

The SCRIBE

JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

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Editor: Percy S. Gourgey

WISHING ALL OUR READERS A HAPPY 1986

Board of Deputies

THE BOARD OF Deputies of British Jews is the representative body of British Jewry. It was first organised in 1760 and now comprises 640 representatives of most synagogues and institutions of Anglo-Jewry. After negotiations which started three years ago Iraqi Jews were offered places on the Board in keeping with the size and importance of our growing community.

A Special General Meeting of the Iraqi Jewish Congregation was held on 9 October 1985 for the election of three Deputies. From six eligible candidates the following were duly elected: Naim Dangoor, Meir Basri and Sami Shammoun, who will hold office until April 1988.

It is hoped that a further meeting will be held in the near future to elect two more deputies ●

Atomic Peace

AMERICA'S STAR WAR programme has put the Soviet Union at a great disadvantage. Even Reagan's offer to share the know-how does not redress the balance since the financial burden of developing the new system would be too great for the Russian economy. President Reagan's enthusiasm for the star war system is because it is a defensive rather than an offensive strategy. World peace would depend not on a balance of terror as at present but on the ability of a nation to ward off nuclear attack. But what happens when a new discovery penetrates such defence?

The best guarantee for world peace is the removal of the causes of discontent both nationally and internationally. Neither capitalism nor Communism has been able to bring about the utopia they promised. In the West the rich are getting richer by leaps and bounds acquiring the power over fellow men that such wealth confers. In the Soviet bloc it is the Party that exploits the rest of the population. What we need therefore is a fair system to share the abundant wealth of our globe for the benefit of all. While this is a job for the Messiah, we have to realise that the Messiah will not come uninvited ●

The United Nations at 40

THE CELEBRATION IN October 1985 of the 40th anniversary of the U.N. is a significant occasion. The U.N. is as strong or as weak, as wise or as foolish, and as significant or as trivial, as its member States wish it to be.

One of its significant acts was to provide for the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Indeed, in Israel's Proclamation of Independence the historic 1947 Resolution is referred to no less than three times, apart from Israel's offer to extend her hand of friendship to her Arab neighbours.

Moreover, in December 1948 the U.N. General Assembly adopted a Resolution concerning the Palestinian Arab refugees. Significantly it stated that only those "willing to live in peace in Israel" should be permitted to return to their homes which they had abandoned on the orders of the invading Arab commanders whose armies invaded Israel in May 1948. This fact is often overlooked because if it is observed it means that the Arab refugees returning to Israel could on no account seek to destroy her.

Another significant fact blurred by Arab propagandists is that over ¼ million Jewish refugees from Arab lands came mainly to Israel involving, virtually, an exchange of populations. While Israel absorbed the Jewish refugees from Arab lands, Arab states deliberately prevented the absorption of the Arab refugees in order to keep burning the flames of resentment and hostility to Israel. Every other refugee problem in the world, including that of the 10 million between India and Pakistan, has been settled.

The United Nations would best serve the cause of justice, freedom and peace, for which it was set up, by persuading the Arabs to negotiate with Israel directly. Failure to do so would bring the U.N. to further ridicule exemplified in its 1975 "Zionism = racism" Resolution — an historic libel against the Jewish people who have been the greatest victims of racism ever because of the Nazi holocaust in the Second World War ●

P.S.G.

Sunday Opening — Saturday Closing

THE CAMPAIGN to legalise trading, the live theatre and sports on Sunday demonstrates the shallowness of Sunday observance among the Gentile community. If Sunday is to be profaned then we invite the Christian faithful to return and find refuge in the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath.

For 200 years early Christians continued to observe Saturday as a day of rest and kept Sunday in memory of the Resurrection. When Rome adopted Christianity Saturday was discarded. In 321 Constantine enacted the first Sunday law for resting "on the most honourable day of the Sun", but Sunday was never a substitute for the Jewish Sabbath.

The modern trend for more leisure extended the weekend to include both Saturday and Sunday. For the observant Jew in a Christian society it is an ideal arrangement, denied to Jews in Israel — Saturday for spiritual needs, Sunday for weddings, barmitzvas and recreation. There are attempts in Israel to have a two-day weekend based on Friday and Saturday but this would be inferior to the Saturday/Sunday arrangement.

Likewise, the Moslems never intended Friday as a substitute for the Jewish Sabbath as it was not practical for the nomadic Arabs to have a weekly day of rest. Friday was for imitating the Eve of Sabbath preparations and prayers of the Jews living among them.

The Jewish Sabbath remains unique and may one day emerge as the universal day of spiritual recreation for the united human race ●

Lebanese Jews

AFTER LENGTHY NEGOTIATIONS the US State Department agreed to grant the small Lebanese Jewish community political asylum in the United States.

Anyone with relatives or friends in the Lebanon Jewish community should contact Mrs Epstein at HIAS, 200 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003 (Telephone: 6746800) to arrange for assistance in handling the applications for the visa to the United States ●

HOW THE JEWS WERE SQUEEZED OUT OF IRAQ

CONTRARY TO EARLIER promises, the substantial minorities of Iraq were betrayed by the Allies of the First World War when they decided to hand over the whole country to Arab rule.

"None of the minorities showed any disposition to welcome a local form of control which would in practice put them completely in the power of the Arabs; and, owing to the number of Shiahs among the latter, there was an utter lack of unity even among them.

"The alarm of the minorities reached a climax in the case of the Jews, who, directly they realised that the British Government had seriously made up its mind to organise a local form of government, sent a representative to the High Commissioner, and requested, in a body, the privilege of British citizenship. They based their claim on the fact that their country had been conquered by British troops and that they were actually at the moment Turkish subjects under British control; and that therefore the British had no moral right to force them to accept a change of nationality, unless they so desired it. They were eventually appeased by the personal influence of the High Commissioner and by his assurance that ample guarantees would be afforded them by the British Government against any form of local tyranny ..." (The Heart of the Middle East).

We give here the full text of the petition which was sent to the British Civil Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, by the leading notables of the Jewish community of Baghdad, one week after the Armistice:

The Petition was not accepted and the Jews were offered the useless option of retaining their Turkish citizenship.

In the space of 30 years, after discrimination and persecution, the ancient and distinguished Jewish community of Iraq were faced with a bleak future and welcomed the opportunity to emigrate to Israel in 1950/51.

It is a fact of history that the Moslem conquest of Iraq in 637, and indeed of Palestine and Syria in 638, were carried out at the invitation, and was only possible with the help, of the large Jewish communities who were suffering persecution at the hands of the Byzantine and Persian administrations.

Any Middle East settlement must include the recovery of our share of Iraq and other parts of the region ●

To: The Civil Commissioner, Baghdad

Baghdad, 18th November 1918

Sir,

We have the honour on behalf of the Jewish Community of Baghdad to bring the following to your kind consideration:-

The Allied Great Powers have triumphantly brought to an end the greatest war that ever scourged mankind to find themselves confronted with a work of pacification and reconstruction of unprecedented magnitude. One of the most important problems which face the Allies is the satisfactory solution of the complicated questions of nationalities.

The Allied Powers have repeatedly proclaimed that they are determined, as regards the small nations to take into account and respect any just aspirations or legitimate claims with the view to precluding any popular friction and eliminating all causes for future wars.

As far as Mesopotamia is concerned the Allied policy it is understood will be to promote indigenous government and encourage the establishment of an autonomous administration. This scheme is excellent in principle and reflects the greatest credit on the Governments of Great Britain and her Allies as a fresh manifestation of the elevation of principles with which this war has been waged. But its immediate execution is coupled with such difficulties as render it hardly recommendable.

It is too early now to have an accurate idea of the exact form of this future government, but the semi-official assurances given suggest the assumption that the local administrative body may be vested with wider powers than perhaps advisable in consideration of the following reasons:

The state of utter unpreparedness of the inhabitants for serious political or administrative responsibilities hardly qualifies them to undertake with success the management of their own affairs.

A government in accord with the desire of the local majority cannot but bear a very strong theocratical character due to the dominance of religious feelings which are unconciliable with the idea of giving to alien confessions any sort of privilege or rights. This cannot be consistent with the democratical views of the Allies.

Owing to the absence of scientific institutions this country cannot furnish men capable to take up any branch of the administration. Even the subordinate staff, fresh from the Turkish bureaucratic practices, may be a calamity for the country if freed from control. The high functionaries under Turkish rule were mostly Turks especially prepared in the Constantinople universities.

A small nation abandoned to itself with no adequate preparation for efficient self-government cannot even maintain its rank of small nation but is inevitably destined to be crushed in the great economical strife. It is feared therefore that the results which are to be apprehended might not only be disadvantageous to the progress of the country, but also contrary to the views of the Allied Great Powers and the principles proclaimed by the regretted liberator of Baghdad the late Lieut-General Sir Stanley Maude.

The Jews of Baghdad feel it their duty to declare that their aims in the present juncture would be to have a free opportunity for economic and educational development, those having proved through the ages the two main elements which guaranteed the existence of their race in adversity. Two centuries of active commercial relations with Great Britain have slowly cemented a community of interests which in these days are greatly inspiring their determination: they wish to submit through the undersigned a request that they may be graciously taken under the shield of the British Government and considered true subjects of His Majesty, holding themselves prepared to accept all obligations and rights of true citizens. They are confident that their brethren in all Iraq will formulate the same desire. We may recall on this occasion that since 50 years Baghdad has furnished to the British Empire important colonies of Jewish Traders, established mostly in India and England, who enjoy without exception the rights of British citizens. Our Community trust that an agglomeration of 80,000 Jews in a country like Mesopotamia may prove as good subjects to His Majesty as their brethren in England.

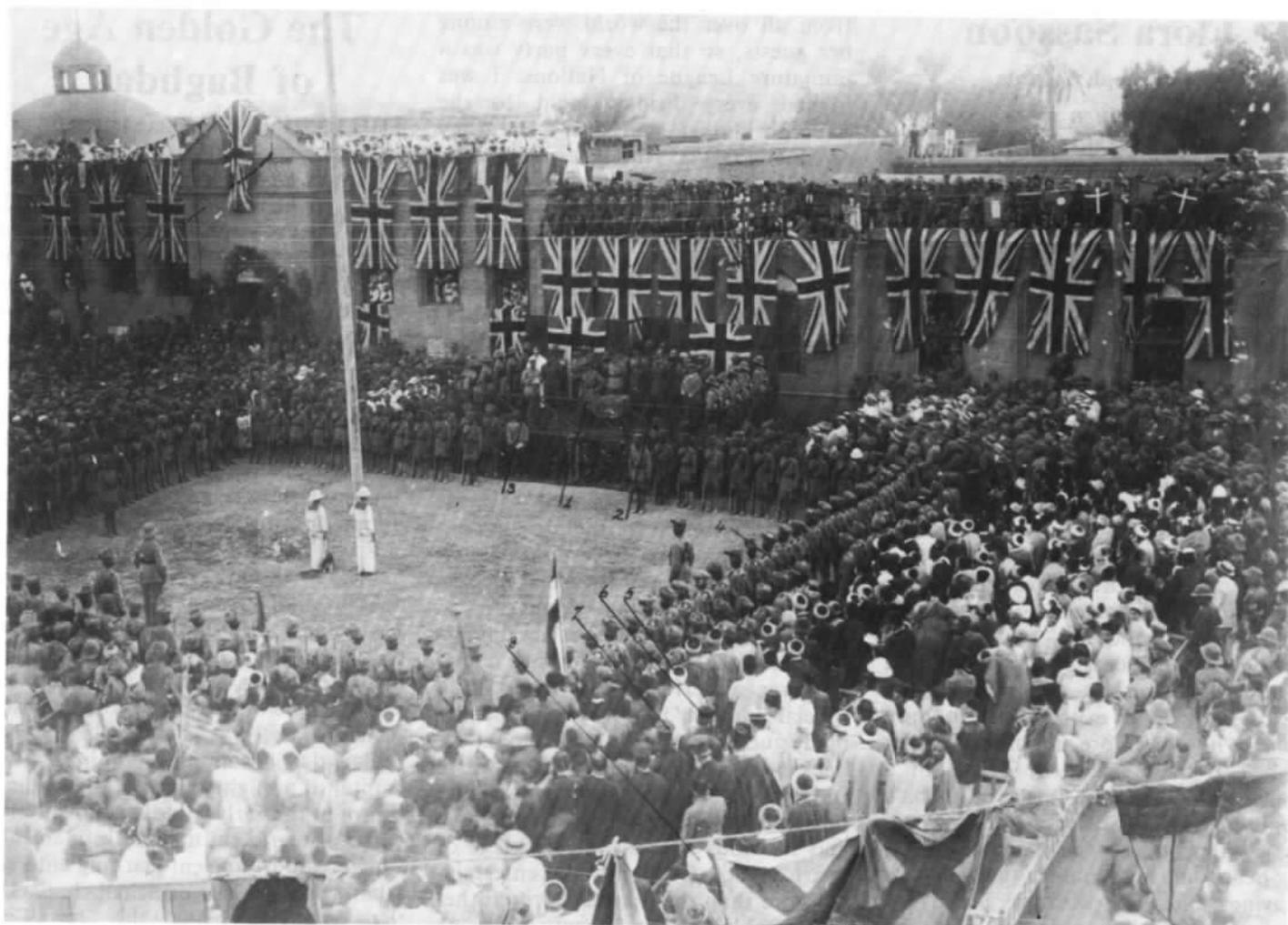
This request however, we fully realise, may raise complicated questions of political and legal character, which we do not propose to examine, this application purporting only to record the desire of the Community and referring to the competent authority the right issues to frame.

We beg to request you, Sir, to kindly communicate with the Government at Home on this subject, and solicit your personal assistance in this connection.

We have the honour to be, Sir, Your Obedient Servants.

President of the Jewish Lay Committee — Shaul Hakham Heskell
Acting Chief Rabby & President of Religious Council — Hakham Moshi Shamash

Abraham Hayim Somekh (Shabander)	Simon Hay Isac (Heyyawi Abul-Timman)	S. Birshan
Abraham Haim (Aqerib)	Heskell Hindee	Yehuda Zelouf
Shoua Bekhor	Ezra M. Bekhor	Menahem Daniel
Sion E. Gourgi	Shlomo Shooker	Sassoon Khezam
Shaul Hougui	Menashi Djedda	Saleh M. Cohen
Ezra S. Shashoua	-S. Shashoua	Moshi Shashoue
Sasson Murad	Menashi Sehayek	Isac M. Iny
Yamen Cohen	Fraim Toeg	Saleh E. Sasson
Frayem Djedda	Meir H. Gareh	Murad Djouri
Abr. E. Djouri	Sion E. Dangoor	S. Jos. Shemtob
S. Bekhor	Sion Is. Mikhael	Abr. A. Bashi
Isac Ruben	Sion Sabha	Elijahou Khezam
Yamen Shooker	Sasson H. Toeg	Daoud Somekh
E. D. Bassous	A. H. Elkibir	Saleh Faraj Haim
Yona H. Yona	Isac E. Tweina	Abr. E. Yehouda
Ezra Asher Salem	Gourdji Mokamal	Yehouda Y. Noonoo
Abdulla S. Ini	Menahem Gahtan	Ruben Gahtan
Saleh Y. Naftali	Ezra Abd. Menashi	Heskell Ezra Naftali
		Abraham Denoos



A hitherto unpublished photograph: Proclamation of the Armistice in Baghdad November 11th 1918.

Jews of India Exhibition in New York

A MOST INTERESTING Exhibition of various items concerning the three main sections of Jews in India is on display at the Jewish Museum in New York from October 1985 to February 1986. It is accompanied by a series of lectures, films, symposia and it has caught the imagination of the Jewish public who form long queues to attend the different events.

I participated in a symposium in November on the Baghdadian, Bene-Israel and Cochin Jewish emigrants from India. I traced the history of the Baghdadian community to its origin in Babylonian times mentioning the scholarship which culminated in the Babylonian Talmud and the period of the Gaonates and the Nesiim and Hakhamim in the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

The first Baghdadian Jew arrived in India about 200 years ago and he was Jacob Semah who landed in Surat in present Gujerat State about 200 miles north of Bombay. The main streams of emigrants following the arrival of the illustrious David Sassoon in Bombay in 1832 who was himself a refugee from

persecution. The Baghdadian Jews followed the pattern of activity which he initiated, i.e. business and trade on the one hand and public service and charitable endeavour on the other. Bombay has always been the main centre of Jewish settlement in India and, in general terms, its position is comparable to New York as the main port and commercial and industrial centre of the country. (Calcutta is another city where Jews settled in considerable numbers but this is the subject of a separate lecture by Rabbi Musleah). Prominent families of Baghdadian origin were the Sassoons in Bombay and Shanghai and later England, the Ezras and Eliases of Calcutta, the Menashy Meyers of Singapore, the Musrys of Indonesia and the Kadoories in Hong Kong.

One could write about the "Knights of Baghdad", for instance there were Sir Jacob Sassoon, Bart., Sir Sassoon J. David who founded the Bank of India in Bombay and Sir Alwyn Ezra (uncle of Sir Derek Ezra, ex-Chairman of the British National Coal Board); in Calcutta there was Sir David Ezra (no

relation) former Sheriff of the City, who with his wife Rachel, (Mrs Flora Sassoon's daughter) became legendary figures for their hospitality and orthodox observance; in Singapore there was Sir Menashy Meyer who also founded the synagogue in Oxley Rise; in Hong Kong there was Sir Horace (now Lord) Kadoorie, son of Sir Ely Kadoorie, who himself emigrated from Baghdad to found their great business empire and in Shanghai there was Sir Victor Sassoon, Bart., nephew of Sir Jacob, who inherited his title by special dispensation. Although not a knight, David Marshall, whose father emigrated from Baghdad, became the first Chief Minister of Singapore in 1956. Needless to say, in Baghdad itself there was Sir Sassoon Heskail, who became the first Finance Minister of Iraq in 1920.

Following the advent of independence in these countries, many members of the Community emigrated to Israel, Britain, Canada and the United States mainly for economic reasons as they had not, thank God, suffered persecution ●

P.S.G.

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Flora Sassoon

by Joseph Yahuda

(This tribute, written some years ago, came to light recently)

I HAD THE signal privilege of meeting the late Flora Sassoon — the widow of the late Solomon David Sassoon — within a week or so of my arrival in London many years ago with my uncle, the late Professor A. S. Yahuda, who introduced me to her. Of course, I had heard of her long before, her far-flung renown having often been coupled and compared with that of another legendary figure, Ribqa Mas'ooda, the wife of Mnashy Meyir of Singapore fame. I was struck by the aura of grandeur which radiated about her and have cherished the vivid impression of our first encounter. But there were many sides to Mrs. Sassoon — as there are facets to a diamond — which became evident incidentally and even accidentally as time went on and I learned by sweet experience to admire and to love her more and more. So that when I knew her well, I was in a position to adopt the Queen of Sheba's opinion of King Solomon and sincerely say: "True indeed was the report which I heard in my country about your sayings and your wisdom; I had not believed it until I came and saw with my eyes; behold, not even half had been told me; you have exceeded in wisdom and wealth the account which I heard."

Mrs. Sassoon's family surrounded her like shining stars in a brilliant galaxy. Her learned son David with his saintly wife Selina, both of whom have long since joined her in blissful eternity, are buried with her on the Mount of Olives, together with her younger daughter Muzzell. The elder, Rachel, married Sir David Ezra and lived in Calcutta, visiting her mother once every two years. May the memory of these five members be blessed. Other members of Mrs. Sassoon's family are settled with their families in Jerusalem and continue there the family tradition. Each one of them deserves individual treatment; suffice it, however, to say that they all shared three characteristics to an exceptional degree, that is: strict observance of the commandments, with all the consequential virtues; proverbial kindness and generosity; and modesty and humility in inverse ratio to merit and wealth.

Mrs. Sassoon's magnificent house in Mayfair — her drawing room was reputed to be one of the finest in London was open to rich and poor, rabbis and scholars, professional men and business men, Jews and non-Jews ... In fact well-known men and women

from all over the world were among her guests, so that every party was a miniature League of Nations. I was invited every Friday night to the Sabbath dinner and every Saturday afternoon to tea. And when I married, my wife was naturally invited with me. We often stayed over for *habdala*, after which Mrs. Sassoon read to the assembled company interesting passages for her weekend correspondence and entertaining tidbits from newspaper cuttings. Regular services were held in David's study, where the ark contained beautiful scrolls and the book-cases held priceless tomes. Although, as already mentioned, Mrs. Sassoon and family were strict observers, she was tolerant towards others, leaving it to their own conscience to determine the course of their conduct, but she nevertheless encouraged observance in tactful ways.

Mrs. Sassoon presided at her dinners and teas like a queen holding court. She was a perfect hostess and took special interest in every one of her many guests. In the dining room, at the back of her seat at table, there was a full length portrait of her when she was presented at Court, wearing her unique and fabulous multi-string necklace of pearls. Not infrequently she entertained more than thirty guests around her dinner table and over seventy to tea. As a special favour she would seat an honoured guest next to her. Her dishes and delicacies were of international fame and she knew the prandial peculiarities of her commensals. Thus she would now and again direct one of the servants waiting at table to one guest or another with his or her favourite dish, or a special pastry or sandwich.

There was serious talk as well as joviality at these parties and Mrs. Sassoon could hold her own in scholarly discussions with the most erudite; but she would not be drawn into an argument. The farthest she would go was to put a challenging question — and leave it at that — whatever the answer of her interlocutor might be. She was a person of high principles and in matters of principle she would not compromise; yet moderation was the keynote of her impeccable conduct. Again, she was a person of authority and at the same time considerate and gentle to all. In politics she was a conservative who did not shut her mind to new ideas or oppose reform and her guests were people of all shades of opinion. She had the magic of attracting people as a magnet attracts iron filings and shrewdly read their character like an open book. Her arresting personality was in line with her culture and social standing. Beyond doubt, she was one of the greatest women of the century. ●

The Golden Age of Baghdad

THE PERIOD OF ancient Baghdad's greatest growth and prosperity corresponds to the 50 years from 763, when Mansur moved there to 813, when the capital sustained its first siege. The period covers parts of the reigns of six caliphs: Mansur, his son Mahdi, his grandsons, Hadi and Harun-al-Rashid, and his great-grandsons, Amin and Mamun. During this half-century the city grew from a new raw capital with an artificially restricted population into the undisputed first city of the world with enormous material resources and a population of over 2 millions.

From its foundation it attracted many Jewish settlers. In fact, it was the Jewish mathematician and astologist Mashallah, with the Persian astronomer An-Naubakht, who drew up the measurements of the new capital, which was situated near Jewish settlements.

Baghdad became the administrative capital of a mighty empire, the trading centre of the early Middle Ages and the focus of world culture and refinement. The stream of ancient learning entered Islam through four principal channels, the foremost being the Jews of Mesopotamia. Jewish influence was further enhanced by the proximity of Baghdad to Sura and Pumbeditha, the great academies which formed the centre of local Jewish life. The Jews of Iraq supported the house of Ali throughout. Ali established his capital at Kufa in the centre of Jewish Babylonia, near Sura. Mar Isaac, the Gaon of Sura, paid homage to Ali and received privileges from him. ●

Who is a Jew?

When asked, Einstein replied, "It's all a matter of Relativity. If my theories succeed, the Germans will say I am a German and the French will say I am a Jew. If they fail, the French will say I am a German and the Germans will say I am a Jew!" ●

Lecture on "The Dhimmi"

BAT YEOR, A refugee from Egypt and an expert on the subject, gave a talk on "The Dhimmi" — the position of Jews and Christians under Islam following publication of her book. The function was organised by the ZF Jews of Arab Lands Committee and the World Sephardi Federation in London. Mr Percy Gourgey presided. Dr David Silvera, newly-appointed W.S.F. Director, also spoke ●

The Arabs and the Abars

IT IS VERY probable that Arabia was the home of all the Semetic races and the starting point of Semitic culture, in which case the Sumerians, the Phoenicians, the Jews, the Assyrians and the Babylonians could all be classed loosely as "Arabs". But it is more apt to class the Semitic peoples as Arabs and Abars, the Arabs being those who stuck to their homeland and stayed behind under all conditions, and the Abars being those who emigrated in search of a better environment and kept moving to look for better conditions. The present Arab-Jewish conflict is the outcome of these two contrasting strategies. It can be said of the Jews, "qui va à la chasse perd sa place". Recognising this danger the economics of the Torah, by the 50 year jubilee system, jealously tried to let the nation retain ultimate ownership of the land. I find it strange that a conqueror has to acknowledge previous titles to land. When the Arabs conquered the Middle East they claimed ownership of all land by conquest. Israel should do the same and make sure, through land taxation, that the nation cannot lose ownership of the land. The Jewish people lost their homeland in the past more because of emigration than as a result of military defeat. This pattern has now been resumed in Israel.

Arabia has been claimed as the real scene of many of the earlier episodes of the Bible, and it seems certain that the earlier Jewish authorities recognised their kinship to its inhabitants.

The tradition of Monotheism, which is the basis of Semitic culture, goes all the way back to the historical Adam (as distinct from the mythical Adam) who lived some 8000 years ago. Adam was literally the father of civilisation because he discovered the wild wheat and started agriculture that obliged mankind to live in settled communities.

Adam was a great leader and a prophet. He and his successors were very likely the authors of the first chapters of Genesis. Through Adam were established knowledge of the One God, the principle of free will, crime and punishment, man being created in God's image, the Sabbath, man's title to this earth, etc. Adam most probably lived in East Africa at the end of the last Ice Age and moved to Arabia when the Red Sea was still a lake.

The early episodes of the Bible were not taken by the Hebrews from the Babylonians or vice versa but were ancient traditions handed down from Adam to Noah to Abraham. The Monotheism of Adam remained alive

even while Semitic nations had lapsed into idolatry. The Bible tells us that up to the time of the Tower of Babel mankind spoke one language. We can infer that they also had one religion — the religion of Adam.

This historical analysis is meant to show that Semitic nations and tribes migrated within a well defined area of the Middle East bounded by Turkey to the North and Iran to the East. That whole region does not belong exclusively to the Arabs but equally to all the peoples of the area, including the Jews●



Letters

From Professor Khezzom:

"I love The Scribe. I read it from cover to cover. I also frame the photographs you publish in the Journal. They are very valuable.

I am intrigued by the idea of reviving the position of Resh Galutha (Exilarch). There is a big concentration of Iraqi Jews and Jews of Iraqi extraction in the UK. May be that is where it should be initiated. It would be great also from the educational point of view. Maybe some Jews of Iraqi ancestry would become interested in studying those great institutions and the checks and balances they constituted toward each other.

I honestly envy you people for having the opportunity to be together, particularly when you have individuals who share in their interest in the history and the accomplishments of that time honoured community. We go to great lengths here to meet others of Iraqi background to pray together at least. I have such intimate memories of the Sabbath prayers, the Saturday night prayers, and the intimacy that the religious life of that community provided the rest of us. We went this Reshana to Los Angeles to Kahal Joseph Synagogue, which has mostly Indian Jews and which follows the Baghdadi Minhagh. It was Hiy youth!

I am very interested in any and all of your publications. If you have published already the Haggadah, I would like to receive several copies of it, and would like to distribute to friends who may not know about it."

San Francisco
J. DANIEL KHEZZOM

Other Comments on THE SCRIBE

"It is excellent information for Iraqi Jews to keep in touch with the past and present affairs".
M.Z.
London N3

"Very interesting news".
J.R.
London

"We have missed The Scribe for many years and are glad it is reappearing."
E.M.H.
London

"We enjoy reading it".
M.S.
London

"We do enjoy reading The Scribe. It gives us information about our heritage and news about the community, which we do not find anywhere else".
D.S.
Ealing

"It is wonderful to know what is happening regarding our community, as I left Baghdad in 1948".
A.S.
London SW1

"I would like to see more articles on the 800,000 refugees absorbed by Israel as against the Palestinian refugees who fled when Israel was created. The West must be made aware of this fact and should be stressed frequently."
K.J.S.
London N3

Les Cantiques des Cantiques

by Alfred Moshi (Extracts)

Les Cantiques des Cantiques coulent
dans mes veines
Et je revendique le sang de mes aieux.
Ma voix est montée jusq'au ciel
La révolte a petri mon âme millénaire
Le ciel fût prodigue de quelques éclairs
Ce fût l'unique réponse à mon appel
Quand je voulais entendre tonner le
tonnere
Mon âme est pétrie d'amour millénaire
Et se laisserait emporter par la douceur
d'aimer
Il est mieux de chanter quand on ne
peut se taire
Et chanter est une manière d'aimer
Et comme l'eau qui jaillit des
Fontaines
Chante à la gloire de Dieu
Les Cantiques des Cantiques coulent
dans mes veines
Et je revendique le sang de mes aieux●

ISRAEL — a country of 4 million
people and 14 million taxpayers.

Abba Eban

Books

"The Road from Babylon" Haim Raphael, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1985, 294 pp., £16.95. hbk.

"The Jews of Iraq" Nissim Rejwan, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1985, 274 pp. £16.95. hbk.

"Ruwah Qadim (A Wind from the East) — Operation Babylon, in Hebrew, Shlomo Hillel, Speaker of the Knesset, published in Israel.

THE HISTORY OF the Jews in Iraq is not the story of just another Jewish community. For over 1000 years Babylon was practically the Jewish homeland and assumed paramount leadership over world Jewry. It was here that the Babylonian Talmud was written and Judaism was hammered out and blossomed. The achievements of Babylonian Jewry are all the more remarkable when compared to the intellectual barrenness of neighbouring communities.

We have been regaled this season by the above three books which appeared in rapid succession, touching on this story from the beginning and in the case of Hillel's book recording the end, or let us hope the temporary interruption, of that story. The two in English fill a big gap in the recorded history of the subject and Hillel's long awaited book gives a first-hand report of his secret mission to Iraq and other Arab countries just after the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Road from Babylon is so called because "that is where it all started". In fact it deals mainly with the Expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Jewish exodus from Spain hit the Mediterranean shores like a giant tidal wave with repercussions lasting over a hundred years and transformed non-Ashkenazi Jewry, which now carries the general label of Sephardi (Sepharad = Spain), and which has now become the majority of Israeli Jews. Rejwan's book is a primer of Jewish history in Iraq meticulously written with a refreshing attention to details.

Two questions haunt the last ten years of Jewish history in Iraq, before the mass emigration of almost all the community: who was responsible for the riots of 1941 and who engineered the mass exodus of 1950. In between these years Jewish traders did very well, thank you. In the wake of the British occupation in June 1941 British soldiers told Jewish shopkeepers, "you will soon forget the riots". Indeed, the money poured in by the British army transformed the economy (and fuelled inflation). It can be said that 90% of

Jewish material wealth was created in these nine years, but the memory of the 1941 and 1948 riots influenced a large number in their decision to emigrate.

Rejwan accurately reports how the Jews innocently went out on 1st June, first day of Shabuoth, to the airport dressed in their best clothes and were attacked by the frustrated Iraqi soldiers, after their defeat. Raphael informs us that only the intervention of the British army restored order and saved the situation. This shows how easy it is for historic facts to be distorted.

The fact of the matter is that anti-Jewish rioting was standard British army wartime policy to soften the civilian population for occupation. As Rejwan points out the riots attributed to Rashid Ali took place only after he fled to Turkey. The killing and looting occurred in the two days of vacuum that followed. The same process was repeated in the wake of British entry to Tunis, Libya, Somaliland and other places.

On the morning of Monday, 2nd June 1941, at the height of the riots, Khalid Pasha Zahawi, governor of Baghdad, unexpectedly rang our bell and told my father how bitter he was that despite his appeals to the British army for permission to open fire at the rioters, he was not allowed to do so, until the mobs had done their worst.

As regards the historic mass emigration of the Jews of Iraq in 1950/51 Hillel's theory that it was all due to Nuri Said is unconvincing. Nuri was just his masters' voice and the evidence is that the operation was due to a combination of American pressure, British desire to remove Jews from Iraq in the interests of its trade and Arab attempt to embarrass Israel. But whether, in accordance with a decision by the Arab League, the Jews were expelled in retaliation for the Palestinian Arabs, or were allowed to go in exchange for them, the result is the same: Jew was traded for Arab — effectively, an exchange of populations.

"Babylonian Jewry in the Diaspora" Abraham Ben-Jacob, published by Rubin Mass, Jerusalem, 1985, 600 pp. £30. hbk.

MR. ABRAHAM BEN-JACOB, the foremost historian of the Iraqi Jewish Community, has recently published his book in Hebrew on Iraqi Jews outside Iraq and Israel which is full of information. He had previously published two other books: The Jews in Iraq and the Jews of Iraq in Israel.

While writing to the author praising his endeavours we pointed out that some names were spelled not according

Cookery Corner

SHEIKH AL MAHSI

3 small egg plants 4-5 inches in length
frying oil
salt & pepper
750 grams tender lamb
1 tbsp. blanched almonds or pine kernels
2 tbsp. raisins or currants
2-4 tbsp. pomegranate juice or
1-2 tbsp. lemon juice
½ tin tomato juice or 1tsp. tomato paste in ½ tin water
1 tbsp. date syrup

Peel off the green round the stem of the egg plant. Cut off this end. Hollow out the centre and then use the small piece as a cork. Fry one by one in hot oil turning continually. Mince the meat finely and fry. Season with salt & pepper and keep stirring it till half cooked. Add the almonds cut in strips and raisins and continue stirring till the almonds brown slightly.

Fill the egg plants three quarters full and cork with the small end pieces. Sprinkle with salt & pepper. Mix the tomato and pomegranate or lemon juice and date syrup. Season and pour over the egg plants. Bake in a hot oven for half an hour adding a little water if there is any risk of drying. It is preferable to use a fireproof dish as transferring to a fresh serving dish often breaks the egg plant.

This dish may also be prepared by frying whole egg plants, cutting a slit in the upper surface and filling the meat through this opening which is then hidden with strips of tomato. If nuts and raisins are not liked 2 tablespoonfuls of chopped parsley may be added to the meat as an alternative. Similarly the chokes of globe artichokes may be stuffed and served with rice or mashed potatoes ●

to the long-standing tradition of our Community in particular, and Hebrew in general, but according to Arabic rendering and asked if Arab influence is becoming so great that one day Israel will abandon Hebrew and speak Arabic as happened 2500 years ago when Aramaic became the spoken language of the Jewish people?

In his reply Mr. Ben-Jacob states, "Regarding the Arabic spelling you are quite right. But what can I do? This evil system now prevails among oriental academics and whoever doesn't follow their Arabic system is considered old-fashioned and uneducated. You will no doubt appreciate my situation" ●

N.E.D.

Baghdad Zionist Pioneers

Re-printed from the Jerusalem Post,
30 August 1963

YOUR ARTICLE OF August 6 on "Zionism in Baghdad" really dealt with the Halutz Movement in Iraq rather than with Zionism.

Your correspondent, in his enthusiasm for the youth movement, does less than justice to the dedicated work of the previous generation. The sorry fact lamented by him that so far no work of history, reportage, etc ... has been produced to tell the story of the Halutz Movement, applies to all other aspects relating to the life and work of that ancient Babylon Community, whose ancestors once wrote the Talmud.

The article rightly states that by the time World War Two broke out, fully two generations of Iraqi Jews had already gone through a deep process of transformation and westernisation, first started by the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. The "Alliance", for whom Iraqi Jewry have always had a warm place in their hearts, is primarily responsible for the fact that, as mentioned in a recent editorial in your paper, among the immigrants from Iraq there were the educated, the highly qualified and the wealthy, who had headed the community in their country of origin.

The Keren Hayesod was founded in 1920 and among the first committees formed to carry on the work and collect funds for the development of the Yishuv was that founded in Baghdad in 1921 by the late Dr Ben Zion. The late Mr. Sion S. Aboodi, a well-known banker, was Treasurer. Among the members of the Committee were the names of leading personalities like the distinguished advocate Shaool Hacham Daood, Mr. Menshi Goorgi and Hacham Benyamin, whom every male child got to know, a few days after birth, in his quality of chief honorary *mohel* of Baghdad.

The members of the first Keren Hayesod Committee, which, in that summer of 1921, used to meet almost daily in the courtyard of the Albert David Sassoon School, were a mixed lot. Some were very pious, coming from the old *yeshivot*; others were rather "modern" for to the sound talmudic studies of their boyhood were added the secular teachings of the "Alliance". Yet they all had one thing in common: a profound knowledge of the Tora and, in the case of many of them, of the Talmud, and a deep love for Zion ●

Tel Aviv

S. OVADIAH

The function of Music in the Babylonian Jewish Tradition

by Sara Manasseh

(This is an extract from an excellent thesis for the M.Mus. degree with the subtitle, "From Baghdad to Bombay and Beyond".)

THE MUSIC TRADITION of the Babylonian Jews is an oral tradition. It encompasses two major aspects — liturgical and para-liturgical song. However, a third aspect, that of secular art and folk music has also been an important factor and must be considered. Since the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BC the use of musical instruments in the synagogue service on Sabbaths and Festivals has been forbidden. The liturgical and para-liturgical music tradition is therefore essentially a vocal tradition. Before and during the twentieth century, Jewish musicians in Baghdad were the most prominent instrumentalists in the performance of the flourishing tradition of Arabic art music. Their participation in both non-Jewish and Jewish musical events has of necessity introduced certain aspects of Arabian art music into the music tradition of the Babylonian Jews.

Regarding liturgical song, Idelsohn writes,

The traditional song of the Babylonian Jews is of special value ... the Babylonian Jews represent the oldest settlement outside Palestine known to history, a settlement which has continued uninterruptedly and has been subjected to no important influences from other Jewish communities, and it may therefore be assumed that in their traditional song ancient elements have been preserved.

These ancient elements are present primarily in the cantillation of the Bible, and some of the melodies sung at synagogue (Shiloah 1972:1458). The melodic profiles used in biblical cantillation are indicated in the form of written or printed signs in the text, though not in the Torah scrolls themselves. This system of scriptural accents, or *ta'amim*, originated c.900 AD in Tiberias, and was later adjusted according to the demands of Babylonian Jewry. (Werner 1980:624)

The performance of para-liturgical song, both during the synagogue service and outside the synagogue, has been the custom for many centuries. The most popular genre of para-liturgical song in the Babylonian Jewish tradition is the *shbah* — (plural *shbahoth*) a song of praise. The texts of the *shbahoth* are especially com-

posed poems, or *piyutim*, sung as metrical hymns, and were introduced into the synagogue liturgy in the sixth century as a subterfuge to circumvent the prohibition of the study of the Talmud (Werner 1980:626). Some of these songs, created in Palestine and Babylonia during the paytanic period of the Middle Ages, spread throughout the Diaspora and became the standard songs of the Jewish home.

Shbahoth are sung regularly, particularly at home and in synagogue. Some *shbahoth* are associated with specific festivals and other occasions. Benjamin the Second, a traveller who visited Iraq in 1847, describes the singing of *shbahoth* on the Sabbath:

...every man will go to his house to change his clothes, and hurry back to the synagogue to receive the Sabbath with prayers and praises up to one hour before sunset, and then return to his house, and in the company of his family, sing songs and hymns in honour of the Sabbath, and drink wine that makes the heart glad ... and eat the evening meal that sometimes continues half into the night.

The texts are of a semi-religious nature, often expressing national troubles and hopes, and are of great beauty and literary merit. At first the texts were isosyllabic (with the same number of syllables per line), but later they adopted Arabic metre and rhyme. Most of the texts are in Hebrew and in the form of an acrostic of the poet's name. They are generally composed in stanzas with a recurring refrain. The song may be sung by soloists, but more often by all the group present.

From the tenth to the fourteenth centuries most rabbis composed poems and hymns for the synagogue. In the sixteenth century religious Hebrew folk poetry flowered under the mystical kabbalistic movement at Safed in Palestine. The most outstanding poet of this generation was Israel Najara, who was born in Safed in 1550 and died in Gaza in 1620. Najara's poems were written to be sung, and were published in his universally acclaimed *diwan*, 'Zemiroth Yisrael' (Songs of Israel) first published in 1587 at Safed, in which he grouped 146 of his songs according to the *magaam*, an established custom in Oriental countries. The hymns written by Najara and other Oriental poets remained the standard songs of all Jewish communities and are sung to the present day ●

Rich Man, Poor Man

A rich man who shows me his wealth is like a beggar who shows me his poverty; they are both looking for alms — the rich man for the alms of my envy; the poor man for the alms of my pity ●

Ben Hecht

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Spot an Ancestor

A FURTHER SELECTION from the Register of military taxpayers of the Baghdad Community of 1892.

In 1849 the introduction of the *millet* system in the Ottoman empire gave each individual non-Moslem community official representation through a designated leader. For the Jews this leader was the *haham-bashi* (chief rabbi). A further reform was the abolition of the *jizya* the special tax paid by *dhimmis* (Jews and Christians). It was replaced by a tax to relieve *dhimmis* from military service. This military tax was finally abolished in 1909.

Saleh Yosef Abul Tutun
 Elia Shimeon Abul Adhan
 Ezra Yacob Shalom Abul Qaw
 Dawid Abdulla Abu Najem
 Moshi Ibn Aziza Abul Sabun
 Heskeli Eliahu Dawid El Beg
 Saleh Nahom Eskeji
 Yacob Hai Moshi El Iny
 Elazar Meir Agha Elazar
 Mordechai Heskeli Muallim Elia
 Yehuda Muallim Eliezer
 Reuben Yosef Istanbuli
 Selman Hai Afnas
 Sasson Abdulla Nessim Lafnas
 Heskeli Hayim Leyteem
 Ezra Reuben Lemzayyin
 Dawid Saleh Laqraa
 Eliahu Mordechai Lemjallid
 Mordechai Saleh Latifa
 Heskeli Ezra Abraham Lekbir
 Saleh Heskeli Ezra Lekbir
 Meir Heskeli Ezra Lekbir
 Yishaq Heskeli Ezra Lekbir
 Yacob Yishaq Heskeli Lekbir
 Hugui Yehuda Heskeli Lekbir
 Ezra Shimeon Abdulla Laaraj
 Saleh Sasson Laaraj
 Heskeli Elia Laaraj
 Nessim Yacob Lela
 Heskeli Saleh Lela
 Yacob Yishaq Labiadh
 Dawid Bentayi
 Moshi Shimeon Berhoum Qendarchi
 Yishaq Saleh Abraham Bennou
 Ezra Heskeli Bennou
 Khlef Heskeli Barukh
 Saleh Mordechai Bahari
 Abdulla Moshi Mrad Bahari
 Saleh Abdulla Chitayat
 Muallem Abdulla Yishaq Chitayat
 Ezra Moshi Chitayat
 Yosef Abdulnabi Yosef Chitayat
 Menashi Dawid Chitayat
 Menashi Moshi Chitayat
 Ezra Nessim Chitayat
 Eliahu Heskeli Chitayat
 Daniel Yosef Chitayat
 Moshi Yishaq Shmuel Chitayat
 Yacob Saleh Gahtan
 Yacob Aharon Gahtan ●



Energy Minister Moshe Shahal and friends at a recent London reception.



At the ZF Seminar:

l-r: Rabbi Alan Plancey, Percy Gourgey, Bat Yeor, David Silvera.

Shechita

SHECHITA IS erroneously described as Jewish ritual slaughter. There is nothing ritual about Shechita; it is not part of our religious observance. It is simply the permissible method of slaughtering animals for food. It satisfies two basic commandments: 1. Jews are forbidden to eat blood; we are not bloodthirsty. Shechita allows the animal blood to drain away. 2. Not to inflict pain on the animal. Thus only a very sharp and perfect knife can be used. Loss of blood in itself is not painful. Shechita can only be performed by a qualified and trained person who is the first functionary in any Jewish community. Compare this concern for animal welfare with other methods of animal killing, such as wrenching a chicken's neck or beating an animal on the head; also, the barbarism of bull-fighting and fox hunting. I personally think that any method that satisfies our basic requirements should be considered.

But the main argument between the sponsors of Shechita and its critics centres on "stunning". The argument that stunning renders the animal unfit for Jewish consumption, thus depriving the Jewish community of eating meat is not accepted by the critics as

valid. The argument that human beings have the right to eat meat regardless of animal welfare is rather lame. Likewise, I reject the argument that Shechita should be allowed solely on the grounds of religious tolerance even if this method falls short of modern standards.

Having said all that, let us compare stunning and Shechita objectively:

Firstly, there is no reasonable evidence that Shechita causes more pain than stunning:

Secondly, Shechita is a simple and complete method that can be relied on at all times and places by large and small communities. Stunning may not be available at some times and in some places, with the result that slaughter would be crude and painful.

But above all stunning is immoral and dishonest. Dying is part of living: if we have the right, or if we give ourselves the right, or if we accept that man has the right, to kill animals for food, then the animal still has the basic right to know when it is going to die. Stunning is a furtive way of dispatching the animal. It can only appeal to those who tolerated the gas chambers where men, women and children were dispatched to face death on false promises ●