

# FAMILY REUNIONS

A dozen or so Modianos, who met almost by chance during a Caribbean cruise in January 2004, had an extraordinary experience. Most of them had never met each other before. Yet overnight these total strangers felt and acted like loving brothers and sisters. It was family love at first sight!

The cruise itself was a great disappointment. Yet, the discontent was swept overboard by the thrill of this impromptu family encounter. All those present knew about the research into the genealogy of the Modiano family. But this was quite different. It was a moving and exhilarating experience. They all seemed to wallow in the warmth of this unexpected family atmosphere.

They were too many to be able to sit at the same table for meals, but afterwards they would repair to one of the ship's unused salons to chat. At one of these gatherings the idea came up: why not have a global Modiano family reunion to share with others this exciting experience?

This is how the project was set in motion. But considering that Modianos live in 17 different countries, the next question was:

A reunion, yes -- but where?

Florence, one of the most beautiful cities of Italy and, why not, the world, came instantly to mind. For the Modianos Florence has particular significance since it lies half-way between Livorno (whose citizenship the Modianos have had for centuries) and Modigliana, the township that gave us our surname.

A message was sent out to all the Modianos on Mario's mailing list. The response was very positive. The reunion was masterfully organized by Guido Modiano, the Milan patent lawyer who had already greatly contributed to the genealogical research.

The Florence reunion took place between June 23 and 26, 2005. It was attended by some 120 Modianos and descendants from 14 countries in three continents. It was a great success.

This is the report that Mario sent out after the reunion to those Modianos who had not managed to go:

***The First International Reunion  
of the Modiano Family in Florence  
June 23 – 26, 2005***

The whole purpose of the Florence Reunion was to give participants an opportunity to enjoy a sense of belonging to a single great family, and to discover how, when Modianos meet, even if they are total strangers, they instantly relate to each other.

If this miracle of “family love at first sight” was achieved in Florence, then our first worldwide family reunion was an unqualified success. Reactions, so far, show that all 120 participants enjoyed this unusual experience sparked by what I call the “Modiano magic”.

Florence gave us the opportunity to relish this family feeling, explore our relationships, discover long-lost cousins, visit meaningful towns linked to our family history, and look forward to future and broader family contacts.

Let me tell those of you who were not there, what happened.

**DAY ONE**

Many “cousins” reached Florence on June 22 to avoid the rush, but the Reunion proper was launched on Thursday (23) evening with a cocktail party in a private reception room of the elegant Metropole Hotel.



This was the first contact among 120 family members. Thanks, first, to the large name-badges prepared by Guido Modiano and his ladies' team; secondly, to the enhanced doses of cognac I induced Giorgio, the barman, to add in the Sangria bowl, the atmosphere warmed up very quickly.

This was followed by a spirited and delightful family dinner in the course of which Guido, the reunion organizer, delivered the welcome address.

During this event Guido graciously offered me (Mario) a silver-plated plaque with an inscription of thanks for reconstructing the family tree. Armando Modiano of Athens offered Guido a similar plaque for organizing the Reunion.

## **DAY TWO**

The second day was dedicated to Modigliana, the Tuscan town (80 km or 50 miles northeast of Florence) that gave us our family name.

After lunch in a country inn, we were received at the Modigliana municipality where Mrs Oriana Carducci who is in charge of the archives, showed us pages in the town's book of records of 1566 which listed the decision to allow the "Jew Moise from Fano" to open a bank in town. Moise is possibly one of our earliest ancestors.

Mrs. Carducci took us on a tour of a part of the town that is still called "the ghetto". She told us that about 200 Jews had settled here as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There are even indications that they had set up a synagogue in a section of this vast compound.

Our excursion lasted longer than anticipated, so the program had to be revised and it was past dinnertime when we returned to the hotel.

### **DAY THREE**

Saturday's program was long but substantial and very exciting: first there was the family meeting in the hotel's conference room; then we heard an interesting lecture by Professor Michele Luzzati on the origins of our family; and, in the evening there was the gala dinner at Verazzano Castle in the idyllic setting of Chianti's wine-country.

The family assembly began with the showing of a ten-minute video-clip about the family's history produced by Micky Modiano of Athens. It was directed by the family's latest acquisition, Ioanna Modiano (who had married Joe Modiano of Athens barely a month before). The star narrators of the show were Milen wife of Johnny Modiano of Athens, and Alexandros Modiano, Joe's brother.

We were fortunate in choosing Raymond Modiano of Long Island, N.Y. to be our assembly chairman. He was the right man in the right place. He first called on Laurence Modiano of London to explain to the audience the family's new "logo" designed with the help of Guido's talented office draughtsman and presented in the video-clip. Laurence explained why we call it "logo" rather than coat-of-arms. Don't get any funny airs, please.



This is the logo for the Florence reunion. For an explanation of its symbols click [here](#)



Mario was then called upon to make my report on the progress of the research into the family's genealogy since the publication of the Modiano book in the year 2000. Since then the number of names on our family tree has increased from 1,800 to 3,000. It is still growing.

The report was interspersed with speeches by family members directly related to new family branches listed in the report. At one stage, the assembly expressed its gratitude to Italy for saving during the war so many Jews from extermination by the Nazis; we all stood up and kept one minute's silence in memory of the Modianos and all those who had perished during the war.

Perhaps the most impressive appearance was by Aybars Bora whose Modiano great-grandmother from Ezine (near the Dardanelles in Turkey) had converted to Islam with her Bar-David husband and their children, in order to avoid the anti-Semitic violence that was rife in that region in the early 1920s. The conversion was kept secret from the descendants of this branch.

Aybars who is a journalist by profession and is now branching off into film and TV production, told the amazing story of how he discovered that he was a Modiano descendant. It was a poignant account that brought tears to many eyes in the audience. There was a warm embrace between our chairman, Raymond, and Aybars, when they found that they belonged to the same Modiano branch (E9).



During the coffee break, some of the participants received copies of documents from the Salonika Jewish Community archives (which are withheld by the Russians) that concern themselves or their own branch; at the same time volunteer ladies were selling T-shirts with the family logo, copies of CDs with the video-clip and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Modiano book, as well as the original (printed) volume of the Modiano genealogy. All this was done in the hope of collecting funds to plug the deficit in the reunion budget.

When the session resumed, several participants gave short addresses (they were limited to five minutes each) mainly to tell their own wartime experiences, but also to encourage more family contacts at regional, national and international level. Already Roberto Modiano of Naples is organizing a reunion of Italian family members in his hometown next year.

Because we were running short of time – everybody had so much to tell – we broke off the session to give the floor to Dr. Luzzati, professor of medieval history at Pisa University, and an expert on the Jewish presence in Italy during the middle Ages. (For a report on the professor's address click [here](#)).

Prof. Luzzati spoke of the ease with which surnames of Jews changed as they moved from one Italian town to the next. He put forward an imaginary Modigliano family tree that could have sprang from a different Jew than Moise of Fano whom we regarded as the most recent common ancestor of the Modianos.



The family assembly resumed after Luzzati's speech with Rosa Modiano Miller who read a dramatic account of her own family's experience during the Nazi persecution in Salonika in 1943.

### ***The Gala Dinner***

The gala dinner in Chianti that same evening was a real treat. The Chianti countryside is very beautiful in June. Verazzano castle was impressively set on top of a hill, and we visited its well-stocked cellars.

Dinner was preceded by a wine-tasting session that contributed to heightened spirits. It wound up with a moving keynote speech delivered by Dr Renzo Modiano, the author, whose book "Di Razza Ebraica" (Of Jewish Race) tells how the persecution of the Jews of Rome in 1943 affected him personally as a child then aged 8.

Our chairman, Raymond, made a little speech of affection and love for the family in Ladino, a family language, he said, that had been sadly neglected during the morning session.

Laurence Modiano attracted a large audience around the grand piano to hear him play popular themes as the party broke up in time for us to be back in Florence by midnight.



**There were so many of us that we could not fit all into this picture taken in Verazzano, Tuscany just before the farewell dinner on June 26, 2005.**



## ***Florence: post-Reunion activities***

The post-Reunion program in Florence provided for a tour of the city and a visit to the Uffizi Gallery on Sunday; as well as a visit to Livorno, the city that gave us protective citizenship for centuries, on Monday. Florence is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and the Uffizi displays some of the most important Renaissance works of art.

The tour wound up with a visit to the interestingly grandiose Florence synagogue, which we had missed on Friday because the excursion to Modigliana had taken longer than we thought.

Livorno, the port-town itself is not renowned for its beauty. But its new synagogue is a handsome modern building that serves the religious and spiritual needs of a 600-strong local Jewish Community.

The visit was arranged by Fabrizio Bedarida, who had in the past explored the Livorno state and Jewish community archives for the Modiano genealogy. The community's secretary told us the history of the Jewish presence in that city and organized a small reception for our group.

We next visited the municipality's impressive archives where most of our recent ancestors and we are or have been registered. The chief archivist gave us a full tour of the building where thousands of voluminous folders are meticulously preserved.

At a local restaurant we were served no fewer than 15 courses of fish for lunch that were washed down with large quantities of local wine. By that time we were all fit for a siesta in our air-conditioned beds, but no, we still had to visit Pisa. The effort was well worth it in spite of the scorching sun. The visit to the "Court of Miracles" was stunning. Besides Pisa's famous Leaning Tower, we saw its impressive Dome and the Baptistery. And we learned that Pisa, in painting, architecture and sculpture anticipated the Florentine movement of the renaissance.

The reunion broke up shortly afterwards as most participants dashed off to return to Florence and pack, or even head directly for the airport to catch out-bound flights.



## ***REGIONAL REUNIONS***

Even before the Florence reunion, there was an impromptu family gathering in Mexico City in October 2004. It was beautifully organized in record time by Enrique and Nitsa Modiano a few months after we met them during the Caribbean cruise.

**Enrique Modiano from Mexico City describes**

### **"THE VERY FIRST MODIANO INTERNATIONAL REUNION"**

The arrangements were made. Hotel, restaurants, tours, buses and meeting places were booked. Costs were figured out. Guides and hosts were lined up, and in a short while, the idea came alive, and on the 29th September 2004 we started the events of the reunion with a WELCOME dinner in one of the restaurants of the *Presidente* Inter-Continental Hotel of Mexico City.

It was a very warm get-together. Each one of those present was asked to tell the audience who he/she was and his/her relationship to their Modiano origin. It was moving to see all those present realize that there was a very close-knit relationship between the locals and the visiting Modianos. As the speakers took their turn, the bond kept getting stronger and stronger. To this day all the Mexico Modianos still speak of that event).

That dinner was the starting point of our family reunion. The next day we set out on several tours and visits. The tours took us to the pyramids of Teotihuacan, the National University of Mexico, the historical center of Mexico City with its National Palace -- seat of the Federal Government -- where we saw some of Diego Rivera's best murals commemorating the Mexican Revolution of 1910, then to the Cathedral and the excavations of the "Templo Mayor" (just next to it), which show some of the foundations of the Aztec culture.

The visit to the extraordinary Museum of Anthropology of Mexico also contributed to heighten the excitement of this family meeting, also because -- odd as it may seem -- many of our Mexican participants had never been to some of these places, as happens in most cities -- the locals have never been "there".



**A small family group at the pyramids of Teotihuacan**



After the visit to the Pyramids we were all invited to the home of Freddy and Betty (Modiano) Revah. They had recently donated a Sefer Torah to our Temple, and, as the tradition requires, the Sefer Torah was visiting their home. Watching this ceremony and admiring the beauty of this precious gift, was a real treat.

On Friday night we all attended a beautiful Shabbath/Succoth Service at the Shaar Ha'Shamaim synagogue. Rabbi Abraham Palti extended a welcome to the visitors and wished them all the best, mentioning the roots of the Modianos from Italy, to the Ottoman Empire and then to the rest of the World. It just happened this was the first day of Succoth, so we said Kiddush at the Temple, before partaking of the traditional Sabbath dinner served in the premises.

After breakfast on Saturday we visited the campus of the National University of Mexico, before moving on to the Bazaar Sabado to admire the work of Mexican artisans. Invigorated by the delicacies consumed at the Bazaar's restaurant we headed for lunch at the old Hacienda de San Angel Inn, a restaurant set in the grounds of an old *hacienda* dating from the late 1800s.

On Sunday we went to the Ballet *Folklorico* of Mexico City at the National Palace of Bellas Artes. This was followed by a visit to the Centro Deportivo Israelita, the Jewish

Community center , a focal point for Jewish athletic, social and cultural activities. There followed lunch in a restaurant specializing in Spanish cuisine, the Altamira.

The culmination of the reunion came after lunch in the afternoon when Nitsa and I offered an open-house reception for all those that wished to say farewell to our newly-found "cousins", in our home, Sunday October 3rd.

The highlight of this reception was the presentation of the ***Modiano Shield and Coat of Arms*** in the form of a cake (see picture). **It was simply fantastic!!** Everyone cheered, laughed, some cried, because, as always, all good things in life must come to an end.



**The spectacular cake!**



*After the memorable launching of family reunions in Mexico City in the fall of 2004, and between the first and the second global reunions in Florence (2005) and Salonika (2007), there were two regional conferences – one in Southern California and one in Naples, Italy.*

*This is how **Roberto Modiano**, who together with his cousin Louisa, organized the Naples gathering, describes the family meeting.*

## ***THE MEETING IN NAPLES***

by Roberto Modiano

In the wake of the very successful family reunion in Florence in mid-2006, my cousin Louisa and I, suffering from acute withdrawal symptoms, agreed we could not wait for two years until we got together with our dear “cousins” again. So we decided to organize a “half-way” reunion in Naples.

Promptly messages went out to as many Modianos as possible by post, by telephone and through the Internet. Thanks to Louisa’s stubborn efficiency we managed to get in touch even with Modianos who had never been contacted before! The news caused much excitement in Italy as well as among the Modianos throughout the world. The final details of the program went out to those who had expressed an interest by April.



Our “in-between” reunion took place between June 1 and 4, 2006. Thirty Modianos and descendants came to Naples from three continents – from France, Greece, Israel, Mexico and the U.S. and, of course, Italy.

Our plan and purpose was simply to get as many Modianos together -- even if all we did was to sit in a room and chat. Well, then, DAYENU to use the term from the Haggada of Pessah which means “It would have been enough!”

- If we had a chat and no time to taste the Neapolitan cuisine with its pizza, mozzarella, and special cakes... DAYENU!
- If we had the chat and the great food, but did not see the great sights of Napoli, Positano, Sorrento and the Amalfi coast...DAYENU!
- If we had the chat and the great food and the fantastic sightseeing, but did not go to downtown Naples for some free shopping...DAYENU!
- If we had the chat and the great food and the sightseeing, and the free shopping, but not the great Neapolitan songs during our outings... DAYENU!

- If we had the chat, and the great food and the fantastic sightseeing, and the free shopping and the unforgettable songs, but not the two T-shirts specially printed for the occasion... DAYENU!

- And if we had the chat and the great food and the fantastic sightseeing, and the free shopping and the unforgettable songs and the souvenir T-shirts, but something went wrong...We would still say DAYENU because we were so happy to be together.

In fact the program included time for chatting, for good food, for sightseeing, for two social dinners, as well as a meeting with the Jewish Community of Naples, even a small souvenir from Naples for everyone.

The program which was planned and managed exclusively by Louisa and myself, ended with an unforgettable night-club dinner with Neapolitan songs by the exceptional Rondinella Sisters with the amusing assistance of some Modianos<sup>1</sup> invited on stage to give a hand with the show!

So, on the Sunday morning June 4 when bye-bye time came, we all agreed that everything went well. We were a little sad at the farewells but happy for the good time we had together.

Last, but not least. The international family reunions are great events. But the smaller, regional get-togethers offer the opportunity for "cousins" to rub elbows, to look into each other's eyes, and to hold hands. This is why the Naples meeting shall remain one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: The Modiano invited on stage is Roberto himself who revealed that night a rare talent for show-biz!



happiest memories of our lives. Louisa and I hope that there will be many more “in-between” reunions all over the world, so we can participate in ALL of them.



**Modianos in the idyllic setting of the Bay of Naples**



# ***A MODIANO MINI-REUNION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA***

By Arlene Mindus

The southern California Modiano mini-Reunion was held on Saturday afternoon and evening, February 4, 2006. Its purpose was to reunite those Modianos who met in Florence, Italy during the summer of 2005 while introducing those to other Modianos who were unable to attend. Haim and Ani Modiano graciously offered to host this reunion in their beautiful, spacious home in Fullerton joined by their three children: Natalia, Nir, Galit, and by her husband Assaf, and their baby son, Ari.

I live in Columbia, Maryland and decided to spend January and February with my sister, Marcia Divona, who lives in Tustin. My visit was the motivation for organizing the mini reunion. My son, Jason, who lives in Redondo Beach and my niece, Brooke Benlifer, from San Diego, joined me. Marcia's three daughters came with their families: Kathy and Simone Russek and their three children, Kara, Eddie, and Mariah; Lisa and Steve Gotlieb and their two children, Ryan and Samantha; and Suzanne and Henry Shin with their two children, Hannah and Andrew.

Arlene and Marcia's cousins, Joyce Feld-Glisson and Judy Blumberg made the trip from Knoxville, Tennessee and Dartmouth, Massachusetts respectively in order to attend the mini reunion. Their mothers, Lena, Rebecca, and Ruth are Modiano sisters.

Aaron Daniels came with his wife, Anita, and their daughter, Felicia. Their son, Michael and his wife, Janelle from Carlsbad, joined Victor and Doris Modiano from Sherman Oaks. Isaac Comfortes from Santa Monica came as did his older brother, Raphael, who lives in Los Angeles. He brought their 92-year-old mother, Lucy, from Pasadena. Victor Modiano from Anaheim, Raymond Modiano's brother, brought his friend, Jo An Sartin. Eliane and David Hary came from Santa Monica. Nir Modiano, originally from Woodbridge, Connecticut, is completing his residency at Stanford University in San Francisco and was able to come for



the weekend especially to attend the mini reunion.



**A small group of Modianos at the southern California mini-reunion**

A catered dinner with a variety of Middle Eastern dishes and deserts was the featured menu. Marcia made her famous lasagna to remind us of our Italian heritage. Those who arrived first helped Ani set up the food stations around the kitchen, but as more guests arrived, lively conversation resulted with guests gathering in the living room, family room, dining room, and outdoors by the pool area. The children were happily occupied in the

game room and in the home theater on the second floor. After dinner, Brooke was surprised with a cake and candles as everyone sang Happy Birthday to her. We all shared a special moment as we joined hands in a large circle in the living room for Havdalah led by Ani and Eliane Hary.

Many other Modianos who live in southern California were invited but unable to attend due to prior commitments. Those in attendance had a great afternoon and evening and look forward to future mini reunions in southern California!

And then there was Salonika!



The Salonika logo

*Notice, if you can, how the first vertical line of the M simulates the turrets of the White Tower*



***The 2nd International Reunion  
of the Modiano Family in Salonika  
June 21 – 23, 2007***

The family reunion in Salonika was an outstanding success. The main reason was because our family relates to Salonika far more than any other place in the world.

Here is the account by Anne-Marie Faraggi, a leading genealogist from Neuchâtel, Switzerland, who observed the reunion. The following account was published in the English edition of *La Lettre Sepharade* in its issue of October, 2007.

***LA FAMILLE MODIANO:  
RETOUR AUX SOURCES<sup>2</sup>  
Salonika June 21-23, 2007<sup>3</sup>***

After the Florence reunion of 2005, the second reunion of the Modiano family took place in Salonika (Thessaloniki). Italy and Greece, or more precisely, the cities of Modigliania and Salonika, are considered the two “cradles” of this family.

After several years of genealogical research, Mario Modiano, a long time correspondent in Athens for the London Times, wrote a book entitled “Hamehune MODILLANO: The

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<sup>2</sup> “The Modiano Family – Return to the Roots”

<sup>3</sup> (The Modiano Family Going Back to its Origins Salonika June 21-23, 2007)

Genealogical Story of the Modiano family from ~1570 to Our Days.” The author published his first version in 2000 in Athens, only for members of the Modiano Family. His research continued to evolve and the book is now available to the public on the following web site: [www.themodianos.gr](http://www.themodianos.gr). On this site, one discovers that the family’s ancestor settled in the 16th century in Modigliana, a small city not far from Florence. This is how the patronymic, expressed in various forms: Modigliano, Modillano, Moliano and Modiano, was acquired. At the beginning of the 17th century, the family settled in Salonika and continued to live there until 1943<sup>4</sup>.

Some of the 140 participants attending this second reunion were born in Salonika, but for the majority of them who had a parent or grandparents born in Salonika, this was a new experience. It was thus a real return to the origins of the family. The participants were walking on the ground where their ancestors had lived for over three centuries. The Torre Blanca (the White Tower) on the quay, an old jail from the time of the Ottomans that they had heard of, was becoming real.

The reunion started with a cocktail, followed by a meal in the seaside hotel Makedonia Palace. It permitted everyone to reconnect with or to meet new people. Coming not only

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<sup>4</sup> 1943 is of course the year of the deportation of the Jewish community of Salonika to the death/labor camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen Belsen. 96% of the Jewish population of Salonika perished. (Editor’s note)



from various places in Greece - but also from places all over the world such as France, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Monaco, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the USA - the participants were finding in this city a link with one another. According to Mario Modiano, these distant cousins, who often had just met, felt a common tie, a feeling of belonging to the same family.

A tour of the city reinforced this impression, showing them that they all had roots in Salonika's past, an architectural past with the Villa Jacob Modiano, which is now the home of the Folk Life and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia-Thrace. Conceived in the Art Nouveau style, a little motley, the structure is the work of the architect Elie Modiano (1881-1968). Built in 1906 as a residence for Elie Modiano's father, the banker Jacob Saul Modiano, born in 1857, the house was purchased by the municipality of Salonika in 1913. Elie, who had studied to become an architect in Paris, built other important structures in the city, such as the Modiano market (Greek name: Agora Modiano), which has kept its original name since 1924.

This market is a busy and lively center where one may find all kinds of food stalls. In the genealogical tree offered in the book, Jacob Saul Modiano, his wife Mathilde Hakim and their six sons, were the ancestors of some of the participants of the reunion: Modianos from Greece and Italy, the Daniels and the Confortès from the US and the Ezrattys from Paris, France. Their roots were there. In 1928, this branch stood out again by founding a charitable institution. In order to honor the memory of their father Saul Daniel Modiano, who had passed away in 1922, his children provided the funds for the construction of an old





**You cannot realize how difficult it is to ask 150 Modianos to say "cheese" all at the same time.  
Here posing on the verandah of the Makedonia Palace Hotel after the assembly.  
The idea was to have the White Tower in the background.**



peoples' home (the Saul Modiano Old People's Home) for needy aged residents. This foundation is still active and the home serves 34 residents today<sup>5</sup>.

Several officials of the city met with and praised the Modiano family: David Saltiel, president of the Jewish Community of Salonika, the city's prefect, Panayotis Psomiades and Salonika's mayor Vasilios Papageorgopoulos. They expressed their pride in receiving a family of the gente alta (the upper-class), which had such a strong impact on the city because of its knowledge and generosity, and had actively participated in the development and flourishing of Salonika by willingly sharing their financial resources. One day of the reunion consisted of various conferences; let us mention here a few.

In his talk about "How is the family search going?" Mario Modiano announced that a 7th version of his book will be ready by the end of 2007, and available on the web. He added that for reasons of age and health, he is looking for a successor to pursue his genealogical work on the Modiano family. He also added that he would be, of course, available to help with the transition. He is waiting for candidates to come forward.

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<sup>5</sup> The Home was not in operation from 1943  
- when residents of the home were deported with the rest of the population - up to 1974.  
The current building dates from 1981. (Editor's note)

The history of the Jewish Community of Salonika" was the title of the presentation by Yannis Mégas, an engineer by trade, but whose skills as an historian are established. He is the author of a book of old postcards representing Salonika<sup>6</sup>.

Dr. Bianca Maria Ciminelli, researcher in genetics in the Biology Department of Rome's Tor Vergata University where she collaborates with Prof. Guido Modiano, presented an "Update on the DNA research" and explained that her studies were on the male Y chromosome and to be part of the study, a saliva sample was necessary. Twenty-three participants volunteered. This analysis's goal is to find out if several members of the Modiano Family that Mario Modiano has not been able to attach to the same tree are, in fact, descended from the same ancestors' family, the family of Modillano rabbis, who settled in Salonika at the beginning of the 17th century.

Two films, one light and the other dramatic, were presented.

A video revealed the strengths and shortcomings of the male Modianos! Several women married to Modianos were interviewed and shared their thoughts about this subject. The consensus was that the male Modianos are "softies" who are always right or think that they are right!

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<sup>6</sup> "Souvenir. Images of the Jewish Community. Salonika 1897 -1917"  
1993 French/English Ed. Kapon, Athens, Greece ISBN: 960 7254 02 3.



David Gavriilidis' film on the Jews of Salonika, "Towards" made in part on the basis of archival films was dramatic. It relates the story of a Salonika child, who, during a visit of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, discovers pictures that make him relive the horrors of WWII, which his family, like all the others in Salonika, went through<sup>7</sup>. Very emotional, this film touched many in the audience.

One also needs to add the visit to the Jewish Museum, which is located in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood. Opened a few years ago, it displays pictures, exhibits containing traditional or religious objects, clothing and documents relating to the deportation of the city's Jews. Archives are being acquired and assembled in the Museum<sup>8</sup>.

A very interesting article on this particular subject has been just published by Avotaynu and reviewed in the previous issue of La Lettre Sépharade<sup>9</sup>.

The farewell dinner at the end of the reunion took place not far from the city in a seaside restaurant. All the descendants of the Modiano family realized how much the Modiano name had become a symbol of the city. They left rich with new memories. In two years, a third reunion is already anticipated... in Jerusalem!

***Written by Anne-Marie Faraggi***

***Translated from French by Rosine Nussenblatt***

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<sup>7</sup> The child imagines the life of his grand parents, whom he sees with interspersed images of archival extracts from the Museum.

<sup>8</sup> The director of the Museum, Erika Perahia Zemour, is appealing to the public to offer objects, photos and documents to illustrate the life of pre-WWII Salonika. She may be contacted by e-mail at: [jctmuseo@otenet.gr](mailto:jctmuseo@otenet.gr) or by mail at: Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, 13 Agiou Mina street

<sup>9</sup> Devin E. Naar "Bushkando Muestros Nonos i Nonas." Family History Research on Sephardic Jewry through the Ladino language archives of the Jewish Community of Salonika. Avotaynu, vol. XXIII, n° 1, Spring 2007.

# **The Third International Modiano Reunion, Tel Aviv, ISRAEL, 3-7 June 2009**

**c'tgr qt v'by**

**Moshe Barne'a & Vered Cassuto**

translated from the Hebrew by Semadar Millo

The Third International Modiano Reunion took place on June 3-7, 2009, in Tel Aviv, Israel. The Reunion was held at the Sheraton Moriah Hotel, on the seaside, and most oversea participants stayed in this hotel.

## **Wednesday afternoon, June 3**

The Reunion opened on Wednesday afternoon, June 3, with a coffee-and-cake party in the hotel's hall. Each family member got a badge with his or her name under their country's flag. For many, mostly Israelis, it was their first international family gathering, and the hall was very joyful. Some members gave speeches, and that was the informal opening of the reunion.

## **Thursday, June 4**

The next day we went on an excursion to Jerusalem, Israel's capital. The bus was crowded and everybody was very excited, especially those who were visiting Jerusalem for the first time. We were accompanied by a guide with comprehensive knowledge of the history, archaeology and geography of Israel.

The journey took a long time because of heavy traffic, but we enjoyed the magnificent view from the windows.

The visit began with a panoramic view of the old city of Jerusalem. After that we went to the Wailing Wall, which is one of the most important sites of the Jewish nation. In the Wailing Wall square, some of us stayed with the guide to hear an historical and archaeological description of the site. Others approached to touch the Wailing Wall's stones, to pray and to insert notes with wishes among the stones. One of our wishes is to hold similar gatherings in the coming years, and to have more and more family members coming to take part in them from all over the world.

We had a break for lunch at the Hotel Etz HaZait's restaurant. The oriental meal was very rich and diverse, and enjoyed by all.

Then came the second, and hard, stage of the excursion, which was the visit to Yad Vashem museum.

Each visit to the place is difficult, all the more so to a family that lost many of its members during the war. For all of us, older and younger, it was a powerful and unforgettable experience, and we all bowed our heads and kept silent during the visit.

On the way back to Tel Aviv we were still a bit gloomy, but the calming views and the mountains covered with forests along the road brought back the feeling that life must go on.

We reached Tel Aviv in the evening and had dinner at the hotel. Looking back, we think that after such a visit it would have been better to have left that evening free.



### **Friday, June 5**

According to the program, there was a choice between a free morning and a visit to the youth village of Hadassim. The village's school houses a sophisticated Chemistry and Physics Laboratory donated by a member of the Modiano family. About 30 people came on this visit. A bus sent by the village had picked us at the hotel and drove to the village. Hadassim is among the largest youth villages in Israel, and it provides residential facilities for immigrant children and for children from troubled households who are survivors of abuse and neglect.

The school functions as a normal regional school for about 1,500 students. Every morning children come from all over the region, and return home at the end of the day. This way the village children can integrate into a normal schooling system on the one hand, and enjoy the protection and support of the village on the other.

On entering the village we were welcomed by the manager. We started our excursion in the chemistry laboratory, watched an experiment in a chemistry class and had a chance to converse with the students. Then we entered the old chemistry laboratory so we could compare and evaluate the donation. Later we heard a lecture about the treatment and help given to the children residing in the village. We then visited the special foster care residences at the youth village for teenagers who are experiencing crisis in their lives. The meeting with the children and the "mother" who dedicates her life to upbringing and taking care of these children was extremely moving.

Toward the end of the visit the school staged for us a short musical show by two gifted graduates. We all joined in singing and were very cheerful.

The family member who donated the laboratory then decided to give the village another donation at the end of the visit; so some other members joined and did the same, thus increasing the Modiano family's gift to Hadassim youth village.

### **Friday afternoon**

On Friday afternoon we held the central event of the reunion – the meeting of the family members in the hotel's conference hall. This was the moment we had all waited for. Lots of Israeli Modianos joined us from all over the country, and the hall was packed.

To begin with we heard an interesting lecture from Mario Modiano from Athens. Mario, who had initiated the family gatherings, and thanks to whom we got to know each other, spoke about the family's history of emigration from Salonica to other countries in the past 400 years, as a result of historical events affecting Salonica. The lecture was simultaneously translated into Hebrew and Italian on the screen behind the speaker. Click [HERE](#) for the full text.

Later on we watched a presentation of family photos from all over the world. Some were new and updated, showing the younger generation, and some were old photos of family members who are no longer with us. Those present in the hall whose family members were shown in the presentation were asked to talk about them.

After we learned how the family was scattered worldwide we heard from Arlene Modiano-Mindus and Raymond Modiano about the beginning of the us. Reunions are held every two years, though occasionally there are smaller gatherings by family members who miss each other and can't wait until the next reunion. Photos from this gathering can be seen at the end of this report.

In the end, amidst great excitement, Gabriella Modiano gathered us all successfully for the traditional family photo.





The evening ended with a Friday night dinner at the hotel. Dinner was delicious and made a pleasant and tasty ending to an especially successful and exciting family gathering.

### **Saturday, June 6**

The bravest among us set out early in the morning for an excursion to Massada -- a rugged natural fortress of majestic beauty in the Judean desert overlooking the Dead Sea. It is a symbol of the ancient kingdoms of Israel, its violent destruction and the last stand of Jewish patriots confronting the Roman army in 73 A.D.



We went up by funicular. The view from above was spectacular and breathtaking – the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, against the desert. The excursion took a long time, but was very interesting. Our guide gave us a detailed historical survey of the place and the characters that built it and lived there. After the tour we traveled nearby to Ein Gedi, where we had lunch. Regretfully there was no time to bathe in the Dead Sea. Due to the drying up of the sea in recent years, its shoreline has retreated, and the way from the restaurant to the beach takes longer than it used to.

After a long and exhausting day we all sank into deep sleep on the way back to Tel Aviv.

### **Sunday, June 7**

Many family members who stayed in the hotel, after having breakfast together, met in the lobby for exciting farewells. Some prolonged their visit in Israel for further tours, while the others went back home on that same day, but all of us are already looking forward to our next gathering, in 2011.







# The Modianos share a beautiful family moment in Paris

A brief account by the 2011 reunion organizers

The most striking feature of the Modiano Reunion in Paris -- the fourth since 2005 -- was the massive participation of the family's younger generation, the largest ever recorded. What makes this even more remarkable is that this time there were overall fewer participants than before. The presence of the young Modiano was particularly noticeable on the dance floor of the cruise-boat 'Louisianne' during a delightful evening dinner-cruise in the river Seine, where they danced until the small hours of the morning.

Let us now go back to the beginning of the story.

The organization of this, the 4<sup>th</sup> Modiano meeting, got under way early in 2010. After having obtained the addresses from the previous organizers and Mario, we sent a mail to the family in order to get an estimate of the number of probable participants. We had about 100 positive answers. We thought this number could ultimately rise to 150. Then we drafted a program. By the end of 2010, 40 persons had registered.

In January 2011, a terrible tragedy struck: we lost Barbara (<sup>1</sup>\*), a key member of the team.

By May 2011, 80 cousins had registered. To keep the budget under control, we asked our own kin to help us. Many offered to give us a hand: Karinne, Serge's wife, for the overall organization; Sarah and Juliette, Viviane's daughters, for the logistics and the music; David, Barbara's brother, offered the help of his firm; Raphael, Serge's son, for the wine and sound on the cruise; Marie Claude, a friend of Viviane, for the translation. We thank them all warmly.

## LET THE FUN BEGIN!

*Thursday, 23 June 2011*

-Arrival of family members at the Hotel Crowne Plaza, Place de la Republique. At the registration desk each participant receives a name-badge and a bag containing the detailed program, useful city guides, and a welcome gift – a beautiful album of photos from of past reunions that Barbara had put together.

-The welcome cocktail is held in the terrace of the Crowne Plaza. Dinner follows in an adjacent dining-room in a very jolly atmosphere. Participants come from all over the world: Mexico, Brazil, USA, Hong-Kong, Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey and, of course, France.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Modiano Levitan was a keen organizer, the niece of Serge Modiano.

*Friday, 24 June 2011*

- Lunch in a community centre in the Marais. Greek menu and Italian wines. Visit of the Jewish quarter with guides in two groups of 30 persons. Very interesting visit (a very old synagogue and the Museum of Jewish Culture and History).

In the evening, everyone is free to go and have dinner in little groups in restaurants in the neighborhood of the hotel.

*Saturday, 25 June 2011*

- Morning visit of the Nissim de Camondo Museum. A beautiful mansion that belonged to his father, containing an incredibly rich collection of furniture and art objects from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The guides are very knowledgeable and we spent a very instructive morning.

Saturday afternoon is free for everybody to rest or do some shopping.

- Saturday at sunset: departure by bus for a dinner-cruise on the river Seine. Beautiful weather. Cocktails and organic-cheese-and-wine "*degustation*". Everybody on deck to admire Paris in the sunset. Dinner and music. Vera, Karinne, Charlotte and all the young generation invite us to the dancing floor. Vera is a very good Charleston dancer! Back to the hotel around 1h30. The youngsters stay on board to dance some more.

- *Sunday 26 June 2011*

A session with addresses from Mario, Bernard Guetta, Myriam Rebhun, Roberto Fischer, Jean Carasso, Maurice Israel and Roberto M. from Naples who makes us laugh with a video prank. The exchanges are very interesting and we learn a lot about the MODIANO and family life in old Salonika.

Unfortunately, twenty cousins have had to leave early to catch planes. There are about 60 of us.

- A vote is taken on where the next family reunion should be held in 2013. Mario suggests the American continent since most of the Modianos live in the States or in Mexico and it would be fair, he said, that after 4 reunions in Mediterranean countries, the next one should be in the western hemisphere. There was a demand for an Istanbul reunion, but Sami Eskinazi told us there were no young people there to organize it. Mario said that if people wanted to go to Istanbul, then we could revive an idea (originally made by Phyllis Modiano) to hold the reunion aboard a cruise-ship that would visit Istanbul. There was instantly strong applause approving the idea. Frida from San Diego suggested that as she runs a travel agency she could organize such a cruise in Aegean Sea. A vote was taken and the cruise idea carried it. Frida promised to look up prices and possibilities and report back.



### ***The most moving moments***

-Bernard tells us about the confidences he heard from his Modiano mother just before her death this year: after her parents were rounded up and sent to death camp during the war, she became a tramp in the streets of Paris at the age of 15. In freezing weather, loitering without even a coat, she meets a beggar who gives her a bottle of wine to drink. She gulps it down all the way. The man tells her: "Little one, listen and remember: now you must walk, walk, and walk and never stop". In a flash, Bernard understood the driving force in his mother's life: she had never stopped walking..."

-The book that Myriam wrote (just published in Italy) tells the story of her direct family and her grand-father who was a famous doctor in Ottoman Salonika who had migrated to Naples in the First World War.

-Michaela's moving tears...

### ***The funniest moments***

-The fictitious Dante Modiano of Napoli that Roberto, also from Napoli, discovered in a novel, and of course our Vera who amused us during those three days.

### ***The most surprising moments***

Mario's discovery of a Modiano descendant in Belize, in the middle of the jungle where he runs an ecological hotel; or the links between the Camondo and the Modiano families in Istanbul (they were next-door neighbors). There is a Modiano de Camondo family in France.

### ***And to conclude :***

The traditional reunion photo is taken on the terrace just before we sit for a brunch in the sun-drenched terrace. The meeting ends at 14h30. Mission accomplished. We have spent a delightful moment together. We miss you all already.

*Let us remind you that the Modiano Paris 2011 organizing committee was composed of : Barbara, Viviane, Mathilde, Charlotte, David, José and Serge.*

*(Text written by Serge Modiano and Viviane Ezratty-Livartowski)*

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*PS. The budget covered all costs and even allowed us to invite last minute guests for the Sunday meeting.*



The traditional family photograph at the end of the reunion

**For more pictures of the Paris reunion, click [HERE](#).**