

THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF GREECE

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One year of operation of the Museum

A message from the President of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Mr. Sam Benrubi



The Jewish Museum of Greece completed one year since it acquired its own premises and modern installations, and has been functioning as a modern museum. For more than 20 years we have been dreaming of building a museum of international radiance that would shelter objects that declare the Jewish presence in Greece for 2.300 years. We went through many stages of development, difficulties and adversities, but on March 10th 1998, the day came when the dream became reality.

One year ago we celebrated the inauguration of our Museum's new premises. It was a day that marked a milestone in the history of two peoples with great cultural contribution to humanity. These two peoples lived side by side, tracing a course that was recorded in history and that made history. The author Mr. Nikos Dimou refers to it in the inspired speech that he gave on the day of the inauguration which is included in this issue.

Today we are celebrating one year of operation of the new Jewish Museum of Greece. We have the intention, the mission and the responsibility to preserve and develop it further.

The financial and moral support that we received from the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (K.I.S.) the Jewish Communities of Thessaloniki and Athens, as well as many individuals, gave this small and beautiful museum its present form.

We thank all of those who helped the dream come true. We urge all of you to participate in this effort, help promote this project, and become friends and supporters of the Jewish Museum of Greece.



The Board of Directors, the Association of Friends from Greece and Overseas, the staff, the volunteers and I personally, have been dedicated to this Museum for the last 22 years. We work together because we share the same dream, and the same passion and devotion as on the day we began this project. However, now we have something more: We have the new building that was inaugurated a year ago, that we have to enrich, to come to know better, and to cherish. All of us should adopt this wonderful project, and contribute so that it attains the level that its history commands: The new Jewish Museum of Greece.

FROM THE RIBBON - CUTTING CEREMONY. LEFT TO RIGHT: MR. S. BENRUBI, MR. M. YOEL, MINISTER OF EDUCATION MR. G. ARSENIS, PRESIDENT OF K.I.S MR. M. KONSTANDINIS AND MR. M. MATSAS.

Sam Benrubi
President of the Board of Directors
of the Jewish Museum of Greece

Significant steps of a creative course

by **Mr. Makis Matsas**, President of the Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece

Our dear Friends,
Last April we had the joy to welcome many of you at the General Meeting of the Friends at our Museum's new premises. For those of you who could not be present, we want to offer here an update, and certain explanations.



FROM THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY

It is true that this General Meeting has been delayed. However, this was not accidental. We decided to stop inviting you to General Meetings, only to expose you to problems. We decided not to invite you one more time in order to explain to you our efforts to save resources, to express our worries and to see the justified concern in your eyes: "Will this new building for the Museum ever be finished, or are we wasting our time?" Yes, our dear Friends. The project was indeed difficult. We dedicated ourselves to it, but in the end nobody wasted any time. Therefore, at the General Meeting of April, we had the satisfaction not to present any more plans, ideas and dreams. We presented an existing achievement, a Museum that has already been functioning in its new premises for an entire year, a Museum that the international press has described as one of the four most significant Jewish Museums in Europe.

During this past year, the Museum and the Association of Friends developed intense and multi-level activity. I will mention some of the most important events, presentations and publications:

- In November 1998 a week of events was organized in New York, personally sponsored by members of the Board of Directors. During the reception that was organized by one of the American Friends, Mrs. Joanna Rose, the new Museum was presented to a select New York audience. We also participated in the re-organization of the Association of American Friends, that elected a new and dynamic Board of Directors, with Mr. Isidore Tiano as president.
- In January 1999, we co-operated with a well-known publishing house, to present two books on the Genocide of the Greek Jews during World War II.
- A memorial evening was organized in commemoration of the 55 years since the deportation of the Jews of Athens. Literary texts were read and a documentary film by Mr. Nestoras Matsas was shown. The event was held in February 1999, at the hall of ceremonies of the War Museum.
- Members of the Board of Directors of the Museum and the Association of Friends, organized presentations of the Museum to key individuals and potential donors, in Paris and Geneva.



NEW HONORARY FRIEND OF THE MUSEUM: U.S.A. AMBASSADOR MR. N. BURNS WITH MR. M. KONSTANDINIS

• During the past year we held a series of private tours for dignitaries from Greece and abroad, while important personalities became Honorary Friends of the Museum. Former Prime Minister of France Mr. Michel Rocard, former Prime Minister of Israel Mr. Simon Peres, the U.S. ambassador in Greece Mr. Nicolas Burns, former Minister of Culture Mr. Thanos Mikroutsikos, and the Oscar winning composer Vangelis Papathanasiou, were among those who joined our Association of Friends.

• On the occasion of the General Meeting of April 5th and with the decisive contribution of dedicated volunteers, 150 new Friends were registered. Combining the experience of the older and the energy of the new Friends, the new board that was elected, aims at the re-organization and upgrading of the Association.

- We published a bilingual book presenting the Museum and



GUIDED TOURS FOR DIGNITARIES: BOARD MEMBER MR. F. ABRAVANEL, MAYOR OF ATHENS MR. D. AVRAMOPOULOS, PRESIDENT OF J.C. OF ATHENS MR. B. ALBALAS



WITH DR. JOE HALIO DURING THE RECEPTION IN NEW YORK

introducing its history, aims, and vision for the future. It includes an insert, which is a valuable tool of our fundraising plan.

• The Newsletter of the Museum is published once again. For the first time there is a Greek edition along with the English one. Our target is to communicate regularly with all our Friends, to inform you of our plans and activities and to ask for your participation and support.

During its first year, our Museum proved that thanks to its inspired history, its priceless collection and its human resources, it functions actively and creatively, it dreams and achieves.

Through this communication, I feel obliged to thank from the bottom of my heart all the friends who helped, all those who stood by our side during our first steps. I specifically wish to mention the former Minister of Culture and friend, Thanos Mikroutsikos, who supported our request, and for the first time, the State sponsored a cultural project like this one.

The support coming from the Friends in America, Greece, Europe, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece and the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki was also significant. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

So far, the continuous support from the Friends has been decisive. However, we face a menacing and merciless future. As I had said in a speech in the past, "... so long as the dream is not realized, we don't have to worry. However, once the dream becomes reality we do have to worry... for reality is harsh and unrelenting".

Therefore we need more Friends, more volunteers in order to create work groups and action committees. All together, we must create a plan whose only target will be the financial autonomy of the Museum.

If you consider that every new Friend is a new hope and that all the Friends together are the guarantee of the Museum's future, I believe that all of you, each one in his or her own way, will want to help this cause, that was realized after so much effort and sacrifice.

Makis Matsas,

President of the Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece



THE FACADE OF THE NEW MUSEUM

The new Board of Directors of the Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece



President : Matsas Makis
 Secretary : Maissa Manon
 Treasurer : Berahas Solomon
 Vice President : De Chaves Lila

Members : Benrubi Sam
 Mordechai Minos
 Kannetis Maurice

Announcement

Dear Friends,

The Jewish Museum of Greece plans an extensive periodic exhibit titled "Children's images and objects of the century coming to an end".

We are looking for babies' and children's photos, toys, furniture, clothing, bed-clothes, amulets, jewelry, and objects that the Museum will borrow from individuals or organizations, put them through a process of conservation and study, place them on display for about one year, and then return them to their owners. For information and suggestions, please contact the curator, Mrs. Zanet Battinou, daily from 9:00 - 14:30.

Thank you very much for your interest.



A child's quilt from Larissa. Donated by Sarina Mizrahi



Zacharias, Alice, Mimi and Elli Levi, Volos 1915. Donated by Elias and Alice Beraha

Two thousand years of loneliness

by Nikos Dimou



«Now the Jews of Greece are opening their home to us, the home of their tradition.»

Greeks and Jews, ancient people, people who have left their mark on humanity, we both have thousands of years of history behind us. Our paths have frequently crossed. In the eyes of the world we have sometimes acted like opposite poles, ascetic monotheists versus sensual polytheists, the eternally guilt-laden against the frivolous Epicurean. At other times we have been part of the same fabric, as in the work of Philo of Alexandria who turned Plato's ideas into thoughts in the perception of Jehovah.

We have trodden parallel paths for thousands of years. We have trodden paths side by side in this country for two and a half thousand years. How well have we come to know one another? Certainly not as well as we should have. What do we Greeks know about Jewish tradition, art or literature? What do the Talmud, the Kabbalah or even the Torah mean to us? We say "Jews" and we think of one, unified whole. We are not aware that the children of Israel who lived in our country belonged to completely different communities with different history, traditions and language. The Jews of Thessaloniki were Spanish-speaking, while those of Corfu were Italian-speaking and those of Ioannina were Greek-speaking. They came from Sicily and Palestine, from Austria and Portugal. They gave their synagogues the names of the places they had come from. Some of them belonged to the ancient Romaniotes, some to the old Sephardis and others to the later Ashkenazis.

So what we are actually referring to is a multi-cultural mosaic, laden with the riches of centuries of tradition and culture which lived side by side with us, but from which we were separated by an invisible partition. For two thousand years they lived by our sides as strangers. Neither the Ottoman Turk nor the Greek authorities herded the Jews of Greece into ghettos, but there were walls of a different kind. Religious intolerance and suspicion on one hand, and on the other, fear. Entrenched in panic, which had become an almost permanent state, the Jews tried to remain inconspicuous, tried not to provoke. "Humble, as humble as frightened wretches, most of them were," that's how Dimitris Hadjis describes the large Jewish community of Ioannina in *The End of Our Little Town*, "...wealthy or beggars, scholars or labourers, from there, from their Jewish neighbourhoods, no-one ever severed links, ever went further afield, ever differentiated himself from the rest. Not for anything would a Jew set himself up in another part of town. All in a hurry they would scurry home at dusk as if some old fear had awoken within them."

Giorgos Ioannou, too, writing about Thessaloniki mentions, "But the Jews too, as a people, had always been reticent and withdrawn as far as we were concerned..... I do not know the exact reasons for this distancing, but I am able to guess...."

The reasons for the distancing are obvious - there is the old fear which Hadjis mentions, there is the memory of harassment and persecution, scorn and derision. "...around town a great many things of all kinds were said about them," Hadjis writes. "A whole load of faults, failings and weaknesses were laid at their door; things which we were supposed not to have... They were generally portrayed as a lower breed of men, an insignificant, dirty race."

We have got into the habit of reciting the eloquent platitude, "For centuries Greeks and Jews have lived as kindred spirits, in harmony and in love..." Neither was this way of life always harmonious, nor did we always live as kindred spirits, in love. We do not serve truth (therefore neither do we serve the nation) by inventing artificial love affairs. At the best of times there was what Ioannou calls, "an attitude of indifferent tolerance." Let us not refer to the worst of times.

And all this seemed completely natural in those days. The idea of a multi-cultural society is a recent invention, dating from the latter twentieth century. For many centuries identity was determined by religion. People lived separately; the Orthodox in one village or neighbourhood, Muslims in another and Jews in another. Parallel lives, but separate.

Later on - in the nineteenth century - came the advent of national consciousness, which, in the case of



SHOWCASE WITH MILITARY MEMORABILIA OF JEWISH OFFICERS OF THE GREEK ARMY, FROM 1912 - 1940.



the Greeks, was the same as religious consciousness. Even today the vast majority of participants in opinion polls say that a non-orthodox Greek is not a true Greek.

It will be a long time yet before we realize what an asset it is for a society to be composed of many races, many faiths and many traditions. We are only just beginning (still very tentatively) to look upon the Other, the different one, not as a threat but as a source of enrichment of our lives. Most are still afraid of such people and forswear them. At times they are needed as scapegoats, for nothing unites people as much as the creation of a common enemy.

It is by no means fortuitous that the Jewish Museum is opening now, at the dawn of multi-cultural society. Now that we have lost the wealth of this great tradition, now when, due to emigration and in an even greater measure to the catastrophic holocaust, the Jewish element has all but disappeared, now that the Jewish population which at one time was almost 10% of the population of Greece (over 50% in Thessaloniki) has dropped to 0.05%, now we are given the opportunity to get to know them.

Museums are usually founded upon an absence. It is the irony and terrible logic of history. When a living presence becomes scarce, then we turn to heirlooms, facts and figures.

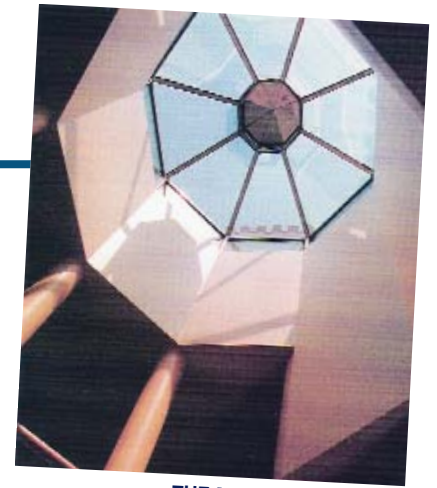
Yet there were times when communication and interpenetration between cultures was much greater. I have in mind that wonderful Hellenistic period which we are all descended from spiritually. The thought processes of the earliest Greeks may have been superior, but the world of ideas which we have inherited has been through the great Hellenistic melting pot and took form there. The Christian dogma of today, for example, which we should not forget was originally a Hebrew heresy, is a mixture of Hebraic (The Old Testament, Essenes) and Neoplatonic ideas. The teachings of Jesus are sometimes lost in the general dogmatic accord. (It is typical that the word "love" is not mentioned anywhere in The Creed, which is commonly known as "I believe"...)

So in that distant (yet so close) time Jews spoke Greek. Indeed, some spoke nothing but Greek - it even proved necessary for them to translate The Old Testament into the Greek vernacular, otherwise many believers would not have been able to read it. And they considered this superb translation of the Septuagint, inspired by God. The Alexandrian philosophers studied the Bible and Plato concurrently. The Graeco-Hebrew interpretation by Philo the Jew, opened the way for both Neoplatonism and Christianity. It is plain that both Paul the Apostle, who shaped Christian dogma, and the author of the Gospel According to St. John, were aware of the Philonic philosophy of the Word.

At that time then the two peoples communicated and influenced one another freely. Later on, they were separated by their dogmas and put into different camps. Today, however, we celebrate the creation of a unifying link. For Jews from all over the world, the new Jewish Museum of Greece constitutes a means of return and remembrance. For us, the gentiles, it constitutes a - very belated - opportunity to become acquainted.

"The young Greeks of Thessaloniki never set foot in the homes of Jews," Elias Petropoulos writes in a moving piece on memories. "To me," he continues, "every Jewish home was a fairy-tale."

Now the Jews of Greece are opening their home to us, the home of their tradition. But not only the home - they invite us into the sanctuary of their faith, their synagogues, as these have been salvaged in their jewel of a museum. They show us their art, both sacred and secular. It is an opportunity for us to get to know them - albeit after two thousand years. It is an opportunity for us to enter the fairy-tale - the tragic fairy-tale - of their history. And for us to tell them that, although we have frequently hurt them, we want them here, by our sides. The oldest and wisest but most tormented nation of the world is here with us. It's time the two thousand years of loneliness came to an end.



THE MUSEUM SKYLIGHT



WEDDING COSTUMES, 19th CENTURY.

Curator's Report

by Zanet Battinou

The first year of operation of the Jewish Museum in its new premises, inaugurated in March 1998, has already been completed. A small gathering was held on March 10th 1999, where the Museum staff celebrated the first birthday of the new beginning. This constituted an excellent opportunity for a review of the Museum's activities during the past year, and a brief announcement of the plans for the immediate future.

Some Statistic Data

The data that was gathered in the past twelve months, show that the annual number of visitors has doubled in the new Museum, as it reached 10.000 people. The number of schools, universities and educational institutions that booked visits and guided tours has increased by 235%, while organized groups of visitors have gone up by about 52%. As the Museum becomes more widely known and is included in more and more international travel guides, the above data will certainly increase.

Reorganization of the Association of Friends

One of the most important events of the year was the re-activation of the Association of Friends of the Museum. On the occasion of the General Meeting of April 1999, the Board of Directors of the Friends and dedicated volunteers were mobilized, and added more than 150 new names in the Association's membership. Furthermore, the infrastructure of communication between the Museum and its members and the special privileges and services offered to members, were updated.

Events that were organized with the co-operation and support of the Association of Friends include, a presentation of publications on the subject of the Holocaust, a week dedicated to the new Museum in New York, under the auspices of the American Friends, and an evening in memory of the 55th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Athens during WW II.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of members of the Board of the Museum and the Friends, several private guided tours were organized for important visitors from Greece and abroad, such as academics, writers, politicians, diplomats, composers and businessmen. Most of them became members of the Association of Friends and contributed significant donations to the Museum's work. One of these valuable contributions gave us the ability to start the Museum web site. The address is www.jewishmuseum.gr. This enables us to expand the communication between the Museum and the public. This program is now in its first phase, it will be completed at the end of the year and allow people the world over, access to the Museum.

Educational Activities

One of the fundamental goals of the Museum is the development and expansion of its educational programs. Within the framework of this effort, we have furnished the Educational Programs Area with wall-to-wall carpeting, cushions to sit on, and religious artifacts for use in the home, in prayer, on holidays and in the synagogue. Young visitors can handle these objects and familiarize themselves with them.

Further to the improvement and enrichment of the program for children aged 11-12 years from the Hebrew Primary School, with new material and games, we completed the design of an equivalent program for children 8-9 years old. The new program will be put in practice this year for the first time.

Part of this new material was used to complement the activities organized for two special events in March 1999. Adults and children from Larisa, Karditsa and Volos participated in programs with guided tours and educational games in the Museum. A special day was also organized in May for children from Thessaloniki, Rhodes and Ioannina, guests of the Jewish Community of Athens.

This year the Museum received many visits from schools of all levels, as well as universities and educational institutions. A special program has already been designed and awaits a generous sponsorship so that it may be put into effect. It aims to acquaint and familiarize children aged 10-12 years, from schools of general direction, with the Greek-Jewish history and religious tradition.



From the meeting with the Board of the Association of American Friends in New York. From left to right: D. Brickner, J. Molho, M. Matsas, B. Berlin, S. Benrubi and D. Argyriadis.

Visitors from the Jewish Community of Larissa guided through the Museum.





Educational program for the 6th class of the Hebrew Primary School of Athens.

Apart from activities concerning children and youngsters, the Museum hosted and contributed to a seminar on the History, Ethnography, and Music of the Jews of Greece, organized by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In January it participated in an International Convention in Paris, on the subject of the European Jewish Cultural and Architectural Heritage.

Furthermore, in March began a two-year program of the European Community titled "RAPHAEL - OIKOS II", in which our country takes part with the Jewish Museum, England participates with the Oxfordshire Museum and Portugal with the Setubal Museum. Through a CD-ROM production and a periodic exhibit, the program aims to show how a smaller religious or ethnic community can co-exist with and enrich, the larger community that hosts it.

Finally, the Museum was invited to participate, with material from its Photographic Archive, in 5 photographic exhibitions that took place in schools and cultural centres, as well as in historical publications and photographic albums.

Significant New Acquisitions in the Museum's Collection

During the months when the Museum was closed in order to organize its installation in the new building, and especially during its first year of operation, it received a great number of artifacts, donated by Jewish individuals, communities and organizations. Here is an indicative report on some of the most significant artifacts donated until March 1999.



Dr. Jean Alalouf.

* Military memorabilia of Dr. Jean Alalouf, from Thessaloniki, dating from the Graeco-Italian war in 1940. The collection includes his military medals, original photos, and the published announcement of his death in Israel. The donor is Mr. Kapouano from Athens. (97.62 - 97.67 a-c).

* An infant's undershirt and dress with a matching pillowcase for B'rith Milah from Thessaloniki, were donated by Mrs. Nelly Abravanel (97.71 a-c).

* Passports and documents of the Borboli family, relating to their journey and residence in Palestine during the war years. The donor is Mr. Matathias Borbolis from Athens (98.6 a-d).

* A collection of 13 original etchings with landscapes and architectural monuments of Israel, from the first half of the 19th century. They were donated by Mr. Minos Mordechai from Athens (98.20 - 98.32).

* A collection of 69 rare dedicatory plates (shaddayioth), mostly silver with partial gold plating, from the Synagogue of Ioannina, were donated by the Jewish Community of Ioannina, as well as a velvet cloth with gold embroidery (98.44 - 98.116).

* A collection of objects from the life of Chief Veterinary Officer of the Greek Police, Elias Isaac Kofina, from Ioannina. It includes military and police uniforms, accoutrements and medals, diplomas and documents from his professional career, as well as a number of photos that depict his life and that of his family from 1920-1971. The donor is his niece, Mrs. Evelyn Levi from Athens (98.119 -98.280).

* Mrs. Fortuné Kanneti from Athens donated embroideries, linen pillowcases and a number of family photos in the memory of her sister-in-law, Betty Givre (99.2 - 99.12).

* Mr. Moissis Elia Arditis from Thessaloniki, resident of Athens, donated the stripped jacket he wore, while a prisoner at the concentration camp of Birkenau, aged 14. In memory of his parents and sister (99.13)

The Museum would like to take this opportunity to give kind thanks to all donors of artifacts, who, through their active interest and participation, decisively support its work; the accurate and vivid representation of the history and tradition of Jews in Greece.

During the first year of operation in its new premises, the Jewish Museum engaged in a multitude of intensive and creative activities. However, its dynamic course within the fascinating world of contemporary museums, a world filled with enticing challenges and attractive possibilities, has just begun.

The immediate plans of the Museum which are awaiting sponsorship in order to be realized, include: the completion of the text labels for the permanent exhibits, the campaign for the conservation of etchings and manuscripts from its collection, the electronic cataloguing of the research library, and the creation of a slide-presentation titled: "Images of the Greek Jews". The Museum staff will be happy to assist all those interested to find out how they can contribute and participate in the above as well as in other plans and projects.



"Shaddai" dedicated to the Old Synagogue of Ioannina by Mordechai Ischakis, in 1813.



Moissis E. Arditis, one month after his liberation from Auschwitz.

A conservation campaign

...Adopt an etching or a manuscript!

The Jewish Museum of Greece announces a campaign for the conservation of etchings, manuscripts and drawings on paper from its collection, in order to ensure their preservation and to be able to safely present them to the public, through periodic exhibits and publications.

Rare artifacts of great historical value, such as pre-marital contracts (Ketubbot), circumcision certificates (Alefiot), etchings, drawings, identification cards and archival material from World War II, suffered extensive damage before they entered the Museum's collection. Dirt, tears, fungi, bacteria, and in some cases extensive corrosion of the material, are some of the problems that require immediate attention.

The Jewish Museum invites you to participate in the Conservation Campaign that it initiates, by adopting an artifact or archive, personally or as a family/company/group of individuals, in your name or in the memory of a loved one. The cost for the conservation of a single artifact begins at 15.000 and rises up to 105.000 drachmas. The cost for the adoption of a small archive is estimated at 45.000 drachmas. In recognition of your contribution, you will receive an adoption certificate. Acknowledgement of the adoption and description of the work done, will be published in the Museum Newsletter. For more information please contact the curator, Mrs. Z. Battinou, daily between 9:00 - 14:30.



Pre-marital contract (Ketubah) of Haim Ben Yehuda Moshé, from Ioannina, 1931.



Etching, Jewess from Istanbul, ca. 1800.

Program of periodic exhibitions in the Jewish Museum



Partial view of the periodic exhibitions area

- A) Exhibition of paintings by Julio Kaimi. March '98 - March '99
- B) Exhibition on the Jewish Community of Rhodes. March '98 - September '99
- C) Exhibition of paintings by Raphael (Falis) Leon. April '99 - September '99
Upcoming :
- D) Visual arts installation by Artemis Alkalai. October '99 - January 2000
- E) Exhibition on the Jewish Community of Volos. November '99 - March 2000
- F) Exhibition titled "Children's images and objects of the century coming to an end".
March 2000 - March 2001



* A new CD record has been released, with Sephardic songs interpreted by the "Little Choir" directed by Mr. Sakis Negrin. It is a production of the Jewish Museum, with the generous sponsorship of Mr. Makis Matsas. Available from the Museum giftshop. *

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e-mail: jmg@otenet.gr - **website:** www.jewishmuseum.gr - **Opening hours:** Daily from 9:00 - 14:30 - Sunday 10:00 - 14:00. Saturday: closed.