

# The SCRIBE

## JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

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40 YEARS ON

## No Cause for Celebration

The trauma of Israel ever since its inception in 1948 can be seen as a continuation of the suffering of the Jewish people this century, which culminated in the extermination of the six millions at the hands of the Nazis. The Holocaust lasted four years, but Israel's ordeal has been going on for forty years, and no relief is in sight.

Those forty years included 5 wars, thousands of victims, endless acts of terrorism and crippling defence expenditure that has stymied Israel's growth. This of course is in line with the long term objectives of Israel's enemies. By slowly eroding the gains of the six-day war the Arabs hope to put Israel in an impossible situation that would eventually lead to the destruction of the Jewish State. And General Rabin, the architect of that brilliant war is now reduced to chasing the teenage rabble of Gaza.

Since Israel joined the United Nations over 100 new countries have been admitted to that body without problems or controversy. But Israel has become increasingly isolated in the world community gaining new enemies every day and losing old friends all the time. Israel cannot count even on full American support. Slowly, the anti-Israel international lobby has developed into anti-Zionism and has now become open anti-semitism.

What is the remedy?

From the beginning Israel was manoeuvred into playing Russian roulette with the Arabs. Heads they win, tails she loses. In other words, to survive, Israel has to win every confrontation with her enemies. This unequal situation encouraged the Arabs not to come to the negotiating table. Egypt made peace only to recover Sinai and save its ailing economy from mounting war expenditure; but it did not bring an overall settlement any nearer. The threat remains from the "Eastern Front" where Syria's gas missiles pose as much a menace as atom bombs, and Islamic fundamentalism has added a new dimension to the equation.

To make the confrontation equal the Arabs have to be at risk to lose as much as Israel in an armed conflict. Therefore Israel's overall aim should be to create a Middle East confederation not dominated by the Arabs. Israel's occupation of Lebanon raised our hopes in that direction, but that golden opportunity was bungled.

Likewise, Israelis who came from Arab countries have important economic and territorial claims on their countries of origin. These claims have become vested in the State of Israel but the government does not want to make capital out of this in case it will prejudice the dominant position of Ashkenazim viz-a-viz the Orientals and Sephardim.

Israel must increase its population from within and not by more aliyah. By swallowing the communities of the Diaspora one after another, is Israel destined to be, God forbid, the gra-

veyard of the Jewish people?

Arab populations in and around Israel have doubled and redoubled in one generation. Israel's demographic standstill can be seen as the bankruptcy of the Zionist philosophy.

Moreover, Israel refuses to make use of a powerful argument, namely that 40 years ago there was an exchange of refugees. To carry this argument to its logical conclusion the Palestinian refugees, who have been kept in camps by the Arabs for political reasons, should be thrown into the laps of their Arab brethren, firstly by not offering them any employment in Israel, and secondly, by taxing the land in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The Arabs took our lands by conquest, we can recover it by taxation, in accordance with the Torah commandment that every Jubilee all land has to revert to the State.

In any case, it is not usual to celebrate 40 years of a happy event. It is either 25 years or 50 years – a silver of golden jubilee. Forty years also reminds us of Israelite wanderings in the wilderness.☉

40 years ago

## El Dangoor Refuses to Surrender

from

THE  TIMES

LONDON MAY 17, 1948

Cairo, May 16

A Communique by the Ministry of National Defence gave news of the progress of the Egyptian Army. It said:

"Egyptian forces crossed the eastern frontier at dawn on May 15. Our artillery went into action against the heavily fortified settlement of EL DANGOOR. The remainder of our forces continued to advance, passing Khan Younes. EL DANGOOR was wiped out and set ablaze after the defenders refused to surrender. Our forces are advancing towards Gaza which was entered at 6.45pm by our vanguard."

El Dangoor was the site of kibbutz Nirim started in 1946 in the Western Negev, near the Egyptian frontier, in the neighbourhood of Nir Yitzhaq of today.

The name derives from Rabbi Shalom Dangoor who was born in 1832 and studied under Hakham Abdulla Somekh. He served for a short time as Dayyan. In 1897 he was appointed Rabbi in Egypt and stayed there for seven years. In 1907 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Suez and stayed in this position till his death in 1916. He visited the Holy Land five times between 1899 and 1914 and bought land there. When his sons asked him why he was buying land in the desert he replied: All of Eretz Israel is holy and our job is to redeem it; so instead of buying a small piece in Jerusalem I bought enough land to contain two large cities.

In 1962 his children left Egypt for USA.

We salute the memory of the heroic defenders of El Dangoor and suggest that the Israeli Government should revive the name there.☉

# The Jews of Iraq between 1920 and 1970

## Selections from the paper by Simha Horesh Part 4

### The 1958 Revolution

When Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic, this led to pro-Egyptian disorders in Lebanon; Iraq and Jordan soon afterwards, in February 1958, constituted the Arab Federation. King Husayn of Jordan, fearful of the consequences of the Lebanese disturbances on Jordan, requested the Iraqi government to send an armed force to be stationed at the Syrian-Jordanian frontier. Brigadier Abdul Karim Qassem took advantage of the passage of the forces through Baghdad to stage the revolution of the 14th July 1958. Qassem was a member of the Iraqi Free Officers movement, established in Iraq along the Egyptian example around 1952, and he rose to its leadership. The Free Officers movement kept in touch with the opposition political parties of the United National Front. The plan and details of the revolution were worked out by Qassem himself.

The first notice of the revolution was broadcast on the radio early in the morning inviting the people to go and watch 'edifices of tyranny crumble'. Proclamation No. 1 called on the people to support the army and its rising against the royal palace and the palace of Nuri al-Sa'id. It demanded of the people to inform the authorities about any corrupters 'to extract' them and destroy them. There was also the pledge of the formation of a 'popular' republic to uphold 'Iraqi unity' (a point very much emphasised in the proclamation), to maintain bonds of fraternity with Arab and Muslim countries and to adhere to the United Nations principles and honour pledges and treaties in accordance with the interests of the homeland. The proclamation specified that a Council of Sovereignty had been appointed to serve temporarily until such time as the people elected a president.

The response to the revolution was overwhelming, for a mob of hundreds of thousands came out into the streets, wild and frenzied 'screaming its joy and its thirst for vengeance'. The mob attacked the British embassy, the royal palaces, statues of King Faysal I and General Maude (who led the 1917 British occupation of Baghdad), looting and destroying everything until curfew was imposed and quiet eventually prevailed. In the meantime the whole royal family was massacred and the body of Crown Prince Abdul Ilah was dragged in the streets and mutilated by the mob. The Jews were petrified with fear, for the hysterical mob shouted slogans calling for their deaths. The old regime, for all its evils, was at least known to them; now it had all been destroyed and they feared whatever the new one would bring. A sickening fear surged through the Jews - a relic of the days of June 1941 - of an anti-Jewish attack by the mob.

Proclamation No. 3, broadcast in the afternoon, declared martial law throughout Iraq. Further proclamations were made about the Council of Sovereignty and its composition and the appointment of Qassem as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, prime minister and acting minister of defence; Abdul Salam Aref, his active partner in the revolution, was appointed deputy commander-in-chief, deputy prime minister and acting minister of interior. In the cabinet were represented all the political groupings in the country except the Communist party, but even so, it had sympathisers of the government. Aref was a fervent supporter of President Nasser of Egypt and the champion of forces advocating "Unity now" (with the United Arab Republic). Soon Aref broke out with Qassem and was relieved of his posts. He was later on accused of plotting against Qassem and

imprisoned. With this, the movement for "Unity now" was dealt a sharp blow. Brigadier Ahmed Mohammed Yahya replaced him as minister of interior.

A provisional constitution was announced on 27th July cancelling the 1925 organic law and its amendments. With that, **all special regulations regarding minorities were abolished**. The constitution specified Islam as the religion of the state and guaranteed equality before the law, freedom of thought and religion. The constitution regarded the Kurds as partners, with the Arabs, in the homeland and their national rights (*qawmiyya*) within Iraqi unity were recognised. Qassem's attitude to minorities was determined through the concept of 'national unity through revolutionary rebirth'. He offered minorities complete equality of rights with the ultimate aim of getting them completely assimilated. Indeed, during his period in power, despite their initial fears, the Jews had nothing to complain about. Jews who were serving sentences on charges of Zionism and Communism were liberated and expelled from Iraq. At the beginning of 1961 an amendment was published in the Official Gazette to the law of 1951 regarding supervision of the property of Jews (who left Iraq and did not return within a specified period and consequently lost their nationality). The law was stated as 'incompatible' with the principles of the revolution which promised equality for all. More than 450 Jews expelled by Nuri al-Sa'id were authorised to return to Iraq (though it is not known how many, if any, took advantage of this law). Nevertheless, the law was enthusiastically received by the Jews as a sign of the positive attitude of the government towards them. All through Qassem's regime the Jews enjoyed full freedom in conducting their business and could leave Iraq freely.

### Arab Socialist Regimes

The Ba'ath party had, during the last two years of Qassem's regime, organised itself and trained a party of militia of thousands. The militia came into good use when the Ba'ath party staged its coup on Friday, 8th February 1963, in cooperation with Aref and some army officers, when they took control of the streets and fought the Communists who came out in Qassem's support. Proclamation No. 1, broadcast on the morning of the 8th, declared that the 'revolution had come to destroy those who had deviated the course of the 14th July revolution and to restore its glorious march' and that Qassem had been killed (Qassem was only killed the next day in the afternoon). The broadcast text was without plan and barely coherent and concentrated on inciting people against Qassem. A 'National Council for Revolutionary Command' was set up to replace Qassem's government; Aref was nominated President of the Republic to replace the Council of Sovereignty. Aref had not played a prominent part in the planning of the revolution; his relationship with the Ba'ath party started with the conflict that broke immediately after the 1958 revolution when he espoused the Ba'athist demand for Arab union, but this was only temporary, for Aref himself was not attracted to Ba'ath principles. The Ba'ath needed him as a figurehead to enhance the prestige of the party since none of their leaders were known to the public. An uneasy partnership was therefore made between the two for the purpose of the coup.

A purge of government institutions was immediately embarked upon, especially in the ministry of education, to rid them of their 'Communist cells' and teachers from Arab

countries were brought in to fill the vacancies ensuing. The composition of the Command Council remained secret; most of its members were reputed to be very young and inexperienced in public affairs, and almost all came from poor classes. The party militia, now called the National Guard, was entrusted with the task of pursuing Communists and their sympathisers and in the process committed severe excesses. There was a lack of co-ordination among the Ba'ath party members and this considerably weakened them and eventually led to their fall in November 1963.

News of the Ba'ath coup in Iraq was received with fear by the Iraqi Jews who hoped that somehow Qassem would be able to put it down. Their hopes were dashed when Qassem was caught and executed. The early proclamations of the new regime had nothing in them to calm Jewish fears. It is interesting to note that only in the version printed in the Official Gazette, was there a clause assuring the government's respect of minority rights and its intention of letting minorities take part in the 'National' life (this was not in the broadcast version). Another clause promised action with a view to achieve Arab unity and to recover 'occupied Palestine', and these did not exactly alleviate the anxiety of the Jews. Nevertheless, despite all the atrocities it committed, the Ba'ath regime paid little attention to the Jews. The only anti-Jewish provision was made in April 1963, when a new law to replace the one abolished by Qassem was enacted, through which a Jew leaving Iraq and not returning within a specified period would lose his nationality and his property would be confiscated. Otherwise, they were free to conduct their business and to travel.

The 18th November coup had followed a troubled week in the Ba'ath leadership when rival factions struggled for control. They were out-manoeuvred by the army officers led by Aref and ousted from power. The National Guard was proclaimed dissolved and its members were ordered to hand in their arms. There was street fighting as some of them resisted, but the army was soon in control. A declaration signed by Aref was then broadcast explaining the reasons for the coup and concentrating vast powers in Aref's hands; he was appointed President of the (new) National Revolutionary Command Council, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and he was vested with special powers to be renewed automatically if necessary. The declaration spoke of the formation of an advisory council from citizens of good reputation, qualifications and experience. This was in line with Aref's known attachment to traditional Islam, for an 'advisory council' was reminiscent of early Islam. Aref was pious, conservative in the extreme and this was strongly felt in the cabinet programme announced on 24th December 1963. The 18th November revolution had come to correct the 'again deviated' course of the 14th July revolution, and added "We have in our Arab legacy and Islamic Shari'a, all that is needed to give our system meaning and content, without recourse to imported principles. Aref's pioussness was said by some to have been coupled with aversion to people of other faiths, and that this was behind the anti-Jewish measures taken immediately upon his coming to power.

Taher Yahya, a former member of the Free Officers movement, was nominated prime minister in a cabinet composed of army officers and completely controlled by the army.

Early in 1964 the Jews could no longer obtain permission to travel. It was not declared

officially; Jewish applications for passports simply did not receive any replies and the Jews soon got the hint and stopped applying for passports. Soon afterwards, the Land Registry office stopped registering transactions for Jews which meant that the Jews could no longer buy, sell or mortgage property. When in July 1964 there was a nationalisation of banks, industries and insurance companies, all facilities at banks given to Jews were cancelled and licences for Jewish insurance agents withheld. Jewish employees in nationalised companies and industry were expelled from their jobs. Most Jews being engaged in free business enterprise, socialist measures were a severe blow to them and indeed it became increasingly difficult for Jews to continue working.

Again, the Jews were required to get new certificates to prove that they still had their Iraqi nationality; the new certificates were given to them in the autumn of 1964. However, with the increasing number of Jews out of work and their despair of getting jobs or being able to leave Iraq legally, they started escaping across the Iraqi border into Persia en masse. The land registry office still did not register transactions for Jews and those escaping were forced to relinquish their property when they left it behind. The escapes were obviously with the government's knowledge, for an operation of such dimensions could not go unnoticed. However, the government turned a blind eye to it all.

Dr Abdul-Rahman al-Bazzaz, an intimate friend of Aref and Iraq's ambassador to Britain, was appointed deputy prime minister in a government formed by Brigadier Aref Abdul Razzaq on 6th September 1965. Razzaq, a 'Nassarite', and some of his supporters in the army, frustrated by the fact that unity with Egypt had not materialised, planned to overthrow Aref and demand immediate unity with Egypt, but Aref's brother Abdul Rahman succeeded in thwarting the attempted coup. Bazzaz was appointed prime minister with the aim of establishing a civil government that could effectively tackle internal problems and improve conditions in the country. One highlight of Bazzaz's short period in power was his government's twelve-point programme for a settlement of the Kurdish question which had been one of Iraq's worst problems. However, with Bazzaz's replacement, this came to nothing and for all their ambitious plans and programmes the government under the Aref brothers accomplished very little.

The appointment of Bazzaz had been received with a measure of relief by the Jews; for along with his being a fervent proponent of Arab nationalism, he was known to be balanced and moderate, and they hoped that their lot would improve with him. When Aref was killed in a plane crash in April 1966, he was succeeded by his brother Abdul Rahman who asked Bazzaz to remain as prime minister. Bazzaz became also minister of interior and in this capacity he had more control of internal affairs. Eventually, an improvement did come about for the Jews, for the land registry office was once again open to them. Four Jews were granted passports and allowed to leave Iraq (after leaving a deposit of a thousand dinars, to be confiscated if they failed to return within a specific period). This was very important for the Jews for the thing that bothered them most at the time was their inability to leave Iraq legally. When Bazzaz left for Moscow in August, the Jews awaited his return with anticipation for they believed that he would continue with the trend he started and that once again they would be free to travel. However, here again they were disappointed for he was replaced immediately upon his return. (The four Jews who left were the last to leave Iraq legally up to 1971). In the meantime, up to April 1967 Jews continued escaping across the border●

## LETTERS

From Haham Dr. Solomon Gaon

I have just received your copies of *The Scribe*, for which I thank you and which, as always, I found most interesting. Most of the copies are sent to the Iraqi community here through the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation and I have also distributed some of the copies among the students of Yeshiva University who are, as you know, very interested in what happens in the world of our Iraqi brethren.

I must tell you that I found very interesting the little poems of Emil Murad and I have asked the library to order his novels from Israel. I was especially interested to see the photographs of the young Iraqi Jews whom I had known when I began to minister to Lauderdale Road. I am very glad to have these photographs and to be reminded of these young men. Let us hope that young Hayim will soon be well.

Yeshiva University New York  
"Young" Hayim celebrated in January, amid an avalanche of flowers and cards from wellwishers, his 50th birthday at the hospital, by standing on his feet for 2 minutes for the first time since he was taken ill. [*The Scribe*]

I am delighted that you published the abridged version of my article in the *Masorti Journal*. I admire your skill in providing an exact precis of the text.

I look forward to receiving future copies of your very elegant, informative and readable magazine – if, as a Castilian, I am eligible to receive it.  
Gonville College,  
Cambridge (Dr) David Abulafia  
(Of course you are – Ed)

Recently I came across issue No. 24 of *The Scribe*. I was very thrilled to read the opening phrase describing the publication as the Journal of Babylonian Jewry. The phrase Babylonian Jewry stirred a very deep emotion inside me and brought to mind some wonderful memories from the old country and the old city of my childhood – Baghdad. I would like very much to receive *The Scribe* in order to keep in touch with members of the Babylonian Jewish community, and in due course I would be more than happy to provide you with news about members of the small Iraqi community here in beautiful Perth, the capital of Western Australia.

I would like to congratulate you on your excellent service in publishing this journal.  
University of (Prof) Rony Gabbay  
Western Australia

I was recently shown a copy of *The Scribe* which I found interesting and delightful. My parents were born in Baghdad and migrated to Australia in 1911. Mother's name: Khatena, Father's name: Cohen. Quite possibly I have relatives, of whom I do not know.

I would be pleased to receive your publication.  
Sydney, Australia Rachel Shute

I am anxious to add a complete file of your journal, from its inception, to our research collection of materials about Jewish communities throughout the world. Thus, I would be very interested in receiving all available issues and to have the name of our library added to your permanent mailing list. I would, at the same time, like to learn of any monographs and pamphlets dealing with Babylonian Jewry that may be available through the Exilarch's Foundation.

Best wishes for the continued success of your fine work in England and abroad.  
Price Library of Judaica  
University of Florida

A few years ago I endowed a chair at Princeton University in the name of my father entitled "The Khedouri Zilkha Professorship for Jewish Civilisation in the Near East". Professor Avrom Udovitch currently holds the chair.

My purpose in having done that was that Princeton is translating the papers found at the Cairo Geniza. I became very conscious of the fact that there were, in fact, very few Arabic-speaking Jews in the Near East, and I wanted a place to preserve this culture. It also happened that both my daughters had been to Princeton.

If you would like to be in touch with Professor Udovitch to ask him about his findings, his address is as follows: Professor A L Udovitch, Chairman, Near Eastern Studies Department, Princeton University, 111 Jones Hall, Princeton, New Jersey 08544.  
New York Ezra K Zilkha

Being of Iraqi origin I find *The Scribe* highly interesting and would appreciate being included in your mailing list.

The article "The Jews of Iraq between 1920 and 1970" makes interesting reading. My compliments to Simha Horesh.  
London, NW8 Abe Chitayat

The arrival of *The Scribe* at my home is a treat – just like the arrival of an old friend and his views, amusing and well informed at the same time.  
London, W6 (Mrs) Violette Shamash●



## COOKERY CORNER

by Alice Shashou

(Her own special recipes)

### Cheese Baklawa

Grate 1 packet Haloumi cheese, plus 1 packet Fetta cheese, plus 1 packet Mozarella cheese.

Mix well. Butter a rectangular pyrex. Use 1 packet of filo pastry. Divide in two. Cut each foil in two. Put one layer of pastry and brush lightly on one side only with melted butter or melted margarine. Continue arranging the half packet of filo. Add the mixed cheeses and make it even. Add the other half of the pastry sheets after buttering them. Cut in diamonds (same as baklawa, only slightly bigger). Sprinkle with sesame seeds and caraway seeds. You can freeze it. Before putting in the oven, beat 4 eggs and  $\frac{3}{4}$  pint milk, mix and add on top of the baklawa.

Bake in preheated hot oven for about 10 minutes; lower and bake another 20 minutes or until set and coloured.

Take it out of the oven, cut it again deeply. Put the pyrex back in the oven till crispy and well baked. Serve immediately.

### A Variation of Kahi

Melt some butter and margarine. Take half a foil of pastry (for baklawa). Butter it on both sides with a brush. Sprinkle with a filling made of: Ground walnut and a little sugar and rose water. Fold it in two. Then fold it again in two. Put in preheated hot oven and then reduce till golden in colour. When nearly cold, pour on top a syrup which was prepared one day or two in advance.

**Syrup:** 4 cups sugar; 2 cups water; 2 tablespoons of rose water;  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons of lemon juice.

Dissolve the sugar in water on low fire; add the lemon juice and simmer until the syrup thickens and coats the back of a spoon.

Before you serve, arrange in a plate and sprinkle with cinnamon powder. Especially good when served with clotted cream ●

## Heritage Shop

Home based charities are enthusiastically taking advantage of the "all aboard" charity shop at 255 Finchley Road, London NW3. The idea for the shop arose as the result of numerous telephone calls to the Board of Deputies' Central Enquiry Desk. In order to assist with volunteers or goods please phone 01-387 4044 ●



Naim Dangoor congratulating the Chief Rabbi on his elevation to the Peerage.

Photo by Peter Fisher

## WOJAC Conference

The Third International conference of WOJAC (World Organisation of Jews from Arab Countries) opened in Washington on 26 October 1987 amid a spate of publicity and fanfare. But the most important resolution concerning Jews from Arab countries was passed that day not in Washington but in the Knesset in Jerusalem, where it was adopted by 100 members out of 120. It contained, inter alia, the following:

**Israel, for its part, has made it known that, within the framework of a peace settlement, it will be prepared to compensate the Arabs who left Israel. In the talks concerning this compensation, the rights of the Jews who were compelled to leave the Arab states and abandon their property will be taken into account.**

If this indeed is the stance Israel is determined to take towards the issue of compensation then it is logical and fair to require the government of Israel to use part of the frozen assets of Palestinian Arabs to pay Jewish refugees, say 50% of their claims. For this purpose it would be most useful and practical to invite Jews from Arab countries to register their individual claims while they are still alive.

However, it is argued that in a peace settlement, which Jerusalem badly wants, Israel may agree to pay the Palestinians full compensation even though Arab states will not recognise Jewish claims. This is what happened at the peace negotiations with Egypt. But that would mean that the peace settlement is carried out at the expense of Jews from Arab countries. Having linked the claims of both sides in a set-off calculation, the government of Israel cannot escape assuming the liability of making some payment to the Jewish claimants.

Against this logic Israel has argued

that billions were spent on settling Jewish refugees and that therefore no individual claims will be entertained! This may apply to Jews who settled in Israel. What about Jews who settled in Europe and America and whose wealth, which they left behind, was quite substantial? The WOJAC executive decided years ago that the claims of these Jews should be vested in the State of Israel. Thus everybody will end up empty-handed.

This means that WOJAC is merely a propaganda platform for Israel, and a crude one at that; for the Israeli establishment has consistently and mysteriously refused to make capital out of the most important fact that 40 years ago there was an exchange of refugees, and that Jewish material, political and territorial rights in their countries of origin, far exceed Palestinian claims. To follow this reasoning to its logical conclusion, the process of exchange of refugees should be completed by deporting the remaining Palestinian refugees into the lap of their Arab brethren in order that they too carry out their part of the bargain by absorbing and integrating the Palestinian refugees just as Israel did with the Jewish refugees.

A step in this direction would be to cease the employment of non-Israeli Arabs in Israel. President Herzog informed us, during his visit to London, that 100,000 such Arabs come to Israel every day to work. These think nothing of withdrawing their labour when they feel they can harm the Israel economy. They should all be sacked in one go and their places taken, not by imported labour from Portugal or Vietnam, but by members of the Israeli Defence Forces who volunteer to fill the gap by doing community work ●



## Abraham Sofaer

Abraham Sofaer, who died in Los Angeles recently aged 91, was a seasoned classical actor whose career spanned over 60 years on the stage, in films and on television and radio.

He was born 1 October 1896 in Rangoon, the eldest child of Rahma Solomon and Isaac Sofaer, a merchant, who had emigrated to Burma from Baghdad in 1877. He started as a teacher in Rangoon where he met Psyche Angela, a fellow teacher, whose grandfather, Isaac Cohen, was a famous Victorian figure who ran the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel when it was the home of English melodrama.

Abraham emigrated to England in 1920 and married Psyche in 1922. It is interesting to recall that one of Cohen's daughters (Psyche Sofaer's aunt) married the man who was doing the catering in Cohen's theatre – his name was Joseph Lyons, who later founded the famous restaurant chain of J. Lyons.

Abraham's first appearance on stage was a walk-in in 1921 in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Palace Theatre, Newark-on-Trent. In the twenties he played over 100 classical roles on tour and he pretty well made the part of Shylock his own, a mouthpiece for all the persecuted people in the world.

His performance as Othello in 1934 was recalled later in a leading article in *The Times* as one of the four outstanding renderings of that part in living memory. He was regarded, in his prime, as one of the best verse speakers on the English stage.

Perhaps Sofaer's greatest successes were his "Jewish" roles of Isaac Cohen in *The Matriarch* and Benjamin Disraeli in *Victoria Regina* which he played more than 750 times in the late thirties.

He entered films with *Dreyfus* and *The Wandering Jew* in the thirties and appeared in the following 40 years, in over 40 films such as *Quo Vadis* (in which he played the Apostle Paul). He played opposite Elizabeth Taylor in *Elephant Walk* which was recently shown on Channel 4.

Among Abraham's large clan is his cousin's son Judge Abraham Sofaer, legal adviser to the State Department in Washington.

Mr Elias M. Sofaer writes,

"My grandfather went to Rangoon in the 1870s at about the same time as Isaac Sofaer. My father and the rest of the family joined him in 1894. In that year Haham Ezra Dangoor arrived with his family to become the Rabbi of Rangoon but they returned to Baghdad a year later. In Rangoon Eliahou Heskell Dangoor met and married my aunt. My father returned to Baghdad in 1915 where he opened a branch of BGSS. My uncle stayed in Rangoon and died there.

Isaac Sofaer became a wealthy property owner and one of his buildings was officially opened by the Governor-General of Burma with a gold key which Sofaer gave him as a souvenir. However, Isaac Sofaer lost all his money in the property crash that followed.

It is to be noted that all the 'Sophers' who went to Rangoon spell their name 'Sofaer'"

It is interesting to note that in 1881 there was already a committee to look after the small Babylonian community. The committee was composed of: Heskell Hai Shlomo Heskell Khedhourri; Yaacob Abraham Hachen; Yishaq Yosef Said; Benyamin Meir Shuker and Yishaq Shlomo Benyamin.

In November 1893 on the occasion of the visit of Lord Lansdau, governor-general of India, the Iraqi Jewish community constructed a triumphal arch with the Hebrew inscription "Barookh Habba" and was the first that the visitor passed through. At about that time the government granted the community a piece of land to build a synagogue and when land values soared shops were built around it. The government then demanded the payment of the value of the land. The community wrote to Queen Victoria who ruled that the community should pay the value of the land but that the government should return the money as a donation!●

### The Masorti (Conservative) Movement

Their information sheet states:

"The Masorti approach to Judaism combines the strength and power of tradition with a human and open-minded attitude, so that the letter of the law does not become more important than the spirit. It preserves the warmth and richness of the traditional service and observance of the Mitzvot which mark a fulfilled Jewish life.

In Great Britain today, there is growing polarisation on the religious scene which leaves the "middle ground" bare of opportunity for the thinking Jew who wishes to retain tradition without doing violence to reason. The Masorti Movement now fills the gap.

We see Halacha, Jewish Law, as central

## Tax Evasion

It is legally recognised that tax avoidance is legitimate. Tax evasion, however, is criminal. There is a Baghdadian saying that if you eat a meal with a blind man be fair. You do not take all the *kubbas* and the tasty morsels for yourself just because he can't see. The Inland Revenue can be looked upon as a sleeping partner, a blind man, and we must not take advantage. Even if the law allows certain ways of avoiding taxes those who can afford it should be generous with the Exchequer.

Moreover, most members of our community came to these shores with little capital and have struck it rich over the years. For this reason also we must pay our taxes with pleasure and gratitude.

Some Arabs who come to the West from Arab countries find shoplifting too strong a temptation to resist. So it is with tax evasion. It is due to irresistible temptation, greed and stupidity rather than to criminal intent.

There are many wealthy people who do not use their riches for the high life and think nothing of giving large sums to charity. The Exchequer should be seen as the charity par excellence and should receive the benefit of our attention.

In our countries of origin governments were oppressive and the individual was always pitted against the state. This attitude should not be maintained here, especially as taxation is not punitive and the Chancellor tries to reduce it.

Because of our lack of security the aim of many of us is to build up huge reserves to rival those of the Bank of England. This should be a mitigating circumstance in the eyes of the authorities in the UK who want to encourage people to save and get rich.

Perhaps the tax authorities should embark on a public relations exercise, especially for new immigrants, on the duty and merits of paying taxes●

to Judaism. But we adopt an historical approach which recognises the past and future capacity of Jewish Law to adapt as eternal values are applied to changing conditions and needs. This is the approach adopted by Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs and also by the Conservative Movement in the United States and Israel.

We have committed ourselves to work for unity and mutual respect between the Jewish religious denominations and are taking active steps to encourage dialogue. We believe that practical solutions can and must be found to prevent the Jewish people from tearing itself apart with religious schism."

There are five Masorti synagogues in Greater London●

# Spot an Ancestor

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

Nessim Shmuel Nawi  
Heskel Reuben Nawi  
Heskel Ezra Reuben Nawi  
Saleh Sleman Nawi  
Abdulla Dawid Heskel Nawi  
Shlomo Reuben Nawi  
Moshe Khdher Nawi  
Heskel Dawid Nawi  
Abraham Khdher Nawi  
Abdul Fzair Khdher Nawi  
Shaul Saleh Khdher Nawi  
Meir Selman Nawi  
Eliahu Reuben Nawi  
Heskel Yosef Nawi  
Heskel Ezra Yacoub Neqqash  
Eliahu Yacoub Neqqash  
Heskel Rahamin Neqqash  
Heskel Yosef Neqqash  
Maatuq Yacoub Neqqash  
Nessim Moshe Nessim  
Aboudi Yuosef Nessim and sons  
Abraham Dawid Yacoub Nessim  
Nessim Shimeon Yosef Nessim and son  
Yacoub Sasson Nessim  
Yacoub Yosef Nessim  
Yosef Yacoub Nessim  
Abraham Shalom Hakham Nessim  
Yosef Shalom Hakham Nessim  
Abraham Yishaq Hakham Nessim  
Nessim Shimeon Muallem Nessim  
Moshe Yishaq Namerdi  
Mordechai Saleh Najma  
Heskel Ezra Saleh Najma  
Saleh Benyamin Naftali  
Yehuda Heskel Naftali  
Dawid Ezra Nurael  
Nessim Yacoub Naba'a  
Aboudi Moshe Darwish Saatchi  
Dawid Nathan Saatchi  
Khdheri Muallem Sleman  
Selman Hakham Sleman  
Yosef Sasson Hakham Sleman  
Mordechai Abraham Asher Salem  
Rahmin Asher Salem  
Ezra Asher Salem  
Salem Asher Salem  
Eliahu Moshe Salem  
Yishaq Moshe Salem  
Muallem Mordechai Saleh Smaira  
Nessim Abraham Smaira  
Abraham Nessim Smaira  
Abraham Ezra Meir Smaira  
Eliahou Heskel Shua Smaira  
Eliahu Meir Smaira  
Moshe Meir Smaira  
Heskel Shua Samra  
Shaul Heskel Hayim Shua Samra  
Abraham Shua Samra  
Dawid Heskel Hayim Shua Samra  
Menashe Abraham Hayim Yishaq Sleman  
Heskel Shimeon Sleman  
Ezra Abraham Hayim Yishaq Sleman  
Yosef Selman Shimeon Sleman  
Yacoub Selman Shimeon Sleman  
Eliahou Selman Shimeon Sleman  
Mordechai Selman Shimeon Sleman  
Yosef Yishaq Sleman  
Saleh Reuben Yishaq Selman  
Meir Yacoub Smouha  
Menashe Heskel Smouha  
Shmuel Yosef Smouha  
Ezra Meir Yishaq Smouh  
Selman Shmuel Smouha  
Heskel Yosef Smouha  
Heskel Ezra Sloumi

Heskel Moshe Settouna  
Heskel Ezra Salama  
Abraham Yacoub Sopher  
Yosef Yacoub Sopher  
Heskel Eliahou Sopher  
Yacoub Eliahou Sopher  
Abraham Eliahou Sopher  
Aharon Eliahou Sopher  
Moshe Eliahou Sopher  
Shlomo Eliahou Sopher  
Aharon Eliahou Sopher  
Ezra Aharon Elia Sopher  
Abraham Elia Sopher  
Abraham Shuwa Elia Sopher  
Yacoub Shuwa Elia Sopher  
Yishaq Elia Sopher  
Heskel Abraham Elia Sopher  
Elia Yacoub Sopher  
Elishaa' Sasson Sopher  
Moshe Yishaq Sopher  
Moshe Dawid Sopher  
Yishaq Abraham Yacoub Sopher  
Abdulla Dawid Sopher  
Elia Aharon Sopher  
Heskel Ezra Sasson Sopher  
Menashe Aharon Shlomo Sopher  
Elishaa' Abdulla Dawid Sopher  
Menashe Abdulla Dawid Sopher  
Elia Abraham Sopher  
Yosef Heskel Sopher  
Saleh Aharon Shlomo Sopher  
Abraham Elia Sopher  
Sasson Ezra Sehayeq  
Yosef Elia Sehayeq  
Aboudi Rahamin Sehayeq  
Sasson Hayyu Sehayeq  
Yehuda Yishaq Sehayeq  
Shlomo Ezra Sehayeq  
Hougui Dawid Sehayeq  
Yosef Rahamin Benyamin Sehayeq  
Selman Rahamin Eshayeq  
Ezra Heskel Hayim Eshayeq  
Ezra Eshayeq  
Moshe Abraham Saleh Eshayeq  
Ezra Sasson Sehayeq  
Yosef Sasson Sehayeq  
Yona Shimeon Eliahou Sehayeq  
Eliahou Hayyu Sehayeq  
Sasson Rahamin Sehayeq  
Hougui Benyamin Sehayeq  
Saleh Rahamin Sehayeq  
Eliahou Yishaq Somekh  
Saleh Abdulla Somekh  
Ezra Abdulla Somekh  
Heskel Ezra Shlomo Somekh  
Yosef Ezra Shlomo Somekh  
Yacoub Shlomo Somekh  
Abrtaham Hayim Shlomo Somekh  
Meir Abraham Somekh  
Abraham Ezra Somekh  
Abdulla Saleh Somekh  
Abraham Yosef Somekh  
Eliahou Dawid Somekh  
Dawid Yehuda Yishaq Somekh  
Yehuda Dawid Somekh  
Abraham Meir Somekh  
Yosef Reuben Somekh  
Meir Heskel Reuben Somekh  
Yacoub Reuben Somekh  
Shmuel Shemtob Shmuel Somekh  
Aharon Shmuel Somekh  
Menashe Yosef Somekh  
Shaul Yosef Somekh  
Sasson Yosef Somekh  
Yehuda Moshe Somekh

The Mishnah lists ten social groups that returned from Babylonia with Ezra about 430 B.C.E. Among these categories there were complex rules regarding who could marry whom, for the groups constituted a distinct social pecking order, as follows, starting at the top:

1. *Kohanim* (priests) – Male descendants of Aaron, who was a brother of Moses and a descendant of Levi.
2. *Levites* – the other male descendants of Levi, who served as assistants to the Kohanim.
3. *Halalim* – offspring of some forbidden marriages entered into by priests.
4. *Israelites* – all other Jews of unblemished heritage (that is, descendants of Jacob who had not inter-married with non-Jews).
5. *Gerim* – converts to Judaism.
6. *Harurim* – freed slaves.
7. *Mamzerim* – bastards. Children of a married woman not by her husband.
8. *Netinim* – descendants of the Gibeonites, who were circumcised at the time of Joshua (1200 B.C.E.) and were not regarded as full Jews because their conversion was not voluntary.
9. *Shetukim* – persons unable to identify their father.
10. Persons unable to identify either their father or their mother.

Not included in this list were gentiles and slaves, who had no legal status at all in Jewish law at the time, since Jewish law applied only to Jews. It is also interesting to note that this social order applies only to Jews who returned to Israel from the Babylonian exile. As late as the third century C.E. the Jews still in Babylonia continued to claim that their lineage was superior to that of the Palestinian Jews, on the theory that the only Jews who had returned to Israel with Ezra were those of lower social groups who didn't like being treated as second-class citizens in Babylonia.

(From "Finding our Fathers")

*The Mormon Genealogical Society has requested to film all our genealogical records of the community for safekeeping in Utah, USA, for the benefit of researchers. However, on careful consideration, it was decided to decline the offer.*

P.S. The name "Sopher" is now spelled in various other forms: SOFAER, SOFAIR, SOFFAIR, SOFER, SOFFER, SAFIR.

## Is there a colonel in the house?

It is said that Israel cannot keep the Territories and remain a democracy.

So, why not give up democracy!

It is idle to believe that the Hillels of today are descended from Hillel the Elder who, anyhow, had already left Babylon 2,000 years ago. Or that Mani's are descended from Jesse, father of King David; that the Sassoons' ancestor was Ibn Shoshan, prince of the community in Spain; that Shlomo-Dawid indicates descent from King Solomon.

In any case, in 10 generations the genes of an ancestor become diluted to 1 in a thousand; in 20 generations to 1 in a million; in 30 generations to 1 in a billion, and so on. (Marrying first cousins only halves this process). And here we are talking of 60, 70 and 80 generations!



Mr. Shlomo Hillel, Speaker of the Knesset, autographing his new book at the special reception held in London.

## Operation Babylon

by Shlomo Hillel  
published by Collins - £15

Shlomo Hillel, Speaker of the Knesset, and leading son of Babylonian Jewry, was in London in February to launch his book, being the English version of his Hebrew bestseller on the Jewish Aliyah from Iraq.

Shlomo was the prime mover of this historic operation in which he was involved from the age of 24. During his daring exploits in the emigration of 130,000 Iraqi Jews he was given the code name of Richard Armstrong.

During his week in London Mr. Hillel was acclaimed at various functions and he gave several interesting talks on Israel's problems, past and present. David Dangoor made the observation, of which Mr. Hillel was not aware, that just as the Israelites were rescued from Pharaoh's Egypt with a Strong Arm, the Jews of Iraq were rescued by Armstrong! The book is pervaded by typical Hillel wit and humour.

Full reviews of this important addition to the history of Babylonian Jewry will appear in the next issue. Readers are invited to send in their comments on the book●

## Board of Deputies

The triennial elections of deputies for the Board of Deputies of British Jews are due to take place in April/May 1988.

All members of the Iraqi Jewish Community are invited to a Special General Meeting which will be held at 14 Russell Road, London W14, on Tuesday, 10th May 1988, at 6.30pm for the election of Deputies to hold office until April 1991.

Candidates must be nominated by at least five members. Nominations for the three places allocated to our Congregation must be in writing and accompanied by the written acceptance of the candidate and should be posted not later than 29th April.

The elections will be carried out by those present at the Meeting: The Board of Deputies does not allow postal ballots or voting by proxy●

## Dor-Le-Dor

The World Jewish Bible Society in Jerusalem publishes an English-language quarterly called Dor-Le-Dor directed especially to the lay reader who wishes to further his understanding of Jewish Scripture, and to gain deeper appreciation of the various aspects of Biblical research.

Dor-Le-Dor contains a wealth of stimulating and thought-provoking

material that can be useful to discussion and study groups. Among recent articles: On Darwin's Theory of Evolution, The Hebrew Element in Everyday English, Noah and the Ark Reexamined, The Development of Biblical Prayer, The Story of Creation, etc.

Annual subscription is \$12 or equivalent, to be sent to the Society at 29A Keren Hayesod Street, Jerusalem, Israel 94188●

## Nabucco

Verdi's grand opera *Nabucco* will be performed outside the ancient walls of Jerusalem in the second half of May. It deals with the first Exile to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and includes the famous "Va, pensiero" aria sung by the Hebrew captives.

*Nabucco* will be produced by Vittorio Rossi who has established an international reputation for his out-door productions and will include two choirs, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and an array of famous singers.

It is the international operatic event of the year●

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