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THE ORIGINS OF THE ASTRONAUT PROGRAM IN ISRAEL 1998: BETWEEN ASTRONAUT  
TRAINING AND PAYLOAD DEVELOPMENT

**Abstract**

The paper is the second in a series of essays which portray the origins of the first Israeli astronaut project – that culminated in the spaceflight of astronaut colonel Ilan Ramon, on the space shuttle Columbia on the STS-107 mission, that ended in tragedy just minutes before landing on February 1st, 2003.

In the paper the scientific aspect of the project will be discussed, including the selection of the scientific payload, MEIDEX. Through never before researched internal documents from the Israel state archives, handwritten minutes from meetings, including Ilan Ramon's own notes, the story of the program will be analyzed - including the increasing involvement of the air force in the project.

Interviews with the experiment researchers and the air force project officer enable to through light on various aspects of the program like never before.

The paper will cover the time period of 1998, a critical year for the decisions on the scientific experiment and the start of training for Ilan Ramon in Houston, Texas.