

# THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF GREECE

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## newsletter

47

AUTUMN 2001

## THE MUSEUM'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR



The Frankfurt International Book Fair has been one of the most important annual cultural events for the last 53 years. Publishers and writers, trends and new ideas as well as techniques from the world of books are brought together at Frankfurt every year in a festival whose prestige totally justifies its reputation.

This year Greece was selected as the Guest of Honour of the International Book Fair. Notable events and kiosks laid before the exhibition's international audience aspects of Greek history, folklore and art, as well as of the modern Greece of tourism and the Mediterranean spirit, the Greece of 2004 and more besides. One of the events was the presentation of the heritage of Greek Jewry, undertaken by the Jewish Museum of Greece.

The Greek Committee of Frankfurt 2001 had invited our Museum to submit its proposal for events related to the presence of Jews in Greece through out history, as part of the program entitled "Greece – Guest of Honour of the 53rd Frankfurt Book Fair 2001". Such an invitation was not only a great honour in itself for the J.M.G., but also a recognition of the quality of the Museum's work and the standard of its international presentations.

The Greek Committee approved our proposal immediately and took the events under its wing, proving an ever-present source of support for the Jewish Museum all through the preparations and production. The President of the Committee, Mr. Giorgos Romaios, showed particular interest right from the outset. There was close, very constructive co-operation with Mr. Philippos Dracontaeidis and Mrs. Aspa Moraitis, appointed by the Committee to act as the Museum's contacts on all

matters. We are grateful for their accurate and timeous guidance.

So the Jewish Museum of Greece took part in the International Book Fair with three notable events: the exhibition "The Jews of Greece: 2300 Years of History and Tradition", as its main event, the Artemis Alcalay art exhibition entitled "Remembrance", which ran simultaneously, and the appearance of an eighteen-member, mixed voice choir, which performed Sephardic and Romaniote songs. The events were held on the premises of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt, which had at an earlier date expressed the wish to host our Museum's contribution to this international exhibition.

### "The Jews of Greece: 2300 Years of History and Tradition":

#### The features and content of the exhibition

The exhibition "The Jews of Greece: 2300 Years of History and Tradition" was on display in the temporary exhibition space of the Judengasse Museum, a department of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt, from 13th September to 11th November 2001. Dr. Johannes Wachten of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt was in charge of the German side of the organization. He proved an indefatigable, reliable and worthy colleague during the planning stages and presentation of the events.



# FROM THE FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR



Partial view of the lower exhibition area

The exhibition was an exciting journey through the eventful history of the Jews in Greece, from late antiquity to the present day. It aimed to acquaint visitors with aspects of both Jewish traditions which flourished in this country: the ancient Greek-speaking Romaniote tradition, whose presence in Greece dates back to the 3rd century BC, and the Sephardic Spanish tradition, brought here from the Iberian Peninsula, mainly towards the end of the 15th century. In addition to history, the sections of the exhibition focused on subjects such as religious tradition, synagogal architecture, e-

very day life, costumes, domestic worship, communal organization, professions, education, language, the arts and literature.

The exhibition design was underpinned by the need to combine material, data and media so as to produce a clear impression, a vibrant picture of the life of Jews in Greece. Design and production was undertaken by the Kalou-Contopoulos firm of designers. Anastasia Kalou and Marina Contopoulos produced a warm, colourful, original presentation, which showed the available material to the best advantage. It is the third time the Museum has worked with this art and design firm, following the temporary exhibition "Children's Images and Objects of the Century Past" and the international touring exhibition "The Holocaust of the Greek Jews: the Persecuted and the Rescuers", and the result was deemed particularly successful.

In its final form the exhibition included original material from the collections and archives of the Jewish Museum of Greece, a large part of which had never been on public display before. Over 55 original items from the Museum's collection were used to create an authentic picture of this distinctive Mediterranean tradition. This was also an opportunity for a great number of these objects to be conserved and specially prepared for display. The Museum's own conservator, Mr. Harris Haitas, took care of the books and objects made of paper personally, and organized and supervised the work of the specialist conservators: Mrs. Mary Kapotsi (metal), Ms. Tatiana Koussoulou (garments and textiles) and Ms. Chrysanthi Askopoulou (garments and textiles). The Museum thanks them for their splendid work.

The original objects were complemented by many photographs from the Museum's archive, maps, sketches, reproductions and replicas. Mr. Sakis Negrin, architect and musician, put together a choice selection of musical themes, thereby adding an acoustic dimension to the exhibition. The strains of synagogal hymns and prayers, traditional songs, Hebrew nursery rhymes and excerpts from religious ceremonies and school celebrations from various Jewish communities in Greece, accompanied visitors as they went round the exhibition. Slides from the Museum's photographic archive were shown continuously, depicting people and scenes from the every day life of the Jews in Greece during the 19th and 20th centuries.

There were explanatory texts for the objects on display. These were written by the researcher, Ms. Panagiota Andrianopoulou, who also produced the special exhibition labels. Translations of all printed matter and exhibition texts were written in German and English by Barbara Spengler-Axiopoulou and Kay-Elvina Sutton respectively, thereby catering for the needs of German and international visitors to the exhibition.





## The exhibition inauguration ceremony

The September 11th terrorist attacks on the USA had repercussions on the daily routine all over the world. Many international events which had been scheduled to take place around that time had to be cancelled. It was inevitable that the opening ceremony of the Jewish Museum's exhibition on 13th September would also be affected by the tragic events: the Board of Directors representative was unable to arrive in time and the evening's program of entertainment had to be cancelled. Even so, the opening ceremony went ahead with undiminished splendour, as it would not have been right to cancel an exhibition dedicated to history and civilization. The ceremony began with an address by Mr. Georg Heuberger, Director of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt, who called upon those present to observe one minute of silence for the victims of the terrorist attacks. After expressing regret that the president of the J.M.G., Mr. Benrubi, had been unable to attend the opening ceremony, Mr. Heuberger presented the exhibition pointing out that, "It is an honour for the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt to host this great event for the Jews of Greece." He also thanked, by name, all those who had worked on the two exhibitions which the Museum had organized.

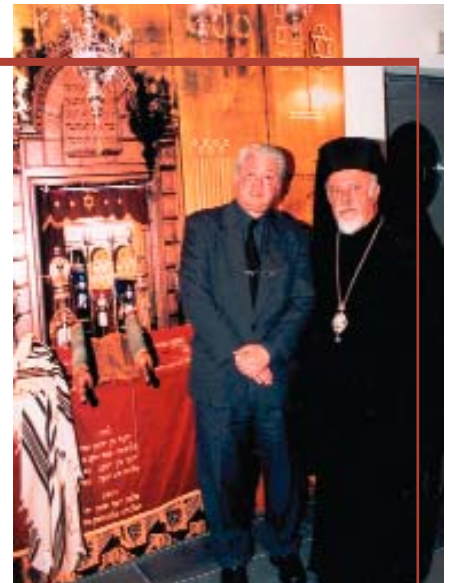
During the opening ceremony addresses were also given by Town Councillor Deiter Bürger of Frankfurt, Mr. Giorgo Romaio, president of the Greek Committee of Frankfurt 2001, and Mrs. Zanet Battinou, curator of the J.M.G., who read a speech on behalf of the president of the J.M.G. as well as introducing the subjects covered by the exhibition. Town Councillor

Deiter Bürger's address set the note as, after congratulating the exhibition organizers and contributors, he went on to talk about the common links between the Greek and Jewish spirit. He drew particular attention to the fact that it was the marriage of these two, which gave the world the Christian religion, which he called "the daughter" of Hellenism and Judaism. The president of the Greek Committee Mr. Romaio, for his part, stressed the importance of the contribution of the Jewish Museum of Greece to the Greek events at the International Book Exhibition in promoting the centuries long history and tradition of Jews in Greece. He also spoke from experience of the way Christians and Jews in Greece live side by side in harmony. The inauguration ceremony was also attended by Metropolitane Augustinos of Western Europe, the Greek General Consul in Frankfurt Mr. Christophilis, representatives of the Greek Frankfurt Committee Mr. Pantelouris and Mr. Delivorias, representatives of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt and a host of invited guests. Ms. Battinou then took those who had been officially invited on a tour of the exhibition. During the tour, fervent interest was expressed in the content of the exhibition.

**Guided tour of the official guests through the exhibition, following the inauguration ceremony.**



**Visitors examining the exhibits at the upper exhibition area.**



**The director of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt, Mr. G. Heuberger with the Metropolitane of Western Europe Augustino within the exhibition.**



**The President of the Greek Frankfurt Committee, Mr. G. Romaio, delivering his inauguration address.**

# FROM THE FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

## "Remembrance", An Art Installation by A. Alcalay

Running concurrently with the exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Greece, the art installation by Artemis Alcalay entitled "Remembrance" had its opening on the second floor of the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt.

The artist's work was displayed among the museum's exhibits in thematically linked groups. Being displayed in the museum space lent additional aspects of meaning to the work and added to its emotional impact on the visitor. The combination of natural materials – metal, cloth and wood – and the puppets which Artemis Alcalay uses in her work, create a personal approach to the Holocaust: the human aspect in life and the pain of loss seen through the objects. Visitors to the exhibition commented most favourably on the exhibition itself, the presentation and the exhibition catalogue, which had been curated by the art critic Dr. Aphrodite Kouria.



The artist with the curator of the exhibition Dr. Aphrodite Kouria and Mr. Delivorias, member of the Greek Frankfurt Committee.



## The Mixed-Voice Choir Concert

The concert given by the eighteen-member mixed-voice choir took place in the Stadtwerke Concert Hall next to the Judengrasse Museum on 7th October, with Mr. S. Negrin conducting. The choir sang Romaniote and Sephardic Jewish songs from Greece. The event opened with a speech by the J.M.G. curator Ms. Zanet Battinou, who introduced the choir, spoke about their work and about the importance of the tradition of music throughout the history of the Jews in Greece. Among other things, the museum's curator said: "Music is a precious, creative bridge which unites people. A living testament to the cultural production of every people, musical tradition enhances every moment of ordinary life. It holds within it images and events, emotions and desires, in short, the very soul of its people.

The study of music provides significant insights which contribute to the re-creation of a valid picture of the past."

The eighteen-member mixed voice choir came into being a year ago, thanks to the generous sponsorship of a member of the Jewish community of Athens. With its rich repertoire of sacred and secular music, it already has a number of performances to its credit. The pieces performed in Frankfurt were genuine sounds from Greek-Jewish tradition. The pieces were performed in choral arrangements which are the work of the choir's director, Mr. Sakis Negrin. Some of the pieces were being performed for the first time. The program of music was in three parts and covered the entire range of the traditional music of the Greek Jews. There were synagogal/religious hymns, Romaniote and Sephardic music. In his introduction to each part, the choir's director Mr. Negrin, drew attention to the historical and ethnological conjunctures, which gave rise to each particular type of music. The audience loved the choir and found the performance very moving. Two encores were called for and well-deserved praise was lavished on the choir by all concerned in the events.



The choir's director, Mr. Sakis Negrin, examining silver dedicatory plates from his hometown, Ioannina.



## «Search for a Face» Group Art Installation

June 25th 2001 saw the opening of the group art installation entitled "Search for a Face" at the Jewish Museum of Greece, at the uppermost level of the J.M.G.'s exhibition area, which is reserved for art exhibitions and art related events. Although the installation was originally scheduled to end on 30th November 2001, it has been extended to run until the end of January 2002.

The kernel of inspiration for this exhibition lay in the question: How does the eye of an artist perceive and give form to the stimuli which a museum provides, as a place of remembrance, preservation and display of silent exhibits, as well as a place of research and living dialogue between yesterday, today and tomorrow, between collective and individual identity.

Four young artists, each with an established reputation in the contemporary world of visual arts, Artemis Alcalay, Marilena Zamboura, Dimitris Sevastakis and Elias Harissis, walked around the Jewish Museum of Greece, stopped to examine its display-cases, felt the atmosphere of its physical and historical space and then, each in their own way, attempted to answer the original question. Through works of art displayed to the public for the first time, they sought a means to express, a way to personify their encounter with inspiration, using the historical dimension, artistry or craft of the museum's exhibits as their starting point.

A. Alcalay's work with the home-spun cloth and the taleth searches for the inner life of the person at prayer. Through her vibrant

colours and the intensity of her artwork, M. Zamboura, presents an inter-religious bond

between the human and the divine. E. Harissis focuses on human beings and their desperate attempt to satisfy their thirst for existence. Inspired by symbolism, D. Sevastakis uses the tree as a meaningful, powerful symbol of knowledge and faith. The exhibition has its own catalogue, curated by the art critic Nikos Xidakis. The catalogue provides an introduction to the artists and their work.

This exhibition supports the Jewish Museum's opinion that a modern museum ought to be a living part of the fabric of society and as such it is certain to expand and renew its museum audience. In addition to presenting the history and ethnography of the Jewish people in Greece through the ages, the Jewish Museum of Greece, particularly since moving to its new premises at 39 Nikis Street, has shown great interest in making known the presence of Jews in Greece today, especially in the area of art and literature.

This is the reason why the uppermost level of the spiralling exhibition area at the J.M.G. is usually reserved for cultural events of a different nature, such as this. Placing such exhibitions at the end of a visit to the museum was by no means fortuitous. On the contrary, it was a conscious choice, as we believe that art provides an added dimension, thereby helping to create a fully formed picture of the Jewish people in Greece, a picture which is not tied to any one time. Three individual exhibitions of work by Greek – Jewish artists have already taken place here, two of which were related to the historic memory of the Holocaust.

The genuinely new element introduced by the "Search for a Face" installation is the way the museum has reached out to artists from beyond the bounds of the Jewish community. The Jewish Museum of Greece would like to see the start of a productive, well-intentioned dialogue to further peaceful, multicultural relations between populations living side by side. We firmly believe that art and culture are the best means to achieve this.



The artist, Mr. Elias Harissis with the President and the Secretary of the Board of the J.M.G., Mr. Sam Benrubi and Mr. Moissis Konstantinis.

◀ ARTEMIS ALCALAY «WANDERING»



▲ MARILENA ZAMBOURA «TRIPTYCHON».



▲ ELIAS HARISSIS «THIRST»



◀ DIMITRIS SEVASTAKIS «ANCESTRY» segment

The artists with the exhibition curator, Mr. N. Xidakis.

# Freddy Abravanel

in memoriam...

*A day before Yom Kippur, during the Days of Awe, God's chosen one, Freddy Abravanel, departed from our midst.*

Freddy Nissim Abravanel was born on 3rd October 1924 in Thessaloniki, into the prosperous, educated family of Errikos (Joseph) Abravanel and Eliza Abravanel, née Capuano. He was brought up among progressive people who valued good education and tried to secure such for the younger ones. His Austrian educated father, with his knowledge of Judaeo-Spanish, French, Greek, Italian and German, and his mother with the education befitting a family of social standing (an A.I.U. graduate speaking French, Judaeo-Spanish and Greek) tried to ensure that their children, Joseph, Yvette and Freddy, would have a good education and be proficient at languages. So Freddy Abravanel attended nursery school and the first three years of formal education at the German School of Thessaloniki, until 1933 that is, when Nazism finally took hold of Germany. Then he was enrolled in the French Lyceum of Thessaloniki.

Like many Jewish families in Thessaloniki, the Abravanel were a family of merchants. They had a shop and a glassware and household goods business. They also had a sizeable estate consisting of a cinema and some apartments. They were one of the few Jewish families who retained their Spanish nationality right to the time of the Second World War, 450 years after the Sephardim were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.

When the Germans occupied Thessaloniki life changed for the Abravanel, as it did for the other 65.000 Jews in the city. As early as May 1941 their home was commandeered by the Germans. On the afternoon of 29th July 1943 the heads of all Jewish families of Spanish nationality were taken to the Beth Shaul Synagogue. The other members of the families were then informed and finally, that same evening, all 367 Sephardim with Spanish nationality were confined within the Baron Hirsch district. They remained there until 2.8.1943, when they were deported to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp where they stayed until 2.2.1944, when Spanish nationals were transported to Spain. The tragic experience of the concentration camps left indelible scars on nineteen-year-old Freddy, but steeled his intrinsic principles of humanity, making them the guiding force for the rest of his life.

For Freddy Abravanel the liberation was the beginning of a painful, dangerous Odyssey. He wandered all over northern Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt) and Palestine, before embarking on a ship for Piraeus in August 1945.

On his return to Greece he settled in Thessaloniki. His family estate was in inconceivable dilapidation. He continued his studies at the French Lyceum, qualifying in economic sciences, while also working for the family firm of Abravanel & Benveniste.

In 1953 he married Nelly Benrubi and they had two children, Errikos and Liza, who, in turn, each gave him three grandchildren. In 1960, having sold his share in the Thessaloniki company, he moved to Athens to start a new venture through the Benrubi company with his father-in-law Haim Benrubi and his brother-in-law Sam. It was not only a financial investment, but also one of great personal effort, which was to last for forty consecutive years. In 1985 he was decorated with the "Ordre du Merite" by the President of France M. Mitterrand in recognition of his contribution to the development of trade commercial relations between Greece and France.

What most people do not know about him is that he was a great backgammon player and he loved the sea. The sea occupied much of his time from a very young age. Indeed, because of his ability to retain information, amateur seafarers regarded him as one of the most knowledgeable sailors of Greek seas.



During the Museum's religious inauguration, February 1998



Freddy Abravanel with his wife Nelly Benrubi.







February 2001, Freddy Abravanel with the President of the Friends of the Museum, Mr. Makis Matsa and the Curator, Mrs. Zanet Battinou, during the visit of the French director of the "Shoah", Claude Lanzmann.

His involvement with the Jewish Museum dates back to 1975-76 with his participation in the Museum's first informal board, just a year after the idea of creating the Museum was conceived in 1974. This board's main aim was the formal recognition of the Museum by the Greek State. The Museum moved to Amalias Street in 1984 and this move was followed by the much sought after recognition in 1989. Like the other members of that first board, which included Mr. M. Konstantinis, Mr. S. Benrubi, Mr. M. Tabach, Mr. J. Lovinger, Mr D. Alhanatis, and, at a later date, Mr. M. Mordohai, Freddy Abravanel worked indefatigably to establish the J.M.G. It is difficult to separate his personal contribution from among those significant, early achievements of

the board. He was a modest, discreet, quiet person who worked inconspicuously but effectively, towards the collective goal with a spirit of co-operation and good rapport. It was with the same undiminished love and intensity that he played an active role in the Museum's every important moment; in its relocation to its permanent home, in formal inauguration, in Museum events, guided tours, visits, conventions, he was both a distinguished host and ambassador of the institution he so dearly loved. But he was also present in the lacklustre every day affairs, generously offering advice, information, his time and his knowledge with deep human interest and a warm smile. Unpretentious, polite and approachable, he conquered our hearts.

In all his dealings he was known for his sincerity, humanity, generosity, discretion and boundless kindness. As he was perceptive, judicious, sensible, clear-sighted and experienced, all those who knew him considered his advice valuable. The Jewish Museum of Greece and the Community it serves is all the poorer for the heartfelt loss of our beloved, irreplaceable Freddy Abravanel.



The Museum's inauguration, March 1998.

### *The General Secretary of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Moissis Konstantinis' Funeral Oration for the unforgettable Freddy Abravanel*

*Today the Jewish people of Greece are in mourning; mourning the unexpected death of a distinguished, judicious and creative personality, the noble Jew, Freddy Abravanel. Much wept for, never-to-be-forgotten Freddy.*

*Unpredictable fate allowed cruel death to take you away from your family and friends. You are leaving us and we lose a sagacious, responsible, clear-minded man of sobriety and reliability. Genteel, bountiful and sympathetic to every humanistic cause, you were loved by all. Your ethos and attitudes were reflected in your personality. This makes your death such a great loss. This is why we mourn and lament the loss of our creative fellow conversationalist and sincere collaborator.*

*With deep feelings of respect and emotion, in full awareness of the greatness of the loss, the Jewish Museum of Greece, of which you were an out-*

*standing member for a number of years, and which you loved so much, and the Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, address this last farewell to you, through me, and it is on respectfully bended knee before your venerable body that I convey the sorrow felt by the Board of Directors, the staff and all of their members.*

*Your wife, your children and grandchildren, your relations, friends and colleagues will all remember you with love and gratitude for everything you so generously gave during your exemplary time spent on earth.*

*May the Lord rest your soul. Your memory will remain indelibly engraved in our hearts forever.*

*Farewell revered friend and colleague.*

Freddy Abravanel (back row, 6th from left) truly loved the sea: from his participation in a sailboat race.



# Announcement



David and Moissis Konstantinis with their parents.

Dear Friends,

A large part of the success of the exhibition "Children's Images and Objects of the Century Past", at the Jewish Museum, which was visited by over twenty-six schools during one year, was due to the fact that so many of you willingly lent personal artifacts and objects belonging to your families in order to augment the exhibition. The museum thanks you most kindly for your trust and support of its work.

The Jewish Museum once again asks for your active support in the forthcoming periodic exhibition entitled "Hidden Children in Occupied Greece" which is currently being prepared. We would like personal accounts from people who were children at that time and may have been forced to leave their homes and hide, move from place to place, use false names or false identities, or who may even have lost their real identity, in some cases permanently. We are also looking for related photographs and original artifacts. The Museum would like to borrow the objects, photographs or any relevant material for the duration of the exhibition on the understanding that when the exhibition closes they will be returned intact to their owners. We look forward to receiving the same immediate, warm response you have given us in the past. Please, contact the Museum curator Ms. Zanet Battinou, on 32.25.582, weekdays 9:00 – 14:30, or e-mail: [jmg@otenet.gr](mailto:jmg@otenet.gr).

Thank you for your kind interest.



Lina Benrubi (right) with her parents in Thessaloniki before WWII (left).

## The Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece

The active participation of the members of the Association of Friends, as well as the ever-increasing numbers of individuals and families joining its ranks, is proving to be a significant factor for the Jewish Museum of Greece.

The moral and material support of the Society of Friends of the Jewish Museum, now an ever-present reality, reinforces in a decisive way the development of its important cultural and educational work and firmly establishes its *raison d'être*.

A mention in writing of one small group of our most dedicated Greek and foreign contributors is the least we can do to show our gratitude and pay tribute to the Association of Friends as a whole for their active support.

The following is a list in alphabetical order of the Museum's benefactors donating sums of between 300.000 and 6.000.000 drachmas during its last two years (1999-2000) of operation:

1999 Alcalay Alexandros  
Abravanel Freddy  
Epimelia Diafimistiki A.E.  
Hassid Elio  
Kokoni Alexandra  
Keech Dennis  
Levi Anna  
Mordohai Minos  
Mallat Alex  
Polyzou Saporta Theodora  
Saltiel Allegra (Candy)  
Simha Alexandros  
Yohai Samuel

2000 Benrubi Sam  
Benveniste Rosa  
Matsas Makis  
Rinaldini Carlo

Dedicatory plaques placed according to the Museum's Fundraising Project.



STAFF : ZANET BATTINOU - ARCHAEOLOGIST, CURATOR  
VICTORIA KOSTI - FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATOR  
ORIETTA TREVEZA - CURATORIAL ASSISTANT  
NANA BATI - GIFTSHOP MANAGER  
HAYIA COHEN - ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT  
H. HAITAS, M. KAPOTSI - CONSERVATORS  
LEONIDAS PAPADOPOULOS - PHOTOGRAPHER

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