

The Romaniote Jews of Ioannina





For two thousand years, Ioannina, a small city in northwest Greece, has been home to a very special Jewish community; a community of Jews who are neither Sephardim nor Ashkenazim, but rather “Romaniote” Jews. This branch of Judaism traces its roots back to the Roman Empire and these Jews are considered “Hellenized,” or Greek Jews. The Romaniote Jews adopted the language and customs of Greek civilization as their own, while at the same time maintaining their distinct Jewish identity, acculturating but not assimilating. In its conservatism and resilience to change, the Jewish community of Ioannina reflected the wider Christian community and northern region of Greece in which it existed. It is this quality which kept the community intact for so many centuries, for unlike the majority of other Romaniote communities in Greece, Ioannina’s Jews never became absorbed into the prevalent and much larger Sephardic community, adopting neither its liturgy and traditions, nor its language, Ladino. Over the course of two millennia and under different rulers and regimes, in periods of austerity and prosperity, Ioannina’s Jewish population existed, growing and shrinking in tandem with the prevailing political situation of the times. Never a wealthy community, the Ioannina Jews made their livings mostly as merchants, tradesmen, and craftsmen. There was a patriarchal society of arranged marriages, large families, and strict Jewish orthodoxy, where men were the community leaders and breadwinners, and women maintained the traditional roles of housekeeping and childrearing.

How Romaniote Customs Differ from Sephardic Customs



Torah Tikkim

Megillat Esther,
the scroll read on
the holiday Purim



All objects here courtesy
Kehila Kedosha Janina, New York

“To my knowledge, the Romaniote customs differ in the incorporation of piyyutim (liturgical poems) in a mixture of Greek and Hebrew and, in our synagogue, the order of the service is different from that of Sephardic Jews. Of course, our style of chanting is quite different. The differences in the celebration of holidays is best shown with the use of different foods. [Sephardic Jews] eat rice at Pesach where Jews from Ioannina do not. As far as name giving is concerned, both groups (Romaniote and Sephardim in Greece) honor our mothers and fathers and name our children after them.

In a traditional Sephardic synagogue, the tevah (podium or bimah) is in the center and in a traditional Romaniote synagogue it is on the far western wall facing the ark with the Torah scrolls. In both communities the women do not say blessings over the Torah nor read from the Torah. We encase our Torah in tikkim (heavy metal and wooden cases) and do not remove them from the tikkim when carrying them up to the podium for reading. ”

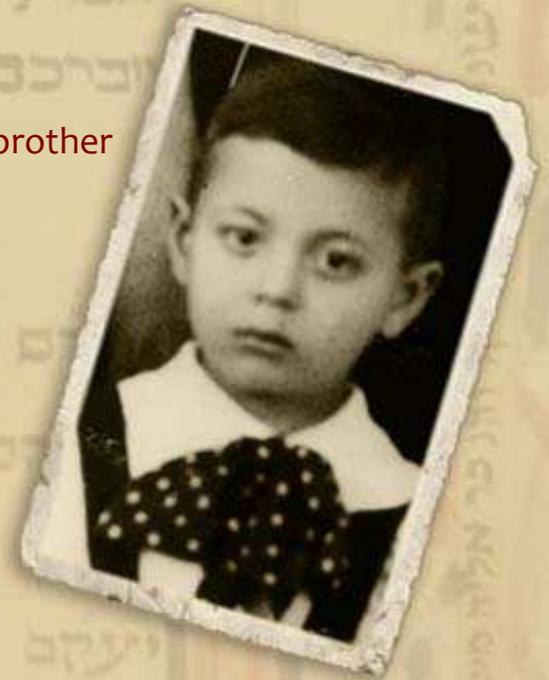
Marcia Haddad Ikonompoulos, museum director of the Kehila Kedosha Janina in New York.

Unique Romaniote Traditions



Congregation Kehila Kadosha Janina

Salomon Makis Batis, younger brother of Artemis Miron (nee Batis)



An example of an 'aleph', a hand made birth certificate for a baby boy

- 1) Prayer that the new baby will be protected.
- 2) Prayer that the angels should watch over the child.
- 3) Including the date of birth, this announces the joy of the parents in announcing the birth of their son.
- 4) A sentence from the Torah, this is the priestly blessing, traditionally recited by father to child each Friday night

The Old Synagogue of Ioannina



“This synagogue was within the walls of the old city (The Castro) where there was also a Jewish neighborhood. Younger families such as ours lived in a newer neighborhood outside the old city and we prayed in the synagogue there. But that synagogue was totally destroyed by the Nazis.”

Artemis Miron (nee Batis)



The Romaniote Synagogue of Ioannina, today



The Batis Family of Ioannina

Artemis Miron (nee Batis)



Family of Artemis Miron (nee Batis), 1936-1937

Her father, Josif Pepo Batis-Batis,
her mother Eftichia,
her brother Salomon Makis, and Artemis Miron (nee Batis).



Hellenized (Greek) Jews



Eftichia Batis in traditional Greek costume,
Epirus region



"I want to tell you that outside of our homes there were no differences between the non-Jews and us. We studied together in the same schools with the non-Jews, we spoke Greek like them, and we dressed like them. Outside our homes there was no difference between Jews and non-Jews pertaining to business, to neighborliness, to education - but in our homes, we strictly observed our Judaism."

Artemis Miron (nee Batis)

Holiday in the Fields



1930s, Women of the Batis family and non-Jewish local women in a wheat field in a village near Ioannina

“My grandfather wanted to give his son, my uncle Yitzhak, a treat when he would come back from Athens after having worked and studied so hard. So he would send him off on a holiday... to enjoy the outdoor country life. Who would accompany my uncle? My grandfather’s eldest daughter, my mother. And she would take her kids along as well. My father would agree, and off we’d go. These women in the photo are the local peasants - very warm, very nice people. We’d be there for a month or so, and then return back to school.”

Artemis Miron (nee Batis)

An Ioannina Courtship and a Wedding



Members of the Batis and Levy families at the engagement party of Yitzchak Batis and Aliko Levy, 1935 or 1936.

“This is an historic photograph.

In Greece, they would do shidduchim (arranged marriages), according to the family’s social standing. Therefore, they had to make a match for my uncle, who was highly educated and a pharmacist, with a respected family. But how could they do this so there wouldn’t be any gossip if the couple wasn’t right for each other? Well, what they would do was have an engagement party outside of the city, and invite both families to meet each other, and also the couple would be allowed to go off together to get to know each other. It was a real event!”

Artemis Miron (nee Batis)

Members of the Batis and Levy families at the wedding of Yitzchak Batis and Aliko Levy, 1937.

“There was the requirement of the dowry and this was elaborately displayed before the wedding and the traditional Romaniote ketubbah would list what the bride was bringing into the marriage (usually the matrimonial domicile in addition to linens and household items) since these would be returned to her family if the marriage failed (highly unlikely in this conservative community). The saying of the seven blessings a year before the actual wedding ceremony was common in Ioannina but was lost after the war.”

-Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulos, museum director of the Kehila Kedosha Janina in New York



The Holocaust of Ioanninote Jewry

On March 25, 1944, 1,860 Jews of Ioannina – men, women, children, babies, and the elderly – were loaded onto trucks and deported to Auschwitz. Artemis Batis (Miron) was among only two hundred who returned after the war. She was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau at the age of fifteen, along with her family. Upon arrival, her mother, little brother, grandmother, and most of her extended family members were sent to the gas chambers. Artemis was taken into the camp for slave labor, eventually being forced out on a death march to the terrible camps of Ravensbrück and Malchow. In 1946, after her liberation, she made her way to Mandatory Palestine, where she married Yosef Miron. She has three children and many grandchildren.

ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΕΣΘΗΡ	1899
ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΕΡΙΚΟΣ	1929
ΜΠΑΤΗ	ΛΟΥΙΖΑ	1931
ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΗΛΙΑΣ	1934
ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΣΟΛΟΜΩΝ	1875
ΜΠΑΤΗ	ΑΣΤΡΟ	1885
ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΙΩΣΗΦ	1903
ΜΠΑΤΗ	ΕΥΤΥΧΙΑ	1909
ΜΠΑΤΗΣ	ΣΟΛΟΜΩΝ	1934
ΜΠΑΣΑΡΑ	ΜΑΖΑΛΤΩ	1880
ΜΠΑΣΑΡΑΣ	ΝΙΣΗΜ	1912
ΜΠΑΤΤΙΝΟΣ	ΜΠΟΧΩΡ	1884

“If I was asked to sum up the Jewish community of Ioannina, I would say that it was an ancient community that despite two thousand years of different regimes, rulers, and laws, managed to exist and observe its Jewish customs and traditions without assimilating, and for that, it deserves a prize.”

- Artemis Miron (nee Batis)

The names of the murdered Jews of Ioannina, carved on 24 marble panels and hung on the walls of the synagogue. Appearing in this panel are the names of Artemis Miron's family.