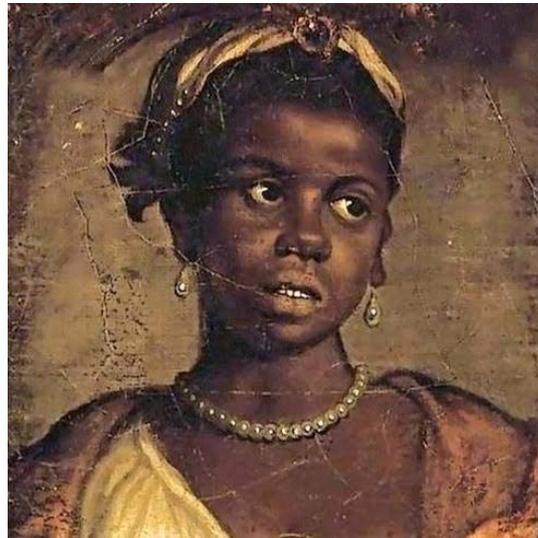


Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews



Introduction

The reason for writing this paper was to prove or repudiate claims that Emilia Bassano and other Bassano descendants were “black”, at the request of Katrina Langford (alias Katrina Brown) who was allegedly writing a movie, and offered to use my book in the film, but claimed “*the producer will only consider it if she’s black, or half black if her mother was Margaret Johnson*”. She asserted, “*my partner is Tiffany Haddish*”, who “*wants to play Amelia*” (Emilia). To be clear, I did not set out to prove the Bassano’s were black, but investigate the truth, whether black, white, or tanner Italian-Spaniards.

The above portrait has been shared around the world as a depiction of Emilia Bassano after being published on Facebook by Ansell Ortell in 2015, with the assertion that Emilia was the sole author of the Shakespearean works. The inference is that Emilia Bassano was a Blackamoor, which by definition is a “*member of the group of Muslim people from North Africa who ruled Spain from 711 to 1492*”.¹ This viral post, amongst other things, caused a young Hollywood scriptwriter to contact me regarding proving whether or not Emilia was a Blackamoor. Throughout this paper, I will prove that the Bassano family were not Blackamoors. When referring to “*black Hebrews*” in this paper, I refer to the original “*black Hebrews*” cited in the Tanakh (Old Testament), such as the lineage of Solomon and the “*blackish*” Shulamite, but not necessarily the ‘*Original African Hebrew Israelite Nation of Jerusalem*’ who claim to have descended from the *ten lost tribes* of Israel.²

The Assertions

The portrait cited by Ortell above is not of Emilia Bassano, but is a circa 1550 “*portrait of a Moorish woman*” that was painted by a student at the Venetian School of Paolo Veronese. I suppose

¹ Cambridge Dictionary: Moor. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/moor>

² Jewish Virtual Library, Minority Communities in Israel: Black Hebrews. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/black-hebrews>

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

this may be why many people have assumed the Bassanos were *'Blackamoors'*. Ortell further asserted:

Amelia Bassano is the lady who wrote all of Shakespeare's plays. Because she was black they would not publish her work. She died in poverty because she never received a dime for her work. Shakespeare was illiterate and could barely write his own name.³

Most of my readers know by now that I have written a major academic work investigating the "early plays" of Shakespeare that were performed in London prior to the birth of William Shakespeare and Emilia Bassano. Those who follow my Facebook page would know that Volume 1 of *'Genesis of the Shakespearean Works'* is about to be released. Consequently, I have already proven that Emilia did not pen "all" of the Shakespearean plays, although I believe she did pen at least eight of the "latter plays".

Ortell also asserted that Emilia died in poverty without her work being published. This is also false, because Emilia's poetic work of *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum (Hail God, King of the Jews)* was published in 1611. The title should have indicated immediately that Emilia was not a Blackamoor (black Muslim), but a Jew. In fact, Emilia Bassano was the first Jewish woman in England to declare herself a poet in her 1611 'booke' of poetry.

As a Jew who embraced Jesus Christ as King from an Essene perspective, Emilia was merely writing of the ignorance of Pharisees and Sadducees, who spent their days debating Oral Judaic law. This is abundantly clear in her statement:

Zeale, Lawes, Religion, now they doe pretend

Against the truth, vntruths they seeke to frame.⁴

As a skilled poet, Emilia was extremely careful with her words to protect her own life. Those before her were not so fortunate. Thomas Kyd and especially Christopher Marlowe learned the ills associated with writing against the theologically acceptable custom of the day. In May of 1593, Kyd and Marlowe were arrested for suspected involvement in a manuscript containing "vile heretical Concepts denying the deity of Jhesus Christe our Savior". Without trial, Marlowe was stabbed to death, allegedly over a dispute of payment of a bill. Therefore, it is not surprising that Emilia wrote in a guarded style to protect her own life.

Antonio Bassano in his 1544 *Sefer ha-Refu'ot* (Book of Remedies) refers to his 'true Hebrew' heritage from the land of his forefathers. This expression was also used by the dramatist of *1 Henry IV* in the words of Falstaff (a 'true Hebrew Jew'):

You Rogue, they were bound, euery man of
them, or I am a lew else, an Ebrew lew.⁵

This canto in our modern language should read:

You rogue, we did tie them up, every single one of
them, or I am a Jew, a true Hebrew Jew.⁶

³ Ortell, Ansell (19 August 2015), WOW, What Do You Know?!!! - Amelia Bassano is the lady who wrote all of Shakespeare's plays.
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10206991532087546&set=a.1732006060755.2095127.1256612986&type=3&theater>

⁴ Bassano (Lanyer), Emilia (1611), SALVE DEVS REX IVDÆORVM, Richard Bonian, a free copy of the works can be found in the Renaissance Editions, University of Oregon,
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/lanyer1.html>

⁵ F1, 1H4 2.4.1137-8.

⁶ 1H4 2.4.1137-8 modernized by Peter Matthews.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

Why is this significant you may ask? Because the dramatist drew a distinction between a 'Jew' and a 'true Hebrew Jew'. Allow me to explain why. In the Tanakh (Old Testament), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were Hebrews, not Jews. 'A Hebrew' in Deuteronomy 15:12 is the word עִבְרִי transliterated as 'Ivri',⁷ which is taken from the root word Eber (Abraham's father), a descendant of Shem, meaning 'region beyond'.⁸ Some suggest it means to *pass over* or *cross over the Jordan*, but this cannot be until after Jacob.

In Jonah 1:9 when the storm struck, Jonah was asked what is your country and your people, Jonah replied, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."⁹ The word "Hebrew" was used to describe Abraham, Joseph, Jonah, all of Jacob's descendants in Egyptian bondage, as well as all of Israel. The distinction the dramatist makes is a Hebrew as opposed to a Jew is a true descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. An example of this is found in King Kuzari, king of the Khazars, who adopted Judaism, but was not a true Hebrew, as recorded by Rabbi Judah ha Levi.¹⁰

Interestingly, Numbers 12:1 calls the wife of Moses a Kushite woman as follows: "While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman".¹¹ Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* recorded Zipporah as "dark-skinned" – "often is his gold complexion dimm'd, and every faire from faire some-time declines" telling us very plainly that the Patriarchs were originally dark skinned because of interbreeding with Kushite/Ethiopian Jews. Thus, we know Moses sons Gershom, Eliezer, and grandson Shebuel were black Hebrews.

The word 'Jew' can be a person born a Hebrew or a person who converts to Judaism. Personally, I do not agree with the term 'Jew' because it was originally an ethnic slur against Hebrews in Greek antiquity, although it is a common term today that is accepted by Hebrews and Jews alike. The word 'Jew' comes from the Greek word αἷα (blood) translated as 'a Jew' from the root Greek word Ἰουδαῖος meaning 'Jewish' but also refers to an 'usurer' (moneylender) in an evil context from Ezekiel 22:12,¹² well depicted by the dramatist in *The Merchant of Venice*.

The dramatists of the Shakespearean works were well-educated Hebrews, with a thorough understanding of the difference between being a true Hebrew Jew and a Jew who has chosen Judaism as their religion. In essence, it comes down to lineage. The Bassano family were true Hebrew Jews from the lineage of David, which means they were descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; they were certainly not Moors (Muslims).

I have proved beyond reasonable doubt that Ortell's assertions are almost entirely false - Emilia Bassano did not pen the entire Shakespearean works, her works were in fact published, and the Bassanos were not Muslims. The one assertion that needs further investigation is the possibility that they were black. The Bassanos certainly were not Blackamoors, but could they have been black Hebrews?

⁷ Strong's Concordance: 5680 - Ivri. <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/5680.htm>

⁸ Strong's Concordance: 5677 - Eber. <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/5677.htm>

⁹ Jonah 1:9 NLT

¹⁰ Ha Levi, Rabbi Judah (1140), *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith*, translated by Rabbi N. Daniel Korobkin, 2nd Edition, ISBN 9781583308424.

¹¹ Numbers 12:1 NLT.

¹² Strong's Concordance: 2453 - Ioudaios. <http://biblehub.com/greek/2453.htm>

Black Hebrews or Tanned Italian-Spaniards?

There has been much talk over the past few decades about Emilia Bassano-Lanier as the “Dark Lady” of the sonnets, however, Ortell gave the impression that Emilia Bassano was black-skinned. We must investigate the veracity of these claims. In my 2013 book *Shakespeare Exhumed: The Bassano Chronicles*, I identified the overleaf miniature portrait by Nicholas Hilliard as Emilia Bassano.

The portrait is currently housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (housed in the British Galleries, room 57a, case 3). These miniature portraits were predominantly produced by a nobleman seeking a suitor for his daughter, or a suitor seeking the hand of marriage of his beloved.¹³ I believe this is the very nature of the miniature portrait, one capturing her suitor Alphonso Lanier, and one soon after their marriage of Emilia. As Emilia’s father had passed away by 1593, Emilia was aligned with the surname Holland of her sister, hence the reason the portrait was identified by historians as “Mistress Holland”.¹⁴



Figure 1 - Miniature Portrait of Emilia Bassano

I have no doubt that this miniature portrait is of Emilia Bassano due to the imageries utilized on her bodice and hair comb. I obtained a high-resolution image from the V&A Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum) and enlarged the image by one thousand times the size on a large high-resolution screen to find on the bodice: *honeybees, the Tree of Life, and stags*. The two main emblems on the Bassanos earliest coat-of-arms were three *honeybees* above the *Tree of Life*, and the stag refers to the family coat of arms of her husband, Alphonso Lanier. The hair comb at the crest of her head is actually a row of double-winged six-legged *honeybees* all in a line.

¹³ Wikipedia: Portrait miniature, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_miniature

¹⁴ Matthews, Dr Peter D (2013), *Shakespeare Exhumed: The Bassano Chronicles*, Bassano Publishing House, Australia, ISBN 9780987365255, pp. 244-7.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

The inscription contains the reference '*Ano Dni. 1593. Ætatis suae. 26.*' effectively meaning '*In the year of our Lord 1593 of his (or her) age 26*'. Emilia Bassano was baptized on 27 January 1569 and was married on 10 October 1592; therefore this miniature was commissioned soon after her marriage to Alphonso Lanier. As the miniature would not likely to have been completed until late 1593 or possibly even 1594, then the age of 26 is a perfect fit for Emilia. Furthermore, Emilia was not born on 27 January 1569. Depending upon the festivities in the Church at the time, and whether or not Baptista baptized had Emilia immediately, she may have been born in late 1568, which would make Emilia 26 at the time.

Thus, Emilia Bassano may have been a white English woman whose parents were Baptista Bassano, a black Jewish Italian-Spaniard, and his English court concubine Margaret Johnson. Alternately, Emilia may have been dark-skinned and as it was common place in England, she was wearing stark white foundation like Queen Elizabeth I.

Bassanos referred to as 'Black' in Depositions

Creechurch Lane was a regularly visiting place of the earlier Bassano family, because the earliest secret Jewish Synagogue was on Creechurch Lane, London. In fact on 23 September 1584 Arthur Bassano (1547-1624) and other court musicians (probably his brothers) were arrested at Creechurch as below:

Sept. 23. Declaration by John Spencer, sheriff of London, of the misdemeanors committed by Arthur Bassano and other Her Majesty's musicians, at the muring up of a way and gate at a place called Creechurch, Aldgate, pretended to be privileged. Their violence and insolence towards the Recorder of London.¹⁵

It seems the matter was not heard until 3 October 1584, as the below entry provides further details:

Oct. 3. John Spencer, Sheriff of London, to same. Details the circumstances under which Arthur Bassano and other Her Majesty's musicians had been committed to custody. Will attend the Council, as ordered, on Thursday next. Incloses: Declaration by Mr. Sheriff Spencer, of the insolence and opprobrious language of Arthur Bassano and his fellows, to himself and the Recorder of London, and obstructing their officers while muring up the way and gate at Creechurch, Aldgate.¹⁶

In the same location at Creechurch, Mark Anthony Bassano was arrested after a clash with Soldiers only ten months later on 16 August 1585:

Aug. 16. Depositions of Valentine Wood and Tho. Norton, relative to an affray between Mark Anthony Bassano, one of Her Majesty's musicians, and certain soldiers without Aldgate, near the Bars. Opprobrious words uttered by Bassano against the soldiers, then on the point of departure for Flanders. Bassano in danger of being slain, the soldiers thinking him to be a Spaniard.¹⁷

The depositions (witness statements) by John Spenser described the Bassanos as "*a little black man was booted*" probably referring to Arthur Bassano, and "*a tall black man*" probably referring to one of his brothers.¹⁸ John Hudson suggested this entry proves the Bassanos "*were of*

¹⁵ Queen Elizabeth - Volume 173: September 1584, Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1581-90 (1865), pp. 200-204.

¹⁶ Queen Elizabeth - Volume 173: October 1584, Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1581-90 (1865), pp. 204-210.

¹⁷ Queen Elizabeth - Volume 181: August 1585, Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1581-90 (1865), pp. 256-265.

¹⁸ Deposition by Spenser against Arthur Bassano and other court musicians, August 1584. Also refer GB-Lpro, SP12/173, No. 25, 47.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

Moroccan/ North African ancestry,”¹⁹ which is quite fanciful as they themselves declared they were of Hebrew descent. Emilia in *‘Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum’* wrote of “*blacke foil underneath his beautie*”, referring to “*the roote of Jessie*” – the Patriarchal lineage of King David.

We must then examine why the Bassanos acted so viciously against Spenser and later Fleetwood regarding their arrest. William Fleetwood was the Recorder of London in 1584. Fleetwood ordered the Bassano brothers be taken to Newgate Jail. When the Bassanos learned it was Fleetwood, they reacted vehemently, almost prophetically, asserting it would not end well for them. In the end, Fleetwood and Spenser were made to apologize and pay the Bassano’s food and wine bills run up while in prison.

Spenser was known for rounding up foreigners, especially Jews and Spaniards. The “black” (as they were called) Bassano brothers were not only musicians, but the Bassanos were merchants for many generations. So much so that they held monopolies over trade in England, given only to favoured courtiers.²⁰ Spenser was one of the Bassano’s direct competition in bringing goods back from Venice, Spain and Turkey. It was in his best interests to have the Bassanos arrested. Could he have referred to them as ‘black’ because they were swarthy, or was it because they resembled Jewish Spaniards whom he despised? In the 16th century, many English Puritans despised Italians, Spaniards, and especially Jews. In the legal case of Jacques Francis, a Venetian sailor by the name of Anthony de Nicholao Rimerio asserted Francis was “*a morisco [Spanish: Moor] born where they are not christened*” and no weight should be given to anything Francis said. In the deposition of Domenico Erizo, he described Francis as a “*pagan infidel black*”.²¹

In fact, many 16th century English people referred to Jews as “black”, whether they were in fact black or merely dark-skinned Europeans, because they believed Jews were associated with “the devil” in the murder of Christ. They failed to recognize that Jesus Christ surrendered to the Will of his Father – this was the Divine Will of God. Jews have been accused of poisoning wells and even bringing the Black Plague, although all these claims have now proven to be false. It was merely fearmongering by many writers, such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker and James Howell who wrote of Jews as a “*curse*”, “*uncouth looks*” and a “*stench*”. William Brereton wrote of Jewish men as “black”. Quite often Jews with long dark hair were depicted as “black men”. Therefore, the usage of “black” in the deposition may have merely used as a slur against the Bassano brothers because they were Jewish Italian-Spaniards.

In the case of Mark Antony Bassano, he was later perceived as a “Spaniard”, even though he was born in England and had Venetian parents. Some writers as a result have assumed that Mark Antony was an Italian-Spaniard Blackamoor. He certainly was not a Blackamoor, but was a tanned Italian-Spaniard in a white Anglo-Saxon England? Interestingly, Emilia referred to Cleopatra as “blacke”, partner of Antonio. We know that Antonio Bassano married Elena Nasi, a Nasi “*Rex Iudæorum*” that can be traced all the way back to Muslim occupied Babylon where Rabbi Makhir ben Yehudah Zakkai Nasi (Makhir) (725-793AD), later renamed Theodoric, made a pact with the Merovingian Kings to betray the Caliphate.

¹⁹ Hudson, John (2017), This is How we Know Amelia was ‘Black’, Dark Lady Players Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/darkladyplayers/posts/1423134831056755>

²⁰ Menzer, Paul (2006), *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage*, Susquehanna University Press, ISBN 9781575910772, p119.

²¹ Depositions of Anthony de Nicholao Rimerio and Domenico Erizo, HCA 13/93, ff. 275-6 (28 May 1548) and HCA 24/17.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

In 756AD Abd al-Rahman, the Muslim Umayyid emir of Cordoba, refused to recognize the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. Prince Charlemagne while standing in for his father Pepin the Short, visited Bagdad and attempted to get Rabbi Makhir to surrender Moorish Narbonne under the Umayyad governor Yusuf ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Fihri on the pledge of a grant of extensive lands, marriage of a royal princess, and an act that called forth of a protest against Pope Stephen III, Rabbi Makhir agreed on the basis he held royal status of the title of Jewish Principate.²² The result was an uprising in Narbonne and the Umayyid's rule of 40 years ended in 759AD.

Makhir did in fact receive his royal status of "*Theodoric IV*" and married Auda Martel, Pepin the Short's sister, Charlemagne's aunt, and was granted lands just as Charlemagne pledged. Therefore, Makhir's son was William of Gellone. Because of this marriage to Auda Martel, Makhir's descendants became royalty in Burgundy, Spain, Bavaria and Saxony.

Court Documents

Historic documents prove that the Bassanos frequented England as early as 1517 before they emigrated to England at the request of King Henry VIII on 1 October 1539. The Bassanos had performed numerous times in England and there is evidence that some of the brothers resided in England from around 1531.²³ Whilst Henry VIII had a passion for Venetian music, it was Queen Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536) who had a passion for Spanish and Italian music, and she seemed to have an attraction to black servants. Her father was Ferdinand II, King of Sicily and Aragon (a region of Spain), hence her passion for Spanish and Italian music. Queen Catherine's entourage included a "black trumpeter" by the name of John Blanke, where the Exchanger Roll of 1507 recorded:

Item to John blanke the blacke Trumpet for his moneth wages of Novembre
last passed at viij d the day.....xx s [20 shillings]²⁴

There was also a Fraunces Negro who worked in the royal stables.²⁵ Therefore, it is quite plausible that King Henry VIII sought out the Bassano family for Queen Catherine. This would suggest that the Bassanos might have been black considering the sons of Antonio Bassano were referred to as "black" in later depositions.

Bassanos Performed in the Blackamoor Inn

The Derbyshire descendants of Antonio Bassano have also come into question regarding one record of performance at *Blackamoor Inn* in Ashbourne. From this record, some deduce they were Blackamoors, which I have already proven is false. However, we must investigate this record to repudiate this claim.

Christopher Bassano was a Vicar Choral at St Oswald's Church. There are notes to confirm his brother Richard visited the church in 1710 to set up the new organ with Thomas Cook, who was also of Staffordshire. In true family tradition, on Sunday 6 August 1710, around the time the '*Bassano's Church Notes*' were penned, after the service had concluded, Richard Bassano played

²² Chronicle of Moissactheo

²³ Matthews, Dr Peter D (2013), *Shakespeare Exhumed: The Bassano Chronicles*, Bassano Publishing House, Australia, ISBN 9780987365255, pp. 86-7, 95.

²⁴ Exchequer roll of 1507, E 36/214, f. 109 (7 Dec 1507).

²⁵ Kaufman, Miranda, *Blacks in Tudor Britain*. <http://www.mirandakaufmann.com/blacks-in-tudor-britain.html>

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

“a grave sonata” in an “elaborate Italian manner” before a church full of people. He sang Psalm 121 “as an anthem” and “set a new standard to be aimed at”,²⁶ most likely with Christopher on violin:

I look up to the mountains— does my help come from there?

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!

He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps.

The LORD himself watches over you! The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night.

The LORD keeps you from all harm and watches over your life.

The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.²⁷

Philo claimed the practice of singing psalms originated from the Jewish Essenes.²⁸ The fact that the Bassano family held Jewish, predominantly Essene traditions, is of particular interest as we investigate the origin of the Shakespearean works filled with Jewish Essene imagery. Kabbalists use Psalm 121 with amulets “to ward off Lilith, the Queen of demons”.²⁹ There was a pocket-size Medieval Jewish book used by Kabbalists called *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim (Book On the Use of Psalms)* that was also banned by the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of 1559, alongside the Bassano’s Kabbalistic books. *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* claims if a person sings Psalm 121 reverently seven times, you will be safe from all evil occurrences by angelic protection.³⁰ Further information is contained in Volume 1 of *Genesis of the Shakespearean Works*.

This performance by Richard Bassano mentioned above, sparked a revival in Derbyshire with 5,000 people from all the neighbouring gentry filling the Church on 13 September 1710 to hear the orchestra with Christopher Bassano on violin. The celebrations continued most of the day with a concert in the evening at Blackamoor’s Head Inn.³¹ In the records of the St Oswald’s Church, there is an entry as follows:

1710. The performers [the Bassanos] were entertained at dinner at the parish charge, service being ended at about 2 o’clock, and at night in the great parlour at the Sign of the Black moor’s Head. They made afine consort both of instrumental and vocall musick, and so concluded the musick of ye day.³²

²⁶ Cox, John Charles (1879), Notes on the churches of Derbyshire (Volume 2), <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/j-charles-john-charles-cox/notes-on-the-churches-of-derbyshire-volume-2-ala.shtml>

²⁷ Psalm 121, New Living Translation.

²⁸ Smith, William; Cheetham, Samuel (2005), Encyclopaedic Dictionary Of Christian Antiquities (in 9 Volumes), Concept Publishing Company, ISBN 9788172681111, p94.

²⁹ Levine, F (2000), The Use of Scripture in Practical Kabbalah. <http://kabbalah.fayelevine.com/letters/pk010.php>

³⁰ *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim (Book On the Use of Psalms): Psalm 121*. Also found in *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses (Part 2)* translated by Joseph Peterson (2005). <http://www.esotericarchives.com/moses/67moses2.htm>

³¹ Shaw, George E. (1998), *Matters of Life and Death: History in Baptisms, Marriages and Burials as recorded in the Parish Registers of St. Oswald’s Parish Church, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, England - 1539 to 1945*, <http://www.dustydocs.com.au/link/8/25474/137723/baptisms-marriages-burials-limited-1539-1945-ashbourne-town-on-the-internet.html>

³² Shaw, George, historian: *The Green Man and Black’s Head*. <http://ashbourne-town.com/pubs/green/index.html>

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

The Bassanos continued their celebrations at the Blackamoor Inn in Ashbourne. Some commentators seem to think this means the Bassano were Blackamoors. However, the Inn was named so because of it was a traditional English bar made of “*dark wood panelling topped by a dark red frieze and ceiling*”,³³ not necessarily because it was frequented by Blackamoors.

Conversely, there were a lot of pubs in Derbyshire, some still standing today from the 16th century. Why did the Bassanos choose the Blackamoor Inn? Could they have been black? Could they have been attracted by the name of the inn? Or could it have just been in close proximity to the Church?

Records show the Blackamoor Inn was located at 10 St John St, Ashbourne, and was later renamed Black’s Head and amalgamated with The Green Man Royal Hotel next door.³⁴ St Oswald’s is located on the same road only 480 metres away, so it was a short stroll. Thus, it could be because they allowed Blackamoors in the pub, or it could simply be because it was the local traditional English bar within walking distance. It might have had nothing to do with ethnicity or colour of their skin. We might never know the answer to this question.

London Descendants

Conversely, we must also consider the descendants, because our hereditary traits do not lie. As some of you may know, I happened to marry a descendant of Antonio Bassano, and my eldest son looks very similar to the early sketches of Shakespeare. Whilst my son is not a descendant of William Shakespeare, it makes me wonder whether the early sketches were of the real dramatists of the “*Early Plays*” later attributed to William Shakespeare.

Antonio Bassano had eleven children, so the Bassano family is quite extensive. One of Antonio’s lineages moved to Staffordshire, then onto Derbyshire, before many of them moved back to London. Some emigrated to the United States and some in the last generation emigrated to Australia. One particular lineage was Alessandro Bassano (1829-1913), who was a photographer who served Queen Victoria using the company Bassano Ltd. Interestingly, Alex (as called by the English, although his name by birth was Alessandro) took numerous photographs of actors in many of the Shakespearean plays. He also left us a quite a number of family portraits.

³³ Derbyshire - Pubs and Inns with a literary connection, <http://www.homesteadbb.free-online.co.uk/derbys.html>

³⁴ Grist, Mark, The Lost Pubs Project: Blackamoor Inn. http://www.closedpubs.co.uk/derbyshire/ashbourne_blackamoorinn.html

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

In some photographs Alessandro had quite pale skin and in some darker skin, but some of his children did exhibit signs of his Italian-Spaniard heritage.

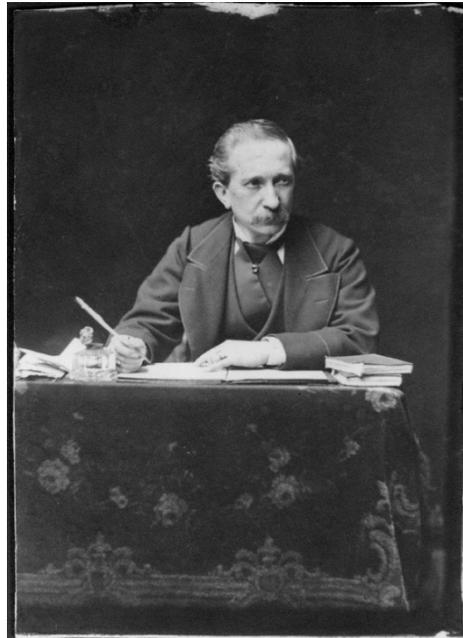


Figure 2 - Alessandro Bassano.
© National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 3 - Alessandro Bassano, family portrait. Circa late 1890's. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

© 2018 inclusive Dr Peter D Matthews. All rights reserved. This academic paper may be freely used for academic purposes, subject to citing Dr Peter D Matthews as the author.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

The only photographs that have any hint of dark skin is a self-portrait of Alessandro circa 1880 above, and a circa 1860 portrait of Alessandro's eldest daughter Camilla Teresa ('Lily') Bassano. Alessandro was a 10th generation English born descendant of Antonio Bassano. The rest of his family exhibits little evidence of any "black" heritage.



Figure 4 - Alexander (born Alessandro) Bassano.
© National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 5 - Camilla Teresa ('Lily') Serjeant
(née Bassano). © National Portrait Gallery,
London.

Later Derbyshire Descendants who Moved back to London

I had the pleasure of spending some months with Ada Goodwin-Bassano (1916-1995) when she visited Australia for my wedding in 1988 with her granddaughter. I remember Ada fondly as a sweet little Jewish lady of Venice with quite an olive complexion. If it were not for her strong English accent, I would not have believed Ada was born in England. In her elderly years she never ventured out much, yet she was quite dark for an English woman. Her daughter, Valerie Drinkwater, is now in her mid-seventies and does not venture out much either, yet she also has a distinct olive complexion. Overleaf are photographs of Ada Bassano in her late teens and an early photograph of her mother, Florence Emily Bassano (1884-1955) who has a similar dark-skinned (but not black) Jewish-Italian appearance.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews



Figure 6 - Ada Goodwin-Bassano (1916-1995)



Figure 7 - Florence Emily Bassano (1884-1955)

As you can see by the above photographs, both Florence and Ada were quite dark-skinned for women born in England. This could merely be their Italian-Spanish heritage, but they are both 12th and 13th generation descendants of Antonio Bassano.

Imagery in the Sonnets

A numbers of scholars have used the imagery in Sonnet 127 of the 'Dark Lady' to refer to Emilia Bassano as "black". Sonnet 127 below refers to her having "raven black" eyes alluding to the possibility that she was a bastard of "black" heritage, which was not counted as 'fair' in Anglo-Saxon England:

IN the ould age **blacke was not counted faire,**
Or if it weare it bore not beauties name:
But now is blacke beauties successiue heire,
And Beautie slanderd with a bastard shame,
For since each hand hath put on Natures power,
Fairing the foule with Arts faulse borrow'd face,
Sweet beauty hath no name no holy boure,
But is prophan'd, if not liues in disgrace.
Therefore my Mistersse eyes are Raven blacke,
Her eye so suted, and they mourners seme,

© 2018 inclusive Dr Peter D Matthews. All rights reserved. This academic paper may be freely used for academic purposes, subject to citing Dr Peter D Matthews as the author.

Were the Bassanos Blackamoors, Black Jews, or tanned Italian-Spaniards?

Dr Peter D Matthews

At such who not borne faire no beauty lack'
Slandering Creation with false esteeme,
Yet so they mourne becoming of their woe,
That every tounge faies beauty should looke so.(Sonnet 127)³⁵

As you will see when I release my major academic work of '*A Complete Commentary of the Shakespearean Sonnets*', I do not agree with these theories at all referring to Emilia as the Dark Lady. They are baseless conjecture. My work on the Sonnets will prove otherwise.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Bassanos were not Blackamoors (black Muslims). The first generation Bassanos that emigrated to England were true Hebrews who embraced Jesus Christ as Lord. They embraced Jewish Kabbalah, the Babylonian Talmud, the Zohar of Mantua, and the ancient Jewish Essene doctrines contained in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. The Bassanos were not of Negroid heritage, but Hebrew heritage. Therefore, the claim of Emilia being a Blackamoor (black Muslim) is hereby repudiated.

The sons of Antonio Bassano were identified as "black", and much of their writings were focused upon the true Hebrew origin, which included being "black" as recorded in Scripture. To conclude, I suggest the Bassanos were *black Hebrews*; certainly not black Africans, Muslims, or Blackamoors. Langford's claim is proven and Ortell's claims are herein repudiated.

³⁵ Q1, Son. 127:1892-9.