

Agudat Israel's Mo'etset Gedolei ha-Torah (rabbinic leadership council) and became a significant and influential figure in Israeli Orthodox circles. He was also president of the Va'ad ha-Yeshivot (Council of Yeshivot).

Abramsky wrote extensively on Talmudic and halakhic subjects; most of his books bear the title *Hazon Yehezqel*. His most prominent work is a commentary on Tosel'ta (*Tosefta' Hazon Yehezqel*, 19 vols. [1925–1967]). He also wrote *Qovets Ma'amarim be-Dinei Mammonot* (1979) and *Peninei Rabbeinu Yehezqel le-Sheqdat ha-Torah ule-Yir'ah* (1983).

• Yosef Bukshoim, ed., *Seder ha-Ziqaron Li-Khevodo ule-Zikro shel Yehezqel Avramski* (Jerusalem, 1977–1978). —IRA ROBINSON

ABRAVANEL FAMILY, influential Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian scholars.

Yitshaq [Isaac] Abravanel (1437–1508), Bible commentator, philosopher, statesman, and communal leader. He succeeded his father as treasurer to King Alfonso V of Portugal. Because he was believed to be involved in a plot against King João II, Yitsh was sentenced to death in *absentia* but managed to flee to Castile. In 1492, however, although an influential minister at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, he failed to dissuade them from expelling Spanish Jewry. He himself fled to Naples and then to Venice, where his talents as financial adviser to the monarch soon brought him into the forefront of public activity.

His literary productions cover many subjects in the realm of biblical exegesis, philosophy, and theology. Abravanel's political experience is evident in his extensive biblical commentaries, which cover the Torah, Former Prophets and Later Prophets, and Daniel. For example, in his commentary on *I Samuel 8* (which records the origins of the institution of monarchy in Israel) he praises the constitution of Venice as the best form of government. He compared the social institutions of biblical times with those of his own day, which he was in a unique position to observe through his long diplomatic experience. While drawing heavily on his predecessors in the Jewish exegetical tradition, he did so with a keen critical sense and occasionally accepted the opinions of Christian scholars when they did not conflict with the Jewish faith.

Compared to the classical medieval exegesis, his treatment of the Bible is copious and discursive yet lucid and popular. Instead of commenting on individual verses, he divided each book of the Torah and Prophets into thematic sections, prefacing each by a number of varied queries, the answers to which constituted the bulk of his commentary. He usually bases the philological foundation of his commentary on the work of his predecessors, especially Ibn Ezra and Radak. But he addresses broad literary questions regarding the authorship and composition of the various biblical books with particular acuity. For example, he cites internal evidence to challenge the

traditional rabbinic views regarding the authorship of *Joshua*, *Judges*, and *Samuel*, arguing that they were written long after the historical events they describe. He also questions whether *Deuteronomy* should be considered the word of God, like the other four books of the Torah (and as a believed traditionally), or simply a record of Moses' parting speeches to Israel. Abravanel's style is often sermonic and includes philosophical dimensions, and he held that the Bible contains an esoteric as well as a literal meaning. However, his commentary excludes both kabbalistic interpretation and radical philosophical allegorization. A rationalist by training as well as by inclination, his position remained strictly traditional, and though much absorbed in philosophy, he maintained that it must take second place to religion. He also opposed the tendency to sum up the totality of Judaism in a given set of dogmatic principles and held that all elements of the Torah equally shared divine authority and significance. His original view of messianism is expressed, for example, in his commentary on *Daniel*, in which he also attacks Christian scholars for manipulating the biblical text in order to suit their own particular views. In some of his commentaries, he affirms belief in the coming Messiah, who he thought would appear in the year 1503 and whose advent would be preceded by the resurrection of the dead. Abravanel regarded the suffering caused by the expulsion from Spain as a manifestation of the tribulations that would, according to traditional Jewish belief, precede the coming of the Messiah.

Abravanel's philosophy is neither original nor free from internal contradictions. Among his objectives was to liberate Jewish philosophy from those elements that detract from complete faith in his view. Even Maimonides' philosophy was subject to his critique. One of his disciples reports that after expounding the views of Maimonides in a lecture, he concluded, "Thus is the opinion of our master, Moshe son of Maimon (Maimonides), but not that of our master, Moshe son of Amram" (the biblical Moses). He maintained that God communicated his truth to humanity through prophecy, which he viewed as a miraculous phenomenon and refused to explain in naturalistic terms. Abravanel differed from Maimonides in his theory of prophecy, which he believed originated not in the active intellect but in God Himself. Abravanel also held that Israel received special divine providence, whereas other nations receive providence only indirectly through the working of natural law. Abravanel's works, which include commentaries on the mishnaic tractate *Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), the Passover *Haggadah*, and Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, were eagerly read by the Spanish exiles, and their forecast of an imminent messianic era helped pave the way for the initial success of David *Re'uveni and Shelomo *Molkho. Abravanel's philosophical speculations, however—the last link in the chain of medieval Jewish philosophy—exercised little future influence,

partly because of the growing appeal of kabbalistic thought. His biblical commentaries, translated into Latin, influenced Renaissance Christian scholars.

His published writings include: commentaries on the Torah (Venice, 1579) and the Prophets and Daniel (Pesaro, 1511–1512 and 1520); the messianic work *Ma'ayanai ha-Yeshu'ah* (Ferrara, 1551); and the philosophical works *'Ateret Zeqenim* (Sabionetta, 1557) and *Ro'sh Amanah* (Constantinople, 1508).

Yehuda Abravanel (c.1460–1521), Italian philosopher, poet, and physician; son of Yitshaq Abravanel; also known as Leone Ebreo or Leo Hebraeus. Yehuda Abravanel's infant son was forcibly baptized in Portugal; he laments this event in his poem "Telunah 'al Zeman." A practicing physician in Naples, Yehuda also published four poems in memory of his father. His Latin work *De coeli harmonia* has not survived, and his reputation rests on his posthumously published *Dialoghi d'amore*, one of the first philosophical works written in Italian.

Modeled on the Platonic dialogue, *Dialoghi d'amore* examines the nature of spiritual and intellectual love, which is regarded by Abravanel as the principle dominating all existence and reaching its apotheosis in the love of God (*amore intellectivo di Dio*). This love, according to Abravanel, permeates the entire universe, and through it all creatures attain their perfection. God is identified with love; hence, the soul reaches God by loving him. The mutual love that exists between God and the universe creates a powerful circle of love, turning on every section of the cosmos from the highest celestial sphere to the lowest earthly stone. The goal of individual love lies in the joy of the lover in union with the beloved, who embodies all that is good and beautiful. Ultimate love involves the same union of God the creator with his creation. From this central theory derives a wealth of reflections on religion, metaphysics, mysticism, ethics, aesthetics, logic, psychology, cosmology, mythology, astrology, and astronomy. Abravanel's humanist thought is influenced both by the Neoplatonist philosophy cultivated in the fifteenth-century Platonic academy of Florence and by the works of Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol. This work, which typified Renaissance learning, was not widely known in Jewish circles; but it exerted considerable influence on sixteenth-century European thought and lyric poetry (e.g., Michelangelo, Tasso, Camoëns, Montaigne, Bruno, Spinoza) and was followed by a large number of imitative treatises. *Dialoghi d'amore* was first published in Rome in 1535 and within twenty years had at least five editions. The book was twice translated into Spanish and three times into French. A facsimile, *Leone Ebreo*, edited by C. Gebhardt (with introduction and bibliography), appeared in *Bibliotheca Spinozana* (vol. 3 [Heidelberg, 1929]) and in an English translation, *Leo Hebraeus*, by F. Friedberg-Seeley and J. H. Barnes (1937).

• **Yitshaq Abravanel:** Menahem Marc Kellner, *Principles of Faith* (London and Toronto, 1982). Eric Luwee, *Isaac Abravanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany, 2001). Jacob Samuel Minkin, *Abravanel and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (New York, 1938).

Ben-Zion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel* (Philadelphia, 1968). Joseph Sarachok, *Don Isaac Abravanel* (New York, 1938). Ephraim Shmueli, *Don Yitshaq Abravanel ve-Gurush Sarfand* (n.p., 1963). Collette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 393–397. J. B. Trends and Herbert M. J. Loewe, eds., *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures* (Cambridge, 1937). **Yehuda Abravanel:** Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1964), pp. 250–263. Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1959), pp. 128–136. Collette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 407–409.

—REVISED BY MORDECHAI Z. COHEN

ABROGATION OF LAWS. The abrogation of Torah law (biblical commandments) by the sages falls into three distinctly different categories: temporary abrogation, permanent abrogation, and incidental abrogation. Each of these three broad categories can be understood separately.

Temporary Abrogation. Jewish law recognizes the authority of the sages of every generation to suspend Torah laws on a case-by-case basis when the continued enforcement will be profoundly deleterious to the needs of the Jewish people. As Maimonides states (*Hilkhot Mamrim* 2.4) "just as a doctor may amputate a hand or a foot to save the patient's life, so too, a *beit din* may decree, in proper circumstances, a temporary violation of the *mitstot* to preserve all of them." However, these suspensions—derived from the conduct of Elijah on Mount Carmel, which violated Jewish law (*I Kgs.* 18.19–26)—may not be of any significant duration. One, and perhaps the only, exception to the temporary nature of the abrogation, is in the area of criminal law, where the Talmud notes that local courts have the authority to punish criminals if the court feels that without such punishment society might deteriorate into lawlessness. The court-ordered killing of a person in a situation where Jewish law would not normally sanction this person's death is considered a temporary suspension of the prohibition to kill.

Permanent Abrogation. Jewish law recognized the right of the Talmudic sages, whose ordination was considered part of the unbroken chain from Moses, to suspend permanently the fulfillment of any given commandment when such suspension could be done through inactivity rather than activity. Thus, the Talmudic sages decreed that one may not blow the shofar on Ro'sh ha-Shanah when it falls on the Sabbath, and that one may not use a *lulav* on the first day of Sukkot when that date falls on the Sabbath. Both of these decrees were permanent even though the effect of these Talmudic rulings was to abrogate the fulfillment of the biblical directive. A minority of later scholars limits this authority to cases where the Bible did not explicitly permit the activity that the sages sought to curtail. Although "Rava" and "H'isda" dispute as to whether the sages have the authority to prevent the fulfillment of a biblical obligation even through affirmative action (*Yev.* 89a–b), the normative decision is that the active permanent abrogation of Jewish law is a power not granted even to the Talmudic sages.