

Benveniste and the Jews of Rhodes

Edward Gelles

Introduction

My immediate family background was in central and eastern Europe, but several of my ancestral lines can be traced back to the Iberian peninsula where they prospered for hundreds of years. However, even before the Inquisitions of the late 15th century Sephardic communities sometimes came under pressures leading to conversion and emigration. The latter mainly encompassed those who chose to abandon ancient homes rather than give up their religion, but many converts (called *marranos* and *conversos*) also followed them as time went by. Their peregrinations took them in several directions, principally north to the Low Countries or east to the Ottoman Empire. In their new homes some reverted to their old religion. From the Low Countries they went to Britain and the New World or to Germany and beyond. Those who were welcomed by the Ottoman Sultans settled in different parts of eastern Europe that had fallen under Turkish rule.

Among these Jews were Benveniste, of a family that had flourished in Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain and in Provence where they had manifold connections (*see* Edward Gelles at Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts - *Benveniste Nessim of Barcelona and Shem Tov Halevi of Gerona* and *Millennial Descent from Shem Tov Halevi of Gerona*).

A branch of these Benveniste reached the island of Rhodes about 400 years ago and intermarried with families which had contributed to the ancient history of the Jews, whose “hither & thither” millennial odyssey took them from the Levant and Egypt and from the Anatolian coast to Cyprus and Rhodes, and thence to southern Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Spain, and back again.

History of the Jews of Rhodes

There have been Jews on the island of Rhodes for more than two thousand years. Hellenised Jews came there in ancient times and many went on to Sicily and further west. They were under Byzantine rule for centuries. From the early 1300's the Knights of the order of St John held the island, until it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1522. A Jewish community flourished there until the second world war when it was decimated by the German occupiers.

Spanish Jews had come to the island from the late 13th century onwards, but this essay is mainly concerned with the major Sephardic influx following the Inquisition of 1492.

Accounts of the history of Rhodes and its Jewish community are available on the internet, and include articles on *Avotaynu Online*, on *e-Sepharad*, and on the web sites of the Rhodes Jewish Community, and of its Jewish Museum.

1923 - a Cohen family of Rhodes
Flor Tarica (center standing)



Family Photos – Rhodes Jewish Museum

The Israel family of Rhodes

The Israel family who came to Rhodes from Jerusalem and Alexandria contributed rabbis to the island for several centuries. At the end of the 17th century a daughter of Rabbi Moshe Itzhak Ben-Habib of Salonica married Moshe Israel, who became Chief Rabbi of Rhodes. Their son R. Elyahu Israel, who was born in Alexandria, followed his father in that post.

From Leon Taranto's "Extraordinary Israel family rabbinical lineage" reproduced on the web site of the Jewish Museum of Rhodes we have the following :

R. Moshe **Israel**, b.1670 in Jerusalem, d.1740 Alexandria, Chief Rabbi of Rhodes 1713 -1727 m. Hannah **Habib**, daughter of R. Moshe b. Itzhak Ben Habib, born ca. 1645 in Salonica, died in Jerusalem

R. Eliyahu **Israel**, b. 1710, d. 1784 Alexandria, Chief Rabbi of Alexandria, Cairo, and Rhodes 1769-1773, m. (2) Esther **Tarica** - from his first wife :

R. Moshe **Israel**, b. 1747 and d. 1782, from Jerusalem to Rhodes Chief Rabbi of Rhodes 1781-2 m. - **Farhi**

R. David **Israel**, b Rhodes, father of two Chief Rabbis of Rhodes -

(1) R. Michael Chaim Moshe **Israel**, who died 1881 in Jerusalem.

He married a daughter of Chief Rabbi Haim Yehuda **Israel**

(2) R. Rafael Itzhak **Israel**, born ca. 1811 in Rhodes and died ca. 1903 in Jerusalem

The above extract from the extensive family tree is relevant to the ancestry of **Elise Campbell** whose parents were Ralph L **Israel** (a great-grandson of the above-mentioned Rhodes Chief Rabbi Michael Chaim Moshe **Israel**) and Ouida Victoria **Cohen**. Elise's listed ancestral surnames include **Cohen**. Camhi, Cohn, **Farhi**, Gersosky, **Habib**, **Habib**, **Israel**, **Israel**, , Polivka, **Tarica**, and in-laws **Rousso**, **Hasson**. She is thus related to numerous Rhodesli families.

Benveniste of Rhodes

The names of Israel, Tarica, and Habib feature in the ancestral background of present day descendants of the ancient Benveniste family, who came to Rhodes from Spain following the great Iberian Inquisitions.

The appended charts of Marcelo Daniel Benveniste of Buenos Aires (born 1957) and Arthur Benveniste of Los Angeles (born 1934) show their connections to these and other old Sephardic families of Rhodes

For **Marcelo Benveniste** ancestors included Alhadeff, Berro, Bardavid, Israel, Benatar, Hasson, Russo, Tarica, Menashe, Capeluto, and in-laws Codron and Yaffe, Benhabib and Cohen.

For **Arthur Benveniste** ancestors included Russo, Capeluto, Israel, Tarica, Galante, Hasson, and in-laws Benatar, Amato, Notrica.

Sephardic families from the Iberian peninsula who found new homes in the Ottoman Empire generally preserved much of their genetic stock and Ladino culture. Centuries later many of these Jews, who left Rhodes before the German occupation in the second world war or who survived the Holocaust, went to the United States, primarily to Los Angeles and Seattle, and in South America to Buenos Aires, and other cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo.

On the other hand, their old Iberian cousins, who originally took the northern path to the Low Countries and then into central and eastern Europe, mixed with Ashkenazi families and in the course of time their descendants now show distinguishable lower degrees of Sephardic admixture.

Related Jewish families of Rhodes

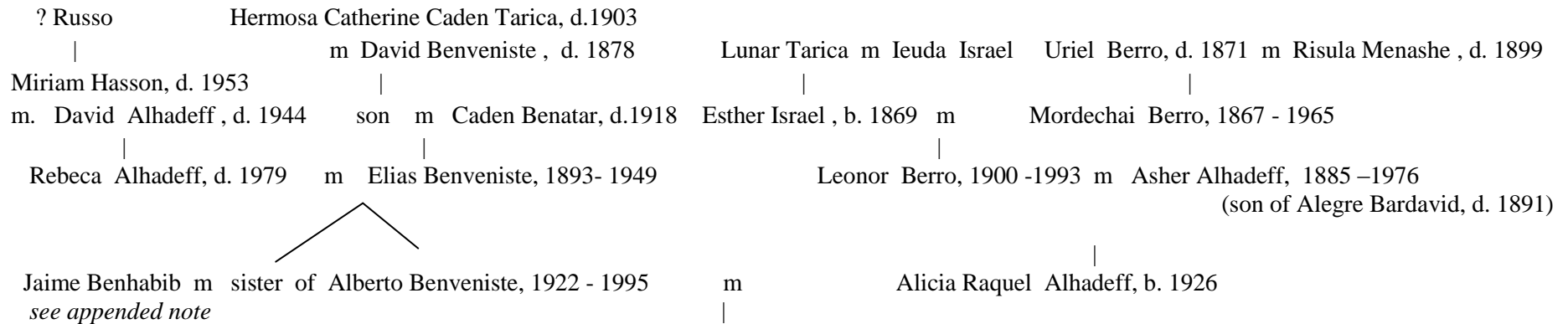
Referring to a family tree of Jews from the Island of Rhodes and Turkey by Victor Alkana & Petros Michailidis :

"in general the families are from Rhodes, Cos and the Turkish mainland near Izmir (Bodrum & Aydin appear now and then). Some spouses were obtained from Istanbul. The migrations vary. Many went to Seattle, WA & Los Angeles, CA. Some went to the Belgian Congo. Some went to South America" (Victor Alkana < valkana@ix.netcom.com >).

Highlighted names in the appended extract relate to ancestral connections of Marcelo and Arthur Benveniste, and include some relatives of Edward Gelles :

“Abolofia, Abrevaya, Absaradel, **Abulafia**, Acher, Alalouf, Alazraki, Alcana, Alderoqui, Alfici, Algazi, **Alhadeff**, Alkana, Alvo, **Amato**, Amedio/Amodeo, Angel, Anreader, Ardity, Arkless, Arnaw, Arougheti, Avdalovo, Avzaradel, Azvaradel, Babani, Baigun, Balbach, Barbaimon, **Bardavid**, Barki, Barokas, Baron, **Behar**, Bejar, **Benatar**, Bendjuya, Benezra, **Benhabib**, Benoun, **Benveniste**, Benyacar, **Berro**, Bienn, Binoun, Biton/Beton, Buchuk, Cadranel, Cadrone, Calderon, Calvo, **Camhi**, **Capelluto**, Capeloto, Capelouto, **Capeluto**, Capilouto, Capuano, Caston, Cazes, Chalme, Chara, Chertkow, **Codron**, Coen, **Cohen**, Cordoba/Cordova, Crain, Curiel, Danon, Elias, Elkana, Eryol, **Eskenazi**, Esperanza, Fainstein, **Farji**, Fils, **Franco**, Galamidi, **Galante**/Galanti, Gateno, Genni, Girard, Glazer, Gluckman, Goldberg, Goldstein, Greenspan, Grife, Gross, Grossman, Guini, **Habib**, Hahn, Haki/Haky, **Halfon**, Hanan, Hart, **Hasson**, Hazan, Huerin, **Huniu**/Hunio, **Israel**, Jason, Jassen, Kaplan, Katz, Lanchano, Levi, Levin, Levy, Louza, Mainardis, Mandel, Marincik, Matorin, Maya, Mayesh, Meir, **Menache**, Mezistrano, Michaud, Mintzer, Miron, **Mizrahi**, Mosafir, Moscatel, Moscona, Munter, **Musafir**, Nahmias, Negrin, Nof, **Notrica**, Palombo, Peha, **Piha**, Pizante, Policar, Posner, Rackner, Ramsey, Rava, **Russo**, Salfati, Salmoni, Saul, Scapa, Shapiro, **Shemaria**, Solam, Soriano, Sourmany, Stern, Surmani, **Tarica**, Tastassa, Varon, Ventura, **Yaffe**, Yaras, Yohai, Zlotorynski and many others. “

Ancestry of Marcelo D. Benveniste



Marcelo Daniel Benveniste, b. 1957

m. Liliana Tchukran

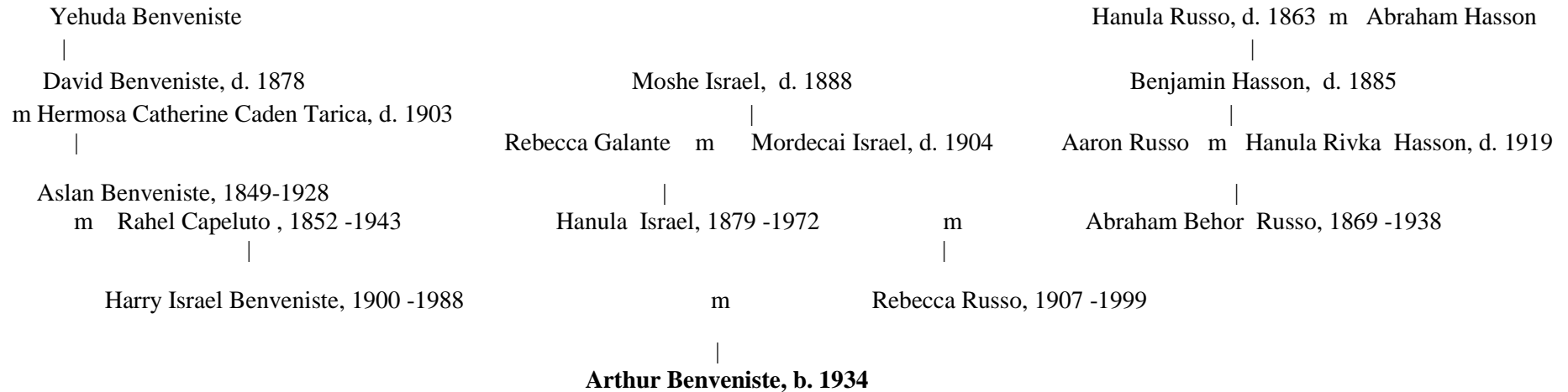
Notes

The siblings of Leonor (Luna) Berro included Rosa Berro (1895 – 1984) who married Moshe Capeluto (1886 - 1947) and Sarah Berro (1899 - 1985) the wife of Narcise Codron, whose daughter Rebecca Codron (1925 - 1994) married Salomon Yaffe (born 1914 in Turkey).

The sister of Alberto Benveniste and Jaime Benveniste married Jaime Benhabib (1912 – 1999, whose brother Miguel Benhabib (1911 - 1988) married Miriam Cohen (1924 - 2010). The two brothers were the sons of Gabriel Benhabib (1880 - 1956) whose wife was Esther Menashe (1887 - 1967).

The above ancestry chart drew on various sources – including Marcelo Benveniste’s scattered entries on several web sites,

Ancestry of Arthur Benveniste



Notes

The above chart draws on web site entries by Arthur Benveniste's sister, Jeanette Benveniste (born 1936), material on the web site of the Jewish Museum of Rhodes, tombstone inscriptions, and Census records

The issue of David Benveniste and Hermosa Catherine "Caden" Tarica were linked by marriages to Benatar, Capeluto, Hasson, Amato, and Notrica families.

Edward Gelles : Mitochondrial-DNA matches FMS (Full Sequence) Google map, Family Tree DNA (19 January 2019)
exact matches (shown in deep red) including Marcelo Benveniste whose ancestors in Rhodes originally came from Spain,
and Raymond Russo from Monastir in Macedonia



1 Marcelo Benveniste

Y-DNA HAPLOGROUP J-M 267
mtDNA HAPLOGROUP K1a1b1a

Most Distant Ancestors Paternal: David **Benveniste**, b. 1840
Maternal: Uriel Berro, d. 1871

Born in Argentina. Descendant of Sephardic Jews from Rhodes (now) Greece, whose forebears left Spain in the era of the Inquisition

Ancestral Surnames: Aljadeff (Rhodes) Alhadeff Alhadeff (Rhodes), Benveniste, Benveniste, Benatar, Berro. Berro (Rhodes), Bardavid, Hasson, Israel, Menache, Russo, Tchukran, Tarica

2 Raymond Russo

Y-DNA HAPLOGROUP E-V13
mtDNA HAPLOGROUP K1a1b1a

Earliest Known Ancestors Paternal: Bochor Russo, 1845?, Monastir (Bitola), Macedonia
Maternal: Isaac Alcosser, 1870?, Monastir (Bitola), Macedonia

Ancestral Surnames : Alcosser, Alcosser (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia) Bromberg, Cohen, Cohen or Kamchi, Cohen (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia), Frey, Ishach, Youshah. Ishach Ischach (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia). Katz, Kamchi Kamchi (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia), Levy, Potaschman, Russo (Z"L), Russo, Russo (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia). Torunczyk Torunczyk "Thorner", Yosha (Bitola (Monastir, Macedonia)

3 Dr Susanne Esserman

Earliest Known Ancestors : Paternal: Isserman
Maternal: **Benveniste**

Ancestral Surnames : Appel (Russia/Ossining NY), Bayden (Germany /Ossining NY) , Breitzer (Kaluga, Russia) , Cohen (Iberian peninsula) Cunja (Cohen) (Portugal / Azores), Djboh (Morocco) Desboches (later changed to Dayboch etc., Esserman(was changed from Isserman) (Australia/New Zealand/ South Africa/ Ireland), Furtado (Azores/ Iberian Peninsula) Frank-Levi (Europe/ Germany/England) Hart (Amsterdam Netherlands), Isserman (Kovno / Kaunas (Courland), Isserman (Latvia/Courland) , Levy (Europe and later to the West Indies) Mendes (Iberian Peninsula) Pardo (Iberian Peninsula), Perlitzskyi (Bratislav and Odessa), de Sousa (Portugal) , Schainholtz (Bratislav and Vinnitsa), Schwartz (Moscow /Kaluga), Stark (Latvia), da Silva (Portugal), Trustinetskyi (Bratslav / Odessa) , Troystenetskyi (Ukraine), Volfenzon (Odessa) Wolff (surname changed from Trustinetskyi in New York), Wolfsohn (Odessa), Wolfensohn (Odessa / the Baltic area).

Mixed Ashkenazi – Sephardic background
Exact FMS mitochondrial match with Edward Gelles
Autosomal DNA matches with Edward Gelles 107 cM / 10 cM

DNA matches of Edward Gelles and his cousins with descendants of Benveniste of Rhodes and their connections

Mitochondrial DNA matches (HVR1, HVR2, or full mitochondrial sequence FMS)

FamilyTree DNA : autosomal total DNA matches and length of longest segment in cM

	Marcelo Benveniste	Arthur Benveniste	Russo, Alhadeff <i>et al</i>	Habib, Menashe	Tarica, Hasson
Edward Gelles	<u>exact FMS match</u>		Raymond Russo <u>exact FMS match</u> Elliot Capsuto 31 cM / 13 cM	Isaac Habibi Menashe HVR2 mitochondrial match	Lorie Anne Huniu Escalera 90 cM / 11 cM
Elsa Gellis Schmaus 1 st cousin			Alexis Rindler 64 cM / 10 cM		Rick B Froehlich <u>69 cM / 9 cM</u> Rachele Shemaria 53 cM / 14 cM
Thaddeus N Taube 2 nd cousin			Elliot Capsuto <u>32 cM / 12 cM</u> Saralyn Eskenazi-Brown 52 cM / 16 cM		Iris Pamela Howitt- Planamento 57 cM / 9 cM
Marilyn Low 2 nd cousin	21 cM / 10 cM		David Eskenazi 67 cM / 16 cM	Isaac Habibi Menashe 31 cM / 9 cM	
Stuart Rothenberg 1 st cousin x 1 removed		46 cM / 15 cM	Elliot Capsuto 91 cM / 10 cM		
Susan L Weinstein 2 nd cousin x 1 removed		49 cM / 8 cM	Elliot Capsuto <u>92 cM / 10 cM</u> Alexis Rindler 76 cM / 11 cM		
Rabbi Israel Friedman distant cousin	28 cM / 12 cM		Alexis Rindler 68 cM / 8 cM	Sandra Byrne 60 cM / 13 cM	Rick B Froehlich 58 cM / 9cM
Dr Nikolay Kaufmann distant cousin	43 cM / 10 cM	Jeanette Benveniste (Arthur's sister) HVR1 mitochondrial match	Larry Russo 23 cM / 10 cM	Isaac Habibi Menashe 29 cM / 9 cM	Lori Anne Huniu Escalera 44 cM / 10 cM

Notes on the above Table

Mitochondrial DNA test results for Edward Gelles and some of his cousins compared with those for Benveniste of Rhodes and for descendants of their closely related Rhodesli ancestors start with the FMS (full mitochondrial sequence) DNA match between Edward Gelles and Marcelo Benveniste that indicates a common ancestry of our mother-daughter lines at some point in the past.

Autosomal DNA matches (from Family Finder of Family Tree DNA) provide useful measures of consanguinity for up to about five generations, but even when they are beyond that generational range they can be helpful in conjunction with other types of DNA test in giving further support to the picture we have of our past migrations as derived from history and traditional genealogy.

The magnitude of the autosomal total DNA matches and longest DNA segments for my cousins with Marcelo and Arthur Benveniste are indeed modest but in keeping with probable generational distances to common ancestors.

The Table also illustrates the connections some of my cousins have with a selection of probands who have recorded ancestors that are related to the Benveniste of Rhodes. Most show a connection with the island or the well established centers of the Rhodesli diaspora such as Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

Lori Anne (Huniu) Escalera

Earliest Known Ancestors

Paternal : Abraham **Huniu**

Maternal: Ziontz .

Ancestral Surnames : **Hasson** (Rhodes), **Huniu** (Rhodes), Hirsch (New York), **Levy** (Rhodes), **Notrica** (Rhodes), **Peloso** (Rhodes), Schlutsky (New York), **Shemaria** (Rhodes), **Tarica** (Rhodes), Ziontz (New York)

Autosomal DNA matches with Edward Gelles 90 cM / 11 cM
with Dr Nikolay Kaufmann 44 cM / 10 cM

Alexis Rindler

Ancestral Surnames : **Alhadeff, Eskenazi**, Rindler

Autosomal DNA matches with Elsa Gellis Schmaus 64 cM / 10 cM
with Susan Weinstein 76 cM / 11 cM
with R. Israel Friedman 68 cM / 8 cM

Rick B. Froehlich

Ancestral Surnames : **Hasson** (Montgomery, AL), **Tarica** (Atlanta, GA)

Autosomal DNA matches with Elsa Gellis Schmaus 69 cM / 9 cM
with R. Israel Friedman 58 cM / 9 cM

Rachelle Maxine Shemaria

Earliest Known Ancestors

Paternal: Isaac **Shemaria**

father's family Shemaria / Piha were all from the isle of Rhodes

Ancestral Surnames : Beton, Berinhout, **Franco**, Piha ,Franco, Franco (Greece), **Hasson**, **Moussafir Franco**, Piha, **Piha** (Rhodes), Piha (Greece) Senter, Berinhout, Senter, Shemaria, **Shemaria** (Rhodes), Shemaria (Greece), Sharhon

Autosomal DNA matches with Elsa Gellis Schmaus 53 cM / 14 cM

Saralyn Eskenazi-Brown

Earliest Known Ancestors : Paternal : Mordo Eskenazi
Maternal : Esther **Benveniste**

Ancestral Surnames : **Alhadeff**, **Benvenisti**, Coraco, **Eskenazi** (all of Seattle, Washinton), **Levy** (Turkey)

Autosomal DNA matches with Thaddeus N. Taube 52 cM / 16 cM

Iris Pamela Howitt-Planamento

Earliest Known Ancestors : Paternal : William Klein
Maternal : Fortunee **Tarica**

Ancestral Surnames: **Angel** (Rhodes), Klein (Germany), Parmet (Russia), Howit (South Africa), **Alhadeff, Berro, Tarica, Planamento**, and **Tarica** (all of Rhodes)

Autosomal DNA matches with Thaddeus N. Taube 57 cM / 9 cM

David Eskenazi

Earliest Known Ancestors : Paternal : Eskenazi
Maternal : Moskovits

Ancestral Surnames : **Eskenazi** (Marmara, Turkey; Seattle; San Francisco) **Levy** (Constantinople, Turkey) **Rouso/Russo** (Marmara, Turkey, Rhodes; Seattle) **Mitrani** (Turkey; Rhodes; Seattle) **Alhadeff** (Rhodes; Seattle) Ojalvo (Turkey; Seattle) **Behar** (Turkey; Seattle; Los Angeles) Passy (Turkey; Seattle; Los Angeles) **Israel** (Turkey; Seattle; Los Angeles) Varon (Turkey; Seattle; Los Angeles) Mezistrano (Turkey; Seattle) **Bensussen** (Turkey; Seattle) Moskovits (Mezo Laborcz, Slovakia) Mandel (Slovakia; Omaha; Los Angeles) Sherman (Mezo Laborcz, Slovakia Cheyenne, Wyoming; Los Ange) Durschlag (Slovakia) Benovic (Slovakia; Toronto) Green (New York City) Weiss (New York City Los Angeles) Neuvirth/Neuwirth (Slovakia; Cleveland; Kansas City) Brock (Cleveland; Los Angeles) Horowitz (New York City Los Angeles) Roosekoof (Hungary; Cleveland) Benedek (Hungary; Los Angeles) Dunn/Don (Zasliai & Vilkauskis, Lithuania; San Francisco; S) Fridstad (Lithuania) Tau/Thau (Lithuania)

Autosomal DNA matches with Marilyn Low 67 cM / 16 cM

Elliot S Capsuto

Ancestral Surnames : Capsuto, **Cassuto**, **Franco**, Hirsch, Kafsudo, Karp, Levinson, **Russo**, Streicher, Saraquesne, Swartz.

Autosomal DNA matches with Stuart Rothenberg 91 cM / 10 cM
matches with Susan L Weinstein, Tad Taube, and Edward Gelles

Isaac Habibi Menashe

HVR2 mitochondrial DNA match with Edward Gelles

Autosomal DNA matches with Marilyn Low 31 cM / 9 cM
with Dr Nikolay Kaufmann 29 cM / 9 cM

Sandra Byrne

Ancestral Surnames : Shifr, Bellitsky, **Israel**, Bellitsky, Byrne, Chester (Tsesler), Chester, Clintovich, **Cohen**, (Camhi), Cohn, **Camhi**, Donnerstein, **Farhi**, Habib, **Habib**, **Israel**, Israelwitz, **Israel**, Siegel, Tsesler, **Tarica**, Wigan, White, Zeff.

Close relative of Elise Campbell (see page 3)

Autosomal DNA matches with R. Israel Friedman 60 cM / 13 cM

Larry Russo

Earliest Known Ancestors :

Paternal: Sadoc **Russo**; Sephardic; born circa 1820

Maternal: Sarah **Franco**, born circa 1855

Ancestral Surnames : **Russo, Rousso** (Rhodes (currently Greece formerly Ottoman Empire)) **Soriano** (Rhodes, Greece), **Menashe / Menasce** (Rhodes) **Capeluto / Capelouto / Capellouto** (Rhodes), **Israel** (Turkey), **Galante** (Turkey), **Hasson** (Rhodes), **Codron** (Rhodes), **Franco** (Rhodes) , **Benatar** (Rhodes).

Autosomal DNA matches with Dr Nikolay Kaufmann 23 cM / 10 cM

Conclusion

Many ancient so-called Ashkenazi families, including my own, had some roots on the Iberian peninsula more than a thousand years ago. In the later middle ages many of these Sephardic Jews left Spain and Portugal and sought new homes in more tolerant parts of Europe. In their subsequent migrations they acquired different amounts of genetic admixture which is now increasingly the subject of study by means of genetic genealogy.

I have written about our connections with a number of well known Sephardic families, including the Benveniste before and after the Inquisitions at the end of the 15th century (Edward Gelles, *The Jewish Journey : A Passage through European History, chapters 2 and 3* published by I.B. Tauris, London in 2016).

In the present essay I have brought full sequence mitochondrial DNA tests of my close family and of autosomal DNA tests together with those of some Benveniste of Rhodes and descendants of their Rhodesli relatives.

I believe that the results support historical connections with the Benveniste and add a footnote to the grand history of the Jews of Rhodes.