August 2019 E-Newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This past month has been especially busy, with activities across Greece. Our Museum Director was in Greece with a series of tours, sponsored by the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry. Below are photos from recent visits to the Kahal Kadosh Yashan synagogue in Ioannina. More details on the three tours follows.

This Saturday night and Sunday we observe Tisha B’Av, the darkest day in the Jewish calendar. Many calamities have occurred for the Jewish people on this day, including the destruction of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and second by the Romans in 70 CE. As we prepare to observe Tisha B’Av, we should have thoughts of Teshuva (repentance) in mind, but we should also contemplate how to strengthen ourselves and our communities. Please join us this Saturday evening August 10 starting at 7:30pm for Minha, Arvith, and Tisha B'Av services.

As we near the High Holidays, we hope you will keep us in mind and join us as we continue to celebrate in the Romaniote tradition. Our High Holiday schedule is available here.

Tour I: Italy and Greece (June 24 - July 8)

Tour II: Young Professionals Tour (July 8 - 17)

Tour III: Greece (July 17 - 31)
This newsletter, our 125th 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.

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

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 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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**Simchas**

While in Greece, we celebrated two simchas, the 74th birthday of our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos and the 89th birthday of Lenore Hazan Levy. Both birthdays were celebrated on the beautiful island of Mykonos, at the lovely San Marco resort (a property of Homeric Tours).

We enjoyed having Lenore Hazan Levy and her husband David with us on our Rhodes Commemoration Tour in July as she celebrated her 89th birthday on July 30th.

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We were honored to celebrate the double Bar Mitzvah of Elias Mazur and Elias Korman. Elias Mazur has family from Ioannina and Elias Korman’s mother, Natalia Indrimi, is a dear friend of Kehila Kedosha Janina, with heritage from Italy. Natalia is the Executive Director of Centro Primo Levi, which cultivates education and debate on Primo Levi’s work, the Italian Jewish past, as well as current perspectives and conversations of the Italian Jewish community today. Mazal Tov!
Passings

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Lucette Lagnado (September 19, 1956 - July 10, 2019), a talented journalist and writer whose book, “The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit” chronicled the story of her father and the family’s flight from Cairo. We were honored to host Lucette for a presentation of her book and to sell it through Kehila Kedosha Janina. You can read more about Lucette here.

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Lili Karrer, widow of Loukas Karrer, Mayor of Zakynthos who helped save the Jews of the island during the Occupation of WWII.

Visitors Flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

As always, visitors from around the world came to Kehila Kedosha Janina. In July we had visitors from Israel, England and of course, from the USA. Our appreciation to our volunteer docents, Stuart Chernin, Sol Kofinas, Stella Bacola and Lois Genee Ledner, who covered the Museum while our Museum Director was bringing groups to Jewish Greece.
While all visitors are welcome, it is always a special occasion when “Our Own” visit. We were honored to welcome a family reunion of the Eliezer family from Ioannina. Members of the family traveled from New York, Colorado, Israel, and elsewhere to visit KKJ and learn more about their Romaniote heritage.

Past Events of Interest

The Greek Jewish and Sephardic Young Professionals Network recently hosted a Day at the Beach. They had a great time in Rockaway Beach with beautiful weather, huge waves, delicious food, and great company.
ORDER YOUR ALEF TODAY!

Kehila Kedosha Janina is thrilled to announce that we now offer reproductions of Romaniote Alefs that can be customized for anyone in your family! This is the first time since WWII that new Alefs will be reproduced for our community. Kehila Kedosha Janina is currently the only source in the world offering brand new customized Alefs.

What is an Alef?

Romaniote Jews have many unique customs, one of which is the Alef. An Alef is a type of birth certificate and amulet that was traditionally created for baby boys to help protect them during the 40 days after their circumcision. In the past, the act of giving birth was associated with much danger and risk in Jewish communities all over the world because of the high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Therefore, one of the protective measures taken was the use of a birth amulet, a physical manifestation of spiritual defense. Alefs were traditionally displayed above the baby’s cradle and contain various names of G-d as well as prayers and Kabbalistic features. The names of the child and parents, the date of birth, and the names of multiple angels were all inscribed on the Alef. Alefs were historically produced among the Romaniote communities of Ioannina, Trikala, Arta, and Patras. Kehila Kedosha Janina is proud to have the largest collection of Alefs in the world.

Although originally produced for baby boys, Kehila Kedosha Janina is thrilled to offer custom-inscribed Alefs for both boys and girls. Help continue your heritage and offer your child or family member an authentic Alef they will cherish for their entire life. (You do not have to currently be a baby to have an Alef made).

Specifications

Each Alef is a fine art archival quality print (giclee print) on Somerset velvet archival watercolor paper. The Alef design was recently created by Rabbi Amadeo Spagnoletto, Chief Rabbi of Florence, who is a master Sofer (scribe). The design is directly modeled after authentic original Romaniote Alefs.

Size: 12.25” wide x 17” high
Price: $250 (includes custom inscription), plus shipping and handling

To order, please email Andrew Marcus at amarcus@kkjsm.org, along with the following information:
- Child English and Hebrew Name
- Father English and Hebrew Name
- Mother English and Hebrew Name
- Child Birth Date (Secular Date with birth time is acceptable)

Learn more at www.kkjsm.org/alefs
Upcoming Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

We are truly honored to host Rabbi Marc Angel for a special book presentation on Sunday September 8 at 2pm. Reservations are required, so please email museum@kkjsm.org if you can attend. Refreshments will be served. Attendance is free. Rabbi Angel will be signing purchased books.
Join Us For
Sephardic Cooking Lessons!

The Or VeShalom Sisterhood is pleased to announce the start of Sephardic Cooking Lessons. First up - Kefes, led by Chef Alex Borukhov, just in time for the High Holidays.

Sunday, August 4, 2019
10:30am at OVS

$18.00 | Sisterhood members
$36.00 | Non-Sisterhood members

Reserve your spot now by emailing sisterhoodcooking@orveshalom.org

RSVP and Pre-Payment Required. Space is Limited

All lessons must be prepaid, with no refunds after Thursday, August 1, 2019.

Stay tuned as more classes are in the works!
News from Jewish Greece

Rhodes

From July 19 to July 24, the 75th anniversary of the deportations of the Jews from the islands of Rhodes and Kos was commemorated. Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos was present with a group from the United States and Israel, most of them Rhodeslis.

To honor the memory of the close to 1,650 Jews from Rhodes and Kos who perished in the concentration camps during the Holocaust, the Jewish Community of Rhodes created a meaningful and emotional five day event. Our complements to Carmen Cohen who was the major coordinator.

The commemorations began on Friday night with a moving religious service led by Rabbi Gabriel Negrin (Chief Rabbi of Athens) assisted by Rabbi Nissim Elneave and Isaac Habib.
On Saturday, July 20, services were held at Kahal Shalom Synagogue, followed by beraha. In the evening, a special concert of Leonard Cohen’s music took place in the Castle of the Knights in the Old City of Rhodes.

On July 21, the official municipal commemoration of the tragic loss of the Jewish Community of Rhodes in July 1944 took place with memorial prayers and speeches, followed by the laying of wreaths on the Holocaust Memorial.

On July 22, the gathering visited the Jewish cemetery of Kos for a memorial there to honor the memory of the Jews who were rounded up and taken to their death at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

On July 23, 75 years after the deportation, the gathering of people, many of whom travelled from far away (the USA, South Africa, Belgium, and all over Greece) marched in silence to the port to lay a wreath in the water in memory of their lost loved ones. They then went to the Jewish cemetery for Hashkava (memorial prayers).

You can read more about the commemoration ceremonies here and here.
Athens

On July 17, our dear friend Rabbi Gabriel Negrin attended the swearing in of the new government in the Greek Parliament, in his official capacity as Chief Rabbi of Athens. As always, Gabby makes us proud.

Veria

An ancient sculpture of Alexander the Great was recently discovered inside the storage room of a Greek museum.

The surprising find was made by Angeliki Kottaridi, a leading archaeologist, and announced in a Facebook post.

"A 'brand new' Portrait of Alexander, still unknown to archaeologists and art lovers...For decades lost in a dark corner of the warehouse of the archaeological museum of Veria between crates with ceramic, half under old mortars and pollutants," Kottaridi wrote in her Facebook post.

The sculpture, which was initially found decades ago underneath rubble near the Greek town of Veria, was rediscovered a few weeks ago as staffers were cleaning out a storage room.
2019 Summer Tours of Jewish Greece
Hosted by the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

This year the Association ran three tours, the first to Italy and Greece, the second for the Greek Jewish Young Professionals, and the last to coincide with the 75th Anniversary of the deportations of the Jews from Rhodes and Kos. Each tour was different, and each group was amazing. As always, we had a healthy number of those with Greek Jewish roots but, also, an amazing group of non-Greek Jews and non-Jews, all intelligent, who brought to each group their love of learning and, through their eyes, made us realize how very special our Greek Romaniote and Sephardic culture is. Rabbi Nissim Elnekave, Executive Director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, accompanied us on all three tours, overseeing our kashrut for those for whom it was important. Along the way, we found ourselves educating many restaurant owners, paving the way for others who want to add a kosher dimension to their itinerary.

Tour I (June 24 - July 8)
Visiting Rome, Siracusa, Florence, Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Ioannina, and Athens

The desire to give substance to the oral history of Ioannina Jews, many of whom dated their ancestry back to Siracusa in Sicily, and the desire to visit Rabbi Amadeo Spagnoletto in Florence, who we had the pleasure of meeting two years ago at an Italian Shabbaton at Kehila Kedosha Janina, were the impetus for this tour. We have to thank Harold Finkel, who said to us two years ago that if I ever “do” Italy, count him in. Harold’s grandmother was from the Cantos family, a definite Sicilian connection. Harold’s lovely wife, Carol, and his sister, Linda, joined us. In addition, the Finkel’s daughter’s in-laws, heard about the tour through their daughter-in-law. This happens so often. Most of our participants learn about our tours by word of mouth, the best advertising. Another special family group was Pam, the daughter of one of our favorite KKJ members, Max Nahmias, of Blessed Memory, Pam was joined by her husband, David, and her brother Stew. The group was expanded by Doris, a former teacher and her husband, Ted. A lovely couple from California, Jacob and Deborah added depth to the group. In addition to Harold and Carol, two other participants, Mike and Joyce, had travelled with us before (a common scenario). Last, but not least, in addition to Rabbi Elnekave, Lauri joined us just for the Greek portion.

First we went to Rome, staying in Trastevere, the original Jewish quarter in Rome before the building of the Ghetto in the 16th century.
In Siracusa, we had the honor of the presence of Moshe ben Simon, an Israeli who is an expert on the Jews of Sicily and is a professional tour guide. We were so fortunate to have his expertise. On the island of Ortigia, the oldest part of Siracusa, there once existed a Jewish community which became victims of the Expulsion Order of Ferdinand of Aragon. According to oral history, the Jews of Siracusa celebrated a separate Purim which tells of their surviving what could have been a severe persecution. Kehila Kedosha Janina has a copy of this precious megilah.

A number of years ago an ancient mikveh (Jewish ritual bath) was discovered underground beneath the Church of St. John the Apostle. As was the case in many parts of Italy (and Spain) the church was built on top of the ruins of a synagogue. While restoring the property and creating a hotel, the new owner discovered the mikveh. It is now open to the public for viewing but not for use.

The culmination of our too short visit to Italy was our special Shabbat with Rabbi Spagnoletto in Florence. Rabbi Elnekave was given the honor of sharing the tevah and did us proud.

Our first stop in Greece with the first tour was in Thessaloniki. We thank Elias Matalon for an excellent tour.
Our private bus drove us down to Kastoria, where our good friend Anthony Papadamanios took Joyce Elias to see her relative, Jacob Eliaou. We then proceeded to Ioannina.

We celebrated Shabbat in Athens with Rabbi Gabriel Negrin officiating. It was also the occasion to invite Eliezer Nachmias, a relative of Pam and Stew. Their father, Max Nachmias, was a cousin of Eliezer, who is the brother of Eftihia Nachmias Nachman, the author of "Ioannina, a Journey to the Past."
Tour II (July 8 - 17)
Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Tour
Visiting Thessaloniki, Veroia, Kastoria, Ioannina, Athens, and Rhodes

This is the second young professionals tour of Jewish Greece, and it was a major success. The group included young adults from New York, Miami, Seattle, and beyond, and many of the participants have family heritage from Greece. Our first stop was Thessaloniki, always a favorite with the young professionals. We enjoyed a special walking tour from Elias Matalon, and were happy to have Hella join us in the evening as well.

We then stopped in Veroia, the ancestral home of the Marcus brothers, and Kastoria, to visit the ancestral home of Lena Russo’s granddaughter (Melanie Russo) and Benny Elias’ granddaughter (Alexis Cassuto). Again Anthony Papadamianos took special care of our group.
Our next stop was Ioannina, where we were honored to meet the new Mayor of Ioannina, Moisis Elisaf, who is also President of the Jewish Community of Ioannina. Rabbi Elneve blessed the Mayor Elisaf.

On our way to Athens, we stopped for a visit to the Monastery in Meteora. In Athens, we spent quality time with Rabbi Negrin, who, in addition to being a great rabbi, is an excellent tour guide and cook!. We celebrated Kabbalat Shabbat and Saturday Shabbat services. After Friday night services, we were treated to a delicious Sephardic Kosher Shabbat dinner.
Our last stop for the Young Professionals Tour was the beautiful Island of Rhodes where sea and Sephardic/Romaniote culture mixed beautifully. We enjoyed an amazing walking tour with Isaac Habib. We took a day trip to the ruins in Lindos, and reflected on such a meaningful trip reconnecting with our roots.

Tour III (July 17 - 31)
Visiting Athens, Rhodes, Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Ioannina, and Mykonos

We started in Athens before we headed to Rhodes to take part in the 75th Commemoration Events (see article above in this newsletter).

We then traveled to Thessaloniki and Kastoria (home of Lenore Hazan Levy’s ancestors)
Our stop in Ioannina was very special as we were able to celebrate Kabbalat Shabat on Friday night and, in addition, have Saturday Shabbat services, with the help of Rabbi Elnecave and Marco Battino.

Our final stop was Mykonos, a special way to finish any trip and, in this case, a special way to finish three trips and get a little R&R. It turned out to be the special place for our Museum Director (and Tour Leader) and our lovely participant Leonore Levy to celebrate their respective birthdays (Marcia July 28 and Lenore July 30).

As the sun sets over Mykonos, we do not say “Goodbye.” We never say goodbye to Greece. *Tou xronou. Next year!*

As always, with our return, we begin to plan for the upcoming year. Let us know what you would like to do.

A final picture for this newsletter from our Museum Director: “I always visit the grave of my mother’s cousin in the cemetery in Thessaloniki. Moses Errera died at the age of 23 in 1943. His crime: trying to escape the deportations. His grave represents that of the 112 members of the Errera family from Thessaloniki who perished in Auschwitz Birkenau, along with those deported by the Bulgarians in the Spring of 1943 (12 members of the Rousso family from Kavala and countless members of the extended Rousso family from Monastir (Bitola). The stone that I put annually on his grave does not alleviate the heaviness in my heart but, rather, fulfills the promise I made to my Nona, Marika. Thank you to all the lovely people who accompanied me to Greece this year. You make my pilgrimage easier.”
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.