

## DON ISAAC ABARBANEL

### Introducing: Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437 Lisbon – 1508 Venice)

#### 1. Rabbi Joseph Caro, Beit Yosef commentary to Tur, Orach Chaim 168

This question was asked in the academy of the light of the exile of Ariel, the great one, our mentor Rabbi Isaac Aboab, may his memory live in the next world, in a great public gathering of sages and scholars, including the great eagle, our mentor Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, may his memory live in the next world...

#### 2. From Google Maps



#### 3. The Kings of Abarbanel

Alfonso V	1432-1481	King of Portugal
John (Joao) II	1455-1495	King of Portugal
Ferdinand II	1452-1516	King of Aragon, and then unified Spain
Ferdinand I	1423-1494	King of Naples

#### 4. Some biography

Family line – Davidic heritage; Don Judah Abarbanel of Seville; Samuel Abarbanel; Judah Abarbanel

##### Life in Portugal

The end of Portugal's Golden Age, under King Alfonso V

Treasurer to King Alfonso V; "The Great Eagle"

1483 - Flight from King Joao II, successor of Alfonso, to Castille

##### Life in Spain

Employed by Ferdinand and Isabella to collect revenue and supply military provisions

Dominicans harass the Jews

##### Expulsion

1491- The unification of Spain under Christian control

Pope Innocent VII balks; Ferdinand and Isabella do not

30,000 ducats; Kidnapping of Isaac

## Life in Naples

King Ferdinand I of Naples receives them

Plague

Don Isaac Abarbanel is invited into the royal service, but also expands his scholarship

Sephardim meet Ashkenazim

1503- Flight to Venice from Charles VIII of France

5. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Introduction to Book of Kings, translation by Dafna Seigman, copyright Melton Curriculum  
And in the ninth year... the king of Spain conquered all of the Kingdom of Granada, and the great and mighty city of Granada. And in his position of strength and of great pride, a religious spirit overtook him, and Esau said to himself: "How shall I appease the god who helped me in battle? What shall I offer my maker who delivered this city into my hands, other than bring the stray sheep of Israel under his wings and restore them to the correct faith – or else expel them to another land and never allow them to return to my country or my presence?"...

6. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Introduction to Book of Jeremiah

But the third form of perfection, which is in writing in a straight and precise way, I think that Jeremiah also lacked that, for the reasons I have mentioned – meaning, that he was a youth when he began to prophesy and so he did not learn precise language and proper writing. This is demonstrated by the read-written, written-but-not-read, read-but-not-written, which is found more in his book than in the other prophets...

7. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Joshua, pg. 13

As the chief philosopher, Aristotle, said in his work, "The Heavens and the Universe": We must give thanks to those who came before, who began to investigate, for although they may not have discovered Truth, at the least they raised the question. Had they not initiated the investigation, we would not be able to complete it.

8. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Jeremiah, pg. 316-317

Jeremiah wrote, "In those days the house of Judah will go to the house of Israel," and none could understand what this meant - but then, lo and behold, through the agency of explorers who traveled from Portugal to India for spices, I received a letter from Jews living in the lands of the west, who claimed to be descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who had been exiled from the cities of Judah by Sanchereb and had not returned for the Second Temple! Behold, the house of Judah goes to the house of Israel!

9. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Samuel, pg. 184

[Maimonides wrote] that Samuel did not prophesy before this, and did not know that this would be the format of prophecy... It is not as the Master, the Guide wrote... and the scholars among the Christians have agreed with this in their books.

## Several books which may help

- A History of the Jewish People, Marx and Margolis
- A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, Volume I, Yitzhak Baer
- A History of the Marranos, Cecil Roth
- The Censorship of Hebrew Books, William Popper
- Covenantal Rights, David Novak
- History of the Jews, Volume IV, Heinrich Graetz
- Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue, Eric Lawee
- The Jew in the Medieval Community, James Parkes
- The Jew in the Medieval World, Jacob Rader Marcus

## DONA GRACIA

### 10. Maimonides, Letter of Consolation

(Hebrew available at <http://benyehuda.org/gluckson/maimonides.html>)

Our brethren, the Jews who are placed into trouble, may Gd soon have mercy upon you... The troubles which come from Gd upon His creations are for a good purpose... Gd will not exchange and will not trade in the Jewish nation, which He chose among all of the first nations, for another nation... The essence is that one should not cease praying. Even if, due to the anger of the oppressor and due to the compulsion, one cannot pray the established prayer at its proper time, evening, morning and noon, one should still pray an abbreviated prayer. At least, they should recite daily that they are members of the Jewish nation, holding their Torah in their hearts.

#### Who are the players?

Agostinho Micas / Shemuel Nasi	Father of Dona Gracia
Beatrice de Luna Micas / Gracia Nasi	Dona Gracia Nasi
Francisco Mendes / Tzemach Benvenisti	Husband of Dona Gracia
Ana Reina Mendes	Daughter of Dona Gracia
Diogo Mendes / Meir Benvenisti	Brother-in-law of Dona Gracia (Francisco's brother)
Brianda	Sister and sister-in-law of Dona Gracia (Married Diogo)
Joseph Micas / Joseph Nasi	Nephew and son-in-law of Dona Gracia (Married Ana Reina)

#### Biography

1510 – Birth into a publicly Christian family of Nasi / Micas  
1528 – Marriage to Francisco Mendes  
1537 – Birth of her daughter, Ana Reina  
1538 – Francisco dies; Flight from Portugal to Antwerp  
1542 – Death of Diogo  
1544 – Flight to Italy; Strife with Brianda; Venice and Ferrara and Venice  
1553 – Moving to Constantinople  
1556 – Ancona  
1558 – Tiberias  
1569 – Passes away

11. Ladino <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/01/spain-honours-ladino-language-of-jewish-exiles>

12. La Senora <http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/special/jewish/JewishIzmir.html>

### 13. Maimonides' Letter to Moroccan Jewry on Forced Conversion, Part 3

I will now explain the error in which this one who increased emptiness fell. Achav ben Omri, who denied Gd and worshipped idols – and about whom Gd testified, “There was never another like Achav” – fasted for two and a half hours, and then, the sages taught, the decree upon him was voided... Gd did not cheat him of the reward...

If Gd would give good reward for small good deeds for these well-known heretics, then how could Gd not reward Jews who were forced into *shmad* and who performed mitzvot in private? Would there be no distinction for Him between those who performed mitzvot and those who did not, those who served Gd and those who did not?...

### 14. Rabbi Yehudah haChasid, Sefer Chasidim 704

Some people are killed to honor Gd's Name, and some righteous people are not killed, but rather they die at Gd's Hand upon their beds. Had they been in a *shmad* situation, they would have been killed, so why should they lose? Their reward is only reduced by the benefit they received in fulfillment of their desire not to enter such a situation, but to live and bear children. Those who are killed receive greater reward, for the benefit they did not receive in this world.

### 15. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, Responsum 70

Two families fought with attacks and insults, and the community caught wind of it and decreed that they not continue thus. One of them jumped up and swore that his family would not accept the decree, and they did not cease their attacks. The other jumped up and reminded him that he had assimilated during the time of *shmad*. Another arose and said, "You cannot mention that, for it has been decreed!" without mentioning who had issued the decree. Indeed, it is now known that Rabbeinu Gershom decreed that one who mentions such a thing should be ex-communicated.

### Books on Dona Gracia

#### History

- Dona Gracia and the House of Nasi (Cecil Roth)
- The Long Journey of Gracia Mendes (Marianna D. Birnbaum)
- The Woman who Defied Kings: The Life and Times of Dona Gracia Nasi (Andree Aelion Brook)

#### Historical Fiction

- Daring Daughter of the Covenant, Emilie Barnett
- The Ghost of Hanna Mendes, Naomi Ragen