

# The SCRIBE

## JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

PUBLISHED BY THE EXILARCH'S FOUNDATION

No. 36

SEPTEMBER 1989

Est. 1971

### The Queen and the Caliphate

On her recent visit to London, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto succeeded in bringing Pakistan back into the Commonwealth. As a result there are now more Moslems than Christians in the Commonwealth, and in addition to her title as Defender of the Christian Faith the Queen may assume some responsibility for defending the Moslem faith as well. In fact, as head of the foremost Moslem country in the world, Miss Bhutto may well offer the Queen or Prince Charles the vacant Caliphate, subject to certain requirements.

As the country that defeated the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Great Britain has a valid claim for the title of the deposed Sultan who was the last Caliph.

If the Queen assumes that dignity it would become relatively easy to extend the blasphemy laws to cover Islam, and may even result in the banning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. It would bring one step nearer the Queen's secret ambition of becoming "universal monarch", a title last used by Genghis Khan.

The next candidate to return to the Commonwealth is no doubt the United States of America that proclaimed independence from Britain in 1776 with French help at a time of bitter Franco-British rivalry. British agents in turn sowed the seeds of the bloody French Revolution that toppled the monarchy, and whose bicentenary has just been celebrated. However, America's ties with the mother country were never completely severed: Americans still refer to "The Queen". Moreover, the English language remains a very strong link with Britain. When Bismark was asked once what was the greatest event in modern history, he replied it was the fact that America chose to speak English. That reality decided the United States to enter the two world wars on the side of Britain and has thus saved the world from German domination and tyranny.

Should the Queen or her successor become universal monarch, it would fulfil Farouk's prediction when he was forced to abdicate that eventually there would be only five kings left in

the world - the King of England and the four kings in a pack of cards!

The hallmark of universal monarchs has always been religious toleration - Alexander the Great, Cyrus the Great and, more recently, Genghis Khan, who used to say, "I have achieved supreme political power; religion is not my speciality".

But when the Messiah will reign as universal monarch there will be only one religion ●

N.E.D.

### Demography and Abortion

by S.M. Glick

Dean of Ben Gurion University

The demographic problem in Israel is composed of two elements: an ever-increasing non-Jewish population and lagging Jewish population growth. Little serious thought is given to the Jewish half of the equation, aside from fruitless heated discussions about aliya and yerida. There is almost no mention of the major continuing drain on the Israeli population via abortion, legal and illegal.

According to official Ministry of Health statistics, about 20,000 "legal" abortions are performed annually. Health Minister Shoshana Arbeli-Almozilino stated to the Knesset some time ago that perhaps another 40,000 illegal abortions are being performed annually, almost exclusively by the Jewish population.

These numbers indicate that in the short period of its existence, Israel has lost several hundred thousand or perhaps as many as several million potential Jewish citizens by abortion.

Nor is the situation static. It continues to deteriorate. In 1985 there were 3,000 more legal abortions than in 1983 - a frightening increase. The "health of the woman" clause under which over 6,000 legal abortions are performed annually is openly acknowledged to be merely a camouflage. The number of medical conditions that prevent a woman from carrying an infant to term is infinitesimal. The abortions under the clause "danger to the infant" has risen 40 per cent in two years - with no explanation.

In a country that in 40 years of existence has sentenced only one criminal to death, is it reasonable that being an "unwanted" baby should carry with it a death sentence?

In Israel there are thousands of childless couples willing to pay almost any sum in

order to get a child for adoption, and they reach out to jungles of Brazil and behind the Iron Curtain to do so. Would it not be more logical to suggest adoption as an option to a pregnant woman who does not want her child? The child is desperately wanted by others, and one can, by mutually agreed-upon adoption, solve two problems in a humane and compassionate manner ●

### Know Your Friends

Condensed from

*The Wall Street Journal* 12/7/89

Contributed by William S. Shashoua

As a result of the "four corrections" adopted by the Likud Party's Central Committee, Secretary of State Baker is threatening to bring the Russians into the Middle East negotiations.

A reasonable man would say that the U.S. itself should have demanded these corrections.

- (1) Does the State Department think useful negotiations can be held while the Palestinians are rioting, directed by the PLO?
- (2) Does American policy now call for a separate state on the West Bank?
- (3) Does anyone think that Israel will agree to throw East Jerusalem into the cauldron once more?
- (4) Does the U.S. want to bar Jews from settling in the land of their heritage?

More troubling is the State Department's disdain for the wishes of Israel's voters. The State Department seems now to be courting not just moderate Arabs but the most immoderate Arab groups.

*The Scribe:* America needs Israel as much as, if not more than, Israel needs America. The State Department seems to take Israel's friendship for granted and feels free to manipulate Israel's policy. Our advice to Secretary of State Baker is "Don't push too far". The mood of the Israelis is such that Mr. Shamir's terms will not be on the table for long.

On behalf of the EFRAT U.K. Committee, I must thank you most sincerely for publishing our Appeal in the June issue of your excellent publication. Its contents opened my eyes to many subjects and I found it compelling reading.

All those who work in Israel for EFRAT (Jewish Association for Birth Encouragement) do so on a voluntary basis. Its work is vital for our future. Its success means the saving of Jewish life ●

22 Rotherwick Rd., Dr. Joshua Saper  
London NW11 7DA

*The Scribe:* EFRAT is most worthy of generous support. Donations should be sent directly to the above.

# The French Revolution...

*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*

by Naim Dangoor

Hard on the heels of our visit to China where we watched life there after the Communist Revolution, and where we witnessed at close range the student demonstrations and the abortive uprising, my wife and I decided to go to Paris to see at first hand the bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution – a watershed in modern European history. A friend had told us that the best place to watch the proceedings would be in front of our TV set; and although modern television brings events live to our homes efficiently and in detail, this is not a good substitute for the real thing.

The highlight of the celebrations was to be "Homage to *La Marseillaise*", a combined parade and spectacle along the Champs-Élysées on Friday 14 July from 9.30pm to midnight, with 8,000 participants, choreographed by Jean-Paul Goude.

Four hours before the start the streets were already packed, but luckily I spotted a first floor Iranian restaurant where we booked a window table on the Champs-Élysées and to which we came at eight o'clock to watch the celebrations in "royal" comfort.

To Goude's haunting rhythm, the procession filed past – drums from the French regions, rain from the British, snow from the Russians, and jazz music from the Americans. The foreign contingent was headed by the PLO float, which I thought was in bad taste. In the end, spectacular fireworks rose from the *Arc de Triomphe* and the million bystanders spilled over the Champs-Élysées to present a rare sight of that long and wide avenue completely filled with people from end to end. It was altogether an unforgettable experience – very Goude!

The next evening we went to the Palace of Versailles for the open air opera –

Andrea Chenier – on the time of the Revolution, with Plácido Domingo.

## Britain and Europe

Mrs. Thatcher criticised the Revolution on the grounds that it was followed by a reign of terror, and then came Napoleon who, she said, wanted to unify Europe by force. The bicentenary was not to celebrate the reign of terror but the concept of freedom that followed from the Revolution. As for Napoleon wanting to unify Europe, he obviously had the right idea 200 years before a united Europe becomes a reality. Britain was the odd man out then as she still is today. It is doubtful if Britain will get better terms from the EEC than those offered by Napoleon and we would have been spared two world wars and the Holocaust. Moreover, as a result of the cataclysms of the twentieth century, the leading nations have lost control over the "third world" nations, and today, with the two Super Powers neutralising each other, petty dictators and terrorists pose the real threat to world peace.

## Human Rights

As for the Declaration of the Rights of Man that was made at the start of the Revolution, it is true that this was not a novelty.

These ideas emerged from the so-called Judaeo-Christian tradition (meaning that part of the Christian tradition that was taken from Judaism). That declaration may look good on paper but it hasn't changed human prejudices, and anti-semitism remained rooted in French society until it erupted in the Dreyfus affair.

## The Dreyfus Affair

In 1884, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of spying and was condemned to life imprisonment. After a long campaign conducted by Emile Zola, a retrial took place in an atmosphere verging on civil war and Dreyfus was finally pronounced completely innocent in 1906.

An Eton boy at the time was asked to translate the French phrase, *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*. With the Dreyfus affair on everybody's mind, his answer was, "The Jew is not worth the scandal!"

The Catholic clergy, the military and the right wing did not hesitate to exploit anti-semitism to buttress their position. The "Affair" contributed to the separation of Church and State in France, and by its influence on Herzl – to the development of Zionism. The Dreyfus Affair was in a way the *barmitzva* of modern France, a coming of age, as the French people moved forward with a clear conscience to face the challenge of the Great War in 1914.

## Slogans and Reality

However, the slogan, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, still rings hollow in a country which enthusiastically collaborated with the Germans to send French Jews to the gas chambers; where anti-semitism is today on the increase and where 25 per cent of the population sympathises with the National Front. In its rabid anti-semitism, Christianity contains within it the seed of its own destruction.

Some facts of history: the revolution started through a misunderstanding after a lunch given by the governor of the Bastille prison to the leaders of the mob became too prolonged. Queen Marie Antoinette was still holding lavish parties at Versailles months after the uprising. King Louis XVI was guillotined in 1793 as an afterthought. His sentence was confirmed by only one vote (361-360). Robespierre said, "Let the King die that the nation will live". Only a small minority in France today approve of his execution. The French Revolution was a prelude to the Russian revolution and the totalitarian regimes of Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler.

The revolution in Iraq in 1958 copied the French in every detail: the date of 14 July, the massacre of the royal family, the show trials of members of the old regime, the reigns of terror that followed on several occasions ●

# ...and The Hebrew Revolution

Proclaim Liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof

The Hebrew revolt against enslavement and against Pharaoh's persecution and tyranny, and the Exodus from Egypt 3,400 years ago, were more dramatic than the French uprising, and more profound in their aims. While the French worshipped "Reason" and a nude woman, we were taken to Mount Sinai to enter into a covenant with the Master of the Universe. In typical Jewish fashion we went straight to the Source: we don't want middlemen or intermediaries.

As in other visionary movements, Moses had to deal with reactionary forces – Korah's rebellion and the worship of the golden calf.

## The Torah of Moses

The Torah given to us by Moses is truly

the basis of human civilisation, establishing a holy link between our Creator and mankind. In the field of human rights and equality the Torah laid down that we must have ONE LAW for us and for the stranger that lives within our gates.

In a world where slavery was practised until modern times, the Torah commanded that slaves must be released on the seventh year.

## Economics of the Torah

But the most important innovation was in the field of economics. The French Revolution was a one-off attack against privileges but today the rich are getting richer and the poor have to suffer in the name of democracy and a faulty capitalist system. By the Jubilee year, the Torah

provides for a *continuing revolution* against privileges and against economic slavery whereby the rich exploit the rest of the population. We are commanded every fifty years to "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof". Land reverts to the community, debts are cancelled and everyone can turn a page and start afresh on equal footing.

The ideals of the Torah have yet to be completely fulfilled. We were meant to be a "kingdom of priests" to spread the message of the Torah but we failed our mission and took no action in this respect. We left it to others to borrow from us for resale.

WAS THE CROWN OF THE TORAH TOO BIG FOR OUR HEAD? ●



# Hakham Abdallah Somekh

Rabbinical scholarship in Baghdad was for thirty years (1743-1773) dominated by Hakham Sadqa Hosssein who came from Aleppo. The next generation was led for 50 years by Hakham Moshe Haim, grandfather of Hakham Yosef Haim, whose family earned the title of *Beit El Hakham*. The following generation saw the rise of another luminary, Hakham Abdallah Somekh.

Hakham Abdallah was born in 1813, the eldest of eight brothers and eight sisters. He inclined to spiritual matters and was the pupil of Hakham Moshe Haim. His father, who was a prosperous diamond merchant, encouraged him in his pursuit. In 1840 Heskell Menashe Zebaida established for Somekh a teaching yeshiva called Midrash Abu Menashe where Hakham Abdallah gave his pupils a complete course of study leading to ordination. Benjamin the Second who visited Baghdad in 1848 reported, "The religious instruction among the Jews of Baghdad is admirable, for there is a large yeshiva in which sixty young rabbis study. This school is under the direction of the learned Rabbi Abdallah ben Abraham Somekh, who performs the duties of his office without pay".

## Midrash Beit Zilkha

In 1854, Zebaida's sons Menashe and Sasson enlarged the yeshiva and called it "Beit Zilkha", which remained the centre of Torah study until the mass emigration of 1951.

The reputation of Hakham Abdallah and his yeshiva continued to grow, attracting students from other countries and providing rabbis and ritual slaughterers for places as far off as Iran, India, the Far East and Yemen. He wrote several books, notably *Zibhe Sedeq* (legal decisions and responsa on the *Shulhan Arukh*) published in 1904 with an introduction by Hakham Ezra Dangoor.

## Enlightened Rabbi

Throughout the community Hakham Abdallah was referred to as *Estayee* (Master). His full pedigree is Hakham Abdallah, Hakham Abraham, Yosef, Heskell Hassomekh, Eliahou, Abraham, Nessim. He married his first cousin and they had four sons and four daughters. He was an enlightened Rabbi who believed in *Torah im derekh erez* - Torah study with worldly knowledge - in accordance with the Talmud's advice: *Derekh erez qadma latorah* - worldly knowledge precedes Torah study. Ignoring the protestations of leading religious personages at home and abroad, he was instrumental in the rehabilitation of the Alliance School, which moved in 1872 to new imposing premises, by sending his own son there. Two headmasters of the Alliance - Selman Gareh and Morris Cohen - were married into the Somekh family.

Hakham Abdallah died on Shabbath 18 Elul = 13 September 1889 during a cholera epidemic. The affair of his burial shook

world Jewry in general and the communities of Baghdad, Constantinople and London in particular.

## Epidemics in Baghdad

Cholera and plague epidemics were common in those days, brought about mainly by the burial traffic from Iran to the Shia's holy places of Najaf and Karbala. The plague epidemic in 1742 wiped out most of the rabbis of Baghdad including the chief rabbi and the entire Beth Din. This necessitated bringing Hakham Sadqa Hosssein from Aleppo who himself died in the epidemic of 1773.

The worst outbreak was the plague epidemic of 1831. For many months Baghdad was besieged by Ali Pasha and his soldiers, who were sent from Constantinople to depose the rebellious wali Daud Pasha. During the siege, famine, flood and plague raged in the city. Finally Ali Pasha entered the city on Kippur night and Daud Pasha was taken to Constantinople. It is estimated that in that episode a hundred thousand people from a population of 150,000 perished. The *muezzins* shouted from the minarets *Allaf*, that is to say the death toll had reached a thousand a day! In April alone, 30,000 people died and on 27 April water flooded the Jewish quarter destroying 200 homes.

Somekh was brought from Grara suburb to Baghdad where he died on Friday night. The wali, Mustafa Assem Pasha, was anti-Jewish. The army commander, Tawfiq Pasha, was an honest man.

R. Moshe Halel and R. Sasson Smouha requested the wali to allow burial in the regular Jewish cemetery within the city limits but he refused because of the cholera quarantine. However, he gave written permission for burial at the Cohen shrine outside Baghdad where R. Jacob Harofeh was also buried.

On Saturday night the funeral procession of thousands of people, Jews and Moslems, crossed the bridge to go to the Cohen. But the local official prevented them from going inside the shrine. The Jews managed to open the door and carry out the burial inside the Cohen enclosure.

## Mass arrests

The next day, on complaints from Moslems, the wali ordered the arrest and imprisonment of community leaders: R. Halel (40 days); R. Smouha (41 days); Heskell Menahem Iny (33 days) and others - a total of 25 Jews. There was also a pogrom.

On Monday 15 September the wali arrested R. Abraham Joshua Elisha'a Horesh and Abdallah Heskell El Kabir. Both remained in jail 40 days. On Tawfiq Pasha's advice, Yehuda Saleh Zeloof\*, nephew of R. Somekh, who was then 31 years of age, and spoke eight languages, and others went to Khanaqin and Mosul (beyond the jurisdiction of the Baghdad wali) with the seal of the Chief Rabbi, Hakham Elisha'a Dangoor, and sent tele-



Hakham

Left to Right: H. Shm Elisha'a Dangoor\*, I Shamash\*\*, H. Yisha

€ = pupil of H. Some

Other pupils were: H. Eliahou Mani, H.

grams to the Sassoon family in London, to the Board of Deputies, the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Alliance Israelite in Paris and to Constantinople, bearing the signatures of 70 Community notables.

## Further arrests

When the wali got wind of this move he ordered the arrest of all those who signed the telegrams. On Sunday 21 September the following were arrested: Hakham Elisha'a (25 days); R. Nessim Levy (3 days); R. Ezra Cohen (28 days); R. Moshe Shamash (28 days); Saleh Kashi (85 days). On Kippur day Joseph Shemtob was arrested (17 days). On 5 October - Asher Salem, Yisshaq Yisrael, Aharon Yehuda Rushti - all 34 days. On 12 October Heskell Reuben Somekh and Menashe Shashoua were arrested.

The Sultan ordered Hakham Elisha'a to go to the telegraph office and tell the story. But with the wali sitting next to him he refused to communicate.

On 28 October Constantinople asked Tawfiq Pasha, the army commander, to tell the truth, and he did.

## Wali transformed

On 28 November a Royal Decree removed the wali to Damascus, where he subsequently died of cholera.

At the same time, the order was given for the removal of R. Somekh's body for

\*Of him our book keeping teacher Khedhoori Shohet used to remind us:

*Taallam el heroof  
lihatta tesir kateb ma'arouf  
wadaftarak bein el tejjar masfouf  
mithil dafater Yehuda Zeloof!*

Learn good handwriting,  
so that you become a noted clerk,  
and your ledgers well ordered among merchants,  
like the books of Yehuda Zeloof!



## Abdallah Somekh and Baghdadian Rabbis of his generation

(from an illustration commissioned by the Exilarch's Foundation)

Mjallid, H. Sasson Yisrael, H. Yeheskel Moshe Halevi\*\*, H. Ezra Adam, H. Ezra Dangoor\*\*, H. Yosef Hayim<sup>†</sup>, H. Abdullah Somekh, H. Eliahou Obadiah, H. Sasson Smouha\*\*, H. Dawid Papu\*, H. Abraham Halel\*\*, H. Moshe Mjalled\*\*, H. Ezra Cohen<sup>†</sup>.

\* = became Chief Rabbi

Abraham Horesh, H. Heskell Shlomo Dawid, H. Shlomo Bekhor, H. Heskell Hai Halevi ●

burial in the regular Jewish cemetery, the quarantine having by then been lifted. When the body was disinterred on 5 December it was miraculously found to be in a perfect state of preservation.

In his report to Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary, Colonel Tweedie, British Consul-General in Baghdad, found nothing unusual in the maltreatment of the Jews by the Moslem populace. "The prescriptive right of doing as he pleases with a Jew is here held to belong, in virtue of his natural and religious superiority, to every Moslem". Col. Tweedie advises that Jews should put up resistance! (Colonial hypocrisy).

\* \* \*

Mr. Morris Cohen comments on such a procedure thus: "The will of the Mussulmans is such, that if this persecution is resented openly by the Jews, there would most probably be a general attack on the Jews and much bloodshed". "The Jews being unable to obtain redress from the authorities find themselves compelled to submit to these various forms of ill-treatment in silence".

\* \* \*

At the Public Records Office at Kew, in Greater London, we found the following memoranda concerning this episode. Because of their historical interest we publish them in full.

\* \* \*

**Letter from Colonel W. Tweedie, British Consul-General in Baghdad to Sir William A. White, British Ambassador in Constantinople:**

I enclose a memorandum by Mr. Morris Cohen, a British Jew, resident of Baghdad, where he holds the situation of English master in a large school maintained by the Israelitish Alliance Society of London and Paris. Mr. Cohen is a man of superior education, and sensible, moderate in views. I had been depending on him to keep me informed orally of what was

passing in the affair referred to and he had done so to the best of his knowledge.

I also enclose a memorandum on the case by the Residency Surgeon, who has a large private practice among the Jews. (Whether permission was given for burial actually in or only near the shrine of Joshua Cohen forms a primary issue).

### Memorandum by Mr Morris Cohen dated 29th October 1889

During the cholera an order was issued by the local authorities to the effect that dead bodies, instead of being buried in the usual cemeteries within the precincts of the town, were to be interred out in the plain at a distance of about 500 yards from the limits of the town or from any habitation. This order had been more or less strictly obeyed by all parties.

On September 13th, the death of a very distinguished rabbi, Abdallah Somech, being imminent, a deputation of two rabbis (Abraham Halel\* acting chief rabbi and Sassoon Smouha) and a third gentleman, Youssef Shemtob Effendi, a member of the Commission of the Vilayet, waited upon the Governor General to ask for permission to inter Haham Abdallah Somech in the ordinary cemetery in the town, as it would be considered an act of utter impiety to inter a rabbi so religious and venerated in any unconsecrated ground, as is generally done in the case of prostitutes, murderers, etc. The Governor General naturally refused to violate the general enactment in favour of a particular person; upon which permission was asked to bury Haham

Abdallah at the "Cohen", the tomb of Joshua, the high priest, situated on the right bank of the river, at a distance of about a mile from any habitation. The Governor General answered that a permission was hardly necessary, seeing that it was their own ground; but the deputation insisted that bodies are never taken by the Jews from one side of the river to be buried on the other, and a written permission was then granted to the effect that the body was to be interred at the "Cohen".

On Friday evening September 13th, Haham Abdallah died of old age and grief at the death of his son Sassoon from cholera. As it is forbidden to bury on the Sabbath-day, the funeral was appointed to take place on Saturday night. During the day it was a generally understood thing that the Governor General had given a written sanction to burial in the "Cohen", the Chief Commissioner of Police and the President of the Municipal Council having both received intimation to that effect from the Governor himself, as policemen would be required to accompany the funeral in the evening. Late in the afternoon a police

\*Note the spelling - not Hillel

officer in charge of about 20 men arrived at the house of mourning under orders from their superiors. A little before sunset, four Jewish grave-diggers crossed the river to prepare the grave for the reception of the body. On their way to the "Cohen" they called at the house of the Mussulman watchman to get the key of the outer gate of the tomb. The watchman, accompanied by 3 or 4 persons, went with them and opened the gate. The site of the grave having been chosen, the Jewish grave-diggers set to work, whereupon the watchman informed them that if he did not get a *bakshish* of £50 he would find means to prevent the burial from taking place. At the same time he referred to a precedent when his father, being watchman, received a present of £40 at the burial of Haham Yacoub about 30 years ago under almost similar circumstances. The grave-diggers mentioned that they did not know anything at all about giving a present and that besides, the Governor General had given his full permission. The watchman objected angrily and finally, assisted by the Mussulmans who were with him, compelled the grave-diggers to desist from their task, drove them out of the courtyard, locked the door and went away, saying he would go to Abdallah Zibak and stop the entire proceedings. Meanwhile, the dead body was being carried out of town, the number of persons accompanying it reaching to over two thousand. On arriving at the "Cohen", the door was found locked and the grave-diggers standing outside told how they had been driven out.

After some deliberation, two rabbis, Abraham Halel and Sassoon Smouha were delegated to return to town at once and inform the Commissioner of Police what had occurred. At the same time another gentleman, Menahem Heskell (member of a Court of Appeal), went to see Abdallah Zibak, the President of the Municipal Council of the right bank. The coffin being laid on the ground, the people gathered round and listened to an extempore sermon to pass the time away. After about an hour, impatience began to be manifested and someone having succeeded in climbing over the wall of the building forced open the door. A cry was soon raised that the door was open and the multitude poured in. The courtyard would contain some two or three hundred persons. While the body was being buried, a number of Mussulmans headed by Abdallah Zibak suddenly made their appearance and, armed with heavy sticks, began to lay about them furiously on all sides. A scene of wild confusion ensued. The suddenness of the attack so far from town and at night too, induced many of those who were able to leave the courtyard to take flight towards the town in fear of a general massacre. Many persons received severe blows on the head, face and arms, others having fallen down, were trodden on in the general confusion. Meanwhile, however, while those near the gate were receiving blows, the others at the farther end of the courtyard succeeded in burying the venerable rabbi and the Mussulmans, perceiving that the burial was accomplished shortly after, withdrew,

some on horseback, others on foot. They continued assaulting all whom they met out in the plain.

The fugitives on their way to town were met by the two rabbis who were now returning accompanied by the Chief Commissioner of Police and the President of the Municipal Council of Baghdad. They showed their wounds and bruises and with cries and lamentations asked for justice. The Chief Commissioner of Police expressed deep sympathy with them and promised to give the affair full consideration. About this time, Abdallah Zibak himself, accompanied by some of his followers, passed that way and was stopped by the Chief Commissioner of Police and severely reprimanded for their unwarranted and cowardly onslaught. The Chief Commissioner asked by what right they dared to interfere with the Jews burying a respected member of their own community in their own property. He then arrested several of his followers who were conveyed to prison there and then, and at the same time informed Abdallah Zibak that he would have to answer next morning for his conduct. All parties then quietly dispersed and went to their respective homes.

The next morning Haham Abraham Halel (acting Chief Rabbi), Haham Sassoon Smouha and Heskell Menahem repaired to the office of the Chief Commissioner of Police to lodge a complaint on behalf of the entire community. They were conducted before the Governor General who asked them if they were Turkish subjects, and on their replying in the affirmative, he simply added "Away with them to the Tower" and without a word of explanation they were lodged in a common felons' jail in the company of thieves and murderers. The consternation among the Jewish community at the news of this imprisonment cannot very well be imagined. But the terror and the general panic increased, when during the day many other arrests were made without any explanation of any kind. Among those who were thus seized while they were walking quietly along, some managed to obtain their liberty by paying whatever they had about them, others unwilling or unable to pay were at once imprisoned. During the week several persons were imprisoned daily, no-one being able to account for the proceedings. Later on it was rumoured that the "Cohen" was claimed by the Mussulmans as Mussulman property, that those imprisoned would not be released unless and until the body of Haham Abdallah was disinterred. Then it was said that the Governor General had permitted the body to be buried outside the "Cohen" and not inside. Meanwhile, telegrams were sent to the Sultan, the Grand Vizir and others at Constantinople and London. Persons who had signed these telegrams were also arrested and imprisoned. It must be mentioned that of those who are imprisoned many were not even in the town at the time of the burial. The most astonishing part of all is the appearance of Mussulman witnesses who are suddenly called in, and who, on seeing the person accused, at once pretend to recognise him as having been present at the funeral, armed too with a

revolver or a dagger or any other arm they choose to designate. The idea of old Jewish rabbis, all white-bearded men, who have spent their lives in poring day and night over Jewish literature, arming themselves with revolvers or offering any sort of resistance to Mussulmans, is preposterous and ridiculous in the extreme. And yet they are accused of armed rebellion.

Particular severity seems to have been intentionally exercised towards these unfortunate persons by their being kept in prison so long, and especially during the most solemn festival when it is incumbent to spend the day in Synagogue. They might from the very first have been released on bail.

The (Moslem) persons imprisoned by the Chief Commissioner of Police on the night of the attack were released by order of the Governor General. This has not been explained. The Commissioner himself is said to have been severely scolded by the Governor General for interfering in the matter. Is it not astonishing that no complaint was lodged that night by the Mussulmans against the Jews if it be true that several thousand Jews offered armed resistance to them?

What should the Jews arm themselves for on Saturday evening if nothing occurred during the day to lead them to expect any resistance? And if they had had any cause to expect resistance from the Mussulmans, would they have armed themselves as a remedy or rather complained to the authorities and taken any other precaution common to a peaceful and rather timid community?

It is said the Governor General heard a continuous noise as of rioting. This can be explained by the custom of singing or, rather, chanting psalms all the time a dead body is being carried along to the grave. How is it no unfriendly demonstration was made by the Mussulmans in the bazars and town on the other side of the river?

The common belief is that Abdallah Zibak, in order to screen himself from the charge to be preferred against him by the Jewish community, supported by the Chief Commissioner of Police and the President of the Municipal Council, must have had an interview with the Governor General and succeeded in some satisfactory manner in inducing him to turn the charge against the Jews themselves. This belief is borne out by the fact of so many false witnesses appearing against persons who were not in town at the time of the burial and swearing that they saw them there armed etc., etc. It has been learnt that a number of Mussulmans were collected together at Abdallah Zibak's house and induced under threats and exhortations to give false testimony and that a Moullah promised absolution for the sin and even showed how it is actually meritorious.

My information is collected from the testimony of a great number of persons who were present from beginning to end, from some who were wounded, from some who have been accused; and from personal knowledge.

Some moral considerations naturally flow from the rather arbitrary proceedings of the Governor General in this sad occur-

ence. The attitude of the Mussulman population in general has become decidedly unfriendly and the Jews are afraid to complain of continued petty acts of aggression. In several instances people have extorted money from Jews under the threat of giving witness that they were at the funeral armed with revolvers. A respectable merchant whom I know intimately was violently insulted by a Mussulman in a coffee-house full of people, for having removed his fez on a warm afternoon and put it on his knee for a moment. Small tradesmen have in many instances been compelled under threats to sell their wares at inferior prices. Yet nothing is heard of all this, simply because the Jews are afraid to complain to the authorities; hardly expecting any justice where so much injustice has already been experienced. Counter-accusations are so common here and so easily maintained by the aid of false witnesses that the Jews are ordinarily inclined to suffer their grievances in silence rather than raise still greater ones by complaining.

On returning one day to town during the cholera, I was astonished to find that Jews only were refused re-admittance into town by order of the Governor General, and in my presence several Jews were violently kept back by three soldiers who said they had received orders from Wali Pasha to prevent the Jews from returning to town. Mussulmans and Christians were allowed to pass freely in and out of the gate (Babu'l Muadhham) while the Jews, once outside the gate, were in quarantine. Is there any country in the world where quarantine restrictions are laid upon Jews only: while all other nationalities are allowed free ingress? These restrictions were enforced at the three gates of the town, and men, women and children of the Jewish persuasion returning to town at the end of the cholera were kept out in the scorching sun all day without any shelter and were only allowed to pass on paying a good *bakhshish*. Such restrictions against the Jews produce a demoralising effect upon them and debase them still further in the eye of the Mussulmans. The news of the quarantine against the Jews spread for miles to all the villages along the river; so that those persons who were ready to return to town, or unable to remain outside any longer for want of funds, were plunged in great distress.

The absence of complaints on the part of the Jews in general must not be held to indicate the absence of grievances or any satisfaction with their social condition, but rather as a result of their deep conviction, arrived at by sad experience, that in their efforts to obtain justice they merely embitter their condition and involve themselves in such evil toils that they are finally glad to withdraw at any price ●

**Morris Cohen**  
Baghdad October 29th 1889

**Memorandum of Surgeon-Major  
Bowman, Residency Surgeon,  
Baghdad, dated October 30th 1889**

On the outbreak of cholera, when the Jews left the town, the Governor-General was much annoyed, as he did not consider

this movement necessary. On the 13th September, the death from cholera of the Rabbi Abdulla Somech occurred: a man of great repute among the community. The Jews asked permission of H.E. the Wali to bury him in their cemetery within the walls of the town: this was refused; but he allowed them (at their urgent request) to inter the remains within the tomb of Joshua Cohen, an old burial place for rabbis on the right bank of the Tigris, about 1,500 yards from the town. Upon the arrival of the funeral at the gates, the door keeper refused to permit their entrance, when some of them climbed over the walls and opened the doors and began digging the grave. Whilst so engaged, Abdulla Zeibak, the Reis of the Municipality on the same side of the town, forcibly attempted to prevent them from continuing the burial which resulted in injuries to both parties. However, afterwards the Chief of the Police came up and order was restored; but after the Jews had buried the body in the tomb. The day afterwards some Rabbis and leading members of the community complained to H.E. the Wali, he promptly arrested them on the charge of resisting the local authorities with firearms and other weapons; having been so informed by Abdulla Zeibak.

On the 15th September the wife of Assher Salem died in Baghdad. The funeral procession on leaving the house were stopped by the Quarantine and Police Officials (the officials being under the impression the Jews were going to bury in their old cemetery) and another riot took place. The body was eventually buried in a new cemetery beyond the city walls, the same day ten rabbis and sixty other Jews were arrested in connection with this disturbance. Upon this the Jews applied to H.E. the Mushir, the Governor-General having declined to interfere with the judicial or police authorities. Finally the Jews telegraphed to the Sublime Porte and the Minister of the Interior. His Excellency, the Wali, hearing of this (I am informed) issued orders for the prosecution of each of the signers of the telegram (about 80 persons) but since then most of them have been released; nine Jews being at present in prison.

1st. The Jews doubtless have reason to complain of the barbarous manner in which some of their community were taken to prison under arrest, viz., tied to the tail of the mule the police officer was riding.

2. Some Arabs of the Abu Shibal quarter entered the Jewish houses near, insulted the females and forcibly took away at least three women: upon complaining to the authorities, they stated they could get no redress ●

**Signed R. Bowman, Surgeon Major,  
Residency Surgeon,  
Turkish Arabia, Baghdad  
October 30th 1889**

**Board of Deputies Intervenes**

In its Annual Report of 1890, the Board of Deputies gives full details of the Somekh affair and complains that the Governor (Wali) of Baghdad, who was supposed to be the cause of all the mischief, was transferred first to Adana and thence to

the Governor-Generalship of Syria, a much better appointment than the one he had held at Baghdad. It goes on to say, "If local governors in Turkey are thus rewarded for promoting fanatical attacks on the Jews, it is greatly to be feared that the number of such attacks will increase".

In fact, a letter dated 27 March 1890, from the Conjoint Foreign Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association to Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary, reports new arrests in Baghdad and refutes the claim that the Cohen Shrine of Joshua the High Priest was a Moslem mosque.

It adds, "In the year 1860, a similar attempt was made to deprive the Jews of the possession of the Tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel and at the insistence of the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Turkish Ambassador to England interposed with the Sublime Porte, and the right of the Jews to the Tomb was established.

The letter was signed by Arthur Cohen, President of the Jewish Board of Deputies and by Albert Sassoon, Vice-President of the Anglo-Jewish Association.

Sir Albert Sassoon, after whom the Baghdad Alliance School was named, was the eldest son of David Sassoon and became First Baronet of Kensington Gore. He was born in Baghdad in 1818 and died in 1896 in Brighton ●

**A storm in a tea-cup? A £50 tip would have averted the whole crisis!**

**In 1889 people could not imagine that the First World War was only 25 years away, that the Second World War and its Holocaust were 50 years away and that Hitler was five months old ●**

**Baghdadi Wisdom**

**El floos ma tghatti el eyoub**  
(Money cannot cover faults)

**El hejara teji min qarib**  
(A stone usually comes from a close person)

**Bi'i wendam ahsan min ma tbi'i wa tendam**  
(Sell and regret better than not sell and regret)

**Hamiha haramiha**  
(Its guardian is its robber)

**Yakel el thimm testahi el ain**  
(The mouth eats - the eye is shy)

**Kil ma yejebak wilbis ma yijb el nas**  
(Eat what you like and wear what others like)

**Kathir mal kathir qahir**  
(Too much money - too much worry)

**Kathir abeed - kathir neheeba**  
(Too many servants - too many thefts)

**El kafan ma binu jeyoub**  
(The shroud has no pockets) ●

**Middle of the Road**

The current joke in Hong Kong is to which side of the road will traffic keep after 1997 - to the right as in China or to the left as in Hong Kong. Apparently a compromise has been reached to drive in the middle - as many Chinese drivers already do ●



Shamash Secondary School, Baghdad

Finishing Class - June 1947

(Left to right, front to back): Masters - Hussein Muruwa, Nessim Ezra Nessim, Murad Mikhael (Headmaster), Yusef Musa, Meir Haba Valentine Khedhour, Salim Abdou, Habiba Ibrahim, Elisha Dabora, Ezra Daniel, Moshe Sopher, Esperance Obadia, Victor Salim, Angele Cohen Richard Aboudi, Aboudi Dallal, Ezra Hakkak, Abdulla Shamash, Salim Hayim, Dawood Hellawi, Selman Sasson

## COOKERY CORNER

by Alice Shashou

### Helen's Zucchini Quiche (American recipe)

8 eggs  
6 cups shredded zucchini or courgette with the peel  
1 cup mazola  
2 large chopped onions  
2 cups biscuick powder (a pancake mix)  
Little onion powder  
1 cup grated cheese  
Basil, salt, pepper to taste

Butter a pyrex dish of 13" x 9". Mix all the ingredients together and pour it all in the pyrex dish. Make it even. Garnish with slices of courgette. Bake at 350°F for 40 minutes or until golden brown. Serve hot.

### Baba Ghanuj

This can be served as an appetizer, a dip or salad.

2 big egg plants (aubergine)  
8 tablespoons tahina  
2 cloves garlic  
Salt to taste  
Juice of 1-2 lemons depending on taste  
2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley  
A few black olives

Grill aubergines until the skin blackens and blisters. Remove the skin carefully and squeeze out the bitter taste.

Mash the aubergines with an electric blender to make a puree.

Crush garlic with salt. Add tahina and beat very well till it becomes lighter in colour. Slowly add lemon juice and if too thick, add water, then the puree of aubergine and the tahina sauce and mix thoroughly. Adjust the taste by adding lemon juice or salt. Pour the mixture into a bowl or small serving plates.

Garnish with chopped parsley and black olives and serve with pitta bread ●

## Tips

by Alice Shashou

When preparing coleslaw salad, the last ingredient to add is the mayonnaise because it curdles with vinegar.

If one drinking glass is tightly stuck inside another, don't try to force them apart. You could crack both. Instead fill the top glass with cold water and immerse the lower in hot but not boiling water. The top glass will contract slightly and the bottom one will expand, so both will come apart easily.

Eggs are fresh if, when placed in a bowl, of cold water they sink straight to the bottom and stay there. If they float, then they are not fresh.

Because salmonella food poisoning has been linked to eggs, we should be very careful. Put eggs in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Store in the egg boxes, protect them and keep them away from anything like fresh meat. Remember that egg shells are porous.

Buy only as many eggs as you require and use them up within two weeks of purchase.

If there are any cracked eggs, discard them.

When cooking cauliflower, the smell can sometimes be reduced if a slice of bread is added to the cooking water.

Cooking is a very personal matter and two cooks following the same recipe can produce different results.

When adding gelatine to a cold mixture, especially with cream, have the gelatine warm and melted without letting it boil.

If you add cold gelatine to a cold mixture, it will turn thready.

The first banana to be seen in England was around the mid-1600s.

Cakes should not be iced until absolutely cool.

To ripen avocados quickly, bury them in a bowl of flour.

To freshen stale potato crisps, heat under grill for a few minutes. Do not brown.

Pancakes can be made in advance and frozen.

It is much better to add your own fresh fruits to natural yoghurt. There is added sugar in fruit-flavoured types.

Wash your chips in warm water to eliminate some of the starch and dry well before dipping them in the hot fat. That way they won't stick together and will be crisp●

## Ottoman Jewry

The approaching five-hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from Spain and their massive arrival in the Ottoman Empire, arouses a renewed interest in the history and the cultural heritage of Turkish Judaism. In Israel itself, in which 100,000 of this community of 200,000 is gathered, MORIT, Foundation for a Cultural Centre of Turkish Judaism, proposes to work for the saving and promotion of the heritage. MORIT initiates to found in Israel a Centre with an archive, library, museum and information centre and a place of reunion; a Centre which will serve as an active institution in several cultural fields and will be open to all. MORIT is organising in Israel in October an International Congress of Turkish Judaism●

Box 1300

Bat-Yam, Israel

MORIT

The Sassoons became so wealthy and so prominent in China a century ago that the Chinese used their name to denote all Jews. One Chinese teacher tried to explain Good Friday to his pupils thus, "No.1 Sassoon was crucified and the other Sassoons became very angry!"●