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 College¹ in Beirut. Under pressure of the French authorities, he left Beirut in 1922, and worked for a few years in Mersin, Turkey.²

He emigrated to Palestine (then under the British mandate) in 1927.³

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.⁴

St. Joseph's University, a Jesuit institution.

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.

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.

See: https://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk eng.asp?mk individual id t=673. See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliyahu Sasson. And:

Public Activities

- Active in Arab National Movement (1919)
- Edited a Jewish-Arab newspaper in Damascus "Al-Hayat" the aim of which was to promote good relations between Arabs and Jews
- Upon immigrating to pre-State Israel worked as an electrician, journalist and lecturer on Mid-East affairs
- Joined the Political Department of the Jewish Agency
- Head of Arab Department of the Jewish Agency, 1933-1948
- Visited Arab countries on numerous occasions to meet with Arab leaders
- Member of Israeli delegation to the UN, 1947-1848
- Director of Middle East Department of Foreign Affairs Ministry, 1948-1950
- Member of Israeli delegation for ceasefire negotiations in Luzon, 1949
- Head of Special Office of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Paris for contacts with the Arabs
- Amongst other activities conducted negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan
- Israeli envoy to Turkey, 1950-1952
- Israeli envoy and Ambassador to Italy, 1953-1960
- Israeli Ambassador to Switzerland, 1960-1961

Publications

"The Path to Peace - Discussions and Correspondences" (Heb) (1978)

Numerous articles in daily press and magazines

Eliyahu's parents were **David Sasson** and **Sarah Aboulafia** (Abu el Afiya).⁵

I did not find mention of the names of David's parents; but knowing that David was a brother of my grandfather **Haim Sasson**⁶, and that the latter's eldest son bore the name of Raphael, one can assume that the name of Haim's father, and therefore of David's father, was **Raphael Sasson**.

The paternal grandfather of David and therefore of Haim is, however, clearly named by Eliyahu in his autobiography: it was **Rabbi Israel Sasson**, who was born in Baghdad in Iraq, then migrated with his entire family to Damascus in Syria in 1838, where he died in 1874 (the 17th of Nissan 5634, according to a list on sephardicgen.com).

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See: https://www.geni.com/people/Elijah-Sasson/6000000049084738935, and follow the links. Note that this site, geni.com, contains information freely inserted by various people; which means that the information is not guaranteed to be accurate. According to some on geni.com David, the father of Eliyahu, also was named Moshe. But this is not confirmed, except by the fact that the son of Eliyahu was called Moshe. The name David is, on the other hand, confirmed by various credible sources.

It is certain, based on several first-hand testimonies, that my grandfather Haim Sasson was an uncle of Eliyahu Sasson. The latter has often enough and warmly interacted with our family members (my uncles/aunts and cousins). For example, he met Raphael (the eldest son of Haim) in Rome, as his children Robert and Diane have reported to me; moreover, these and others have visited him several times in Israel. I personally visited the widow of Eliyahu, Giulia, in her house in Jerusalem, with my mother, circa 1978. Eliyahu was therefore certainly a first cousin of our parents, and not a more distant cousin. It is probable that Eliyahu met his cousins in Egypt when he went there on diplomatic missions.

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**⁷, 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)⁸. 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)⁹; 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**.¹⁰

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.

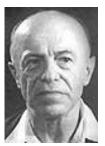
Haim Zghoul ran an orphanage in Damascus. Olga still lives in Nice, France.

⁹ 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.

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



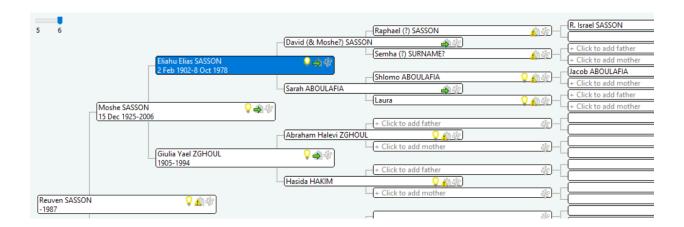
Eliyahu Sasson



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 / ישש, Eliyahu /	Damascus / דסשק	24 Shvat 5662 / כר שכט			
	Jerusalem /	חרסב	סק Tishrei 5739 / דתסרי משליט		
		No Image Availal	ble		
Plot	Spouse	Father	Comments		Cemetery Name
		Mother			City / Country
		David / TIT	A gover	nment mister	Har Hamenuchot Givat Shaul /
		Sarah / איט			Jerusalem / Israel
Name (Other Surnames)	Place of Birth	Date of Birth		Hebrew Name	Age
	Place of Death Date of Deat		h	Hebrew Date	Burial Date
SASSON / nww. Golia / n/m	Damascus / דמשק	S666 / 10101			
	Jerusalem / סיושרים	יוושרים /		משל"ר / 5754	
		No Image Availal	ble		
Plot	Spouse	Father Mother		Comments	Cemetery Name
					City / Country
		7		Of the last of the	THE RESERVED AS A SECOND CO.
		Avraham Shmuel / איל	אברהם שמ	Zionist activist	Har Hamenuchot Givat Shaul /

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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