

The SCRIBE

Journal of Descendants of Babylonian Jewry

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Editorial

AFTER A lapse of some years, it has been decided to resume publication of "The Scribe". May I recall that the periodical was named after the famous biblical "Ezra The Scribe" who left Babylon about the year 478 B.C.E. to return to Jerusalem to propagate the incomparable teachings and values of the Torah and generally to stimulate Jewish consciousness. His return followed that of Zerubbabel and Yeshua in 538 B.C.E. in accordance with the Cyrus Declaration comparable to the Balfour Declaration of our times. The great Babylonian Talmud, produced over a period of 3-4 centuries early in the Common Era was a direct result of the stimulus to scholarship originally provided by Ezra.

Since the destruction of Jerusalem's First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 B.C.E. and the deportation into captivity there of the Jews of the Kingdom of Judah, there has been a continuous period of sojourn in that part of the world, (later known as Mesopotamia, and, after the First World War, as Iraq), of the Jewish community. It was of this same community that the Psalmist sang (Psalm 137): "...and they hanged up their harps by the Rivers of Babylon and wept at the Remembrance of Zion". It was also in this same Psalm that the famous words occurred which became the clarion call of the Return to Zion dramatically organised by Dr. Theodor Herzl in 1897: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning... if I set not thee above my chiefest joy."

But the curtain was finally rung on that particular glorious period of Jewish history so full of colour and incident — and there were many such periods of glory in Jewish history — with the barbaric public hangings of nine innocent Jews in Baghdad on January 27, 1969. It was this horror

which brought on to the world stage the cause of Jews of Arab Lands. Just two decades before there had begun the mass exodus of the 150,000 Jews of Iraq, mostly to Israel after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Since then there has taken place the amazing "Ingathering of the Tribes of Israel", as Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion described the mass emigration to Israel of Jewish communities not only from the Middle East but also from Europe, America, the Far East and Africa. It has served to emphasise what I would call the "romance of being a Jew", namely the enormous diversity of the Jewish People with their differing backgrounds, cultural experiences and social mores all yet characterised by an overall unity of faith and fate.

This special issue coincides with the convening in London of the Second Conference of the World Organisation of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) from 28-30 November 1983. The first conference was held in Paris in November 1975. The aim of the conference is to focus world attention on the plight of Jews still in Arab lands, especially in Syria, fortunately few, but still in dire danger, and the position of nearly 800,000 Jews who had to leave their homes in Arab lands since 1948, mostly for Israel, with their claims and rights, and above all their aspirations for peace and well-being.

We believe that, together with our brethren from other Arab lands, and, it need hardly be said, our Ashkenazi brethren who were and are foremost in the leadership and organisation of the Zionist movement — the national liberation movement of the Jewish People — we shall build an Israel that is free, prosperous and beneficial to all. For as Herzl said in his vision of the Jewish state: "The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth and magnified by our greatness".

P.S.G.

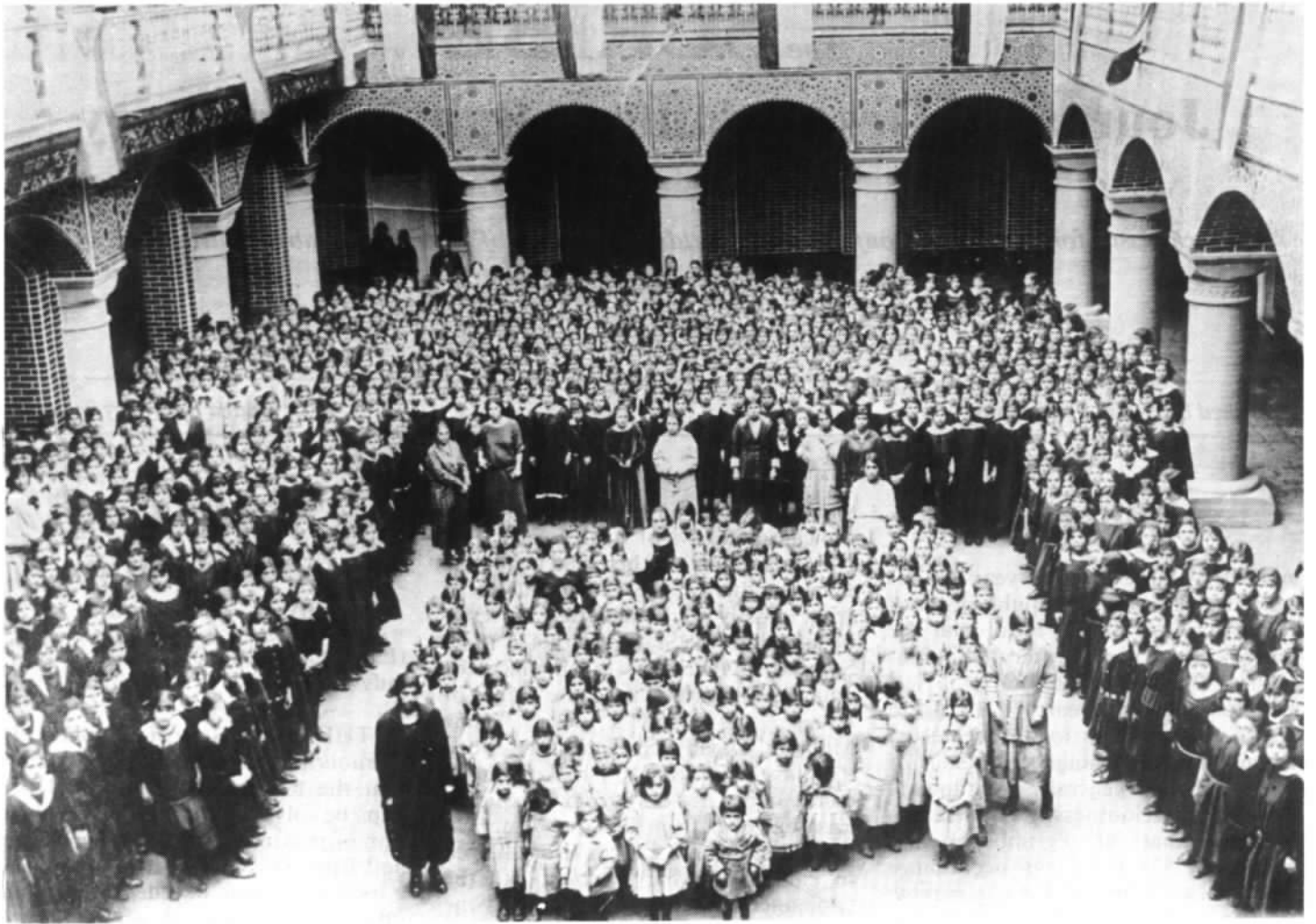
Middle East Confederation

by N. E. Dangoor

(Extract from *Chronicle* Vol. 3 No. 3
July 1983)

IN THE APRIL issue of *Chronicle* Mr. Teimourian put forward the suggestion that the Kurdish problem could perhaps be solved by promoting a federation of present-day Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. This is a wishful dream and unrealistic. Such a federation would upset the balance of power in the region and pose a serious threat to peace. It would be opposed and resisted by Israel and its Arab neighbours alike. The presence of Kurdish minorities in these four countries is not enough reason for uniting them in one entity with one end in Europe and the other end in Central Asia. But a union of a different configuration has a better chance of resolving not only the chronic Kurdish problem, but also other minority problems there, including the Palestinian.

The area covered by Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Arabia is a precise geo-political and historical region, being the cradle of civilisation, the fountain of religion, the crossroads of three continents and the home of many ancient national groups. Its fertility and strategic importance made it the prey of foreign invaders throughout history. The Arabs were destined to play a unique role in the historical development of this region. Sheltered in their desert, they were relatively immune from foreign invasions, but were always ready to pounce at the right time on neighbouring territories. Thus, after centuries of warfare between the Byzantine and Persian empires that sapped their energies, the desert Arabs, under the banner of Islam, could defeat both powers. By their ability to subsist in conditions not



Laura Kadoorie Girls' School, Baghdad



Boy Scouts of Rahel Shahmoon School, Baghdad

Middle East Confederation

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suitable to their rivals, the Arabs have been able to retain and consolidate their conquests and to fan out into the outlying regions of the Middle East as the general climate became warmer. This process has continued both in peacetime and in the wake of military action. Likewise, by destabilising the region, the Arabs have succeeded in creating a continuous flow of emigration from the Middle East of Jews, Kurds, Lebanese, Christians, Assyrians, even the more advanced Arabs, who are scattered all over the globe but who would have been invaluable to the development of the region. By the same process a sizeable Israeli diaspora has been mushrooming in Europe, Canada and the U.S.A. Middle Eastern politics and events have to be viewed and understood in this light. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire nothing came out of the self-determination that was promised by the Allies to the various national groups of the Middle East. It is said that the Ottoman "millet" concept, under which a large measure of autonomy was granted to various racial and religious minorities, had to give way to the modern national concept — but this has not succeeded. "Arabs, Jews, Kurds, Seljuk Turks, Persians, Assyrians, Telkaifis, Armenians — how to mould such a composite collection of races into a single nation? Sunnis, Shias, Jews, Christians, Sabians, Yezidis — how to lessen the friction between such a variety of creeds?" (The Heart of the Middle East by Richard Coke).

Imperialism

In the end imperial and oil policies favoured treating with the dominant Arabs and everything was handed over to them. There has been an obsession in the world in modern times that democracy means the rule of the majority. Majority rule as an expression of democracy only holds true in a homogeneous society where the differences are over minor issues. In a society divided by race, language, religion or colour, the rights of all groups, large and small, must equally be ensured and protected. This principle would solve Ireland, South Africa, Cyprus and the Middle East.

Of course, once in the saddle, the Arabs would not agree to share power with the other groups or allow them any form of self-rule. Hence, the Assyrian massacre of 1933 and the relentless suppression of Kurdish up-

risings in their struggle for autonomy. In 1918, a few months after the Balfour declaration, Prince Feisal, later King of Iraq, declared before a large audience at the Albert Hall, "Palestine for the Jews and Arabia for the Arabs."

Subsequently Arab attitudes changed. When the U.N. voted the partition of Palestine in 1947, the Arabs agreed to accept a plan of Jewish immigration without a state. When Israel was established, they agreed to the partition plan. Since the Six Day War, they have offered to accept the 1967 borders. These are all false promises, for the Arabs cannot in the long run accept situations which go against the grain of pan-Arabic aspiration. Their aim would always be the elimination of Israel as a foreign body, or cancer as they call it.

Refugees

After the establishment of Israel, many Palestinian Arabs fled on the advice of Arab governments who wanted them out of the way and were confident to bring them back in triumph. Shortly thereafter, there was an exodus of similar numbers of Jews from Arab countries to Israel and it was widely recognised at the time by the powers and indeed by the Arab governments themselves, who allowed their Jews to leave for Israel, that there was thus a logical and desirable exchange of populations — like many others that took place after the war in Germany, India and other countries. But while Israel absorbed its refugees after many years of hardship in transit camps, the Arabs deliberately left theirs unsettled, although they had all the land and all the money to settle them, and kept them as a political weapon and a lever against Israel in their continuing effort to defeat the Jewish state.

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as the direct result of Arab refusal to recognise Jewish political rights in the Middle East: and, having become refugees, the Palestinians should have joined the long queue of national groups aspiring to achieve their full rights in the Middle East: Jews, Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, etc. By wielding the gun the PLO tried to jump the queue. Zionism was the liberation movement of the Jewish people. To the extent that it seeks to destroy the State of Israel, the PLO is not a liberation movement, but an arm of Arab imperialism.

Regionalism

The Arabs say that the Palestinian problem must be solved by Israel. The Israelis maintain that it is an Arab problem. In fact, it's a regional problem if only because of the interest taken in it by all the neighbouring countries. This and other problems in the Middle East cannot be solved piecemeal. The solution must be global, for there can be no peace for the Palestinian refugees while the material and political rights of the Jewish refugees are ignored. The solution must be global for there can be no peace in one corner of the Middle East while the Lebanese Christians are faced with a life-and-death struggle: while 6 million Kurds cannot attain autonomy: while the Armenians and Assyrians remember their massacres and their stolen lands: while the Shiah majority in Iraq are oppressed: while the Arabs control 5 million square miles of territory and non-Arabs are denied any territory. These are not isolated problems and must be solved together. The solution must be global for there can be no peace in the Middle East while a few Arab rulers squander most of the oil wealth and embark on ruinous adventures. The solution must be global, for peace, law and order in the Middle East are indivisible. The Arabs have acted irresponsibly in their attempt to Arabise the whole region. As such they have forfeited the right to lead the Middle East.

The peoples of the Middle East who often suffered together under foreign domination but were never united in freedom could then organise themselves into a confederation that would seek neither to Arabise, Islamise or Sovietise the Middle East: a confederation that would ensure autonomy, freedom and prosperity to all the people of the region who will be free to live and work everywhere — a formula which may satisfy Palestinian aspirations.

Religious Toleration

•Roman Emperor Julian 361-3, who renounced Christianity, declared all religions to be equally tolerated.

•Persian king Hormuzd IV 579-590 declined to persecute Jews and Christians remarking, according to Tabari, "As in a large territory there are many kinds of soil, so it is fitting that a great empire should contain many kinds of opinions and ways of living".

•Caliph Al-Mamun 813-833, while prohibiting schisms of established religions, declared that any ten persons (minyan) could form a new sect.

Some facts about Jews of Arab Lands

1. Since 1948 over ¾ million Jews have left Arab lands as a result of the adverse policies of their governments. This is to be borne in mind when considering the position of half-a-million Palestinian Arabs who left the country when Israel was established in 1948 and invaded by the armies of her Arab neighbours. Most of the Jewish refugees were settled and rehabilitated by Israel at enormous expenditure in contrast with the Arab refugees still languishing in refugee camps because Arab governments have refused to assist them. It is clear that an exchange of populations has occurred.

2. The important Security Council Resolution 242 which refers to refugees and their plight must also be extended to cover the position of Jewish refugees as has been stressed by successive Foreign Ministers of Israel and suitable compensation must be made to them for their properties confiscated by Arab governments.

3. The present plight of Syrian Jews now numbering about 4,500 is particularly acute as they are denied fundamental human rights in flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Syria is a signatory. These Jews are subject to severe restrictions and persecuted and are especially denied the right of emigration. They are thus hostages to fortune and some of them were killed when trying to flee from Syria after the October 1973 war launched against Israel by her Arab neighbours. Their lives are at stake.

4. The Jewish communities of Arab lands, numbering over a million Jews before the Second World War have been living in these countries of the Middle East and North Africa for over 2000 years, well before the Arabs invaded these countries from Arabia with the advent of Mohamed who preached the new religion of Islam in the 7th century A.D. These Jewish communities had their own sovereign territories, e.g. Mehoza (Iraq) 5th century; Himyar (Yemen) 4-6th century; a Berber kingdom (Morocco) early 7th century — well before the rise of Islam. In the Koran — the Muslim Bible — all Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, belonging to monotheistic faiths founded before the rise of Islam, are accorded the status of "Dhimmi" i.e. a "protected" but inferior status subject to certain restrictions such as paying a special poll tax denying them equality with Muslims. These "dhimmis" have been subjected to persecution and discrimination throughout the centuries.



Presenting an illustrated scroll addressed to the Shah of Iran on the occasion of the 2,500th anniversary of Cyrus of Persia — and his Declaration — in 1971. (l to r) Iranian Ambassador Afshak, Mr. N. Dangoor (holding scroll) Mrs. Dangoor and Mr. Gourgey.

To A Dreamer

by Meer S. Basri
(Translated from Arabic)

I beheld the dream. Oh, What beautiful visions,
Oh how gracious the life of dreamers!
The Procession of the Ages flashed and dimmed,
So clear and auspicious.
All the years of life, and days of childhood,
Illuminated by their joys and sorrows.
They look bright, seen from afar,
Pure as a mirror of heaven.
And the travels by land and sea,
Cities of the Orient, domes of gold,
And people, a kaleidoscope of colours and dresses.
All pass before the eye, are renewed,
Exhibited, sublimated, multiplied,
Then they vanish like air bubbles.

5. The claims and rights of Jews of Arab lands, especially those relating to compensation and access to their holy places in these lands such as the tombs of Jewish prophets and sages, must be taken into account in considering various proposals to solve the Arab-Israeli disputes of over three decades.

P.S.G.

Spot an Ancestor

A FURTHER selection from the register of military taxpayers of the Baghdad community of 1892.

Efrayem Nissim Efrayem
Salah Nissim Efrayem
Ezra Efrayem
Shaul Yosef Eliahou
Moshi Yosef Eliahou (Dellal)
Ezra Agha Heskell
Shaul Rahamim Belboul
Eliahou Abdulla Belboul
Menashe Abdulla Belboul
Yosef Abdulla Belboul
Dahood Shalom Belboul
Menashe Dahood Shalom Belboul
Hayim Shalom Belboul
Abraham Hayim Shalom Belboul
Yacoub Moshi Belboul
Ezra Yacoub Moshi Belboul
Moshi Heskell Belboul
Yizhaq Meir Belboul
Khedhoury Abraham Belboul
Heskell Shalom Bekhor
Habib Raphael Bekhor
Heskell Yosef Bekhor

N.E.D.

(Photos from the collection of N. E. Dangoor)