

# The SCRIBE

## JOURNAL OF DESCENDANTS OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

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### EDITORIALS

#### Syrian Jewry

The recent rapid deterioration in the position of Syria's 4,500-strong Jewish community gives cause for serious concern. Twelve Jews are in gaol accused of trying to leave the country illegally. Torture and indignities of all kinds are inflicted on them. Many members of the community, resident mainly in Damascus, Aleppo and Kamishly suffer under constant police surveillance, are subject to curfew and sudden evictions to make way for Palestine Arabs, the elementary rights of freedom of movement and association are denied them, and they are prevented from engaging in normal business activity. It is immoral and incomprehensible that all this should not be severely condemned and put to rights by the international community with its United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In considering the position of the Syrian Jewish community as a whole, it is necessary to consider briefly the modern history of Syria, as no Jewish community can be isolated from the general conditions prevailing in the country in which it lives.

After the 1914-18 war, Syria with Lebanon came under French Mandate as Palestine and Iraq were under British Mandate. In the Second World War Syria came under Vichy France after the fall of France in 1940. It is perhaps ironic to reflect that in the Allied operation to free Syria and thus pave the way for the full independence of this Arab country, a Palestinian Jewish contingent served which included Mr. Moshe Dayan, who lost an eye in the fighting! Syria has always been a hotbed of Arab nationalism and it is no surprise that the Baath party was founded there in 1942 by a teacher, Michel Aflak. In the last 25 years Syria has had an almost annual turnover of dictators and their regimes. In the Six Day War she was driven from the Golan Heights from where she had harassed Israeli kibbutzim for many years. She has refused to accept the Security Council resolution of November 22nd, 1967 as a basis of settlement and is now in the Federation of

Arab Republics with Egypt and Libya (and Sudan?) founded in 1971. Syria has become a Soviet military and naval base from which the Soviet Union pursues its expansionist aims in the area.

There is a remarkable similarity between the Soviet and Syrian policies *vis-à-vis* Jews — (1) both oppress the Jewish minorities in their midst, (2) both are hostile to the Jewish State, (3) both are ruled by totalitarian regimes, and (4) both are allied in the pursuit of certain common aims in the region. Since the Six Day War the Syrian Jewish community has been subjected to severe restrictions in all spheres. It will be recalled that in 1965 Syria publicly executed Elie Cohen, that remarkable Israeli agent, an Egyptian Jew who had emigrated to Israel a few years earlier. She has also given assistance to hijackers and held Israelis and Jews as hostages.

A most vigorous protest must be launched to bring international pressure to bear on Syria to alleviate the position of the Jews there.

#### Iran Celebrations

Elsewhere in this issue we publish a copy of the scroll presented on October 26th, 1971 to the Iranian Ambassador in London for transmission to the Shah of Iran. This was at his reception held at the Savoy attended by the British Foreign Secretary, ambassadors and many other distinguished guests as part of the celebrations on the occasion of the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. His declaration allowing the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple has been compared to the Balfour Declaration in modern times. It also represented what was probably the first charter in history for ensuring the rights of minorities.

We are confident that through this presentation, gladly accepted by the Iranian authorities who televised the proceedings, ties of understanding and goodwill will be fostered between Iran and Jewish

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# THE BURDEN OF JEREMIAH

by N. E. DANGOOR

Jeremiah is often credited with having started the Jewish diaspora. He was instrumental in persuading King Jehoiachin to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar and as a result, the young king together with 18,000 of the leading citizens of Judah were deported to Babylon in 597 B.C.E.

Jeremiah wrote to the exiles warning them not to expect an early release and gave them the advice that became the charter of the diaspora:

"Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; and *seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*" (Jer. 29 : 4 and 7.)

Four years later King Zedekiah rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah was arrested and imprisoned for treason because during this final siege which lasted no less than three years, he openly advised voluntary submission to Babylonian power. Thus confused and weakened, Judah's defenders could not win. United, they could have a sporting chance to prevail. The resultant defeat of Judah in 586 B.C.E. was the greatest tragedy in Jewish history. Judah was depopulated and Jerusalem laid waste.

Nebuchadnezzar offered Jeremiah safe conduct and asylum in Babylon in recognition of his unwitting help but the prophet, who had great love for his people (being also afraid of the exiles in Babylon), refused these offers. He was disillusioned by Nebuchadnezzar's harsh measures and stayed on to lament the fall of Jerusalem. According to tradition, he was stoned to death in Egypt by his own countrymen.

## PRIESTLY FAMILY

Jeremiah was born in 650 B.C.E. and while still a young man he was called to be a prophet. He prophesied for over 40 years in the days of Josiah and his sons Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. To devote himself to his calling he did not marry.

Being of a priestly family opposed to the ruling priests in the Temple, he was doubly sensitive to the corruption in the established order. He advocated reforms and aimed to make religion a personal relationship between Man and God and instead of ritual and cult, establish humanity, justice and morality as the standards of the nation. But he received little satisfaction from the Establishment.

The new world power was the Neo-Babylonian Empire which defeated Assyria and Egypt. Judah, which had been a vassal of Assyria, changed its allegiance first to Egypt and then to Babylon. Jeremiah favoured continued submission to Babylon, which was now ruled by a series of enlightened kings, hoping thus to be free to institute his reforms without hindrance from the state.

The essence of Jeremiah's objective was to separate religion and state. It can truly be said that the operation was successful but the patient died! But Jeremiah, who was more concerned with preserving, at any price, the purity of Judaism than the Jewish state, saw beyond this when he prophesied: "I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee, but I will not make a full end of thee." (Jer. 46 : 28.)

In the diaspora Judaism proved capable of living without a state of its own, and had complete freedom to develop itself into the governing force in Jewish life.

The ruler who, 50 years later, put into full effect the separation of religion and state was Cyrus the Great. He gave and guaranteed freedom to all peoples in practising their religion and earned the title of "The Lord's Anointed" in our Holy Scriptures. He also ensured that religion does not interfere in the affairs of state.

## AIM OF SYNAGOGUE

In the Second Commonwealth, the synagogue which was created in the diaspora, retained its importance alongside the rebuilt Temple. Judaism developed along the lines laid down by Jeremiah and continued by Ezekiel and Ezra. Prayers replaced sacrifice and repentance became the new way to divine forgiveness.

In the first century C.E. relations between Judaea and the Roman occupiers again became critical. Jewish survival was threatened. Jeremiah's doctrine that spiritual and temporal powers need not be in conflict was regarded by some as a means of ensuring that survival. It was in line with the doctrine of personal religion on which Judaism and, later, its daughter religions of Christianity and Islam developed.

## ORTHODOX JUDAISM

The problems that faced Jeremiah are very relevant now that the State of Israel has been reborn. If Judaism thrived and developed in foreign countries in isolation from the state, why can't it do likewise in a Jewish state? In seeking to control and direct government policy, Orthodox Judaism would go back to the conditions that prevailed before 586 B.C.E. when Judaism was merely a state cult and not a personal relationship to Deity. We must not allow the seeds of contention that were in deep freeze to come to life again.

What more can Judaism require of a state, Jewish or non-Jewish, than complete freedom — freedom for itself and for all other faiths; for no true religion can suffer from tolerance, nor benefit from repression, of other faiths and no religion should claim for itself a monopoly of God.

Religious leaders, instead of seeking temporal power, should go out and seek the hearts of men for only in this way can we bring nearer the Kingdom of God.

# From Orient to Occident - In one Generation

by PERCY S. GOURGEY, M.B.E.

Born in Baghdad in the year 1818, Abdulla Ibn Daud Sason, eldest of the thirteen children of David Sassoon—the founder of the famous House of Sassoon—became barmitzvah in Bushire, Persia, grew up and prospered in Bombay and died as Sir Albert Sassoon, First Baronet of Kensington Gore, London, in 1896. This fantastic story of the Sassoon family, fascinatingly told in "The Sassoons" by Stanley Jackson, published by Heinemann's, is also fitting testimony to the integrity, perseverance and resourcefulness of a renowned Jewish family who successfully spanned the worlds of East and West in one generation.

As is to be expected, the earlier part of the book with an exotic flavour, is largely taken up with the life and business enterprise of David Sassoon, "the one that really counted" (according to his great-grandson, Siegfried Sassoon, the poet), and at whose death in Bombay in 1864 there was widespread mourning and the memorial for whom included many famous subscribers, including Gladstone. It was David Sassoon's father, Sheikh Sason ben Saleh (1750-1830) who occupied the position of Nasi, or Head of the Community in Baghdad, who arranged for the flight of his son and family at dead of night from Baghdad to Bushire when it became clear that the Jews were to be persecuted by the then Governor of Baghdad, which was an important part of the Ottoman Turkish empire.

## BUSINESS EMPIRE

David Sassoon landed in Bombay in 1832 and by virtue of his business acumen, fair dealing and hard work laid the foundation of that business empire extending from the Far East to the Near East via India which was almost entirely managed by his eight sons. At the time of the American Civil War when cotton from the Southern States was blockaded, Manchester imported Indian cotton through the Sassoon firm in Bombay. Later the Sassoons were to make an invaluable contribution to the growth of Lancashire's and Bombay's great textile industry.

Adhering strictly to the precepts and practices of Orthodox Judaism, David Sassoon, "a tall, lean, hard-muscled, Greco-like figure", established the pattern of business activity on the one hand, and public and charitable work on the other, which was followed by many Baghdad Jewish emigrants to India, Burma, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong-Kong, Shanghai and Japan. But it was through the friendship and hospitality given by his eldest son, Albert, to the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), on a visit to Bombay that the Sassoon connection with the Royal Family, and subsequently with national and international figures in politics and finance, began in real earnest.

There is described in meticulous, if rather boring, detail the hobbies, pastimes and magnificent residences of the numerous members of the Sassoon family in London, Brighton, Kent and elsewhere.

## DREYFUS CASE

Of considerable interest are references in the book to Rachel Beer, owner of the *Sunday Times* and *Observer* and Sir Philip Sassoon. Rachel Beer, a grand-daughter of David Sassoon, secured a sensational newspaper scoop when the notorious Major Esterhazy confessed to her that he had sold French military secrets to the Germans for which Captain Alfred Dreyfus had been wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. Dreyfus, it will be recalled, was the central figure in the case that rocked France at the turn of the century because of its anti-Semitic undertones and for whom the famous author, Emile Zola, penned his daring "J'Accuse", to secure Dreyfus' acquittal. The case opened the eyes of another author and more famous personality, Dr. Herzl, with all that that implied eventually for Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel.

Sir Philip Sassoon, whose mother was a Rothschild, and who was a Junior Minister in several pre-war Conservative Governments, showed no interest in the delicate negotiations leading to the British Mandate over Palestine in 1922 though he was one of Prime Minister Lloyd George's secretaries and, as Dr. Weizmann observed in his autobiography, "the only Jewish member of the delegation". The Sassoon contribution to the Zionist cause could have been immense and I recall how in an interview with President Weizmann in Rehovot in 1949, I remarked that it was a pity that the Sassoons were not prevailed upon to adopt the same attitude of support as the Rothschilds, perhaps through Sir Jacob Sassoon of Bombay and his wife, Lady Rachel Sassoon, my mother's aunt, who themselves were intensely Jewish-minded. The author omits much to show Sir Jacob's and Lady Rachel's deep and abiding consciousness of their Jewish heritage, and their piety. Their nephew, the late Mr. Simon Nissim, my uncle, who died in February 1968 left his large house in Knightsbridge, London and much of his valuable art collection to Israel.

## "RED" CHINA

The later heir to the title and wealth of Sir Jacob, who was childless, was Sir Victor Sassoon, of whose career the financial and racing aspects are given in considerable detail, with interesting side-lights of his work in the Indian Legislative Assembly and his brushes with the Japanese and later Communist Chinese authorities before and after World War II in the twilight era of colonialism. He died in 1961 at the age of 77, two years after marrying his American nurse. Another of the Sassoons to die childless was Lady Rachel Ezra of Calcutta whose hospitality and charm were almost as legendary as that of her renowned mother, Mrs. Flora Sassoon, whose grandson, Rabbi Solomon, who provided

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# THE CREATION OF IRAQ

## Extracts from "The Heart of the Middle East"

by RICHARD COKE (Published by Thornton & Butterworth, 1925)

"The edifice that has not firm foundations, make not lofty; and if thou dost, tremble for it."—SAADI (famous Persian poet)

The broad outline of the task to which the British Government had committed itself with regard to the future of Mesopotamia was summarised in the official announcement of June 20th, 1920:

His Majesty's Government, having been entrusted with the mandate for Mesopotamia, anticipate that the mandate will constitute Mesopotamia an independent State under the guarantee of the League of Nations and subject to the mandate to Great Britain; that it will lay on them the responsibility for the maintenance of internal peace and external security, and will require them to formulate an organic law to be framed in consultation with the people of Mesopotamia, and with due regard to the rights, wishes and interests of all the communities of the country.\* The mandate will contain provisions to facilitate the development of Mesopotamia as a self-governing State until such time as it can stand by itself, when the mandate will come to an end. The inception of this task His Majesty's Government has decided to entrust Sir Percy Cox, who will resume his position on the termination of the existing military administration as chief British representative in Mesopotamia.

### DIVERSE GROUPS

Such a task might well have appalled even so experienced an Eastern public servant as Sir Percy Cox. Nobody was in a better position than he to know that modern Mesopotamia possessed, in actual fact, hardly even the rudiments of a national spirit, and that the "rights, wishes and interests of all the communities in the country", so glibly referred to by His Majesty's Government, represented about as various an assortment of conflicting desires and policies as could be found anywhere on the earth.

Arabs, Jews, Kurds, Seljuk Turks, Persians, Assyrians, Telkaifis, Armenians—how mould such a composite collection of races into a single nation? Sunnis, Shiah, Jews, Christians, Sabians, Yezidis—how to lessen the friction between such a variety of creeds?

The Mesopotamian nation was to be a new experiment in nation building; it was to demonstrate the belief prevalent in the West that there is nothing in the world which cannot, if necessary, be made by machinery. No great evidence was forthcoming that the native population of Mesopotamia wanted to become a nation—indeed, large and influential portions of it fought to the last ditch against it; but

\* Cf. Balfour Declaration of 1917.

the League of Nations and the British Government conceived it as an excellent way of disposing of a country that was threatening to become a nuisance.

None of the minorities showed any disposition to welcome a local form of control which would, in practice, put them completely in the power of the Arabs; and, owing to the large number of Shiah among the latter, there was an utter lack of unity even among them. On account of the long Turkish predominance, nearly all the local men with administrative experience were Sunnis; and the Shiah, forming fifty per cent of the Moslem population, soon began to assert loudly that the land which contained so many of the Shiah holy places was once more about to come under complete Sunni control.

### PROTECTION SOUGHT

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

It had been recognised by the Assembly of the League of Nations that Mesopotamia was not wholly Arab, and the nationals of the new State were therefore, it was decided, to be designated not Arabs, but "Iraqis". The double aim of the Arab nationalists now began to be apparent. While welcoming the birth of an Iraq State as the dawn of Arab independence, they never ceased to harbour the hope that the Arab dominion might eventually take a wider scope; and the agitation for complete Arab independence, which had been previously conducted from Syria, now began to be transferred to Iraq. This indirectly led to considerable feeling between the British authorities in Mesopotamia and the French in Syria, who openly accused the British of fomenting Arab nationalist trouble in the latter

## CREATION OF IRAQ (cont'd from page 4)

country; a feeling which was soon increased by the French suspicion that the British were in secret negotiation with the amir Feisal, whom the French had shortly before summarily driven from Syria. Meanwhile the High Commissioner in Mesopotamia was faced with the added difficulties that the Kurds in the north would be content with nothing short of local autonomy under British protection, and flatly refused to offer their loyalty to the new Iraq Government; and, faced with the desire of the Jews, most of the Christians and many Moslems to become British, of the Kurds to become independent, of the Sunni and nationalist Arabs to remain Arab, and of the Shiah Arabs and Persians to be freed from any Governmental authority whatsoever, the British officials in Baghdad had a heavy task to persuade themselves that any genuine Iraqi national feeling existed at all.

## ELECTIONS PLANNED

But the British statesmen at home were still obsessed with the idea that machine-made nations were possible; and an important step forward in the creation of the new Iraq was taken early in 1921, when the High Commissioner announced the creation of an electoral law, which should form the legal basis for elections to form a new National Assembly. But the elections were never held, and the national assembly never met; and, in the event, the king and the constitution were found to a great extent by the British authorities themselves.

Consequently, when it was publicly announced that the amir Feisal was on his way to Iraq in a British ship to offer himself as a candidate for the throne, the people had little doubt as to who was destined to become the first King of Iraq.

The amir Feisal did not, however, have the field completely to himself. Several local people of note were understood to be ready to offer themselves if a suitable opportunity should occur. The Sheikh of Mohammerah, an old ally of the British, a Shiah and a man of great wealth and influence, was considered to be largely acceptable to the Arab and Persian Shiahs; the Naqib of Baghdad, himself acting as president of the local Council of State, was an obvious possibility; and Seyyid Talib Pasha of Basrah, a politician with a very lurid past, was also understood to be prepared to work in his own interest. In addition to the possible opposition of rival candidates, the amir Feisal had to face the fact that he was not a native of the country, that, as a Sunni, he could not expect a warm welcome from the very strong Shiah community, and that a great number even of Sunnis were inclined to resent the sudden rise to fame during the war of the family of the Sharif of Mecca, resting so largely on British support and British money. There were a number of the more old-fashioned Sunnis, indeed, who were inclined to consider the rebellion of the Sharif against the Turkish Sultan and Caliph of Islam as a most impious act.

## FEISAL'S SUCCESS

The amir Feisal landed in Basrah in May, 1921. Meanwhile the other candidates for the throne failed to make any great effort on behalf of their claims, with the sole exception of Seyyib Talib Pasha, whose energy and indiscreet frankness eventually led to his seizure and deportation by the British authorities. (Another candidate, Sheikh Khazaal of Mohammerah, was later murdered.)

The removal of Sayyid Talib Pasha had an undoubted effect on the eventual success of the candidature of the amir Feisal. The Eastern mind is more cynical in political matters than the Western, and will always assume that the Government, as the strongest organisation in the community, will in the long run get its own way by fair means or by foul. There appeared, then, nothing very unusual in the British deportation of Talib Pasha. Such a course was undemocratic and, in view of his admitted services to the British cause in the past, distinctly ungrateful; but British belief in democracy did not extend very far east of Malta, and gratitude, in any case, is not necessarily a political virtue. It was thereafter assumed by the public that the British had determined that the amir Feisal was to occupy the throne, and that there was the end of the matter.

On August 23rd, 1921, Feisal was crowned King of Iraq in the courtyard of the Baghdad Serai, built fifty years before by the Turkish vali Midhat Pasha. Thus for the second time in under two years, prince Feisal found himself "acclaimed" a king.

[NOTE—Under the nationalist regime conditions in Iraq gradually deteriorated. This is not surprising as the country had no historical traditions as a national state. Its frontiers conform to no principle of nationality.]

The fear of the minorities was soon to be justified: the Assyrians were massacred, the Kurds have not ceased fighting for autonomy or independence, the Shiahs never got a fair deal in running the country, the 200,000 strong Jewish community, which had a continuous existence for 2,500 years and which was aptly described by Feisal as the mainstay of Iraq, were in the space of 25 years (by 1950) completely manoeuvred out of the country, and other useful elements including many Christians and Moslems had to seek refuge elsewhere. This is the pattern of Arab expansion and this today is going on in the Sudan.

Ali Abdel Rahman, Sudanese Minister of the Interior, told the non-Arab South Sudanese Christians who form 60 per cent of Sudan's population: "The Sudan is an integral part of the Arab world . . . anybody dissenting from this view must quit the country."

Unless the Arabs will learn to live with other nationalities in the Middle East, there can be no prospect of lasting peace in the region—D.

It was recently reported that over 11,000 Iranians were expelled from Iraq—Ed.]



(l to r) Mme. Afshar, the Iranian Ambassador, Mr. N. E. Dangoor (displaying scroll), Mr. M. Dellal, Mrs. R. Moshi, Mrs. N. E. Dangoor, Mr. P. S. Gourgey (holding scroll case)



In conversation with the Ambassador before putting scroll in case

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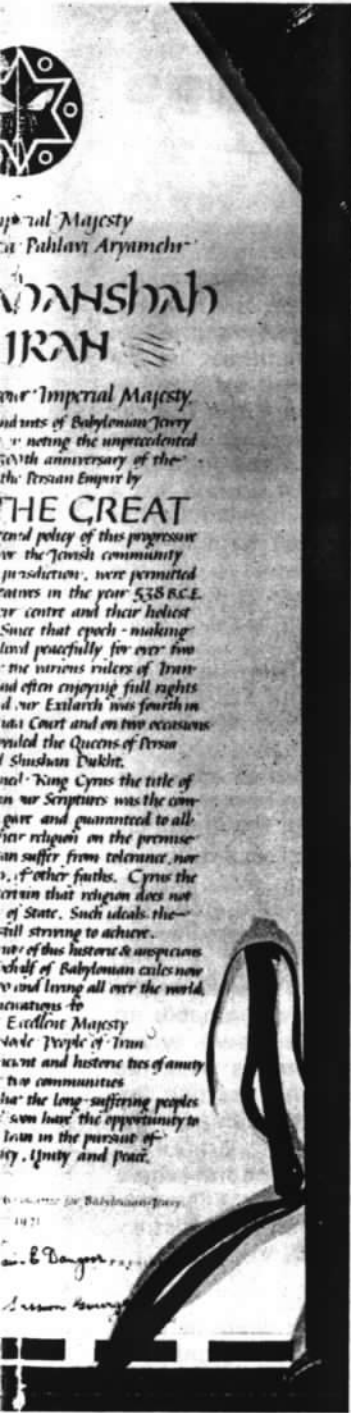
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Presenting the scroll to the Ambassador  
(l to r) Mme. Afshar, the Ambassador, Mrs. S. Fattal, Mr. Dangoor,  
Mr. Gourgey, Mrs. Dangoor



(l to r) Mme. Arsnar, the Ambassador, Mrs. S. Deyong (sister of Mr. Gourgey),  
Mr. S. Fattal, Mr. N. Dangoor (holding scroll) Mrs. Dangoor, Mr. Gourgey

# The Condition of the Jews in Baghdad and London 800 years ago

by N. E. D.

Eight hundred years ago, Benjamin of Tudela, Navarre, paid an extensive visit to the Mediterranean countries and the Middle East. His memoirs are a mine of information for life in those days and historians refer to them for many details not available in other sources.

He visited Baghdad of which he writes in praising terms. The Caliph was versed in the Torah and could speak and write in Hebrew. There were 40,000 Jews in Baghdad living in security and prosperity. Among them were many learned men. At the head of the community was the Exilarch whose genealogy goes back to King David. Benjamin describes the Exilarch's weekly visit to the Caliph as follows:—

"And every Thursday when the Exilarch goes to pay a visit to the great Caliph, horsemen—non-Jews as well as Jews—escort him and heralds proclaim in advance: 'Make way before our lord, the son of David, as is due unto him.' *'Imalu tariq li sayyidna ibn Dawood.'* He is mounted on a horse, and is attired in robes of silk and embroidery with a large turban on his head, and from the turban is suspended a large white cloth adorned with a chain upon which the seal of Mohammed is engraved.

"Then he appears before the Caliph and kisses his hand, and the Caliph rises and places him on a throne which (the prophet) Mohammed had ordered to be made in honour of him, and all the Mohammedan princes who attend the court of the Caliph rise up before him." [*The Jew in the Medieval World* by Jacob R. Marcus]

## TRAGIC PLIGHT

In contrast, the condition of Jews in England 800 years ago was very tragic. In the tenth century, when Baghdad was at its zenith, Europe was just beginning to rise to prominence through the discovery of large iron deposits. By the end of the eleventh century European Christendom felt strong enough to challenge the Mohammedan "infidels" for the recovery of the Holy Land. The First Crusade (1096-1099) was called forth by the resolutions of the Church Councils of Piacenza and Clermont. It was accompanied by fanatical anti-Jewish pogroms all over Europe. One community after another was destroyed in quick succession. Thousands of Jews refused to accept baptism, preferring to lose their lives through massacre or suicide. When the Christian armies conquered Jerusalem all the Jews there were killed.

The travels of Benjamin took place during a lull between the Second and Third Crusades. Preparations were going on all over Europe for the resumption of the Holy War. Henry II was reigning in England and in 1171 he gave his consent to the imposing of a tax on all his dominions to save the Holy Land from recapture by the Saracens. The tax amounted to two pence in the pound for the first year and one penny in the pound for the four subsequent years. Almost all the kings of Europe laid a similar imposition on their subjects which received the name of Saladin's tax. But in 1187 Saladin captured Jerusalem and allowed the Jews to resettle there.

## PERSECUTION AT YORK

In 1189 when Richard I came to power he helped to organise the Third Crusade. The Jews of England again suffered at the hands of the populace who wanted to indulge in a crusade less dangerous and with more immediate profit. At Richard's coronation there were riots at Westminster and rumours that the king had given permission to kill the Jews. In London the mob attacked Old Jewry, setting fire to houses. All Jews were killed at Lynn. Many were slain at Stamford Fair and Bury St. Edmunds. The greatest tragedy of the period was the annihilation of the Jewish community of York.

"Five hundred Jews had retired into the castle for safety and finding themselves unable to defend the place, murdered their own wives and children, threw the dead bodies over the walls upon the populace, and then setting fire to the houses, perished in the flames. The gentry of the neighbourhood, who were all indebted to the Jews, ran to the cathedral where their bonds were kept, and made a solemn bonfire of the papers before the altar!" (*History of England* by David Hume, 1823, Vol. II)

## FULL CIRCLE

It is noteworthy that after Saladin's death in 1193 Richard I, also known as Richard the Lionheart, offered Maimonides or Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) a post as his personal physician but Maimonides, who had been the private physician of Saladin, refused to live in the barbaric atmosphere of feudal Europe.

Now, after 800 years, the wheel has turned full circle and the Jews of Baghdad, fleeing from discrimination and oppression, are welcomed to the hospitable shores of England, enjoying complete equality with a people now steeped in the Judaeo-Christian traditions of humanity, tolerance and justice.



# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

by EXILARCH

By miraculously containing Egypt for the past 24 years, Israel not only ensured, against odds, her own survival but also saved the rest of south-western Asia from Egyptian domination.

But for Israel, Egyptian governors in the name of pan-Arabism, would today be sitting in Beirut and Damascus, Amman, Baghdad and Riyadh, to administer, through poison gas if necessary, as they did in Yemen, their brand of civilisation and extend through repression and tyranny the miseries of the long-suffering peoples of the Middle East.

But for Israel, Arab armies, in the name of pan-Islamism would today be knocking at the gates of Iran, aided perhaps by some reactionary mullahs who learned nothing from the lessons of history—that religious fanaticism has always been the cause of the downfall of the countries concerned.

## UNSETTLED CONDITIONS

Today Israel is still in a state of siege; Jordan in turmoil; Lebanon in a precarious balance between

Christians and Moslems; Iraq in a vacuum. Thus a small force can change this stalemate one way or the other—either put the Middle East on the road to recovery and progress or send it down the abyss of destruction.

We, Babylonian Jewry the most ancient surviving community in the Middle East, and almost of the whole world, steeped in the history of the region from time immemorial, who have been uprooted from our Middle Eastern home of 25 centuries, would like to observe to all who would impose a settlement that the conflict is not merely between Egypt and Israel but concerns all peoples of the Middle East; that the strife is not over now many square miles of Sinai to be occupied or evacuated but quite simple over the right of non-Arab peoples to exist in the Middle East. There can be no meaningful settlement unless it is comprehensive for the whole region and unless this basic fact is realised.

Middle Eastern exiles all over the world can help in finding a just and lasting peace.

## Letters to the Editor

From Mr. A. Rosen

I would like to congratulate you warmly on the appearance of *The Scribe*. It is aptly named after the renowned biblical figure, Ezra the Scribe, since its aim is to draw attention to the past and present position of Jews in, and from, Arab countries.

I was particularly interested in the article "Spanning the Centuries" stressing what Mr. Gorgey called "the penta-centric history of the Jewish People"—the five centres of Jewry throughout the ages, Israel, Babylon, Spain, Poland and the United States. By coincidence, in an address I delivered at the Richmond Synagogue, I suggested that Jewish Law had been expounded in five main centres in contrast to other codes of law which had evolved from the soil of the land. It seemed to me to be highly indicative of the divine nature of our religious jurisprudence that we had developed a legal system, incredibly, as a people without a fixed geographical centre, having thus made a unique contribution to civilisation.

I wish every success to your magazine.

Aubrey Rosen, B.A., M.Sc.,  
Lay Minister,  
Richmond District Synagogue

From Mr. M. Pottesman, Mr. M. Salasnik

It is with great interest that we received and read the first issue of *The Scribe*. Such a publication concerning the cultural and historical background of the once-flourishing Jewish Community in Iraq and other Arab countries is long overdue.

We feel sure that this new magazine will sustain interest in the present plight of Jews in the Arab

countries and we trust that it will receive widespread support.

M. Pottesman,  
M. Salasnik,  
Co-Chairmen, Action Committee  
for Arab Jewry (ACAJ)

From Mr. A. Ben-Jacob

I enjoyed reading the interesting article on the Patriarch Abraham. There is much in *The Scribe* of interest to Babylonian Jewry and other Oriental communities. We wish you well in your efforts, and look forward to receiving more issues of your Journal.

Abraham Ben-Jacob,  
Jerusalem.

## SHAH THANKS JEWS

At the Iranian Embassy in London, the Chargé d'Affaires conveyed the thanks and appreciation of His Majesty the Shah to Mr. Dangoor and Mr. Gorgey, as President and Chairman respectively of the Committee for Babylonian Jewry, for the sentiments expressed in the scroll presented to mark the occasion of the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. The sentiments included a reference to Cyrus' declaration permitting Babylonian Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

Details of the celebrations in Iran were widely publicised in the general and Jewish press.

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communities everywhere. As for the term Babylonian Jewry, it invokes memories of past glories (including that of Ezra the Scribe) to transcend present controversies.

# 75th Anniversary of Lauderdale Road Synagogue

## EXTRACT FROM SERMON OF THE HAHAM

by Rabbi Dr. S. GAON

"... Our brethren coming especially from the Middle and Far East have not only increased the numbers of Sephardim in this country but they have created a potential for a more intensive Jewish life according to Sephardi tradition. The Congregation of *Shaar Hashamayim* (Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue) has more than doubled its numbers during the last quarter of a century. Our brethren from Communities going back to the first Exile, from Iraq and Egypt, have joined us and so have members of the great Communities of India and Morocco. Sephardi out-

look and to some extent the form in which the religious thought of the Sephardim is expressed is the outcome of close co-operation between Jewish and Arabic cultures which is also evident in our prayers and our attitude to education. Our new members have already added to the strength of our leadership and they have made us aware of a larger, broader and deeper meaning of Sephardism. Indeed the make-up of the Congregation that celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary of this Synagogue is quite different from the Congregation present today. . . ."

Comments and articles welcomed. The views of individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the Journal.—Ed.

Please send to:  
The Editor, The Scribe,  
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EDITORIAL (continued from page 1)

### Social Problems

The problems affecting the underprivileged sections of Israel's population, in housing, employment and education, require compassion, sustained effort and co-ordinated planning for their solution. Are there short-term and long-term plans to enable those at the receiving end to see the light at the end of the tunnel? Would it not encourage potential and actual donors in Israel and the Diaspora if they are informed of those plans and specific projects to which their contributions are channelled? In short, how much goes where? But there is far more to it than just the giving and the receiving. There is the need to spread an understanding of the cultural and social background of the immigrants concerned, and this could well be part of an enlightened adult education programme.

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much of the material for the book, settled recently in Israel.

This is a remarkable story of a remarkable Baghdadi Jewish family, many of whose achievements would serve to focus attention on the life and work of Jewish emigrants from Baghdad to India and the Far East.

### OBITUARY —Mr. N. Basri—

The sudden and premature death of Mr. N. Basri came as a shock to his numerous friends in this country and to thousands of listeners and fans throughout the World. As Head of the Arabic Music section of the B.B.C. for more than 25 years, he built it into a comprehensive unit unique in the world.

Mr. Basri was by far one of the greatest experts in the field of Arabic music. He was the first man to devise its orchestration and in recent years had arranged and supervised the recordings for the great Egyptian singer Abdul Wahab and other leading Arab singers.

His knowledge of Arabic literature and Arab history and religion was unparalleled. During the Second World War, he was chosen by the Ministry of Information in preference to the Imams of the Woking and East London Mosques to appear in a feature film reciting passages from the Koran.

Basri was greatly loved by countless listeners to his programmes and only once did religious prejudice play a part in his long career. This was when a Beirut journalist submitted a play to the B.B.C. and was turned down as being unsuitable. The journalist was unapacified at such a rebuff and published a vitriolic article in his paper castigating the B.B.C. for appointing an Iraqi Jew to such a high position in the organisation. Many of the listeners sprang to Mr. Basri's defence and one Saudi Arabian had written to the newspaper concerned protesting that art and music know no religious barriers and emphasising that the Arabs were fortunate in having such a talented and dedicated man who was making a contribution to Arab culture.

At Mr. Basri's funeral in the Golders Green cemetery, the Jewish mourners were outnumbered by Moslems and Christians—men and women, all with sad hearts, paying their last tribute to a greatly loved personality.

A.D.

# COOKERY CORNER

by GASTRONOME

*A gourmand is a frustrated gourmet!*

Napoleon once attributed his military success to the fact that his army marched on its stomach! Another wit has said that the shortest way to a man's heart is through his stomach. (Spinsters please note!) It is a fact that men appreciate good cooking more than women do and also produce better cooks when they get down to it. Women's Lib has resulted in the neglect of the kitchen and the loosening of family ties.

Three of the main cuisines of the world are the Chinese, French and Middle Eastern. Each developed in its peculiar circumstances. In China fuel was expensive and so they went for quick cooking which sometimes left food half-raw. In the frequent times of siege and famine, they ate anything they came across: birds' nests, rotten eggs (the older the better), ants (now coated with chocolate), worm stew and similar things that now form the exotic dishes of Chinese cooking. It is noteworthy that bread and the tomato have not yet entered the Chinese diet. (They may, now, under United Nations influence!—Ed.)

The French cuisine was developed mainly by a hunting community. It is rich both in meat dishes and cheeses and butterfood.

In the Middle East the staple diet is bread. The cultivation of wheat in northern Iraq 10,000 years ago obliged man to settle in villages to await the crops and this is considered the start of civilisation.

It is stated that the general division of Middle Eastern cooking into sweet and sour dishes was influenced by the Persian doctrine of good and evil. However, one can hardly find anything evil in the traditional sour dishes of the Middle East. We give here from *Baghdad Recipes* (compiled by Mrs. Renee Elkabir and others and published in Baghdad) a recipe for a traditional sour dish which formed part of the Sabbath fare in Iraq:

## KUBBAH HAMIDH

2 cups rice  
1 cup minced lean mutton

Soak the rice in water for an hour. Drain and grind finely while still wet. Mix the well-minced meat (free from fat) with the ground rice to make a thick paste. This mixture is used for the casing.

1½ cups minced meat  
¾ cup minced onion  
parsley (optional)  
salt and pepper

Mix the minced meat and onion and season to taste. This is used for the stuffing.

Take a small piece of the casing paste and flatten it till about ¼ inch thick and about 3 inches in diameter. Put some stuffing onto it and work the casing round to form a ball. Continue till all the material is used up. Complete one Kubbah before making the flat casing for the next.

1 lb. bones  
8 cups water  
2 lb. vegetable marrow or turnip or egg plant  
½ tsp. tomato paste  
¼—½ cup lemon juice according to taste  
1 tsp. dried mint

Bring the bones to the boil. Add the vegetable in large slices (use one vegetable only), the tomato paste, the lemon juice and the dried mint. Boil for about 1½ hours. Add the Kubbahs and boil again until they are well cooked, about ¼ hour. Remove bones, season and serve.

The success of this dish depends on the casing of the kubbah being made very thin.

## "Cellar" Club

"The Cellar" Dramatic Group announce that the Arabic play "The Marriage Broker" has been postponed to 26th and 27th December, 1971. Tickets from The Secretary, "The Cellar", 11 Russell Road, London, W.14.

## Action Committee

The Action Committee for Arab Jewry (ACAJ), together with other organisations, is organising a silent torchlight procession on behalf of Syrian Jewry on Sunday 12th December, 1971 starting from Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, at 5 p.m. Watch press for further details.

## THOUGHT FOR CHANUCAH

"The little Maccabean band was like a rock in the midst of a surging sea. Standing almost alone in their day, the heroes beat back the forces that threatened to involve all mankind in a common demoralisation. They kept a corner of the world sweet in an impure age. They held aloft the torch of true religion at a time when thick darkness was covering the nations."—  
Morris Joseph, 1903 (Selected by G.)

## Iraq and Iran - 35 years ago

One of the most prominent Jewish personalities in the Far East was the late Mr. N. E. B. Ezra who, through his paper, "Israel's Messenger", fearlessly championed Jewish and Zionist causes. Mr. Ezra who died in Shanghai on 4th December 1936 had written earlier that day an editorial "Iraq and Iran" (re-published below) showing a political prescience remarkable for its contemporary relevance. The "Shanghai Times" said of Mr. Ezra in an editorial the next day that he was "an outstanding example of a man who had faith and who acted in every detail of his life in accordance with that faith, fighting most staunchly for what he believed to be the right." Mr. Ezra wrote:

"The recent upheaval in Iraq and the sudden resignation of the government has given an opportunity to the British Government to give a warning to Iraq, to beware of her plighted word to give equal rights to the minorities. The murder of General Jaffar

Askari has been deplored and Mr. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, has rightly stressed the fact that "one principal criterion by which the new government would be judged by the outside world was the humanity of its treatment of minorities." In former times, the Arabs used to sing a slogan, *// bilad biladna wu il Yahood kilabna!* This "music" should be combatted and Iraq must be taught to learn how to tolerate her subjects of diverse creed and faith. Her next door neighbour — Iran — must stand as an exemplary rebuke to her, insofar as the country has progressed and established peace and unity among all the sections of the inhabitants, regardless of creed, caste or colour. We take off our hat to Iran and wish her continued success and prosperity. Asia is proud of her and it is hoped that her liberal regime will have its repercussion in all the backward Asiatic countries. Iran is indubitably worthily representing the human ideals of Islam, and we foresee the time when all the Asiatic countries will join also with New Judea and work for the greatness and welfare of Asia as a whole."

— P.S.G.

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