

# NEWSLETTER 2017

## Starting from January.....

### SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL VISITS



The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Jewish Central Board of Greece has organized an educational program in order to preserve our historical memory and also to give teachers and students the

opportunity to understand the significance of the Holocaust.

The program includes annual visits of non-Jewish students to the Holocaust Museum, film contests for students on "The Holocaust and the Greek Jews", training seminars for teachers on how to teach Holocaust to students and educational visits of schools to Synagogues or to Jewish Museums.

Based on this program, this year we also received visits from local schools giving them a lecture on the rich history of the Jewish Community of Rhodes and on the Holocaust, which was the cause of the vanishing of the local community.

## May

### Presentation of the Jewish



In the framework of the program "We honor our Communities" at the community's cultural center in Athens, it was organized presentation of the Jewish Community of Rhodes with the title: "Past & Present".

Mrs Donna Lilian Capon, former general secretary of the Central Jewish Board of Greece, gave a lecture on the historical past and the traditions of Jewish Rhodes

Mrs Carmen Cohen, director of the Jewish Community of Rhodes, on the other hand, gave a speech on the rebirth of the community in 1956, the Community's achievements the last 20 years, since Mrs Bella Angel took over the presidency of the Community and on the Community's present time and its goals for the future.

In the intermission between the lectures the soprano LouizaKone sang well known Sephardic songs .The event ended with the screening of the documentary: "L'isola delle Rose, La tragedia di un paradise" – "The island of Roses – Tragedy in Paradise"



Poster of the documentary

**Sam’s Koffler Bar Mitzvah**

Mrs. Julie Friedman-Koffler, from New York, wrote a letter to the Central Jewish Board in Greece expressing her son’s wish to celebrate his bar mitzvah in Greece in a synagogue that it is not very active, as he thought that



it is important to share simchot and celebrations.



We were the only community in Greece who responded, so they decided to have Sam’s Koffler bar-mitzvah in Rhodes and at the same

time to celebrate Shavuot in our Synagogue. It was the first time during the last 20 years that we had a service for Shavuot in our Synagogue.



A group of friends and relatives joined the family and they all had a memorable and joyful time in Rhodes. We have made new friends and supporters of the Community and above all the sweet bar-mitzvah boy who has started to learn Greek and he wants to come and volunteer one of the next summers.

*In Honor of Sam’s Koffler Bar Mitzvah,  
Carolyn & Wilfred Brown donated to the  
Synagogue a table for lighting the candles.*



## June



BEIT HATFUTSOT  
THE MUSEUM OF THE  
JEWISH PEOPLE

The Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot that is located in Tel Aviv contacted us, asking for photos and historical material in order to include Kahal Shalom Synagogue and the Jewish Community of Rhodes in their Database.

### **KehilaKedosha Janina annual trip to Jewish Greece**

We welcomed Marcia Haddad Ikonomopolou , museum director of Kehila Kedosha Janina synagogue included Rhodes in her annual trip to Jewish Greece During their stay we organized a Friday night service for the group at Kahal Shalom Synagogue .



Isaac Habib, our tour guide gave them also a walking tour of the Jewish quarter and a tour of the Synagogue and Museum.

The group had an enjoyable and memorable stay in Rhodes.

## July

### Israel minister's visit

On June 29- July 2 a conference was organized in the beautiful island of Rhodes. The conference started off as a gathering of the Jewish Community



of Libya who currently resides all over the world, mainly in Israel, Italy, UK and other countries, to commemorate the final expulsion and practical end of the communities' long sojourn in that part of the world.

High profile Israelis of Libyan origin, including a couple of ministers, as well as the veteran Sephardi politician and former foreign minister David Levy, attended the event.

What made the event a unique one is the fact that some high profile Libyan current officials expressed a wish to be part of the reconciliation process, as well as opening a new chapter between Libya and its Jewish diaspora.



On the occasion of this conference we received a visit to the Synagogue and the Museum of the participants to the conference as well separately from the Minister for Social Equality Mrs Gila Gamliel and her family.

The Director Mrs Carmen Cohen welcomed her and gave her a tour as she was interested in acknowledging the history of the community and our present activities.

**Family reunion**



On the 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> of July descendants of the Menashe family organized a family reunion in Rhodes to celebrate the birthdays of



their Matriarchs who were turning 80, 83, and 85.

The members of the Menashe family lived in the island before the Second World War and immigrated or escaped before the deportation.

More than 80 members of the family gathered from all over the world. Most of them got to meet each other for the first time!

Together with their group leaders we organized welcome cocktail at the



Synagogue’s yard, walking tour in the Jewish Quarter, tour of the Museum and the Synagogue and a Friday night service.

As they were present, during the annual Commemoration events for the deportation

of the Jews from Rhodes and Kos, they also participated at the official commemoration service and we gave them the honor to light a candle and to lay a wreath at the Holocaust Memorial on behalf of the Rhodesli Jews who live abroad.

**Preston Witman Production**



Cecilia Zoppelletto

Cecilia Zoppelletto, producer and director of PrestonWitman Production, came to Rhodes in July with her crew (PaoloCamata – cameraman & Raphael Odukoya – sound man) in order to film an independent documentary titled: “From Rhodes to Congo”.

The documentary follows the story of the Jewish Community from the island of Rhodes in the early 1900s to Africa.

An important chapter is the community in the Juderia of Rhodes. Due to the historic and spiritual relevance of the Kahal Shalom Synagogue, the Synagogue was filmed.

MrSami Modiano (born in Rhodes, lived in Kamina- Congo after his liberation) and Mr Isaac Habib (born in Elisabethville – Congo, second generation Rodesli) were interviewed.



Paolo Camata



As they were present during the Commemoration events of July 2017, they also filmed the concert and

the official memorial service at the Synagogue. They are planning to include plans of both events to the documentary.

**Commemoration events**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1944, Jewish life seized to exist in Rhodes. After a presence of hundreds of years on the island. In one single day, the



Jews of Rhodes were taken away, never to return. Only 151 Rodian Jews survived the Shoah out of more than two thousand taken away.



Every year the Community holds events around that date to commemorate the deportation of the Jews of

Rhodes and Cos .

The program of this year’s events included :



Asskavot at the Jewish cemetery.

Kabbalat Shabbat service and dinner.

Shabbat service followed by “beraha”.

Music concert at the Palace of Grand

Master titled “We sing and remember” with the soprano Mariangela Chatzistamatiou,

Memorial service at the Synagogue for the Holocaust victims and wreath laying at the Holocaust Memorial

Screening of the film “DIE WELLE –The wave”



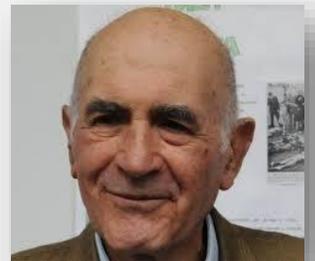
**Stamatiou Foundation**



**Rhodes Scholarship Foundation**

The cinematographic group of the Rhodes Scholarship Foundation "Emm.Stamatiou& Mary Chris.Stamatiou” has started the

shooting of a documentary film narrating the experiences of the Jews of Rhodes during the Second World War, based on the testimony of Mr. Sami Modiano, holocaust survivor from Rhodes. The team included footage that was taken from inside of the KahalShalom and the Museum .



**Sami Modiano**

## September

### Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur



Photo from file

Every year during the High Holidays with the financial support of Safra Foundation, we invite a Hazan from Israel to hold the services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Friends of the Synagogue and the Community travelled from their home countries to spend the High

Holidays in our Synagogue



We took this photo from facebook

Marcia Haddad Ikonopolou of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue honored us for a second time this summer bringing another group from the States. The group attended with us the Rosh Hashana services. We all shared together the dinner. After services as it is customary. We welcomed the New Year 5778 at the yard of our library with a delicious buffet organized by the ladies of the community. As it is the custom all together we broke the fast of Yom Kippur!

## October

### Sukkot



“We had built our Sukkah, knowing that we were not going to have any services for the festival of Sukkot. Since I have been coming to Rhodes, we used to receive from Athens the Etrog and the Lulav; but this year, we were

disappointed as none of these were sent to us. Nothing we could have done...but yet never despair...

This morning, father and son came to the synagogue holding a bag. You can guess what was in their bag! An Etrog and a Lulav. They were told that there was a synagogue in Rhodes, so they had come for the Sukkot service, and

deliver those symbolic items. Within the

next fifteen minutes, we end up having a minian and out of the blue, we could have a religious service for the festival of Sukkot.

Thank you Gabi Magnesi and your son

Shauli for dropping by in our synagogue and

bringing with you the Etrog and the Lulav, and leading the service. This is a ness (miracle) that you came to us unexpectedly from the Holy Land to Rhodes.

Let us hope for another ness for SimchaTorah!

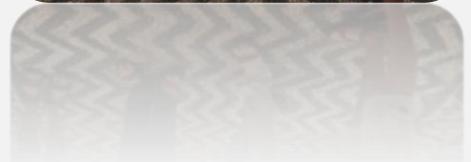
Hag Sukkot Sameach dear friends!”

**Posted on Facebook by Mr. Isaac Habib on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October**



**Simchat Torah**

This year's photos from Simchat Torah!



**Hidden Children exhibition**



The Jewish Community of Rhodes, in collaboration with the Department School Education of the Dodecanese and the Jewish Museum of Greece, organized an exhibition titled: "Hidden Children in Occupied Greece".

The exhibition was presented at the hospice of France.



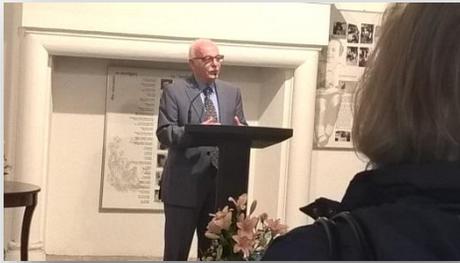
"Hidden Children in Occupied Greece "is a traveling exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Greece, which explores

the stories of the hidden Jewish children from all over Greece during occupation, covering a wide range of experiences, developments and endings that these unfortunate «children of war" had to live.



Simple people protected the persecuted, at moments in which they were in the extreme limits of despair, having no way of defending themselves against the indignant persecution that the conquerors had launched against them.





**Alexander Simcha**

The opening of the exhibition took place on 31 October and was open to the public until the



**Reina Molcho**

7<sup>th</sup> of November. We had the honor to have with us two of these “Hidden Children”, Mr. Alexander Simcha and Mrs. Reina Molcho. Many school

children, that visited the exhibition, had the opportunity to listen to their personal stories, memories and experiences.



## During the year.....

We welcomed group visits to the Synagogue and Museum to pray and to learn about our history.



## TREE PLANTING PROJECT FOR THE CEMETERY IN RHODES

Planting a tree is a meaningful and traditional way in the Jewish faith to honor the memory of departed loved ones and honor them.

This year, the Jewish Community of Rhodes began the reforestation of our cemetery. Despite the immaculate maintenance of our cemetery, we thought that we could offer the descendants of Rhodes, the honor of planting a tree in memory of victims of the Rhodes Shoah, or simply in memory of a departed loved one.



Each planted tree will have a plaque mentioning the name (s) of the victims and the donor. This past summer, a first shrub was planted by Mrs. Giovanna Cohen honoring her father, Rahamim Cohen, who survived the extermination camps and died in 2009.

We, at the Jewish Community of Rhodes, are very enthusiastic about this project and pleased to offer this opportunity.

**There is a limited number of tree. Anyone interested in participating in this “mitzvah” should contact:**

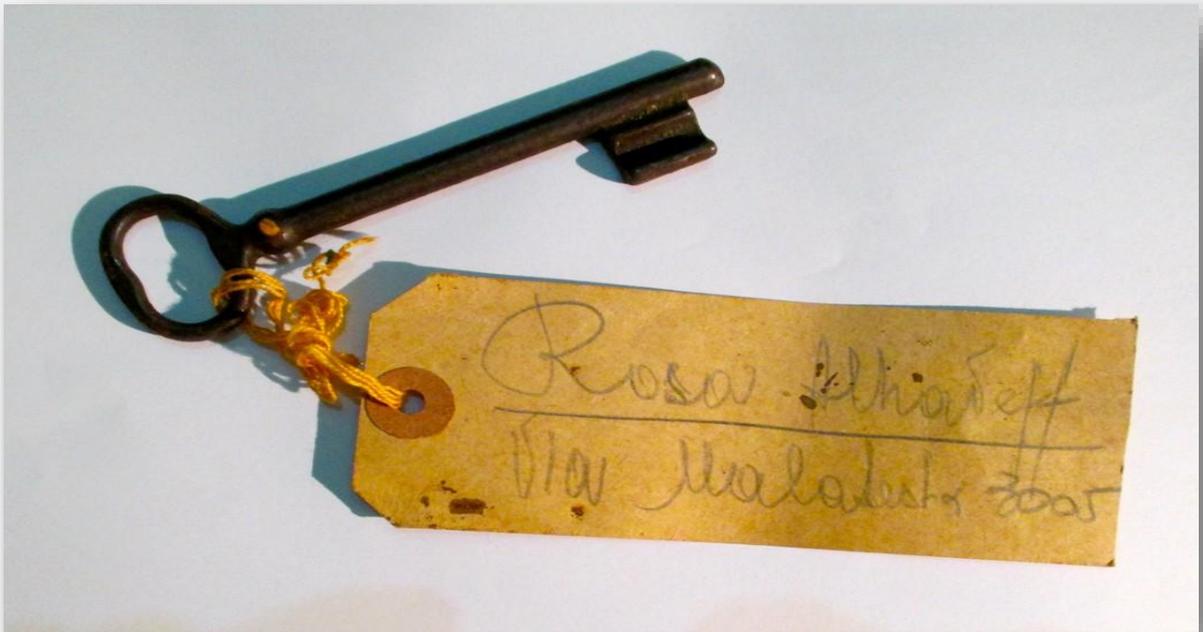
**Carmen Cohen**

**Jewish Community of Rhodes**

Email: [jcrhodes@otenet.gr](mailto:jcrhodes@otenet.gr)

## Articles about the Jewish Community of Rhodes

### THE SECRET OF THE LAST JEWS OF RHODES



A Daunting Discovery: The largest Carabinieri Archives Outside of Italy and a List of 1661 Names Shed Light on a Greek island's Darkest Moments

Christiane Schlötzer, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 11th 2015.

Translated by Bettina Ben AtarLütgerath

How was it possible? A locked door, unopened for nearly 70 years?: Nobody ever wondered what was behind it, or nobody wanted to know? What was behind that closed door in the building of the Police Headquarters of the Greek island of Rhodes?

Miracle is a big word, but one that the historian Marco Clementi uses when he speaks of that door and its secret behind it, which only recently has been brought to light.” It’s a miracle for I couldn’t believe what I saw”.

The sun stands high and the air is stagnant. The island of Rhodes, far in the south of Greece, lures throngs of tourists to its long beaches even in this summer of national crisis. “I go swimming daily, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to cope,” says Clementi. Reading the letters on yellowed paper in which people are asking to leave this beautiful island seeking asylum somewhere, anywhere: in France, England, Turkey, Africa, or the Americas”. The letters are 76\77 years old: that finally those letters can be read by Clementi is part of the miracle.

Marco Clementi wears a grey t-shirt the color of his hair: Like the dust that has settled on the old papers. At a certain point the contents of the room behind the mysterious door could have turned to dust. That this will not happen and that Marco Clementi will be able to tell a dark chapter of the history of this sunny island during the first half of the 20th century, is due to the perseverance of a former Greek state employee who didn’t tire of stating and finally putting in writing what he knew: that at the main Police Headquarters of the island there was this locked room containing many old files, and that was never aired nor opened and checked the contents.

His letter landed in the local archives. That was 2002 and nothing much happened after that. Not for nearly 10 years, until a new administrator, Eirini Tiliou, was named head of the island's state archives and the historian Marco Clementi heard about the rumors regarding the locked door while he was carrying on research in Rhodes. "What kind of papers would be there?" he doubtfully thought at the time.

The director of the archives asked for his help. Together they went to the police headquarters after Ms. Tiliou had gotten the necessary permits. "It was a very emotional moment to be able to open the door", she said later.

Clementi remembers vividly what they both saw: a room with one crumbling wall, and all that was standing against it was irremediably lost. Everything else, however, was intact. Nearly 90.000 documents in bookcases, boxes and brown folders labeled in blue, yellow and red colored pencil. The testimony of a long forgotten, zealous bureaucracy.

These papers cover the years between 1912 and 1946, a period of time when Rhodes was under Italian sovereignty; the occupation of the Dodecanese islands was part of Italy's colonization policy. But unfortunately, for a short but fatal period, at the end of World War II, the island fell under German yoke.

The documents include information about many of the approximately 100,000 people formerly living on the island: about their social and economic life, their friends and enemies and their opinions regarding the different rulers of the time. A treasure for historians.

Clementi, a historian specializing in the former Italian occupied areas, ascertained that the documents he and Ms.Tiliou rescued in 2013 were archives from the Italian Carabinieri. The largest collection of this kind preserved outside of Italy. More precisely, the documents are records from a special unit of the Carabinieri, a division of the Fascist police, that worked in Rhodes in a similar fashion as later did the German Stasi.

Under the fascist dictatorship, the so-called “enemies of state” were black-listed everywhere including Rhodes: the Carabinieri made files on spies, political suspects, the inhabitants habits and their religion: Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish. The files that the Carabinieri labeled “Di razzaebraica” (of Jewish race) and “Comunitaisraelitica di Rodi” became of great interest to the Germans when they took over the island.

“Impossible” is the reaction that Clementi hears when he informs the Carabinieri archivists in Italy about the archives discovered in Rhodes. Even in Rome no one knew about the records that had been left in the far away island – forgotten or destroyed.

Clementi notes that another Carabinieri archive outside of Italy can be found in Montenegro, but that it is much smaller covering only two years and not 33, as the one in Rhodes. “It is unbelievable that nothing was thrown away during all these years, and the entire archive had landed on our laps”.

There are many historical photos, portraits and family pictures. They are now kept in an old vault protected from natural light, in a building which is in complete disrepair. Clementi spent many months organizing the

documents, but he couldn't ask for funds not even for new filing folders due to the lack of funds at the Greek State Archive.

The Holocaust Museum in Washington has in the meantime begun to fund the cataloguing and digitalization of these documents – at least those pertaining to the former Jewish Community of Rhodes.

The Jewish Community in Rhodes was one of the oldest in the region, with origins dating back to the second century BC. It survived persecution and expulsion by the hands of the Knights of St. John, and although substantially decimated, it blossomed during the Ottoman period.

At the beginning of the Italian occupation the Jewish Community, numbering approximately 4,500 people: at that time, the community thought that it would be able to adjust well to the change of sovereignty, which it did.

The first civil Italian Governor, Mario Lago, made his mark on the island mostly as a master-builder. He brought Italian architects to Rhodes and they built buildings in neo-renaissance style as well as some reminiscent of the Venetian Doge's Palace.(Il Palazzo del Governo).

In 1936, Lago was replaced by Cesare Maria de Vecchi, who immediately began the restructuring of the palace of the Knights and at the same time removing some facades of many buildings that appear too Turkish in style.

Within a short time the new governor, a fervent follower of the fascist dictator Mussolini, identified some categories of citizens as disturbing elements. In the beginning Greek, Turkish and Jewish teachers lost their jobs

and were replaced by Italian ones. Then in 1938, with the declaration and implementation of the “Racial Laws” all those Jews who had become Italian citizens after 1919 had to relinquish their Italian citizenship and leave Italian territory. That affected hundreds of those who had come to the island with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Within 6 months they were told to leave the island. In their distress the Jews wrote those letters that Clementi has now discovered. They pleaded with the British and French government to allow them to find refuge in British ruled island of Cyprus or in the French colonies of North Africa. It was a factual expulsion, but it saved them from Auschwitz.

On September 11th, 1943 the German Wehrmacht occupied Rhodes (and the other islands) and imprisoned the last Italian Governor, Inigo Campioni. “Thus the island fell under the authority of the German military, but the civil administration remained Italian,” Clementi explains. And these documents confirm it. By then approximately 1,800 Jews had remained on the island.

As if uncovering the documents in the police headquarters was not enough, Clementi also located the records, in the State archive, that document the Italian-German cooperation after the Armistice, thus at a time, when the Italian government had already surrendered to the Allies. One more serendipitous discovery and one more invaluable piece of history. It is a list of 1661 names, typewritten, meticulously numbered, with only the number 181 missing. Whether on purpose or by chance- no one knows.

What we know is that on July 1944 the Germans used this Italian list to round up and deport the remaining Jews on the island. Of the 1767 Jews

deported from Rhodes and the neighboring island of Kos to Auschwitz only 163 survived.

Reports by the few survivors describe how they were summoned on July 20th 1944. For three days they were locked up in the rooms and garden of the Italian Aviation headquarter, without food or water. An Italian who was watering his flowers in the garden next door and held the water hose over the wall in order to help, was shot instantly. Only the young Turkish consul was able to save 43 Jews from deportation because of their Turkish citizenship. All others were transported in three freight ships to the harbor town of Piraeus and then further on to a camp in Athens, from where they were packed into trains to Auschwitz. These recollections have long been known.

But that a list existed, on six pages with five columns on each page containing an exact list of the Jews and that was compiled by the Italians none knew. Perhaps only a historical detail, but an extraordinary one, a dreary document of those last days of the Jews of Rhodes. This death-list was typed on the back of the official forms for the registration of birth, the “ElencodelleNascite”.

“No Italian was ever tried, nor held accountable for any of this”, Clementi says. Where did you find this list in the archives? “In a box of archives, marked 1945”. Not 1944 as would have been correct.

If you plan to pay a visit to the archive and meet Mrs. Tiliou, then expect to take a giant leap over a small antechamber filled with empty boxes. The area under these boxes are now home to myriads of fleas.

Eirini Tiliou —petite and energetic — closes the door to her archive room quickly. The document- filled boxes and the historic folios are piled up as high as the vaulted medieval ceiling. Fire extinguishers hang between the boxes. The air is damp and sticky. “Working here is a health hard”, says Tiliou. There isn’t enough money for either an air conditioning or for permanent employees. That’s why she is usually alone with her treasures in this Branch office of the State Archives of the Dodecanese islands: The Ottoman documents, the collection of Italian architectural sketches, the mountains of papers.

Together Clementi and Tiliou have written a book entitled *The last Jews from Rhodes*, DeriveApprodi, Rome 2015. The book is also about the Carabinieri Archives. And about other little known stories including those of the two boats (the Rim and the Pentcho) en route to Palestine, that shipwrecked on the shores of Rhodes, not unlike those we see today filled with refugees. They were carrying hundreds of Hungarian, Austrian and Ctzeck Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. After they shipwrecked they were brought and interned in Rhodes. Many of them eventually reached their destination, Palestine, others were transported to the Italian mainland internment camps and escaped the fate of their coreligionist of the island.

The crimes that Germans committed in Greece, the massacres of civilians in villages on the mainland and in Crete, the extermination of the Jews in Salonica, all this has only recently come to public attention.

## Worth visiting while in Rhodes

### **The Butterfly Valley of Rhodes**

The Butterfly Valley is a natural beauty, and an unforgettable experience. A peaceful walk enjoyed by everyone through the shaded lush green valley with a small stream running through it. The site is beautifully arranged, with little wooden bridges and stone steps. You are always surrounded by butterflies camouflaging themselves, hidden on the tree trunks as you walk up towards summit where the monastery of “Kalopetra” dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was built in 1780. Not to be missed!



#### Location:

The Butterfly Valley (Petaloudes) is located in the northern part of the island, 26 km from the town of Rhodes and 6 km from the western coast. Starting from Rhodes city you will find the valley between the villages Paradisi and Theologos along a small road that heads inland.



#### **Natural Rhodes**

Visitors can witness a spectacular phenomenon which rarely occurs in nature. Huge numbers of butterflies (Panaxia Quadripunctaria) congregate in this small valley during the final stage of their life cycle. Every year, at the end of the wet season (late May), thousands of butterflies are attracted by the scent of the Oriental Sweetgum trees which cover the entire landscape. They are actually adult moths that follow the waterways and migrate to reproduce in valley (females leave for other suitable areas to lay their eggs in the early fall) due to the high humidity of the area. The butterflies appear between mid-June until September. In recent years the butterflies were also found in the forest of Mount Filerimos in Ialissos.

If you wish to add a historical fact about the Jewish Community of Rhodes, write about your family's history or give us ideas on how to improve the newsletter

**PLEASE**

**contact us at**

[jcrhodes@otenet.gr](mailto:jcrhodes@otenet.gr)