

THE POLITICAL ROLE OF SOLOMON, THE EXILARCH, C.715-759 CE (PART 1)

by David H Kelley, FASG¹

ABSTRACT

This two-part article treats the hereditary Jewish rulers known as Exilarchs, claimed as male-line descendants of King David. Part one discusses methodology and reviews 19th and 20th century scholarship on the history and genealogy of the Exilarchs. It then treats the seventh-century Exilarch Bustanai, his two wives (one Jewish and one a Persian princess), and their descendants. All this is background for part two, which will discuss the political role of the eighth-century Exilarch Solomon.

Foundations (2006) 2(1): 29-46

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Introduction

In this two part paper, I will attempt to show that the hereditary Jewish rulers known as the Exilarchs were from the sixth century CE onwards normally descendants of the Exilarch Bustanai by his second wife, a Persian princess who had for a time been a slave. I shall argue that the Exilarch Solomon (ruling in the early eighth century CE) was a grandson of this marriage and that he was also known by the Iranian name Rosbihan. His Persian ancestry was an important factor in allowing him contact with the ruler of the Khazars, a distant cousin, on an equal footing. The conversion of the previously pagan Khazar rulers to Judaism occurred, I think, in Solomon's reign and was due to his efforts and policies. Georgian sources indicate that somewhat earlier a Jewish prince of the House of David, named Solomon, married a Christian Guaramid princess of Iberia (herself of royal Persian ancestry). It will be shown that this marriage, which has usually been dismissed as a fantasy, makes very good sense if the husband is identified with Solomon, the Exilarch, explaining some anomalies in both Georgian and Jewish history. I think that this was also a marriage with important political implications, perhaps affecting Solomon's relationships with the Khazars and with Byzantium. The Khazars were middlemen in trade stretching from the Carolingian empire to China, visited by at least some Khazar rulers. The establishment of a Jewish colony in China at about this time may be a result of the Khazar conversion and, directly or indirectly, the policies of Solomon. I believe that Solomon was making skilled use of real economic and political power to further both secular and religious goals. Two other events early in the reign of Solomon were the adoption of the iconoclastic policy in Islam in 723 CE through the Caliph Yazid II (whose sister-in-law was a Persian relative of Solomon's) and the parallel adoption of iconoclasm in Byzantium through Leo III in 726 CE. Accounts of both events refer to the involvement of a man called "Forty Cubits," sometimes identified as a Jew. The priestly supporters of icons later used these accounts in anti-Jewish propaganda. The varying versions have often been dismissed as fictitious for that reason and also because it seemed so improbable that any Jew could have been so influential both with a Caliph and with a Byzantine emperor. In particular, this Byzantine emperor had

¹ Author's address: 2432 Sovereign Crescent SW, Calgary, Alberta T3C 2M2, Canada

enacted major anti-Jewish policies of forced conversion, and was then at war with Islam. The very special circumstances created by Solomon's membership in the international hereditary elite, his wealth, and his special status as the acknowledged heir of King David might have allowed him to move back and forth between cultures in a way which would have been impossible to most Jews. The iconoclastic policy would have fitted well with what we know of Solomon's intellectual and religious role in Judaism and his attempts to extend Jewish influence in many areas. Hence, I think that he was very appropriately nicknamed "Forty Cubits" and that he was, indeed, a giant in the important effects of his policies even to the present.

The Heads of the Exile and the Princes of the House of David

Our knowledge of the history of the medieval family recognized as the heirs of King David is derived from scraps of historical reference and a few pedigrees of descendants (Grossman, 1984). The purposes of examining these lists of office-holders and genealogies are:

- to establish a generalized chronological framework
- to differentiate genealogical lists from lists of office-holders
- to demonstrate the degree of reliability which they have
- to show how to use closely related lists to detect deliberate modifications or errors
- to indicate the kinds of errors which are most common
- to show that the pedigrees were rarely modified for political purposes
- to indicate the major problems in reconciling Sherira's historical statements with the genealogies, insofar as they relate to a distinction between a "Persian" branch and a "Jewish" branch.

Starting at a fairly early period the heads of the family of the House of David who were leaders of the community had the Aramaic title *Rēsh galūta* (Hebrew *Rosh ha-golah*), which translates literally as "head of the exile" and more generally as Exilarch. It was applied to only one individual at a time; there is no evidence or suggestion that more than one individual could simultaneously have been head of the exile, though of course there might have been opposing claimants recognized as Exilarch by different segments of the populace. Many people have equated the term Exilarch and the term *nasi*. The term *nasi* (pl. *nesi'im*), where it occurs in the Bible, has been translated "prince." In modern times, it has been used to translate "president;" the President of Israel or of the United States is called *Nasi* in Hebrew records and newspapers. It has been suggested that *nasi* was used in some medieval documents to mean "head of a community," but none of the alleged examples seem to be correct. It has also been alleged that *nasi* sometimes merely means "illustrious man." Most of the alleged examples name men who can easily be identified as members of families of claimed Davidic descent. The term *nasi* occurs also in the pedigree of the so-called Patriarchs at Jerusalem, Patriarch being a title recognized by the Roman authorities. One of these Patriarchs is Judah ha-Nasi, whose name both Gil and Neusner, for example, translate as "Judah the Prince." It is said that Judah ha-Nasi would have granted precedence to his contemporary, the Exilarch Huna, but the stories are confused and confusing. Judah's descent is said to be from David's son, Shephathiah or even (utterly implausibly) to be through females (Neusner, 1965). People have taken the term prince as if it equates with the term patriarch, and maybe for Jerusalem at that time it does. I have not found the term *nasi* applied to claimed descendants of Davidic lines such as those of the Heads of the Sanhedrin in Tiberias

or the family of Sherira. Where individuals with known pedigrees are called *Nasi*, they are descendants of Bustanai.

Nasi was a title of honour, not a title of office². Sar Shalom, for example, had four children, each of whom was called *nasi*. That is highly unlikely for a title of office; it is entirely likely for a title of honour. In the 12th century in Baghdad, Benjamin of Tudela mentions two heads of *yeshivot* who were *nesi'im* of lower status than the Exilarch. I think that the usage of *nasi* in Narbonne shows that it was being used there as a title of honour. There were several contemporary *nesi'im* in Narbonne, but there was only one king; he was a *rex*, a title bestowed by the Carolingian emperor on members of subordinate groups. Incidentally, the use by Zuckerman (1972) of principedom in his title is misleading; Narbonne wasn't a Jewish principedom, it was a kingdom with a Jewish ruler. Thus *nasi* is not the equivalent there of *rex*, though the *rex* would always have been a *nasi*.

The latest study available to me in English on the various Exilarchs is *The Exilarchate* (Gil, 1995). He gives a very impressive discussion of the contemporaneous evidence, particularly the evidence from Geniza fragments. He is the leading scholar in the study, publication, and translation of Geniza fragments. This study of the Exilarchate, where it uses contemporaneous documents, is probably by a considerable margin the best study which has been written. He explains the social structure of the Exilarchate and discusses its institutional history. His use of the usual kind of historical documents is masterly, but when he turns to pedigrees and lists of office-holders, he does not understand the appropriate way to use the evidence.

A sharp distinction needs to be made between pedigrees and lists of office-holders³. Their purposes, methods of compilation, and historical value are all different. In general, pedigrees were used for validating or celebrating status. They were kept as an accumulating record within a family. This means that the last name on a pedigree was usually contemporary with the date that the list was written down. Except for copying errors and, rarely, deliberate distortions, they include all lineal ancestors, whether or not they held office, and omit all office-holders who were not lineal ancestors. Comparison of versions preserved by different descendants provides mutual validation. Rarely, some historical note may be appended to an ancestor. If such notes are preserved in different pedigrees, it may be possible to find out when they were added to the pedigree, but it is often difficult or impossible to determine their validity.

Lists of office-holders, on the other hand, were often compiled by historians. Their purpose was usually to make the context of other documents clearer. Often they were taken from a variety of sources and inconsistencies were not uncommon. The date of compilation cannot reasonably be inferred from what is included or omitted, without other evidence. The calibre of the list is determined by the capabilities of the historian, and the evidence is more like that normally used by historians.

The descendants of the Exilarchs consistently give a pedigree of their ancestors in the time immediately after Zerubbabel which is very different from that given in Chronicles. This has been used by many scholars to discredit the value of the traditional pedigree. One of them is Gil, who says, "*In the Seder Olam Zuta, for example, there is a list of names beginning with Zerubabel that has been imaginatively adapted from I Chronicles 3*" (Gil, 1995). It has been suggested that the pedigree was

² The English term prince may be either; it is not distinctive.

³ Gil's failure to make this distinction substantially weakens his interpretations.

constructed in a fanciful and improbable way and that there was no genuine tradition because of the conflict with known data. However, this makes no allowance for two factors. The first is the repetition of Biblical names in later periods. This practice was frequent, and sometimes associated pairs or sets were repeated, such as the names Shemaiah and Shechaniah. This made confusion between an earlier pair and a later pair even more likely than confusion of single names. The second factor is the structured nature of the similarities between the Chronicles account and the traditional pedigree. I would have expected that anyone constructing a pedigree would have used it directly in the form it has in the Bible (or in the form of the prototypical document from which the Biblical pedigree derives). This "pedigree" seems to include a number of names of people in the genealogy in Chronicles in the order given there, although many names are omitted and the list contradicts the genealogical relationships given there. Scholars who knew the pedigree in Chronicles very well continued over many generations to maintain this contrary pedigree, consistently and in general with few additional errors. This suggests that for them it was an important and valid tradition which took precedence over the Biblical account. That I think means that it must have had some intent other than that which it seems to have. I would suggest that it was in fact a list of those descendants of Zerubbabel who actually held the office of head of the exile, and that, because of intermarriages with non-Jewish people by princes of more senior lines of the house, the office passed, possibly frequently, to younger brothers or other relatives. This list of office-holders was at some point regarded by the later descendants of the family not as a list but as a genealogy. The transposition between list of office-holders and genealogy is one which does occasionally happen in either direction⁴.

There is every probability that the Exilarchs themselves kept a genealogy with people added to it. For example, Benjamin of Tudela, writing probably early in 1166, referred to the princes of Narbonne "*at the head of whom is R Kalonymos son of the great Prince R Todros of blessed memory, a descendant of the House of David as stated in his family tree*" (Zuckerman, 1972, p.58). Branch lines which diverged would have had access to this and could have copied a series of names. This series of names, which would then be preserved by their descendants, could be used at a later date by showing it to the Exilarchs or to some other branch of the family, and when the pedigrees were compared, it would be readily apparent where they agreed and where they diverged. This served as an indication that the person had a pedigree and that it was a valid pedigree. It validated his status and claim. Possession of a pedigree was not just possession of a scrap of paper. In the Middle Ages, these pedigrees were *the* evidence. "So-and-so has a pedigree" did not mean that they had ancestors, it meant that they had a piece of paper or parchment documenting them. The immediate ancestors of people holding major public office would be known. For the more remote generations, I do not think that people were generally inclined to let others see their pedigree. Rarely, there might have been a specific reason for making a public announcement with a pedigree attached. Although some scholars have maintained that Sherira was little interested in genealogy, since he mentions only a few of his early ancestors, I would agree with Rabinowich, who points out that Sherira had a very clear knowledge of his genealogy, since he knew his ancestors several centuries earlier⁵. When Sherira talked about the fact that he was a hereditary Gaon of

⁴ Gil in fact treats the one list of office-holders in his account (No.6 of his table) as if it were a pedigree, and he also says that the various genealogies which he covers are not complete lists of exilarchs and that not everyone in them is an exilarch (which, of course, is true because they are genealogies). In addition he doesn't do a good job of handling the question of multiple names for particular individuals, sometimes different names in different lists.

⁵ Rabinowich (1988) Introduction, Section D.

Pumbedita, he mentioned those of his ancestors who held that office; supplying a pedigree or mentioning other ancestors wasn't relevant to what he was writing about.

If scholarship in these studies had developed cumulatively through careful integration of new materials and correction of old errors, one could simply use this latest account by Gil. Unfortunately, a number of the earlier scholars introduced errors which have been widely accepted even up to the present, and some early correct accounts have been ignored or explicitly contradicted by later scholars.

The first major study of the Exilarchs was done by Felix Lazarus (1890)⁶. Lazarus knew the historical data well, and he understood the proper use of lists and pedigrees and the difference between them. He created his own list of office-holders, using a list given by Elisha Crescas (Gil No.6), the only list of exilarchs which we have, and using Talmudic references and historical accounts, especially the Epistle (*Iggeres*) of Sherira Gaon. The list of Elisha Crescas comes from a manuscript of 1383. It is quite a lot later than many of the other documents that we have, and we do not know how it was compiled. Unfortunately, the punctuation and discrimination in the list is most inadequate. It is very hard to tell for a given sequence of two or three names whether these are different names for the same person or are a sequence of office-holders. This has led to some quite different interpretations of the list. The list is given in Figure 1 with the interpretations of Lazarus, Gil, and myself. It has to be emphasised that the list may not have included rulers whose right to the office was disputed. Lazarus did a very nice job of analyzing, of pointing out relationships, and of drawing conclusions from the genealogies and the list. Unfortunately, many of the pedigrees which are now available were not available to him. Even more unfortunately, a very substantial number of otherwise extremely capable later scholars who have worked with this material have generally not understood the most appropriate ways of using pedigrees and have confused genealogies and lists of office-holders.

Jacob Mann did some very interesting work on the later Exilarchs (Mann, 1927)⁷. This article, which is in Hebrew, has a major collection of the pedigrees. However, he made some egregious errors in correlating the material that he was working on. He also discusses a number of genealogies in two other works (Mann, 1920/22; 1931/35), but he simply didn't understand how to treat them. Like many historians analysing lists, he thought you should begin by treating the earliest people in a list, whereas, in fact, you need to look first at the latest people in the list, see who they were, see how they correspond with your knowledge from other sources, and then see what other sources are in agreement (particularly, other pedigrees which are similar). If, as you work backwards in time, you can show an overlap of several generations between two pedigrees, you have a sound reason for considering them together. It is necessary to work backwards in time because the later sections of the pedigree are those which are best known to the descendants (and, indeed, to other members of their communities). Errors or false claims or interpretations are much more likely to occur in the earlier sections of pedigrees. Close relatives will maintain more information about immediate shared ancestors and will usually know less about more distant relatives unless they are particularly eminent. Mann's article influenced others but was not crucially incorporated into later studies, either with his interpretation or with criticisms of it.

⁶ Some years later Lazarus (1934) supplemented this with *Neue Beiträge*.

⁷ My access to this is limited to later citations, my transcription of the accompanying pedigree, and a partial rough translation by a friend.

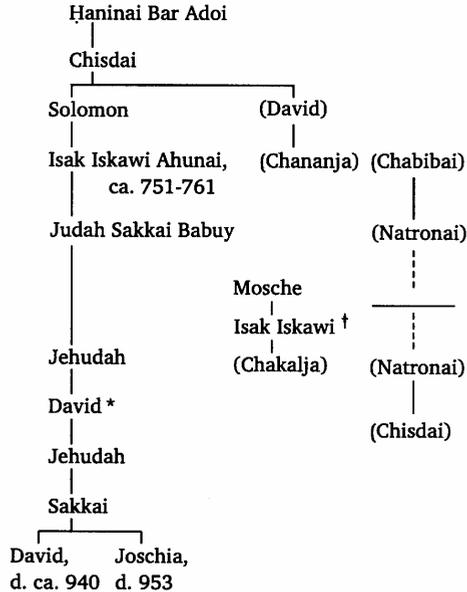
Elisha Crescas's 1383
List of Exilarchs from
the Damascus Ms.

Bustanai
Ḥaninai
Bar Adoi
Ḥisdai

Solomon
Isaac
Iskoi
Judah
Zakkai
Baboi
Moses
Isaac
Iskoi

David b. Judah
Ḥisdai

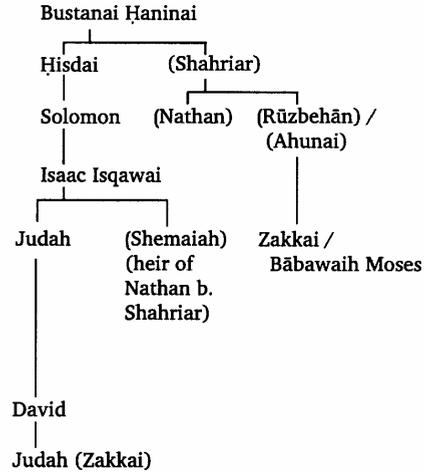
Lazarus's
interpretation



* Harkavy made David son of Judah Zakkai.

† Lazarus thought a seal of Isaac, son of Moses, belonged to this Exilarch.

Gil's
interpretation



Gil puts Ḥisdai b. Naṭronai as Exilarch immediately after Naṭronai b. Ḥaninai, whose father he identifies as Ḥananiah, son of David.

Author's
interpretation

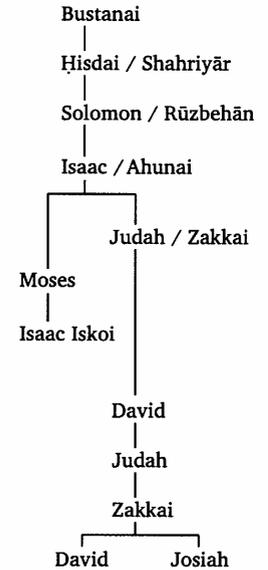


Fig 1. Three interpretations of Elisha Crescas's list of Exilarchs (Gil No.6) (slash line marks a postulated identity).

Table 1a. Comparative table of genealogies of the exilarchic family (names in bold are explicitly referred to as Exilarchs)

Gil (Biruni) 5	Gil 1 (T-S 12.138)	Gil 2a (Mosseri) (cf. Lewin)	Gil 7 (Pinsker)	Gil 4 (T-S AS 150.148)	Dayyan of Aleppo	Mann (L289)	Gil 3 (Dropsie MS.)	David of Mosul (1288) (Poznański, <i>Geonim</i> , 121)	Joseph of Aleppo (1471) (Posnanski, <i>Schiloh</i> , 162-3)
	Kafnai Hanīnai	Hūnā	Kaphnai Hanīnai		Hūnā Kaphnai				
Bustanai Kaphnai [!] Hisdai	Bustanai Hisdai	Bustanai Hisdai	Bustanai Hisdai	Bustanai (Ḥanīna) Hisdai	Bustanai Hisdai		Bustanai Baradai Hisdai		
David 'Anan Saul	David 'Anan Saul	David 'Anan Saul	David 'Anan Saul	Solomon	Zakkai [!] Solomon Nehemiah [!]		Solomon		
Daniel 'Anan	Josiah Şemaḥ	Josiah Jehosaphat Bo'az	Josiah Jehosaphat* Bo'az	N.N. Baradai Bo'az	Isaac Judah David	David	Isaac Judah David		
		David Solomon Hezekiah	David Solomon Hezekiah	N.N. (Zakkai?)* David	Judah Zakkai	Judah Zakkai	Judah Zakkai		
			Hisdai David Solomon Bo'az	N.N. David Nehemiah N.N.	Josiah Solomon Jesse David Joseph Moses	Josiah Solomon Azariah	Josiah Solomon Azariah Zakkai Joseph Zakkai	Josiah Solomon Azariah Zakkai Joseph Rabba	
				* possibly Nehemiah; the Ms. is badly damaged. Probably but not certainly a continuous pedigree. (Copy of Ms. courtesy of Cambridge Univ. Library.)	(to Dayyan family of Aleppo)			Zakkai	Zakkai
			*Gil, <i>Exilarchate</i> , p.48, omits Jehosaphat in this list but gives him in the Hebrew edition.					David Daniel David (1288)	David Judah Solomon
									Jedediah Solomon Josiah
									Jesse Zedekiah Joseph (1471)

Table 1b. Comparative table of genealogies of the exilarchic family (continued)

Gil 9 (Neubauer -- Solomon Muleh)	Mann, <i>Jews in Egypt and Palest.</i> -- Sar Shalom	Gil 8 (Coronel -- Jedediah b. Jesse)	Gil 2b (Mosseri) (cf. Lewin)		Gil 10 (Neubauer -- David b. Zakkai)	Kamenetzky (MS. Heidelberg #10)
					Kafnai	
Bustanai		Bustanai			Bustanai	
Hisdai		Hisdai				
Solomon		Solomon	Solomon		Solomon	
Isaac		Judah Isaac	Isqawai		Isqawai	
David		Judah David			Judah David	
Judah		Judah*	Judah			
Zakkai		Zakkai	Zakkai		Zakkai	Zakkai
* Solomon Uzziah	Josiah Uzziah	Josiah Solomon Azariah	Josiah Solomon (951)	David (d. 940) Judah Hezekiah	David	David Judah Hezekiah
Judah Josiah	Solomon Judah Josiah	Solomon Judah Josiah		David Hezekiah		David Hezekiah (1021)
Phineas Solomon Muleh	Hodaiah Phineas Sar Shalom (1341)	Jedediah Hezekiah Solomon				
	[misdated]	Jesse Jedediah (1376 [misdated]/1191)				
*possibly deliberate omission of Josiah of Khorasan		*Gil, <i>Exilarchate</i> , p.48, has Jehosaphat by a typographic error but correctly Judah in the Hebrew edition.				

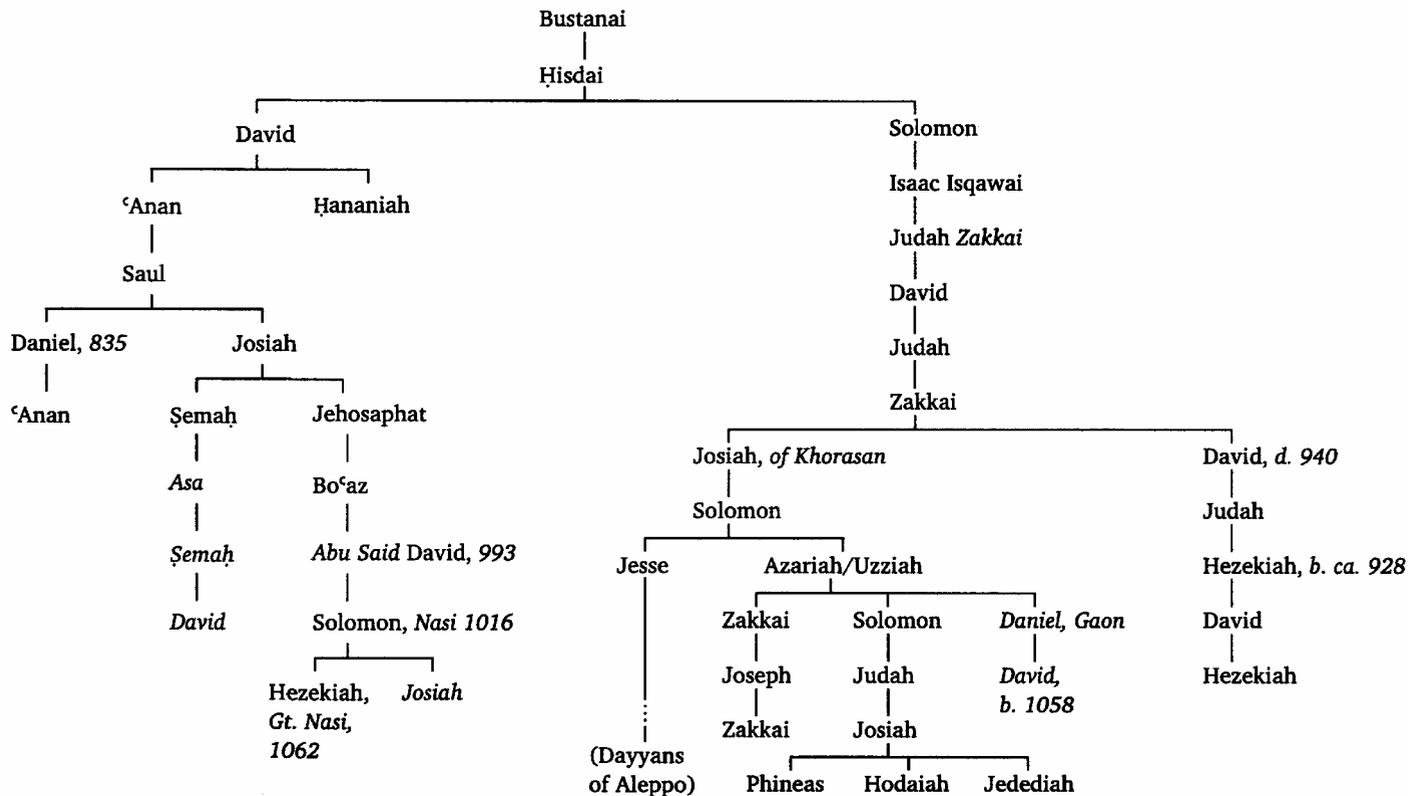


Fig 2. Descendants of Bustanai, based on Table I and (if italicised) other sources

The next important study of the Exilarchs was by Alexander Goode (1940/41). He made a reconstruction which has been widely adopted in other publications. Although much of it is sound, I think that it is incorrect in a number of aspects. Again, he did not understand the difference between the Elisha Crescas list of Exilarchs and the pedigrees; he treated them as if they were much the same thing, leading to major errors, particularly with respect to the way in which Bustanai was related to the later Exilarchs. Most of the encyclopaedia articles have followed Goode, incorporating in some cases some modifications by Liver, who wrote an important study of the House of David in Hebrew. Liver worked out a reconstruction of the pedigree of the Exilarchs, but he has a sceptical point of view and does not appear to understand how to use pedigrees and genealogical analysis. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* chart on the later Exilarchs as well as a number of biographical articles on individual Exilarchs and other prominent figures were written by Abraham David and are a substantial improvement on Mann's reconstruction but are not presented as fully as would be desirable.

It is often useful to compare a number of related pedigrees. Gil (1995), for example, considers ten lists related to the history of the Exilarchs. Of these, one is the list of office-holders compiled by Elisha Crescas (Gil No.6); eight are pedigrees which start with the most recent generation and go backwards in time, using "ben" (Hebrew) or "bar" (Aramaic) for "son of;" and one (Gil No.2) presents relationships of three different lineages in tabular form. Table I (parts a & b) in this article includes all nine of the genealogical lists in Gil together with some not in Gil. In this table I have grouped the lists so that those which are most similar in the latest shared sections are together. That means that both genealogically and historiographically, similar sources have been put together, making it easier to see how various sources support or contradict other sources. Figure 2 illustrates how the information from Table I and other sources can be consolidated into a genealogical chart showing various branches of descendants of Bustanai.

Consider the two pedigrees which are displayed in columns 6 and 8 of Table Ia. The first of these is the pedigree of the Dayyan family of Aleppo, preserved in Aleppo into the 19th century and by members of the family today, published as part of the commentary *Yashir Mosheh* by Mosheh ben Abraham Dayan (1879)⁸. The second of these is the Dropsie College Geniza MS.462, a fragment which had been sitting for hundreds of years as discarded paper in the Cairo Geniza (Gil No.3). This Geniza fragment could not have been known by the Dayyans; the Geniza fragment and the Dayyan pedigree were independently preserved over a period of more than 700 years. The correspondence between these independently preserved pedigrees shows that both of them are based on a common tradition. The two pedigrees differ in the more recent generations, since they cover different branches of the family, but they agree for the seven generations from Solomon, the son of Josiah of Khorasan, back to Isaac. The Dayyan pedigree then makes Isaac the son of Nehemiah, the son of Solomon, the son of Zakkai. The Dropsie MS. and all cognate pedigrees omit Nehemiah and the early Zakkai. Conversely, the Dayyan pedigree goes on to H̄isdai, son of Bustanai. The Dropsie 462 pedigree makes Solomon's father H̄isdai the son of Bar Adoi (Baradai), son of Bustanai. In this case, it is the Dropsie pedigree which disagrees with all cognate sources, and Bar Adoi's name should be dropped. The name could have been added during the time after Zakkai b. Azariah, since it is not found in pedigrees of Zakkai b. Azariah's brother, Solomon. Incidentally, Baradai is

⁸ This is the only Davidic pedigree relating to this period known to me which was not considered by Gil. I have seen four versions, courtesy of Mr. Yosef Dayan of Pesagot, near Ramallah. A 1617 pedigree of Nathan Dayan includes Azariah, omitted in the published pedigree.

Gil's silent correction of Mann's transcription, b. Dāḏoy. He discusses this reading elsewhere⁹. The elimination of Bar Adoi as an ancestor means that all the Rabbanite pedigrees go through Isaac, the son of Solomon, the son of Ḥisdai, and all of the Karaite pedigrees go through 'Anan, the son of David, the son of Ḥisdai. Whether Ḥisdai's mother was Bustanai's Jewish wife or Persian wife will be considered subsequently. Since the Elisha Crescas list includes Bar Adoi as an Exilarch, it seems that he followed his father, Bustanai, as Exilarch until Ḥisdai succeeded. Gil's conclusion that Baradai or Bar Adoi was the actual ancestor of Daniel b. Azariah and his family cannot be reconciled with the correspondences which have been cited. Apparently the earliest surviving Rabbanite pedigree is that of Azariah¹⁰, who was the great-grandfather of Zakkai of the Dropsie long pedigree. Azariah and the five generations immediately preceding him agree entirely in both of these pedigrees and also in the pedigree of the Dayyans of Aleppo. Such a degree of correspondence indicates the care with which the pedigrees were preserved.

A number of copying errors appear in the lists in Gil (1995, p.48). In list 7, although it is labelled as "descendants of Jehosaphat," the name of Jehosaphat is accidentally omitted in the English edition, though present in the Hebrew edition¹¹. This missing Jehosaphat has jumped to list 8 in the English edition, appearing at the place where Judah appears (correctly) in the Hebrew edition. There is an important error in the transcription of Elisha Crescas's list of Exilarchs (Gil No.6), of which Gil says (p.49), "*List 6 contains the lineage of the descendants of Isaac (Isqawai) b. David, the David who likely was the brother of Solomon and father of 'Anan.*" Gil mistakenly treated this list as if it were a pedigree or lineage, whereas it is a list of successive Exilarchs with no specification of their genealogical relationships. The error in Gil's copy of this list is that David, the ancestor of the Ananites, has somehow replaced Solomon, who appears in Neusner, the source cited by Gil. This error leads Gil to distinguish between Isaac, the son of David of this list, and Isaac, the Exilarch, the son of Solomon. In fact, there is no evidence that Isaac, the son of David, exists. Since this is not a lineage but a list of office-holders, the Isaac who appears *is* Isaac the Exilarch, not his non-existent "cousin."

Further comparing lists, the substitution of Isqawai (Aramaic equivalent of Isaac) for Isaac in list 10 makes it highly probable that Isaac and Isqawai in the Elisha Crescas list are two names for a single individual, as was maintained by Lazarus (1890) and accepted by later scholars, including Gil. This view is reinforced by the Elisha Crescas list, which gives two Isaacs, each followed by the name Iskoi (Isqawai). The sequence of names Judah, Zakkai, Baboi, Moses probably represents two exilarchs, but it is not clear how the names should be distributed among them. The Isaac whose name immediately follows Moses is identified by Lazarus (p.174ff) with an Isaac, son of Moses, attested on a seal inscription. The solution of Lazarus was to identify Judah, Zakkai and Baboi as separate names for a single individual. There is an Isaac Isqawai who is named in a *responsum* from c.810. This is Isaac the second according to Lazarus. Gil calls the second Isaac a "presumed" Exilarch, but is bothered by the 50-year interval between the *responsum* of c.810 and an earlier one of c.760¹². It seems entirely reasonable to disassociate Isaac Isqawai of 810 from the previously-mentioned Isaac Isqawai, son of Solomon. Given some name repetition during this

⁹ Gil (1992) p.721, fn.158.

¹⁰ Published in Mann, (1927) p.20.

¹¹ Gil (1997a) 1:95.

¹² Gil (1995) pp.50-51, especially fn.63.

period, it seems probable that the second Isaac was a grandson of the first through the Exilarch Moses. Gil (p.49) says that "*most of the early Exilarchs about whom we have information from other sources have clearly been omitted from these lists: Hananiah b. David ('Anan's brother), Naṭronai b. Haninai, Zakkai b. Ahunai, Ḥisdai b. Naṭronai, and 'Uqba.*" The Exilarch Zakkai b. Ahunai has to be identified with Judah Zakkai of the Elisha Crescas list, and none of the other four were ancestors of the Exilarchs in the main line, so naturally they were omitted from the pedigrees, although Ḥisdai b. Naṭronai is apparently Ḥisdai of the Elisha Crescas list, the ruler following David b. Judah Zakkai. The parallelism of the pedigrees makes it clear that Judah Zakkai should be identified with Zakkai b. Ahunai, who is therefore not omitted from the lists. Whether we read "Judah Zakkai Baboi" (as the names were grouped by Lazarus) or "Zakkai Baboi Moses" (as grouped by Gil) or "Judah Zakkai" and "Baboi Moses," this Zakkai was an Exilarch and the son of the Exilarch Isaac of 760. The only historically known Zakkai in this general time frame is Zakkai b. Ahunai, which should mean that Ahunai was the Aramaic name of Isaac. Goode (1940/41, p.157) maintains that Judah b. Isaac b. Solomon was a descendant of Bustanai's Jewish wife but inconsistently identifies him with Zakkai b. Ahunai. Abraham David (1971) regards Zakkai b. Ahunai's Hebrew name as Judah but leaves Judah in a genealogical vacuum. A pedigree given by Sherira in the tenth century shows Zakkai b. Ahunai b. Shahriyar (son of Bustanai and his Persian wife). Gil (1997b, pp.163-164) points out that Shahriyār had a son, Rūzbehān, who was the ancestor of Geonim and Exilarchs. He regards Zakkai b. Ahunai as the Exilarch particularly intended and, taking the pedigree given by Sherira literally, makes Rūzbehān another name of Ahunai. However, if Isaac was the Jewish name of Ahunai, then the existing version of the pedigree given by Sherira has lost a generation, since Isaac was a great-grandson of Bustanai. This implies that Rūzbehān was the Persian name of Solomon and that Shahriyar was the Persian name of Ḥisdai. Zuckerman (1972, p.78) gives Solomon's successor, Isaac, as Isaac b. Rosbihan b. Shahriyar, but cites no source. Zuckerman did not seem to realize that this pedigree implies the identification of Solomon with Rosbihan and of Ḥisdai with Shahriyar (named for his Persian great-grandfather). Indeed, the chronology itself strongly supports the view that this Ḥisdai was a child of the Persian wife. Four generations are decidedly more probable chronologically than three, scanty as our chronological control is. Even with four generations, once one recognizes that Solomon's grandmother was the Persian princess, it also becomes clear that it is chronologically much more likely that Bustanai married her under the Caliph Ali (who gave her sister to his son Ḥusain and their niece to Al-Walīd, later Caliph) and that she was, as Ibn Daud said, a daughter of Yezdegird III, rather than of his grandfather, Khusrau, as other sources alleged. Gil (1997b, p.161) prefers the information, in the best text of Sherira Gaon, that she was a daughter of Queen Puran (Būrān), sister and predecessor of Yezdegird III. This could be accepted without particularly affecting any of the subsequent arguments here.

The practice of using Jewish names in one context and Persian or Aramaic names for the same individuals in other contexts is well attested. This practice has sometimes led to confusion. The strongest evidence against the identification of Ḥisdai and Shahriyar is the statement of Sherira that Bustanai's sons by his Jewish wife were Bar Adoi and Ḥisdai and that they kept their half-brothers, Shahriyar, Gūrdānshāh, and Mardānshāh, sons of the Persian wife, locked up in a cage. One possible interpretation would be to accept the statement but assume that Bustanai had two sons named Ḥisdai, one by each wife. In our time it would be exceedingly unlikely to have two brothers with the same name, but brothers of the same name are attested though rarely in medieval Jewish families. The practice might have been commoner than we realize, for our documentation would seldom allow us to distinguish two brothers of the same name. However, a more likely explanation is simply that Sherira combined

evidence from several sources and assumed that the Aramaic names should be applied to the sons of the Jewish wife, although *Hisdai* was actually an alternate name of *Shahriyar*. If *Bar Adoi* was actually a son of *Bustanai's* Jewish wife, and *Hisdai* was not, that might provide a good political reason for inserting the name of *Bar Adoi* in the pedigree of *Zakkai ben Azariah*.

The *responsum* of c.760 mentions one of the children of the *Nasi* called *Nathan b. Shahriyar*, whose heir was *Shemaiah*, son of *Isaac the Exilarch* (Gil, 1995, p.50). In Gil's reconstruction, *Shemaiah*, the heir of *Nathan* of the Persian branch was the grandson of his first cousin of the inimical Jewish branch. In my reconstruction, *Shemaiah* was the grandson of *Nathan's* brother and both belonged to the Persian branch. See Figure 3.

Gil's reconstruction.

Author's reconstruction.

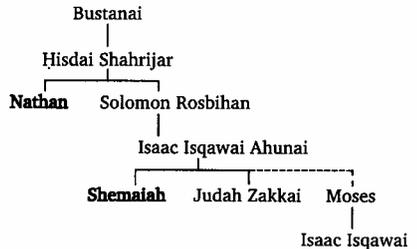
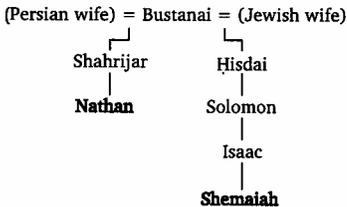


Fig 3. Relationship of Nathan and his heir Shemaiah

There is another factor which may be of importance here. Directly south of the Khazars lay Iberia or Georgia, an area which was usually under Byzantine rule, but where Armenians, Persians, and later Arabs often dominated, in a bewildering mix of religious and cultural affiliations. Some of the ruling nobility claimed descent from the Persian royal family (probably more than we now know). Such families would have recognized a descendant of the last Persian king, *Yezdegird III*, as having particularly high status. According to Georgian sources, to be discussed later, the heiress of one of the earlier ruling lines married, about this time, a man named *Solomon*, of the House of David. If *Solomon Rosbihan* not only had a Persian grandmother, but a Christian Iberian wife, however "converted" to Judaism, and possibly a Christian son in Iberia, this might well have had repercussions in the Jewish community. After *Solomon's* death in about 759, he seems to have been succeeded by his son, *Isaac*, without dispute. However, *Isaac's* death in the 760's seems to have been followed by a four-way dispute. A certain *Naṭronai*, probably a descendant of *Bustanai's* Jewish wife, *Isaac's* son, *Judah Zakkai*, and 'Anan and *Hananiah*, sons of *Solomon's* brother, *David*, all claimed to be *Exilarch*. The account that makes 'Anan the heir of *Solomon* implies that *Isaac*, although the son of *Solomon*, and recognized as *Exilarch*, was, for some reason, not a legal heir in the writer's eyes. 'Anan was later regarded as the founder of the *Karaite* sect and is discussed by *Nemoy (1947)*, who, however, does not adequately consider the genealogical evidence. *Naṭronai's* claim would have rested on disallowing the rights of all the Persian branch. The claim of *David's* sons could only be because of some

dispute about Solomon's descendants, for David shared the descent from the Persian princess. This series of disputes would be hard to understand unless there were factors which are not directly mentioned by our existing sources. Many scholars have tried to define the Exilarch's power as largely religious, but to me it seems to have been chiefly political. A further factor which is probably involved is the expectation of the coming of a Messiah in the House of David about this time. The names of Solomon and David, which had not been used for many generations, of Nehemiah, and of 'Anan are all Messianic names. The Aramaic name Naṭronai, "Avenger," was also Messianic, as was Makhir. However, this factor is too complex to treat at more length here.

The genealogies are the direct testimony of the people concerned and represent a continuing tradition. Sherira's remarks derive from an area and class politically opposed to the Exilarchs and are a historical reconstruction based on varying sources of unknown degrees of reliability. For these reasons, I regard the testimony of the pedigrees as generically superior to that of Sherira when they are in conflict. The examination of the pedigrees was necessary in order to evaluate the statements which indicate that Solomon's grandmother was the Persian princess. This affects the appraisal of Solomon's relationships with the Islamic caliphs, the Byzantine emperors, the Georgian rulers and the Khazar Qağans.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to use Grossman's 1984 study of the Exilarchate for this period.

Bustanai and the Persian Princess

Gil's analysis (1997b) of the Bustanai story entirely supersedes the work of Tykocinski, which had been the basis of most of the more sophisticated accounts in English. Gil's most important contribution is the demonstration that three accounts considered to be different versions by Tykocinski are parts of a single text written by Sahlān b. Abraham in 1040-41 CE, copied from an original of the Gaon Nathan b. Abraham, the rival of Solomon b. Judah. This text also includes fragments from the New York Theological Seminary published by A. Marx after Tykocinski wrote and a beginning segment first published by Gil himself. Solomon b. Judah was supported by the Exilarch (or counter-Exilarch) Daniel b. Azariah. Sherira (writing in the tenth century) indicated that Bustanai had two sons by a Jewish wife and three sons by a Persian wife, a royal princess who had been enslaved. The sons by the Jewish wife maintained that Bustanai had not freed and converted the Persian princess and that her children were, therefore, illegitimate. A court found that they should be considered legitimate. Sherira says that some judges expressed doubts about the decision and he, himself, suggested that it was due to kinship between the judge and Bustanai's part-Persian descendants. Gil summarizes all this and makes a reconstruction of the relationships¹³.

Ibn Daud's *Book of Tradition* (Cohen, 1967) written in Spain about the mid-twelfth century, says positively that the Persian woman was converted and married:

In the days of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, king of the Arabs, the Persian Empire had been uprooted and the daughters of Yezdegerd taken into captivity. Then 'Umar, king of the

¹³ Gil (1997b) pp.160-165; Gil (1995) pp.50-52.

Arabs, gave Yezdegerd's daughter to R. Busatanai¹⁴ the exilarch. The latter converted her to Judaism and took her for a wife.

If, as Gil, Goode and others have postulated, all of the later descendants came from the Jewish wife, not the Persian wife, it seems very unlikely that any of Ibn Daud's sources would have said so definitely that the Persian princess was Bustanai's legitimate wife.

The fullest account of the Bustanai story is *The Story of the House of David* first printed in 1577/8 and alleged to have been written in 1127. The account mentions a *Book of Memoirs of the House of David* which Baron suggests "contained official genealogical records of the exilarchic family."¹⁵ Here it is said that Bustanai "immersed her [the Persian princess] and gave her a marriage contract and arranged a betrothal ceremony." Gil strongly disagrees with Baron's position and maintains that neither Ibn Daud nor *The Story of the House of David* have any independent historical value. He offers no explanation as to why these sources should emphasize the legitimacy of the Persian wife and her descendants.

Most of the other evidence comes from polemical sources using phrases in as insulting a way as possible. Aaron ha-Kohen b. Joseph, also called Khalaf b. Sarjādo, Gaon of Pumbedita (943-960), was an opponent of Saadia; the latter was supported by Abu Sa'd David and his brother, Josiah, sons of Boaz (see Figure 2). Aaron called the sons of Boaz "the children of slave girls and camel flesh." Boaz was a descendant of Hisdai, son of Bustanai, and the reference to "slave girls" refers to Bustanai's Persian wife. Gil thinks that "camel flesh" is a claim (which he disbelieves) that the sons of Boaz had Arabic ancestry as well¹⁶.

Josiah b. Aaron, Gaon of Pumbedita (an adult by 990, d.1025), whose family claimed male-line descent from Hillel and King David, wrote that "**five of Bustanai's children were born of the 'daughter of kings' and were 'the sons of foreskin and shame; while two of them were heirs to holiness.'**"¹⁷ This interpretation by Gil is close to Jacob Mann's interpretation " 'five generations, sons of uncircumcision and shame, two of whom only inherited sanctity,' ie, two only of Bustanai's five sons had a Jewish mother."¹⁸ Gil discussed this passage with a quite different translation and interpretation, citing " 'progeny of uncircumcised and shameful [relations]' and 'out of five generations, two inherited sanctity,'" which he there regards as an apparent reference to Jehoshaphat and Šemah, the great-grandsons of 'Anan¹⁹. Mann points out that the person attacked by Josiah b. Aaron was said to be of the 17th generation from Bustanai and "the royal princess." The reference was probably not to 17 generations in a strictly genealogical sense, but may have been a reference to 17 descendants who had held office. Abraham David (1971, col.1026) lists David b. Zakkai and his brother, Josiah, of Khorasan, as the 16th and 17th Exilarchs from Bustanai. The Gaon Josiah b. Aaron, would have been contemporary with Abraham David's 25th Exilarch, Hezekiah b. David (13th from Bustanai in Figure 2).

¹⁴ sic: footnote has R. Bustanai

¹⁵ Gil, (1997b) p.146, fn.21.

¹⁶ Gil (1992) p.791, fn.10.

¹⁷ Gil (1995) p.51.

¹⁸ Mann (1920/22) II, p.68.

¹⁹ Gil (1992) p.542.

An even more extreme account is that of Nathan b. Abraham, who became Gaon in Palestine in 1038. His account of Bustanai, written in Arabic, has been largely reconstructed by Gil (1997b) on the basis of a copy made by Sahlān b. Abraham in 1041, of which the fragments (from the Cairo Genizah) are now widely scattered. According to the Gaon Nathan, Bustanai was given a slave girl by the Caliph, 'Umar. He took her as a concubine but did not free her, and he married no other woman. "Thus of his seed came 'Anan, all (those named) Bo'az and the sons of Zakkai, Exilarchs in Baghdad and a few people in al-Andalus." The account goes on (pp.170-171) to say that the "Bne Marawatha" ("sons of the masters") in the Christian countries are of David's seed but not descended from Bustanai. These are the descendants of Naṭronai, usually regarded as derived from Bustanai's Jewish wife, but Nathan b. Abraham does not seem to have been a man who would undermine his argument in order to make fine distinctions.

The effectiveness of the polemic would depend largely on widespread acceptance of the view that the later Exilarchs descended from Bustanai and the Persian princess. If the Exilarchs themselves held such a view, the insistence of Ibn Daud on the legitimacy of the descendants of the Persian princess would have a ready explanation, whether true or untrue.

The confusion caused by improper understanding of the genealogy is well exemplified by Baron (1952-83)²⁰ who wrote "Nor are the circumstances which led to the transfer of authority to the descendants of the Persian princess altogether clear. This change occurred some time after the decease of the vigorous Exilarch Solomon bar Ḥisdai, best known for his efforts to raise the standing of the academy of Sura by appointing new leaders in 733 and 759. Perhaps Solomon had displayed excessive loyalty to the Umayyad dynasty, and the new Abbasid ruler, Al-Mansur, after 767 appointed Zakkai bar Ahunai of the Persian line, Zakkai establishing his residence in the new capital of Baghdad." In fact, Zakkai succeeded his father, Isaac Iskowi Ahunai, in regular succession, and his grandfather was Solomon, son of Ḥisdai Shahriyar. The descendants of Izdadwar held power continuously from the time that Ḥisdai succeeded his half-brother until the end of the Exilarchate, save only for three counter-exilarchs.

Part 2 of this article will appear in Foundations Vol.2, issue 2 (July 2006) - Editor.

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²⁰ Vol.3, p.9.

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Chronological Summary

Bustanai born about 626 (aged 16 under Omar in 642; aged 35 under Ali, 656-661); married about 660 to Persian princess, Izdadwar. Died about 670?? (ff. Abraham David 1971).

Ḥaninai Bar Adoi, son of Bustanai and Jewish wife, perhaps born about 646-650; Exilarch about 670.

Ḥisdai Shahriyar, son of Bustanai and Izdadwar, born about 662; Exilarch prior to the death of his aunt's husband, Ḥusain, in 680, replacing his half-brother, then perhaps about 30-35. Probably died by 715 or earlier.

Solomon Rosbihan, the Exilarch, great-grandson of Yezdegird III—descended from the Turkish Khakhan—believed to descend from Caesar (i.e., the Byzantine emperor)—second cousin of Muḥammad, the fifth Imam, c.712-731—second cousin of Caliph Yazīd III, whose father d.715.

c.715-20 (?) — Solomon, descendant of King David, married a Guaramid princess, a sister of Guaram, the Curopalate (Guaram d. c.748).

716-17 — Maslama attacked Amorium and Constantinople — “Forty Cubits” an ambassador of Leo III to Maslama.

717 — Leo III became Byzantine emperor—probably from Commagene, spoke fluent Arabic, had Arabic support when he usurped.

c.719 — Naṭronai ben Nehemiah became Gaon of Pumbedita. Also called Rav Yenuka. A descendant of the House of David. Perhaps married the sister of the Exilarch, Solomon. Often confused with a later Naṭronai, also Gaon of Pumbedita.

720 — Leo III ordered the forced conversion to Christianity of all Byzantine Jews.

723 — The Jew “Forty Cubits” persuaded Yazīd II, the Caliph, to adopt anti-image policies in Islam.

726 — Beser assisted Emperor Leo III in adopting the iconoclastic policy.

730 — Publication of the edict against images, Byzantium.

732-3 — Constantine, son of Leo III, married “Eirene,” sister of the Khakhan Bulan, of the Khazars, and probably niece of the Byzantine empress, Theodora, sister of the Khakhan Bushir.

732 — Ashot, the Bagratid, became King of Armenia and adopted a pro-Caliph policy until his deposition in 748.

c.740 — Bulan, the Khazar Khakhan, converted to Judaism.

741 — Constantine V, aged 21, brother-in-law of Bulan, became emperor and fought his brother-in-law, Artavazt, the Armenian.

744 — Yazīd III, second cousin of the Exilarch, Solomon, briefly became Caliph, then was replaced, first by his brother, Ibrahim, then by his father's first cousin, Marwan II, who was told by an Exilarch “magician” that he and nearly all his relatives would soon be killed, which happened in 750.

c.759 — Solomon Rosbihan died. Succeeded by his son, Isaac Iskowi Ahunai, a man probably about 40.

c.767? — Ahunai died. His son, Judah Zakkai Baboi, was perhaps aged somewhere between 15 and 25 and was immediately opposed by three rival claimants. The chronology of these years has been very confused and I have yet to see a summary which seems to make sense.

c.766-768 — the deposed Exilarch, Naṭronai, went to the West.

c.767-8 — Establishment of a break-away sect by ‘Anan, one of the opponents of Zakkai. ‘Anan's descendants became Karaite Exilarchs.