



# Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

## March 2019 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

In March we celebrate Purim, the story of Queen Esther and Mordechai, who foiled the plans of Haman to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire. It is a time of celebration of the salvation of the Jewish people and for Romaniote and Sephardic children to eat sweets and receive presents. Dressing up in costumes was a highlight of the celebration and every time Haman's name was mentioned, the stamping of feet and the sound of noisemakers are used to drown out his name. This is one holiday where it is perfectly acceptable to get drunk. In the words of Rabbi Joseph Caro, "On Purim a person should drink until he doesn't know the difference between 'Cursed be Haman' and 'Blessed be Mordechai'" from the Shulhan Aruch.



**Purim at the Athens Jewish Orphanage after World War II**

This newsletter, our 120<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).

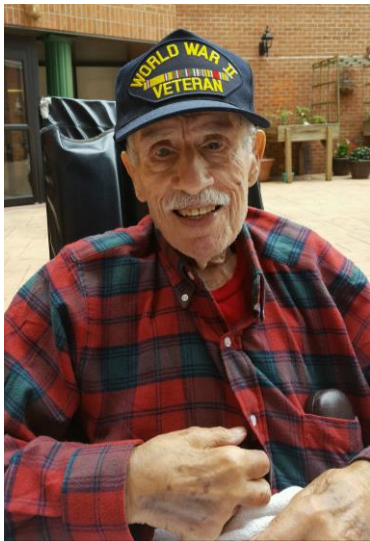
We have now reach over 10,000 households worldwide. What an accomplishment for a little synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City. Our community of 'friends' continually grow with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us 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

Isaac Cohen passed away on February 5<sup>th</sup>, just short of his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. We posted a short obituary in our February e-newsletter but, having received additional information, we are posting a more detailed obituary. "Isaac Cohen passed away on February 5th, just a few months shy of his 99th birthday (April 30th, 1920). Isaac Cohen was a father, grandfather and great grandfather. He served proudly in WWII under General Patton. He was with General Patton when they liberated Dachau Concentration Camp.

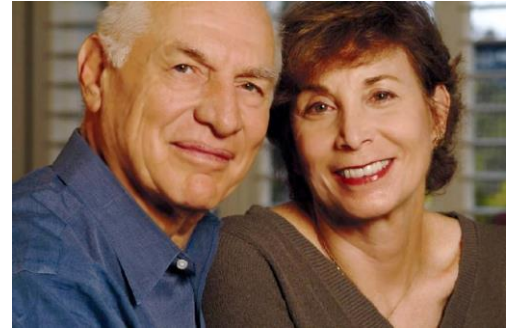
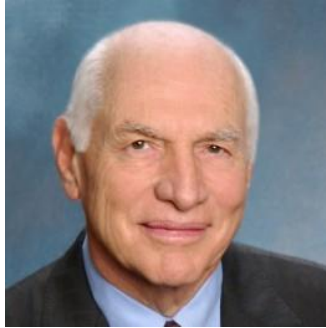


He was born and raised in Williamsburg Brooklyn and often attended services at Kehila Kedosha Janina, and was Bar Mitzvahed there in 1933 (and coincidentally officiated by Judy's paternal grandfather Simon Asser). His father and mother, David Abraham Cohen and Ester Cohen were founding members of KKJ. Dad worked in the US Postal Service for 39 years and retired in 1984. He is survived by his sister Molly Ewig, his 3 sons, 4 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren."





It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Michael Keston from the extended Colchamiro family. Michael was born Michael Kestenbaum in the Bronx. His mother Mary (Dostis) was the daughter of Esther Negrin and Isaac Dostis, and his grandmother was the oldest daughter of Jessula and Rachel Colchamiro. Michael is survived by his wife of 49 years, Linda, and 2 sons, Daniel and James, and his older brother Stanley.



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### Simchas

We are overjoyed to welcome to the world Alexander Belabbas, the first child of Lena Orfanos Belabbas and the first grandchild of Spyros and Sophia Orfanos.



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We are overjoyed to share the landmark birthdays of Sol Matsil (90 years old) and Esther Mollengarden (96 years old).

Sol is a member of our Board of Trustees, a past president of the Pashas and the Brotherhood of Janina. Sol was born February 12, 1929 in Brooklyn, NY, his father, Bechoraki (Matsilach) Matsil serving the Romaniote community in Mapleton at the Kehila Kedosha Janina of Mapleton. Bechoraki was a rabbi, a mohel and a shoet, and Sol being his youngest son, would often accompany his father to synagogue, learning the ancient tropes of the Romaniote liturgy. Bechoraki kept a prayer book with the names of over 600 boys that he personally circumcised, half in Ioannina and half in New York. Sol married Irene in 1954 and is the proud father of a son, Marc, and a daughter, Vicki, and three grandchildren.



Esther Mollengarden is the daughter of Lillie and Asser Rafael Mioni and the granddaughter of Moshon Mioni. The Mollengarden and Zimberg families celebrated their matriarch's 96<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 18<sup>th</sup>. This lovely picture was sent to us by her son, Art Mollengarden.



### Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

The most interesting people visit Kehila Kedosha Janina. We hope to count you among them. In February, in the midst of a cold, New York City winter, our synagogue and museum was warmed by those who sought us out and made an effort to visit.

On a wet, cold February Sunday, Stephen Lewis wandered into Kehila Kedosha Janina and charmed us with his stories and knowledge. We look forward to future visits.

We were overjoyed when Marty Sabba and his lovely wife Annie came to visit with friends from Milan Italy, the Ravennas. Marty was so proud of his heritage and the synagogue on the Lower East Side that his family would attend, that he wanted to share it with his friends from Italy. Can we blame him?



Stephen Lewis and our President, Marvin Marcus



Daniele Ravenna





**Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina**

**Purim**

Join us at Kehila Kedosha Janina for the traditional reading of the Megillah on March 20<sup>th</sup> starting at 5:30pm.  
Please RSVP to [amarcus@kkjism.org](mailto:amarcus@kkjism.org)

KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM  
WISHES YOU A

**HAPPY PURIM!**

חג פורים שמח

Χαγκ Σαμέαχ

**PURIM ALEGRE I DULCE**

**JOIN US TO CELEBRATE PURIM!  
WEDNESDAY MARCH 20 AT 5:30PM**

**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

**MINCHA, ARVITH, AND MEGILLAH READING  
FOLLOWED BY A TRADITIONAL GREEK JEWISH DINNER**

**"THE JEWS ENJOYED LIGHT AND GLADNESS, HAPPINESS AND HONOR"**

לִיהוּדִים הִיְתָה אֹרֶה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשֵׁשׁ וְיָקָר

**PLEASE RSVP TO [AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG](mailto:AMARCUS@KKJISM.ORG)**

**Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals – Shabbaton March 8-9**

THE GREEK JEWISH & SEPHARDIC YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

## **GREEK SHABBATON AND SHABBAT DINNER**

**FRIDAY MARCH 8 TO SATURDAY MARCH 9**



**KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
280 BROOME STREET NYC**

**FRIDAY NIGHT KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICES – 6:30PM**

**FRIDAY NIGHT SHABBAT DINNER – 7:30PM**

**\$25 PER PERSON**

**RSVP TO [GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GREEKJEWISHYPN@GMAIL.COM)**



**MEET OTHER YOUNG GREEK, TURKISH, AND SEPHARDIC JEWS  
ENJOY A DELICIOUS SEPHARDIC DINNER & GREEK JEWISH SHABBAT  
HEAR INSPIRING WORDS OF TORAH FROM RABBI NISSIM ELNECAVÉ,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SEPHARDIC BROTHERHOOD**

**OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR 20'S AND 30'S**

**SATURDAY MORNING SERVICES 9:30AM, KIDDUSH LUNCH 12:30PM**

**SPECIAL SEPHARDIC CLASS LED BY AARON LEVY 2:00PM**



**Save the Dates!**

**Opening of New Art Exhibit in Our Communal Room – April 4 at 6pm**

We are honored to host a special art exhibit that will open on **Thursday April 4<sup>th</sup> at 6pm**. We will have a special reception for the opening with live Greek music and refreshments. The artist, Stewart Nachmias, is the son of Max and Eve Nachmias (both of Blessed Memory) who were both born on the Lower East Side. The Nachmias family were founding members of our community. The exhibit will run through June 4<sup>th</sup>.



**STEWART NACHMIAS  
CAST PAPER & PRINTS**

**STEWART NACHMIAS**

**CAST PAPER & PRINTS**

April 4 - June 4, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday, April 4, 6-9pm  
Refreshments & Live Greek Music



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA  
Synagogue and Museum  
280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002

Gallery Hours:  
Sundays: 11:00am - 4:00pm  
Weekdays by appointment  
Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou, Museum Director  
516-456-9336

You can contact Stewart Nachmias at:  
917-207-7238 • [stewzo@aol.com](mailto:stewzo@aol.com)  
[stewartnachmias.com](http://stewartnachmias.com)

on reverse:  
Generations, cast paper woodcut, collograph, chine collé. 20" x 26"

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**Lecture on Bulgaria by Joseph Benatov – April 7 at 2pm**

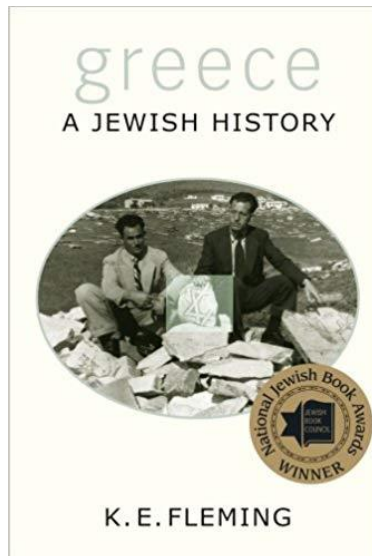
Joseph Benatov is Lecturer in Foreign Languages in the Modern Hebrew Language Program. He holds a doctorate in comparative literature and literary theory from the University of Pennsylvania. He often lectures on competing national narratives of the saving of the Bulgarian Jews during World War II. Dr. Benatov lectures regularly on the history of Jewish life in Bulgaria and on the fate of Bulgarian Jews during the Holocaust.

Join us at 2:00pm on April 7<sup>th</sup> in our communal room (The Ada Finifter Communal Room and Education Center) at Kehila Kedosha Janina at 280 Broome Street on the Lower East Side. There will be a visual presentation accompanying the lecture and refreshments served afterwards. The lecture is sponsored by the Ada Finifter Endowment Fund. Please RSVP to 516-456-9336 or [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)



## Lecture on Greek Jewry by Katherine Fleming – April 14

Katherine Elizabeth Fleming is the Alexander S. Onassis Professor of Hellenic Culture and Civilization in the Department of History at New York University. In Spring 2016, she was announced as NYU's next Provost, and she assumed office on September 1, 2016. In addition, Katherine is a good friend of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Professor Fleming's iconic book, "Greece-A Jewish History," will be on sale during this event.



Join us at 2:00pm on April 14<sup>th</sup> in our communal room (The Ada Finifter Communal Room and Education Center) at Kehila Kedosha Janina at 280 Broome Street on the Lower East Side. Refreshments served afterwards. The lecture is sponsored by the Ada Finifter Endowment Fund. Please RSVP to 516-456-9336 or [museum@kkjism.org](mailto:museum@kkjism.org)

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## Yom HaShoah Holocaust Remembrance Day Ceremony – April 28

This Yom HaShoah we are honored to host filmmaker Rita Sara Cohen for a stirring presentation of her latest documentary film on the Jews of Ioannina. Our program will start in the sanctuary for our traditional lighting of the candles in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. Afterwards we will show Rita's film in our downstairs communal room.





**Save the Date!**

**Greek Jewish Festival  
Sunday May 19, 2019 12pm-6pm**

Kehila Kedosha Janina is currently planning our fifth annual Greek Jewish Festival for Sunday May 19, 2019.  
Check our festival website for updates: [www.GreekJewishFestival.com](http://www.GreekJewishFestival.com)

# GREEK JEWISH FESTIVAL

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## Events of Interest in New York City

### Chinatown Lens on the Lower East Side – March 5<sup>th</sup> at 5:30-7:30pm

THE "CHINATOWN: LENS ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE" PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT IS SPONSORED BY: LOWER EAST SIDE PRESERVATION INITIATIVE and NEW YORK ARTS CENTER

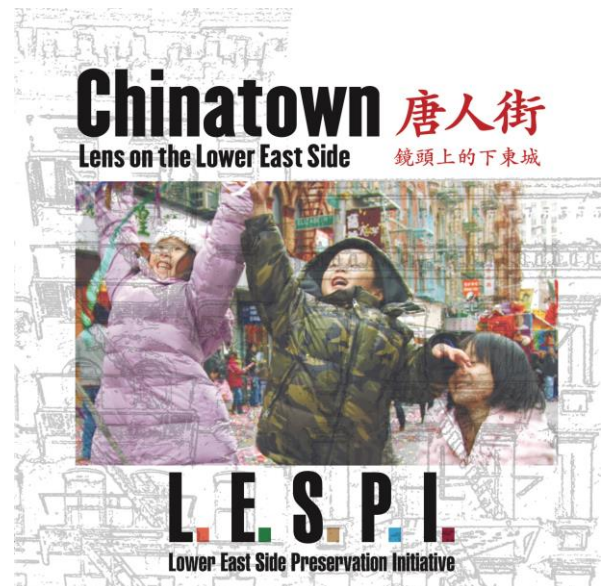
Curated by: Carolyn Ratcliffe and Corky Lee

Contributors: Corky Lee, An Rong Xu, Edward Chen, Karen Zhou, Jook Leung

Opening Reception and Book Launch: Tuesday March 5, 5:30-7:30pm

New York Arts Center, 78 Bowery, New York, NY

This contemporary photography exhibit is based on the work showcased in Lower East Side Preservation Initiative's recent book, "Chinatown: Lens on the Lower East Side," a collection of beautiful photographs of Chinatown's historic core - from Canal to Worth Street, Baxter to the Bowery. The photographs capture the spirit of today's residents, workers, and visitors against a backdrop of the area's rich and wonderful historic buildings. The book, accompanied by a lively local history, is intended to show how the neighborhood's streetscapes are not only beautiful and irreplaceable, but also serve to enrich and enliven everyday modern life. Chinatown's streetscapes are now in danger: if the city does not protect them through landmarking or other means they will fall prey to demolition and overdevelopment.






American Sephardi Federation

Learning Ladino: A Six-Part Introductory Course

by Dr. Joe Halio

@ASF's Sephardi Scholars Center


18 February-25 March 2019

**American Sephardi Federation Presents:  
Learning Ladino: A Six-Part Introductory Course by Dr. Joe Halio**

February 18 – March 25, Each Monday, 6:00-8:00PM

The ASF's Sephardi Scholars Center at the Center for Jewish History - 15 West 16th Street, New York City  
Please register [here](#) or call 1-800-838-3006. *Admission is limited*

**New York Sephardic Jewish Film Festival – March 6-20**  
Full schedule and tickets [here](#)




American Sephardi Federation

Please join us for the

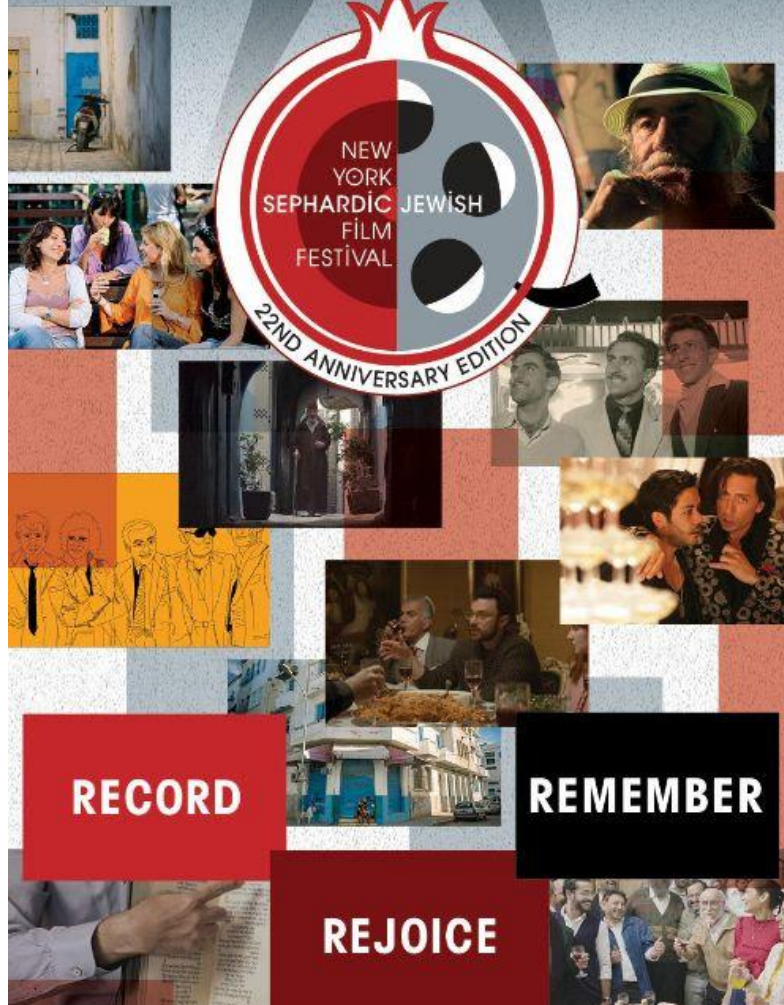
**NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival**

**MARCH 6-20, 2019**



NEW YORK SEPHARDIC JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

22ND ANNIVERSARY EDITION



**RECORD**

**REMEMBER**

**REJOICE**

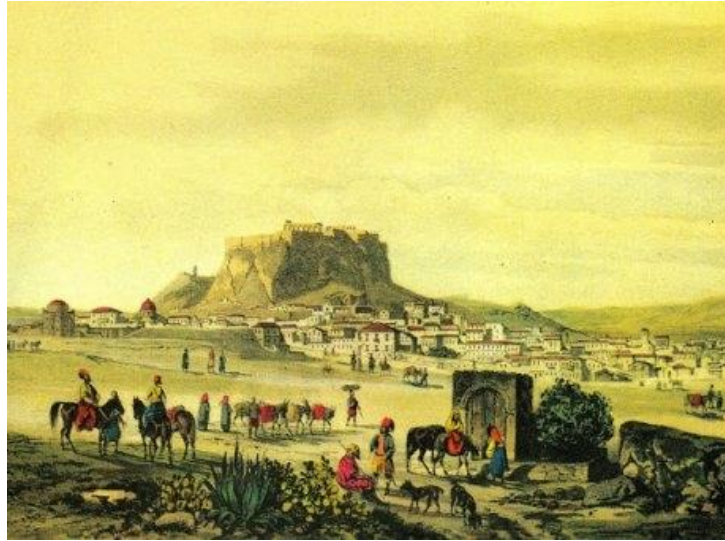


The Athenian's Society of New York

In Celebration of Greek Independence Day, March 25, 1821  
Presents a Cultural Evening with

**A Historical Documentary "Walks in Ottoman Athens" and  
Artists' Exhibition of our Community**

March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 4:00pm - 9:00pm  
Kefalos Society of America, 20-41 Steinway Street, Astoria, NY.11105



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**Events of Interest in the United States**

**Fall River, Massachusetts**

We are honored that our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, will speak at Bristol Community College Holocaust Center on March 7<sup>th</sup> at 4pm

Thursday, March 7 at 4 p.m. Jackson Art Center, H209-210

Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Speaker on "The Plight of the Jewish Population in Greece during the Holocaust". Marcia is the Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She has devoted her life to telling the story of Greek Jewry as an author, translator, editor and lecturer. The event is open to the public.

Holocaust Center  
777 Elsbree St  
Fall River, MA 02720  
Phone: 774.357.2444

  
**HOLOCAUST CENTER**  
BRISTOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Portland, Oregon

### Portland Sephardic Film Series Schedule – New Date for March Film, Now Showing March 5

Congregation Ahavath Achim and the Sephardic Cultural Center of Oregon are pleased to announce the 13th Annual Sephardic Winter Film Series, featuring films of Sephardic content. The schedule for the remainder of the season is shown below. The film screenings are free of charge and a free dessert reception with a Q&A period follows each film.

#### *A Woman Called Golda* Part 2 of 2

This feature is part two of a continuation of the feature film of Feb 12, 2019. 99 Minutes.

Ingrid Bergman gives her Emmy Award winning performance of one of the most famous women in modern history. From Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she harbored an incredible dream to help the people of Israel build a new homeland. Through hardship, war, and countless sacrifice Golda survived to become Israel's first female Prime Minister. Her stunning story reminds us of how one person can make a notable difference. An all-star cast of accomplished actors completes this film. English language, 110 minutes, Color, Producer: CBS, 1982. Speaker: David Tver

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## University of Southern California

University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation opens for tours – and hires its first visitor-experience guide

For the first time in its 25-year history, USC Shoah Foundation has opened its doors to enable the public to interact with displays and testimony-based exhibits.

And so it is fitting that the Institute has also hired its first visitor-experience guide to lead public tours in its new space on the fourth floor of the University of Southern California's Leavey Library.

That guide, Program Specialist Marissa Wojcik, moved to Los Angeles from Chicago to take the job.

In addition to being a budding museum expert – the 25-year-old holder of a master's degree has worked at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia and the Illinois Holocaust Museum near Chicago – Marissa understands the value of the Institute's work firsthand. Her 83-year-old grandmother, Irene Wojcik, is a Holocaust survivor.

"We're the last generation that's going to actually be able to interact with survivors," Marissa said. "I think it's so important that their stories continue to be told, and I'm going to do everything I can to tell them."

The facility's lobby hosts several immersive touchscreen surfaces that enable guests to hear the recorded stories of survivors, map the locations in which their testimonies take place, and learn about the history of USC Shoah Foundation's many educational programs.

"It is such a human story, no matter what genocide event or human-rights atrocity you're talking about," she said. "And USC Shoah Foundation helps us make connections between all of them, and present day."

Marissa's grandmother has her own incredible story of survival.



Irene Engel was born in France in 1935 while her parents were on the run. Their families had lived in Berlin for generations, but Irene's parents grew alarmed when Hitler came to power; they fled to Marseille in 1933. Some of Irene's cousins found refuge in Shanghai, but most of the family would be killed at the Treblinka death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. (One of Irene's cousins, Horst Abraham, gave his testimony to USC Shoah Foundation.)

In 1947, Irene, her sister and parents boarded a Greek cargo ship bound for the Gulf of Mexico. After getting turned away at a port in Alabama, the four-member family took up residence in Ecuador. In 1951 they migrated to Chicago, where Irene attended high school and settled for good. She met and married Bob Wojcik, who was raised in a Polish Catholic family. "When I was growing up we went to their house every Sunday," said Marissa. "We would go to watch the Bears games."

Now that Marissa is in Los Angeles, their weekly visits happen by phone. She started working at the Institute in September – two months before the new location opened for visitors.

Having written her graduate thesis on the incorporation of technology into the communication of Jewish history, she was delighted to hear from USC Shoah Foundation about work that would put her into direct contact with the very technologies about which she had written.

"The interactive map is my favorite piece," Marissa said of the responsive wall map in the lobby that exposes users to all of the locations mentioned in the Visual History Archive's 55,000 testimonies, and the Archive's many access sites. "It just shows how global we are. To have that visual representation and to see the different experiences connected is so important."

Because her job didn't exist before she took it, Marissa has a say in shaping the position.

"We've never had a space that people can just wander into before, so I'm here to figure out what that looks like," she explains.

Over the last month, Marissa has had the pleasure of watching a number of groups learn about and connect with the stories she shows them in the lobby.

"We had an Armenian high school a couple of weeks ago that brought 60 of their school kids through, which was really cool," she said. "We had an adorable couple come through a few days ago, on vacation from Toronto. Our visitors have reflected how international a reach we have, from Canada to Mongolia."

She's also been able to watch connections form between visitors.

"We had a middle school here a couple of weeks ago at the same time as there was an older couple who came up to find the man's mother's testimony," Marissa said. "The kids from the group came up and asked him what he was doing, and he said he was watching testimony and invited them to join."

When the students asked whose interview he was watching, the man told them it was his mother's.

"And it was a personal connection that a lot of these kids don't have to the Visual History Archive," she said. "For him to be able to share that, but also for the kids to now be able to have that personal connection, was so meaningful."

Join Sephardic Bikur Holim and the Rachel &  
Nissim Altabet Fund for Part I of our  
Sephardic Lecture Series

# UNDER THE WINGS OF THE SULTAN

## THE RISE OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

DR. DEVIN E. NAAR

THE ISAAC ALHADEFF PROFESSOR OF SEPHARDIC  
STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Sunday, March 3 @ 4pm

Sephardic Bikur Holim Sanctuary  
6500 52nd Ave South, Seattle WA

Series is Free and Open to the Public

This lecture traces the trans-Mediterranean journey of the exiled Spanish Jews to the sultan's realm and the cultural and political dynamics that shaped the communities they created and developed over the subsequent centuries. In short, it explores how the descendants of Spanish Jews eventually became Ottoman Jews.

RSVP TO [ETHAN@SEATTLESEPHARDIC.ORG](mailto:ETHAN@SEATTLESEPHARDIC.ORG)



## Past Events of Interest

### International Ladino Day at the Center for Jewish History

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, we were treated to an exceptional day of presentations at New York's International Ladino Day. Presentations were made by Jane Mushabac, Danny Elias, Professor Byran Kirschen and Rabbi Nissim Elnecave, among others.



Rabbi Elnecave



Professor Kirschen



Jane Mushabac and Danny Elias

## News from Jewish Greece

### Jewish Community Applauds First Greek Ministry to Adopt IHRA Definition of Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community in Greece is applauding the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs for adopting an internationally-recognized definition of antisemitism on Monday, calling it a significant step in the fight against anti-Jewish hate.

The announcement came on Monday during a ceremony posthumously honoring Constantine Giannitsis, a notary who saved five members of the Moissis family in Athens during World War II, as a "Righteous Among the Nations" — a title bestowed by Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial.

The ceremony was attended by Greek Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs Konstantinos Gavroglu and Secretary General for Religious Affairs George Kalantzis.

"There is a need to strengthen acts and ideas safeguarding democracy against the poison of fascism and of racism which have appeared again throughout Europe," Gavroglu said.

He announced that the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs, which is part of his ministry, has endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, "with the active participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic."

Kalantzis called the move historically significant, and said it was a particular honor for his Secretariat to be the first to adopt it.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece welcomed the decision on Tuesday, saying it "contributes decisively to the understanding of anti-Semitism as a phenomenon threatening the values of democracy."

First endorsed in 2016 by the IHRA, whose 31 member countries include Greece, the definition describes antisemitism as "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews," and includes examples such as advancing "the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy" and "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination."

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## Thessaloniki

The mayor of the city, Yiannis Boutari announced an important development for the creation of the Holocaust Education Center in Thessaloniki.

In Belgium a royal decree on the creation of the Foundation of the Museum of the Holocaust was signed. The Foundation is based in Brussels and will run the museum. "In this way we acquire international exposure. There will be a general meeting attended by international celebrities. I hope that very soon things will move forward faster," said Yiannis Boutari, expressing his relief in signing the decree, which he said had been delayed from October.



Members of the Foundation are the Municipality of Thessalonika, the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and the Museum of the Holocaust in Paris, France.

## Athens

Students from Israeli schools visited Athens as part of the program "Young Ambassadors," the "Israeli Center for Young Leaders," with the collaboration of the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning and Youth and met with their peers from two public schools, Athens Standard Varvakeion High School and the 2nd Experimental High School Ambelokipi, to discuss issues concerning the youth of the two countries.

"Eighty children from two schools in Greece and three schools of Israel, came together, met and fought to provide answers to key questions, and shoot down stereotypes," he said speaking to ANA-MPA Secretary Lifelong Learning and Youth, Pausanias Papageorgiou.



### Presentation of Second Generation

The 6th High School of Nea Ionia, on the initiative of Prof. Spyropoulos, invited the President of the Second Generation of Holocaust survivor descendants Mr. Marios Sousis to talk to students about the Holocaust on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Mr. Sousis, in his speech, mentioned the importance of the Holocaust, as well as their personal experiences. Very well documented presentation of Mr. Sousis touched the students, who sent him a pamphlet with thanks and with their impressions. Particularly important was the students' initiative to create a banner with the words we remember that hung together with Mr. Sousis.



### Righteous Among Nations from Greece

Full article in Greek [here](#)

Stories of Occupation: Konstantinos Giannitsis and his Jewish friend In Occupied Greece

The father of the professor and former minister, Tasos Giannitsis, Constantine, decided to save the family of his Jewish friend, Asher Moses, and succeeded. In a ceremony at the College of Athens, a title of "Righteous Among Nations" was awarded to Konstantinos Giannitsis.

The voice of Tasos Giannitsis was slightly shaken. "I do not hide that I am very excited," he began his speech. And it was not an easy talk. "Today is an extremely difficult but important and honorable moment for me and my sister, Eleni Kappetou, who at the age of eight lived this story, like my whole family," he continued. This "story" is pure cinematography. The father of Tassos Giannitsis, Constantine, has resolved to save the family of his Jewish friend, Asser Moses, and succeeded. In a ceremony held at the Athens College Monday morning, the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" was awarded to Konstantinos Giannitsis. "The Righteous" was represented by his children, Tasos Giannitsis and Eleni Kappeto, while that of Asser Rafael Moses' family was represented by Rafael Moses and Shelly Liraz. Students of the Athens College though music gave an excellent message of love and solidarity and greetings which were received by Education Minister Kostas



Gavroglou, Irit Ben-Abba, Israeli ambassador to Athens, and David Saltiel, President of the Central Jewish Council in Greece.

The story was narrated by Raphael Moses: In Athens in 1943, all Jews were obliged to declare themselves on penalty of death. The same sentence would be exacted on those Christians who provided protection to unreported Jews. His father, Asser, knowing the fate of his co-religionists in Thessaloniki, decided not to declare and search for false IDs with Christian names, and shelter.



Identity with the fake IDs that would keep them alive was provided by Angelos Evert, then Police Commander, (father of the former Greek politician, Member of Parliament, Government minister, and ex-chairman of the New Democracy party). "The house the family received from their friend Constantine Giannitsis, was nothing great and without central heating, but it had a large garden and lots of chickens," Raphael Moses told the gathering. The family began to cultivate the garden and live a rural life. Apart from Giannitsi's house, there were four more large houses in the area, and two were inspected by German soldiers. The third was the Koskina Clinic and the fourth was the family of Loris Meletopoulos, an educated man and

very philanthropic. Some other neighbors were peasants and lived peacefully in the area, accepting the Moses family as Christian peasants. No matter how much they wondered about the family of an educated man who had suddenly appeared in the area, they did not ask many questions. The times were difficult.

One day, Mr. Moses remembers, he himself dared to go to Kifissia's kiosk to buy a newspaper as his father asked him. So, he got up to go. At Platanos Square in Kifissia he saw a lawyer from Thessaloniki on the opposite pavement, but he did not expect that he had seen him. His name was George Tountas and he worked for the Gestapo. He had recognized Moses and followed him. However, Tountas also had a second "business": together with two other Greek employees of the Gestapo, Georgios Papazisis and Antonis Kassoulakis, who were hiding hidden Jewish families and blackmailing them for money and valuables. "So it happened with their own. After they had taken as much as possible from the family, they continued to question their father to reveal where he had hidden the valuables. When they realized that there was nothing else of value, it was time to alert Gestapo. Their father, however, had a genius inspiration. "Listen, I have nothing to give you, but I will give you the richest Jew of Athens," he told them, and mentioned the name of a well-known Jewish fabric dealer who had already escaped to Palestine. "I will give it to you and you will be rich for three generations." They accepted the attractive proposal, especially with the certainty that the family could not go anywhere. Late that night they left and the neighborhood came to see what was happening. Moses spoke to Loris Meletopoulos, with whom he had developed a special relationship. When dawn came and the curfew was lifted, they transferred the family across the street to the Koskina Clinic. Koskina had the great privilege of having a car. They put them in and transferred them to a house on Three Bridges.



The informers went to Kifissia's home in the morning to make sure the Moses family was in. When they found it closed, they broke the door. Behind them came the Kifissia Gendarmerie and arrested them for the burglary. They took them to the headquarters, they took out their IDs and explained that they were not thieves but agents of Gestapo. Kifissia Gendarmerie commander Georgios Pazaris replied: "I know who you are. You have a choice. Go to Gestapo and explain to them what you have set up or be arrested for the burglary in Kifissia. What do you prefer?" "Of course they chose the prison, and they were forced to return what they had taken from the Moses family. That same evening, Pazaris went to the cathedral at Three

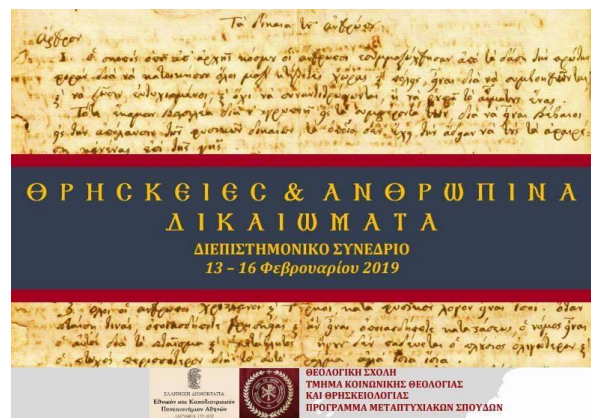
Bridges and passed to the mother of Raphael Moses the six bracelets that the informers had taken the previous day. She never took them off to the end of her life.

"They stayed until liberation in the prison of Kifissia. Subsequently, the two were sentenced to life and died in jail. There are some terribly touching details in history. For example, the neighbors were worried as soon as they saw that the family was locked at home that morning because of the interrogation. Thus, one of the neighbors began to hit the door with various pretensions. At 10.30 someone appeared and asked for bread. With his nonsense, Asher Moses dared to leave. A little later someone asked for eggs, and another member of the family left. There was some mobilization in the neighborhood because they realized something was happening but they could not do much, as the houses of the area were surrounded by Germans. "I will never forget," says Raphael Moses in a shuddering voice, "I went out into the garden and saw the plants blowing without blowing. I heard a voice telling me: go! We do not know if the decision to hide the family arose from Giannitsi's prompting or if Moses asked for it. Terpsithea Giannitsis was pregnant with Tasos, while his sister was eight years old. They risked everything. Like other Christian families. So far, 328 Greeks have received the title of "Righteous Among Nations" for their action in the Occupation. "It was not the rule in Greece of Occupation, it was the exception. The purpose is to preserve historical memory, recognition and gratitude," the president of KIS said in his speech.



During the ceremony, Israel's ambassador narrated the story of the rescue of her father's family in 1943 in Italy. "All Jewish families live with the Holocaust in them," she said. Participants expressed their concern about the spread of racism and anti-Semitism, and so did the very well-thought-out and inspiring events of the pupils in the school.

### Rabbi Gabriel Negrin Among Those Attending Interreligious Gathering





## Arta

### **Wanted: Photographs from the Jewish Presence in Arta – Event of Memory in Arta 03/23/2019**

The SKOUFAS Association of Arta, in cooperation with the municipality of Arta is planning events this year to honor the memory of the town's Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

As part of the event will deliver photographic material relating to the Jewish Community of Arta, entitled "To remember Rosina".

To enrich photographic documentaries they are looking for photographs from Jews from Arta and their descendants living in Athens and in other cities. Any photo will be evaluated to determine whether it contains persons or landscapes from Arta- while photos can be either pre-war or post-war.

The Jews from Arta can send their family photos –in high definition scans to: Mr. Theocharis Vadivouli (lawyer - known historian and graphologist of Arta Jewish community), who conducts this survey (tel: 6955 475476, email: vadivoulis.theocharis@gmail.com)

Those wishing to contribute but do not have the technical ability, may apply to KISE (tel. 210 32 44 315), which will undertake to send electronic copies of their photographs, ensuring the original material.

Any photo can be important both for viewing and for historical research in general!

The first screening of the material in "To remember Rosina", will be held on Saturday March 23, 2019, the Association SKOUFAS room at 18:00, while the second viewing (especially for Jewish youth to visit Arta that day) will take place on Sunday 3/24/19, at the Municipal Gallery at 16:45. The presentation of the photographic material will be made by Mr. Theocharis Vadivouli.





## Trikala

On February 14, 2019 in the Tsitsani Museum the book by Dimitris Ch. Vlachopanou entitled "Isaac Mizan, arm number 182 641," was presented. Isaac Mizan is the last living Jew of Arta. The event was organized by the Association of Epirus Pref. Trikala and the Jewish Community, under the auspices of the Municipality of Trikala. The presentation began with the screening of a video with excerpts from interviews with Isaac Mizan, which were accompanied by photographs of his family. "The Ballad of Mauthausen" by James Kambanellis and Mikis Theodorakis, played in the background.



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## Crete

On Wednesday, March 1, 2019, the High School of Gazi, in collaboration with the Municipality Malevizi (Crete), will organize an event dedicated to the poet Joseph Ventura and his book of poetry, Tanais, in the Gazi High School hall. At the event the poet is going to talk to the public about the work and historical experiences that shaped his art. School students will recite passages of the poem and teachers Varoucha Maria and Anastasia Bulls will present the poem and will coordinate the discussion.



## Alexandroupolis

From March 1-3, 2019 in Alexandroupolis there will be a weekend of events dedicated to the city's Jews, organized on the initiative and cooperation of the Holy Metropolis of Alexandroupolis, the Municipality and the Institute for Thracian Studies of the University of Thrace.

The events will begin with the international scientific conference "From Ottoman Subjects to Greek , Bulgarian and Turkish Citizens: Experiences of Sephardic Jews in the 19th and the 20th Centuries", which will take place in hotel Egnatia, March 1<sup>st</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup> with the participation of distinguished academics from Greece and abroad.

On Sunday 03.03.2019 at 12.00 am, in the Square of the Metropolitan Church, will be unveiled Holocaust Memorial "dedicated to the small number of Jewish community of our late fellow citizens who were deported to Nazi concentration camps in March 1943 where they were destroyed." The monument was erected to highlight the multi-cultural aspects of the city."



## Zakynthos

On Sunday February 17<sup>th</sup>, an anti-fascist march was organized in Zakynthos by Vangelis Vantaraki. It was organized to highlight the Jews of Zakynthos and the heroism of the citizens of Zakynthos who saved the Jews of the island during the Occupation. In the rich program a documentary of the saving of the Jews was shown and Moses Mordos, a Jew from Zakynthos remarked on Facebook: «Yesterday, I experienced something unusual! A sea of 250 of my fellow Zakynthos citizens participated in anti-fascist hiking. This participation surpassed all expectations! They demonstrated that Zakynthos deserves the title "The Island of the Righteous."





## Cyprus

Video showing the detainment of Jews in Cyprus. Watch [here](#).



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## Albania

**In Loving Memory of Simon Vrusho, Curator of Albania's Only Jewish Museum** Full article [here](#)

"The "Solomoni" Museum in Berat is dedicated to the city's extensive Jewish history and the coexistence between Jews, Muslims, Orthodox, and Catholic inhabitants over the last 500 years.

On my last trip to Berat, my friend Jeff arranged for me to visit and to meet the wonderful Simon Vrusho, curator and tour-guide extraordinaire. Since the museum's inauguration at the beginning of 2018, the Solomoni Museum has had visitors from all over the world; England, Israel, Swede, Turkey, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Singapore, China, and America. Dedicated to the fascinating story of Jews in Albania, Simon has also written a book "The Jews of Berat" that is due to be translated into English this year. As I walked into the museum, I was greeted by the beaming face and kind eyes of Simon Vrusho who grasped my hand with both of his and welcomed me warmly to his museum. An instantly likeable man, he spoke full of pride at the story of his people and their existence in this part of the world, as well as all the examples of peaceful and tolerant coexistence between Albanians of different religious beliefs.





“He regaled me with one particular story that I already knew, how Muslim and Christian Albanian’s risked their lives during WWII, to shelter over 2000 local and foreign Jews and to protect them from the invading Nazi forces. According to Albanian Historian, Apostol Kotani, Jews could have arrived in Albania as early as 70 C.E according to Roman sources that mentioned ships with Jewish captives, on their way to Rome. Many of these captives were washed up on the southern shores of Albania and their descendants are believed to have built the Saranda synagogue in the fifth century C.E. Not much is known about the Jewish community in Albania between then and 1281 when a small group of Jewish merchants moved to the port city of Durres, an important centre for global trade at this time. Then during the 15th and 16th Centuries, Jews accounted for 1/3 of the population of Vlore before moving towards Berat in the 17th Century. Between then at the mid-1800’s some converted to Islam or Christianity, but come the 19th Century, an influx of Jews from Ioannina settled in Gjirokaster, Vlore, Berat, Elbasan, and Shkodra, amongst others. The Jewish community was involved in the 1912 struggle for independence, but by 1930, the Census only showed 204 Jews living in the country.

Then, after Hitler came to power, Jews from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Germany began arriving in Albania. Following the Italian conquering of Yugoslavia and the subsequent annexing of Kosovo, more Jews relocated to Shkoder, Tirana, and Elbasan, as well as Berat. As the Germans occupied the country during 1942, the situation became desperate for Albania’s Jews, but the Albanian’s, ever faithful to their ancient code of hospitality, protected them from the German’s and refused to hand over their names. Today less than a handful of Jews remain in Albania, but Simon’s museum stands as a testament to their long and rich history in various parts of the country. Here you can explore the Jewish families of the past, along with the way that they lived in harmony with their Christian and Muslim counterparts, with no hatred or discrimination being levied on anyone based on their religious beliefs. Albania’s history of tolerance and acceptance, and even the modern-day attitude where no-one really cares what religion anyone is a prime example of how Abrahamic religions can coexist happily and tranquilly, for generation upon generation. Simon Vursho wrote a book about the history of Jews in Albania, it is currently only available in Albanian and I am fundraising to translate it into English and publish it so that his memory can live on.”

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## Turkey

This past month, the Jewish Community of Turkey held a commemoration ceremony in memory of the nearly 800 Jewish refugees who were killed in the sinking of the Struma in Istanbul Harbor. These Jews, escaping Nazi persecution in Europe in 1942 and attempting to flee to the British Mandate, were torpedoed in the Istanbul harbor by a Soviet submarine. Repozen en Gan Eden - May their memories be for a blessing.

Below, Turkish Haham Bashi (Chief Rabbi) Isak Haleva with a memorial wreath in honor of those who lost their lives aboard the Struma in 1942.



## Articles of Interest

### Sephardic Jews and Their Language Inspire Mexican Writer

Full article by Tony Paniagua [here](#)

Myriam's Moscona home was filled with the sounds of different languages while growing up in Mexico City, where she was born in the 1950s. Moscona's native tongue is Spanish, but she also studied Hebrew in school. Her parents were Jewish immigrants from Bulgaria who left Europe after World War II and settled in Mexico City.

"They spoke Bulgarian between them, Ladino with the grandmother, and Spanish," Moscona says.

"My mother was an opera singer so she spoke perfect English, perfect German, perfect Italian."

But the language that stood out most to the little Latin American girl surrounded by European adults was Ladino, also known as judeoespañol, or Judeo-Spanish. It was spoken by her grandparents, who had joined the family in Mexico. Ladino traveled to Europe and other parts of the world with Sephardic Jews that were expelled from Spain in the 1400s. They kept it alive in countries such as Greece, Serbia and Tunisia. It's very similar to modern Spanish but retains the words and spelling from another era.

"They spoke in that strange language that was alive with them since they were children. It was that heritage of life in Spain 500 years ago," Moscona says. Moscona was intrigued by her elders' language, customs and religion, especially after losing her grandparents at an early age. Her father died soon after that, when Moscona was 8 years old, and her mother passed away when Moscona was 20.

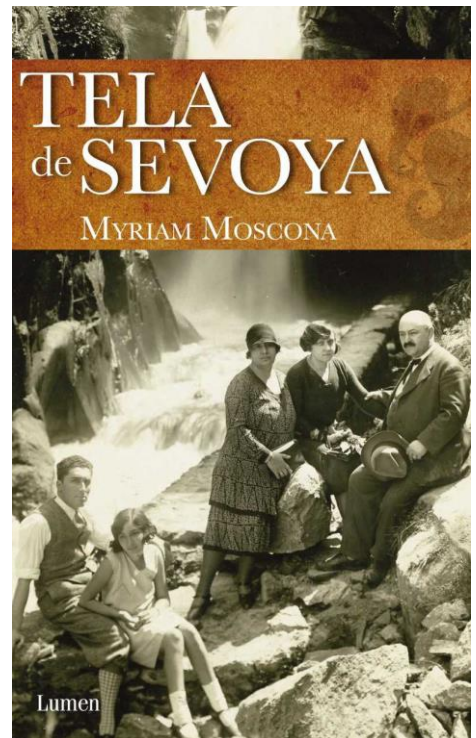
When she was older, as a professional journalist, writer and poet, Moscona conducted research about her family's heritage and language and was able to travel to Bulgaria in 2006. She met with Ladino-speaking populations, explored the countryside, and looked for the former homes of her parents and grandparents.

"It was not the most beautiful trip I ever did, but the most emotional one," she says. When she returned to Mexico City, Moscona decided to write a book that is inspired by her life, although it's not a biography.

Moscona hopes the story of a little girl and her fascinating relatives will reveal how people are more similar than different, regardless of their own languages, cultures or religions. She says another goal is to draw attention to a language whose use has been declining as fewer people pass it on to younger generations.

"What I felt is that that fire was dying and what I had to do is something just to leave a memory of that fire," she says. Moscona's book is called "Tela de Sevoya" in Ladino, which would be "Tela de Cebolla" in modern Spanish, and has been translated to "Onioncloth" in English.

"The only thing I know to do is write so what I want is to leave a memory of this language," she says.





# Sephardim in New York

We thank Shelomo Alfasa for his research in this area.

## SE HABLA LADINO

Seniors' home in Brooklyn keeps 500-years-old tradition going

**L**ADINO LIVES on in Brooklyn. The language carried by Sephardim, the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492, has faded from existence over the last century, but not in a corner of Bay Ridge, where it is still spoken daily.

At the Sephardic Home for the Aged, located on Crotony Ave. just blocks from the water, Ladino — based on medieval Spanish and written in Hebrew script — is used by a couple dozen residents.

"None of my family talks the way I talk, está veja (it's old)," said Diana Yomtov Lufazan, 81, referring to Ladino. "So it is nice to speak the language when I can. We love to joke around (in Ladino), and I like the music."

She then pointed to a canvas she had been working on for a while, adding "no tiene nada (it's worthless)," she said about her art.

The Ladino speakers at the home get a great boost nearly 20 years ago when Esther Cases David, an Egyptian-born Sephardic Jew, became the home's art therapist.

"When they first said I speak it they told me that we have to only speak Ladino," said David, who is in her late 50s. "There is a strong love there (for Ladino culture)."

Indeed, speaking Ladino with someone from a younger generation like David is rare for the residents. The majority do not have children or grandchildren that speak the language, as mastering English was prioritized over Ladino in their households.

After their expulsion from Spain, the Sephardim traveled to countries like Greece, Turkey and Mo-

rocco. While they eventually adapted to their new homes, many never let go of their Spanish heritage. Indeed, Sephardim comes from Sefarad, the Hebrew word for Spain.

They continued to speak in Ladino, and sing the folk songs, or kaminones, with medieval and Old Testament themes. Many families even passed from one generation to the next the keys to their last homes in Spain, hoping one day to return.

These key-holding families never made it back to Spain, but many did make it to New York City, where the Sephardic population in the lower East Side rose to about 25,000 in the early 1900s. There was even a weekly Ladino newspaper called La America that was printed until 1935.

But with time the use of Ladino declined, related to universities and places of worship. Currently, a few synagogues in the New York area do parts of the service in Ladino, though none uses it exclusively.

In the dining room of the senior home there is a mural chronicling the history of Sephardim, from their time in Spain to the townships of New York. In the early 1900s, the Spanish government launched a campaign to get the Sephardim to return, but they refused.

When the Sephardic Home for the Aged opened in 1981 it was more of a social club for elderly Sephardim. Many did not feel part of the predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish population and longed to have a part of their own to socialize in old age.

Today, as the community has shrunk, only about 25 of the 200 residents speak Ladino.

Despite the small numbers, the home is trying to keep the culture alive, holding concerts of Ladino music and hosting family dinners for holidays. They also bake cakes and cookies like "tucoschos de navos," Sephardic cookie rings that are often topped with chopped nuts, a recipe that has been passed down for hundreds of years.

"Ladino preserves are still big around here," said Jackie Calderon Green, the director of volunteers, in her late 50s, and Sephardic herself.

"En bollos corrados no entra moskita," — that is a big one," she said, which roughly translates, "A closed mouth gathers no flies."

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### ORIENTAL JEWS GATHER.

#### At Annual Meeting the Federation Elects Officers.

The second annual meeting of the Federation of Oriental Jews was held yesterday afternoon in the auditorium of Public School 91, at Forsyth and Stanton Streets. The Federation includes twenty-eight societies, with two or three thousand members, and of the Hebrews whom it represents, there are 10,000 to 15,000 in New York. In general, they are those at present or formerly under Turkish rule, who for the most part employ the Sephardic rather than the Ashkenasic ritual, and who do not speak Yiddish. Ladino, the fifteenth century Spanish, with some admixture of foreign words, is spoken by many of them, while others speak Arabic and Greek. The variety of languages is said to be the chief obstacle to the progress of these Jews, who come to America unable to communicate even with their Hebrew brethren; and the activity of the Federation is directed toward social and economic rather than religious ends.

The Oriental Jews are for the most

## Sephardic Names in Aragon Spain

ASADIA	ALMIRON	SENZAN	COXUSE	ORABUENA
ABEMENIR	ALPERGAN	BENCAL	CUEXO	ORTA
ABENCAHADIA	ALTZEYETI	BENDAVID	QURI	PAGO
ABENDAVID	ALVELDANO	BENQATIEL	QURNIEL	PANILLO
ABENDEHUEYT	AMARIELLO	BENJATHOP	DERMITOL	PAMPONES
ABENLUENGO	AMATO	BIENBENGUT	DIENTUNIEL	PEHE
ABENNAHAMIAS	ARAGON	BENOSIELLO	ESCALCO	PECET
ABENPOLLEGAR	ARDUC	BIENVENIST	ESTALLO	PIERA
ABENRABIÇA	ARRUETI	BITAS	EZQUERRA	PIQUO
ABENTLAJAS	ASAYUEL	BOLSENC	FALCON	PLATERO
ABENXUE	ATORTOX	BON	FARA	POLLO
ABERRABI	AVENPESAT	CANADIAS	FARAX	PORPOLER
ABET	AVEMODER	CALAHORRI	FRANCES	PORTELLA
ABIRI	AVESCOES	CALDERERO	GORMENZANO	PORTIELLO
ABJOXAR	AXERICH	CALO	GRISA	PRATS
AÇAFAR	AXECU	CAMAHAS	GUALLAR	QUESPA
ALBEDI	AXIVIL	CAMIN	GURREA	REPOL
ALBELIAS	AYAT	CARAMEL	HAMIZ	RICO
ALBOHAYRE	AZAMEL	CARDENIEL	HAYAT	SALADIN
ALBORGI	AZDAY	CARDIEL	JAVACIX	SALAMON
ALCALAHORRI	AZECRI	CASCANT	LAQUEE	SALVAT
ALCARAGUEY	BACO	CASTINI	LAROYA	SAMARIA
ALCASTIEL	BALSECO	CASTRO	LEÓN	SERRALLERO
ALCOSTANTIN	BARBANPLO	CAVALI	LEVI	SIMUEL
ALDOXA	BARCELONA	CEPON	MANUEL	TAPIADOR
ALFAGUDEL	BEACÉN	CHAPI	MANYOS	TERRELLON
ALFAQUIN	BELERO	CHICO	MATARON	TORRALVA
ALFAYAT	RELIDO	CHIVARICH	MAZAL	TORRELLON
ALFOPI	WELLDAT	CIDICARO	MEHE	TREVAOD
ALFRANCIE	BELTRAN	COGULLA	MIRON	TRIGO
ALJOFAR	BENAYON	COHEN	MORSA	TUSTI
ALMARI	BERNARDOT	CORNAGO	NEHRMAN	ZACAZINOR



## Israel Greek Jews in Israel

We thank Hanna Cassorla Aizik for her historic collection of photos of Greek Jews in Israel.



Mordechai Ben Nathan 1950s

### Dedicating a Square in Ashdod as Thessaloniki Square



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



Purim will fall Wednesday night March 20th and Thursday March 21st. And of course, all over the world, Jews will gather in synagogues and homes to hear the fascinating story of Purim by reading Megillat Esther- the scroll of Esther- which tells the entire Purim story.

But Purim is quite complex, and in fact, the events described in the Megilah in many ways reflect what we have experienced as a people throughout history, especially today, when antisemitism is once again rearing its ugly head in so many countries. The lessons we can learn from the Megillah are therefore quite relevant to our own Jewish identity and history.

We can start with basic antisemitism and how frighteningly contemporary and relevant Haman's Jew-hatred is still today. While Haman's only complaint and contempt is against Mordechai the individual and the fact that he alone refuses to bow to him, he quickly extrapolates and extends his hatred to the entire Jewish people, and immediately plots their physical annihilation: "It seemed beneath his contempt to lay his hands only on Mordechai, for they had told him who Mordechai's people were, and Haman's desire was to wipe out all the Jews....." (Megillat Esther, 3:6). But when he turns to the king to get his approval to annihilate the Jews, he employs a much more familiar and cunning technique: "And Haman said to king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from those of every other people; and they do not keep the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them: If it please the king, let it be decreed that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those who have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (Megillat Esther, 3:8-9). Is this not familiar? The Jews are subversive, mysterious and not loyal- a fifth column. As Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik commented, "There is one people" – not individuals, but a united collective that must be destroyed, even though they live in many countries, speak different languages and dress, act, and live differently. They are ultimately a single entity united in their religious beliefs and therefore must be filtered out from every land and destroyed as a single, united people.

And then there is the king's reaction: No discussion, no questioning, almost apathetic: "And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy: And the king said to Haman, The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you" (Megillat Esther:10-11). This would seem to fly in the face of what seems to have been Ahasuerus' relationship with his Jewish subjects until then, which seems to have been basically good. The extent and diversity of the Persian Empire are indicated in the first chapter of the Megillah, and Jews were just one of several peoples living under Ahasuerus' reign. In fact, our Sages teach us that Ahasuerus made sure that kosher food was also served for his Jewish guests at the huge feast he sponsored at the very beginning of the Megillah. Yet with no hesitation, his attitude changes and he readily agreed to Haman's nefarious "Final Solution" for the Jews of the Persian Empire. Unfortunately, this is another aspect of antisemitism seen all too often over history whereby the local society is often so willing to accept the Haman-like canard and allow antisemitism and rejection of the Jew to become "mainstream" among even the "highest" societies. It can be manifested in physical violence, in outright social, economic and political discrimination against Jews, or, in more modern times, disguised as "legitimate" criticism, or even hate of the State of Israel and "Zionism". And at best, it always seems to be latent, just under the surface, until ignited or released by certain events or groups, quickly spreading to almost every social level and venue.

Yet despite the reality and apparent inevitability of antisemitism wherever Jews dwell, the heart of the Purim story is our victory of Haman's plans and a true victory and salvation for the Jews of the Persian empire at the time. The lessons we learn from this victory as described in the Megillah are no less significant, and perhaps even more, than those we learn about antisemitism. First and foremost, God's role and intervention in Jewish history and survival is a fact of Jewish life that never ends. None of God's various names appears in the Megillah: our Sages saw this as being purposeful so that we would understand that no matter what the circumstances, God is with us. We may not always be pleased, and certainly not understand God's ways – and even be infuriated by them from time to time – but He is always there and will always ensure the survival and eternity of the Jewish people, no matter what the cost at any given time or place in history. Furthermore, our own actions and attitudes are also crucial in battling those who hate us and our people, which we learn from Mordechai and Esther. At the outset Mordechai is described as "the Jew" because of his unwavering loyalty to God and his faith, being proud, courageous, self-confident and unequivocally Jewish, without fear or shame. But once he realizes what is afoot with Haman's nefarious plot, he takes action to save his people, and even forces Esther to join him despite the direct risk to her own life. They inspired and rallied the Jews to such an extent that, not only do the Jews collectively vow to celebrate the Purim victory every year, but also symbolically recommit themselves to the Torah, as the verse says: "The Jews established and accepted [the Torah] upon themselves and their descendants and for all who might join them, never to be neglected, - and that they would keep these two days as they are prescribed, and according to their appointed time every year" (Megillat Esther 9:27).

So while the Megillah may teach us that that no matter how hard we try, we may not be able to eliminate the scourge of antisemitism, it also clearly proclaims that we can overcome its effects by strengthening our Jewish identity and observance as we carry our heads high as proud, committed and active members of the Jewish people. Happy Purim!

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### **Romaniote Pesach Seder Customs**

Romaniote (derived from "Roman") or "Byzantine rite" Jewry originated with Hellenistic Jews who migrated north and west from Palestine into Roman lands during the days of the Roman Empire. According to one legend, they sprang from Jewish slaves who survived a shipwreck when being shipped from Palestine to Rome. According to another account, they originated from escaped Jewish slaves who'd been conscripted by the Romans to dig the Corinth canal. When the Roman Empire was Christianized in 325 C.E. and became the Byzantine Empire under the Byzantine Greeks, those who remained in the Byzantine Empire were "Romaniote," later falling under Moslem Turks when the Ottoman Turks conquered the Byzantine Empire in 1453. Romaniotes evolved Yevanic (also called Yavanic, Judeo-Greek, Yevankitika, or Romaniot), a language combining ancient Greek with elements of modern Greek, Hebrew, Turkish, and Judeo-Italian, as their everyday language. They constituted the mainstream of Greek and Balkan Jewry until the fifteenth century, with flourishing Greek-speaking Romaniote communities in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Sicily, and Asia Minor. About 89% of Greece's Jews (one of the Diaspora's oldest and culturally richest communities) were decimated by the Nazis during World War II and, with them, most of the Romaniote community in Europe. Deported from Greece by Kurt Waldheim, they died almost immediately in the Polish death camps because they could not survive the harsh Polish winters. Today only 8,000 to 10,000 Romaniote Jews remain in the world, with small pockets in Greece (centered around the Romaniote capital of Ioannina in northwestern Greece, as well as Crete and Volos), Turkey, and the southern former Yugoslavia. The old Romaniote synagogue in New York City, Kehila Kedosha Janina, at Broome and Allen Streets, now serves as a museum of Romaniote Jewry as well as a functioning synagogue, and is the only Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.

Among the distinctive Romaniote Passover Seder customs are the following:



- Dipping: Like Sephardim, Romaniote Jews dip the karpas and maror in vinegar, rather than salt water, as Ashkenazim do.
- The Order of the Seder: A Romaniote and Sephardic custom is to sing the order of the Seder again (Kadaysh, Urchatz, Karpas, Yachatz, etc.) at the beginning of each section, stopping at the name of the upcoming section.
- "Ha Lachma": A custom that many Romaniote, Spanish, Moroccan, Turkish, and Tunisian Jews adopted, which first began in Spain in the fourteenth century is for the Seder Leader, before or while reciting "Ha Lachma," to walk around the table three times with the Seder plate in hand, tapping it on the head of each guest. This practice is sometimes connected to the Talmudic custom of "uprooting" the seder plate so that guests might ask questions about the Jews in Egypt, but may also be in commemoration of the Angel of Death passing over the Hebrew homes during the night of the tenth plague.
- The Ten Plagues: At the recitation of the Ten Plagues, the Seder Leader dips his or her finger into the bowl of vinegar used earlier for dipping the karpas, takes out a drop of vinegar at the mention of each plague, then discards the bowl of vinegar after the recitation.

**Kosher Feta from Greece Now Available in the United States  
Thanks to the Rabbinate in Athens and Rabbi Gabriel Negrin**



## Tours of Jewish Greece

The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry is now officially closing out the Italy-Greece Tour and the Young Professionals Tour. There is still very limited room on the last tour that runs from July 17-July 31.

# Summer 2019 Itinerary



The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

## Tour of Jewish Greece featuring Rhodes

July 17 – July 31, 2019

Includes Athens, Rhodes, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, & Mykonos

Also includes the Commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
Deportation of the Jews of Rhodes

For more information email [Museum@kkjism.org](mailto:Museum@kkjism.org)

**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.

Some of our major donations have been generous bequests, which have enabled us to complete major work in our synagogue/museum. Do remember us in your will. Your legacy will be present in our legacy.

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.



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**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)**

**Your donations enable us to continue our work. You can send donations via mail directly to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 or you can donate via our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)**