



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002

March 2010 e-mail newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

As we near the approach of Pesach, our best wishes for a holiday filled with tradition, joy and the love of family and friends. As our internet family continues to grow, we are grateful for support and feedback from around the world.

Traditional hand-embroidered talleth bag from Ioannina

From permanent collection of Kehila Kedosha Janina



This newsletter, our 26<sup>th</sup>, will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website ([www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)).

We now reach over 4000 households worldwide, with our community of 'friends' continually growing with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at [kehila\\_kedosha\\_janina@netzero.net](mailto:kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net).

As always, you all are invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up ([papusoup@mindspring.com](mailto:papusoup@mindspring.com)) 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.

We celebrate the birth of Mathew Dylan Gould, born February 17, 2010, to Jennifer Halpern Gould & Gabriel Gould. Mathew's maternal grandmother is Carol Mathios Halpern, the daughter of Morris Mathios & Julia Cofina, both of Blessed Memory.

### Synagogue News

In February, we were honored to host the Bar Mitzvah of Ethan Pogrebin Klaris, an exceptional young man who, though not from our community of Greek Jewry, will now forever hold a piece of Kehila Kedosha Janina in his heart. His mother, Robin, who works for the New York Times, researched synagogues throughout New York City, wanting to find a very special site for her son's Bar Mitzvah. She chose us. We are honored.



### Museum News

#### Upcoming Exhibit on Families (Dikoi Mas/Los Muestros)

Pictures for our upcoming exhibit on Families (Dikoi Mas/Los Muestros) continue to come in. We love the one of the Cohen family from Kastoria and that of the Eliezer family in Ioannina, and Shirlee Paganetti has not changed a bit since her family picture taken over 70 years ago! Keep the photos coming in. We love them!



**Cohen Family in Kastoria**



**Eliezer Family in Ioannina**

**Cabillis Family in the Bronx**



**Pasha Reunion**

**Many of us attended the Pasha Reunion in Boynton Beach Florida. Always a delight, it is a great opportunity to dance and mingle with other Greek Jews. If you want to join the Pashas, get back to us and we will send you information.**



## Kehila Kedosha Janina Website

New additions to our website ([www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)) for this month include the following: Additions of Lists of Victims from the Holocaust from the Jewish Communities of Arta, Chalkis and Preveza now appear on our new link 'The Holocaust in Greece.' We are in the process of adding additional information on deportations from other communities.



**Former synagogue of Arta**



**Former Jewish home in Preveza**

---

## Responses from our last newsletter

### Possible Recipe in Response to Joe Varon's request

**From Renee Yomtov Rosenthal**

*"The recipe that Joe Varon describes sounds like what we called "koliva", a dessert which was served when a baby cuts the first tooth. Here's my recipe. I don't remember where I got it from..."*

**1 cup wheat berries  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon cloves  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
2-4 teaspoons honey  
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts**

**Soak berries overnight in 2 cups water. Add another cup of water and salt. Bring to boil, cover and simmer over low heat until berries burst completely, about two hours. Drain. Stir in spices and honey. Add walnuts. Cool and serve at room temperature.**

## Corrections

***"With great pleasure and interest-as always, I read the January 2010 newsletter that I received by e-mail. It was an extremely moving surprise for me to find out that among the pictures collected for the "dikoi mas" exhibition, is a studio picture of my family (my father- Sion Bacolas, my mother- Emilia Bacola, my brother -Roulis (Ezras) and myself -Anna). I believe my dear cousin Lenora Lowe has provided you with this picture, and I'm deeply moved and grateful to her for doing so. However, I would like to point out a mistake and possibly make a correction. When the picture was taken (1952) we still lived in Jannina not in Athens. My family moved from Jannina to Athens much later, in 1959. Allow me to express my admiration for the wonderful work of Kehila Kedosha. Thank you for keeping the Janinna Romaniote Community torch burning with so much enthusiasm and devotion.***

***Fondly  
Anna (Bacola) Garty"***

## News of interest

The Modern Greek Studies Association's (MGSA) Transnational Studies Committee will be publishing a bi-annual electronic newsletter featuring the following:

- 1) Academic publications on Greek America, including book reviews.
- 2) Non-academic publications on Greek America, including autobiographies, community histories, fiction, poetry, photography, painting, etc.
- 3) Essays, articles, and book reviews published in the media
- 4) Films and documentaries
- 5) Updates and announcements of current oral history work undertaken in academic institutions as well as in Greek American communities
- 6) Research queries regarding Greek American topics

We request scholars, writers, artists and other cultural producers whose work explores the Greek world in the United States and/or the connections between Greece and the United States (repatriated Greek Americans, Greek films on Greek America, Greek writings about Greek Americans, etc.) to submit the full citation of their work in MLA format, including a two to three sentence description of their work. Each issue will be archived in the MGSA webpage under the heading 'The Greek America Newsletter.'

The purpose of this newsletter is to disseminate information about academic, artistic, and popular works in the transnational field of Greek America.

The publication of the first issue is projected for September 30, 2010. Please submit your material by September 1.

We expect to issue the newsletter on a bi-annual basis. Forward all information to either one of the following: Martha Klironomos: [modgreek@sfsu.edu](mailto:modgreek@sfsu.edu) Yiorgos Anagnostou: [anagnostu.1@osu.edu](mailto:anagnostu.1@osu.edu)

-----

## Requests

Rhonda Matsas Amira is looking for ID's from this old picture taken in Greece.



## Looking for roots

***"I am a descendent of somebody who came from Yannina, and I am trying to find my roots, as part of a project I am doing of building my family tree.***

***The only information I have is as follows:***

***My great grandmother was born in 1863 (the date is to the best of my knowledge) in Yannina, Greece, and was named Matilde (surname unknown, nicknamed Stamo). She married in Yannina a man called NEGRIN, who was either divorced or widowed, and who had 6-7 children, all boys from his previous marriage. My great grandmother had 2 girls with her first husband in Yannina: Fortunee NEGRIN and Annetta NEGRIN.***

***At a certain point she left Yannina with the two girls (I don't know why), and moved to Egypt where she married my great grandfather, Yaakov ABRAM, with whom she had 3 more girls, one of which was my grandmother, Lea (ABRAM) CORCOS.***

***She passed away in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1946.***

***Is there any way you can help me in locating my family history, or any living relatives who are/were from Yannina? I will also be interested in getting information from the synagogue in***

*Yannina (if still operational) – they may have some records from that time, as well as from grave yards – maybe the tomb stones have information about relatives/parents/dates/etc.”*

If any of our readers have info on this family, please get back to us.

### Additional Updates on Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania



Nikos Stavroulakis & Rabbi Mizan at Etz Hayyim

### Read into US Congressional Record on February 2<sup>nd</sup>

#### CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

**ON THE RECENT ARSON ATTACKS ON THE ETZ-HAYYIM SYNAGOGUE ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE  
HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY OF NEW YORK IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Tuesday, February 2, 2010*

*Mrs. MALONEY. "Madam Speaker, I rise today to strongly condemn the recent arson attacks on Jan. 5 and 16 targeting the historic Jewish synagogue in the port-city of Hania on the island of Crete. The Etz-Hayyim Synagogue holds a library of religious books and functions as a museum and memorial in the ancient harbor city of Chania. Etz-Hayyim dates back to the Middle Ages and serves as one of the last Jewish monuments on the island of Crete, in addition to serving as a house of worship. I applaud the Greek authorities' quick action and recent arrests of the suspected perpetrators of the attacks and urge the individuals responsible be swiftly brought to justice. The State Department has praised the Greek government for condemning the attacks and taking a strong stand against anti-Semitism and racism. I join them in their praise and congratulate the Greek government for its swift and decisive reaction.*

*These are only the most recent in a series of anti-Semitic incidents to surface in Greece from Veria to Ioannina and to Volos in the recent past. In fact, this type of virulent anti-Semitism continues to rise worldwide and must be met with equal defiance and determination to defeat those who would perform these despicable acts. We must not let this type of anti-Semitism percolate as the world has seen the evil that stems from this type of hatred and bigotry. I stand firmly with Greece and the Jewish community of Hania, and Jewish communities around the world, and implore the international community to voice their outrage against this intolerance. I urge my colleagues to do the same."*

Send to us by Leon Saltiel. Representative Maloney's district includes Astoria, Queens, once home of the largest Diasporic Greek community in the United States (information provided by Asher Matathias)

---

**Recent Article by Katherine Fleming in Jerusalem Post**

***"For decades after its Jews were rounded up and deported in 1944, Etz Hayyim in Hania, the only synagogue on this Aegean island, served as an informal rubbish dump. Little was left but the floor and walls when Nikos Stavroulakis began a long process of reclamation and reconstruction. Stavroulakis, founder of the Jewish Museum of Greece, located in Athens, had decided to return to Crete; once there, he felt the 14th-century synagogue "calling out to him." Thanks to his tireless fundraising, adept bureaucratic negotiations and superbly restrained aesthetics, Etz Hayyim was rededicated in 1999, an island of Ottoman authenticity in the vast, generic sea of the Greek tourism industry.***

***Then, on January 5, arsonists scaled the synagogue's ancient walls, crafted an incendiary device and filled the building with black, belching smoke.***

***It felt surreal. Greece has never been philosemitic, but here in Hania, so picturesque that it feels like a film set, this display of vicious ignorance seemed dissonant. Etz Hayyim, a little stone building with a cat dozing in the sun-splashed courtyard, rickety wooden tables and chairs tucked beneath the shade of a twisted olive tree — how could this have provoked the rage of anyone?***

***In the days that followed, news of the burning of the synagogue flew around online, but the response in Hania was muted. Some neighbors complained that the fire sirens had kept them up at night; others said nothing. Yannis Pietra and Besnik Seitas, both Albanian immigrants, along with Nasr Allasoud, a Moroccan, were the only neighbors who responded. One had first smelled smoke and called the fire brigade; the others had rushed to help put out the flames and assist with rebuilding. This is but one of the many ways in which the story of Etz Hayyim — arson included — complicates assumptions.***

***Stavroulakis decided "to start work immediately," and by 9:30 on the very morning of the fire, he had brought in carpenters and plasterers, an ironworker and an electrician. The marble floor was polished, the woodwork rubbed with lavender oil. The antique Ottoman carpets were sent off for cleaning. After a difficult 10 days, on the night of Friday, January 15, the synagogue's small interfaith congregation met for Sabbath prayers and Kiddush. Afterward, "we locked the synagogue and returned to our homes, feeling that we had set our steps forward," Stavroulakis recounted.***

***But no. At 4 a.m. on January 16, Etz Hayyim was again set alight, this time with far more devastating results. The first fire caused extensive cosmetic damage, and destroyed a wooden internal staircase leading to the ezrat nashim, the traditional women's section, of which restoration had been painstakingly completed just last year. This one decimated the synagogue's office, which contained all of Etz Hayyim's records and technical equipment, and its library, home to more than 1,800 rare books written in Greek, Hebrew and English, along with its collection of Sephardic and liturgical music. Rare books on Ottoman, Byzantine and Jewish art and architecture, as well as on Balkan, Cretan and Ottoman history and several texts of the Zohar and Rashi, along with concordances and Mishnayot, all were destroyed.***



Arson attack suspects



***The target of these calculated attacks? A synagogue that is explicitly dedicated to interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. Stavroulakis — the lone Cretan Jew in the congregation — oversees a house of prayer that has been dedicated to the memory of Crete’s Jews, victims of the Holocaust, but also to the island’s multicultural history. In negotiating the synagogue’s constitution in 2009, Stavroulakis had to earnestly explain to a delegation from the Central Board of Jewish Communities, in Athens, why the synagogue’s bylaws should make friendly reference to other religions. “I want it to be a synagogue that remembers that there were once Muslims on this island,” he explained.***

***Openness and ecumenism are what Etz Hayyim is all about: The synagogue publishes an annual interfaith calendar — with all text in Hebrew, English, Greek and Arabic — that includes the holy days of Islam and Christianity alongside those of Judaism. Its publications on Sephardic and Mediterranean Judaism make generous reference to the multiple interactions and influences of other religions on Greek Jewish history. It welcomes all comers.***

***And Stavroulakis bristles at the idea that in the wake of this attack, any of this should be different: “The character of this synagogue must not change, and the doors must remain open.” As you step through the gate, no one will check your bag, or put you through a metal detector, or even ask your name. That this should seem “abnormal” is sad testament to how distorted our lenses have become.***

***After the second attack, even the more indifferent members of Hanioti society woke up and took note. An online petition condemning the attacks was widely circulated. Greek American groups and the Greek Orthodox Church leadership, among many others, spoke out.***

***But here, the story took another unexpected turn: On January 23, the Hania police announced the arrests of three men: a 24-year old Greek from the Cretan city of Herakleion, and two British citizens, one 23 and the other 33. An American of Greek descent was apprehended; another American remains at large. This international fivesome — led, it is alleged, by the older British man — was responsible for both attacks. The Greek man had confessed, implicating the others. But for the missing American, all have now been arraigned, though all save the older British man are now free on bail. And all except the Greek man deny their involvement. The men had been captured on surveillance cameras from a nearby cafe.***

***In the 16th century, the island’s most famous Jewish leader was Eliyahu Kapsali, whose copious writings are a valuable source for island life in the period. Kapsali recounted that Purim of 1545 was difficult, with merry-making giving way to dangerous pranks. The “lads” of the synagogue had the “bad habit” of setting off “torches of fire” during the service, “until such a point that the reader is scared, and surrounded with flames of fire, to the extent that in many cases he stops reading, and runs away from the lectern.” More ominously, the synagogue’s open doors made it***

*possible for some with evil intent to enter and take advantage of the chaos: "There are also gentiles who come and join in with the Jewish lads, and their purposes are bad and not good, for they throw their rockets of flame as if they were shooting it in order to strike a Jew."*

*And now, some four and a half centuries later, a Cretan synagogue must again battle flames, and fight against those whose "purposes are bad." So bad that they warrant their own Purim: In the wake of the Etz Hayyim attacks, Stavroulakis has announced that the date of the first attack will be annually commemorated on the Sixth of Shevat as a special Hania Purim. And yes, the doors will be open — to all."*

*K.E. Fleming is professor of history at New York University and the author, most recently, of "Greece — A Jewish History" (Princeton University Press, 2009).*

**New Research Topics: Please send us information on the following.**

- 1) We are now researching early arrivals from Greece to the United States, what we like to think of as our "pioneers." We would appreciate any information on arrivals before 1905: ship manifest records, Ellis Island (or Castle Garden) records, etc. We, especially, would like to have the information as to where they were going and who they listed as the person they were staying with.**
- 2) In addition to the above, do send us information on immigration.**
- 3) We have information on Greeks (and possibly, Greek Jews) going directly to Philadelphia when they arrived in the United States. Any additional information will be appreciated.**

### **New Book of Interest**

**In March, in Komotini, a new book (in Greek) will be presented. The book has to do the Jews of Komotini.**

**"From Gumulcina (Komotini) to Treblinka...the story of Komotini's Jews" by Thrasivoulos O. Papastratis sheds light on the little known story of Thrace's Jewish community that was eradicated during the Bulgarian/German occupation of the area.**

**The event will take place on Sunday, March 14th at 730 pm in Komotini, at the Rhodope Chamber of Commerce Building in Komotini.**

**Former synagogue of Komotini**



## **Article of Interest To All**

### **First ex-Marrano Israeli rabbi returns to Spain as emissary**

**By MARK REBACZ**

**08/02/2010 22:59**

*"Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham, a resident of Shiloh and father of 12, has been appointed a new emissary to the Bnei Anusim community.*

*For the first time since the expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492, a descendant of Marrano Jewry who immigrated to Israel and received rabbinic ordination will return to Spain to serve as a rabbi.*

*Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham, a resident of Shiloh and father of 12, has been appointed a new emissary to the Marrano (or Bnei Anusim) community of Spain.*

*Born in Palma in 1957 to a religious Catholic family, his given name at birth was Nicolau Aguilo.*

*"Religion was a very important matter for my family. We went to church every week and fulfilled all the religious duties of Catholicism," he recalls.*

*But one day, while driving with his mother down Jafuda (Yehuda) Cresques Street, named after a well-known Jewish cartographer who lived in Palma centuries ago, Nicolau pointed at the street sign and giggled, telling his mother, "He was a Xueta!" a derogatory word in Catalan used to refer to the descendants of Mallorcan Jews forced to convert to Catholicism over five centuries ago. Nicolau's mother then turned to him and said, "Why are you laughing? You, too, are a Xueta."*

*That revelation confronted Ben-Avraham with a possible life-changing decision: embrace his Jewish heritage, with all the suffering and shame he associated with it, or discard it entirely and continue practicing Catholicism.*

*Ben-Avraham remembers making the decision.*

*"After some months, I decided to accept the fact as it is, and it was then that I started to research my roots, and to learn more about Jewish history," he says.*

*He began reading everything he could find about Jews and Judaism, and started visiting Palma's small synagogue every week for Shabbat services.*

*"The way was long and hard, but the Mallorcan Jewish community treated me very well," he recalls. "I got a firsthand experience of the Jewish Sabbath and Jewish culture."*

*After realizing that his best option for returning to Judaism lay in Israel, he decided to make aliya. Once here, Ben-Avraham made his way to a religious kibbutz, where he began studying Judaism and Hebrew more intensively. Finally, in the spring of 1978, he underwent formal conversion to Judaism by Israel's Chief Rabbinate, assuming the Hebrew name of Nissan, after the Hebrew month in which he underwent his own, very personal, spiritual revolution.*

*The newly named Nissan continued his quest for Jewish knowledge at Jerusalem yeshivas Mercaz Harav and Ateret Cohanim, and then the yeshiva in Shiloh, where he eventually chose to settle and build a family.*

*In 1991, he received his rabbinical ordination from the Chief Rabbinate, marking the first time in centuries that a Marrano had succeeded in achieving the status of rabbi. Now, more than two decades after having immigrated to Israel, Ben-Avraham is returning to the land where he rediscovered his lost Jewish roots.*

***As an emissary of Shavei Israel, Ben-Avraham will commute on a monthly basis to the Marrano communities of Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Alicante and Seville, where he will assist those seeking to learn more about their Jewish roots. He will teach the communities Torah, Jewish culture and tradition, and conduct a range of social and educational activities.***

***The Jewish community of Spain experienced a golden age from the 9th to the 12th century. This ended with the onset of the Inquisition in the 14th century, when anti-Semitic laws began to be passed and massacres were carried out, culminating with the edict of expulsion issued in 1492. Many Jews, facing conversion, expulsion, or death, opted to outwardly convert, while secretly retaining their Jewish identity and lifestyle. These Jews are known as Marranos by many historians, though many believe this is a derogatory term which comes from the Catalan word for pig. Those who are in contact with them, however, prefer the Hebrew term Bnei Anusim, meaning "those who were coerced."***

***According to Michael Freund, founder and chairman of Shavei Israel, in recent years there has been an awakening among the descendants of the Bnei Anusim to discover more about their identity.***

***Freund attributes this rekindled interest to two main factors. First, Spain and Portugal were ruled by dictatorships up until the mid 1970s; once turned into democracies, the power of the church diminished and people began to feel more free to explore their identities. The second factor is the Internet, which has played a major role in reconnecting Bnei Anusim to their Jewish roots. What once required research in a public library, or approaching a Jewish community to find out information, can now be achieved in the privacy of their own homes. Further, through the Internet, a network of Bnei Anusim is developing, in which people with similar backgrounds and experiences can interact and shed light on many of their questions.***

***According to Shavei Israel, Jews throughout the world must embrace their lost Jewish brethren. If a connection is made between Bnei Anusim and Jews, says Freund, this will benefit Israeli tourism, as well as fight against anti-Semitism. From personal experience, says Freund, "When people discover they have Jewish roots, they develop an affinity toward Israel and Judaism, even if they remain Catholics."***

***According to most counts, there are still tens of thousands of Bnei Anusim in Portugal and Spain, and others even have the number as high as 100,000. In Brazil, which houses the largest concentration of Bnei Anusim, many academics speak of over three million people."***

**<http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=168149>**

**Sent to us by Barbara Taverna of EEJH**

---