

# A Brief Biography of Eliyahu Sasson

by Avi Sion



**Elias/Eliyahu Sasson** was born in Damascus, Syria under the Ottoman Empire, on Feb. 2, 1902; he died in Jerusalem, Israel, on Oct. 8, 1978.

He was educated at the school of the Alliance Israelite in Damascus, and at the French College<sup>1</sup> in Beirut. Under pressure of the French authorities, he left Beirut in 1922, and worked for a few years in Mersin, Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

He emigrated to Palestine (then under the British mandate) in 1927.<sup>3</sup>

There he was an active Zionist, notably as a senior official in the Jewish Agency (1933-48). When the State of Israel was finally founded, he was a member of the Knesset (1965-74), under the Alignment/Labor Party. As such, he was a member of important committees (domestic affairs, labor, foreign affairs and defense); and he held important positions in the government of David Ben-Gurion (Minister of Postal Services, 1961-67, and Minister of Police, 1967-69); and he served as Ambassador of Israel (Italy, 1953-60, and Switzerland, 1960-61); among many other activities. It is said that he almost became president at some point; but was prevented by health problems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Joseph's University, a Jesuit institution.

<sup>2</sup> He there ran a trading house on behalf of a Joseph D. Farhi, until 1925; after which he did similar work for a couple of years.

<sup>3</sup> His parents, on the other hand, made their aliyah in 1919, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Eliyahu (who was 17 at the time) didn't immediately follow them, so that he could finish his studies first.

<sup>4</sup> See: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk\\_eng.asp?mk\\_individual\\_id\\_t=673](https://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk_eng.asp?mk_individual_id_t=673). See also: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliyahu\\_Sasson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliyahu_Sasson). And:



Presumably, R. Israel was born in 1800-10, i.e. 25 to 35 years before his migration in 1838; and we know that Haim was born in 1874 and that Eliyahu was born in 1902. Therefore, one can assume that Raphael was born about 1835-45 (either in Baghdad, before the migration, or in Damascus, after it), and that David was born in Damascus about 1860-70 (so, he would have been about 32-42 years old when Eliyahu, his youngest child, was born). David died in Israel in 1948.

Eliyahu's mother, Sarah, who died in Israel in 1946, was a daughter of **Rabbi Shlomo Aboulafia** (born circa 1860) and **Laura** (unknown surname). It should be noted that Eliyahu mentions Shlomo Aboulafia as his maternal grandfather in his autobiography; and he there also informs us that his mother Sarah passed away not long before the foundation of the State. Shlomo was a son of **Jacob** Aboulafia (b. circa 1840), who was a son of **Isaac** Aboulafia (1824-1910). Shlomo and Laura's children were **Yitzhak, Moshe, Rebecca, Sarah, and another** whose name is not known to me.

In his autobiography, Eliyahu mentions that he is the youngest of three brothers, without a sister. One of his brothers was **Albert/Abraham** Sasson and his wife was **Yvette** (unknown family name); they had no children. Elias' other brother's name is not known with certainty, but according to some it is **Raphael**<sup>7</sup>, and he would be the eldest of the three; he died young, struck by some disease (ca. 1915). If this thesis is true, it would be a confirmation of the above assumption that David's father was called Raphael; and vice versa.

In 1921 (or 1922), Eliyahu married **Giulia/Yael Zghoul** (1905-1994). Her parents were **Abraham Shmuel Halevi Zghoul** and **Fanny/Hasida Hakim** (b. 1870). The siblings of Yael were **Marco/Mordechai, Raphael, Yosef, Hélène, Gilsom, Haim, Olga** and one more (name unknown)<sup>8</sup>. The children of Eliyahu and Yael were **Allegra/Rina** (b. 1923), **Moshe** (1925-2006), **Laura/Ora** (b. 1929), and **Margot/Margalit** (born?). All four children are now deceased; but some of their descendants still live (though there is no direct male line descendant of Eliyahu).

Moshe Sasson was like his father an Israeli ambassador (to Italy, 1973-77, and to Egypt, 1981-88)<sup>9</sup>; he married **Tova Sokolov** in 1949, with whom he had two children: **Reuven/Ruby** (d. 1987 in a car accident, childless) and **Orna Sarah** (1952-2016) m. to Yigal Tamir, who had two sons: **Tal Eliyahu** (b. 1979) and **Mordechai** (b. 1983). Allegra m. Raphael Levy, with two sons: **Amikam** and **Ra'an**. Ora m. Aviad Yafeh (d. 1978), with two daughters: **Dorit** (m. Hawk) and **Revital** (m. Katz). Margalit m. Ezekiel Caspi, with three children: **Naaman, Sharon** and **Oded**.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to others, his name would be Moussa/Moshe; but the name Raphael seems most likely, if we accept the thesis above that David's father bore that name.

<sup>8</sup> Haim Zghoul ran an orphanage in Damascus. Olga still lives in Nice, France.

<sup>9</sup> More information on Moshe Sasson can be found on the web. But beware: Moshe Sasson is not to be confused with David Sasson (1938-2012), who was also an Israeli ambassador (in Greece and the former Yugoslavia), but who descended from another family.

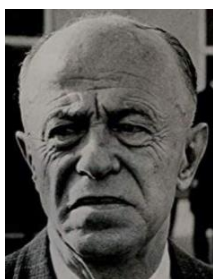
<sup>10</sup> Tova Sokolov's sister Yaffa m. Solomon/Solly Abulafia; they are still alive at time of writing. Raphael Levy still lives; his son Amikam was an ambassador. Revital, daughter of Aviad Yaffe, is a judge.



Eliyahu Sasson



Eliyahu Sasson



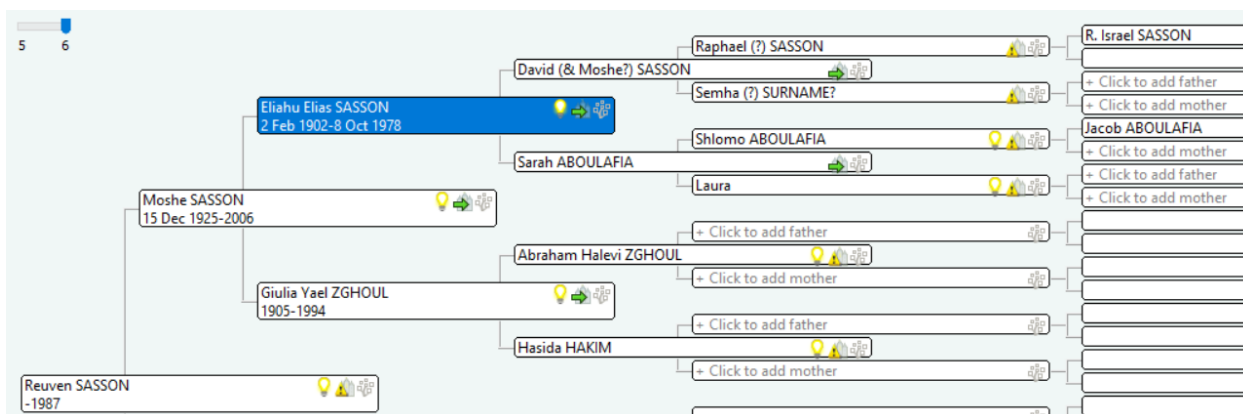
Eliyahu Sasson



Giulia/Yael Sasson



Moshe Sasson



We have listed above the basic facts of the family tree of Eliyahu Sasson. It is worth pointing out some facts - or lack of information.

- We have information about Eliyahu's paternal great-grandfather, Rabbi Israel Sasson. But his wife's name is not known; nor is the number of children they had, except for the son we tentatively named Raphael. Nothing is known yet about R. Israel's parents and grandparents; except that they probably all lived in Baghdad, Iraq.
- As for said Raphael Sasson, nothing is known at all; apart from the fact that he had at least two sons, Haim and David. His wife's name is not known or whether he had any other children.
- Regarding David Sasson, his name is mentioned by Eliyahu in his autobiography; and also on a burial record. It is known that his wife was Sarah Aboulafia; and that they had three sons, but no daughter. Eliyahu's two brothers had no children.
- Eliyahu had only one son, Moshe Sasson; who in turn had only one son, Reuven Sasson, who died childless. *Reuven was therefore the last male descendant (Y-DNA) of Eliyahu, and also of David.*

To conclude, here is an excerpt from an article entitled "Let us Understand," written in Arabic by Eliyahu Sasson, and published in 1921 in the Beirut-based newspaper "Al-Alam":

*"O Muslims, go back to your holy Koran, and Christians, take a look at your holy Gospels; and then answer-me! Is it not clearly written in capital letters that Palestine is the land of the Jewish people and the legacy of their ancestors? So why do you think you can deny us our rights in Palestine, and find evidence that the Jewish nation is not a nation and has no right to come back to life?"*

### JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry - Israel Burial Record

Name (Other Surnames)	Place of Birth	Date of Birth	Hebrew Name	Age
	Place of Death	Date of Death	Hebrew Date	Burial Date
SASSON / אליהו, Eliyahu / אליהו	Damascus / דמשק	24 Shvat 5662 / כד שבט תרסב		
	Jerusalem / ירושלים		7 Tishrei 5739 / ז תשרי תש"ט	
No Image Available				
Plot	Spouse	Father	Comments	Cemetery Name
		Mother		City / Country
		David / דוד	A government mister	Har Hamenuchot Givat Shaul /
		Sarah / סרה		Jerusalem / Israel
Name (Other Surnames)	Place of Birth	Date of Birth	Hebrew Name	Age
	Place of Death	Date of Death	Hebrew Date	Burial Date
SASSON / גוליה, Golia / גוליה	Damascus / דמשק	5666 / ה'תרסו		
	Jerusalem / ירושלים		5754 / תשנ"ד	
No Image Available				
Plot	Spouse	Father	Comments	Cemetery Name
		Mother		City / Country
		Avraham Shmuel / אברהם שמואל	Zionist activist	Har Hamenuchot Givat Shaul /
		Fanny / פני		Jerusalem / Israel

Bibliography (books mentioning Eliyahu Sasson)

**Eliyahu Sasson. On the Path to Peace: Discussions and correspondences.** (In Hebrew, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1978.) The first chapter of this book contains a brief autobiography.

**Abraham Ben Yaacov. The Babylonian Jews in the Final Period.** (In Hebrew, Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1985.)

**Yaron Ran. The Arabist: Eliyahu Sasson, the Zionist struggle against the Arab revolt.** (In Hebrew, Modi'in: Efi Meltser, 2018.)

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