

חברה שלום והולכי קדימה



סוסייראד פאס אי פרוגריסו

The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation

10850 Wilshire Boulevard #750
Los Angeles, California 90024
Telephone (310) 475-4779
Fax (310) 475-8144

Aron Hasson, Founder and President

Simon Soriano, Treasurer

“Ke Haber?”

Winter '98/'99 Newsletter Describing “What is New” Regarding the Preservation of Rhodesli History
By Aron Hasson

This publication of *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* is to serve as a link between “La Juderia” of Rhodes and those people who are interested in the current state of affairs for restoring its special history and heritage. Presently there are numerous projects being undertaken to fulfill these goals. These observations are based upon my most recent trip to Rhodes where I spent my High Holidays in “La Juderia” (the old Jewish Quarter) and at the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue.

One of the highlights of my trip occurred during the *Kol Nidre* service of *Erev Yom Kippur*. The President of the Jewish Community of Rhodes, Maurice Soriano, gave me the honor of carrying the Torah. It was during those minutes when I had a sentimental experience connecting me to my ancestry by reliving the religious aspect of their lives in Rhodes exactly the same way and in the same “Kehilah” as them. During the recent High Holiday services there were always over 100 people in attendance at the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue.

Rejuvenation of the Jewish Community of Rhodes

After the tragedy of the Holocaust, there were several noble efforts undertaken to restart the Jewish presence in “La Juderia” of Rhodes. There were several young Jewish individuals who moved to Rhodes, primarily from the mainland of Greece. The Rhodeslis who survived the War were not able to overcome the personal emotional loss to return to the Island.

Now, over 50 years later, there is a continuing effort by the Administrative Committee of *The Jewish Community of Rhodes* to advance all aspects of Judaism. In addition, it is interesting to note that commercially, Rhodes now maintains a few shops that are now either owned by Jewish Israelis or staffed by Israeli salespeople.

The Jewish Museum of Rhodes

The Museum was established on October 1, 1997, in two of the vacant rooms adjacent to the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue. Now, over 25,000 people from around the world who are visiting Rhodes on holiday have viewed it. During the summer months, an average of 100 people visit the Museum daily. Since the newly installed electrical lighting fixtures and air conditioning were added in April, the visitors have a safer and more pleasing environment to view the Museum displays.

As a side note, I would like to mention that during the past months *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* has received new photos, documents, *ketubbahs*, and other artifacts. Thanks to the generous contribution of many people, the photo collection of the *Foundation* has grown rapidly. They will be used to enhance the Museum for a new exhibit next year.



The “Kahal Shalom” Synagogue

The *Kahal Shalom* is the oldest synagogue in Greece and the sole remaining synagogue on the Island of Rhodes used for services. This past summer a new torah was generously donated to the synagogue by the Rhodesli Sephardic organization from Brooklyn, New York, called the *Brotherhood and Sisterhood of the Rhodes League of Aid Society*. During the Friday night service on July 10, 1998, Reggie Sadis Goldberg and Marion Houghou Crespi presented the torah to the *Jewish Community of Rhodes*. Marion and Reggie's parents were born in Rhodes, and emigrated to New York in the 1910's.

Historical Pamphlets of the “Kahal Shalom” Synagogue

The *Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* has published a historical pamphlet (one page, double sided) for the synagogue which gives a short history of the *Kahal Shalom* synagogue and “La Juderia”. The pamphlet was copied in volumes of several thousands this past year and visitors have had for the first time pamphlets that have been printed in English, French and Spanish. They are given free and they are the only source of information of this unique Sephardic heritage of the Jews of Rhodes.



Monument at “La Calle Ancha”

A new monument is being planned for the “Square of the Martyred Jews”. It will be built in recognition to the Jewish Community that lived and flourished there until World War II. It will be located in the park at the end of “La Calle Ancha”, near the fountain of the “seahorses”. (The photo on the right shows the location where the monument is planned to be built. In the far background is the seahorse fountain.)

It will be a respectful monument, long overdue, giving the proper recognition and dignity to a community that has had an important influence well beyond its relatively small population.



The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation

Internet Web Site

Web site: www.RhodesJewishMuseum.Org

E-mail: info@RhodesJewishMuseum.Org

Technology has now enabled people to visit *The Jewish Museum of Rhodes* even without traveling there through its internet web site. The internet web site allows viewers to view not only the dozens of Museum items, but also listen to audio recordings of “Ladino” prayer songs, stories of the emigration from Rhodes, as well as personal accounts of life in “La Juderia”. There have been over 7,000 viewers to this web site since it was established one year ago.

The Jewish Cemetery

One and a half years ago over 300 “ancient” Jewish tombstones were uncovered at the cemetery in Rhodes. They were initially placed on top of each other along the narrow walkway adjacent to where the tombs of the Rabbis are located.

The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation, has financed the first phase of the restoration of the ancient tombstones. The work has begun for setting the memorial stones upright to their proper dignity, and in appreciation of their historical value. They have been moved from the walkway to a



larger vacant area. Most of the tombstones have been indexed and placed individually on top of raised wooden platforms in five rows (see photo).

An interesting development from this most recent project has been the discovery of many additional old and well preserved tombstones. These newly uncovered burial stones are primarily from the 1700's and the 1800's and have a value to those interested in: genealogy, Jewish history and religious and romantic epitaphs.

Based upon my own personal expertise and instinct I discovered two very old tombstones from the 1600's. Somehow, I was drawn to a section of the cemetery, where it was not known that any burial stones were located. Since I was not expecting to do any “archaeological” work and did not have any tools, I used my bare hands to uncover them. I also used a wet cloth to clean and reveal the Hebrew engravings. Soon after I cleared the dirt from the stone, and using my Hebrew calendar year conversion table, I found



that the burial stone I uncovered was from 1656. It contains two primitive, but elegant floral design engravings and one of an animal. Later in the afternoon I uncovered another burial stone, this time it turned out to be from 1668. I had to depart Rhodes the following morning, but I look forward to see what other new discoveries await us in this coming year.

Excavations Around the *Kahal Grande*

This past year the Greek government has begun archaeological excavations for a Byzantine Church in the vicinity of where the *Kahal Grande* synagogue stood. On my recent trip to Rhodes, I noticed that the excavations might have uncovered remnants of an older synagogue that existed before the *Kahal Grande*.

The older synagogue was destroyed in a war during the 1490's. In its place, over the ruins, the *Kahal Grande* was built. It will be interesting to see what new history comes to light from these efforts. (The photo on the right shows the newly uncovered mosaic floor found in the location of the oldsynagogue.)



Recent Visitor Comments From the Guestbook at The Jewish Museum of Rhodes:

- Sept. 1st: The Museum display is very moving and an important tribute. K. Preston, Wegmouth, England.
- Sept. 3rd: In ricordo dei nostri caduti nel campo, que mai non li scorderemo. In nome della mia famiglia. M. Hougno, Italy.
- Sept. 4th: With profound regret for the great tragedy that befell the Jewish community of Rhodes at the hands of the murderous Nazis. I wish you all the best of good fortune and success in the years ahead as you continue the long tradition of your community on Rhodes. Nicholas Burns, Ambassador of the United States, Athens.
- Sept. 4th: We are sorry for what the Nazis did to the Jews: our fellow citizens and citizens of other countries. Eder Family, Bad Neustadt, Germany.
- Sept. 4th: Muy informativo e interesante. Mis pesames por los 1500 hermanos judios que fueron deportados y asesinados por los Nazis. Susan & Dennis Troper, San Jose, Costa Rica.
- Sept. 8th: I'm glad that here, in Rhodes, you remember the history of our people. Nadia Amnon, Ukraine.
- Sept. 11th: It is absolutely amazing discovering all of my family roots. Michaela Alhadeff, St. Ives, Australia.
- Sept. 15th: Merci a Aron Hasson pour le superbe travail. Affectueusement. Esther Faertid. France.
- Sept. 20th: Thank you for this wonderful Museum. It gives me great pride in my family history to see these photos. This is only the first phase of the Museum. I hope to see it grow and grow with more photos, artifacts and requerdos de Rhodes. Roberto Soriano, San Francisco, California.

Background and Purpose of The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation

The purpose of *The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation* is to preserve the unique history of the Jewish community of Rhodes and to recognize and restore the dignity of its people and heritage. This *Foundation* was established in 1997 as a non-profit organization by Aron Hasson of Los Angeles, California. During its initial year, the primary accomplishments of this *Foundation* have been the establishment of a Jewish Museum in Rhodes, restoring the Jewish cemetery and setting up an internet web site featuring the Jewish history of Rhodes.

This *Foundation* is always interested in acquiring additional documentation for the Museum and internet web site. Please feel free to contact this *Foundation* if you have any items that may be of historical value.

The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation

10850 Wilshire Boulevard #750
Los Angeles, California 90024

The Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation