

# ADA WEINTRAUB FINIFTER SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE STUDY OF ROMANIOTE JEWS

The Finifter Endowment offers a scholarship of at least \$1000 each per year for projects related to study of Romaniote Jews. It is administered by the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel of Michigan State University.

Students (undergraduate, graduate, and post-docs) and faculty in the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel and in other colleges

Applications should ask for no less than \$1,000 and no more than \$5,000. After the scholarship, undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty will be asked to give a public lecture as part of the Serling Institute Faculty/Student Research Seminar, and all awardees will submit copies of completed projects to be kept on file at the Serling Institute



at Michigan State University who are engaged in serious academic work related to the study of the Romaniote Jews are invited to apply.

Projects may include course work, thesis, independent study, relevant study abroad, internships, independent research, travel to collections, or creative academic projects on Romaniote Jews.

Applications will be judged on merit, student academic performance, faculty performance, contribution to knowledge, and/or contribution to society.

**Applicants must apply electronically by March 1, 2023 to:**

Dr. Yael Aronoff: [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu), and Assistant to the Director, Ariana Mentzel: [mentzela@msu.edu](mailto:mentzela@msu.edu)

The application requires:

1. Proposal (a description of the proposed project or research)
2. Discussion of the applicant's relevant qualifications
3. Brief curriculum vitae or transcript
4. Letter of recommendation
5. Budget

for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel.

## Selection

A committee of two faculty members appointed by the Director of the Serling Institute along with the Director will select Finifter Award recipient(s). Awards will be for the summer or academic year and may be used for tuition, to support travel, study abroad, or internships related to the project.

## About Romaniote Jewry and Ada W. Finifter's Family History:

It is not clear whether or not the designation "Romaniote" Jewry derives from the Hellenized Latin word for Greece or has some connection to their having lived under the Roman empire as well. Romaniote Jews are those who originally came to the Mediterranean areas of Europe from ancient Israel beginning well before its conquest by Alexander the Great. They are sometimes confused with Sephardic Jews, many of whom fled from Spain to Romaniote Jewish

communities in Greece and other parts of Europe during the Inquisition. Romaniote Jews, however have no history in Spain.

As compared to research and knowledge about Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry, there is relatively little systematic knowledge about the origins and life experiences of Romaniote Jewry. Some scholars speculate that Romaniotes originally came to Greece as merchant traders, having become familiar with Greek culture as a result

of its spread

through

ancient Israel

during the

Hellenistic

period that

followed

Alexander's

conquest. Another

theory is that

they were taken

as slaves, either

intentionally to

Greece, or, during

the Roman

empire, intended for

Rome but landing in Greece by chance after

a mishap on one or more of the transport

ships.

Romaniote Jewish communities were also found in Italy, France, and other parts of Mediterranean Europe. After the much larger numbers of Sephardic Jews migrated eastward from Spain and Portugal, many Romaniotes were absorbed into the Sephardic communities. Some of the original Romaniote communities continue to this day, however, almost exclusively in small or isolated areas, such as Janina (Ioannina) in Greece, from where Ada W. Finifter's mother's parents migrated to the United States around 1905.

Over ninety-percent of Jews in Greece were murdered during the Holocaust but small numbers of Romaniote Jews continue to live in Greece (and France, and possibly elsewhere in Europe) to the present day, as well as in various cities of the United States. There is a sizeable community of Romaniote

Jews in the New York area, who continue to maintain the Kehila Kedosha Janina synagogue, a New York City historical landmark thought to be the only Romaniote synagogue in the United States.

Ada W. Finifter's interest in Romaniote Jews derives from her lineage on her mother's side. Her mother's parents, Leon Colchamiro and Julia Mazza Cochamiro (whose maiden name was Galanos) lived in Janina (Ioannina), Greece. Her grandparents were already married and had two or three children when they emigrated to the United States around 1905. Her grandparents lived initially on the lower east side of Manhattan where her grandfather was instrumental in founding the Kehila Kedosha Janina. His portrait is displayed in the synagogue's museum and his name is carved on the original stonework of the synagogue as the "rabbi", although he was not a rabbi in the way we use the term today. This title was given to him as an honorific for his role in founding the synagogue. The family subsequently moved to Harlem and eventually to Brooklyn, where the family house remained until the late 1980s-early 1990s. Among the eight children of her grandparents was her mother, Stella Colchamiro. Her mother married Isaac Weintraub, her father. She had a brother named Leon.



Colonel Mordechai Frizis (1893-1940) from the ancient Romaniote Greek Jewish community of Chalkis with his wife Victoria.

Members of the Romaniote Greek Jewish Community of Volos: Rabbi Moshe Pesach (front left) with his sons (back). Prior to 1940.



**For more information please contact:**

**Dr. Yael Aronoff**

**Director, The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel**

**Serling Chair in Israel Studies**

**Email:** [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu)