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The SCRIBE

JOURNAL OF BABYLONIAN JEWRY

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The Claims of Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries

by Percy Gourgey MBE

The Middle East Peace Process, started in Madrid in November 1991, provided for discussions on the refugee problem, both Jewish and Arab, based on UN Resolution 242 that were scheduled to take place in Ottawa.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the UN Coalition victory over Iraq in its invasion of Kuwait in March 1991, injected a note of realism in the attitude of Arab states towards Israel.

While ½ million Palestinian Arabs fled when Arab armies invaded Israel in May 1948, ¾ million Jews had to leave Arab countries. A just formula must include the consideration of exchange of refugees and the reciprocal claims of both sides.

Jewish claims could be expressed as follows: First, fair compensation for confiscated individual and communal property. Second, compensation for discrimination and persecution practised by Arab governments against Jews. Third, a rightful share in the wealth of the Middle East commensurate with our numbers and standing in the region. Fourth, access to our shrines in Arab countries and restoration of our religious heirlooms.

Just because Jews from Arab countries have not resorted to terrorism to publicise their claims, the rights, whether of those living in Israel or elsewhere, must not be ignored. These must be considered at the resumption of the multilateral negotiations of the Madrid Peace Process.

Scribe: For his many years' work as Chairman of the Jews of Arab Lands Committee, Percy Gourgey was among the Nominees in the first functioning of the "Chief Rabbinate Awards for Excellence" scheme●

Ethnic Cleansing

British Conservative and Labour Euro-MPs recently united to block a £270 million European Community aid package for Syria, because of Syria's human rights record and the halt in the emigration of its Jewish citizens.

By allowing some 2,000 Jews to leave, Syria would have achieved ethnic cleansing at the request of the victims, and at a price of £100,000 per head. Syria's refusal to comply means that it hopes to extract an even higher price by holding the Jews as hostages.

By expelling 400 Palestinian trouble-makers, Israel is accused of ethnic cleansing but the Arab countries managed to do their ethnic cleansing of Jews quietly, when no one was noticing●

Let us join the Peace Talks

In its dealings with Palestinian Arabs, the Israel government does not take into account the hardships suffered by Jewish refugees from Arab countries who arrived destitute in Israel because their properties were confiscated by their countries of origin.

Moreover, when it comes to the demands of the Palestinian diaspora, Israel's trump card is the 1½ million Jews from Arab countries residing outside Israel. Repatriation for them is out of the question, and thus it is for the Palestinian diaspora. Population transfer should be the essence of any peace settlement.

When it comes to reparations, in 1948 we constituted two per cent of the population of Arab countries, which entitles us to 2 per cent of their wealth and 2 per cent of their land - viz, 100,000 square kilometres.

It should be clear that Israel is not just the creation of the Holocaust but the natural reaction to Arab anti-Semitism. With Oriental Jews forming over half of Israel's population, we make it a culturally entrenched Middle Eastern country and not a European implant. The Middle East has been our habitat since time immemorial. In addition, we can provide a springboard for Jewish-Arab operation as was often the case in the past.

As an organisation of Jews from Arab countries residing outside Israel, we have requested the two major powers, America and Russia, to be allowed to participate in the talks dealing with the refugees within the peace process, especially now that Israel is acquiescing in allowing diaspora Palestinian Arabs into the talks.

But instead of supporting this call for parity, Israel is turning a deaf ear to our demands.

New York Prof. Heskell M Haddad M.D.
President, World Organisation
for Jews from Arab Countries

Scribe: "Greater Israel" measures only 26,000 square kilometres. So, in the context of land for peace, it is the Arabs, and not Israel, who should, in theory at least, cede the extra land●

Reluctant Freedmen

Commenting on the slowness of the Russian people to appreciate their newly-won freedom from Communist dictatorship, the Chief Rabbi speaking on BBC Radio compared them to the Israelites in the Passover story.

It took only one day, he said, to get the Israelites out of Egypt; but it took forty years to get Egypt out of the Israelites!●

Grand reopening of The Jewish Museum

1109 Fifth Avenue, New York

After a two-year expansion of its splendid landmarked facility, the Jewish Museum reopens on 13 June, 1993. In conjunction with the reopening, the museum has established the Sephardic Heritage Society whose purpose is to encourage and support education programmes on Sephardic culture and history for the benefit of current and future generations.

With a lead grant from the Maurice Amado Foundation, the museum will integrate the Sephardic perspective into programmes for families and Jewish schools. Future programmes will be designed for adult audiences. An estimated 300,000 visitors from all over the world will come to the new museum each year. This provides an ideal opportunity to build a significant audience for Sephardic programmes at the largest Jewish cultural institution outside Israel.

The Society's Founding Members will host a special cocktail reception on 17 June as part of the museum's grand reopening. For more information please write to:
Yvonne Hillel Cohen
100 United Nations Plaza Apartment 44A
New York, NY 10017, USA●

Sarajevo

It was at Sarajevo that the opening shot was fired nearly 80 years ago that started the first world war and a century of conflicts, revolutions and bloodshed. The chickens have now come home to roost. The poor people of Bosnia are having a taste of the misery that was unleashed on the world through them.

How to apportion responsibility for the tragic events that have been taking place in former Yugoslavia?

A critical analysis of the Passover story of *Had Gadia* blames the dog for starting the chain of events in the story that ended with the Almighty slaying the Angel of Death: the dog had no right to bite the cat!

Two years ago, Bosnia which consists of Serbs, Croats and Moslems declared independence by a majority vote that was not accepted by the Serbs. The European community led by Germany hastily recognised Bosnia's independence and the Serbs started their invasion.

We have always said that majority decisions cannot apply in countries sharply divided by race, colour, language or religion. The rights of all these elements have to be satisfied and safeguarded.

The rape of Bosnia is Germany's present to its WWII ally!●

The Jews of Iran

by Israel Ambassador Dr Moshe Yegar

Part III

Under the Pahlevi Dynasty (1925-1978)

The political and social conditions of Persian Jews changed fundamentally with the ascent to the throne of Riza Khan Pahlevi and the establishment of the new Pahlevi dynasty in 1925. Bent on secularisation, modernism and the Westernisation of his country, Riza Shah, and after him his son Muhammad Riza, carried out far-reaching reforms affecting the social, cultural, and political structure of the country. By weakening the power of the Shi'a clergy, which for centuries had stood in the way of modernisation, and by eliminating the Shi'a concept of the ritual "uncleanliness" of the non-believers - once the basic foundation of the state's attitude towards non-Muslims - the Shah laid the foundation for a revival which had beneficial effects on the Jewish sector of the population. No other Muslim country except Turkey went through so fundamental a change in so short a time as Persia (or Iran as it has been called since 1936) under the new dynasty.

These steps benefited the Jews indirectly. Jews were granted the same legal rights as the Muslim majority. Politically, Jewish rights were limited to the election of one member of the *Majlis* (Parliament) and Jews could not hold important political offices. Aside from the Department of Health, where Jewish doctors were considered desirable, Jews were rarely admitted to the civil service, and Jews were not accepted in the ministries of foreign affairs, war or police. A Jew could theoretically rise to the rank of Colonel in the army, but there is no record of Jews having advanced in the regular establishment beyond the lower ranks. Thus the Jews remained a national minority in Iranian society, with some protected rights.

In 1941, the English and Russians jointly occupied Iran. Riza Shah's neutralism or perhaps pro-Nazi sympathies led to his deposition by the Allies during World War II. This marked a turning point in the history of Iranian Jewry, for shortly thereafter the United States entered the war and began to replace the British as the premier Western power. Under Riza Shah's successor, Muhammad Riza, a more favourable climate was provided for the continuous improvement of Jewish life in Iran.

The economic situation of the Jews of Iran also improved markedly.

Jews dealt in trade, industry and tourism. A community of professions was formed - physicians and engineers who studied abroad. Many others became small traders, artisans or government officials. In 1957, a roof-organisation for all the Jewish communities was formed - *Anjuman Kaliman*¹ (The Iranian Jewish Community Council) that was recognised by the government as the formal body representing the Jewish population.

The council, functioning mainly through committees, managed its schools, cemeteries, the Koresh Hospital, and its public properties, including those of abandoned Jewish communities throughout Iran. It also disbursed limited welfare funds. The

Jewish deputy to the *Majlis* was elected by that organisation during the Shah's reign.

The principal representative of the Jews was the Jewish member of the *Majlis*. Powerful in his own right, he dominated communications between the government and the community, as was the case during most of the 1960s. Habib Elghanian, the president of the community council during the last years of the Shah's regime and member of the *Majlis*, was reputed to be the wealthiest Jew in the country. He was arrested and executed in the early stages of the Khomeini revolution.

Links with the Land of Israel

In spite of their long insulation from the rest of the Jewish world, there were some irregular contacts through the centuries between the Jews of Persia and the Land of Israel, through *Shlichim* (Messengers from Zion), who arrived in order to collect contributions for the congregations in the Holy Land. The first such messenger to Persia was Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh from Safed, who visited Persia in 1590. During the 17th century, travellers arrived in search of the "Ten Lost Tribes". An important messenger to visit Persia in 1708-1712 was Rabbi Yehuda Ben Amram Divan, who wrote a book describing the communal life of the Jews of Persia.

Individual *olim* from Persia managed to arrive in the Land of Israel from time to time all through those tortuous centuries, but the first organised groups started coming only during the 19th century. In 1829, a group of Mesh'hedi Jews came under the guise of the *Hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage) to Mecca and to Jerusalem. In 1886, an organised group came from Shiraz and established two neighbourhoods in Jerusalem (*Shabat Tzedek* and *Neve Shalom*). In 1895, a group of Jews from Teheran came, headed by Rabbi Mulla Elazar. In 1910, a group was organised in Hamadan for the study of Hebrew and as a result some of them, as well as others, made *aliyah* after World War I. After the war, an additional number of Mesh'hedi Jews came to Palestine. By 1930 there were already 3,000 Mesh'hedis in Jerusalem, half the total number of Jews from Persia who had come to the Land. Persian Jews settled in Eretz Israel forming communities according to their places of origin in Persia. They built synagogues, established communal institutions for mutual help, social welfare, burials and provided assistance for new arrivals. Between 1919 and 1948 some 3,600 more came.

Simultaneously, a revival of Hebrew, coupled with Zionist activity took place in Iran. The first Zionist Club was established in 1917. Its members occupied themselves mainly with the study of Hebrew. Some books in Hebrew or in Persian, dealing with Jewish history and related subjects, were published. Newspapers in Persian, or in Jewish-Persian, were also published. Most of this activity soon came to an end because of restrictions imposed by the Government.

The situation changed again during World War II. Zionist activity became legal once more. Iranian Jews assisted Jewish refugees from Poland and Russia who had escaped the Nazis and had arrived in Iran via the Soviet Union. In 1942, the Jewish Agency opened a "Palestine Office" in Teheran, the purpose of which was to assist the refugees who arrived there and to encourage *aliya* in general. This office continued to function until 1979.

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Iran accorded it *de-facto* recognition in 1950, and opened an unofficial diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv. Israel opened a similar office in Teheran. Both offices operated until Khomeini came to power. Good practical relations existed in a variety of fields. Trade relations were developed. Israeli firms operated in Iran. El-Al flew regularly to Teheran. Israel purchased Iranian oil. Iranian students studied agriculture, medicine and other subjects in Israel. Israeli experts assisted Iran in various development projects. During those years, Israel was permitted to encourage Iranian Jews to emigrate to Israel and, indeed, several thousands did, especially after the Six-Day War of 1967. Iran served also as a transit country for Jews who escaped from Iraq, including Jews from Kurdistan². The estimated number of Iranian Jews in Israel today is 75,000 (including second generation Israelis). They are to be found in all walks of life. They have produced poets, authors, teachers, farmers, army officers and politicians. The *olim* from Iran suffered their share of hardship in the process of absorption in Israel, similar to that of most other *olim* from other countries who came to Israel to renew their sovereign life in their independent country.

The Khomeini Revolution

As subsequent events have shown, the Pahlevi dynasty was not sufficient to change the fundamentalist - Shi'a character of the Iranian people³. The Khomeini takeover shook the country to its core, completely changed its political, religious and social structures and brought tremendous hardship and suffering upon the Jewish community as well. Diplomatic relations with Israel came to an end. The Khomeini revolution hit the Jewish community very hard. But this should not have come as a surprise. It is known that the Shah had suggested to some of the leaders of the Jewish community to leave the country while he was still in power. It was understood that the community would find itself in dire straits overnight were they to lose the protection of the Shah. This, indeed, turned out to be the case⁴.

The rise of the Khomeini regime led to retrogression in the status of the Jews and limitations imposed on their community institutions. At first there was direct persecution, including executions of communal leaders because of their connections with the Shah. Later, the situation eased and, for whatever reasons, the Jews who have not fled the country remain in a fairly stable condition.

Paradoxically, the Khomeini regime has

actually given the Jewish community something of a new lease of life. The constitution of the Islamic Republic recognises the Jews as one of the three protected religious minorities, and guarantees "complete freedom in the practice of religious duties and functions, such as in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, wills and testaments". Hence, the Jewish rabbinical courts have re-acquired powers in part, taken away under the Shah's secularisation efforts.

Not only has the regime allowed the old institutions to continue under a new leadership, but its religious tone has led to a religious revival among the Jews, if only in self-defence. In 1981, the Jewish community elected a new representative to the *Majlis*, the Iranian parliament, to assume the seat held under the Shah by the executed *Habib Elghanian*⁵. Synagogue attendance has increased with the encouragement of the communal leadership, as part of the Jewish effort to increase the legitimacy of religious observance. Public meetings at which government officials appear are held in the synagogues periodically, to strengthen ties with the regime.

While the Jewish schools have been nationalised and have come under even closer government supervision than in the days of the Shah, the Ministry of Religion provides financing for Jewish religious education, which is compulsory for Jews. Those children not enrolled in Jewish day schools must acquire a Jewish religious education through supplementary schools. As a result, afternoon Hebrew schools have been established. *Siddurim* (prayer books) and textbooks have been published with the Education Ministry's backing.

Major changes have taken place in the economic sphere. Most Jews in government posts and at the Universities were dismissed after the revolution, and today an estimated 60 per cent of the working Jewish population is self-employed, principally in retail businesses and small trades, and another 10 to 15 per cent are professionals.

To date, the Jewish community is recognised by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic as a *bona fide* religious minority, with rights to practise its religion and to own private and communal property. In each city, Jewish Community Councils, officially recognised by the Government, see to the welfare, religious and educational needs of the Jewish community, and represent Jewish community interests.

The *Anjuman Kaliman* (Jewish community council) located in Teheran, is the nominal umbrella organisation of Iranian Jewry, recognised by the government as the representative of the Jewish population. But, in fact, it barely functions. There is no Iranian Chief Rabbinate to exercise judicial or religious authority over the Jewish community.

Despite official protection, Jews are still subject to harassment by revolutionary guards and the local workers' committees, and there still are occasional executions. On the other hand, Jews continue to serve in the Iranian army and several dozen are known to have been killed in the war with Iraq. As the price for all this, the Jewish leaders are forced to regularly denounce Israel and Zionism.

During Khomeini's years in power, Jews, like all Iranians, endured hardships

that the war with Iraq, a poor economy and a repressive regime brought on them. Jews are still subjected to strict regulations concerning travel outside the country. The climate exists for arrests, extortion and executions, and Jews have been victims. However, such activities are aimed not only at Jews. The victims have been the middle and upper stratas, cutting across religious lines. Yet because of the Jews' heightened vulnerability as a minority, they sometimes make convenient targets in a society where corruption and religious fanaticism are rife.

One has to remember that anti-Semitism in Iran (traditionally meant anti-Judaism, as in the neighbouring Arab countries. It has always been strongest where traditionalist Muslims held power. Even under the Shah, when the Shi'ite priesthood was strong, Jews were frequently unable to exercise their civil rights. Under Khomeini this anti-Jewishness became state policy.

The Khomeini-Shi'a terror and the vehement anti-Israel and anti-Zionist propaganda have convinced many to leave. A few thousands manage somehow to emigrate every year. Some 10,000-15,000 have reached Israel. Many more have gone elsewhere.

In the years 1978-1979, during which the Shah's regime was crumbling and Khomeini's power was being consolidated, the number of Jews in Iran was estimated as follows. 50,000 in Teheran, 8,000 in Shiraz, 3,000 in Isfahan, and a few more thousand dispersed in other places. Altogether between 60-70,000. The big Exodus started only at the beginning of 1978 when some

15-20,000 people left in great haste. Half of them came to Israel and the rest went to the US, Canada or Europe. But the majority of the Jews of Iran decided to stay, in spite of efforts made by Israeli representatives and Jewish Agency officials to convince them to leave before it was too late.

Since the Khomeini revolution, the Jewish community has shrunk to 20-25,000. Most of them live in Teheran.

It is assumed that there will be a remnant Jewish community in Iran for the foreseeable future, comprised of those who do not have the will or wherewithal to leave. It should, however, be noted that the security of the remaining Jews in Iran - and their continued ability to leave - hang in the balance. This is the nature of that regime.

From a Jewish history point of view, the years of Khomeini's rule were not basically different from the darkest periods of the Persian dynasties of the 16th-19th centuries. The difference this time is that the Jewish community is being gradually liquidated. But this time the Jews of Iran have a place to go, which was not the case in earlier centuries. What happened during the last few decades in all other Middle Eastern Muslim countries, happened in Iran too. Jewish communities which existed in those countries for some 2,000 years ceased to exist. All meaningful Jewish life came to an end. It is too early to predict what will happen in Iran now that Khomeini's personal rule has come to an end. However, it seems safe to say that it is doubtful if there will ever again be a viable Jewish community in Iran.☹

Notes by Naim Dangoor:

- 1) *Kalimi* = Jew. Moslems refer to Moses as "Kalim Allah" - the one who spoke with God.
- 2) The large-scale escape of Jews to Israel via Kurdistan and Iran is a dramatic chapter in the history of Babylonian Jewry in the closing years of our community.
Baghdad-born Mr Shlomo Hillel, former Speaker of the Knesset, gives a first-hand account of these hair-raising escapades in his best-selling masterpiece *Operation Babylon* published in 1988.
- 3) The recent upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism is generally related to the crushing defeat of the Arab armies in the six-day war. Moslems interpreted the historical victories of the Israeli army as divine reward for Jewish loyalty to the fundamentals of the Torah and to the traditions of Judaism.
- 4) The fall of the Shah was due to the Carter Administration's withdrawal of support for him. The Shah could have maintained his regime with a fraction of the repression and tyranny used by the Khomeini authorities.
- 5) Elghanian's absurd indictment was for being a Zionist spy, enemy of God, and for waging war against God and his messenger the Imam (Khomeini).
- 6) Israel has been falsely accused of ethnic cleansing, but in fact it is the Moslem countries of the region that have, by persecution and harassment, quietly got rid of their ancient Jewish communities. However, there is reason to expect that, if peace comes to the region, new Jewish communities will again flourish in all Israel's neighbours.

In the previous issue we referred to the visit of the Shah of Iran Nasr-ed-Din (Naser-ed-Din, to be exact) to Iraq at the time when Midhat Pasha was the Turkish *Wali* (Governor) of Baghdad.

In a special pamphlet, Dr Abraham Ben-Jacob, the outstanding historian of Babylonian Jewry, gives interesting details of the Shah's visit. He quotes the diary of Rabbi Shmuel Abraham Sadqa Hossein which states that the Shah visited Baghdad in 1870. Both the Shah and the *Wali* were seen as enlightened rulers and pro-Jewish. The Jewish community gave special receptions in the Shah's honour and appealed to him on behalf of the Jews of Iran. He promised that he would do the necessary to improve their condition.

Another document, undated, unaddressed and unsigned, written in Judeo-Arabic and found in the Sassoon archives in Jerusalem, gives a first-hand report of some of the activities. On the Shah's arrival in Baghdad, an immense multitude went out to welcome him, including school children - 200 Jewish and 100 Muslim. Baghdadian Jews stood on one side and Persian Jews on the other side with a Torah Scroll between them. The Shah came and bowed to the Torah. A few days later he invited the Dayyanim and Hahamim and, as witnessed by the writer of the document, asked them in Hebrew, "Are you Doctors of Torah and of medicine or of Torah only?" [The Rabbis were apparently introduced as "Doctors of the Law (*Torat*) - N.D.] They were astonished by the Hebrew he spoke and they couldn't tell whether he learned that sentence for the occasion or if he knew the Holy Tongue.☹

A Galaxy of Babylonian Rabbis

In 1876, Jacob Obermeir, a Jewish teacher from Vienna, came to Baghdad as the tutor for a young Persian prince, but he also taught French at the *Alliance Israelite* school.

Obermeir soon started to criticise community customs, expressing his opinion in matters of religion. He wrote a letter to the *Hammaggid*, the chief periodical of Orthodox Jewry in those days, which was published in Germany, in which he heaped ridicule upon Hakham Yosef Hayim, a revered rabbinical leader of Oriental Jewry.

When the periodical reached Baghdad, the city was in an uproar. That very day the rabbis, led by Hakham Abdallah Somekh, announced a strong *cherem* (ban) against Obermeir. Sharp letters of protest, signed by 27 of Baghdad's scholarly rabbis and other communal leaders, were sent to *Hammaggid* and the rabbis of Jerusalem, under the leadership of the Rishon Le Zion Rabbi Abraham Ashkenazi, and also Rabbi Shalom Moshe Hye Gagin.

These letters were published in the periodical *Lebanon*, appearing in Jerusalem. The ban against Obermeir was supported by the Jerusalem Rabbinate and by the *Hakham Bashi* (Chief Rabbi) in Constantinople, the supreme government-sanctioned authority over all rabbinical and religious matters throughout Moslem lands.

Realising his error, Obermeir sent a letter of apology to the periodical who refused to publish it. That week he received a cable from Vienna informing him of his wife's sudden death. He immediately went to the home of Hakham Yosef Hayim and begged forgiveness. But the Rabbi refused to forgive until Obermeir signed a promise to leave Baghdad as soon as his mourning period was over. Thus the ban was revoked.

It is interesting to list the names of the 27 rabbis and the other dignitaries who signed

the letter of protest that appeared in the *Lebanon* periodical:

Rabbanim and Dayyanim

Abdallah ben R. Abraham Yosef Somekh – (1813–1889). The leading rabbi of his age, known in the community simply as *Stayee* (Master). Most subsequent rabbis graduated at his *yeshiva*.

Nissim Hye ben Yehesqel Hayim Binyamin Halewi d.1895 – Somekh pupil.

Abraham Moshe Hillel (1820–1920) – Somekh pupil, grandson of R. Moshe Halewi. Chief Rabbi 1884, 1886–1889, 1911–1915.

Sasson Elijahoo R. Moshe Halewi – known as R. Sasson Smouha. (1820–1910). Somekh pupil. Dayyan 1841–1876. Chief Rabbi 1876–1880.

Nissim ben Aharon Elia Cohen – Somekh pupil – Dayyan.

David Hye Meir Yosef Nissim (Salman Matuq).

Abraham Yehoshua Eliezer Ezra (Horesh) d.1902. Dayyan.

Yitzhaq Abraham Shlomo Shohet (Mjallid) (1835–1920). Somekh pupil. Chief Rabbi 1893–1905.

Yosef R. Yaacob Yosef Harofei.

Elishaa Nissim Muallem Sasson (Dangoor) d.1895. Had his own *yeshiva*. Chief Dayyan; Chief Rabbi 1880–1893, with intervals during which R. Abraham Hillel acted in his place.

David Elijahoo.

Abraham Nissim Hayim Moshe (Dangoor) (1840–1925).

Moshe Reuben Moshe Sasson (Dangoor) d.1914.

Moshe Hayim Shlomo David Shamash (1836–1923) Somekh pupil. Chief Dayyan. Chief Rabbi 1918–1923.

Ezra Sasson ben Reuben (Dangoor) (1848–1930). Dean of the Great Synagogue of the Exilarch. Chief Rabbi 1923–1928. Published many religious books.

Yehesqel Moshe (Shmuel) Halewi (1836–1914) Chief Dayyan.

Ezra Yehesqel Elijahoo Cohen d.1924. Was in charge of the Shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Moshe Yaacob Yehesqel Ezra (Nissim David Menahem Gabbay)

Yaacob Yehesqel Ezra (Nissim David Menahem Gabbay).

Shalom Sasson Aharon

Yehesqel R. Abdel Ezra Yaacob

Abdel Elijahoo Abraham

Moshe Ezra Yehesqel Sethihon d. 1881. Family origin from Aleppo.

Reuben Yosef Yaacob (Belbul) d.1907

Moshe Rahamim Hossein (Moshe Sadqa). Chief Rabbi for 3 months in 1905 pending arrival of R. David Papu from Jerusalem to become Chief Rabbi.

Shmuel Abraham Shlomo Shohet (Mjallid) d.1923

Abdalla Yaacob Elishaa Gabriel.

(Hakham Heskell Shlomo David was in India).

Dignitaries:

Yehesqel Ezra Abraham Gabbay.

Yosef-Ezra Abraham Gabbay (Yosef Gurji) known as Signor Gurji. (1809–1894). Maternal uncle of David Sassoon (1792–1864).

Sleman Elijahoo Yehesqel Yona

Hayim Reuben Gabbay

Reuben Yehesqel Yehuda Yaacob (Maatuq)

Elia-Shaul R. Yitzhaq Hayim Gabbay.

Sources: *In Our Leaders' Footsteps* by Menachem Girtitz and *Babylonian Jewry* by Abraham Ben-Jacob●



30 years on – some of the *Hakhamim* (rabbis) mentioned above: Left to right – Ezra Reuben Dangoor; Ezra Adam; Moshe Shamash; Sasson Smouha; David Papu; Yitzhaq Abraham Mjallid; Abraham Hillel; Yehesqel Halewi.

The Jewish Calendar

The Jewish Lunisolar calendar satisfies the religious requirements in relation to the Moon, and also keeps pace accurately with the Solar year. This is done by having 13-month leap years 7 times in a 19-year cycle. Thus the Jewish New Year falls on 2 October in 1997, 2016, and 2035.

The Jewish year begins in the autumn, the Christian in the winter – a quarter of a year later. The Jewish day begins at sunset, the Christian at midnight – a quarter of a day later.

By adopting 25 December as the birthday of Jesus, 1 January becomes the date of his circumcision, i.e. his purification 8 days later as required by Jewish law, according to which the purification of his mother falls 40 days later on 2 February, which is a feast observed by the Roman Catholic Church for the “Purification of the Virgin Mary”[Ⓢ]

Tel Aviv Shimon Murad Nissim

★ ★ ★

Déjà Vu again?

In 1871, Bismarck fought three wars in six years to unite Germany. His policy known as “blood and iron” was marked by atrocity and brutality.

Since then, Germany has adopted the same cruel policy. History tells us that whenever Germany becomes too weak or too strong, trouble starts. The recent wave of assaults, fire bombings and violence against foreigners and Jews reminds us of the early 1930's when Hitler rose to power. The news is chilling. The German people cannot read their own history and see the crimes of their nation[Ⓢ]

New York Albert Khabbaza, M.D.

Calendar Reform by Naim Dangoor

We measure the passage of time by three distinct yardsticks: the solar year of 365¼ days, the lunar month of 29½ days and the 7-day week.

The solar year was used in Egypt where the annual flood of the Nile was of crucial importance. The lunar month was used in Babylon. But the 7-day week was based on the story of Creation and probably goes back to our revered ancestor Adam, father of human civilisation.

In order to reconcile the three different measurements, Hillel II, in the year 358, devised and enforced an official Jewish calendar having an occasional extra month, which is very accurate, has been used since then and has succeeded in its object of providing a uniform calendar for all Jews. By contrast, Orthodox and other Christians differ in dating their festivals and Moslems likewise differ in fixing the beginning of a month. In fact, Moslems started by adopting the Jewish leap year, but then abandoned the extra month by having a shorter 354-day year of 12 lunar months. In this way, the Moslem year will overtake the Christian year by the year 20,816!

In the modern world, calendar reformers aim at having calendar dates coincide every year with the same weekday, the lunar month having become irrelevant. To achieve this, the year would consist of 52 weeks = 364 days with a blank day or two at the end of the year to be called World Day(s). Thus, wage payments would be simplified and Easter Sunday would fall on a fixed date every year. But a fixed Easter would result in a roving Sabbath: every year the Sabbath would fall on a different day of the week; it would be a disaster for the observant Jew. Ironically, two (ultimately abortive) attempts were made to change the duration of the week with the

avowed aim of destroying – not Judaism, but Christianity! One was the introduction of a 10-day week at the time of the French Revolution and the other was a 5-day week after the Russian Revolution.

Some may claim that the 7-day sequence must have, in any case, been broken over the centuries, but I dispute this. I believe that the 7-day week is mankind's most ancient time scale, religiously and strictly observed since the time of Adam and subsequently sanctified and enshrined in the Ten Commandments. Thus, Jews have every reason to oppose Calendar reforms as proposed. In this they are supported by many Christian bodies.

A practical solution to the problem that would not tamper with the weekly sequence is to have a calendar year of exactly 52 weeks = 364 days, and to accumulate the extra time until it forms a whole week which can then be observed as World Week.

The maximum any date would be out of true is 3½ days and the average is 2 days. By comparison, the unavoidable cumulative discrepancy in our Jewish calendar is 4½ days every 1000 years, and according to the position of the sun, we now celebrate Passover 8 days later than at the time of Hillel II.

The only remedy for this is quite simple; 2000 years from now, one Second Adar would be suspended. Although there may still be no Sanhedrin to authorise this change, a concensus among all Jewish congregations would be just as valid. Thereafter, the Jewish calendar would continue without alteration for a further 7,000 years.

A further reform would be to have 13 months of 4 weeks or 4 quarters of 13 weeks[Ⓢ]

Ahiever Zionist Youth Exhibition

Last October, a meeting took place at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or Yehuda, of the founders of the Zionist Youth Group *Ahiever* – distributors of Hebrew books in Baghdad. They came to participate in the unveiling of the *Ahiever* exhibit presented by their comrade George Elias, who had been the Society's treasurer and who donated the exhibition and came from Manchester to oversee the planning and design.

The event resembled a class reunion of students of the Jewish Community Schools in Baghdad, who had founded *Ahiever* in 1930. The first founders of *Ahiever* were pupils of grades 7 and 8 of the *Shammash* School, encouraged by their Palestinian Hebrew teacher Abraham Rosen. They were soon joined by pupils from the *Alliance Boys School*, the *Rahel Shahmoon School*, *El-Wattaniya* and others, all encouraged by their Hebrew teachers, Isaac Bonfils, Meir Shilon (Shlank), Reuben Shiloah (Zislany) and others.

In the five years of its existence, the *Ahiever* group successfully imbued the pupils of the Baghdad Jewish community schools and also the Jewish pupils attending the State schools with the Zionist spirit. Their activities centred around the lending library, located in the *Midrash Talmud*

Torah School and which contained about a thousand Hebrew books. The library also served as a club room, where people could read and listen to lectures. Here too, circles were organised for Hebrew language instruction, choral groups and parties. The proceeds from these activities were dedicated to the Jewish National Fund.

Members of the group also published the first – and only – Hebrew students' news bulletin, *Shemesh*, edited by Salih Mukammal (today residing in Toronto, Canada), who visited Israel and was present at the reunion.

The zenith of *Ahiever's* achievements was in its pioneering *Aliyah* to Israel and the organisation of two working groups: The Baghdad Workers in Rehovoth, founded in 1933, and The Baghdad Workers in Ra'anana, in 1934.

Ahiever activities were brought to an abrupt halt in August 1934, when the Iraqi police uncovered the *Shemesh* youth group, which had just been established that same year. To their credit, the *Ahiever* members kept the spirit of the movement alive, and thus laid the foundations for the setting-up, in April 1942, of a Zionist underground movement.

Mr Mordechai Ben-Porat opened the evening, bringing blessings from the execu-

tive of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center to Mr George Elias for his contribution and expression of willingness to assist the Center in the future as well. Mr Elias, visibly moved by the occasion and from his reunion with his former schoolmates, declared how impressed he was by the Babylonian Jewry Museum and the activities of the Center.

As the person who promoted the idea of the reunion and organised it, and as a researcher of the history of *Ahiever* and Iraqi Jewry, I take this opportunity to turn to our brethren in the Diaspora who so generously donate to various institutions here in Israel, and call upon them to act too for themselves – their own community, and to contribute the necessary funds for the expansion of the Center, which, in its activities, not only commemorates the name of the donor, but also documents and researches, presenting the results in exhibits which will serve as sources of information on various subjects relating to the history and culture of Babylonian Jewry for all who are interested. The accumulated material can also be a basis for a book of the biographies of the leaders and activists over the last few generations of Babylonian Jewry, both in Israel and in the Diaspora[Ⓢ]

Dr Shaul Sehayik

BOOKS

A History of God from Abraham to the Present

by Karen Armstrong

500pp. Heinemann £16.95

Why have the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam inspired so much more violence and cruelty than, say, Hindu or Buddhist religions?

Why has the last part of the twentieth century seen the rise of fundamentalism in all three faiths?

Why has the West been the first to discard God?

Is the idea of one God essential to humanity?

Does God have a future?

The author, who was originally a Roman Catholic nun, sets out to answer these and other questions in her well-researched book, reviewed by Naim Dangoor.

Writers and commentators on religions and their history make two common mistakes. The first mistake is that Monotheism started with Abraham.

Now, the Book of Genesis telling the story of Man's first encounter with God clearly indicates that the roots of Monotheism were laid down by the historic Adam, discoverer of cereals and father of our civilisation.

The basic tenets are all there: that there is One God who created the Universe out of nothing and Who created Time; Man's freedom to choose between good and evil; Man's responsibility for his actions and duty in the world; That the Universe is subject to the certain laws of God; the holy Sabbath.

The Bible affirms that all these ideas became widespread at the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord". Further down the line, Noah too had an encounter with God and the pedigree of Abraham shows him as a direct descendant of Noah and of Adam.

What happened in the meantime is that people lapsed into idolatry, but pockets of Monotheism still existed in the Middle East. Abraham's journeying from Mesopotamia to Canaan was to enable him to join in with believers in the God of Adam. Melchizedek was King in (Jeru)Salem and priest to the Most High God.

Indeed, Abraham's evidence of the existence of the Living God in contrast to the inert idols around him, may sound naive to us. According to Josephus, first century Jewish historian, Abraham was an astronomer of sorts. He noted that while some stars were fixed in heaven, others moved around all the time. This convinced him that there was a God out there moving the stars from place to place!

The second mistake by careless writers is that Jehovah was a tribal god.

The God of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses was not tribal but universal. Abraham addressed God as the *Judge of all the earth*. God revealed himself to Moses as "I am that I am" – The Eternal.

Quotations are cited from Scriptures to show the narrower understanding of

Jehovah, such as Micah's, "Each people walks in the name of its own god, and we walk in the name of Yahweh, our God, for ever and ever". The explanation for this is that when the Hebrews became a nation established in Canaan, they had to conform to international rules current at the time. Any claim by a country that its god was true and other gods were false would have been tantamount to a declaration of war. Similarly, when they went to war, the Philistines brought out their god in battle and the Israelites had to bring out the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments as a symbol of God.

Our mistake was that, at the time of David and Solomon, when there was a lull in the super powers of the region, we did not go on to conquer the world for God. We were too timid. Sixteen centuries later a private man named Mohamed, in a similar situation, proved the power of determination and courage to make far-reaching conquests.

We go through our daily routine enjoying the pleasures of this world and lamenting its sorrows, and have no time to pause and ask ourselves what this life is all about. Unless we can aspire to become gods in our own right, then life is not worth living. We would merely be God's prisoners, Jehovah's hostages.

We are created in God's image, so if God can do it, why can't we? Eventually. God doesn't mind, for we are part of a reality that is INFINITE. The Universe can be looked upon as part of a gigantic four-dimensional computer game, creating all sorts of worlds with their own rules out of nothing! Should we not try to take part in this exciting game?●

Minyan

Ten Jewish Lives in
20 Centuries of History
by Chaim Raphael

126pp Kuperard Publications, No.9,
224 Iverson Road, London NW6 2HL
£16.95

Minyan is the minimum quorum of ten required for public worship. Among the ten lives chosen by the author are those of King David, Rabbi Hillel of Babylon, Maimonides, Dona Gracia Nasi, Menashe ben Israel, the Vilna Gaon, Sir Moses Montefiore, Chaim Weizmann. A very readable book.

In Babylon ten adult men were required for a minyan, although in Palestine seven were considered sufficient. In the end, the Babylonian version prevailed. There are several scriptural precedents for this number but the one chosen by the author is the dialogue between Abraham and God when God confirmed to Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom if ten righteous people were found in it.

The import of this conversation is generally misunderstood by Bible readers, and may or may not have been understood by Abraham himself, who started with 50 and went down to 10. Had he continued to reduce the number, God's reply would have been the same, "I will not destroy Sodom for one righteous man". Such an

attitude by a merciful God is clearly reflected in the judicial systems of civilized countries which say in effect: Let a thousand guilty men go unpunished rather than one innocent person be condemned unjustly.

What God was telling Abraham is that in a wicked city no one is innocent. If you can't remedy matters, get out! Indeed, when Abraham found himself earlier in similar circumstances in Ur, God ordered him, "Get thee out of thy country . . ."●

The Jewish Baghdadi Dialect

Studies and texts (in English) in the Judaeo-Arabic dialect of Baghdad by Professor Jacob Mansour and published in 1991 by the Heritage Center.

It is a definitive and very thorough work covering what may have been the original Arabic dialect in Iraq. The book deals only with the spoken language of the Jews of Baghdad which was also used by Jews of some other parts of Iraq. The Jews also had a written literature which employed the Hebrew alphabet, and which differed from the spoken language●

Hatred of Jews and the Farhud in Iraq

A comprehensive account (in Hebrew) of the pogrom of 1941, researched and documented, edited by Professor Shmuel Moreh and Dr Zvi Yehuda and published in 1992 by The Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, PO Box 151, Or Yehuda, Israel●

The origin of AMEN

a speculation
by Naim S. Mahlab

The accession of Ikhnaton to the Egyptian throne in 1370 BCE, heralded a religious upheaval which lasted until the rise of the Ramesside dynasty which hailed from Tanis, the old capital of the Hyksos who are assumed to be of Semitic origin. Ramesses I reinstated the god Amen, and even combined him with Ikhnaton's god Aton (the sun) into Amen-Re, the "King of the Gods" who was "hidden" in that he was everywhere. Shades of Jehovah.

His grandson, Ramesses II, glorified Amen and embarked on an orgy of construction. Among his labour force were probably followers of Ikhnaton's reforms. This imposed hardship, coupled with religious turmoil, may have led to the Biblical exodus.

The participants in this exodus were partly Semitic but mainly Egyptian. They were reared in the creed of Amen, whom they took with them and whose name they continued to invoke. The cult of Amen probably gave rise to the Hebrew "emunah" and was absorbed into subsequent Hebrew rituals. This type of evolution is not unique in mythology. El, the Babylonian god, was absorbed into the Jewish deity, Jehovah, and the two names became interchangeable. El even evolved into the Muslim Allah. The manner in which Amen is used in Jewish worship confirms, in my opinion, this hypothesis. We say "Amen" not as an expression of faith, but an invocation of a higher power●

A different Law of Return

by Dr Eric George Dangoor

In the midst of the Iranian revolution, a retired Israeli general, Avraham Yoffe, sent Israeli agents on a daring mission. Their goal – to bring back some long-lost inhabitants of Israel – eight rare deer whose ancestors once roamed Israel's Biblical landscape.

The mission was a success and the animals were smuggled out onto the last El Al flight to leave Teheran. The deer and their "Sabra" offspring can now be found in the Hai-Bar reserve on Mount Carmel, alongside 279 other protected areas all over the country.

As naturalists know, Israel's natural heritage is a rich legacy indeed. The land forms the only corridor connecting Asia and Africa with Europe. It boasts a large selection of animals and plants and is home to many resident and migratory birds. To get a firsthand experience of this, just visit the refuse dump outside Ramat Gan next time (if you have nothing better to do!) There you'll find a variety of birds which surpasses any experience in an English bird sanctuary. So the next time you come across that characteristic smell as you travel in a bus, take pride in this major tourist attraction – to some feathered travellers at least!

The situation in reality has always been delicate. Since ancient days the land and forests have been denuded and plundered by different armies and inhabitants. Consequently, many indigenous species have become extinct. More recently, wars, pesticides and building programmes for new immigrants have been some of the factors compounding this problem. Nature awareness until more recently has taken a back seat in the list of priorities.

However, not all is gloom. Israel, despite its many difficulties, has a good track record on environmental and protection and currently 18% of its landscape is set aside for protected nature reserves. There exists strict conservation laws as well as increasingly popular education programmes.

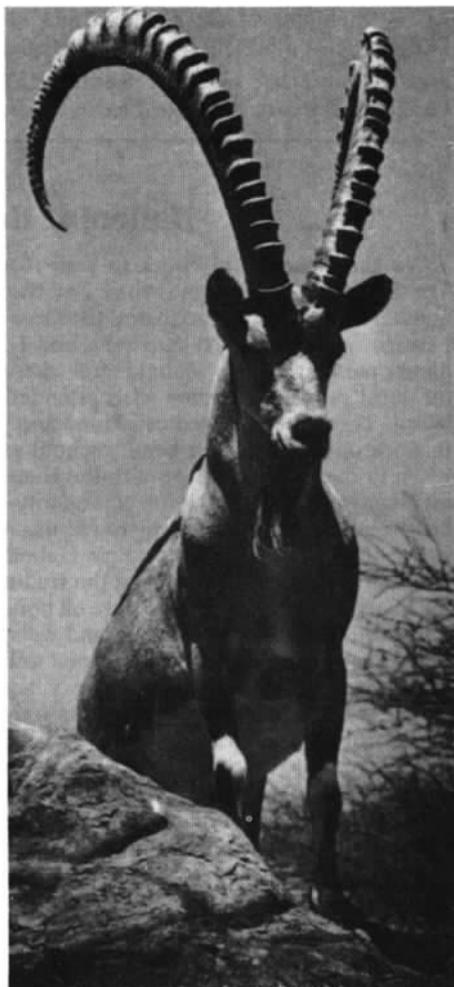
The Nature Reserves Authority (NRA) was set up by the government to administer this task of healing the land. Following Biblical descriptions, conservationists have brought back the Ibex, Oryx, wild ass and other once common species with the aim of eventual release into the wild. The Authority also advises farmers on the use (or abuse) of their land and takes a very active role in promoting natural awareness amongst the public, especially the young, with courses trips and voluntary activities.

Elie Kedourie Chair

The Tel Aviv University wishes to establish a chair to honour the name of the late Professor Elie Kedourie. The cost involved is about \$350,000.

A meeting was recently held in London to discuss ways of achieving this objective, which was addressed by Professor Itamar Rabinovich, Rector of the University, who was on his way to take up his appointment as Israel Ambassador to Washington. Professor Rabinovich heads negotiations between Israel and Syria within the peace talks●

The time has come for Jews (and non-Jews) to recognise the importance of Israel's natural heritage. Tree planting helps but is not enough. For this reason, Aubrey Rose and I are setting up a voluntary "Friends of the Israel NRA" with the aim of assisting it in its vital work. We hope to promote a greater awareness of Israel's natural assets amongst our community. In time, it is hoped that this issue will continue to rise to a higher level on the Israeli and Jewish agenda. We also believe that Israel's continuing effort to improve on its already high standard of natural conservation should be more widely recognised.



IBEX (wild mountain goat) at Ein Gedi

For anyone interested in obtaining information or helping out in whatever capacity, please write to: FINRA, 49 Basing Hill, London NW11 8TG●

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Jamil Sopher, Washington●

I was very proud to come across the March issue of *The Scribe* while visiting last week our friends Renee and Dr Naim Dallal. I was more proud to read the long list of "Jewish Doctors in Iraq in Modern Times" and their great achievements and contributions to the Iraqis in general and to the Jewish community in particular.

I could not see the name of my brother Dr Joseph Moise Mayer who graduated as an MD in 1943 from Baghdad. He worked in Iraq until May 1948 when he left for England to specialise in surgery. He worked in England and Scotland until 1956 when he emigrated to Canada. He is still residing and practising medicine in Toronto. My brother Joseph was one of the very few Jews who had received the Bravery Medal for his participation in what was called the battle of "Mazza" against the Kurds in Northern Iraq in 1945 when he was drafted.

My other brother, Dr Naim Moise Mayer, graduated from France as a dentist and he worked in Ramat Gan, Israel until 1991 when he retired to Toronto.

We are the sons of the late Moise Mayer who you probably either knew or heard of. Our mother was the late Rachel Eliahov Bekhor.

I cannot pass the opportunity to express my sincere congratulations to the great work you are doing and my great impression about *The Scribe*, its quality and its wide scope.

Scarborough, Canada **Sasson Mayer**



The late Moise Mayer, Headmaster of Shamash School, Baghdad

Needless to tell you how very much *The Scribe* is enjoyed by so many and I thank you for all your concern and endeavours to make it such a success.

Montreal, Canada (Mrs) Mavis Shahmoon

I have received several *Scribes* and I cannot tell you enough how much I am enjoying every issue. My thanks and very best wishes to you in continuing this very wonderful project.

Cote St. Luc, Quebec (Mrs) Rose Caplan

Your article on "Babylon and Baghdad" printed in your March issue was most informative and interesting. Could you please continue with these adaptations in your future issues? Also, the article about the Jews of Iran was invaluable to me because my Ashkenazie friends always ask me about my history as an Iranian Iraqi Jew and now I can refer from your publication. Your efforts are fully appreciated.

London N2 **Gilda Naghar**



At the UK Sephardi JIA Annual Dinner recently held at the Dorchester Hotel, London.

Left to right – Uri David (Sephardi JIA New Chairman) and Ruth David; Naim and Renée Dangoor; Guest of Honour and Guest Speaker, Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer (Fuad Abdel Ezair); Fahima and Gert Victor Dallal (who recently celebrated their Diamond Wedding (60th) and received a telegram of congratulations from the Queen; Amira, wife of Gideon Meir, Minister Plenipotentiary at the Israel Embassy, London; Ronny and Violet Musry.

Photo – John R Rifkin

It is high time that we should discontinue allowing our Babylonian identity to be submerged to the point of oblivion by the appellation "Sephardi", which at best is a misnomer when it is applied to us Babylonians. It would be most reprehensible for us to lose that identity.

The term Sephardi came to apply to us only because of common ritual. By provenance we are not Sephardim. We are Babylonians. While I respect and revere the great achievements of the Jews of Spain, practically everything was supplied to them by our great and intellectually vibrant Babylonian community: rabbis, Hebrew teachers, grammarians, books and Sifre Torah, even Hazanim, Babylonian style. To their credit, the Jews of Spain received all these with open, grateful arms and with gratitude.

I am sad to say that practically with everyone I have entered into discussion with respect to Jewish history in general and Babylonian Jewry in particular, my counterparts exhibited such mortifying ignorance (except rabbis and a few educated persons) about the history and importance of the Babylonian community. They mention the Talmud but never mention where it was produced.

Moreover, when I do try to inform these unaware people that the Talmud was written in Babylon in the great academies of Sura and Pumpaditha, Mahoza and Nehardea by the Tigris-Euphrates, they seem to be incredulous: how can such "Oriental Jews" coming from a backward country produce such great literature?

What would such people say if I had told that among all the Jewish communities in the world, only the Jews of Iraq can claim descent from kings, princes, nobility, kohanim as well as simple Israel? They would have thought me a lunatic. Not that other communities cannot count among them people of such descent, but ours is documented in the Bible itself.

The Scribe journal is doing a wonderful and magnificent job. It is awakening readers to our glorious and ancient cultural and historical heritage.

Highland Park, N.J. **Jack H Zeloof**
Scribe: Ezra Ha-Sofer took back with him

to Israel all Babylonian Jews who were of doubtful pedigree.

Genealogy

In your last issue, Mrs Lydia Collins states that in 1904 Joseph Sasson Sykes (1868-1960) was naturalised. I am the nephew of Joseph Sasson Sykes who was born in 1863 and immigrated to England in about 1880. I have seen his Ottoman passport which in European lettering showed him as Joseph Ishaq. My uncle never formally changed his name to Sykes. Apparently, the locals pronounced his name Sykes and his British passport showed him as Sykes alias Sayek. Also, there is reference to my uncle Eskel Sykes, allegedly naturalised in 1907. My uncle Heskell Sehayik lived in Baghdad and died in Baghdad in about 1910. Never did he call himself Sykes. He only made short visits to Britain and certainly was never naturalised.

London **David Moshi Sassoon Schayek**

Mrs Collins's reply to Mr Schayek:

Your uncle Joseph was a friend of my great-grandfather Isaac J Isaacs in Manchester. I understand that both had originally been brought to Manchester by Abdullah Elias and had lived in his house.

In the naturalisation papers of your uncle Joseph from the Public Record Office in London, he explains his name and the reason for the adoption of Sykes. I have also visited his grave in Golders Green Cemetery where he is described on his tombstone as Joseph Sassoon Sykes.

I have examined the naturalisation papers of your uncle Heskell Sehayik at the Public Record Office. Naturalisation was granted in 1907, but sadly he died shortly afterwards. He describes himself as "Sehayik (known as Sykes)". The Manchester business was indeed known as E & J. S. Sykes.

I have been attempting to put together a pedigree of the Sassoon-Sehayik family. I enclose a draft family tree and would be very much obliged if you could point out any errors or omissions.

Lydia Collins informs us:

There has been a marvellous response from people writing about their families in Manchester.

مير بصري

الجندى القديم

لئن حارب في أمم الحروب
 في سبيل العالم الحر السعيد
 ودمي أمريق في قاصي الصحراء
 ليروي الأرض في العهد الجديد
 وأنا الله عليل صرمت
 ورفاق غيبوا تحت التراب
 سال منهم في الأشهاد القوم
 لهم يرووا له أغانية الشباب
 وفضى عهد التمام والجماعة
 وتولى الأمر تجار الحياة
 فأعادوا العبث والبؤس القديم
 رهنه القوم لذك وعذاب
 سد في وجههم درب الرجاء
 خارت الأعطش في الليل البهيم

The Old Soldier

(translated from Arabic)

by Meer Basri

I fought in the War of Wars
 to herald the free felicitous world.
 My blood was shed in distant lands,
 to irrigate the earth in the New Age.
 I am now old and decrepit,
 My friends disappeared under the clay.
 Their blood flowed in the trenches,
 before they were satiated with the bliss of youth.
 And the age of devotion and enthusiasm
 has passed.
 The merchants of politics have taken up matters
 in their hands
 and brought back the old tricks and
 wretchedness
 The people resigned themselves to disgrace
 and agony.
 The gates of return have been shut in their face.
 The dreams evaporated in the dismal night

My dad, Edward Shawn has been giving me your *Scribe* which I found very interesting, even though I was never in Baghdad.

Actually, I was born in Bangkok, Thailand and got married in Israel to an Iraqi. My father left Baghdad in 1927 and went to Bombay for a while, and then to Japan where he stayed until 1947. My mother's family is also originally from Iraq, but my mother was born in Bombay and met my father in Japan and was married in 1937.

My father said that my grandparents were living in a house next door to the late Hakham Ezra Dangoor, Alaw Hashalom. Actually, my father's first cousin Jacob Marshal was married to Khatoon Dangoor, granddaughter of the Hakham.

My family name in Baghdad was Shahrabani.

Richmond, BC, Stanley Shawn
Canada

N.D. adds: Seventy years ago, while our men were out, my grandmother, wife of the Hakham, had a fall on the flat roof of our house and fainted. A Shahrabani (pronounced Shaghbani) from next door bravely climbed over the party wall and came to the rescue!

The *Scribe* is available, free of charge, on cassette, for those who prefer to hear it rather than read it

Rocky Marriage

by Gila Khabbaza

Shattered pictures
 in their frames
 shattered dreams
 calling names
 there's a baby
 crying on the floor
 the milk is spilled
 she cries for more
 the parents are too busy
 for it all
 as the neighbours
 bang on the wall
 the grandparents cry
 when they see the mess
 lawyers
 jump with joy
 as they hear them confess...

Marriage

Marriage is a suitcase
 of comfort
 one carries around
 through the path of life
 with children
 as accessories,
 attachments of life

I currently choose
to travel light...

P.S. These poems are part of a collection of poems named "Secrets of the Heart" by me, which have been very popular in my recent poetry readings



1910 Baghdad: Left to right - Abraham Shaul Basri, who later became judge and advocate; Heskell Darzy and Meir Daniel - notables; Reuben Menashe Battat, who later became senior judge and member of parliament

Misgav Ladach Hospital

We recently opened additional space that will help us to cope with the increasing number of births, around 220 per month at the moment.

Misgav Ladach has become known throughout the country as the centre for natural births, where there is a minimum of medical intervention and maximum involvement of the mothers and their partners.

Since I know that your organisation is very concerned with demography in Israel, I personally ask you to adopt Misgav Ladach Hospital as your project

Misgav Ladach Hospital Reuben Kashani
Jerusalem Director General

Count your blessings (Scribe 57)

I enclose some thoughts which you may like to consider for your next issue. They have been written by me.

Another If...

If... your back is not broken,
 If... Your feet can walk;
 If... both arms can bend and your fingers grip,
 If... you can see the world with both your eyes;
 If... you can hear the sound of children's laughter with both your ears.
 If... you can smell the smell of a loved one;
 If... the cold does not freeze you,
 If... there is no hunger or thirst to tear out your guts;
 If... you have all these, then who is there for you to envy?
 Use...
 Use... your feet to walk straight and your legs to walk tall.
 Use... your hands and your arms to lift those that have fallen and to help them on their way.
 Use... your heart to feel for those that are stricken.
 Use... your lips to talk only of good.
 Use... your ears to hear that which is pleasant.
 Use... your eyes to see the beauty of all that surrounds you.
 Use... your brains to think thoughts that are just.
 Use... all these that have been given you and you will bring a little more cheerfulness to yourself and those who surround you.

London NW4

Fred Sopher

(Just back from his honeymoon in Hawaii)

If -

by Rudyard Kipling

(abridged)

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating;
 If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings;
 If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch;
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

We called her "Sitti Habiba", wife of the late Hakham Ezra Dangoor. She was the aunt of my late mother, Sarah Soffair (née Smouha). I, Heskell, was being sent all the way from Fadhil Eifan, Baghdad, to the Hakham's residence, to deliver *Manot Pourim* (sweets and bakery) to Sitti Habiba from my mother. It was not an easy affair to reach her, as first of all the maid should tell her who is the "messenger". She always gave me a generous tip, which as a young boy, I needed very much to buy books. I think the period I am talking about is between 1926-1930. This much about our relationship with a bit of nostalgia.

Now, I would like to express my pleasure, contentment and spiritual satisfaction which reading your *Scribe* is rendering. As a matter of fact I and my friends who receive *The Scribe* yearn to receive it and any delay beyond the regular time of arrival makes us rather anxious and thirsty

Kiryat Ono, Israel

H N Soffair

