

Editorials

Iraqi Jewish Martyrs

THE DATE OF 27 January 1984 marked the 15th anniversary of the atrocious public hanging of 9 innocent Iraqi Jews in Baghdad's so-called Liberation Square. Over a quarter million Iraqi Arabs thronged in the Square to witness this shameful spectacle which shocked the civilized world and brought to its attention the plight of Jews from and in Arab lands. Many world statesmen condemned this atrocity at the time. It was a famous American ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Arthur Goldberg who declared that "as we protest loudly about the position of Soviet Jews and other flagrant violations of human rights, so must we protest about the position of Jews of Arab lands." This event denoted the last chapter in the 2500-year old history of Iraqi Jewry originating in Babylonian times. Suffice to say that the utter poignancy of the situation was realised when the day after the hangings the brothers of two of the martyrs only came to know of the tragedy on seeing their photographs in the press. When one hears so much of Arab and other refugees — and rightly so, on humanitarian grounds — one should not forget the Jewish refugees from Arab lands, let alone those who survived the Nazi holocaust.

Syrian Jewry

AS IF TO underline the plight of Iraqi Jews, news was received of the killing in Aleppo, Syria of a pregnant Jewish lady, Mrs. Lilian Abady, and her two small children on 29 December 1983. The Syrian authorities who are amongst the most vicious of Israel's Arab enemies — witness their presence in Lebanon now — do not allow the emigration of the 4500 Jews in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Syria is a signatory, and do not give them adequate protection in their country.

The Jewish community of Syria, like that of other Jewish communities in Middle East countries, lived there many centuries before the Arabs came with the rise of Islam in the 7th century C.E. It is time that the media and public opinion generally gained a clear perspective of the whole Middle East situation, including now the dangerous Iran-Iraq war, if justice is to be done.

Every year Shabat Zachor, which is the Sabbath before Purim, is now observed as Syrian Jewry Sabbath when sermons are preached in Synagogues and prayers recited to commemorate the deaths of four young Syrian Jewish girls whose corpses were found on the border between Syria and Lebanon in March 1974 as reported in a Beirut daily, "An-Nahar." They were caught trying to escape from Syria, tortured and murdered. The Syrian authorities have the responsibility for this atrocity for making it illegal for Jews to leave Syria.

*Blessed art Thou, O Lord,
our God,
King of the Universe,
who bringeth forth
bread from the earth.*

The Staff of Life

by N.E.D.

ALTHOUGH the Bible starts with the beautiful and moving story of the creation of the universe and the creation of time, Genesis is essentially the story of civilization which, by definition, started when man settled down to develop agriculture not so long ago. The historical Adam, therefore, was the discoverer of wild wheat which started agriculture and as such Adam is the father of civilization. Agriculture was a great turning point in the evolution of the human race which until then subsisted on hunting animals. In keeping with ancient tradition Adam is honoured by naming him as the First Man, the progenitor of the human race. Bread itself is accorded a unique place of honour at our tables, having a special blessing, and by treating it as sacred. The full grace after meals is recited only when bread has been eaten with the meal.

The aphrodisiac quality of wild wheat prompted the story of the Fall which is often associated with the dawn of sexual awareness. In fact one of the opinions in the Talmud states that the forbidden food that Adam ate in the Garden of Eden was wheat.

The story of Cain and Abel shows the subsequent struggle between the two actions — the old hunter and the revolutionary farmer. Indeed the story of the Garden of Eden was the usual yearning after "the good old days" whenever people embark on a new venture or a new way of life.

At the end of the Ice Age as the glaciers continued to retreat, the fauna that had been an important food supply for the hunters of the Old World became extinct. Mankind became more numerous and more active and craved for a new source of food. Adam's cereal was the answer and in search of suitably watered fields man had to move north where at the

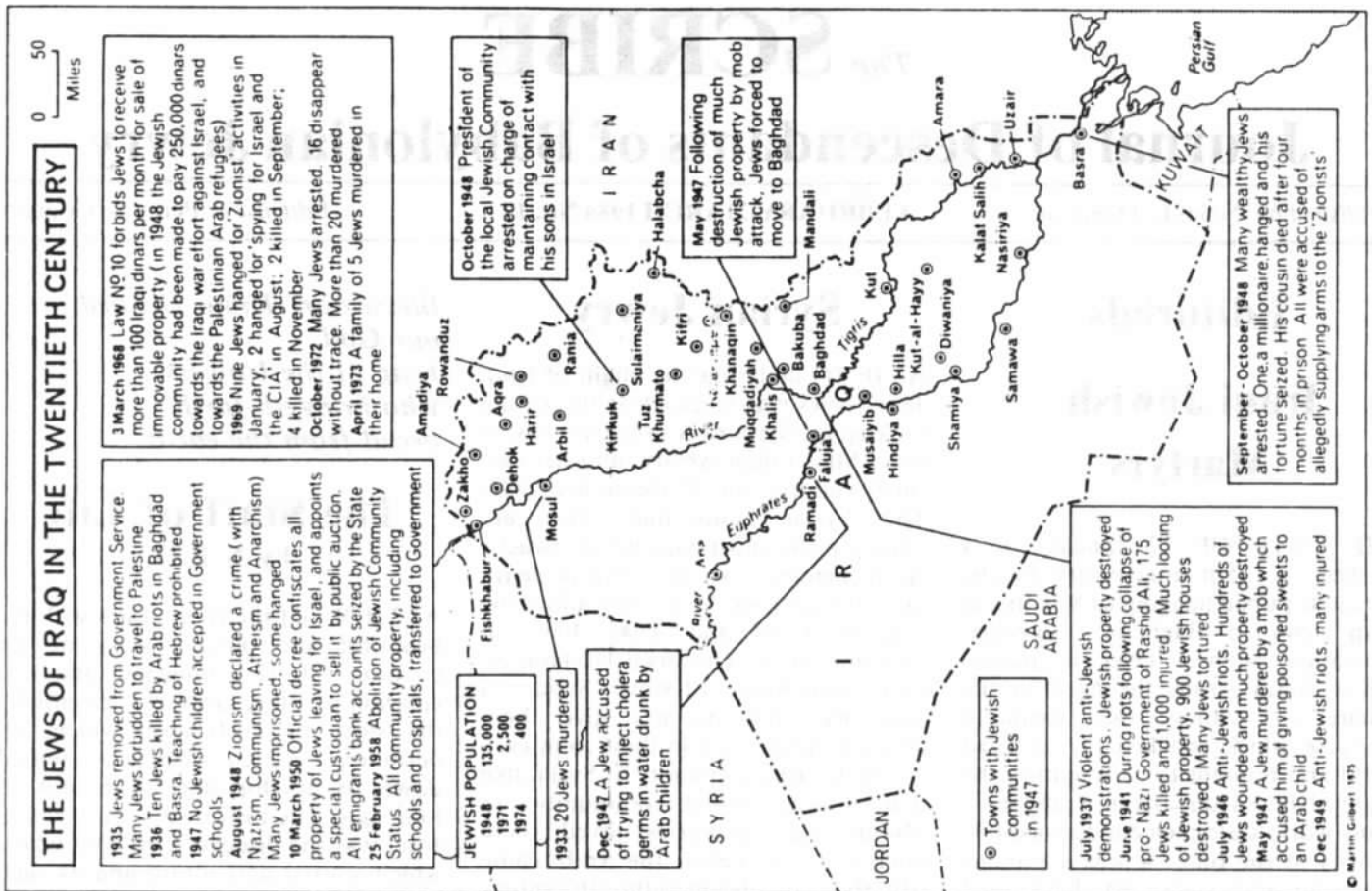
Israel and Ishmael

DESPITE THEIR enormous wealth, Arab governments are unfortunately still distinguished by confusion, dictatorship and terrorism. This is in striking contrast to the orderly processes of parliamentary democracy as prevalent in Israel. Even in biblical times a famous non-Jewish prophet, Balaam, praised Israel instead of cursing her as bidden by a royal enemy of Israel at the time. This praise is expressed in the well-known phrase: "How goodly are thy tents, O Israel

and thy dwelling places, O Jacob."

Is it not time that Western and other governments bring as much overt pressure to bear on Arab governments as they do on Israel to negotiate peace and put their house in order? And now far more serious and dangerous than the Arab-Israel conflict is the Iran-Iraq war with its enormous losses in men and material, including oil supplies, and the possibility of dragging the super-powers into the conflict.

(continued on page 3)



Courtesy: Martin Gilbert

AT THE GALA EVENING AT WOJAC CONFERENCE



(L. to R.) Justice Arthur Goldberg, Mrs. Eban, Mr. Abba Eban M.K., Mrs. Tamman, Mr. Leon Tamman, Minister M. Ben-Porat, Mrs. Dangoor, Mr. N. E. Dangoor, Mr. P. Gourgey, Mrs. Basri, Mr. M. Basri.

The Tower of London

By Meer S. Basri

(Translated from Arabic)

(1)

O Tower of London, invincible river fortress,
Stronghold of the knights, will you break your silence?
Nature has smiled on you this bright day
And Time for you relented his steady pace.

And the visitors have come, a noisy crowd,
Interrogating your walls about past ages.
And many a phantom wailing in the deep caves,
Observed the living humans disgusted and weary.

The Jewels of the Crown are well guarded,
They shone on the heads of English kings in the days of glory.
They have seen the splendour of palaces; but now
They peep as fair maidens from under their veils,
Dazzling the eyes of the rabble.

(2)

Hail, O lofty tower, baring its battlements
And hidden ramparts, and the secrets of the past,
The terrible jails, the blue blood flowing
On the dusty pavement.

Princesses of peerless beauty and brilliant youth
Bow their heads under the executioner's axe.
Oh, the awful death, oh! the unrelenting axes!
If the horrible night could utter a word.
If it could reveal the secret woe,
If it could resound with echoes of forgotten ages,
Recount the tragedies of concealed vaults,
The visitors would have shed their tears,
And inquired: What happened,
What were those evil years and nefarious days?

(3)

History has told blood-curdling events.
It recorded the humility of peoples and the pomp of kings,
The terrible massacres of endless wars,
And many a vile and many a magnanimous deed.

The strong, arbitrary despot chained the people with fetters of bondage.
He lived in his palace in luxury and magnificence,
Little did he care for the misery of the masses.
Time passed. The people's era has dawned in the wake
Of revolts, repressions and reprisals,
And the people submerged the poor individual.
In the name of the people the dictator rose to oppress the people
And to build on the ruins of the world
A glorious palace bathed by streams of blood.

The Staff of Life

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earliest known village of Jarmo in the Kurdish foothills and Jericho in Israel the first farming communities were established many thousands of years ago. Today, two-thirds of the food calories consumed by the human race is provided by cereals.

Bible commentators are puzzled why

the generation of Adam was allowed only fruit and cereals but that after the Flood meat was allowed. In the early days of agriculture all animals were still wild and meat was hard to come by. The place of Noah in the march of civilization is that he domesticated animals. This is graphically illustrated by the story of the Ark and the zoo that went into it. Noah is likewise honoured by naming him and his family as the sole survivors of the Flood.

Claims for Compensation

THE LONDON Conference of WOJAC (World Organisation of Jews from Arab Countries) held in November-December 1983 reiterated claims for compensation to be presented at an appropriate time to Arab governments which have either confiscated the property of, or otherwise done injury to, the Jewish citizens of their respective countries. We wish to stress that such claims must be made not only in respect of individual Jews but also for the Jewish people who have maintained a continuous presence in the Middle East, contributed substantially to its prosperity and are thus entitled to a just share of the region and its resources. This is a point made by a "letter to the Editor" appearing in the Jewish Chronicle dated 9 December 1983 under the heading "Why I wept by the waters of the Thames," and published in this issue. While the public sessions of the conference were well-organised, the same cannot be said of its business sessions criticisms of which were voiced by representatives of major Jewish organisations, on different occasions.

FROM THE JEWISH CHRONICLE
9 DECEMBER, 1983

Why I wept by the waters of the Thames

Sir,

Tears came to my eyes at the resurrected conference of Jews from Arab countries, held in London last week, for its petty and naive objectives and for its trite arguments, ignored by foe and friend alike.

For reasons of its own, the Israeli establishment has persistently refused to make use of the main argument that thirty years ago there was in fact an exchange of refugees — the 800,000 Palestinian Arabs who left Israel and the 800,000 Jews from Arab countries who came to Israel. While Israel absorbed its refugees, the Arab governments deliberately kept theirs in camps as a lever against Israel.

The conference was scheduled to start on November 29, the date in 1947 of the UN partition resolution. But Jewish rights in the Middle East do not stem from the UN resolution, nor from the terms of the Mandate, the Balfour Declaration or even biblical promises. God did not promise us a national home in China or South America but in the region which was our habitat since time immemorial.

Abraham emigrated to Canaan to escape persecution and to develop a separate culture and identity. This was in no way a surrender of Hebrew rights in the region as a whole.

Jewish aliya in the fifties from Arab countries was on parallel lines. The conference stressed Jewish claims for property left in Arab countries but I maintain that the Jewish people, who have kept a continuous presence in the Middle East, are entitled to a just share of the region and its resources. This can be achieved either through a confederal arrangement or by getting a direct share of the oil wealth. When Turkey ceded its rights in Mosul to Iraq in 1925 it received in return a share of Iraq's oil income for 25 years.

The conference invited (our friends) the Arabs to make peace with Israel. But the Arab governments have said in effect that there is no room for both of us in the Middle East — it is either us or them. And since they don't want us as their neighbours and they can't throw us into the sea we have to take the only remaining course. Zionism as we knew it, based on co-operation with the Arabs, has come to a dead end. Israel must spearhead a Middle East liberation movement to put an end to the mess that the region has been put in by the Arabs.

The conference voiced concern for religious objects left behind in Arab countries. My late father in his old age and after great hardship, expense and difficulties sent out of Baghdad nearly 400 historic sefarim to the London community. A few were given to various synagogues but the rest have disappeared without trace, which is very disturbing, considering that collectors now pay up to £10,000 each for these rare scrolls.

The only novelty of the conference was Minister Ben Porat's plan to resettle Arab refugees in the West Bank but this has really nothing to do with Jews from Arab countries.

NAIME DANGOOR

A Thought for Passover

"From between the paws of the rock-hewn Sphinx there emerged the genius of human liberty, and the trumpets of the Exodus throbbed with the defiant proclamation of the Rights of Man."

—Henry George

The Other Middle East War

By Percy Gourgey

WHILE WORLD attention was focused on Israel's campaign in Lebanon, a war of equal intensity is being waged near Basra, following Iran's invasion of Iraq after ejecting all Iraqi forces from her soil. Iran has given the name "Operation Al-Kuds" (Jerusalem) to this new conflict but the more recent action is called "Operation Ramadhan", as it began just after the annual month-old Muslim fast in 1980.

The Iraqis fight much better on their own soil, and the severe losses they have inflicted on the Iranians amount to about a thousand killed, wounded or captured each day. There is considerable disenchantment in Teheran over this war which, however, has the personal approval of Ayatollah Khomeini.

The Ayatollah is backed by the extremist Islamic element in the government who have four objectives:

1. to punish Iraq's President Saddam Hussein for ordering the invasion of Iran in September 1980, and bring about his downfall,
2. to extract reparations from Iraq of the colossal sum of about 200 billion dollars,
3. to promote a revolution in Iraq by the majority Shiite sect, based on the Iranian pattern, and
4. to march on to Jerusalem after these objectives have been achieved.

Whether the Iranians will succeed is highly doubtful but their immediate aim was, through the continuing hostilities, to prevent the opening of the seventh Non-Aligned Summit in Baghdad in September 1982 when Saddam Hussein was due to succeed Cuba's Castro as Chairman of the Group for the next three years. Some of the non-aligned states wanted the summit postponed in view of the fighting and representatives of Cuba and Iraq met in New Delhi to try and resolve the problem because of India's eminence in the non-aligned world. India was somewhat embarrassed by it all as she has friendly ties with both Iran and Iraq. Baghdad was, however, determined to have the summit for which great preparations had been made despite the war. It was held in New Delhi in March 1983.

It is stated by Mr. Rajavi a prominent Iranian leader in exile in Paris that over 500,000 have been killed since the Gulf war began.

Iran is now attributing Iraq's success in repelling her forces to secret Israeli assistance and training. It is ironic that after Israel's rapid advance into Lebanon coincided with Iran's

counter-invasion of Iraq, Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan, which backed Iraq, ascribed Iran's military prowess also to assistance from Israel!

Yet to get the Middle East wars into perspective, the Guardian newspaper, which can hardly be described as friendly to Israel, stated in a recent editorial that the losses in Lebanon "pale into insignificance" when compared with those incurred in the Iran-Iraq war. The bitter fighting in the oil-island of Majnoon, near Basra, with the Iranians sending young boys to the front, and the Iraqis using mustard gas is appropriately "Majnoon" which is Arabic for "crazy".

Spot an Ancestor

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

Aboudi Shuva Hakham Bekhor
Yizhaq Shuva Hakham Bekhor
Shuva Yizhaq Hakham Bekhor
Shuva Aboudi Hakham Bekhor
Yosef Shuva Hakham Bekhor
Shuva Hakham Shlomo Hakham Bekhor
Moshi Shuva Hakham Bekhor
Shuva Shalom Hakham Bekhor
Yosef Shalom David Hakham Bekhor
Ezra Yamen Badnani
Eliahou Yamen Badnani
Mordechai Reuben Bibi
David Aharon Basous
Heskel Aharon Basous
Yizhaq Aharon Basous
Mordechai Saleh Basous
Yehouda Abraham Saleh Basous
Eliahou Heskel Ezra Basous
Yosef Heskel Ezra Basous
Shlomo Yosef Basous

N.E.D.

Pesach Hagada

For the Festival of Passover, a Baghdadian Hagada with both Arabic and English translations is obtainable in London from Y.Z. Books, telephone no. 01-724 2666 — also copies of our special November-December 1983 issue and the current issue.

Golden Wedding

WE WISH TO extend warm congratulations and best wishes to Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Zeloof of London (formerly of Baghdad) on the happy occasion recently of their Golden Wedding which was celebrated at a party in London.