

Rosh Hashanah in Rhodes

For the Rhodesis, the customary greeting for the New Year is “Renova sovre nostros anyada Buena l klara skritas en livros de vida” “May we be blessed again with the Happy New and be inscribed in the book of life” or more simply “Anyada alegre” “Happy New Year.



Mahzor leRosh Hashanah, Sephardic prayer book for the Jewish New Year, Livorno 1860. It belonged to Aher Varon, who lived in Cape Town, S.Africa

During the month before Rosh Hashanah, selihoth (prayers asking for forgiveness) were recited, generally in the homes of those in mourning.

On the day before Rosh Hashanah, the men went to the cemetery to visit graves of their dear ones.

Sweet tasting food, auguring a New Year filled with joy and abundance, is offered including homemade marzipan and white lemon flavored fondant, which is a symbol of purity. Some Sephardim avoid eating sour or bitter tasting foods or those that are black in color, such as olives, raisins and eggplant as it is associated with mourning. New seasonal fruit is tasted with a blessing of thanksgiving, Shehecheyanu. Several foods are made in a rounded shape, symbolizing continuity and wholeness, including the festive ring-shaped bread, stuffed vegetables, savory pies and pastries, pumpkin coils, leek fritters and marzipan. It is customary to place sugar on the table instead of salt for a sweet year. This sugar was kept part to be used throughout the year for any time when the solution of sugar and water was called for (This sugar was used for minor ailments, such as when someone fell or frightened “spanto”).

It was also a custom to save the tablecloth they used the first night with all the crumbs folded inside. When dawn broke on Rosh Hashanah they took the tablecloth with the crumbs to the sea with someone who had been ill. If no one in their family was ill they could loan it to a family that needed it. The tablecloth was shaken over the head of the sick person with prayers. This was called “Olas a la mar” or making waves in the ocean, and was supposed to cure the sick. Another custom was to avoid wearing anything new on the foot, such as shoes, stockings or slippers.

*From “I Remember Rhodes” by Rebecca Amato Levy