

Romaniote Jews of Ioannina Greece

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While the terms “Ashkenazim” and “Sephardim” are geographical terms designating Jews whose ancestry originated in “German Lands” or Spain, the term “Romaniote” is an historical term, denoting Jews who date their ancestry back to the Roman Empire. When, in the early 4th century, Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to a city on the Bosphorus, named Byzantion, renaming it after himself [Constantinopolis, the City of Constantine], Jews were citizens of the Roman Empire and, in their dialect, denoted themselves as such: *Romaniotes*-citizens of Roman. The term has come to mean “Hellenized” Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, who like Jews throughout history, living in most circumstances as small minorities surrounded by non-Jewish majorities, have absorbed many of the attributes, customs, traditions and, certainly, language of the surrounding non-Jewish majority, in this case, the Greek world of their time, whether it be pagan or Christian.

Certainly, their form of naming reflected this influence. One of the oldest recorded Greek-Jewish names, Moskos, is found on a tombstone dating back to Hellenistic period. The adding of “os” at the end of the name [Mordos, Molhos, etc] would, in essence, Hellenize the name. While, as Jews have done throughout the millennia, a child would be named with a given first name, followed by “ben” or “bat” to denote the paternity of the child, with the passage of time and the acquisition of surnames, many of these names, both given and surnames, would become Hellenized. Sometimes the name would be the translation of the Hebrew into Greek, as in the case of “Eftihia” the literal translation of Mazaltov [good luck] or Sterina for Esther.

For years, I have been researching the naming practices of the Jews of Ioannina, a typical Romaniote Jewish community located in the northwest of Greece near the Albanian border, a community that, until recently, had lived in comparative isolation and had continued to preserve its age-old traditions. The destruction of the community during the

Holocaust has changed this but, fortunately, a sister community had been established in New York in the early part of the 20th century and the synagogue, Kehila Kedosha Janina, still stands. The museum, of which I am the Director, is located inside the synagogue, and we have continued to preserve the traditions and culture of the Romaniote Jews of Ioannina and, recently, expanded our research to assure that information will be available for subsequent generations.

In many ways, the naming practices of the Jews of Ioannina offer valuable insights into this community and, by extension, valuable aids in genealogical research, not only for Romaniote Jews, but all Jews. As the oldest European Diasporic Jewish community [Romaniote Jews have lived on what is now Greek soil for over 2,300 years] we can safely say that these Jews set the precedent, in many ways, for subsequent Jewish naming. Surnames, like their Ashkenazi counterparts, would begin to be acquired in the 17th century and, as in the case with Ashkenazim, was due to requirements of municipalities within which they were residing, in the case of Romaniotes, the then Ottoman Turkish Empire. Previous to the 17th century, without surnames for much of their existence, only their given names [and that of their father] were used. Even today, most Romaniote surnames are based on male Biblical first names: Solomon, Samuel, Avraam, Isaak, Barouch, etc. Needless to say, there would be much duplication. In the Talmud, there is reference to this problem, and it is not unlikely that the reference is to Romaniote Jews. In tractate *Rosh Hashana 16b* it states:

“If there were two [men] in the same town, [and the] name of one [was] Joseph son of Simon and the name of [the] other [was] Joseph son of Simon, neither may produce a bond of indebtedness against the other, nor may another [person] produce a bond of indebtedness against them. How should they proceed? They should indicate the third [generation]. And, if [their names] are [alike] to the third [generation], they add [some personal] description.”

We have, in our synagogue museum, a collection of “Alefs”, birth certificates of male children, which were also used as birth amulets to protect the child for the first 40 days of his life, and across the bottom, the child’s name is listed in this format: example

[Solomon the son of Samuel, the son of Solomon]. Alefs were only made for the males of the family, a custom that reflected the different positions of men and women within the household. It was not that the Jews of Ioannina loved their daughters any less, therefore explaining why they felt no need to “protect them from the evil eye.” It was just that males were more valuable in the eyes of the community. A male child would become a full participating member of the community on his Bar Mitzvah: women did not have a formal coming of age and did not make aliyah and read from the Torah; they did not count in the minyan. A male child would enter his father’s business, helping the family economically: women did not work. It was actually an embarrassment for a woman to earn a living. It meant that either her father or her husband could not support her. A male would take care of his aging parents: this was his obligation. A woman, with no personal source of income, could not do this. Finally, a male could say kaddish for his parents when they died. A woman could not. In addition, a woman was a financial burden to her family. A dowry had to be provided to marry her off and marriage was the only acceptable state for a woman after a certain age. In a poor community, in families with many children, the arrangement of a dowry, part of which had to include living quarters for the bride, hopefully a house of her own, was a great financial burden. Often, even the names of Jewish women from Ioannina would reflect this. If a woman bore the name of “Perna” [from the Greek “pernas”- to pass] she most likely came from a family with many older sisters and her parents were literally asking God to have this “curse” pass from their household. Another name that symbolized this was “Stemma” from the Greek “stamata”-to stop, beseeching God to stop sending them daughters. One of the members of our congregation with the name of Stemma is alive today because, as the last of many daughters in a poor home, her family sent her to the United States in the 1930’s with a cousin, hoping that here where a dowry was not a requirement, they would be able to marry her off. The rest of her family, including all her older sisters with their husbands and children, would perish in the Holocaust.

Returning to the duplication of names, to complicate matters, Romaniotes [like Sephardim] would name their children after their parents. This causes Ashkenazim much discomfort. In actuality, there is nothing in Jewish Law about the naming of children. It is

strictly tradition but, often, traditions are more difficult to change than law. We do not “name after the living” as is so often said [in horror!] by the Ashkenazim but, rather, we adhere to the commandment to “honor our mothers and fathers” and what could be a greater honor than bestowing their names on our children. Therefore, both Romaniote and traditional Sephardi Jews name their children [at least the first 4] after their parents, whether they be living or deceased. Needless to say, there would be many, many repetitions of names. If Solomon had 8 children, not uncommon in a community like Ioannina where large families were the norm rather than the exception, each of his sons would name their first son “Solomon” and each of his daughters would bestow their father’s name on their second son, the privilege for naming the first son left to their husbands.

In Ioannina, because of the repetition of names, “nicknames” *paratsouklia*, many of them descriptive [blue-eyed (*Galanos*), red-hair (*Kokkinos*), small nose (*Koutsomitis*), etc] became surnames. Other descriptive characteristics, also common in other non-Romaniote communities, were occupational names. In Ioannina, of course, these names would reflect local occupations and would appear in Greek: Battinos [one who stuffs-as in a quilt], Koffinas [little basket-the patriarch probably engaged in making baskets], Bakaras (from Greek word for “grocer”), Dragoumanos (from “*dragoman*”- translator) and Lagaris (“polisher of silver” in Greek), to name a few.

As among others, both Jews and non-Jews, locations often were transformed into surnames, usually denoting the origin of the original bearer of that name. In Ioannina, some examples of these surnames were: Volos [a city in eastern Greece], Kastorianos (from Kastoria, city in northern Greece), or Vrachorititis (someone who came from Agrinion, town in western Greece formerly known as Vrachora). Sometime the area was far away, such as “Kabylia”, a region in North Africa, which gave rise to the family name of Kabilis, or close by, as in a neighborhood in Ioannina called Kamaras, which was the source of the family name of Kamaras. Sometimes, the surname reflected one who did business in a certain city, and the Greek name of Politis, used by both Jews and Greek Christians, referred to someone who did business in “the City”, i poli, Constantinopolis. There were even instances where a mere visit to another location resulted in a nickname,

which became a surname, such as in the instance of Katsanos, which became the family name of man who had visited the village of Katsanochoria. A not-uncommon surname among Greek [and other Sephardic Jews] was Askenazi denoting a Jew of German decent. This surname appears in many different forms in the Ioannina municipal archives.

Sometimes the nickname reflected a specific distinction, such as in the case of Platonas, a surname given to man who ran a store under the plane tree [platonas] in the center of the city. Sometimes it reflected the patriarch's religious function in the community, as in the case of Samas, the shamas. Since in Greek there is no 'h' it was pronounced "samass". Where descendants of the "samass" may no longer help in the synagogue, they would continue to carry a surname that reflected that background, much in the same way as Levis and Koens still do.

Sometimes the surname reflected a physical characteristic, not always complimentary, such as Fridis, given to a man with bushy eyebrows, or Golios, which in Greek was "a bird without wings" and was used to describe, in a comical way, a man without hair. In other instances, the surname would reflect an aspect of the person's personality, again, often uncomplimentary. As Eftihia Nachmias Nachman pointed out in her book, *Yannina: Journey to the Past*, the Jews from Ioannina were conservative, observant Jews and whether it be in their use of expletives, or in their possibly derogatory nicknames, while they may appear to be insulting, they were rarely used in such a way. That said, some interesting personality characteristics that became surnames were the following instances:

Svolis (which is Greek for "a clump of earth" and was given to someone who was stubborn), Anionios (the family name that came from a nickname given to a man who boasted that he would live forever, from Greek word for "eternal"), Zarkos (from Greek for "naked" for a man who always appeared underdressed), Diamonios (from Greek for "someone who is as clever as the devil"), Lalos (Greek for "talkative"), and Lamias (Greek for "glutton"). We can only wonder about the man who received the nickname of Kapoulas, which refers to the hindquarters of a mule, and certainly question the origins of the family name Bekiaris from the Greek for "bachelor". Imagine the plight of a family

condemned to live with the surname Mavrogenis from the Greek for “dark birth”, denoting a curse on the individual and, by extension, in this superstitious community, on the family. Just one unfortunate instance could brand a family forever, such as in the name Stavromenos, a surname given to a Jewish man who was captured by bandits and branded with a cross, ‘stavros’ in Greek.

The names of the Jews of Ioannina reflect many aspects of their life, not the least of which was their observant, conservative, close-knit community where everybody knew your business. Some interesting surnames reflecting this are:

Hametz, from the Hebrew for leavened product at Pessah, forbidden for consumption, which became a nickname given to a family member who had ‘hametz’ on him on Pessah, and by extension, a family surname, or Kalchamiras [Colchamiro] from the Hebrew first lines of a prayer said when the house is being cleaned of hametz before Pessah. According to family lore, the family surname was originally Matathia [or Mathios] and one of the brothers [the family was involved in buying and selling of textiles, a not uncommon profession of the Jews of Ioannina] was so meticulous in picking out his fabrics that the other brothers teased him by saying it was as if he was saying the Kalchamira prayer before Pessah. The nickname stuck and when he, as the first brother to arrive at Ellis Island in the early 20th century, was asked his name, he said Kalchamira and that is what was written on his papers. When the other brothers arrived, they decided to use the same name so that everyone in the family would be called the same. Another interesting Yanniote name that stemmed from Pessah was Kakanistras from Greek for “bad fast” probably given to someone who had difficulty fasting.

Other Hebraic words that became surnames in Ioannina were Babocher, meaning “early in the morning” and given to a baker who got up early to ply his trade, Gani, meaning “garden”, Yomtov, meaning “good day” or “holiday” and Saba, a shortened form of Sabetai, a name often given in Ioannina for a boy born on the Sabbath. The name of Yomtov took an interesting turn in one branch of the family on their arrival in the New World. As so often happened among immigrants, trying to assimilate and, unfortunately, too often among Jewish immigrants, not wanting to make their Judaism too obvious

because of discrimination, names were changed, anglicized. There is one branch of the Yomtov family that became “Holiday”.

While the indigenous Jews of Greece were all Romaniotes, from the 14th century on other Jews would start to enter Greece soil. Jews would come from German lands, primarily Hungary, fleeing persecutions. Other Jews would come from the south of France and Italy, also fleeing persecutions. They would establish their own synagogues and separate communities. In 1492, with the massive influx of Spanish speaking Sephardic Jews into lands of the Ottoman Empire, of which Greece was then a part, the composition of Greek Jewry would change. Where, in most communities, due both to their large numbers and more sophisticated culture, the Sephardim, within a few generations, would absorb other Jews, Romaniote, Italian, French and Ashkenazi into their culture, this did not take place in the Jewish Community of Ioannina. In fact, the reverse happened: the Sephardim were absorbed into the Romaniote culture and the only signs we have of their presence is in certain surnames that are of definite Spanish origin. Some of these names are Negrin [first appearing in the Ioannina municipal archives as Nigrin, a more correct Spanish spelling of the word to denote “black”], DeKastro [denoting Jews who lived inside a fortified area and while there is a “kastro” in Ioannina, the “de” in front of the name definitely speaks of a Spanish origin], Russo, from the Spanish for “red”, originally “rosso” and “Markado” from the Spanish “Mercado” given to a child who is ill at birth, to “buy them” from the Angel of Death, from the 15th century Castilian Spanish, ‘mercar’ to buy.

There was also an Italian influence on certain surnames in Ioannina stemming from an influx of Sicilian Jews in the later part of the 15th century. Most of them would come from Siracusa and, until the destruction of the Community during the Holocaust, there was a second Purim celebrated in Ioannina by Jews of Sicilian descent, the Promoplo. According to legend, Syracusan king, under whose rule they lived, asked them whenever he passed through their neighborhood to take out the Torah Scrolls in the cases [tikkim] and to kneel before him. But the Jews hid the parchment of the Law and honored him with empty tikkim, since as religious people they would only bow before God. One day, a Jew by the name of Marcus, who had abjured his faith, revealed to the king the fact that

the Jews were deceiving him and honoring him with empty tikkim. The king decided to go and find out the whole truth. But the samas had a dream in which Eliahu Ha-navi, the Prophet Eliahu, told him that he should put the parchments back into the tikkim, which he did without saying a word to anybody. So, when the king came, everything was in order and, instead of punishing the Jews, he punished Marcus. This legend became a song that was sung during Promoplo, the Sicilian Purim, in Ioannina. Names of obvious Italian origin survive to today: Vita (Italian equivalent of Haim-life), Vidas (a variation on Vita), Dostis [original meaning unknown], Pitsirilo and Kantos [song from the Italian “cantare”], a name given to someone who was a hazan. An interesting change that took place in Greece was with the name “Bellelis” from the Italian “Bella” for beautiful. Since the letter that looks like the Latin “B”, in Greek, the “beta” is actually pronounced like the letter “v”, the name became “Velleli” but those Jews who immigrated to Israel or the United States kept the Italian pronunciation of Belleli. Another interesting surname with both an Italian and Greek influence is Kalabokas, with the Greek for “good” [kala] and the Italian [boca] for “mouth”, obviously given to someone who was proficient in rhetoric.

Ioannina was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1430, 23 years before the Fall of Constantinople and the official end of the Byzantine Empire. Ioannina would remain under Ottoman Turkish control for 483 years, until 1913 when it would become part of Modern Greece during the Second Balkan War. Such a long period of Turkish influence had to leave its mark on the community and we can see Turkish influences in the style of dress [the wearing of the fez], cuisine [baklava, Turkish coffee, etc.], Turkish words creeping into the dialect of the Jews and Christians of the city and, certainly, in certain surnames. Examples of this are the surnames: Hadjis, (from Turkish “hadj”, someone who had made a pilgrimage, in this case, for Jews, to Jerusalem] and Hadjopoulos, with the Greek ending “poulos”, meaning “son of” or the son of someone who made a “hadj”, Koutshkos (from Turkish for “small”), Koundouratzi (“shoemaker” from Turkish “kunduraci”), Sakatis (from Turkish for “crippled”) and Hakim (from Turkish for “ruler”).

It was not unusual to Hellenize both the surnames and given names. An interesting example of this was the surname “Bechoropoulos” combining the Hebrew “Bechor” [first born] with the Greek ending “poulos” meaning “the son of” to form a name meaning “the son of the first born.” This combination of Greek and Hebrew was common in Ioannina, where a language, Judeo-Greco, used primarily in liturgy, began to develop quite early. Judeo-Greco, if anything, had more Greek in it than Hebrew, reflecting changes that had started to take place in the Hellenistic world as early, if not earlier, than the 2nd century B.C.E. It is not a coincidence that the first translation of any part of the Hebrew Scriptures from Hebrew and Aramaic into any other language was the Septuagint, a translation into Greek. And, although many legends exist as to why the translation was necessary, in all likelihood, it was due to the fact that Jews of the time were losing their ability to understand Hebrew.

We, in many ways, have been fortunate in the vast archival material we have at our disposal, something that enables us to undertake extensive genealogical research. As you well know, this is not the case in many other communities, both among the Ashkenazim and traditional Sephardim. The whys behind this is important to note, not only as an explanation but, also has possible tools for researchers into other Jewish communities.

First, our community, the Romaniote Jewish community of Ioannina, has always been small, information more manageable than in a larger community. The community in Greece never numbered more than 4000 and here, in the United States, our mailing list reaches 3000 households, with an additional international mailing [still growing] of no more than 500. Of course, how these people identify themselves is another question: ethnicity is a matter of choice and in some households only one member may be of Yanniot background and, sometimes, that background may only be from one grandparent. The culture is a strong one and we find many of the grandchildren and, even great-grandchildren, identifying on some level with their “Greek-Jewish” side of the family.

Second, the Diasporic community here in the US has, from its very inception in the early 20th century, kept close ties with the community in Ioannina. At the beginning, during the

height of immigration, families here would help provide the means for additional family members to join them in New York. The Sisterhood of Janina would help provide dowries for orphaned girls whose families were without the means. The Kehila Kedosha Janina, along with the Sisterhood, would send money for synagogue repair and maintenance. After the destruction of the Holocaust, where 91% of the community perished, the community here would continue their help, acting as a haven for survivors who wished to come to the United States and increasing their aid to the community in Greece to help them save the remnants of the community, the synagogue and cemetery. Annual visits would be made and continue to be made, assuring that the ties are not severed.

This small community, also, has always been concerned with preservation, not only within Greece, but also here in the United States. Much of this has to do with their distinctive character and their, often, exclusion from the larger body of Judaism. During the period 1881-1924, over 15 million immigrants would enter the shores of the United States, 3½ million of them Jews, most fleeing persecutions in Eastern Europe. Intermingled with this large wave of Jewish immigration were our people, a small drop in the ocean of Jewish immigration. They, unlike their Eastern European counterparts were not fleeing persecutions and pogroms but, rather, political upheavals in the Balkans that were effecting the economy. They, also, like all immigrants, were seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Where assimilation was the norm, the Romaniote Jews tended to assimilate less. Language was a barrier. They were Greek-speaking, not Yiddish or Spanish speaking, thus the need to establish their own synagogue. While there were hundred of Jewish houses of worship on the Lower East Side of New York, where most of Jewish immigrants initially settled, the Greek-speaking Jews of Ioannina did not feel comfortable in those congregations and many of the Ashkenazim doubted their “Jewishness” because they did not speak Yiddish. This exclusion made the Yanniotes stick together and, even today, aids them in preserving their distinct culture and traditions. Ironically, of the hundreds of Jewish houses of worship that once existed on the Lower east Side of New York, Kehila Kedosha Janina is one of only 5 still functioning as a Jewish house of worship.

In recent years, annual visits to Ioannina have born fruit, not only for the small Jewish community who so look forward to our visits and for those who wish to reconnect with their ancestry or wish to learn about this distinct culture, but in the field of genealogy. Through close ties to the Jewish Community of Ioannina and the establishment of close ties to the municipality of the city, we have not only been able to access municipal birth and census records of Jews in the community, but now have them translated and computerized. With a flick of my “search engine” I can access family names, birth years, often death and burial details, family groupings and other interesting facts. Cross-referencing this information with other archival material that we have computerized [Brotherhood records of the community here in the United States, circumcision lists and Holocaust lists], we are able to aid many of our people, not only here in the United States, but also throughout the world, to create, or expand upon, their family trees. In addition, due to the initial research of Isaac Dostis, the founder of the Museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina, we have many family trees of Yanniotas on file. I am now in the process of computerizing these.

In addition to accumulating vast amounts of material for genealogical purposes, our findings have enlightened us, and hopefully others, on some of the difficulties in conducting and documenting this research. First, and whether this is specific to the Yanniotas Jews or can be applied to Jews of other communities is still to be determined, in most instances surnames were not important. They were given to appease the municipality [in the case of Ioannina, both the Turkish and Greek municipalities] but they continued to name as they had always named [child’s name followed by father’s name: Solomon ben Samuel, etc.]. When Samuel had a son, he named him after his father, Solomon, and the name, Solomon ben Samuel would appear. It was not uncommon for the municipal archives to reflect this and the surname would change from generation to generation. One instance where this was very easy to detect because of the comparative infrequency of the names [Raphael and David] is in Andzelos [Angelos] ben Raphael David, born in 1883 and his son, Raphael ben Andzelos born in 1908, whose surname is listed as Raphael, the name of the grandfather for whom he was named. The recurrence of this came to light with discovery of a circumcision list of the late Rabbi Bechoraki

Matsil, who circumcised over 600 Yanniotte boys, both in Ioannina and in the United States after immigrating here in 1919, and recorded all of his circumcisions in a prayer book. We can only assume that the father of the child, who should certainly know the child's name, would be the best source for this name. Yet, in cross-referencing the names with the municipal records, very often the father's name and the son's name were switched. Obviously, the scribe who recorded the name did not understand the process of Jewish naming and when the father gave his name and then his son's, that is how it was recorded: Samuel [the father] and Solomon [the son] listed as Samuel the son of Solomon, rather than Solomon the son of Samuel. To make it even more interesting, obviously, from how the names were listed, when asked the family name, the father would state his own [ben Samuel] and in the next generation, the new father, Solomon, the son of the original Samuel, would do the same, giving the name Solomon. Therefore, in one generation, the "family" name would change from Samuel to Solomon!

This is reflective of another difficulty, that of changes in spelling of names due to how the scribes recorded them. This is a problem in many communities, especially, such as in Ioannina, where Jews did not write in the alphabets of the majority non-Jewish community and used the Hebrew alphabet instead. They did not submit written documents to the municipalities [where the Hebrew writings of brit milah certificates and kitubbahs would not have been understood] but relied on the municipal scribes to accurately record their names. Many changes in spellings would occur according to how the scribes heard the name. An excellent example of this is in the name of Askinazi in Ioannina. In the municipal records, it is recorded as "Askinazi" with an "A", "Eskenazi" with an "E" and "Skinazi" without any vowel in front, the last reflecting the habit of Yanniotte to slur their words, often eliminating either the first or last vowel. To complicate matters, other changes would take place when immigrating, not only to the United States, but to other parts of Europe and to Israel. For example, one branch of the Askinazi family became "Eskononts" at Ellis Island and a Belleli became Balili in Israel because of confusion with the michidoth.

In addition, sources that we would have thought would be helpful in compiling of family trees, unfortunately, have been flawed. One alarming instance of this is the recently

computerized Hall of Names from Yad Vashem, where, rather than recording the names of the victims for eternity, as stated on their website, in the case of many Greek-Jewish names, they have been irrevocably distorted and listed with inexcusable, sometimes embarrassing information. Yad Vashem also chose to use, in most instances, only the Hebrew name of the victim and, in the case of Greek Jews, both Romaniote and Sephardi, the Ashkenazi interpretation of these Hebrew names! Therefore Solomon is listed as “Schlomo” and Samuel as “Schmuel.” As in many other Diasporic communities, the Hebrew name is not sufficient. In the case of Greek Jewry, because of our naming practices and the large number of repetitions in Hebrew names, this form of identification becomes almost meaningless. For instance, I am named after by grandmother Marika, both of our Hebrew names being Mariam, and my actual name is Marika, not Marcia. The nice Ashkenazi woman in the next bed to my mother, who could not read or write English, helped her fill out the information for my birth certificate and evidently thought that Marcia [M-A-R-C-I-A] was a nicer name than Marika [M-A-R-I-K-A]. My grandmother had 13 children, 8 sons and 5 daughters. All of her sons named their first daughter after their mother and all of the five daughters followed suit with their second daughters. We had 13 potential Marikas in the family. To distinguish one from the other, little diminutives would be added to the name: Marinika, Marikoula, etc. Just using Mariam [or, as the Ashkenazi variation would probably appear, Miriam, would have made it impossible to distinguish one from the other. Fortunately, none of Marika’s direct descendants would perish in the Holocaust. That unfortunate distinction would be left to her sister Sarika’s family, that of my mother’s, the Errera branch.

Where, I had once, incorrectly, assumed that these problems in the Hall of Names at Yad VaShem were restricted to Greek Jewry, I have since learned that these mistakes are repeated in many other Jewish communities, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi. The reasons behind this are numerous but the most prevalent was the asking of Jews, many of whom had only a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew, to fill out their testimonies in Hebrew. From the responses, it is obvious that many did not understand what they were reading and certainly, had difficulty writing the answers. Therefore, in addition to the change from Belleli to Balili, mentioned before, and other similar errors in vowel changes, we

have such inexcusable listings such as “an 8-year old boy” listed as “married” to another man. To add insult to injury, when I submitted a correction, easy for me to do because I was able to cross-reference this listing with my computerized municipal archives from Ioannina, I was told that I would have to submit another page of testimony, that Yad Vashem could not change the original, even though it was quite obvious that a glaring mistake had been made. Therefore, I would be adding to the volumes of duplications [triplications and, in some instance quadruplicating] of names. In fact, during my research on another small Jewish community in Greece, that of Corfu, in preparation for a memorial book, I found that of the 1000 names of Corfiote Jews listed by Yad Vashem, at least 1/3 were repetitions. Simply, no cross-referencing had ever been done. Surely, before the present list had been made public, some of the millions of dollars recently allotted by the Claims Conference to Yad Vashem could have been used to correct previous mistakes. In the case of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, it would have been very easy. The text for the publication of our memorial book, “In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ioannina,” had been sent digitally to Yad Vashem [at their request!]. It was never used.

Forgive me for ending on a negative note, but I would be remiss if I did not mention this and, hopefully, with an international audience, many of whom are Israeli, some resolution to this painful problem can be reached.

In summary, the Romaniote Jews of Ioannina, and genealogical research on the community, give us aids in further genealogical studies and also make us aware of possible obstacles, hopefully resolvable, in other communities.