

The SCRIBE

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A HAPPY NEW YEAR 5751 TO ALL OUR READERS AND FRIENDS

Kuwait and After

Arab imperialism cause of ME troubles

Gulf crisis calls into question Iraq's own legitimacy

Need to redraw Middle East borders to accommodate Kurds and others

Oil wealth should be for the benefit of all the peoples of the region

Can WOJAC claim Kuwait's frozen billions?

In March 1921 Britain convened a high-powered conference in Cairo under the direction of the newly appointed colonial secretary, Winston Churchill, to decide on the form of government for the regions wrested from the Ottoman empire.

In the case of Mesopotamia (the name Iraq had not received currency) the question was whether to install an Arab ruler or not. It had been recognised by the Assembly of the League of Nations that Mesopotamia was not wholly (or even predominantly) Arab. The conference provided for Kurdish autonomy and eventual statehood in the Kurdish areas in northern Mesopotamia and also gave assurances for the rights of the other important minorities. The population of Mesopotamia at the time consisted of:

600,000 Sunni Arabs
400,000 Sunni Kurds
200,000 Sunni Turks
600,000 Shia Arabs
900,000 Shia Persians
100,000 Jews
100,000 Christians
100,000 Others

3,000,000 Total

In fact, the Jews of Baghdad, numbering 60,000, were the largest as well as the best educated and most important community in the capital, followed by the Sunnis, the Shias and the Christians.

But the expulsion of Feisal from Syria in July 1920, the rebellion of the Euphrates tribes in August 1920 which proved costly to Britain in men and materials and the clamour of the British parliament for economies, put new pressures to create in Iraq a local administration. Gertrude Bell and Lawrence of Arabia who harboured a romantic attraction for the Arabs, sought to make Feisal king of Iraq. They took with them to Cairo Jaafar Pasha al-Askari, defence minister, who had served under Feisal, to represent the Arab element, and Sasson Effendi Heskell, finance minister, who was a colleague of Feisal in the Ottoman parliament, to represent the non-Arab elements.

As was expected of them, both Jaafar and Sasson confirmed to Churchill that

Feisal would be the best option, and this was endorsed by the conference. It was the wrong choice and was the cause of the tragedies of modern Iraq. The right course would have been to make Iraq a republic with a locally elected president to reflect the diverse character of the country.

It is noteworthy that Sasson Effendi, whom Miss Bell described as the most capable and most experienced statesman in Iraq, pointed out that kings are usually imported from the north and not from the south, as if to hint that Feisal's dynasty would eventually be rejected by the Iraqis.

And so it was that the process of Arabisation of Iraq started – the massacre of the Assyrians in 1933; the pro-Nazi revolt of Rashid Ali in 1941; the denial of the Kurds their autonomy; the virtual expulsion of the Jews in 1950; the Qassem revolution in 1958 that ended the Hashemite reign; the Baath revolution and the reign of terror that started in 1968 (kill one – frighten 10,000!); the futile Iran-Iraq war and finally the invasion of Kuwait which has aligned the whole civilised world against Iraq.

Like Assad of Syria, Saddam's problem is that he has a narrow base of only 20% of the population and has to prevail by the use of an iron fist.

Saddam is now saying that Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait should be treated as a regional problem together with other trouble spots in the Middle East.

If this were to be the case the whole Middle East should then be put into the melting pot. It will have to be recognised that the trouble in the Middle East is not due to Zionism but to Arab imperialism and that a new blue-print for the region has to be worked out to ensure the rights of all the other nationalities of the region.

Moreover, the concentration of vast oil riches in a few hands is obscene and immoral and has destabilised not only the region but the whole world. The benefit of these petro-billions should be spread equitably among all the peoples of the region and possibly beyond.

Since 1973 the Arab countries have earned \$2,000,000,000,000 (two trillion dollars), yet the Middle East remains as

undeveloped as ever. At least one trillion was invested in wars and armies. The Iran-Iraq war cost \$500 billion, more or less.

Finally, we have always maintained that, in addition, the Jews from Arab countries have a birthright claim on the wealth of their countries of origin, in addition to Israel's valid claim for reparations for 40 years of warfare. WOJAC (World Organisation of Jews from Arab Countries) should examine the possibility of laying a claim now on Kuwait's frozen billions.

The London *Evening Standard* wrote about *The Scribe* and the above editorial in its issue of 23 August.

From Judge Abraham D. Sofaer

In light of your invitation to write concerning my future plans, I am pleased to inform your readers that I left the Department of State on June 15 1990, where I served for five years as Legal Adviser to Secretary of State James A. Baker and George P. Shultz. I participated in many interesting matters, including all the military actions taken by the United States against terrorism, the Taba dispute, the Ras Buraq claims, and perhaps most interesting to Jews of Iraqi descent the claims for wrongful death and injury caused by Iraq's attack on the *U.S.S. Stark*. In negotiating a settlement of the *Stark* claims, I visited Baghdad, where I was treated with courtesy and warmth. I went to the synagogue there, and several young women pleaded for my help in securing permission for them to leave in order to find suitable husbands, I joined the efforts of others – notably Senator Arlen Specter, and Representative Mel Levine and Harold Berman – to obtain a reversal of Iraqi policy on Jewish emigration. Early this year, many of the remaining 200 or so Jews left Baghdad.

I have joined Hughes Hubbard & Reed, an American law firm with offices in New York, Washington, D.C., Paris, Miami and Los Angeles. The firm has a broad range of capacities and clients.

With best wishes

Washington, D.C. Abraham D. Sofaer

Moses: Pharaoh of Egypt

by Ahmed Osman (Grafton Books – Publication date: 13th September)

In this book the author argues that Pharaoh Akhenaten and the Prophet Moses were one and the same man.

Up until now, Akhenaten, the revolutionary pharaoh who abolished the Ancient Egyptian religious system with its many deities, and who imposed belief in a single God, has been defamed by scholars for being a rival to Moses.

However, Ahmed Osman sheds new light on both the biblical Moses and the historical Akhenaten, and produces a new and compelling synthesis of the two figures.

Moses, he claims, was the son of Pharaoh Amenhotep III and Tiye, “daughter of Joseph the Patriarch”. Moses was born at the frontier fortress city of Zaru, currently being excavated, in 1394 or 1395 BCE. Fearing for her son’s life, Tiye sent him by water to the safe keeping of her Israelite relatives in the Goshen area outside the city, where a number of settlements have just been discovered. This was to be the origin of the baby-in-the-bullrushes story.

Moses who initially bore the name Amenhotep, did not appear in the royal palace until he was twelve when, to ensure his succession, Tiye arranged for him to marry his half sister, Nefertiti. His ideas about a single God, the Aten, (the sun’s disc) were already well developed and, during the twelve years when he was co-regent with his father, he changed his name to Akhenaten in honour of his faith. On the death of his father, he shut the temples of the ancient gods of Egypt, sent the priests home and decreed that there was only one God, the Aten, a God without an image.

After seventeen years as Pharaoh, Akhenaten was overthrown and succeeded by his son, the boy king Tutankhaten (Tutankhamun), who tried to bring about a compromise between the Aten and the ancient gods of Egypt. Evidence exists that Akhenaten was not killed but survived this overthrow and retreated to Sinai. Attempts were made to erase all trace of Akhenaten from Egyptian memory, forbidding the mention of his name. His followers, however, referred to him as *Mos*, a term used in court cases for “the rightful son and heir”.

Moses returned from Sinai during the short reign of Ramses I to lead the Exodus, but was pursued and murdered by Seti I, probably for trying to obtain water from Egyptian settlements on the way by using his symbol of pharaonic authority, a rod topped by a bronze serpent. This is the most likely explanation of the biblical story that Moses was punished by God for striking a rock with his rod to obtain water, and gives a plausible explanation to the mysterious and abrupt end of Moses’ career.

All this may sound like science fiction but it certainly warrants further investigation. In any case, there is no doubt that Akhenaten’s “monotheism” was influenced by Hebrew beliefs and religious practices and not the other way round, as is often claimed.

“The other Sulman Rushdie”

from The Cairo Arabic daily *Al-Akhar* of 18 July 1990

Egyptian papers inadvertently announced the appearance in London of a book in English entitled *Moses is Akhnaton* in which the Egyptian Moslem author (Ahmed Osman) tries to prove that God’s prophet Moses was “Akhnaton” the great well-known pharaoh and the first king in the whole history of the world to declare his belief that “God is one, without any partner, Creator of everything”.

It is clear that (the idea of) this book is another attempt to hit ancient Egyptian history by stealing its glories and attributing them to the Jews. It also aims at hitting Islam by contradicting the facts and the proofs as contained in the Holy Koran.

Readers may remember Menahem Begin’s visit to the pyramids some years ago in the company of Anwar Sadat when Begin boasted and said, pointing to the great pyramid, “My ancestors had built this pyramid”, reiterating a Zionist lie that it was the Jewish captives and slaves who were employed in building this lofty edifice, the pride of Egyptian civilization.

This author came to Egypt two years ago to launch a book in English containing a bomb of poisonous information targeting the glories of ancient Egyptian history and ascribing them to the children of Israel. This suspect book was called *A Stranger in the Valley of the Kings – the Identification of Yuya as the Patriarch Joseph*. The book claims that Yuya who was an Egyptian born in Akhmim in Upper Egypt and was a priest to the god Min and was a commander of the royal guards was the same person as our Lord Joseph, Peace be on him...!

Such claims, distortions and fabrications lead to extremely serious consequences. It means that four of our pharaohs – Akhnaton, Samankhkare, Tutankhamen and Aye – were of Israelite descent, to the end of such ugly conclusions by which the Zionists aim to steal our heroes and to shake our beliefs.

Mukhtar Suweifi

As others see us

Extract from THE NEW ATLANTIAN – Summer 1990

Issue No. 40 of *The Scribe*, a professionally produced quality newsletter, includes an article on the age-old problem of establishing a precise date for the Exodus, written by Mr. Dangoor himself.

Naim Dangoor has a very neat solution to the difficulty to reconcile statements in the Book of Exodus that the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt lasted 430 years (Ex. 12:40) but that Moses, who led the Exodus, was only four generations removed from Jacob, founder of the Israelites. One normally thinks in terms of 3 or 4 generations per century. And “no way” says Mr.

Dangoor could the “70 souls”, including Jacob, who entered Egypt to be reunited with Joseph, have multiplied to 600,000 excluding women and children in just four generations. Dangoor’s answer to the dilemma is that the Exodus involved many more Hebrews than the descendants of Jacob. Hebrews had begun migrating to Egypt 250 years before it was Jacob’s turn.

Mr. Dangoor’s leading article in the same issue entitled “The unacceptable faces of Capitalism” is also extremely intriguing. He puts forward the thought-provoking maxim that “Communism is a manifestation of a faulty capitalist system that breeds revolt as the rich get richer and the poor find themselves cheated. In short, communism is the disease of capitalism”. His antidote to both is the Jubilee system of the Torah: “Every 50 years, land reverts to the nation, all debts are wiped out and the community starts with a clean slate”. He adds that “This can be done in the modern world by taxing land and paper, and providing a national dividend for all”.

If there is ever to be a “New Atlantis”, a conceptual society living in total peace, harmony and justice, I am sure that something like the Jubilee system has got to be employed. Let us hope there does not have to be an Armageddon first!

Shamir sees the light

Our enemies cleverly manoeuvred world opinion into believing that the Middle East conflict is between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs and that peace could only be achieved in an accommodation between these two factions within the borders of the old mandated area. This scenario was implicitly accepted by world Jewry, by Israeli leaders and by Israel’s friends.

Shimon Peres and his Labour party fully endorsed this analysis and worked hard to find a solution on these lines. Even Yitzhak Shamir and his right wing Likud fell into this trap, and as recently as April he was promising elections in the West Bank and Gaza with a view to giving autonomy to the Palestinian Arabs in accordance with the Camp David accord. He was harassed by Bush and Baker to deliver on his promise.

However, we have been consistently and repeatedly saying for years that the Middle East conflict is not with the Palestinians but with the neighbouring Arab states, which relentlessly waged war on Israel, incited the Palestinians not to come to terms with the Jews; encouraged the Nazis in the Final Solution, financed terrorism, persecuted and expelled their Jewish population and have openly tried to influence Moscow into preventing the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

But at long last Premier Shamir has seen the light and has got our message. He has informed the Bush administration that any negotiations with the Palestinians must be linked to peace talks with the neighbouring Arab countries. In view of Saddam’s threat to burn half of Israel and to shower Israel’s population with chemical bombs, Shamir has now the added satisfaction of pointing out how right he is in his new policy.

N.E.D.

Greetings to new Archbishop

The Right Reverend Dr. George Carey
Bishop of Bath and Wells
The Palace, Wells, Somerset

Right Reverend Sir,

On behalf of Babylonian Jewry throughout the world I send you greetings and congratulations on your election as the next Archbishop of Canterbury. I send you blessings for your future success. I hope and pray that your reign will be marked by the upholding of traditional Judeo-Christian values, by social caring and by responsible government.

I note that, in company with many others, you find the poll tax immoral – a view which I share, although the poll tax does provide better accountability than the rating system. Vox populi vox dei, and something has to be done.

However, criticism cannot be an end in itself and an alternative has to be offered by critics. A few days ago I wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting that local council services be paid for half by poll tax, half by a revised rating system. This is roughly how the charges arise and this is how they should be collected. It would be fair and popular.

Will you give your support to this change? Yours sincerely,

Naim Dangoor

Dear Naim (if I may),

Thank you so much for your very kind letter of the 27th July congratulating me on behalf of Babylonian Jewry throughout the world on my election as the next Archbishop of Canterbury. It will certainly be my intention to uphold traditional Judeo-Christian values and I look forward to working closely with Jewish leaders in this country.

My criticism of the poll tax has not actually been the poll tax itself – indeed, I welcome a system which makes every working adult a contributor to bearing the cost of community service – but I question the morality of the assumption that everybody pays the same amount in the same area regardless of personal wealth. Your own suggestion seems one that ought to be considered more carefully and I will give more attention to this suggestion.

With every good wish, Yours sincerely,

George Carey

(S)Exploits

In his book, *The Heart of the Middle East* (published in 1925), Richard Coke points out that the arrival of British married families in Mesopotamia helped to consolidate the rebellious elements in the country and contributed to the revolt of the Euphrates tribes in the summer of 1920, who regarded it as an attempt to colonise the country.

He adds, "Great strength of character and personal restraint are necessary in any European woman undertaking residence in an undeveloped country, especially in the East; and in the case of a very large body of women drawn from all classes of life, it is not possible to rely on the general existence of these high qualities. There were many married men who had grave cause to regret that their wives had ever been allowed to set foot in Mesopotamia."●

Housing Crisis in Israel

The unprecedented arrival of thousands of Soviet Jews (and non-Jews) to Israel every week has put a strain on housing, and rents have soared. Tent cities are sprouting everywhere to accommodate those of the lower income classes, mainly Sephardi and Oriental Jews, who have lost their apartments.

I asked Israel's Ambassador in London Mr. Yoav Biran to comment on this situation. He admits that some additional effects of the aliyah, such as increases in rents, are hurting the weaker sectors of Israeli society. He promises that "the Government of Israel will attempt to ensure that no group disproportionately takes on this burden".

He writes:

The arrival of tens of thousands of Jewish new immigrants to Israel is the largest aliyah since the 1950's. It now seems as if there will be about 150,000 olim per year if the current rate of emigration continues. At present the Jewish Agency is having to spend £1,000,000 per night to deal with the immediate needs of new immigrants. Most of the new immigrants come from the Soviet Union but the Government of Israel continues its efforts to bring to Israel the remaining Ethiopian Jews still in Ethiopia.

To cope with this immigration the Jewish Agency and the Government Committee on Immigration has now approved an annual budget of \$2.3 billion for absorbing 150,000 new olim per year. The programme allocates \$400 million for constructing and \$1 billion for underwriting apartments from building contractors. Seven thousand homes will be built every month and the government has approved the construction of an additional 45,000 units.

The economic measures taken to provide the finance for the absorption of Soviet Jews are affecting all the citizens of Israel. Unfortunately some additional effects of the aliyah, such as increases in rents, are hurting the weaker sectors of Israeli society. However a recent survey has shown that 83% of Israelis are convinced that the current aliyah is positive and good for the country. Thus the people affected by aliyah are not venting their anger against the olim but against the authorities.

The government recognises its duty to provide assistance to those genuinely in need. Reflecting this approach, Ariel Sharon, Minister for Housing has stated that housing assistance will not only be given to olim but also to returning soldiers and young couples.

The sacrifices that Israel will have to make to absorb the olim cannot be underestimated but the Government of Israel will attempt to ensure that no group disproportionately takes on this burden.

London W8

Yoav Biran

Ambassador of Israel

We acknowledge with thanks receipt of voluntary and generous contributions from:

Mr. E. E. Akerib
Mr. Maurice G. Shamash
Mrs. D. Masri●

On our mailing list

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Ms. Vivien Marshall, London
Dayan C.D. Kaplin, London
J.S. Horosh, London
Mrs. Gisele Fattal, London
Mrs. Marcelle Shamash, London●

My two sons always speak nicely of you and your contribution to Iraqi Jews. I enjoy reading *The Scribe* and I am especially interested in the recipes of my daughter-in-law Lisette and of Alice Shashou●

Ramat-Gan

Louise Hakham David

I occasionally come across an issue of *The Scribe* but would like to get it on a regular basis. I enjoyed particularly reading the article "To 'Israel' or not to 'Israel' That is the Question!!" written by my brother Moshe Kahta in issue No. 42●
Geneva

Souad Kahtan

Song of the Despots
(translated from the Arabic)

Kill, O kill, and then ask questions.
We, the Despots, know the humans' malady.
They are not worthy to live,
Their illness is fear and short sight.
However we trample them under our feet,
They succumb and prostrate to the ground.
Their balm is tears and blood.
So raise the whip and proclaim death.
We are the People. In his name we are
merciless,
So that the power shall be in the great
People's hands.
His morrow emanates from today,
So let the ailing day die in the bud.
We, the rulers, are the conscience of the People.
We know better the country's weal.
This people is only an infant who leans
On our strength; we are his best support.
An obedient people who desires peace,
Who is indebted to us for his sustenance and
security,
Is surely a people loving order
And praying gratefully for his sincere master●

Meer Basri

مير بصري -

نسيب الطغاة

(نقبت من تميليني « طاغية هاتي »
أخرجهما إذاعة إسرائيل العربية سنة ١٩٧٨)

أقتلواهم ألوأ، نسيب الطغاة
لأنهم لا يتخفون من الحماة ،
كلما دنا عليهم بالقدم
لأننا بلسمهم يبع ودم ،
لأننا الشعب ونقو بأسمه
فقد منبشوه من يومه ،
وضمير الشعب نحم الحاكمه ،
لأنه هذا الشعب طفل يتعيه
لأنه شعباً مخلصاً يبعي السلام
لنحو شعب همم حفظ النظام

قد نهبنا داء هذا البصر
بأنهم خوف وضعف البصر
فضعوا وانبطحوا حتى الرظام
فأرفع السوط وبقر بالحمام!
ليكون الأدمر للشعب العظيم
فلميت في معده اليوم التقم
نحم أدري، بصلوح البلد
بقوانا ، نحم غير السند
ولنا بالرزق والأدمه مدني ،
داعياً بالحمد للراعي الأمين

Whenever I read the poems of my school mate Meer Basri, I go back to the years 1926-1927 when we were both students at the Alliance School. In our short recreations, whenever we invited Meer to join us in our contre-vous plays, he always had to refuse, being busy in weaving poems to the satisfaction of our exiled Syrian tutor of Arabic Mohamed el Furati●

Ramat Gan E. Zilkha

We have become acquainted with *The Scribe* through Haham Solomon Gaon and enjoy it very much.

My husband grew up in Baghdad and left it in 1970, with his family following one by one. I am the Executive Director of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York. We share *The Scribe* with a number of the Iraqi families in the congregation.

At a recent Sephardi film festival which we organised we screened Salim Fattal's beautiful 3-hour documentary, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, portraying Iraqi Jewry since WW1 till the 50's and the big aliya. We also screened Yitzhak Haloutzi's beautiful and dramatic film *Braids* telling the true story of an experience during the Israel War of Independence and how it affected the Iraqi Jewish community.

These films should be shown in London●

New York (Dr.) Janice E. Ovadiah

My wife Helen and I were very happy to see the wedding picture of my wife's parents Mr. and Mr. David Marshall in your June 1990 issue. Another item of interest in the same issue was the video cassette of the *Selihot* service held in the Shlomo Shamash synagogue in 1988. I myself took part in the reading of the *Selihot* and am an active member of the synagogue●

Tel Aviv Jack Moses

I would like to thank you for your great effort to publish such a great journal as *The Scribe*. Your work is considered by the majority of Iraqi Jewish community in the U.K. as the fundamental point in uniting the whole community in the country●

London W2 Farid Shamash

I have been receiving the issues of *The Scribe* for about 18 months and have found it of great interest. The latest article in the August issue - "Israel's relations with the United States" is an excellent, hard-hitting article, full of home-truths for America to digest. The article is more relevant than ever today after the Kuwait invasion.

My daughter living in Los Angeles and my son living in Manchester have read my copy of *The Scribe* and are very keen to be put on your circulation list●

Manchester J.J. Marshall

My brother-in-law Mr. J. Joshua in Australia, drew my attention to *The Scribe*, and sent me some copies. They turned out to be of great interest to me. After having finished writing the family history of my side (de Vries family from Holland), I started to write the history of my wife's family, which hail originally from Iraq, via Calcutta and Australia. I would therefore appreciate it very much if you will include me among your subscribers●

Ramat Hasharon M.E. de Vries

I am fortunate having as my neighbours a wonderfully helpful couple - David and Eileen Khalastchy, who supply me every month with copies of *The Scribe*. Their help - assistance during my recent bereavement is an experience for which I am eternally grateful.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, the birthplace of Theodor Herzl, I learned so much of the history of Baghdad's Jewish community. I am grateful to you for the knowledge I gain from your journal●

London SW7 Willie Gertler

I was recently given a copy of your publication *The Scribe* and read it through with great interest. I was born in Calcutta, India. My father was born in Basra, Iraq, and left for India in 1902. My mother was born in Calcutta, but both her parents came from Baghdad. I left Calcutta in 1966 and lived in Canada for 3 years after which I settled in New York.

I would appreciate being put on your mailing list●

New York Aaron Abrahams



The above is a photograph of 81-year-old American Director/Screenwriter, Mr. Herbert Kline and Israeli Actor/Director Mr. Aric Elias, a 1946 immigrant from Iraq and a graduate of the Fine Arts Institute in Baghdad.

These two giants met at this year's Israeli Film Festival in Jerusalem.

In 1946 Mr. Kline was in Palestine and directed and co-produced *My Father's House*, the first feature film to be produced at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. *My Father's House*, a semi-documentary, was restored by the Israel Film Archive/Jerusalem Cinematheque and screened at the festival this year. Sensitive to co-existence issues between Arabs and Jews, Mr. Kline's film is a reflection of the man that had both the creative insight and foresight to let the mind's eye direct the camera with this inner vision of peace.

Iraqi born Mr. Aric Elias, responsible for building the first Arab theatre in Israel, and known for his many theatre/film projects that strive toward bringing the Arab and Jewish worlds closer through dramatic expression, shares Mr. Kline's dream of a freer, more unified Israel.

The Scribe enjoys a certain wide distribution in Israel and I feel it is worthwhile that you publish this article in your journal, the more so because Mr. Kline is now in London engaged in a film screen●

Givatayim, Israel A. Bar-Lev

MY ORIGINS

by Lucien Gubbay

(abridged from his limited edition book)

Part I – The Background

My family moved from Baghdad to Aleppo at the time of my grandfather's birth c.1845.

It was only after the passing of my father's generation that I realised that a unique opportunity had been missed to learn more about the family's origins and to obtain first hand information on its sudden translation – in my father's own lifetime – from the twilight of the decayed Ottoman Empire to the world of modern Europe. This short account was completed in 1988 to set out what little I do know, before that too is lost for ever.

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, the once fertile strip of land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, now known as Iraq, was one of the cradles of human civilisation, possibly even pre-dating that of Egypt. Mesopotamia was also the origin of the Jewish people. It was in Haran, in the north of the country, that Abraham had his vision of the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth; and it was from Haran that he started on his epoch-making journey – in physical terms to establish his followers and their descendants as a distinct people in the land of Canaan, later to be called Israel; and in religious terms, the journey that was to end in the adoption of at least part of his insight by Jews, Christians and Mohammedans, now numbering over two thousand million human beings.

It was to Babylon in Mesopotamia that Nebuchadnezzar deported the Jews in 586 BCE.

Later, a Persian ruler of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, sanctioned the return of some of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the Temple. But the majority of the exiles chose to remain behind in what then was one of the most civilised cities of the ancient world. Under the direction of their own Princes of the Captivity, or Exilarchs, the Jews of Babylon managed to maintain their religious and national identity, and to enjoy a measure of internal autonomy. The Exilarchs, descended from the royal line of King David, were accorded an honoured position at the Babylonian court. Despite setbacks, the community prospered. The institute of the Synagogue, model for both Church and Mosque, originated in the Babylonian diaspora, as did the square Hebrew script in use today. And it was in the learned academics of Mesopotamia that the Babylonian Talmud, the foundation of modern Judaism, was compiled between the second and fifth centuries of the common era.

In the seventh century, the Arabs burst out of Arabia with tremendous vigour. One result of their spectacular swathe of conquest, stretching from Spain to the borders of India, was that the great majority of Jews found themselves living in a united Islamic world. Baghdad, close to ancient Babylon, became the seat of the Caliphs. As described by travellers from comparatively barbarous Europe, it must have been a truly splendid city, with its pleasure gardens and ornate buildings. It was also a great centre of commerce, of learning and of the sciences and arts. The Jews shared in the well-being of the country; and the twelfth century traveller, Benjamin of Tudela, described the ceremonial weekly visit of the Exilarch to the Caliph.

The principals of the two leading colleges of Jewish scholarship were called Geonim, plural of Gaon – Excellency. They were the acknowledged religious leaders of all Jews everywhere; and for hundreds of years Judaism was developed and regulated by means of rulings contained in correspondence between the Geonim and Rabbis all over the world. It was only in the eleventh century that the decline of the Geonim

caused their mantle of leadership to pass to new centres of Jewish learning in Mohammedan Spain and North Africa and in Christian Europe.

Spain

Spain eventually replaced Baghdad as the centre of the Jewish world. Its Jewish community became the largest, the most prosperous, the most learned and the most influential anywhere. It enjoyed a truly golden age, looked back to with aching nostalgia for centuries after, with traces of that feeling even surviving to this day.

The widespread savage pogroms of 1391 marked the beginning of the end for the Spanish Jews, who were finally expelled from the country in 1492, and from Portugal shortly afterwards.

By that time the Ottoman Turks had assumed the leadership of the Islamic world. The Turkish Sultans welcomed the refugees from Spain and Portugal with open arms, enabling them to settle in many parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Salonica, North Africa, other countries of the Near East and in Turkey itself. Some of them even found their way to Baghdad.

The Ottoman Empire

The eventual weakening of central Ottoman control over the provinces of the Empire led to an increasing degree of autonomy for their local governors, who often proved lazy, greedy and corrupt.

Jews were gradually replaced by another minority, the Christians, in their original role as the financiers, administrators, merchants, physicians, scholars and diplomats of the Empire. These Christians, often Italians, Greeks and Armenians, became better educated in European ways and languages than the Jews. They were able to make many more diplomatic and trading contacts in the increasingly dominant Christian countries of Europe, and could rely on sympathetic Christian powers for protection. Increasingly isolated from Europe, the Jews simply lost their ability to compete.

In 1826, in an action that proved fateful for the dwindling Jewish influence in Constantinople, the Sultan destroyed his entire corps of Janissaries by blowing them up in their own barracks. The Janissaries had effectively ruled Turkey in the Sultan's name; and in their fall from power, they dragged down with them the last few remaining prominent Jewish families of the capital.

Paradoxically, it was the Sultan's destruction of the Janissaries that resulted in a tightening of central control over the provinces, with consequent benefit to their Jews. Another very important factor in the improvement of the Jewish condition was the establishment in 1860 in Paris of the organisation called the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Alliance created a network of European-type schools throughout the Near East. It was those schools that enabled Jews to acquire the rudiments of a secular education, as well as some knowledge of French and English. Once again they were able to start competing with their Christian rivals; and for the first time they began to look to the West for the key to survival and worldly success.

England, partly because of genuine Old Testament sympathies, and partly as a lever to exert influence in the declining Ottoman Empire, had begun to interest itself in the plight of the Jew of the Near East. Sir Moses Montefiore's visit to Palestine in 1843 and its effect on its Jews had been noted with approval by the British government; and at about the same time, Lord Shaftesbury's proposal to repatriate the Jews so that they could build themselves a National

Home in Palestine was taken up by Lord Palmerston and linked to the idea of offering British protection to the Jews of the Ottoman Empire. Though approved in principle by Queen Victoria and her government, the Sultan rejected the proposal.

As far back as the year 1580, a British envoy to Constantinople had won a grant of Capitulations from the Sultan, governing the conditions in which British subjects could trade in the Turkish Empire. These Capitulations were modelled on those granted to France some years previously. They protected British subjects and their goods from molestation by the Turks, except for lawful customs; and provided for the appointment of consuls to regulate the relationship of the British merchants with the Ottoman authorities. The Levant Company was granted its charter by Queen Elizabeth I in 1581; and although less famous than the East India Company, it still did much to foster a highly profitable trade with the region and make the fortunes of many British entrepreneurs. Taking full advantage of the system of Capitulations, other European powers wielded considerable influence in Turkish affairs, and gained trade advantages by extending their "protection" to members of Christian minority groups within the Ottoman Empire. Thus Russia protected Orthodox Christians, while France extended its patronage to Catholics and Maronites. Such "protected" persons were no longer subject to Ottoman Law; and could only be brought to justice in courts held in the consulates of the protecting powers. Britain was at a disadvantage here, for there were few Protestants to whom such protection could be extended. Some local Jews, therefore, were adopted as British protected subjects in the nineteenth century; and if justification was needed, the Turks were told that their families were descended from Jews originating in Calcutta in British India.

Baghdad

The Baghdad to which some of the former Spanish Jews eventually made their way was no longer the fabulous seat of the Caliphs of Islam. That city, its greatness already much tarnished by decadence and corruption, fell to the onslaught of Hulagu – a grandson of Ghengiz Khan, the Scourge of God – in the year 1258. Though Hulagu Khan and his Mongol army spared the lives of many of the Jewish and Christian inhabitants, the devastation was terrible indeed, with most of the population being massacred by the implacable conquerors. The pagan Khans at first favoured their newly acquired Jewish subjects; and a Jew was even appointed to the post of supreme governor of Mesopotamia. But his fall from favour, coupled with the conversion of many of the Mongols to Islam, signalled the start of a very long period of intermittent persecution, during which most Jews either perished or quit the city. In 1401, Baghdad was sacked again, this time by another dreaded Mongol, Timur the Lame (Tamerlane); and it is said that the havoc he wrought was only less than that of Hulagu before him because there was so much less to destroy.

It was not until late in the fifteenth century that Jews began to trickle back to Baghdad in any appreciable number. By then the learned academics with their illustrious Geonim had long since disappeared; and the grand, semi-royal office of Exilarch had been replaced by the more prosaic one of Nasi – merely the president or head of the community.

When Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent entered Baghdad in 1534, he was accompanied by his Jewish physician as well as by a number of other Jewish scholars, and was warmly welcomed by the resident Jewish population. In time though, the administration of the outlying provinces of the Ottoman Empire was more and more left to local governors; and the personal attitude of each became crucial to his Jewish community. Some were tolerant; but others were vicious.

Baghdad itself still occupied a pivotal position astride several of the world's major trade routes. Goods reached its markets from the East, either overland or up the Persian Gulf; they then travelled westwards along the main caravan route across the desert to Aleppo in Syria, and then on to the Mediterranean and Europe. The city was able to maintain its status as an important trading centre even though its formerly fertile countryside – once the granary of the East – had been reduced to a series of barren and swampy wastelands by the Mongols, who had destroyed all the ancient irrigation and drainage systems. To make matters worse, a succession of plagues and floods struck Baghdad, each greatly reducing its population; and when in 1831 a great flood inundated the city, already in the grip of the plague, it was virtually emptied of inhabitants. The Jewish population fluctuated greatly in numbers and at times new immigrants even included Jews from central and northern Europe, who Arabised their Germanic names to suit their new surroundings.

The very worst of all the Turkish governors of Baghdad was Daoud Pasha, who ruled between 1817 and 1831. It was during and shortly after this period that some Baghdadi Jews fled the city for British India and the Far East and for Aleppo and elsewhere to the West.

The penultimate blow to fall on the Jews of Iraq occurred about one hundred years later in 1941, following the collapse of Rashid Ali's Nazi-inspired revolt against the pro-British government. A vicious pogrom erupted, during the course of which several hundred Jews were brutally murdered in Baghdad. That prompted more Jews to flee the country; and those who were wise enough to do so then were spared the further years of misery awaiting their brethren who remained behind.

The very last episode in a long and tortured history, which also had its splendid periods, was associated with the events that followed the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the intense wave of militant Arab nationalism that accompanied it. The community was virtually liquidated then, with the vast majority of its members leaving for Israel. Thus, Mesopotamia was emptied of its Jews, who had lived there for almost a thousand years before the Arabs entered the country.

Aleppo

The Jewish community of Aram Zova in Northern Syria – otherwise known as Halab or Aleppo – had ancient roots. It was in existence shortly after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

Local tradition maintains that Ezra the Scribe passed there on his way from Babylon to Jerusalem; and that he built the synagogue which still stands in Tedef, a few miles distant from the city.

Halab's own ancient synagogue was built in the fifth century when Syria was still part of the Byzantine Empire. The synagogue's greatest treasure was the Keter (Crown) – otherwise known as the Aleppo Codex. This Hebrew Bible was written by a Palestinian scribe in the ninth century, and was vowelled by Aharon ben Asher the Masorete. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Keter was the world's oldest surviving biblical manuscript. It was closely studied by Maimonides in the twelfth century; and being accepted by Jews as the authoritative version of the Bible, it is an object of great veneration.

Halab's "native" Jewish population was enlarged by an influx of Sephardi refugees following their expulsion from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century. It was further augmented by another influx of "Francos" in the eighteenth century, this time mainly from France, Italy and Austria. The immigrants merged with the local Jews so completely as to leave only their Spanish family names and a few words of Ladino in the local dialect as a memorial to their origins.

Aleppo was once a great city. A main caravan route linked it to Baghdad and Basra; and goods from the East passed through its famous markets on their way to the Mediterranean coast and Europe, meeting others travelling in the opposite direction. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave the death blow to the commercial prosperity of Aleppo.

The Jews of Halab remained loyal to their roots throughout the centuries of their dispersion. For the first hundred years or so, wherever they settled – in Manchester, New York, Buenos Aires, Mexico City or elsewhere – they maintained their closely knit communities and married their own kind, marriage partners often being specially imported from Halab for the purpose. They preserved their original customs; and the food of Aleppo, fragrant with almonds, pistachios, apricots and rosewater, accompanied them everywhere.

The Jewish community of Aleppo received its

"The Trial"

by Elias Dangoor

About a year ago the manuscript of "The Trial", a story written by a young Jew called Kafka in Prague at the turn of the century, was sold at Sotheby's auction for one million pounds.

"The Trial" was made into a film with Anthony Perkins in the leading role of a young man living on his own in Prague.

In 1964 I had to stay in Iraq for a whole year waiting for a passport permit to join my wife and children in London. I passed the time going to cinemas. I went one evening with my best friend then for fourteen years, the late Mr. Charles Horesh to see "The Trial".



Elias Dangoor and Charles Horesh at Hindiyah Barrage, Iraq, 1964

Let us call the young man in the story Anthony. Two plain clothes policemen knocked at his door early one morning and asked to search the flat. They saw certain marks under the carpet and on the wall and started to shake their heads, looking at each other as if they had found what they were looking for. Anthony told them that he only moved to this flat the day before and that he didn't do these marks, didn't even notice them, neither could he see any meaning to them.

The policemen left without saying a word, and he thought that was the end of that.

Walking on the street, a group of children pointed their fingers at him saying

death blow in 1947 on the day following the decision of the United Nations to partition Palestine. All Aleppo's synagogues and Jewish institutions were burnt to the ground in a violent pogrom which shook the city. Even the Keter was burnt, though part survived and was smuggled out to Israel. The community rapidly dispersed. Only four thousand Jews now remain in the whole of Syria. They lead a fearful existence – isolated, oppressed, and forbidden to leave the country.

Though overlooked by a Christian world obsessed with the plight of Palestinian refugees, it must never be forgotten that the obliteration of the ancient Jewish communities of the Near East was part of the heavy price exacted by the Arabs for the establishment of the modern state of Israel

In the next issue:

Part II – The Families:

Gubbay, Farhi, Shammah, Chayo

"That's him!". He asked them, "What have I done?". They just ran away without a word. This scene was repeated several times with different children in different areas of the city. He suddenly became a well-known person.

His rich uncle telephoned him and said that because his case is too grave and his means are too limited, he has appointed the best lawyer in town to defend him. "What have I done?" asked Anthony. His uncle hung up without an answer.

Anthony went to see the lawyer, acted by Orson Wells, who agreed to see him after keeping him waiting for a few hours. The lawyer, sitting on a high pile of cushions told Anthony who was standing at the door, that because of his respect for his uncle, he agreed to take up this notorious case, and that Anthony should come and see him in two days. "What have I done?" asked Anthony. When there was no answer, the secretary asked him to leave.

Two days later Anthony went early morning and waited till late afternoon when the lawyer called him and said, "Today I had lunch with the judge who is looking into your case. After the meal when I asked him about it he suddenly became furious and full of rage. But because of my good friendship with him he calmed down and promised to look at it again".

"What have I done?" asked Anthony. "Come again tomorrow" was the answer.

The following week there was the trial when the public prosecutor demanded his execution for what he has done. The defence lawyer asked for clemency. "What have I done?" asked Anthony. Nobody answered. The court decided for his execution which was carried out almost immediately.

When we left the cinema we were depressed. Charles said that it is a silly story. I said that it is a story of everyday life in countries like Iraq.

The life of Charles himself was ended in almost identical manner 3 years later in Baghdad. He was arrested, put on trial, sentenced, and executed without knowing what he had done!

Is the manuscript worth one million pounds?

Scribe: Charles Horesh was one of 11 innocent Jews hanged in Baghdad and Basrah in January 1969

COOKERY CORNER

by Alice Shashou

Erouk mal Samak or Fish Patties

The shell:

2½lb halibut or haddock (not frozen)
3½ cups patna rice
3 bunches spring onions (green tops only)
1 bunch of parsley
1¼ bunch of fresh coriander
1 tablespoon ground coriander
1 teaspoon cumin

The filling:

1½lb haddock or halibut
3 bunches spring onions (whites only)
Dash of pepper
Salt to taste
3 tablespoons of ground dried lime
½ teaspoon cumin

Method: The Shell:

Mince the fish and knead it with wet hands. Mince parsley, fresh coriander and the green of the spring onions. Add ground coriander and cumin and mix by hand with the fish mixture adding little water. Wash the rice. Drain and add salt. Wet your hands with water and gently combine fish mixture and rice together being careful not to break the rice. Sprinkle with a little water while mixing. *This is the shell.* Let it rest in the fridge for about 1 hour.

The filling: Fry the fish and shred. Finely cut the onions and fry with the oil of the fried fish. Add salt, pepper, ground lime and cumin. Stir and mix. Let it cool. *This is the filling.*

Wet your hands with water. Take a small portion of the shell and form into a small ball. Flatten it and put 1 tablespoon of the filling in the centre. Keeping your hands wet, close the shell and flatten it. Freeze.

To cook:

Half fill a big pan with water. Add enough salt and bring it to the boil. Drop the Erouk from frozen into the water. Cover the pan and boil for about 20 minutes or until they rise to the surface. Remove them carefully with a spatula and let them drain and cool on a tilted board. Put in fridge. Fry with oil. Serve hot. Enjoy!●

Write: To make sure that the Erouks hold together and do not fall apart, use an oily fish for the shell, such as carp, or add ½ cup semolina to the shell ingredients●

Iraqi Burag

Ingredients:

1 readymade wrapping of spring roll pastry. It contains 20 sheets a pack.
Oil for deep-frying

Filling:

1¼lb boneless chicken
2 finely chopped onions
1 bay leaf (optional)
1 bunch chopped parsley
Seasonings. Salt, pepper, curry, mixed spices to taste.

Method:

Salt and pepper the chicken, add bay leaf and 1 onion and a little water (about ½ cup or more). Simmer covered until the chicken is cooked. Discard bay leaf.

Coarsely shred the chicken with a knife.

Now fry the chopped onion with a little oil until golden in colour. Add the shredded chicken and stir for few minutes. Remove from flame and add the chopped parsley and spices of your choice. Mix well and allow to cool.

Place 1 tablespoon of the filling on the corner of each pastry sheet and fold the top over. Fold the right side towards the left and left side towards the right. Roll up into a tight roll and seal with water.

Heat the oil in a deep pan and fry the *Burag* a few at a time until golden brown.

Drain on absorbent kitchen paper and serve immediately.

Note: You can also use filo pastry instead of the spring roll pastry. *Do not deep fry.*

Freezer tip: You may freeze *Burag* before frying. Defrost for an hour on kitchen towel to absorb moisture, then place in deep fryer.

Another variation: *Burag* with minced chicken or minced meat.

Method:

Sauté the finely chopped onion until golden in colour. Add coarsely minced chicken or meat. Add salt and pepper and stir until all liquid evaporates. Take out of fire and add the chopped parsley and spices. Stir well. *This is the filling.*●

Iraqi Datli

Ingredients:

1 measuring cup plain flour
4oz or ½ cup unsalted butter or margarine
½ pint or 1 measuring cup water
Pinch of salt
4 small eggs
Cherries in syrup for decoration (optional)
Oil for deep frying

Method: The dough:

Sift the flour into a bowl.

Put the water, butter and salt into a saucepan and gently melt the butter on slow fire. Then bring to the boil.

Reduce heat and add the flour all at once and stir well until the mixture leaves the side of the pan.

Place mixture into the bowl of an electric beater and leave until lukewarm or nearly cold. Switch on beater and add the eggs one at a time, processing after each addition until the mixture is smooth. Let it rest for about 1 hour.

To deep fry: Heat oil in a deep pan. Oil your palms. Take a spoonful of the dough and roll into small balls slightly larger than the size of a walnut. Flatten a little, then form a hole in the middle of the ball with your finger. Lower the heat and drop these balls into the hot oil turning them a few times and basting them with oil from the pan until golden and they float to the surface. Using a draining spoon, remove from pan and allow to drain from oil before dipping them briefly in the cold syrup. Arrange on a platter and garnish with cherries.

Syrup: Prepare in advance and use it cold.
3 cups sugar

1½ cup water

About 2 tablespoons lemon juice

About 2 tablespoons rose water

Dissolve sugar in water over low fire.

Add lemon juice and let it simmer until the syrup thickens and coats the back of the spoon. Add the rose water and stir for another minute●

Grapefruit Jam

Ingredients:

4 large white grapefruits
2 lbs caster sugar
About 4 cups water (adding more as needed)
3 tablespoons lemon juice
1-2 tablespoons rose water

Method:

Grate the yellow part of the skin and discard. Cut the white skin into segments. Remove the fruit from the skin.

Wash and soak the skins in water and change 2-3 times, soaking overnight.

On the second day, rinse well and put in a pan of boiling water and boil for about 8-10 minutes. Change water and boil for another 8-10 minutes. Let it cool. Squeeze out all liquid.

Boil water and sugar in a saucepan. Add the squeezed peel and leave to simmer for about 30-40 minutes.

Add the lemon juice and simmer for a few minutes. Then add the rose water and boil it for a few minutes.

Leave some liquid in it so that the peels will not be dry.

When cold, store in an air-tight jar●

The Shofar at Rosh Hashana

by Percy Gourgey

The central feature of the New Year service is the blowing of the *shofar*, the significance of which is unique to Judaism. The obligation to hear it is the first essential of the observance of the beginning of the Ten Days of Penitence. Maimonides has said: "Although the blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana is an unexplained scriptural command, its connotation is 'awake ye who slumber and ponder your deeds; remember your Creator and go back to Him in penitence; ye who miss the truth in your lust for vanities...'"

In our prayers we are reminded of the Babylonian Saadia Gaon's enumeration of the ten objectives in the blowing of the *shofar*, covering fundamental Jewish beliefs and events. These include the belief that Rosh Hashana is the day of Creation on which God assumed sovereignty over the world (*Psalms* 98:6) - "with trumpets and the sound of the *shofar* make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord". Then, to remind us of our forefathers standing at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, "and the sound of the *shofar* was waxing great" (*Exodus* 19:16), to do and hearken unto the Almighty's commands. Thirdly, to remind us of the destruction of the Temple and the sound of invading armies, and battle. Fourthly, to remind us of the binding of Isaac and willingness to be sacrificed to the Almighty, as an example to us. Fifthly, to remind us of the ingathering of the dispersed of Israel (*Isaiah* 27:13) and finally, to remind us of the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.

In our daily prayers we are exhorted to "sound the great horn for our freedom", *teka beshofar gadol le-herutenu*●