

# THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel"

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## POINTS OF KINSHIP

The events in the Middle East become all the more real when they are filtered through real people. If you have visited Israel, you have close friends or family whose plight brings home the pressure of war. Even if you never have visited Israel, or even contemplated a trip, your connections with the extended family provide a link to the events. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of members of the Abravanel family in the State of Israel; here are just a few:

DAVID ABRVANEL (Hertzliya) arrived in Israel from Argentina in 1970 with his sisters and was later joined by his parents. He now works as a manager for Degem Systems, a computer software company, but he has lived on a kibbutz and served as a shaliach, or emissary from Israel, to Mexico.

SHLOMO ABARBANEL (The Negev) works on a moshav in the southern part of Israel. His family came to Israel in 1947 from Libya, but in Libya they were known as the family from Izmir, descended from a Turkish Jewish soldier who had made his home in Tripoli.

CLAUDE ABRVANEL (Jerusalem) is a music professor at the Rubin Academy of Music. An expert on the music of Claude Debussy, he made aliyah to Israel in 1951 from Switzerland.

ODED ABARBANEL (Tel Aviv) is the only El Al pilot ever to have his aircraft hijacked. Oded's family came from the Ukraine and Kovno, Lithuania.

JUDITH ABARBANEL DIESENDRUCK (Ra'anana) is a scientist, whose father operated the famous Abarbanel Pharmacy in Tel Aviv, across the street from the home of David Ben Gurion. Her father was also a founder of the Israel Pharmaceutical Association. She reports that her branch of the Abarbanel family was associated with the Lubavitch Hasidic movement in Russia.

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MARLENA IDELCHIK (Haifa) is one of Israel's newest citizens. She writes:

"I am 54 years old, and married with two sons. I am a microbiologist, and my sister, 50 years old, married with two daughters, is a children's doctor. My mother's father, Samuel Abarbanel, was a simple tailor from the little Russian city of Nevel (not very far from Leningrad). During the Revolution his brother left for the United States, but grandfather was unable to leave. Grandfather had two sons, Solomon and David Abarbanel, who perished in 1941 in the struggle against the fascists, and in 1963 grandfather died. For many years in the USSR it was impossible to write letters to the United States, and the family of my mother does not know anything about their relatives in the United States. We were born and lived all our life in Russia, but now from 1990, we are citizens of Israel."

#### POINT OF DISPERSION

The center of Greek Jewry, a truly Jewish city of the 19th century -- Salonika, or Thessaloniki, a port city in Northern Greece, was a haven to many Jews who fled from the Iberian peninsula in the 15th and 16th Centuries. The family of Abravanel has been closely identified with this city since the original exile in 1492.

How We Arrived. At least three writers - one of the Renaissance, two of the modern age - addressed the origins of the family in Salonika. Cecil Roth, in his work The Jews in the Renaissance (Philadelphia 1959), quoted the marrano physician, Amatus Lusitanus, who lived the last part of his life in Salonika. Amatus reported that in Salonika he treated for "tertian fever (unsuccessfully, in the final result), 'Judah, the grandson of that great Judah or Leo Abrabanel, the Platonic philosopher....'" Amatus insisted that his patient owned "'a manuscript of some length, entitled De coeli harmonia ... which was composed by the good Leo aforementioned at the request of the illustrious Pico della Mirandola, as appears from the preface." Amatus added that the patient died, and the work of Judah was lost to the world.

A more modern writer provides the basis for an alternative link between Spain and Salonika. Meir Benayahu wrote in Sefunot, a publication of the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, in an article entitled "The House of Abravanel in Salonika," that the family originated with Don Samuel Abravanel, the third son of Don Isaac Abravanel.

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Most scholars acknowledge that Don Samuel had attended a yeshiva in Salonika, but believe that he later moved to Italy, where he gained prominence in business and public affairs. Benayahu asserted, however, that the Don Samuel of Italy is actually the son of Joseph Abravanel, Don Isaac's brother, and that Don Samuel, the son of Don Isaac, remained in Salonika until his death in 1504. This Don Samuel left "a young son from whom was descended the Turkish branch of the family." What is Benayahu's proof of this theory? In the archives of the British Museum, Benayahu discovered the funeral oration for Don Samuel, delivered by Rabbi Joseph Garson in Salonika in 1504!

A third link for the family, if not for the family name, is established by Michael Molho in In Memoriam - Hommage Aux Victimes Juives des Nazis en Grece (Thessalonique 1988), who included in his work a photograph of the tombstone of Dona Reina, the daughter of Judah Abravanel. Don Reina died in Salonika in 1540.

How We Thrived. The Benayahu article described many members of the family in Salonika, including a physician named Don Isaac and Don Yehuda Hiyya Abravanel (1540-1597?), a "prince and a great man in Israel, in whom Torah knowledge and high station united."

Other sources mention the Abravanel family of Salonika through the ages:

The Jewish Encyclopedia, for example, indicates that Solomon Abrabanel, the son-in-law of Jacob ben Abraham di Boton, published his father-in-law's book in Salonika in 1720.

In a monumental work entitled Espanoles sin Patria (Madrid 1905), Spanish Senator Angel Pulido Fernandez wrote of life in the Sephardic world, utilizing extensive reports sent to him from Sephardic Jews around the world. Senator Pulido's reporter from Salonika was none other than Don Moises Abravanel, described as a descendant of the noble Abravanel family (the Newsletter is attempting to locate the Pulido archives, and the more than 40 letters and countless photographs and drawings that Pulido said he received from Don Moises in his Salonika reports).



FIG. 127.—D. Moisés Abravanel, distinguido y celoso colohorador de esta obra.

Michael Molho mentioned many other Abravanel in his book, including Don Moises, a prominent publisher and philanthropist, and Rachel Abravanel, a founder of a charitable organization for the sick.

More than 30 entries of Abravanel names are included in the work Precious Stones of the Jews of Salonica (Jerusalem 1968), a study prepared by Dr. Isaac S. Emmanuel before the destruction of the cemetery in World War II, of the tombstones in the Salonika Jewish cemetery.

The Dispersed Family. Persons descended from the Salonika branch who have been mentioned in other editions of the Newsletter include MAX NORDAU (who claimed descent from an Abravanel who emigrated from Salonika to Vienna in the 17th century), MAURICE ABRAVANEL (Salt Lake City, Utah), FREDDY ABRAVANEL (Athens, Greece), JACK ABRAVANEL (Seattle, Washington), FRANCK-OLIVIER KINDEL (St. Cloud, France), ELLIOT ABRAVANEL (Los Angeles, California) and SILVIO SANTOS (Sao Paolo, Brazil).

Only a few members of the family remain in Salonika. If you visit the old age home in Salonika, you will have the delight of meeting LEON ABRAVANEL, age 90. Maintaining the family tradition of publishing, Rene Molho (descended from the Abravanel through her mother), operates Librairie Molho, one of the largest publishing houses in Salonika.

#### POINT OF EXCLAMATION!

The American Sephardi Federation has begun its planning for a seminar to be held in mid-March, 1992 in New York City. The seminar, to be entitled "Abravanel!," will consist of scholarly presentations about the members of the Abravanel family, with speakers from around the world.

The days immediately preceding or immediately following the seminar provide an excellent opportunity for a family reunion in New York City. Please consider this announcement a 13-month advance notice of the First Annual United States Abravanel Reunion. Additional details, including the exact date and location, will be provided soon.

#### POINT OF REMEMBRANCE

WALTER EYTAN (Jerusalem, Israel), the former Israeli ambassador to France, sent a note in January 1991 to the Newsletter from Nidhe Israel Synagogue in Bridgetown, Barbados:

"Tomorrow night I shall be speaking in this historic synagogue. Yesterday I visited the old graveyard which surrounds it. I easily identified one of the Abarbanel tombstones and placed a small stone on it in your name."

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