

The SCRIBE

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WISHING ALL OUR READERS A HAPPY HANUCAH
AND A PROSPEROUS 1987

The Gulf War

WHEN THE CIA enticed Saddam to launch his attack on Iran in September 1980, he set himself three objectives: to start an uprising in "Arabistan", to topple Khomeini and to end the war in three weeks. By the end of 1980, with Saddam deep inside Iran and with everything apparently going his way, none of his objectives was realised. Saddam had effectively lost the war and for the last six years had been fighting a rear-guard action to save his skin. He is dead but he won't lie down.

Some may find comfort in that the continuation of the Gulf war weakens and neutralises Iraq and Iran. But the war has to end one day and the manner of its ending may be an unpleasant surprise. If Iran wins and joins hands with Syria, the floodgates of the Middle East will be wide open. Iran's threat to march on Jerusalem only disguises her ambition in the whole region and Israel may have to fight yet another war for which Assad has been waiting.

Israelis should not just sell arms to Iraq or act as porters for other countries as they did in the Suez crisis, 30 years ago, to no avail. Israel's priorities are to help Iran topple Saddam and then help a moderate regime in Iraq to stem Iran.

Israel must have a regional policy and realise that her frontiers are on the borders of Iran and Turkey. Israel must watch and influence what goes on in the region not just in a negative sense, such as the bombing of the nuclear plant in Baghdad, but with the ultimate aim of organising a Middle East confederation which gives Israel a say in its affairs and a share of its wealth.

Now is the time for moderate Iraqis and Israel to find each other and, with the support of Egypt and moderate Arab states, ensure the safety of the region from the Iranian menace. Israel's survival at present is based on the survival odds of Russian roulette — you have to be right every time. No nation can continue on this basis. Now is the golden opportunity for Israel to turn the lemon into a lemonade and bring peace, stability and prosperity to the whole region ●

The Queen's Visit to China

THERE IS hardly a nation in the world that hasn't fought a war with the British — Spain, France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, the Jews and the Arabs, Iran, India, China and Japan, South Africa, the African colonies, the United States, Argentina. Yet, British diplomacy is such that these conflicts have not left a bad feeling on either side. Out of the ashes of empire came up a commonwealth with common interests and English has become a universal language.

A hundred years ago Britain was pushing opium to gain a foothold in China but now, while Britain still occupies Hong Kong, China has given the Queen a most friendly and enthusiastic welcome.

In contrast, the Jewish people have made enemies wherever we went. We still remember Pharaoh and Amalek, Assyria and Babylon, Haman, Greece and Rome. Memories of the Holocaust will continue for centuries to come. For some reason, we do not have the resilience to transcend our vicissitudes ●

Jews in China

AN EXHIBITION on the Jews of China opened in June at the Diaspora Museum, Tel Aviv. It consisted mainly of nostalgic photographs and slides supplied by families who lived there, such as the Toegs, Abrahams and Nissims. The exhibition was scheduled to move thereafter to New York and San Francisco.

A huge exhibition about the Jews of Iraq is scheduled for 1988 at the Diaspora Museum (Bet Hatefusoth).

Surprisingly, this venue was chosen in preference to the Traditional Culture Centre of Iraqi Jews at Or Yehuda, which failed in its bid to hold the exhibition on its premises ●

Special Holy Day Services

MEMORIES OF the past glories of the Babylonian (Baghdadian) Jewish Community were surely rekindled this year when members of that Community, now living in London, celebrated the High Holy Days according to their own rich and ancient customs.

Over six hundred men and women congregated together in the Synagogue, within the premises of the Jewish Preparatory School, for services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They were conducted by Rabbi Haim Eliyahu who had flown over specially from Jerusalem. Rabbi Dr Abraham Levy, Communal Rabbi of the Sephardi Community and also the Honorary Principal of the Jewish Preparatory School, addressed the congregation on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. His Excellency the Israeli Ambassador, Mr Yehuda Avner, joined the congregation in prayer for the Kol Nidrei service.

Both moving and inspiring, the services gave the younger members a rare opportunity to absorb the traditions of their magnificent heritage. As is the custom, a member of the Congregation, Mr Percy Gourgey, spoke on the significance of repentance in the interval between Musaf and Minha on Yom Kippur.

The Synagogue itself is consecrated to the memory of the late Naima Shamoon, and Mozelle and Albert Bekhor, by the Shamoon family and by Mr Jonathan Bekhor, prominent members of the Babylonian Jewish Community in London. Thanks are due to Mr Sami Shamoon who organised these services which were held in conjunction with the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation. Mr Latif Hoory, another well-known and respected member of this Community made a notable contribution to the smooth running of the services, acting as honorary Shamash ●

A. BEN-DAVID

To rise to the top you must start at the bottom. ●

N.E.D.

Cookery Corner

THE IRAQI Jewish community stands head and shoulders above the rest of the Diaspora with a continuous existence of over 2500 years. It is the oldest surviving community in the whole world with a culture that goes all the way back to Adam, father of our civilisation.

In our lifetime we have seen the rebirth of Israel and the uprooting of our community from its ancient home. While the majority emigrated to Isarel, a hard core, numbering some 20,000 dispersed all over the world. For us Israel remains our spiritual home but we are trying to maintain our traditions without a territorial home of our own. In this The Scribe tries to fill the gap.

Not least of our traditions is the Baghdadian cuisine, rich in variety and which is increasingly appreciated by Ashkenazis and non-Jews.

David Schayek, a typical Baghdadian who cherishes his roots, writes:

"I enclose some Baghdad recipes compiled by Captain Sunny (Solomon) Ezra. He was the brother of Mozelle (Toppie) Manasseh and was a descendant of David Joseph Baher (or Khleif) of Calcutta and a relation of my mother. He visited Baghdad in 1918 in the Indian Army. He went to Eton and married the Housemaster's daughter. Some of his recipes have an Indian slant".

Here are some:

AROOKTAHEEN CUTLETS

Chop $\frac{3}{4}$ Chicken fine, or Veal may be used instead. Chop one spoon onion very fine, stir in a basin. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon turmeric, some finely chopped parsley or chutney leaves, with cayenne some finely chopped chillies if approved, and 2 yolks of eggs, stir well. Make batter with 2 tablespoons flour, 2 yolks, a little water to smooth it and 4 whites very slightly whipped. Mix the batter with the Chicken, etc., fry spoonfuls of mixture in boiling oil, on rather low fire, so that the Cutlets should be cooked before they are dark brown. Flatten them with the slice as they are frying.

GOMBO (BAMIA) CURRY A LA FANCY

Cut 2 medium sized Spanish onions in halves and slice them finely, put it in a saucepan, sprinkle over it 1 teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper and 1 teaspoon turmeric, add $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints water and mix. Put pan on to boil with lid on till

the liquid is all boiled down and the onions are moist and pulpy. Take pan off, cut up one chicken and put aside 4oz. for Cooba (trim the quantity off the pieces of chicken) put the cut up chicken in the saucepan, put it on the fire and mix thoroughly, do it rather roughly so as to break up the onions. Take pan off, add $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints water and mix. Let it stand while you prepare the ingredients for the Coobas. While you are making the ball put pan on fire and let it boil up, then put the balls in, but before doing so, see that it is not boiling too fast (it must be just boiling) leave the basin of water near and give each ball a final rolling before putting it in between the pieces of chicken. Shake the saucepan and let the balls slip in as they must be covered. Put the lid on, let it boil gently till cooked (takes about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour). Shake the saucepan now and then to see that the balls do not stick. Take pan off, add 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Take a tin of Gombos (Bamia), open it and put the contents in a small saucepan. Pour some of the curry in the tin, shake it and pour it over the Gombos. Heat them on the fire and when wanted take the chicken and balls out of the big saucepan and place neatly in a dish, then pour the Gombos into the curry and mix gently. Then pour the whole into the dish and serve.

COOBAS FOR GOMBOS

For the stuffing, chop $\frac{1}{2}$ Spanish onion very very fine. Take 4 oz chicken (you can trim the quantity off the pieces of chicken you are going to use for the curry) and a large piece of fat and chop it fine. Put the onions in your hand and squeeze the water out. Put the chicken and onions together and sprinkle $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon turmeric, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper and knead it all together with your hands till it is thoroughly mixed. For the outside, take 2 handfuls of rice that has been soaked overnight (must be Patna rice as it is the best and holds better together), drain it and put it in a mortar and pound it till it is as fine as flour to the touch. Take about 1 oz of chicken, put a pinch of salt on it. Take the rice out of the mortar and pound the chicken, then put a little of the rice back and pound it together, then put the whole of the rice back and pound all together. Pour in a spoonful or two of water and pound, add the water very gradually as the mixture must not be very moist, must be like dough. To make the balls, have a basin of tepid, not warm, water near, roll out the pounded rice and put some of the stuffing in, roll it up, wetting your hands constantly ●

RESPONSA – Questions and Answers

THE JEWISH religion took thousands of years to hammer out and, although Abraham is usually credited as being the starting point, the roots of Hebrew monotheism go back much earlier, to the time of Adam, founder of settled agriculture and, by definition, father of our civilisation. Adam, Noah, the Patriarchs, Moses, David and Solomon, the Prophets, Ezra and the Rabbis of the Talmud are the pillars of our religion. The unwavering consistency of beliefs over this long period is most remarkable.

It was in Babylon that traditional Judaism finally blossomed with the writing of the Babylonian Talmud, which took 300 years to compile and was finished in 499 C.E. Questions and Answers (She'elot ve Teshuvot), or Responsa, were the written replies given on all aspects of Jewish Law by qualified authorities from the time of the later Geonim of Babylon to the present day. About a thousand volumes containing more than half a million separate responsa have appeared in print.

To provide a cultural bond with the distant communities on whom the Babylonian academies were increasingly dependent after the 9th century, the Geonim solicited enquiries on the Bible, the Mishnah and the Talmud and sent back their authoritative replies.

In this Section we shall endeavour to continue in the same tradition.

Q – Do you believe in God?

A – Before we can answer this question we must define what is meant by "belief in God". There is no need to make a distinction between the atheist who denies the existence of God and the person who, while acknowledging the existence of a Creator, refuses to believe that He is at all interested in the action of His creatures. As Psalm XIV says of Nabal, the morally corrupt person, "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God," – therefore, you can do what you like. The Talmud defines the atheist as one who claims "There is no judgement and no Judge" in the Universe, irrespective of his belief or disbelief in the existence of God.

If we believe that God is interested in the actions of his creatures, does it follow then that Heaven is open six days a week to process men's prayers and to cater for the needs of the world? We believe that the Universe is based on a set of Laws: and just as there are laws of gravity, physics, chemistry and biology there are also,



1949 – Naim Dangoor and his Moslem partner, the late Ahmed Safwat Pasha Alawa, graduates of London University, hand in hand – a prime example of Arab-Jewish co-operation in business life in Iraq prior to the mass emigration of the Jewish community in 1950/51.

In the previous fifty years Jews dominated commerce and banking and left their imprint of sound principles on the local population, their motto being – My Word is My Bond. Kompiyas, or bills of exchange, were widely used in the market place as a very satisfactory form of credit, were circulated and discounted, and were strictly paid by midday on due date.

Iraqi businessmen of the present generation, who are well regarded in international circles, often acknowledge their indebtedness to that high tradition ●

just as surely, moral laws in the world based on Justice, Truth and Mercy which men and women have to live by. One may ask, if there are set rules of behaviour, what then is the purpose of prayer? The answer is that by prayer we try to tune ourselves to our Creator, rather than to try and change God's attitude favourably towards us. As Abraham Lincoln once put it, we should try to be on God's side rather than expect God to be on our side. Rabbi Abraham Levy tells the story of the little girl who prayed for a whole month for a new bicycle without getting it. Her friend teased her that God did not answer her prayer. "Oh yes he did", the girl retorted. "He told me I don't need it!"

According to Talmudic teaching, therefore, acknowledging the existence of God is more than an intellectual affirmation; it includes moral obligation. The declaration: "Hear, O

Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one", is defined as "the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven", which means submission to the Divine discipline.

If God created the Universe in six days with a set of Rules to sustain it, what has He been doing since then? The answer is that Creation is not an act in the past which continues automatically. The cosmic order is ever dependent upon His will. God may also have other activities!

Q – Why don't the Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on January 1st, the first day of the calendar year?

A – By Jewish tradition the birth mila, when a Jewish baby boy enters into the Covenant of Abraham, is more important than the day of birth. By celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25th, January 1st becomes the date of his circumcision ●

שנת הפטירה (או ההקדשה)	למנוחה
תר"ד	עזינה בת עקאם.
תר"ז	צלקה בת מנחם דוד מנחם גבאי.
תר"י	נאלה בת יוסף נסים עזרא אברהם (המקדיש): שלמה עזרא בנימין).
תרכ"א	צלקה בת נסים יוסף נסים.
תרכ"ב	נועם בת דוד ח' בכור, אשת ראובן אברהם עבודי.
תרכ"ב	ישועה חיים דוד יוסף (הקדישוהו הכנים למנוחת אביהם).
תרכ"ג	סירה בת אליהו נסים אליהו.
תרכ"ד	הזקן ראובן אברהם רחמים.
תרכ"ח	שמחה בת דוד יהושע דוד ח' בכור.
תרכ"ט	סירה בת יצחק דוד מרדכי טניג (המקדיש): יהודה יחזקאל עזרא ששון אהרן).
תרל"ד	נאלה בת רחמים אליהו (המקדיש): אברהם שינה למנוחת אשתו).
תרל"ה	יהודה משה נחום (המקדישה): אשתו שרה בת אליהו יחזקאל אברהם ח' צדקה חוצין).
תרל"ה	חביבה בת עקאם (המקדיש): שלמה יוסף שלמה למנוחת אשתו).
תרל"ז	יצחק משה יצחק.
תרמ"ג	מרים בת רחל (המקדיש): יוסף צאלח למנוחת אשתו).
תרמ"ו	דינה אשת יחזקאל חיים דוד משה ישראל.
תרמ"ז	צלקה בת שרה.
תרמ"ח	עזינה בת רחמים אברהם מרדכי (המקדיש): סלימאן ששון ח' סלימאן).
תרמ"ח	לאה בת ח' אליהו מצליח.
תרמ"ח	הזקן משה יוסף עזרא שלמה דוד.
תרנ"ב	מרדכי דוד מרדכי כהן (נתחדש בשנה זו).
תרנ"ד	יוסף עזרא אברהם.
תרנ"ו	חביבה בת בנימין עבד אל-נבי.
תרנ"ה	שאויל משה יוסף עזרא שלמה דוד.
תרס"א	הזקנה שמחה אשת משה יוסף עזרא שלמה דוד.
תרס"ב	עבדאללה-יוסף ח"ר עזרא דנגור.
תרע"ג	הכחור עזרא ציץ משיח יונה.
תרע"ה	מסקענד בת יוסף עזרא יצחק ח' עזרא (המקדיש): יונה משיח למנוחת אשתו).

IN HIS recent book "The Jews of Iraq in Modern Times" in Hebrew, Mr Abraham Ben-Jacob published a full list of the Sifre Torah of the Iraqi community as compiled by the late Ezra Haddad in 1949, of which the above is a specimen. Free copies of the full list can be obtained from The Scribe ●

Raise the Ante

FOR 40 years the Arab-Israel conflict has been a poker game that Israel cannot win and that the Arabs cannot lose, because the stakes are so limited.

The only way to break the deadlock and make the game equal for both sides is for Israel to raise the "ante", by making the stakes – not a share of Palestine but a share of the whole region. However, such thoughts appear to be alien to the predominantly Ashkenazi Israel establishment. At a meeting of Sephardi leaders in Jerusalem with Yitzhak Rabin, when he was Prime Minister, Naim Dangoor suggested that Israel should pursue a regional policy, and pointed out that Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries brought with them important political and territorial rights in various parts of the Middle East. Israel can be said to have inherited these rights which she can use in claiming a wider share of the region.

This only provoked Rabin's angry reply, "Are you suggesting that Jews from Europe have no rights in the Middle East?"

As our Babylonian ancestors used to say, *Ashrei hamdabber al ozen shoma'at* ●

Books

THE LURE OF ZION: THE CASE OF THE IRAQI JEWS by Abbas Shiblak (who turns out to be a member of the PLO). Second Review, condensed from *The Spectator*.

The Jews of Iraq, almost alone among their co-religionists outside Palestine, were not part of the Diaspora created in 70 AD when Titus destroyed the Temple. Their ancestors had chosen six centuries earlier, after Cyrus had conquered Babylon and granted Jews the right to return to Jerusalem, to remain in the land between the rivers, where they prospered. By the first half of this century they formed one of Iraq's wealthiest and most dynamic communities. In 1939, ten of the 25 "first class" members of the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce (those whose wealth was between 22,500 and 75,000 Iraqi Dinars) were Jews. (Only one was an Arab Muslim). Prominent Baghdad Jewish families maintained houses and trading establishments in London, Manchester, Bombay, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Jews formed a vital part of the civil service and constituted a majority among employees of the railways, Basra port and the Iraq Petroleum Company.

Jews were no less conspicuous in Iraqi cultural life, writing plays and books in Arabic. Jews founded five of Iraq's Arabic language newspapers. Jewish men had a literacy rate of 83 per cent, compared to 15 per cent for the Iraqi population as a whole. Thirty-two Jewish musicians were listed among the country's top one hundred. The *Jewish Chronicle* wrote of the Iraqi Jews, who with 114,000 people outnumbered Christians, in December 1949,

they are attached to their homes, traditions and their shrines of the prophets, and would not like to leave them in order to begin life once more in an immigrants' camp in Israel, where they believe people are not particularly friendly to oriental Jews.

By the end of 1952, nearly all Iraq's Jews did leave "their homes, traditions and their shrines of the prophets", most of them to begin life in an immigrants' camp in Israel. Abbas Shiblak's task in *The Lure of Zion* is to explain why they left. Their departure was not the result of traditional Arab anti-Semitism. There had been one pogrom, called the Farhud, against Jews in Baghdad, but that took place in 1941, ten years before the exodus of Iraqi Jews began. Shiblak writes that the Arabs who looted Jewish houses and shops and caused an estimated 300 Jewish casualties were reacting to public Jewish support for a British

expeditionary force, including Jewish units from Palestine, which came to put down an Arab nationalist and fascist revolt by Iraqi army officers. So there was a specific cause. The events of the Farhud were not repeated.

Iraqi Jews were not strongly attracted to Zionism before the establishment of Israel in 1948. Only 8000 Iraqi Jews emigrated to Palestine in all the years between the Balfour Declaration and the creation of the Jewish State, fewer, in fact, than had gone to India to work in trade.

In 1949 American and Israeli officials were looking for a solution to the problem of Palestine's Arabs in the form of a "population transfer" between Israel and the Arab states: the Arab world would accept Palestinian Arab refugees, and Israel would accept Jews from the Arab world. There were only two problems with this solution, suggested even by humane Americans like Herbert Hoover: Palestine's Arab refugees wanted to return to Palestine, and many of the Jews of the Arab world, especially those in Iraq, wanted to stay where they were.

Things moved quickly in the first three years of the 1950s. In March 1950, Iraq passed a denaturalisation law which deprived "any Iraqi who wished, of his own free will and choice, to leave Iraq for good, of his Iraqi nationality". In May, Iraqi officials awarded Near East Transport Inc, a US-registered airline owned by the Jewish Agency, the exclusive right to transport Iraqi Jews to Israel via Cyprus. Shiblak uses interesting Foreign Office memoranda to support his claim, revealing that one of the FO's main concerns was that British firms had been excluded from this lucrative trade. The US was putting pressure on the Iraqis to make the Near East Transport award. Still, a few anti-Semitic press and government statements, along with ease of exit, were not sufficient to spark the exodus.

This is where "cruel Zionism" played its role. Beginning with a hand-grenade thrown at a coffee house frequented by Jews, bombs began to explode at Jewish centres and places where Jews were known to congregate, for example, the US Information Centre. Although the bombs, which were the work of Israeli agents, have been written about before, Shiblak's contribution is to present the evidence (from Israeli press accounts and FO documents) in the larger context of the increasingly precarious position of Jews in Iraqi society. After the bombs, the Jews fled. Forty thousand Jews left the country by the time of the second explosion, and 105,000 more had registered to go. By the next Iraqi census in

1957, there were fewer than 5000 Jews left.

The Lure of Zion is a good, brief account of the exodus, but it suffers from the flaws of the doctoral thesis, which is how it began its life. All the research is confined to written sources, and many of these are secondary. The author made no attempt to interview anyone involved in this unhappy episode in Iraqi and Israeli history. Admittedly, many of those worth interviewing are unavailable to Abbas Shiblak, who, as a Palestinian, cannot go to Israel to speak to Iraqi Jewish exiles. But the publishers, who refer to Shiblak on the back cover as "a young Palestinian now working in Tunisia", might have been more candid. Shiblak works in Tunisia for the Arab League and belongs to Yasser Arafat's Al Fatah.

That Zionists planted bombs in Iraq to cause Iraqi Jews to panic and flee is a historical fact, as Shiblak and others have pointed out. The question the book does not answer is whether those Zionists who planted the bombs were not, given the reign of terror under the present regime in Baghdad, acting in the interests of Iraqi Jews - whether Iraqi Jews had wanted it or not. If Zionists had forced the Jews of Germany and eastern Europe to flee in the 1930s - under similar circumstances and against their will - history might have been forgiving. Many Iraqi Jews are understandably bitter when they recall what they lost in their ancient homeland, but very few took up the invitation of the Iraqi government in 1975 to return home ●

To the Editor of *The Spectator*: "We wish to correct the suggestion that there was a justifiable excuse for the riots of June 1941 in which hundreds of Jews were killed and much property looted. The Jews of Iraq had no way of supporting the expeditionary force sent by General Wavell's command in Palestine which naturally contained some Palestinian Jews. But local Jews were relieved at the failure of the pro-German revolt and the restoration of the legitimate regime. German occupation of Iraq would have spelled disaster for the Jewish community and there was already talk of establishing concentration camps.

The Arabs invaded Iraq in the seventh century at the invitation and with the help of the Jewish community who were suffering from religious persecution at the hands of Mazdakite Persians. A long period of co-operation between Moslems and Jews followed and Babylonian Jewry greatly influenced the development of Islam.

After the Great War, through the influence of Lawrence and Miss Bell,

Iraq was given over wholly to Arab rule without safeguards for its substantial minorities. In the thirties, anti-Jewish feelings were fanned by the German ambassador and Ex-Mufti Amin Huseini, and these were given expression in the bloody 'Farhud' of 1941, with encouragements from 'certain quarters'.

The wisdom of Jewish emigration from Iraq can best be assessed by what happened to those who stayed behind. In 1969 the world was shocked at the public hanging in a Baghdad square of 9 innocent Jews after a mock 'trial' and many others were kidnapped, tortured and killed by 'Security' agents or disappeared without trace.

Jewish rights in the Middle East are not confined to Palestine and there can be no lasting settlement until minority rights in the whole region are satisfied. Our Journal endeavours to keep alive the ancient traditions of Iraqi Jews, now dispersed all over the world, and whose history goes back to the time of Abraham who lived in Iraq nearly 4000 years ago" ●

THE SCRIBE

AGES OF MAN by Lucien Gubbay and Abraham Levy, published by Darton, Longman & Todd, 171 pp. £7.95.

This book is a simple practical guide to the whole spectrum of contemporary Jewish religious life. It is traditional in approach and never loses sight of its historical roots. It is written in three sections, the first covering the concepts of Jewish belief in birth, death, marriage and bar mitzvah, with the second section developing these concepts further. The last section deals with the fundamentals of daily life at home ranging from prayer to dietary laws, the Synagogue and its history. Highly recommended ●

A TREE OF LIFE by Louis Jacob, published by Oxford University Press, 310 pp.

The author is an orthodox rabbi with unorthodox views and the central thesis of his book deals with the Halakhah – the legal side of Judaism – which, far from being self-sufficient and self-authenticating, is influenced by the attitudes of its practitioners to the ideals and demands of Judaism and which may be based on wishful thinking ●

THE BENE-ISRAEL OF INDIA – SOME STUDIES by Benjamin J Israel, reviewed by Percy Gourgey.

The Bene-Israel are a small and unique community of Jews who lived in India for about 2000 years on the west coast near Bombay. Until about the 18th century they were largely isolated from their fellow Jews elsewhere. This book provides a brief, historical account of India's three Jewish communities, the Bene-Israel, the Baghdadian (of Bombay and Calcutta) and the Cochin Jews of South India, and their relations with each other.

As a member of the Baghdadian community, I came into increasing contact with the Bene-Israel in the Bombay Zionist Association and the Central Jewish Board of Bombay of which I was Honorary Secretary at different times.

By their generally gentle and cultured ways they endeared themselves to their Indian neighbours, Hindu and Muslim, and India, thank God, has never experienced anti-Semitism. Numbering about 25,000 in 1948 their large scale aliya to Israel, where most of them now live, was motivated more by idealistic and economic factors than any other. As one of their leaders said to me before emigrating, "don't say we are going to Israel, say we are *returning* to Israel". All the more surprising then was the emotional shock they sustained – to which the author refers at length – when in 1964 the Chief Rabbinate issued discriminatory directives in respect of marriage with other communities thus casting doubt on their Jewishness. After vigorous representations and a demonstration in which Yigdal Yadin took part – his introduction to politics, as he told me at the time, August 1964, on my visit to Israel – the position was regularised in a special session of the Knesset convened by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol.

In India the Bene-Israel occupied important positions in government, the judiciary, the liberal professions and the Armed Forces.

In 1897 Dr Herzl invited the Bene-Israel to send two delegates to the First World Zionist Congress in Basle but they declined following the examples of the 'Protest Rabbiner' in Germany and assimilated elements of Anglo-Jewry. Today the Bene-Israel, like their brethren from India, the Baghdadians and Cochin Jews, are well settled in Israel, as the author indicates. The Israel Cricket Team is composed entirely of Bene-Israel and South African Jews and this surely provides a moral lesson for problems elsewhere ●

Report on Function held by Friends of Tel Aviv University

A CAPACITY audience attended a Reception and Dinner at the Iraqi Jews' Community Centre in London on October 29 where they were privileged to be addressed by General Aharon Yariv, Head of Strategic Studies at the Tel Aviv University, a former Chief of Israel Intelligence and also a former member of the Knesset serving in the cabinets of both Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin.

Mr Avihu Ben-David, the Honorary London Co-ordinator for the Tel Aviv University and organiser of the function, welcomed the guests and introduced Mr Percy Gourgey who chaired the evening. Colonel Yosef Carmel, a Vice President of the Board of Governors, represented the University.

The audience was reluctant to release General Yariv who delivered a dynamic and enlightening discourse entitled "Security in Israel", touching on various factions of this complex and delicate subject, both in Israel and on her borders. His lecture included such topics as: Israel's peace treaty with Egypt, the involvement of Syria in the Hindawi/El Al affair, and the effect of the Iraq/Iran war in relation to Israel, to name but a few.

The Dinner which followed was generously hosted by Mr Sasson Hoogui, a well known member of the Babylonian community ●

A BEN-DAVID

European Jewish Congress

THE EUROPEAN Jewish Congress replaces the European Section of the World Jewish Congress. Its Bureau meeting in Paris in November was attended by representatives of a dozen countries, including Eastern Europe.

Items dealt with included:

- 1) Anti-Semitism and terrorism,
- 2) Soviet Jewry and Human Rights,
- 3) Christian/Jewish relations, including the problem of the Carmelite Convent in Auschwitz.
- 4) It was agreed that an initiative be taken in the field of Muslim-Jewish relations.

When the Second Temple was destroyed 1900 years ago the Jewish people stood alone. Now the majority of the human race acknowledges and worships the God of Israel. The Jewish people must take note of this and extend the hand of friendship and brotherhood to the Christians and Moslems, albeit with certain qualifications ●

In the Next Issue
THE CRUCI-FICTION
by Ahmed Deedat

The Jews of Iraq between 1920 and 1970

by Simha Horesh

MRS HORESH (Née Birshan) was born in Baghdad. Her late husband Charles was one of the nine innocent Jews hanged in Baghdad in 1969. In 1971 she escaped to Israel with her two young children. In 1978 she obtained a B.A. degree at Tel Aviv University and in 1980 was a member of the Israeli delegation to the U.N. Conference on Women in Copenhagen. In 1981 she was invited to Canada by the Hadassah-WIZO Organisation to receive the Rebecca Sieff award. For the past three years Simha Horesh has been Deputy Director of the Harry Karren Institute for Propaganda Analysis, an academic institute intended to give visiting students from universities abroad information on the region by experts on the subject, in one or two day seminars. This is to enable them to counter Arab propaganda when they get back to their universities.

IN HIS book, *Iraq 1900 to 1950*, Longrigg states, "The Iraqi Jews were in 1900 one of the chief minorities in the territory... In Baghdad ... they almost outnumbered the Sunni Arabs and exceeded the Christian, Persian and Turkish minorities combined ... they had so far the supremacy in commerce and foreign trade ... The ruin of their position and happiness by political Zionism lay still half a century ahead ..."

At the beginning of the XX Century, the Jews formed an important minority in Iraq. Their importance was not only in their number; they had a higher standard of education than the rest of the population. The Alliance Israelite Universelle had been established in Baghdad in the 1860s and had introduced Western education to gradually replace the traditional religious teaching in the first 'modern' Jewish schools. Their position in the economy was prominent and they had connections with England, India, Germany and Austria.

Faysal, on his part, did everything in his power to win the confidence and support of the population. He appeared before the various communities and at a reception held in his honour on 18 July 1921 at the Grand Rabbi's house, he made a speech putting the emphasis on the race as the cementing factor for the Iraqi nation: "There is no meaning in the words Jews, Muslims and Christians in the terminology of patriotism, there is simply a country called 'Iraq' and all are 'Iraqis'."

"I ask my countrymen the Iraqis to be only Iraqis because we all belong to one stock, the stock of our ancestor Shem; we all belong to that noble race and there is no distinction between Muslim, Christian and Jew. Today we have but one means to our end: the race."

The Organic law, which came into force in 1925, stipulated Islam as the official religion of the state and promised equality before the law irrespective of language, race or creed. It also gave the various communities the right of "establishing and maintaining schools for the instruction of their members in their own tongues ...". Regarding Judicature, the Jewish and Christian communities were entitled to their own Spiritual Councils with powers of jurisdiction in matters of personal status. The electoral law specified representation for the communities in the constituent assembly and, in the constituent assembly of 1924, there were four Jewish deputies out of a total of thirty three. When the number of deputies to the assembly was increased, the Jews had six representatives. At the Senate, members of which were appointed by the King, there was also one Jewish senator.

Independent Iraq

In October 1932 Iraq became a member of the League of Nations, thus officially ending the mandate and emerging as an 'Independent State'. A declaration was made by Iraq on 30 May 1932 prior to its inauguration to the League containing guarantees given to the Council of the League by the Iraqi Government. Chapter 1 of the declaration dealt with minorities and guaranteed them the right of conducting their internal affairs concerning personal status, religion, education and various institutions as well as the right to use their own language in the conduct of these affairs and institutions. The provisions of this chapter were deemed to be fundamental laws of Iraq and to constitute "obligations of international concern" placed under the guarantees of the League of Nations. Modifications could only be made in them with assent of a majority in the Council and disputes had to be referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice.

Iraq, however, refused the appointment of a representative by the League for the task of supervising observance of the guarantees given to the minorities on the grounds that it would lead to schism among communities. The Iraqi government aimed at the integration of all communities to create 'a nation'. A slogan "Religion is for God and the Homeland is for All" was the cry of the day. Faysal, already in March 1932 had presented to his ministers a memorandum noting that Iraq had not yet attained the necessary cohesion among communities to create a modern nation and suggesting steps for reform. However, the sharp rise in nationalist activity at the attainment of independence in Iraq - the roots going back to the late 1920s, when teachers and refugees from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt poured into Iraq and infiltrated all institutions and walks of life spreading pan-Arab propaganda - worked in the opposite direction.

One year after Iraq's independence relations between the government and the Assyrian minority reached a crisis. Consequently, the Assyrians were hit hard and an indiscriminate massacre was carried out in their villages. The sordid part of the affair was not disclosed to the public and the army was hailed as the saviour from a grave danger that had threatened Iraq. Whether the army operation had indeed been intended by the government to unite Muslims or not, it certainly achieved that purpose in the end. One year after the commitment of Iraq to the League of Nations for "Full and complete protection of life and liberty ... to all inhabitants of

Iraq without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion", the exact worth of the commitment was put to the test and failed miserably. It became patent to all that it was ineffective in deterring Iraq from ill-treating minorities, that the League had no means of enforcing it and that there was no question of intervention on behalf of the minorities.

In September 1933 King Faysal died. He was succeeded by his son Ghazi who was young, impulsive and unsteady, though not unpopular. His reign saw a sharp rise in pan-Arab activity and an expansion of Nazi influence. Ghazi lacked the ability to control the strong currents shaking Iraq at the time or to curb the increasing influence of the army.

There was a gradual deterioration of the Jewish position in Iraq. In 1934 the first discriminatory provision was made against Jews when every Jew wishing to travel had to deposit £50 Sterling. A serious deterioration of the Jewish position was felt when Hashimi took office as Prime Minister in 1935. With the freedom they obtained under Hashimi's ministry the pan-Arabs were active in cultivating a strong anti-Zionist feeling. With Nazi influence it was a short way to anti-Jewish feeling. A series of discriminatory acts against Jews were taken by the government. In 1935 State secondary and high schools were instructed to accept a limited number of Jews; Hebrew and Jewish history instruction was forbidden and only reading of the Bible was permitted, without translation.

In 1936 promotions of Jewish employees of the Iraq government railways were cancelled by order of the Minister as a result of the outcry in local newspapers. Jews were dismissed in various government departments and their places were taken by Muslims. There were new regulations in commerce, the results of which were that the Jews were forced to procure Muslim partners for them to be able to carry on with their business*. All through, the government acted in a roundabout manner, without the enactment of laws. After the outbreak of disturbances in Palestine there were open attacks and incitement against Jews. Manifestos against Jews were circulated, gatherings in mosques and demonstrations were held and a number of Jews were killed as a result. Bombs were thrown at a Jewish synagogue and into the Jewish club and Jews were afraid to leave their homes in the evening. (*To be continued*)

*in all matters requiring a Government licence-Ed.

"The Story of the Jewish Prayer Book"

WHILE REGULAR worshippers in the Synagogue are well acquainted with the contents of the Prayer Book, not much is known about its origin, uniqueness and evolution over the years. In a book entitled "The Story of the Prayer Book" by Philip Arian and Azriel Eisenberg published in the United States, the authors, who are well known American Jewish educationalists, describe the origin of the orthodox Prayer Book of both Ashkenazim and Sephardim.

"Jewish life in Babylonia had continued to flourish from the time of Ezekiel the prophet, who comforted the exiles from Judah coming into this new land. Although at first Babylonia was strange to them, the people soon grew accustomed to their surroundings – so much so that when they were offered the opportunity to return to Judah fifty years after the exile, most of them chose to remain in Babylonia.

"The Jewish community of Babylonia actually became larger and richer than the community in the land of Israel. Babylonia produced more outstanding scholars and was the spiritual centre of Jewish life at the time. For example, although a Talmud was also completed in Jerusalem (called the Jerusalem Talmud) it is the Babylonian Talmud that has moulded Jewish life even down to our own day. This Talmud was largely developed in the two great Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbeditha, founded in the third century C.E.

"It is said that seventythree differences in customs existed between Jews in Babylonia and in the land of Israel, and in the main the customs of Babylonia have come to be the dominant part of our procedures today.

"Seven hundred years after the work of Rabbi Gamliel II of Eretz Israel in fixing prayer, it was still not written down. We have evidence of this in a question asked of Rab Yehudai Gaon ben Rab Nahman, who lived in the eighth century C.E. (The Gaon in Babylonia was a kind of Grand Rabbi of world Jewry, to whom questions on law and ritual were directed. His answers were generally regarded as law).

"Jewish communities began to be established farther and farther away from the Jewish centres in Babylonia and in the land of Israel. As settlements began to emerge in Europe and Africa, it became more difficult to remember the exact content and order of the prayers. Messages asking for guidance were continually being sent from these communities to the great Gaonim in Babylonia. The replies of

these great Babylonian rabbis, who were often the heads of the Sura and Pumbeditha Academies, were called *teshuvot* – 'answers' or 'responses'.

"One such responsum was sent by Rab Natrunai Gaon to a Spanish congregation in the ninth century C.E.

"But it was a later responsum, from Rab Amram ben Sheshna Gaon in 870 C.E., that brought about the first written order of prayers.

"Rab Amram was handed a scroll containing a message from the Jewish community of Barcelona because of their uncertainty as to the exact order and wording of the prayers.

"Finally, however, the Oral Law became so voluminous and complex that it could not be accurately remembered – and so leading rabbis of their time boldly set down the Oral Law into what was called the Talmud. Thus changing times compel changes in tradition, Rab Amram mused.

"So it was in 870 C.E. that the Gaon set down the exact order and content of the prayers as recited in Babylonia for weekdays, Festivals, and fast days – even the Haggadah service for Passover. It was at this moment that the first Hebrew prayer book, or Siddur, was born. For *Siddur* means 'order' or 'arrangement', and this was the first time that the content of the prayers had been written down in 'order'.

"In these copies of Rab Amram's Siddur we find elements that characterise the Hebrew prayer book down to our own day. We note that selections from the Bible form the core of the Siddur. The *Shema*, a large number of hymns from the book of Psalms, and a variety of other selections are all taken from the Bible; we also find selections from the Mishnah and Talmud.

"We also note that the prayers are in the plural. Jews have traditionally prayed to God in the name of the entire people, not in the name of the individual worshipper. In calling upon 'our God' to look with favour upon 'our people', the Siddur proclaims that the well being of each Jew is dependent upon the well being of all Israel. This idea found expression in the Talmudic statement, 'All Israel is responsible for one another'.

"Rab Amram composed his *Seder Tefillot* some two decades before the birth of Rab Saadia, the greatest Gaon produced by Babylonian Jewry. Saadia's genius, comprehension and zeal for his people and for teaching them the faith were phenomenal.

"Amram wrote his guide to 'control' the local rituals and customs which grew up in Spain and the diaspora. Saadia wrote a Standard Siddur, as it

were, for the people since he initiated the project on his own.

"We are indebted to Rabbis Amram and Saadia for giving us the text and the order of the prayer book as we know it today" ●

The New York Community Centre

We just came back from a trip to the United States. When in New York, we were invited to attend a Shabbat Service on Friday evening at 8 p.m. at the Iraqi Community Centre there. It was such a lovely experience to see the men and women enthusiastically enter the Prayer Hall and participate in the Service which was conducted according to the Baghdadi, or "Babylonian" way (as our Naim Dangoor likes to call it!) After the Service they moved to the next hall for the Kiddoush and again the men and women proudly competed to chant "Esheth Hayel"! A table was laden with a variety of goodies, Baklava, Sambusak, fruits, coffee ... (I was told that each week one of the ladies sponsors and sets the table). Then we all sat down to small tables and sofas to eat, chat and socialise with new friends until late in the evening. On that evening there were about a hundred people and I understand that on "Simhat Torah" evening there were over 500 people.

A team of men and women, led by Salim and Odette Mahleb, help to organise these activities. Good luck to them all ●

SHAUL SHUKER

Jordan Is Palestine

THE PALESTINE mandate originally covered the territories of present day Israel and Jordan. In 1922 Britain was granted permission to administer Palestine in two different parts: Western Palestine, later to become Jewish Israel, and Eastern Palestine (Transjordan), later to become Arab Jordan.

Both were administered from Jerusalem and both had the same currency, police and passports. The only difference was that Jews were not allowed to settle in Eastern Palestine (as is the case in today's Jordan).

When Emir Abdulla became King of Transjordan in 1946 he wanted to call his new country "Palestine" but the British refused, as the name would have been misleading. But after the creation of Israel it is correct and proper to look upon Jordan (which is three times the size of Israel) as Palestine – the home of the Palestinian Arabs ●

Letters

I FIND The Scribe of high standard, is interesting to read and renders a good service to the Community. My compliments for the initiative ●

DR DAVIDE SALA

I ACKNOWLEDGE with grateful thanks the two issues of The Scribe, which I found interesting to read and informative. Our friend Professor Daniel Khazzoom of San Francisco, who gave you my name, had spoken to me about the useful work of the Exilarch's Foundation and the plans and projects that you have launched.

Dr Khazzoom has also sent me a copy of the Baghdad Haggadah in three languages; I commend it highly for its attractive appearance, clear print and fine paper.

Here in this sprawling city of Los Angeles, the nucleus of a Baghdadi community has existed since 1923. During the last two decades our numbers have been considerably reinforced by the arrival of many immigrants from the rapidly dissolving communities of India, Burma, Singapore and Indonesia, Iraq and Iran.

Our Synagogue provides the rallying ground for the spiritual, cultural and social life of our people. We endeavour to preserve and perpetuate the ancient intonation, cantillations of the Torah, and the customs and usages of the Baghdad Minhag. We have a magnificent Synagogue with stained-glass windows, and would be happy to welcome our brethren from England who come to California for business or for a vacation.

The officers of the Kahal Joseph Sephardic Congregation, 10505 West Santa Monica Boulevard, West Los Angeles, California 90025 are:

Rabbi	Elias Levi
Hazzan	Sassoon Ezra
President	Benjamin H Elias
Chairman	
(Religious Committee)	Abe S Abraham
Vice President	Mordi Cohen
Secretary	Luna Einy
Sisterhood President	Flo Shamash

RABBI ELIAS LEVY,
Los Angeles

I WAS surprised and distressed by the statements made about me in the article headed "A Stab in the Back" in your March issue and would appreciate the opportunity of replying through your columns.

May I say, for the benefit of your readers who do not know me, that, as a former Elder of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Congregation, a Deputy of some 14 years' standing, now a

member of the Board's Executive, and with considerable experience of communal and political affairs, I am not open to manipulation and so would never have "confessed" in the way alleged. Indeed, I had nothing to confess in this respect, since I have never publicly attacked the Iraqi community (many of whom I number among my friends, since they are members of my own congregation) and certainly did not do so at the plenary session of the Board of Deputies on December 15, 1985 ●

MRS VERA GOODMAN

Zionism and the Holocaust

WE DEAL with the Holocaust mainly by remembering its victims, highlighting its horrors and denouncing its perpetrators. But the Holocaust, which was like an earthquake in human history, also provides invaluable research material on the nature of God, the meaning of Judaism and the future of mankind. Its study should keep philosophers and theologians busy for generations to come.

Why did it happen? In the last issue two views were noted, as to the reason, viz, that the Jews supported Zionism and that the Jews did not fully support Zionism. Although these appear contradictory, there is truth in both of them. The fact is that the Jews were divided on the question of returning to the land of Israel. When Moses embarked on the exodus from Egypt he did not open aliyah centres all over the country, but went straight to Pharaoh and demanded, "Let my people go!"

Another view is that the Jews carried out their role to be "a light unto the nations" only in a passive way. As such, they became not the leaders but the scapegoats of mankind ●

Soweto and The Holocaust

ONE HOLOCAUST equals 10,000 Sowetos. And if Soweto deserves to be remembered once every 10 years then the Holocaust has to be remembered three times a day, every day.

People who shed crocodile tears for the victims of Soweto at the same time try to forget the Holocaust, and some even wish to believe that it didn't actually happen. ●

COMMUNISM is the disease of a bad capitalist system that helps the rich to get richer and drives the poor to economic slavery. The only way to ensure peace is by a just distribution of wealth ●

N.E.D.

Spot an Ancestor

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

Some have enquired when they can expect to see the names of their relatives published. At this rate, it would take another five years to complete the list; so please have patience!

Menashe Shmuel Zerkba
Sasson Saleh Zerkba
Dawid Mordechai Zerkba
Aboudi Saleh Zerkba
Yisshaq Hayim Ezra Zerkba
Hougi Dawid Zerkba
Yosef Dawid Zerkba
Selman Dawid Zerkba
Yosef Ezra Zerkba
Dawid Ezra Yisshaq Zerkba
Eliahu Dawid Zerkba
Menashe Yacoub Zerkba
Shaul Hayyu Abraham Zerkba
Heskel Nessim Zerkba
Aharon Dawid Zerkba
Yamen Yisshaq Nessim Zerkba
Abraham Yisshaq Zerkba
Eliahu Yisshaq Zerkba
Selman Nessim Zerkba
Shaul Shmuel Zerkba
Shmuel Nessim Zerkba
Shaul Yisshaq Zerkba
Yisshaq Abraham Zerkba
Aharon Heskel Zeboulun
Abdulla Yosef Zlaikha
Nessim Yosef Zlaikha
Heskel Reuben Zlaikha
Abraham Reuben Zlaikha
Ephraim Reuben Zlaikha
Mordechai Yosef Zlaikha
Yosef Mashiyah Zlaikha
Eliahu Heskel Zlaikha
Yehuda Reuben Zalayet
Yisrael Reuben Zalayet
Aboudi Moshi Zalayet
Nessim Reuben Zalayet
Nessim Moshi Zalayet
Heskel Abraham Yisshaq Zakaria
Eliezer Sasson Zakaria
Shaul Meir Yisshaq Zakaria
Dawid Heskel Zakaria
Aharon Sasson Zakaria
Yisrael Zakkai
Eliahu Yosef Zaarur
Meir Yacoub Zaarur
Agha Baba Abdulla Hoory
Shlomo Abdulla Hoory
Ezra Yisshaq Hoory
Shaul Agha Baba Hoory
Yisshaq Agha Baba Hoory
Shaul Ezra Hoory
Maatug Shlomo Hoory
Yacoub Heskel Hoory
Yisshaq Heskel Hoory
Yosef Hanania Shuwa Hanania
Sasson Hanania Shuaa Hanania
Shalom Menahem Hanania
Ezra Shlomo Hanania
Saleh Nahom Herdoon
Nahom Saleh Herdoon
Yosef Nahom Herdoon
Saleh Yisshaq Herdoon
Shaul Saleh Herdoon
Abraham Saleh Herdoon
Shaul Abdou Herdoon
Nahom Reuben Herdoon
Yacoub Abdou Herdoon
Eliahu Nahom Herdoon ●