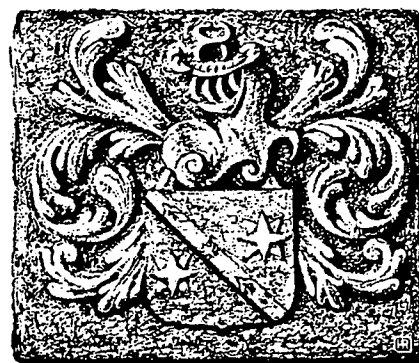


THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel"



Newsletter No. 23
June 1998

NOBILITY LOOKING FORWARD

Jonathan Skolnik, a Columbia University doctoral student, wrote to the Newsletter about the impact of the Abravanel family in 19th century German literature. He presented a paper in Dusseldorf entitled, "The Strange Career of the Abravanel Family." He enclosed his article written for the Leo Baeck Institute Newsletter, an excerpt of which appears below:

JÜDISCHES MUSEUM IN BERLIN

GEDENKAUSSTELLUNG
DON JIZCHAQ
ABRABANEL
SEINE WELT
SEIN WERK

In 1937 in the Jewish Museum in Berlin, an exhibition was mounted to honor the quincentennial of the birth of Isaac Abravanel. The catalogue of the exhibit organized by Alfred Klee and Rahel Wischnitzer, preserved in the Leo Baeck Institute library, enumerates rare old editions of the works of the bible scholar, statesman, and financier to the kings of Portugal and Spain, paintings from the period, and other memorabilia, including

pieces loaned from museums abroad. Why was an exhibit of this scale mounted as the Nazi regime was in its fifth year and Jews were struggling to emigrate? Why did a fifteenth-century Spanish court Jew attract such attention?

Those who recall Heine's *Der Rabbi von Bacherach* (1822/1840) will note that a character with the name "Isaac Abravanel" figures prominently in the (unfinished) third chapter. As part of my doctoral dissertation on German-language historical fiction about Jewish history, I have been researching Abravanel's strange career as a touchstone figure for German Jews. Heine's novel stands at the beginning of a discontinuous tradition that reaches into the post-Holocaust world. Heine's *Abravanel*, it will be remembered, is an apostate who visits Frankfurt's Jewish ghetto only for the food.

Three years before Heine's story was published, Phoebus Philippon's novel *Die Marannen* appeared in the pages of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*. Philippon's *Abravanel* is a benevolent father-figure, a bastion of modern scientific learning and a moral guide to his people when they are expelled from Spain in 1492. In 1856-57, the orientalist

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR—TRAVEL TO LATIN AMERICA

On July 22, my family and I will be embarking on a trip to Latin America. We will be arriving in Rio de Janeiro on July 23, in Buenos Aires on July 27, in Santiago de Chile on August 5, and in Lima on August 10. I hope we will have the opportunity to meet many of you during these travels.

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Hermann Reckendorf published his five-volume *Die Geheimnisse der Juden*, a novel in the form of the memoirs of the descendants of King David (i.e., the Abravanel family) from the time of the Second Temple until Moses Mendelssohn. The novel's Enlightenment telos stands in contract to its messianic tension.

In Reckendorf's novel, the Abravanel family personify a view of Jewish history as a long march of suffering and perseverance, in the service of the author's appeal for religious orthodoxy in his *Nachwort*. Alfred Nossig wrote an Abravanel drama in 1906, where the court Jew is portrayed as a proto-Zionist. Exiled in Amsterdam, the late Hermann Kesten cast Abravanel in his novel *Ferdinand und Isabella* (1936). At the dramatic center of the novel, Kesten's Abravanel delivers an impassioned apology for Spanish Jews, implicitly drawing an analogy between the Inquisition and expulsion in 1492 and Nazi Germany. And in the epilogue to his 1953 novel, *Nachts unter der steineren Bruecke*, Leo Perutz invokes Abravanel in a moving image of a lost world that can never be regained.

The Abravanel quincentennial in 1937 was marked around the world, but the moving force seems to have been Alfred Klee. Publications outside of Germany included contributions by prominent emigres, such as Leo Strauss. The fascination with the Sephardi scholar and statesman was a unique German-Jewish phenomenon. In the hundred years that witnessed a progression from Emancipation to exile and extermination, Abravanel was used by German-Jewish writers to invoke various (and opposing) political positions, but the Abravanel of German-Jewish fiction was always a paragon of *Bildung* and moral fortitude.

In the 1930's, the "liberal" Abravanel was eloquently presented in a book by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, written in 1937 at the request of the Prussian *Landesverband juedischer Gemeinden*. Heschel's resume of Abravanel's career points to the promise of his message, despite his failure in his lifetime. Although Abravanel "served states, from which he had to flee, and accumulated wealth that was confiscated," although his appeal to King Ferdinand (presented in fictional form in Kesten's novel) was a tragic failure, Heschel argues that the then-desperate Spanish Jews could not see that their exile was at the sametime a release from a role in

the murderous enterprise of Spanish colonialism - a blessing in disguise. A hand-written inscription in the LBI's copy of Heschel's book encapsulates more than anything the significance of this historical figure for German-speaking Jews:

"Nicht zurueck soll euer Adel schauen, sondern hinaus! Nicht woher ihr kommt, mache euch fuerderhin eurere Ehre, sondern wohin ihr geht!" In diesen Linien werden Enkel zum Ahnen werden! Und so strebt die Nachfahrin des grossen Gelehrten Abarbanell in eigener und ihrer Kinder Erziehung.

Berlin 1938 Regine Marcus, deren Mutter noch den Namen Abarbanell trug"

"Your nobility should not look backwards, but forward! From whence you came does not make up your honor, but rather where you go!" In these lines shall grandchildren become ancestors. And thus strives the descendent of the great scholar Abarbanell in her own education and that of her children.

Berlin 1938 Regine Marcus, whose mother still bore the name Abarbanell"

Mr. Skolnik reports that there were at least two women named Regine Marcus deported by the Nazis from Berlin to the concentration camps.

ABRAHAM HESCHEL
DON
JIZCHAK
ABRAVANEL

ERICH REISS VERLAG / BERLIN

1937

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MOISES NAIM

The Newsletter recently became aware that Dr. Moises Naim, the Venezuelan government leader and political scientist, and the editor of the journal *Foreign Policy*, is a member of the Abravanel family. The mother of Dr. Naim is an Abravanel, whose family emigrated from Turkey to Italy, and then to Venezuela.



Dr. Naim was appointed editor of *Foreign Policy* by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1997. Prior to that time, he played a central role in 1989 in launching Venezuela's economic reforms as its Minister of Trade and Industry. From 1990 to 1992, he was an executive director at the World Bank; he returned four years later as a senior adviser to the president of the Bank to work on the development of a new global strategy for the Bank and its affiliates. Dr. Naim holds a Master of Science and a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has taught at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced and International Studies in Washington and at the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administracion in Caracas, where he was dean from 1980 to 1986.

PAPER TIGERS AND MINOTAURS: THE POLITICS OF VENEZUELA'S ECONOMIC REFORMS

MOISÉS NAIM

A CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT BOOK

Dr. Naim is the author of *Paper Tigers and Minotaurs: The Politics of Venezuela's Economic Reforms* (1993), an account of the national transition from a state-controlled economy to one relying on free markets and open trade. Henry Kissinger described the work as "[A] handbook for reformers everywhere – a hardheaded, analytical account of the triumphs and frustrations of those who dare to try to renovate the economies and politics of the former Soviet Union, India, Latin America, and south Asia."

SPORTS FIGURE

Janice Abarbanel, a psychiatrist currently residing in Budapest, Hungary with her husband, Neil Porta, information in 1996 about her son Eli. Although now somewhat dated, it remains an interesting story:

My son Eli Abarbanel-Wolff, now 19, has just made the U.S. Paralympic Soccer Team. The Paralympics are not well known in the U.S. In Europe they are very popular. It is an Olympics for young adults with physical disabilities. Eli had a stroke at the age of 2, which left him with weakness on the left side. He has always been an amazing person, and a strong soccer player. He took a year off from Brown University to train for the Paralympic teach, which will play in the Olympic stadium in Atlanta August 15-25 [of 1996]. When these events are over, Eli intends to return to Brown. He has been a strong advocate for disability rights.

ANOTHER SOCCER STAR



The Newsletter was recently sent a photo of another Eli Abravanel, a soccer player who plays professionally for Hapoel Petah-Tikva National League Soccer Team in Israel.

RADIO ENTREPRENEUR

The following correspondence was sent to the Newsletter from Vladimir Abarbanell, of Klimovsk in the Moscow region of Russia:

I'm Vladimir Abarbanell, 45 years old, born in Velikiye Luky City, Pskov region, Russia. There were four brothers (Elmir, Anatoliy, Slava and me) and one sister (Olga) in the family. The father of my older brothers was David Semuel Abarbanell, who was killed in 1941; he was an officer in the Red Army. Elmir and Anatoliy were born before the War, in 1933 and 1936. My brother Slava, sister Olga and I were born after the War. We had another father, but our mother (Eugenia Mironova) have us the last name Abarbanell. I have considered myself to be an Abarbanell all my life.



From our family history I know that the first Abarbanell in our native places was an officer of Napoleon's army in 1812, when the French army came into Russia. The grandfather of my older brothers was Semuel Abarbanell. He had three daughters named Bela, Hana and Ida, and two sons, Semuel and my mother's husband, David. Semuel was a hero of the War. He was in a partisan unit when, at the age of 17, he was shot by the Fascists. Our relatives live today in Kanash City (Chuvash Republic of Russia) and in Minsk (Belorussia).

I'm an owner and chief editor of a small local radio station in Podolsk City near Moscow. My first profession is as a computer engineer and the second, as a director of theater and a drama teacher. I created my own business after 1991, when Yeltsin became President. In 1996 I became the president of Nongovernmental Radio Broadcasters of Russia. In 1990 I was in London with my theater and first received information about the Abarbanell family from the Jewish Encyclopaedia. Recently, I was in the U.S. as a participant in a Program for Russian Media Managers. I lived for two weeks in Washington, worked for three weeks at "Big Country Radio" in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and spent four days in New York. That was a wonderful time.

Readers can reach Vladimir at his e-mail address, abarbanell@glasnet.ru.