding the red "J" on their passports and even to offer Albanian passports to persecuted Jews who had no passport. I was thus presently surprised when in stark contrast to the rather rude reception I had experienced when I called at the Western Countries Consulates I was welcomed by a kind official when I got to the Albanian Consulate. He introduced me to the Consul who made me feel welcome and immediately issued the visas I required.

I was overwhelmed by the friendly reception I was given which cheered me up a lot after all the rejections I had suffered. I was wondering what life would be like in Albania and was pleasantly surprised when the ship on which we had travelled from Split (now Spalato) docked at Durazzo (now Durres) and a couple of Viennese Jewish Refugees welcomed us to the country. They immediately reassured us that we had nothing to worry about as King Zog. The Albanians in general all pursued very friendly interfaith relations. We soon moved into the house the group of Jewish Refugees had rented next to the local police station. They received financial support from the JOINT an American-based international Jewish aid agency.

The warm welcome we received in Albania was a wonderful relief after having experienced the extreme persecution to which we had been submitted under Nazi rule. Though the majority of Albanians had under the Ottoman Empire converted to Islam there were also two minorities of Christians and Greek-Orthodox. Yet they all did and still do share friendly interfaith relations. Since this was a very unusual feature I set about to enquire the reason of its existence.

I quickly learned that the country's population regards itself foremost as being Albanians and pursuance of different religions is allocated secondary importance. This makes them continue BESA, their traditional Code of Behavior disregarding the different religions they now pursue. BESA obliges families to offer hospitality and help if needed to any stranger who may turn up in their homes. This seems to have motivated also King Zog, though he was also a Muslim to provide a very friendly heaven for individuals and groups of people who needed help and accounts for him to have offered asylum to Jewish refugees.

I spent almost five months in Albania during which I learned a lot about the country and its friendly population. As I walked about exploring my new environment I was dressed like an Austrian girl, Thus I differed greatly from the veiled appearance of local young girls. This attracted a group of young Albanian men most of whom had been educated in Italy. They were keen for me to tell them about what life used to be like in Vienna I thus explored Durazzo like the "Pied Piper" followed by a growing group of local young men. One of them, a Mr. Dovana soon invited me to teach his two younger sisters German, French and Mathematics, which I gladly accepted. I liked teaching these two young Dovana girls five days per week.

The older women of the family though we had no language in common made me feel really welcome and proudly showed me some of their antiques which I much enjoyed. I learned that they followed the Greek Orthodox faith. They were just as concerned about my future life as were the policemen, our neighbors, most of whom were Muslims.



King Zog of Albania



Oct. 1949. Jews in Albania on Liberation

When Italy occupied Albania on Good Friday in April 1939 they were worried we Jewish Refugees would be killed in the fighting and made sure we would shelter. I found this very moving. When I left Albania for England in April 1939 because the World War II was on the horizon having finally received a visa as an unskilled laborer I felt sorry to leave my many Albanian friends. The Dovana family posted me a Certificate about the teaching I had done expressing their regret that I had to leave and sending me their best wishes. I still treasure this Certificate after all these years and am happy to have recently established relations with the grandniece of the two Dovana girls I taught before the last war.

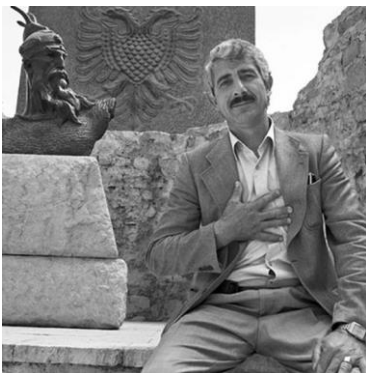
Paying the Debt I owe Albania:

Wanting to pay the debt I owe Albania for having saved the lives of my parents and myself I decided to volunteer my Developmental Expertise first of all to get the British public at last to recognize that Albanians had risked their own lives just to save thousands of Jewish lives before and during the last war. I managed to get the British Interfaith Forum to present to the London Albanian Ambassador the Golden Interfaith Medallion in recognition of the Albanians' courageous behavior. I wish the rest of the world would accept Albania's BESA Code of Honor as their model and thereby make life safer and better for future generations.

Dr. T. Scarlett Epstein OBE Director: PEGS (Practical Education & Gender Support) 5, Viceroy Lodge, 143 Kingsway, HOVE BN3 4RA UK

Editor's Note:

A number of Albanians have been honored as Righteous Among Nations by Yad Vashem.



Ali Sheqer Pashkaj



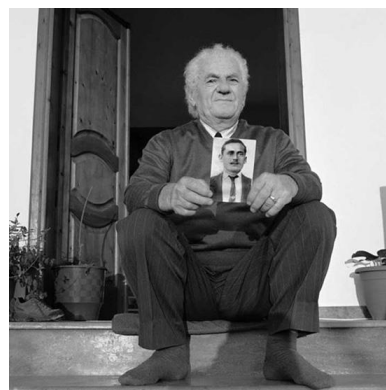
Besim and Aishe Kadiu



Destan and Lime Balla



Brothers Hamid and  
Xhemal Veseli



Nuro Hoxha



## Italy

### New Holocaust Museum in Ferrara Full Washington Post article [here](#)

In a prison that once housed Jews, a new museum is devoted to Italy's Jewish experience.

About 1,952 years ago, Rome sacked Jerusalem. Its soldiers carried off the treasures of the temple and thousands of Jews. The money and slave labor were then used to build a gigantic amphitheater you've probably heard of. It's called the Colosseum.

So there's no denying that Jews have been in Italy for a very, very long time. It's the most ancient community of Jews in the Western world, one that has withstood centuries of sorrow and terrors while producing some of the nation's most important thinkers and writers.

And it's a topic that's the center of attention at the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah. (In Italian, that's Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah, or MEIS for short.)

To explain the mission of MEIS, director Simonetta Della Seta poses a question: How is this museum different from all other Jewish museums?

For starters, don't call it a Jewish museum. Instead, it's "a national museum dedicated to Jews," Della Seta says. MEIS exists because of a 2003 Italian law calling for the creation of an institutional space to teach about the Holocaust, and its mandate was soon expanded to cover all aspects of Italian Jewish life. Della Seta, an academic, journalist and diplomat who comes from a family of Holocaust survivors, is just as adamant that MEIS is not a memorial museum. "If you're going to speak about Jews as dead people, it's not me," she says. "Items under glass is not me."

So it's fortunate, she says, that MEIS is not organized around any sort of collection. That means MEIS can start with a narrative thread, then solicit loans to help tell those stories. "Italy is crowded with documents and objects," she says. "For the first time, we're asking, 'What do we have?'"

MEIS is not even remotely close to being finished. Architectural plans call for five additional adjoining glass buildings — representing the five books of the Torah — that will eventually hold an auditorium, restaurant, archive, educational spaces and a youth wing. None of them has been built yet.



Garden of Questions

That didn't stop the museum from opening late last year in Ferrara, Italy, a gorgeously green city about 70 miles south of Venice. The UNESCO World Heritage site — renowned for its medieval and Renaissance architecture — has also been a vital center of Jewish life in Italy for 1,000 years or so, most notably during the reign of the House of Este, whose leaders encouraged Jews to settle there in the aftermath of the Spanish Inquisition. (Della Seta recounts the story of Gracia Mendes Nasi, a wealthy entrepreneur who pretended to be a Catholic while living in Lisbon, Antwerp and Venice. It wasn't until she moved to Ferrara in 1549 that she was able to practice Judaism openly.)

As in the rest of Italy, Ferrara eventually became less welcoming and forced its Jewish residents into a ghetto. Later, during the Nazi occupation, Jews were kept at the city's prison before being delivered to concentration camps.

That same prison, which was put out of commission in the 1990s, is where you'll now find MEIS. Its debut exhibit, "Jews, an Italian Story. The First Thousand Years," is on display in what was the men's quarters. The crumbling building that housed female prisoners has been razed to make space for the museum's future expansion. And certainly, MEIS will develop into a place for Italians to account for their role in the Holocaust. "We have to face that many Italians helped the Nazis," says Della Seta, noting that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the country's anti-Jewish laws of 1938.



A walk through the first exhibit offers a window into the MEIS approach. Because Jews came from the desert, visitors do, too — with the help of windy sound effects and towering video screens. Then it's on to an explanation of these origins using three elements emphasized throughout the museum: maps, timelines and experts. To hear from leading academic authorities on each topic, simply walk up to a screen and stand under a speaker to hear them offer about a minute of insight.

Rooms aren't crowded with objects. Rather, each one commands space to tell its own story, such as the 1470 print of a book by historian Flavius Josephus, whose writings during the 1st century offer much of what we know about Jewish life from the time. The marble statue of Emperor Titus was buried in Herculaneum in A.D. 79, just nine years after he was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem. Both Romans and Jews thought that the volcanic eruption was a punishment, Della Seta says.

In the next room is the epitaph of a 25-year-old Jewish woman, Claudia Aster, that reveals she was born in Jerusalem and brought to Italy as a slave. On loan from the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, it's a prime example of the kind of artifact that Della Seta expects will find more appreciation in this setting. "Here, there's context," she says, with a video evoking the burning of the temple on one side and a reproduction of Rome's Arch of Titus (which depicts the looting of the temple) on the other.

Even before the arrival of these slaves, there was a growing Jewish community throughout southern Italy. One sign of this presence is the existence of Jewish catacombs dotted with meaningful symbols, such as menorahs. These underground cemeteries are challenging to visit, both logistically and physically, but MEIS offers easy access to several of them, thanks to detailed re-creations. (Look for the graffiti on the walls.)

The exhibit also highlights Jewish artifacts found in various regions of the country, and surveys the contributions of early Italian Jews who made their mark via writing, science, music and many other pursuits.

Although it only takes visitors up to the Middle Ages, the themes feel surprisingly modern. "This is a time of migration," says Della Seta, who insists that people today have much to learn from centuries of Jewish experience and resilience. And this knowledge, she adds, can serve as a tool to combat a recent swell of anti-Semitic sentiment.

The most visible effect of the arrival of MEIS so far has been on Ferrara, which is once again embracing its role as a hub of Italian Jewish culture. On June 10, the museum will host the city's annual Jewish book festival, featuring a full day of author presentations.

At the tourist information office, visitors can grab a new city guide (\$4) featuring a detailed walking itinerary for those interested in Jewish Ferrara. It directs them through the former ghetto; its gates were just off the grand Piazza Trento Trieste. The synagogue (which remains closed for restoration following a damaging earthquake in 2012) is on Via Mazzini, one of the city's main drags. Just beyond that are several quiet cobblestone streets with other significant sites, including the "Scola Spagnolo" (where Sephardic Jews once gathered) and the house of renowned physician and philosopher Isacco Lampronti.

Other than MEIS, there's only one other site on the tour that's open to visitors: the Jewish Cemetery, which dates to at least 1626 and is still in use today. While rambling through the grass of the enormous property — which extends back to the bike path along the city walls — it's hard not to wonder what the people under those tombstones would think about the new museum. But Della Seta speaks for them: "This is needed in Italy."

## Israel

### American Jewish Committee in Israel

For the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, the AJC (American Jewish Committee) had their Global Forum in Jerusalem. Normally, it takes place in Washington, DC. Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, was there as a member of the Westchester/Fairfield AJC involved in diplomatic outreach on the Cyprus Team. Attendees came from all over the world and included a delegation from Greece, headed by Benjamin Albala and a delegation from HALC (Hellenic American Leadership Council).

In early June 2018 a delegation from the Department of the American Jewish Committee young leaders (AJC "ACCESS") together with young leaders of the Greek-American community US HALC- Hellenic-American Leadership Council, under their joint tour in Cyprus and Israel, they visited Athens and met with representatives of Greek Jewry and political actors. The tour of the delegation concluded with their visit to Israel, where they participated in the Annual Meeting of the AJC, which this year was held for the first time in Jerusalem.

In their contacts with politicians, they met with the Minister for Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information Mr. Pappas Nikos, Deputy Foreign Minister, Terence Quick, president of Southwest, Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the Head of Sector Defense of Democracy MP Mr. Claus Kikilia.

The delegation also visited the Athens' Synagogue, where they were welcomed by the members of the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece, General Secretary Victor Eliezer, Rabbi Gabriel Athens Negrin, the president of the Jewish Community of Athens Minos Moises, and members of the Jewish Youth.



Hellenic American Leadership Council



AJC Access in Greece

From KISE (Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece)

This year, for the first time since its founding 110 years ago, the international annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Global Forum, was not in the US but in Jerusalem, while celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of the State of Israel from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 2018, 2,400 participants from 57 countries, including 400 students, international personalities, representatives of Jewish communities from the US and from around the world attended a variety of activities and programs. On behalf of KISE, Benjamin Albala, Vice President, attended upon invitation.



The president of the New Republic Kyriakos Mitsotakis was among the official speakers of the Forum, as AJC, on the 70th anniversary of Israel, chose to remind and celebrate the vital contribution of his father, Constantine Mitsotakis, in Greece - Israel relations, when he was prime minister in 1990.

In his speech, Kyriakos Mitsotakis mentioned the work of his father and, also, relations between the two countries and the two peoples, and concluded with the words of Constantine Mitsotakis: "Our two peoples have the privilege and responsibility to be the heirs of two of the oldest civilizations of the world. While powerful empires and populous nations in our area collapsed and disappeared from history, our two peoples have been able to survive because their existence is based on common principles and ideals: the elevation of man as absolute value, the establishment and defense of democracy and the constant struggle for freedom."

"On behalf of my family, thank you for this great honor."

Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his entourage, during the 12-hour visit to Israel, had a private meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He also had a private meeting with the president of the AJC John Shapiro, chief executive David Harris, the executive board of the AJC and the First Vice President of KISE B. Albala. Among the international personalities who spoke at this year's Global Forum was the Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borisov, the deputy of the Parliament of Georgia Tamar Tsoukosvili, Israeli ministers, the former Foreign Minister Israel Tzipi Livni, and other representatives of international organizations, and taped messages were addressed by the Presidents of Argentina and Colombia.

AJC delegation met with the President of Israel Reouven Rivlin, a special ceremony held in the presidential residence before the start of the Forum's work.

The work of the Forum examined key issues such as the Iranian nuclear threat, Press coverage of Israel's policy, the relations between Israel and the Diaspora, anti-Semitism and the new expression through the invocation of anti-Zionism, the prospects for peace Middle East etc.

The focus has been to highlight the virtues of Israeli society, with the help of state and local government, through concrete achievements and presentations by social groups with strong direction to show the benefits of all Israeli citizens (Jews, Muslims, Christians and others) in the fields of health, education, culture and efforts to overcome social inequalities wherever possible.

The following photos were taken by our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos, while at the AJC events in Israel.



Cypriot Ambassador to Israel



Deputy Ambassador from Greece to Israel



David Harris, AJC CEO

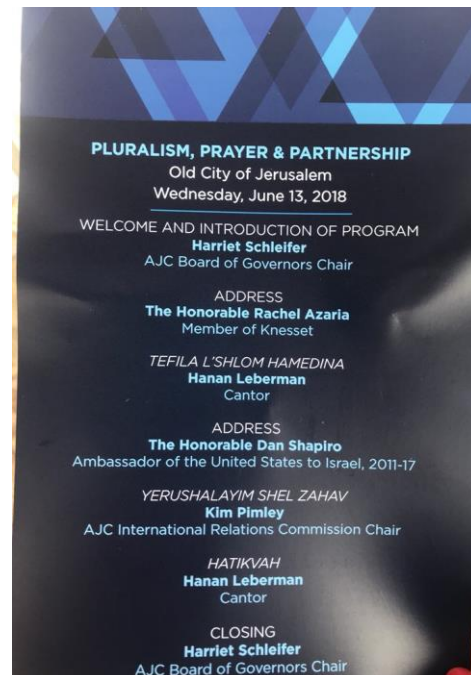


Miss Israel and Miss Iraq



Kyriakos Mitsotakis

While in Israel, AJC visited the  
Greek Orthodox Patriarchy





Hands across the sea. A few months ago, Kehila Kedosha Janina was visited by a special group from Israel, advisors to the Knesset, as part of a program to educate the Knesset about Jews in the United States, especially non-Ashkenazi Jews in New York City. We were top on their list to visit. One of the advisors, Dror Yehoshua, collects Sidurim and was fascinated with our Sidur from Greece. He asked how he could acquire one. Rabbi Gabriel Negrin arranged for the acquisition and, our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, brought the siddur to Israel.



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### A Moving Story from Israel

#### **Dr. Mengele's Victim: Why One Auschwitz Survivor Avoided Doctors for 65 Years** Full article [here](#)

Sixty-five years ago, infamous Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele removed Yitzhak Ganon's kidney without anesthesia. The Greek-born Jew swore never to see a doctor again -- until a heart attack last month brought his horrific tale into the open.

He is a thin man. His wine-red cardigan is a little too big, and his legs are like matchsticks in his brown pants. Yitzhak Ganon takes care of himself. He's freshly shaven, his white mustache neatly trimmed. The 85-year-old sits on a gray sofa, with a cushion supporting his back. He is too weak to stand by himself, but he still greets a guest in German: "Guten Tag."

Speaking is hard for him. "Slowly, Abba," his daughter Iris says, and brings him a glass of water. Her father has never in his life complained of any pain, she says. A month ago he came back from his morning walk and lay down. "Are you sick, Papa?" Iris asked. "No, just a little tired," Yitzhak Ganon answered, before going to sleep. But after a few hours he was still tired. "I don't need a doctor," he told his daughter. The next morning things were even worse. Ganon's wife and daughter called a doctor, who diagnosed a viral infection and told him to go to the hospital. Ganon resisted, but finally realized his life was in danger. At some point he stopped fighting the doctor's orders.





## 'Just One Kidney'

His family brought him to the hospital in his home town of Petach Tikva near Tel Aviv. He had hardly been admitted when he lost consciousness. Heart attack, the doctor said. The blood clots were cleared with the help of tiny balloons, and the doctors put five stents in him. "We thought he wouldn't survive the operation," said Eli Lev, the doctor. "Especially since he had just one kidney."

When Yitzhak Ganon came to, he told the doctors where he lost the other kidney -- and why he had avoided doctors for 65 years. A reporter from the Israeli paper Maariv heard about the story. And now, weeks after the operation, Ganon is ready to tell his story to a German reporter for the first time.

He stretches his back and looks at a photo on the living room wall. It shows the Acropolis in Athens. "I come from Arta, a small city in northern Greece. It happened on Saturday, March 25, 1944. We had just lit the candles to celebrate the Sabbath when an SS officer and a Greek policeman burst into the house. They told us we should get ourselves ready for a big trip."

The 85-year-old slides the sleeve of his shirt up and uncovers his left forearm. The number 182558 is tattooed there in dark-blue ink.

## Tied Down

The transport to Auschwitz took two weeks. His sick father died on the journey. Upon arrival, they had to strip and submit to an inspection. Ganon's mother and five siblings were then sent to the gas chambers. Yitzhak Ganon was taken to the Auschwitz-Birkenau hospital, where Josef Mengele, the so-called "Angel of Death," conducted grisly experiments on Jewish prisoners.

Ganon had to lie down on a table and was tied down. Without any anesthetics, Mengele cut him open and removed his kidney. "I saw the kidney pulsing in his hand and cried like a crazy man," Ganon says. "I screamed the 'Shema Yisrael.' I begged for death, to stop the suffering."

After the "operation," he had to work in the Auschwitz sewing room without painkillers. Among other things, he had to clean bloody medical instruments. Once, he had to spend the whole night in a bath of ice-cold water because Mengele wanted to "test" his lung function. Altogether, Ganon spent six and a half months in the concentration camp's hospital.

## 'Just Fatigue'

When they had no more use for him, the Nazis sent him to the gas chamber. He survived only by chance: The gas chamber held only 200 people. Ganon was number 201.

On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet troops. Yitzhak Ganon made it back to Greece and found his surviving siblings -- a brother and a sister -- and immigrated to Israel in 1949. He got married. And he swore never to go to a doctor again. "Whenever he was sick, even when it was really bad," his wife Ahuva says, "he told me it was just fatigue."

But now Ganon is happy he finally went to the hospital after his heart attack. One week later, he had another heart attack, and was given a pacemaker. "If the doctors hadn't been there," he says, smiling for the first time, "I would be dead now." Yitzhak Ganon has survived, again.

**Gershon Harris**  
**Hatzor Haglilit, Israel**



This year, the fast days of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz and the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av will fall on July 1<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> respectively, and both this year are “postponed”, meaning that the actual Hebrew dates fall on Sabbaths, so the actual fasting, and in the case of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av –“Tisha B’Av”- the customs of mourning and sorrow, are postponed till Sunday.

The 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz was the day the Romans managed to place Jerusalem under siege, leading to the total destruction of the Second Temple 3 weeks later, on Tisha B’Av. And if fact, the interim 3 weeks are also considered days of semi-mourning. We therefore observe these two fast days to commemorate these traumatic and terrible events in Jewish history, not to mention the fact that as long as the Temple has not been rebuilt and until Israel sees true peace and security in its land, our spiritual exile still exists. Therefore, Jewish tradition and law demand that we continue our fasting and mourning until we merit the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and experience the Messianic age and final redemption, which is the Jew’s ultimate dream.

But since the rebirth of the State of Israel, many have begun to question the relevance of Tisha B’Av altogether. And while more common among non-Orthodox streams, not a few more modern Orthodox leaders have also sometimes voiced similar opinions. The basic premise is that as long as we suffered physical exile and persecution with no accessible homeland, commemorating the events of Tisha B’Av was understandable, perhaps even unquestionable. But once the State of Israel was founded, why do we still need to fast and mourn on Tisha B’Av, or indeed, on any of the other fast days relating to the First and Second Temple tragedies? Jews have returned to our ancient and permanent home, including the very Jerusalem that we mourn on Tisha B’Av! True, we still don’t have a Temple, but how can one ignore the prosperity and success of Israel and say the special prayer in the Tisha B’Av service that describes Jerusalem as a barren, abandoned and desolate city in the present tense? And Israel’s very existence, has changed world Jewry in so many positive ways, and there is no question that Israel’s strength has made the world safer for Jews, ensuring that Jewish blood is no longer ‘*hefker*’ – abandoned and defenseless. Under such circumstances, then, what exactly are we still mourning on Tisha B’Av, and more important, why?

There are many ways to respond to this question, but I think that there are two main points that still make Tisha B’Av extremely relevant for all of Israel. Firstly, the idea of commemorating historical events is part and parcel of Judaism. Second, if mourning our loved ones and continuing to perpetuate their memories on an annual basis is a basic tenet of Judaism, so much the more so for a national tragedy of the dimensions of the destruction of our holy Temples and our enduring exile from our homeland. Tisha B’Av was a multiple disaster, resulting in the loss of Jewish independence and of our ability to act as one, united people for almost two millennia, and a total change in Jewish life and the very practice of Judaism. The founding of the State of Israel was indeed a miracle, and certainly may symbolize the end of this terrible period, but remembering our past has always been a key element in maintaining our existence and understanding the future.

But there is a second and possibly more profound reason for observing Tisha B’Av. Our Sages point out that the underlying reason for the destruction of the Second Temple was “Sinat Hinam”, loosely translated as “baseless hatred”. In Second Temple times, Jews were meticulously pious in how they observed all the

Divine commandments between man and God, but not the commandments as to how to treat one's fellow man. This manifested itself in disunity among the people, even in the midst of the battle with Rome, including outright sabotage of one group of fellow Jews against another, which ultimately contributed to the Roman victory; despising one's neighbor because he or she wasn't "religious" enough or suspecting one's neighbors of "blasphemy" because they didn't observe every commandment like I did, and more.

As we look at the Jewish world today, can we really say that it is so different from then? Quite the contrary: Infighting, disrespect of Jewish plurality in practice and thought, groups that think they have exclusivity on the Torah and how it should be observed, institutional competition and outright rejection of differing opinions and approaches continue to plague us, and this is what we must also mourn on Tisha B'Av: Not only the historical tragedy caused by "baseless hatred", but the "baseless hatred" itself. May God give us the wisdom and strength to transform this baseless hatred into unconditional love of each and every fellow Jew, when not only fasting and mourning on Tisha B'Av will become superfluous, but, as the prophet Zachariah says, it will be turned into a joyous holiday!

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## Research

While in Cyprus in 2017, visiting the Former British Military Hospital where Jews, who were forbidden entrance to Israel were kept (some until 1949), our Museum Director inquired as to how to acquire the names of Greek Jews who were among those detained by the British. We are still researching these names. With our connection in Israel with Hannah Cassorla Aizik, we will continue to work to gather these names. Therefore, if your family members were among those Greek Jews detained in Cyprus, please send your names to [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org).



While in Israel, our Museum Director also made connections with Avraam Houli, who is working on very interesting research and asked our help to spread the word. The project involves uncovering the stories of Jewish rescuers, who risked their lives to save fellow Jews during the Holocaust.

### The Unknown Jewish Heroes of the Holocaust

Through Yad Vashem's fine "Righteous Among the Nations" project, Israel and the Jewish People have, since 1963, aptly recognized non-Jews who saved the lives of ten thousands of Jews during the Holocaust while imperiling themselves and their families.



But while the deeds of over 26,513 of these well-deserving non-Jews, who placed the lives of other human beings before their own well-being during those dark years in Europe, have been intensely researched, acknowledged and commemorated over the years, the Jewish People have ignored Jews- operating individually and within Jewish organizations who, during the same period and circumstances, went beyond the call of duty to save the lives of fellow Jews. Like the many non-Jews who have been recognized over the years for their heroism, these Jews knowingly put themselves –and sometimes their families too - in extreme danger in the hope of saving the lives of their brethren –in many cases doing so even when they themselves had the opportunity to flee the Nazi persecutions.

A small number of these rescuers are still alive in Israel and around the world. Some of them remain reluctant till today to recount their stories. Their satisfaction remains in the knowledge that through subterfuge, cunning and bravery they were able to overcome the Germans and their collaborators and save Jews – in the tens, hundreds and sometimes even in the thousands. Today, their heroism goes largely unknown and unrecognized. Ironically, 60 years after these events, no framework has yet been established to pay tribute to these unsung heroes, nor has the subject of Jewish rescue been studied in a comprehensive manner by the academic world.



Honoring Rabbi Moshe Pesach of Blessed Memory

In recognition of the need to break with years of virtual silence on this issue, a group of Holocaust survivors from Holland, France, Germany and other countries who were themselves saved by the efforts of Jews, together with a number of Jewish rescuers and representatives of international Jewish organizations, established in 2000 in Jerusalem a committee whose goal is to recognize Jewish rescue.

Since its founding, the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jews who Rescued Jews during the Holocaust has been engaged in numerous initiatives aimed at bringing this little-known chapter in Holocaust history to the attention of the general public and in particular to the youth. These activities include the ongoing compilation of their stories, contacts with Holocaust commemoration and research institutions, outreach to the media, meetings with appropriate government and elected representatives, and conducting a yearly Holocaust and Martyrs Memorial Day Commemoration marking the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers ceremony organized by the B'nai B'rith World Center and the Jewish National Fund. The Committee, an all-volunteer body, has also been the catalyst of activities at Yad Vashem, the US Holocaust Memorial and other institutions on the issue of Jewish rescue. Making the lessons of Jewish resistance – armed and unarmed – relevant for Jewish youth today is a major motivation behind the activities of the Committee and the epitome of the Talmudic adage "All Jews are responsible one for the other".

Rescue activities by Jews took place throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, under Nazi puppet regimes and even in Germany.

In 2011, the committee and the World Center established a "Jewish Rescuer's Citation" which, until today has been presented to 173 deserving rescuers who operated in Germany, France, Hungary, Greece, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Russia, Poland, Ukraine and Holland.

As time progresses, fewer and fewer of these rescuers remain alive and all efforts must be made to unearth their stories before it is too late. The Committee seeks to promote in various ways the commemoration and awareness of the courageous activities undertaken by Jewish rescuers. This includes the incorporation of Jewish rescue in Holocaust studies school curricula – a project which is of particular relevance because many of the rescuers were themselves youngsters at the time – along with greater academic research into this area. It is imperative that these events become part of the Jewish ethos of courageous resistance to oppression and persecution.

For full details on the project, you can access the website at [www.en.jrj.co.il](http://www.en.jrj.co.il)

To supply names and stories for research, you can contact us at [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org) and we will pass the information on to Abraham Houli.

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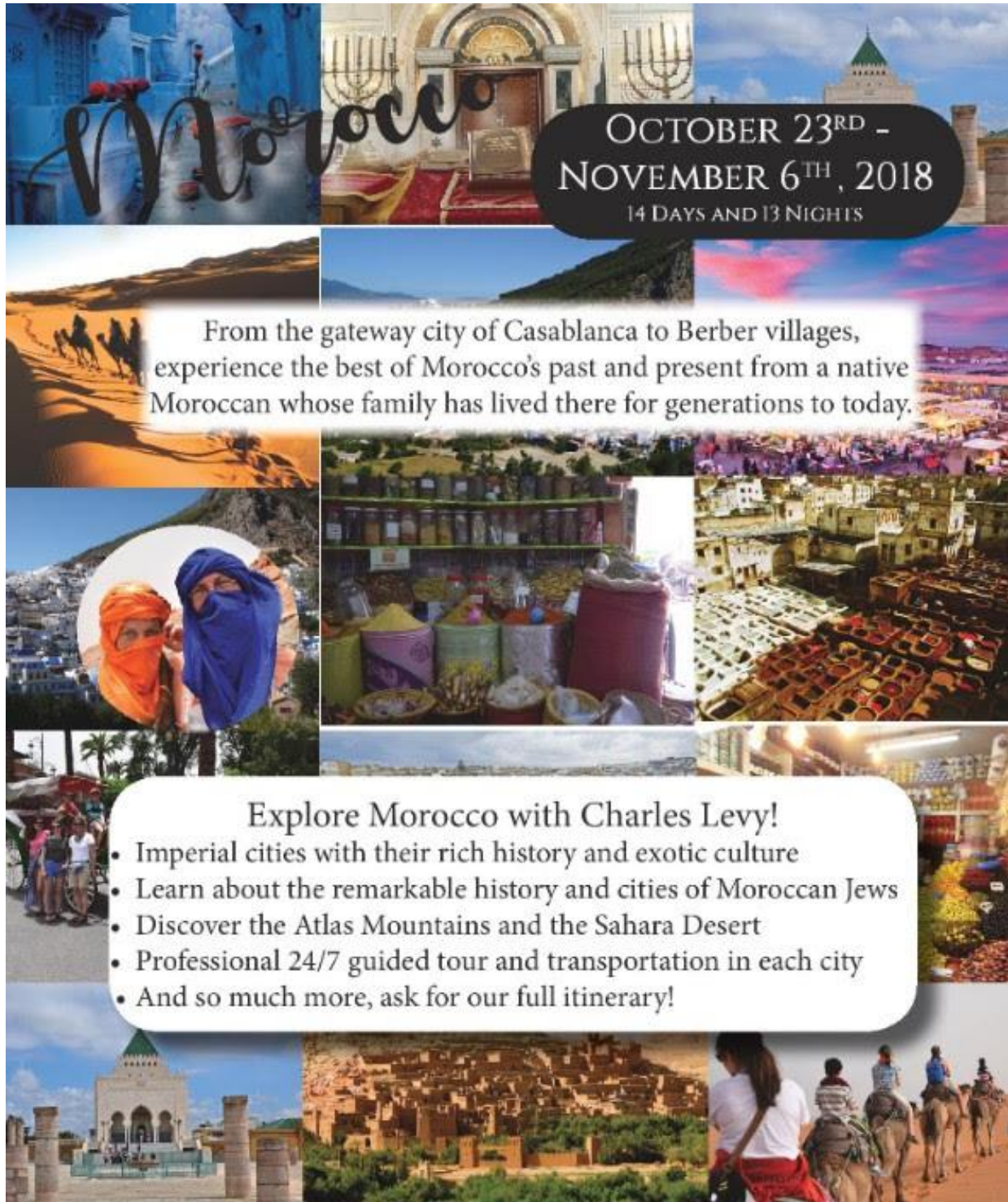
### Picture of the Month



Salonika at the port, early 1900s



## Opportunity to Visit Jewish Morocco



**OCTOBER 23<sup>RD</sup> -  
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14 DAYS AND 13 NIGHTS

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**So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.**

If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) made out to *Kehila Kedosha Janina*, to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street. We are open for services every Saturday morning at 9:30am and all major Jewish holidays and our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm and by appointment during the week.



**Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 112**

**July 2018**

**Kehila Kedosha Janina**

**280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002**

**Website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)**

**Email: [museum@kkjsm.org](mailto:museum@kkjsm.org)**

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