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SHARSHERET HADOROT

FAMILY ROOTS RESEARCH PERIODICAL

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RECENT LECTURES

THE SALOMON FAMILY

Dr. Simcha Mandelbaum

The Salomon family is celebrating 200 years in Israel. It is the oldest and largest Ashkenazi family in Eretz Israel.

The first member of the family in this country was Rabbi Shlomo of Toloschin, who arrived in Eretz Israel in 1794. He was the only disciple of Rabbi Eliyahu the Gaon of Vilna who was permitted to go to Eretz Israel while the Gaon was still alive. (The first official convoy of the Gaon's disciples left Vilna only in 1808.) When the Gaon was asked why he allowed Reb Shlomo to go, while refusing others permission to do the same, he answered: Reb Shlomo is a soul without a body - he is entitled to settle in the Holy City. This does not apply to us - mortals who possess the divine soul in our body. We cannot go as yet." Reb Shlomo settled in Hebron and was buried there.

The second member of the family was Rabbi Abraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref - known by his Hebrew initials as the RASHAZ - who came to Eretz Israel from Kedainiai in Lithuania with the fourth convoy of the Vilna Gaon's disciples and arrived in Jerusalem in 1812. At that time Jews were forbidden by the Ottoman Turkish government to enter the city. 100 years earlier, Rabbi Yehudah he-Hassid ('the Pious') had come to Jerusalem with a few hundred disciples. After living there for a while they were expelled from the city by Arabs, leaving some debts behind. Since then, no Ashkenazi Jew had been permitted to enter the city, as it was "presumed" that he was a descendant of Rabbi Yehudah he-Hassid's group and therefore required to pay the "Ashkenazi Debt" before being allowed to enter. The RASHAZ was wearing "Sephardic" garments and thus eluded the guards. Safely inside the city, he opened a jewelry store and made the acquaintance of Jerusalem government officials. Through personal connections, he was able to discover the existence of an unknown Ottoman law stating that every debt is wiped out after 100 years. He then petitioned the Court and obtained a decision stating that the "Ashkenazi Debt" was null and void. On the basis of this decision he applied to the Governor of Jerusalem and received an official permit for Ashkenazi Jews to enter Jerusalem. The RASHAZ then drafted a communique informing Jewish communities throughout the world of the permit he had received and calling them to "come home".

The communique had an immediate effect. Many families came to Jerusalem and provided the nucleus of the Jerusalem Ashkenazi community, which received special recognition by the Turkish government. The RASHAZ was instrumental in acquiring a very large tract of land in the center of the Old City of Jerusalem which had been left by Rabbi Yehudah he-Hassid's group. He travelled to Alexandria in Egypt to petition Sultan Abdul Hamid, and prevailed upon him to allow the Ashkenazi Jewish community to develop the land and build on it the "Hurvah" synagogue, schools and yeshivot, a rabbinical court, housing for communal leaders and the official residence of the Chief Rabbi Samuel Salant.

How did I start my research? It all began "accidentally". A relative of mine, Advocate Jacob Salomon, discovered among the papers of his father Chaim Salomon (a prominent communal

leader and deputy mayor of Jerusalem) a notebook written by the RASHAZ containing Biblical thoughts and interpretations. Jacob made photocopies of the notebook which he mailed to several relatives. With great difficulty I was able to read one page, and was very impressed by its contents. I decided to ask my son Alexander Mandelbaum, a Bible scholar, to transcribe the text and add his comments and interpretations. He made a "deal" with me. He would do as I asked if I would prepare a list of the RASHAZ's descendants. I speculated that the list would include several hundred names and would take a few days to compile. I soon realized how wrong I was. However, I was not discouraged and accepted the challenge to make a thorough search. The search took about 9 months and was conducted in several continents. The research as a whole resulted in three volumes which I myself have published. It turns out that the RASHAZ has more than 16,000 descendants. They are spread over many continents, but more than 95% of them live in Israel. These descendants are of many colors, occupations and views, but they all have one great thing in common: their unwavering love of Zion.

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Recent discoveries have disclosed new information concerning Jerusalem in the 18th and 19th centuries. Among them:

1. The archives of the "Organization of Clerks and Secretaries", the important charitable organization based in Holland which was very active in that period. The archives were found in a sealed case floating in one of the Amsterdam canals, apparently put there during the Holocaust years for fear of the Nazis. The archives contain copies of all incoming and outgoing letters that went through the office.
2. The Montefiore archives, transferred from the Montefiore estate in Ramsgate to the British Museum. The archives contain, inter alia, three censuses conducted in three different periods, with lists of all members of the [Jewish] community in several cities in Eretz Israel and personal data on each of them.
3. The archives of the Ashkenazi Burial Society (Chevra Kadisha) in Jerusalem, recently computerized, contain very precious information about many members of the family.

SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEARCH

1. My first problem was to reconstruct the immediate family of the RASHAZ: number of children, order of birth, place of birth. A book written by Mordechai Salomon entitled "Three Generations in Jerusalem" states that the RASHAZ came to Jerusalem with three sons born in Kedainiai. The new information reveals that the children were born in Eretz Israel.
2. Mordechai Salomon writes that Miriam, daughter of the RASHAZ, was married to Abraham Isaac Trachtenberg, head of the Trachtenberg family. However, in another part of the book he prints a copy of a letter written to the RASHAZ by his eldest son from England, where he was studying weaving. In the letter he sends regards to his sister Miriam and her husband - Uri. Investigating Miriam's grave site, we find her buried near one Samuel Mordechai of Warsaw. At first glance one might conclude that she had been married to three husbands (not at the same time, of course). However, in searching for the grave of Abraham Isaac Trachtenberg we discovered that he is buried near his spouse Chaya Necha - daughter of Miriam. Now the

mystery was solved. Miriam was married twice, and her daughter was married to Trachtenberg.

3. Traveling one day on the New Jersey Turnpike, I decided to stop off at Elizabeth N.J. in order to participate in the afternoon service at the Elizabeth synagogue. There I found an old acquaintance of mine who asked what I was doing in the States. When I told him of my newfound preoccupation - genealogy - he introduced me to one of the people there, Dr. Neil Rothstein, who became my friend in two minutes. He took me to his home and handed me a letter containing a long list of names. He told me that he had received it from Australia from someone named Eli Rabinowitz and asked me to glance through it. I noticed many people there with the name Harrison and immediately realized that I had found a link to the Harrison family members who are all Salomons, many of them residing in South Africa. The list was essential in order to trace this part of the family, and saved me many hours of telephone calls. Neil also possessed a microfilm copy of the Montefiore censuses which enabled me to obtain valuable information.

4. I was told of one Brad Hill, in charge of the Jewish collection at the British Museum. When I spoke to him he asked what I was looking for. I answered that I was looking for traces of the Salomon family. He retorted "Salomon? That's me!" From then on I received full cooperation from Brad, who knew a great deal about the family and was well informed regarding the Montefiore archives.

The publication of my book "Ten Generations in Eretz Israel - Two Hundred years (1794-1994) caused a lot of excitement. News of the publication spread like wildfire and the book immediately sold like hot cakes. As reviews started to appear in the Israeli press I received many telephone calls, through which I discovered new branches of the family that I had missed. Many family members have since searched their archives, basements and attics and have uncovered manuscripts and documents written by family members, all of which shed light on both family history and the history of Israel. Poems and literature were found, as well as papers dealing with Biblical and Halachic teachings and interpretations. This caused me to publish two additional volumes: Ten Generations in Eretz Israel II and Torah from Zion.

In conclusion, I see my work on the family tree as the accomplishment of my life. I was taught by my dear mother to love and respect the members of my family. Now I have discovered who they are. Moreover, as my family tree is on public record, I can share my love with the rest of the family. May my work be useful to all my family, as well as to all lovers of Zion!

See bibliography (Hebrew) on p.5, and the book review by Shmuel Even-Or on pp. XIX-XX.

FAMILY ROOTS IN ERETZ YISRAEL

Dr. Ruth Marcus

The death of my beloved parents, first my father Itzhak Eliashberg on 19/11/1982 and then my mother Ahuva Eliashberg on 15/2/1987 left me with a feeling of emptiness. I suddenly realized that I did not know much about my father's family. I knew that my paternal great-great-grandfather Rabbi Mordechai Eliashberg, born in 1817 in Cekiske, Lithuania, had been one of the first Choveve Zion and a founder of religious Zionism, renowned as one of the first rabbis to