

The SCRIBE

JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

PUBLISHED BY THE EXILARCH'S FOUNDATION

No. 42

JULY 1990

Est. 1971

Let us recognise Christians and Moslems

by Naim Dangoor

When Israel was reborn 42 years ago, life was resumed from where we left off 2,000 years earlier, as if nothing had happened in the meantime.

When the Romans occupied Judea in 63 BCE, we were the only people in the world to recognise God, and we suffered for centuries for our beliefs. In the intervening 2,000 years only two important things happened – namely, the emergence of Christianity and Islam. What we failed to do by our efforts, we succeeded in doing by our example!

God knows we have suffered even more at the hands of these two religions than we ever did at the hands of pagans, but these sufferings have to be endured philosophically as the discomfiture of parents by growing children. The important fact is that the majority of the human race now worships the God of Israel, Lord of the Universe.

We cannot carry on as if nothing has happened. The rebirth of Israel must be an opportunity for us to recognise and welcome these two momentous developments in the progress of mankind. We are the Chosen People simply because we were the first to acknowledge God. We would be failing our duty in this role if we ignored later comers.

There are, no doubt, serious doctrinal differences, but the fundamental thing is belief in the One True God. The rest is of secondary importance. We should even encourage other approaches within this central theme.

Who is a Jew?

Since monotheism is the characteristic dogma of Judaism, we have the

Talmud declaration: "Whoever repudiates idolatry is accounted a Jew" (*Megillah* 12b). "The prohibition of idolatry is equal in weight to all the other commandments of the Torah" (*Horayoth* 8a); "So important is the matter of idolatry, that whoever rejects it, it is as though he acknowledges the whole Torah" (*Hullin* 5a).

This gives ample reasons for recognising Christians and Moslems as well as those who follow other branches of Judaism.

What is a Jew?

According to Talmudic teaching, the recital of the declaration: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!", which forms part of the morning and evening prayer of the Jew, is more than an intellectual affirmation of the existence of God. It includes moral obligation, and is defined as "the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Ber.* II. 2) which means submission to the Divine discipline. Abraham's submission to the will of God is the example followed by Islam and the foundation of its doctrine.

We also await the coming of the Messiah.

We were promised by the mouth of Jeremiah (31:33,34) "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts... And they will teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them..."

Babylonian Album

We have been busy preparing the exhibition on the Jews of Czechoslovakia which opened end of April in the presence of Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia. This exhibition is accompanied by a book, the first of the series of Community Albums.

The book on Babylonian Jews will be the second.
Diaspora Museum, Sarah Gilboa Karni
Tel Aviv

As former residents of London and part of a growing Iraqi community in Montreal, we were pleased to discover the existence of your publication. I would appreciate it if you would put us on your mailing list. Your journal is informative and it keeps us in touch with other Iraqi communities.
Montreal Dr. & Mrs. Albert Nessim

I know that I am not fighting for my life. I am only fighting for the manner of my death.

Warsaw Ghetto fighter, 1944

Discrimination in Israel

لحقوق بنيغاداة حلو

We have been receiving persistent complaints about discrimination against Oriental Jews by government departments and private employers in Israel. We are asked to do something to redress this injustice and divisive practice.

Israel is a democracy – in theory and practice; the only democracy in the region. Recent events have shown that small parties with only a few Knesset members, even one defector, can have a decisive influence on crucial issues and can even decide which coalition shall form the government. These small parties usually extract a heavy price for their support in a sharply divided Knesset.

Oriental and Sephardi Jews, who at present form the majority of Israel's population, can flex their muscle by electing their own members to the Knesset. This is very easy in Israel's system of proportional representation. If proposed electoral reforms will eliminate the very small parties, Oriental and Sephardi Jews can have an even higher voice in the Knesset and the Cabinet.

Political rights are taken and not given, and you have to shout to obtain them. You get nowhere by withdrawing from the democratic process.

The Exilarch's Foundation is ready to help finance Oriental candidates for the next Knesset elections.

Dry Bones



A Visit to Tunisia

by Elias M. Dangoor

I fancied going to Tunisia to see the historic cities of Qairawan, Cartage and Tunis. Realising that it is a nationalistic Arab country, and the base of the PLO, I obtained a new visit passport from the Post Office, which has no stamp of any other country, and off I went.

On arrival, the first thing I noticed was how dirty almost everything was, even considering that I originally come from a country of similar standard.

Luckily, the hotel was the best in the country. It is called Manar in Hammamet. It is owned by the Arab Bank which is founded and managed by Palestinians.

Tunisia is a small country of mainly plains with the tall mountains of the Atlas chain. The population is two-thirds Berber, one-third Arab. But only 1% speak Berber. The Berber of Morocco invaded the country before Islam, while the Arabs, under the command of Akaba Bin Nafi, conquered it and he established Qairawan as his base town in 671 CE. This city still has its original high walls with the Mosque, souk and old city, all within the walls. But it is interesting to see so many of the Stars of David in old buildings everywhere. The guides always pointed out that the Jews had a great influence in the architecture and the history of the country. Some of their kings had Jewish wives. And this is why we could see the Hanukkah candleholders, the Mezuzah and the Star of David in many old palaces.

Tunisia was also invaded by the Fatimite Shia from Upper Egypt, the Italians, the Spaniards, the Ottomans and the French.

When the Romans invaded Tunisia they built Cartage, which is very close to Tunis and which is now only ruins. We can still see the remains of the grotesque Roman baths, statues and colonnade. Next to it is the modern, large palace of the current Tunisian president who, by the way, was on an official visit to Iraq at the time, and we could see him daily with his host president, Saddam of Iraq, on the news.

The palace of the president is surrounded by two parallel barbed wire walls, with mines planted in between, and soldiers with machine guns in every corner, door or window. It is common to see mini buses full of heavily armed soldiers parked on street corners.

The weather last December was warm and sunny and I managed to sunbathe. Most of the tourists are Germans, followed by the French, British and Italians.

Whenever the market boys see a tourist they ask him which country he comes from, in order to converse with him in his language. When I told them "Iraq", they went away! Whether out of respect or otherwise, it suited me fine!

In the evenings there is nothing much to do other than sit in the bar listening to the music, of which "Jerusalem the Golden" (without words) was their favourite!

Although everything went nicely and smoothly, I was not relaxed and, with hindsight, would not go again. ●

To 'Israel' or not to 'Israel' That is the Question!!!

by Moshe Kahtan

Over the last few months, events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have been so baffling that even Israel, the world media's favourite toy, was consigned to second place. At last, a break! But it took the whole world to turn upside down to achieve it. How flattering, in a way!

The collapse of Communism, the sudden discovery that there was no democracy in any of the so-called "Socialist Democratic Republics" after all, the realisation that for nearly 75 years the people of this Grand Empire have been eating and digesting more lies than food, all this has brought a day of reckoning never experienced before, the repercussions of which will take long to filter through.

Sooner or later, the myth of the PLO will also be consigned to the dustbin of history. In the meantime, Arafat is trying to acquire any new "friends" he can, in any way he knows. Anyone who watched on television his pathetic performance when he went to Lusaka in February to deliver his "kissogram" to Nelson Mandela should begin to form his own views. Certainly, Mr. Mandela would enjoy complete understanding from all if he was alarmed, and, indeed he may well have been, at the violent embrace that he experienced on this very first meeting. He must have wondered, at the time, about what to expect should the relationship develop further!

With all this going on, we still hear every now and then about Mr. Shamir's designs for Greater Israel, about Amnesty International having filed yet another report on the violation of human rights of the Arabs. What is unacceptable is when some Israelis or Jews in the Diaspora try to jump on the same bandwagon, clouding their vision at the same time. Nothing can be more helpful to our enemies than a divided Israel: be it government or people. It is said that in every rose bush there are thorns. In Judaism, these thorns are represented by the Woody Allens and the Gerald Kaufmans of today.

Can anyone remind those faltering Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora of what the Arabs promised to do to the Jews in 1948 and 1967 when they waged their wars, for they seem to have very short memories.

If anything, Israel has given the Arabs a taste of human rights and perhaps that was the biggest mistake of all. After the 1967 war, it got busy building for them hospitals and universities and giving work to thousands. Some will say that, by employing Arabs, Israel got cheap labour. That may be, but it still made it possible for them to earn a living, which is more than any Arab country offered them when they were in the saddle. And, let those who tend to forget, solemnly remember that Israel is the only country in the region where Arabs do not hang in spite of what they do, and they are doing plenty!

Enough said! The question is what now? The answer lies within ourselves. I do not think that it is for us, whether we are

Israelis or Diaspora Jews, to try and do anything other than what is in the interest of the State of Israel, its security and the security of its people. There are many, in fact too many, pleading for the other side to serve their own interests, be they economic or political. What a lot of people seem to forget is that Israel is fighting for its existence, not for dogma.

But the fashion today is that whereas it is tolerable if Arabs hurt or kill Jews, it is, at the same time, considered inhuman to try to stop them.

This state of affairs is not only unacceptable but also criminal. It is enough that, for centuries, Jewish blood was considered cheap almost all over the world. It is inconceivable that today the same principle can be and is being increasingly applied in Israel itself. And nobody really seems to care. The West carries on burying its head in the sand and whilst everybody readily jumps on Israel, given half a chance, these very same people carry on business as usual with the Syrians who have spread their protective wings over the Hashish-producing fields in the Lebanon, with Arafat's organisations, branches and subsidiaries, ignoring the terror and violence they have inflicted upon the whole world. Today, ambassadors and diplomats spend their time negotiating with terrorists, kidnappers and drug-pushers and when they get nowhere they appeal to these criminals for concessions and humane gestures.

So let us not kid ourselves anymore. After forty-two years of conflict and war-mongering by the Arabs, it is time to call it a day. Israel's jurisdiction should be formally extended to Judea, Samaria and Gaza, with an option offered to the Arabs who are not of Jordanian nationality to either toe the line and be peaceful or make their way to practice their trade elsewhere. One Lebanon in the region is more than enough. Such steps will, in the long-term, be in the best interests of all concerned because they will provide the only real and, what is more important, the only workable and lasting solution once and for all.

Finally, to anyone who has doubts or is suffering from a self-inflicted sense of guilt, I would like to remind them that: "In the Land of Israel, Jews are not taking land from Arabs; it is the Arabs who took the land from the Jews. AND DON'T YOU EVER FORGET IT" ●

I thank you very much for *The Scribe*. It gives me joy to read about the Jews I knew from Baghdad, and to try the cookery corner.

I am grateful to my cousin Alice Shashoua for her column on Iraqi Pilau Besamak, and thank you for the recipe of my daughter Lisette David for her Terbiyeli Tebit, as I learned the exact ingredients only through *The Scribe*.

Please continue with your wonderful magazine ●

Ramat Hasharon

Marguerite Zebaida



Congratulations to Mr. Yitzhak Shamir for succeeding in forming a right-wing government. He is seen above, on a recent visit to London, with Mr. Naim Dangour●

COOKERY CORNER

by Alice Shashou

Kubba Shewandar or Beetroot Kubba

Ingredients:

5-6 round, raw, red beetroots
Juice of 4 lemons
About 6 tablespoons sugar or to taste

Ingredients for the shell:

2 cups rice
½ cup or ½lb lean minced meat
Salt to taste – Water

Ingredients for the filling:

About 1 lb coarsely minced beef
1 tablespoon margarine
1 tablespoon water (so that shell and filling cook at the same time) – Salt
3 cups finely chopped parsley
Onions optional

Method:

Soak the rice in water for 1 hour. Drain and grind finely with an electric blender. Mix the minced meat and salt with it, gradually adding water and grinding until you have a smooth paste.

Roll the mixture into small walnut-sized balls. Mix all the ingredients for the stuffing. Wet your hands and flatten each ball in the palm of your hand and put the filling in the centre. Wrap the paste around the stuffing evenly to make a small and round ball.

Always with wet hands, continue until paste and stuffing have been used.

The shell should be very thin.

How to cook the kubba:

Wash the beetroots. Peel, then cut into thin slices. Saute in a pan using mazola oil. Cover with water, 1 heaped tablespoon of sugar, tomato paste and cook covered until tender. Add the lemon juice, sugar and salt and simmer uncovered for a few minutes. Drop the *kubba* one at a time into the boiling sauce. Turn the heat down. Cover the pan and simmer until the *kubbas* are cooked.

Add extra boiling water if needed in order not to let the *kubba* stick to the pan. Taste and adjust seasoning. It should be dark red in colour.

Note: You can use okra or bamia instead of beetroots●

Fine Noodles with Vegetables

Ingredients:

9oz or 1 packet fine noodles
2 tablespoons unsalted butter or margarine
3 cloves garlic, minced } seeds
1 large red pepper } and
1 large green pepper } rib
1 large yellow pepper } removed
2 courgettes, scrubbed and cut
2 big carrots, peeled and cut
¼lb mushrooms, thinly sliced
½ cup chopped parsley
1 cup double cream
1 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
Salt to taste
1 teaspoon pepper
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

Method:

Cut the peppers, courgettes and carrots into julienne strips ¼" wide.

Melt butter in a large frying pan. Add garlic and carrots, saute over medium high heat for 3 minutes. Add the peppers and saute for 1 minute. Then saute the courgettes and mushrooms separately (as they create a lot of liquid), and mix with the other vegetables. Sprinkle with parsley and mix. Remove from heat when all liquid has evaporated.

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add a little oil and the noodles. Cook *al dente*. Drain pasta.

Place vegetables over medium heat. Stir in cream, parmesan cheese, pepper, nutmeg and salt. Add pasta to the vegetables and mix. Taste, adjust seasonings.

Serve immediately in a warm serving dish. Pass some grated parmesan cheese at the table●

Variation of Beabee bel Shakar or Iraqi Biscuit

Ingredients:

3 cups flour
3 teaspoons baking powder
¾ cup caster sugar
1 cup melted butter
1 rounded teaspoon ground fennel seeds
1 level teaspoon salt
About ½ cup lukewarm water.

Method:

Melt butter in the top part of a double boiler over simmering water.

Combine all the dry ingredients. Add 1 cup of the cooled melted butter. Mix well, adding water as needed. Knead on the board or in the food processor with a dough hook attachment. The mixture should make a smooth and soft dough.

Chill for one hour.

Pinch off pieces of dough the size of a walnut and roll between the palms into small balls. Then press gently with your fingers and flatten a little to form small circles. Prick with a fork and arrange on ungreased baking sheet leaving room for the *Beabee* as they do spread a little.

Bake in preheated oven Gas mark 4, 350°F (180C) for few minutes or until a pale golden colour. Carefully lift on to a cooking rack and leave to firm up.

When cold, store in an airtight container. You can freeze until needed●

Eat dried fruits and nuts instead of chocolates and sweets.

If fine, delicate sandwiches are required, freeze the bread overnight and cut while still frozen. It can be cut as thinly as you wish●

Orange Dessert – by Denise Pinto

Ingredients: For 10 persons

5 large navel oranges
2oz sugar
2oz peeled and toasted almonds
½ pint concentrated orange juice
Peel the oranges, retain the rind of 1 orange

Method:

Cut each orange into 5/6 slices (1cm each slice). Cut the rind of the oranges into long thin slices (like matchsticks). Immerse the orange peel into hot boiling water for 2 minutes and drain.

In a pan add the sugar with 3 tablespoons of water and 2 drops of lemon juice and allow the mixture to brown.

Add orange peel into the browned sugar mixture and stir (the peel will absorb the sugar). Add to this half a coffee cup of Arak, Cointreau or Maraschino. Add the whole mixture onto the oranges●

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Dangoor,

Thank you very much for the greatest gift I have ever been given in my life, i.e. Adi Zahav, commentary on the Torah, by your grandfather The Gaon Rabbi Ezra Dangoor, the Chief Rabbi of the Babylonian Community.

Since I received the book I have not stopped studying it. As a long-standing Hebrew teacher, I find it extremely interesting, full of wisdom and thorough knowledge of the Torah and Judaism. Above all, I am impressed by its high standard of morality and humanity.

There are about 500,000 Babylonian Jews in Israel and 2,000,000 other Sephardim there, who know almost nothing about their cultural and religious heritage. Will they be able to see this book? I have been also moved by the picture of the Hakham Bashi which I have not seen for so many years.

When I was a child I saw it in one of the books which he had published. I used to think that it was the picture of an angel and I used to kiss it and ask that angel to help my family and my community. Later, my father told me that Hakham Ezra Dangoor was the most honourable Hakham Bashi in Baghdad, and that he was really a saint, therefore he resigned. He simply could not stand the riff-raff who were fighting each other around him.

All this leads me to believe that you, as the grandson of our great Hakham, will certainly read from cover to cover my report (or my book) on *Bene 'Amenu* in Israel, and you will not keep quiet about it, and you will not say "What has it got to do with me?" or "What can I do?", but you will defend our human dignity and our Jewish dignity and you will bring hope to every Sephardi home in Israel – in your own way, zealous one! ●

Middlesex

Gideon Giladi

Your learned article, "Dating the Exodus from Egypt", in your Passover issue, is very interesting. The Egypt-Israeli connection has always existed throughout the ages.

Our *Goshen* is published twice a year and, just like *The Scribe*, its aim is to maintain a link between the Egyptian Jews wherever they may be, and also keep a record of our heritage. We seem to have shared a common destiny with the Babylonian Jews in that we have been exiled from our native land and dispersed all over the world.

All my Iraqi friends here get *The Scribe* and are very happy to read it – the Shamia's, Isaac Isaacs (from London), his sister Margot Cashdan, Rachele Nissim, Marcelle Garé, Leonie Mahlab, Edna and Victor Mashal (from Montreal), Blanche Jedda (from Geneva) ●

Haifa

Lucy Gottesman

I sent the last copy of *The Scribe* to our niece Susie Khozouri in New York. She phoned to say how much she enjoyed it and asked if she could have it regularly ●

London

Mary Nathaniel



Mr. Shaul Hakham Sassoon recently visited Russia. He is seen above in Leningrad. In the background is the battleship that took part in the 1917 October Communist Revolution.

He writes, "Russia is great in its beautiful cities, rivers, universities, arts, churches, museums and theatres but there is poverty in all the cities I visited due to overspending on armaments.

Riga, capital of Latvia, is rightly considered one of the most beautiful towns of the Soviet Union. There, I visited its rabbi, Goreng Gerson, who is 87, having served the community for 63 years. Of Riga's 120,000 Jews before WWII, only 28,000 remain. Of seventy synagogues, only one remains ●

My grandparents and my father went to Bombay from Baghdad. They were the Ambar family. In Bombay my father met my mother who was from the Kadoorie family. She was going from Baghdad to Hong Kong to meet her uncle, Sir Ely Kadoorie. She stopped over en route at Bombay where she met my father and they got married. I and my wife and the family left Bombay for the U.K. in 1967 ●

Edgware

Sass Moses

Though I have heard of *The Scribe* for some time now, I did not believe that there would be anything of interest in it for me, having left Baghdad as a little girl in 1941. This week, however, I was given your June issue to look at and found it full of information, some old some new, but all of it makes enjoyable reading.

In view of this, I would like to ask you to kindly add my name to your mailing list.

I also think that my mother, Mrs. Rosa Saleh, would love to go down "Memory Lane" with you. Please add her name too ●

Manchester

Raymonde Ani

I enclose a contribution to the Exilarch's Foundation in loving memory of my beloved father, Reuben (Robert) Yahya Shakarchi z"l ●

Brooklyn

Elliot Shakarchi

Acknowledged, with thanks.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing a copy of *The Scribe*. I must say that I found it to be most interesting and informative. I should be very grateful to receive future issues, as well as issues 37 and 38 which, I understand, were of special interest ●

45 St. Giles'
Oxford

David Frank

Fellow in Jewish-Muslim
relations in the Middle Ages
Oxford Centre for Postgraduate
Hebrew Studies

It seems to me that one of the most important things you are doing in publishing *The Scribe* is in expanding the number of its readers so that eventually you will have an extensive list of present-day Babylonian Jews – and their sons and hopefully their grandsons – showing their dispersal around the world. In this way *The Scribe* could fast become THE LINK and the centre for all information on the Babylonian Jews from answering queries or assisting with information on the whereabouts of someone's "second cousin", to acting as a representative voice on vital issues.

I read with great interest the boxed item on page 6 of issue No. 40 taken from *Chronicles of the Past*. The attitude expressed by that caliph reflects quite accurately the attitude of various caliphs of early Islam towards the Jews of the "fertile crescent".

As the exact date of this law is mentioned – namely 3 April, 694 – perhaps I can modestly contribute some additional information.

The dynasty which dominated the Moslem world at that time was the Omayyad Dynasty. The Marwani branch of this Dynasty was ruling during 694. The Caliph was Abd-el-Malik Bin Marwan who ruled between 685 and 705 from his throne in Damascus.

I intend to write an article about my grandmother, Daisy's mother, Esterina Ozer-Setty, who passed away recently aged 99. She saw five generations come after her and was a central figure in the "network" of Jewish families in Baghdad. The story may be of interest to your readers ●

Tel Aviv

William Y. Elias

I am ever so grateful to you for tracing my mother who is still in Baghdad ●

A reader

I was pleasantly surprised when a friend passed two copies of *The Scribe* to me. I never knew it existed!

The amount of information you are able to get into 8 pages is truly surprising.

In your March issue, you give a list of Jewish officials in Iraq. I wonder if my name is on your list, though.



I was born in 1923, finished Medical College in 1947, worked in the Royal Hospital in Surgery for 9 months (unpaid), then in the Iraqi army from April 1948

until my arrest and court-martial in November of that year. Then I worked in Meir Elias Hospital until March of 1952. I specialized in Surgery in England until 1956. I committed then the biggest mistake of my life by returning to Iraq. I was appointed senior surgeon to Diyala Liwa, where I worked in Baquba until I was sacked, arrested and deported to Kut in August of 1958, after the "glorious" revolution of 14 July 1958. Luckily I had met the new Military Governor-General, Ahmed Saleh al-Abdi, when he was stationed in Jalawla before the revolution and was soon released. My guilt was "a supporter of the defunct regime"

Between 1965 and 1971 I made eight attempts to escape from that hell, and succeeded only in March 1971, with my two sons, then aged 14 and 12, to Iran and Israel. In all, I was a prisoner of Zion in Iraq for 15 years, then a voluntary prisoner of Zion in Israel for the past 19 years!!

Incidentally, the notorious president of the court-martial was Col. Na'sani (not Nafsani). It was he who sentenced Aides to hang right in front of his house in Basrah.

The only good thing I remember about Iraq is the incomparable cheese "*jibn uwshari*" that came from Kurdistan.

My wife, who was born in Ireland, never loved Iraq, but loved Jewish cooking: her *kubba shwanda* (that's how she says it), *dolma* and "*timman be-sh'iiriyi*" (does anyone remember what it is?) are excellent. As a matter of interest, she is cooking it right now, using "Ben-Gurion" rice instead of the "*sh'iiriyi*".

Ramat-Gan

Dr. Maurice Saltoun

Scribe: In Baghdad, on the night of Hoshana Rabba (Arava night), the seventh night of Succot, the men used to gather and stay up till dawn reading special portions from Deuteronomy, Psalms and the Zohar. The ladies watched from the balcony and passed the time making *Sh'iiriyi*. This is done from an unleavened dough rolled with 2 fingers into the size of barley grains (hence the name) and thrown into a large tray covered with some flour. The next day it is sifted, roasted and cooked with the rice.

Sh'iiriyi is available at Greek stores as "macaroni rice". It is made from semolina, which is the hard portions of flinty wheat which resist the action of millstones and are collected in the form of rounded grains used for making macaroni. The hardness of semolina gives well-cooked pasta the characteristic chewiness which Italians refer to as *al dente* ●

Jewish Chronology

by Elias Shohet, New York

BCE

- 720 Dispersion of the Ten Tribes by the Assyrians.
- 597 Exile of King Yehoyachin of Judah with 10,000 leading Jews to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.
- 586 Destruction of Jerusalem, burning of the First Temple and dispersion of the remaining Jews to Babylon.
- 561 Death of Nebuchadnezzar. His successor, Evil Merodach, liberated King Yehoyachin after 37 years imprisonment and appointed him Chief of the Babylonian Jews "Rosh Hagola".
- 539 Koresh (Cyrus) Emperor of Persia conquered Babylon.
- 538 Koresh allowed Jews to return to Israel and to rebuild the Temple. He gave them back the golden utensils of the Temple. Over 40,000 returned but many more still remained.
- 458 Ezra Hassofer returned to Jerusalem with many more Jews (Olim).
- 445 Nehamia Ben Hachalia returned to Jerusalem with many more Olim, and with full authority and financial help for the construction of the Second Temple.
- 334 Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East, Persia, Babylon and Judah.
- 323 Death of Alexander. His empire was divided among his generals. Persia, Syria and Judah became under the authority of General Seleucus Nicator.
- 175 Hasmonean Revolt under Yehuda Ha-Maccabee, at the time of Antiochus, the Greek king.
- 165 The revolution was crowned with success and the first Feast of Hanukkah was celebrated.
- 139 The Parthians, a tribe from northern Iran, conquered Babylon.

CE

- 70 Destruction of the Second Temple by Titus. Jews were dispersed everywhere. Many killed.
- 175 Completion of the six books of Mishna (The Oral Torah) by Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, known as Rabeno Hakadosh.
- 226 The Sassanians, the new rulers of Iran, defeated the Parthians and took control of the whole empire, including Babylon.
- 499 Completion of the Babylonian Talmud, a job started by Rab Ashi in 375 CE and completed by Rabina Bar Hunah.
- 570 Birth of Mohamad and the Islam faith.
- 638 Caliph Omar Al-Khatib conquered Babylon. From now on it is known and called Iraq.
- 661 Muawiyah of Bani Umayyah of Damascus, Syria, defeated Imam Ali and became Caliph.
- 750 Al-Saffah defeated the Umayyads and established the Abbasid Empire in Iraq.
- 762 Baghdad was built and became the capital of Iraq.
- 874 Our present prayer books were written by Rabbi Amram Gaon of Babylon and were accepted and used by Jews all over the world.
- 1096 The Crusaders conquered Israel and massacred many inhabitants.
- 1258 The downfall of the Abbasid kingdom by the Mongol tribes of Middle Asia.
- 1393 The Mongol destroyed Baghdad and its heritage. Jews suffered badly.
- 1410 End of the Mongol regime. Iraq was conquered by Turkomans.
- 1492 The inquisition, expulsion and dispersion of the Spanish Jews. Some went to Iraq and enriched its heritage.
- 1508 Haider Ismail, Shah of Iran, conquered Iraq.
- 1524 Sulaiman the Magnificent (Al-Kanooni) Sultan of Turkey recaptured Iraq.
- 1623 Shah Abbas of Iran reconquered Iraq.
- 1638 Sultan Murad of Turkey reconquered Iraq.
- 1781 Sasson Saleh David was appointed Nassi for the Baghdad Jews and Chief Treasurer (Sarraf Bashi) of the Wali.
- 1828 The Wali Daoud Pasha arrested David, his Sarraf Bashi's son, and decided to kill him. After payment of a big ransom, David was released, and immediately afterwards he was smuggled to Abushehir, in South Iran.
- 1832 David Sasson and his family emigrated to India, where he became the head of the Jewish community.
- 1832 The first Jewish school, the Midrash Talmud Torah, was instituted in Baghdad. In 1864, with the financial aid of Yeheskiel Reuben Menashe Zebaida, a large building was constructed. In the course of time and with its branches, it held about 2,000 students.
- 1849 The Nassi period expired and a Hakham Bashi appointed. He used to be recommended by the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul and confirmed by the Sultan.
- 1864 The establishment of the first Jewish school for boys - the Alliance School. In 1874 Sir Albert Sassoon constructed a modern large building. In 1902 Menahem Daniel enlarged it. Then in 1906 another wing was built by Narcisse Leven, which gave it the final shape.
- 1876 The appointment of the first Jewish Member of Parliament in Istanbul, the late Menahem Saleh Daniel.
- 1886 Alliance establish the first Jewish school for girls in Baghdad. Eliezer Kadourie constructed a large and modern building and called it after his wife, Laura Kadourie.
- 1908 The revolution in Turkey, the dismissal of Sultan Abdul Hamid, and the proclamation of democracy. Sir Sasson Heskell was elected Member of Parliament in Istanbul.
- 1909 The establishment of the first Jewish Turkish school for boys, The Ta'awin School. In 1923 the late Elia Shahmoon constructed a suitable building for a school and a synagogue, and called it after his daughter's name, Rahel Shahmoon. Then many benefactors, such as the Daniel family, Benjamin Shamash, Menashe Saleh, Masooda Salman, Masooda Shemtob, Frank Iny, and others, followed the same steps.
- 1910 The establishment of the first Jewish hospital, the Meir Elias Hospital in Baghdad. In the course of time it was enlarged and supplied with modern equipment. In 1953 it was expropriated by the Government of Nuri Al-Saeed.
- 1914 The declaration of the First World War. Several hundreds of untrained Iraqi Jews were sent to fight at the Russian front and many of them did not return. Seventeen Jewish merchants were tortured, killed in a savage way, their bodies were cut to pieces, kept in bags and thrown into the Tigris river. The body of a single victim was recovered and buried.
- 1917 The British conquered Baghdad.
- 1921 Coronation of Prince Faisal of Hijaz as the first King of Iraq, under British mandate. During his lifetime, Jews enjoyed a golden age.
- 1925 The Rima Kadourie eye hospital was built by Sir Eliezer in memory of his mother.
- 1932 Iraq became independent, member of the League of Nations.
- 1933 Death of King Faisal and accession of his son Ghazi.

- 1935 No more Jews were accepted in Government Departments, except on rare occasions.
- 1936 The revolt of Bakr Sidki. Terrorists expelled from Palestine, like Haj Amin Al-Husaini, Fawzi Al-Kawokchi and others were accepted in Iraq. Jews suffered some hard times. Seven innocent Jews were killed in cold blood. Not a single criminal was indicted.
- 1939 Death of King Ghazi. His young son, Faisal the Second, succeeded to the throne, with his uncle, Prince Abdul Ilah, as Regent.
- 1941 The revolution of Rashid Ali Al-Gailani and the pogrom (Al-Farhood). The massacre of 179 innocent men, women and children, the injuring of over 2000 more, raping of women, looting of shops, houses and stores.
- 1947 No Jews were permitted to travel abroad.
- 1948 The establishment of the State of Israel. Five Arab countries fought Israel and lost the war. Jews of Iraq paid the price. Many were imprisoned. Some were killed. Ades was hanged and his fortune, estimated at several millions of pounds, was confiscated. Many others paid large fines. Jewish clubs were confiscated and occupied by Arab refugees. Martial law was declared. Many Jews were jailed for long terms.
- 1949 Jews, mostly young, started to escape the country by different ways. About 20,000 persons escaped to Israel through the Iranian frontiers.
- 1950 About 120,000 persons emigrated to Israel leaving behind valuable properties, buildings, houses, shops and goods estimated at tens of millions of pounds.
The Waqfs, schools, synagogues and buildings stayed under the control of the remaining Jewish community and were managed by the Administrative Council of Iraqi Jews●

From the *Jewish Chronicle*

Turning Hebrew on its head

Sir,

Anyone who has ever attempted Hebrew calligraphy will be aware of the difficulties right-handed people have in writing Hebrew from right to left. Not only does the hand with the pen cover up the writing – a problem shared by left-handed writers of English – but the horizontal strokes of the letters must be drawn from left to right as the pen must be pulled, not pushed. This makes it very difficult to space the letters evenly.

Many people assume that the ancient Hebrew must have been predominantly left-handed, but what is the evidence to support this? If you try to write modern Hebrew upside-down, it is amazingly easy with the right hand. You write from left to right. The letters lend themselves well to the natural strokes of the pen, allowing them to be pulled rather than pushed. Each letter is started from the side next to the previous letter so that spacing is simple. The letters stand on the line rather than hang from it. The only thing that seems odd to us is that we have to start at the bottom of the page and work our way upwards.

Could it be that written Hebrew did, in fact, start like this – “upside down”? We are starting a society to research what at present is just a strong theory.

We should be interested to hear from others●

The Inverted Hebrew Society, Wembley, Middlesex

David Simmons

Reply:

Sir,

The Inverted Hebrew Society sounds like an offshoot of the Flat Earth Association!

In August, 1976, the oldest Hebrew tablet, dating from the twelfth century BCE, was discovered in Israel, in which Old Hebrew was written from left to right.

In the early days of the alphabet, writing was indiscriminate – left to right and back again, top to bottom, or in helical fashion. The final direction of writing was influenced by the kind of pen used.

Certainly since Ezra the Scribe introduced in Babylonia the Assyrian square characters which developed into modern Hebrew, writing was with a reed pen, having a broad tip, held at 45 degrees in a perpendicular plane to the parchment.

The manner of holding the pen dictated writing from right to left, as it kept the unwritten area visible. There is no horizontal pulling or pushing – just sliding.

Again, by the nature of the writing implement, the characters had to be started from the line down, and thus hang from it.

Ezra's shrine in southern Iraq is amid vast reed swamps, and these were the source of the reed pens. This pen did not change for 2,500 years and I well remember how, as recently as 65 years ago, my late grandfather, Hakham Ezra Dangoor, who was always writing something during his waking hours, used a reed pen with home-made black ink to do his writings.

When Greek and Latin took over our alphabet (via the Phoenicians), writing remained from right to left. Later, a metal stylus came into use in Europe and later, the quill (no reeds there), which were held in the same way as we hold a pen nowadays.

This, in turn, necessitated starting the writing from the left, for better visibility. To achieve this, some characters were simply turned over.

There was no left-handed writing in olden times. Natural left-handedness was suppressed at an early age as the left hand was considered “unclean” in the Near East. Shaking hands, saluting, giving and receiving, as well as writing, were all done with the right hand.

The current theory is that the “alphabet” of 22 consonants originated in Sinai at the beginning of the Hyksos period (mid-seventeenth century BCE) at the time of Abraham's travels to Egypt.

And just as Adam can be credited with the discovery of wild wheat (the “forbidden fruit” of the Garden of Eden) and thus, by definition, with the start of our civilisation, and Noah can be credited with the domestication of animals, I like to associate Abraham with the momentous one-off invention of the alphabet, which has democratised learning, when Egyptian signs were used to represent the sounds for which they stood, instead of representing what the sounds stood for●

Naim E. Dangoor

Joe Frankel

At the tender age of 31, Joe Frankel met his sudden and tragic death in a mid-air collision. Over 300 friends and relatives from Singapore, New York, Spain and Israel attended the funeral, to pay their respects and demonstrate the love and admiration he had evoked in all who met him. A fly-past of a squadron of planes from his private flying club dipped in salute and a bugler from his regiment, the First Royal Tank Regiment, sounded the “Last Post”. Rabbi Danny Rich, who conducted the moving service at the Kingston Liberal Synagogue Cemetery, led the singing of “Adon Olam” to Joe's favourite tune.



Joe's mother Grace (née Marshall) was born in Bombay of Baghdadian parents. He is survived by his widow, Alexandra, whom he married less than two years ago.

All who knew him are poorer for the loss – and richer for the memory●

Percy Gourgey

Thank you for your encouraging letter concerning my little magazine *The New Atlantean*. I would like to include a review of your article on dating the Exodus in the next issue. I trust I may quote freely from it. It looks pretty good to me●

Harpندن

P.M. Hughes

BOOKS

Ahmed Osman, author of *Stranger in the Valley of the Kings*, in which he identifies Joseph with Yuya, who was the maternal grandfather of Pharaoh Akhnaton, has written a new book, *Moses – Pharaoh of Egypt*, which will be published in September by Grafton Books.

In it he claims that Moses was a King of Egypt and that the staff which he carried, topped by a bronze serpent, was the symbol of his Pharaonic authority.

In the Second Book of Kings (18:4) we are told that more than 500 years after the Exodus, King Hezekiah “broke in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the Children of Israel did burn incense to it: it was called Nehushtan”. (*Nahash* = Serpent; *Nehoshet* = Brass).

This book, which will prove as controversial as his first, will be followed by yet a third book on the history of King David●

The Sephardi Story by Chaim Raphael
Weidenfeld & Nicholson, £6.95

This popular book on the history of Sephardi Jews has been re-issued in paperback.

Highly recommended to our readers●



**Shamash Secondary School – Baghdad
Finishing Class – June 1948**

(Left to right, front to back): Freddie Yashar, Fuad Zebaida, Bahjat Sion

Yusef Somekh – Masters Yusef Musa, Hussein Muruwa, Gideon Shahrabani, Meir Hayya, Nessim Ezra Nessim, Naji Abdullah, Yusef Dawud – Shua Yusef

Moshi Haron, Jamil Aghasi, Fuad Sadqa, Yusef Dalah, Semha Abdullah, Violet Murad, Khatun Dalah, Daisy Neggar, Marcel Shohet, Eliahu Aghababa, Felix Bettat

Yusef Khebbaza, Yacub Ezra, Hayim Tweg, Morris Elia Shaul, Hai Salim, Heskell Muallem, Menashi Cohen, Fuad Obadiah, Abdullah Salim, Abdullah Mahlab, Sasson Belbul, Morris Mashaal

Haron Seltoun, Dawud Shemtob, Naim Shohet, Albert Elia, Morris Shahmoon, Fuad Nathan, Fuad Shahrabani, Morris Gurji, Abbud Bashi, Ezra Haron, Dawud Zakariah

Dawud Sasson, Salim Bashi, Salim Dengour, Abraham Shina, Yusef Abdul Nabi, Joseph Elia Shaul, Yusef Elias, Morris Peress, Dawud Hindi, Nessim Tawfiq

Photo kindly supplied by Mrs. Aida Hakim (née Shemtob)●



After every issue I look forward to the next, as my family and I are continually learning something new about our heritage.

I was the fourth generation of an Iraqi Jewish family born in Calcutta, India, and lived through the Second World War and the final handing over of India to Independent rule. So you can imagine that we knew very little of our heritage, although our families remained fiercely true to our Babylonian heritage. However, whenever I read *The Scribe* I feel I belong to a great community and I have come "HOME".

Carry on your great work●

Noranda Ezekiel (Sunny) Moses
W. Australia

We just returned from Xian and saw the "8th wonder of the world" the Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses. Truly unbelievable, just like *The Scribe*. No. 40 arrived here today. Enjoyed your article on the Unacceptable Faces of Capitalism. It seems we have been and are on the same intellectual wave length since we were students, though thousands of miles apart. Unless the best aspects of Socialism quickly combine with the best aspects of Capitalism, the world economy is foredoomed to failure. I enjoyed the phrase "Islamic banking is just a clumsy way to get round usury by artificial means". Long live *The Scribe*! Long live the spirit of Jewish justice – *Sedaka*●

Hubei, China

Albert Adatto

Are the Jews a nation, or are they merely religious communities within other nations? Those who feel that their Judaism is only religious cannot and must not deny others who feel themselves part of a nation entitled to have their own territory and their own state●

I read with interest your recent letter in the *Jewish Chronicle* (rebutting Vera Goodman's criticism of the Iraqi Jewish community) and I am so sorry such problems have arisen. The Iraqi Jewish community is, of course, an integral part of Anglo-Jewry and we in TA'ALI are very anxious that all the Anglo-Jewish communities work and act together in harmony and unity. I enclose a copy of the "News and Views" of TA'ALI, which sets out our aims and objectives●

TA'ALI
World Movement

Sidney L. Shipton
Executive Director

Recently I read a copy of your journal *The Scribe* with great interest. My roots go back to Baghdad. I hail from the family of Yacoub Yonah Sadick, my father's name was Shaul. He, with his mother Haviva, his sister Farah – married to Nissim Yonah, came to Calcutta in India. He had more brothers in Baghdad who were jewellers, also sisters. Please add my name to your mailing list●

London

(Mrs.) Helen Himmelschein