

NATHAN SAATCHI



Nathan David Saatchi passed away on May 31 after a short illness. Born in 1908 to a well-known Baghdadi family, he established himself as a textile merchant, importing mainly from Manchester. In 1945 he saw that there was no future for the Jews in Iraq, and moved to England before the Iraqi government instituted stringent anti-semitic laws. He settled in London and purchased wool and textile factories. In 1947 he sent for his family. The Saatchis integrated quickly into English society.

Despite the corporate success of Saatchi and his sons, the family patriarch found immigrant life to be lonely and longed for his Sephardic roots. Several years after settling in London, Nathan became involved in the city's Spanish and Portuguese Jewish community. For years he was considered to be among the elders of the community. He was often called upon to read the Haftara. Two years ago his sons established a synagogue in honour of their parents. "While the family has Sephardic roots, the synagogue follows the Ashkenazi

tradition. We are something like an Upper East side synagogue for singles" its Rabbi Pini Dunner said. He added, "Nathan Saatchi was most personable, bright, sharp, cheerful, until the last week of his life."

He is survived by his wife Daisy and four sons.

Abridged from *Forward of New York*

From David Elias, BEM, MWS, FSWO

The following is a tribute to the Late Aaron Aaron. Some of the information was collected by Mr Nissim Judah who has done a great deal of research on Mr Aaron.

AARON AARON was a great leader, doing a great deal of work for the Jewish Community all over the world. If it were not for his determination and perseverance the Sephardi community in Sydney would not have existed as it is today.

He arrived in Sydney in 1950 and wasted no time in organising the Sephardi community because of his vast experience in community matters in Calcutta, India. He was the chief architect in the formation of the Hebrew Association and New South Wales Association of Sephardim. As a bush lawyer he drafted the first Constitution of the association where it was laid down that the Association would affiliate with the New South Wales Board of Deputies, the New South Wales Zionist Organisation and the World Sephardi Federation.

With his drive and foresight he rallied men and women to the cause of building the first Sephardi Centre and Prayer Hall in Sydney, Australia. Aaron Aaron was a great communal worker

because of his continued activities within the Jewish Community in Australia. He was elected the first Chairman of the association, a position he held for a number of years. In 1960 he was asked to help the association once again and was President until 1964. Aaron Aaron served as an executive member of the Zionist Organisation of Sydney. He was also Treasurer of the Federation of Orthodox Synagogue and a member of the Kashrut Commission of New South Wales and was elected Vice President in 1975.

He represented the association of the Zionist Federation of Australia for a number of years and was a delegate of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. He has been a trustee of the Sephardi Community Centre and Prayer Hall and the Sephardi War Memorial. Aaron Aaron worked towards the formation of the Sephardi Federation in Australia and was the first Chairman and also a trustee of the Sepher Torah Trust Fund. During his term of office as President, he had the foresight to purchase the property on which now stands the synagogue and the next door property on which stands the Sephardi War Memorial.

He came, he saw and he conquered. He knocked on many doors and finally the office of the late Prime Minister of Australia, the Rt Hon Harold Holt.

It can be said of him that his foresight and vision opened the way for the entry to Australia of Sephardim from all over the world. Gone but not forgotten. He was born 15 January 1914 and died 30 July 2000. His wife, who was a great help to him in his communal work, died two years ago. There were three children, a daughter who predeceased him and two surviving sons who live in Australia.



November 1974 at the Gardenia Iraqi Club in London

Harab Obadia Yosef; Nathan Saatchi; Haham Dr Solomon Gaon; Dayan Dr Pinchas Toledano

From Mr Shlomo Hillel Former Speaker of the Knesset

Thank you for encouraging me to write about my brother Frank z"l. We were very close to each other. Since my childhood he was very kind to me but, certainly during the period that I served as a member of our Knesset Mission to the UN in New York we became really close to each other. I learned to appreciate his special personality.

Dear Naim: I know you also appreciated him and loved him and this was reciprocal.

By writing this small article that I am enclosing, I am paying a debt to his memory, a debt of appreciation, of gratitude and of love.

Frank (Ephraim) Hillel z"l



We can say that Ephraim Hillel was a man of the 20th century. He was born at the start of the century, in 1906, in Baghdad, and died in Boston, United States at the beginning of the 21st century (January 2000).

He knew how to adjust to all the dramatic changes that occurred during his lifetime with his own strength, by making demands of himself and with an iron inner discipline. He refused to go easy on himself, and he was just as demanding of other people, particularly those who were close to him, his wife Violet, and the four sons who were born to them in New York. Three of these grew up to be successful doctors, and the fourth became an economist.

Ephraim was the son of a family

of well-to-do traders in Baghdad. As was the custom there, after finishing his studies at the high school, he followed in the footsteps of his older brothers, travelling around for the purpose of trade. In this way he reached India, China and Japan, where he settled for a number of years.

Like many young Iraqi born Jews, he believed that he could only marry one of the girls from the community in Baghdad. In the mid 1930's, when he decided that the time had come to set up his own family, he returned to Baghdad and married Violet, a member of the Dellal family, an attractive and educated woman who was prepared to follow wherever he led.

Meanwhile, his parents and other members of his family had moved to the Land of Israel, and he too was inclined to settle there. In the Zionist archives there is a record of his correspondence with the Jewish Agency concerning the possibilities of making Aliyah and settling in the country. He reached the country with his young wife at the height of the bloody events of 1936-1939.

It was impossible to think of doing business in the Land of Israel in those days, so he turned his steps towards New York. This large and bustling city was good for business, but not good as a place to live in his opinion. It was a place to make a living, but not for living in.

He bought a house far from the busy town, facing a large, open and green field, with a little piece of land to grow vegetables and flowers, something he remembered from his parents' home in Baghdad in which they cared with love and fostered every plant or flower that grew there, and that he had dreamt about when he thought of the Land of Israel. Every morning, in the sweltering summer or the freezing, snowy winter, he rose early in order to reach the local railway station in good time, and from there travelled to Central Station in New York and to his place of work. He believed the effort was worthwhile, because at weekends he could work in his garden.

In the second half of 1949, after the establishment of the State of Israel and the end of the battles of the War of Independence, he visited in Israel, with a renewed hope of settling there. But the conditions in Israel at the end of the forties, a tiny and newly born country with problems of shortages and economic restrictions, were incomprehensible and unacceptable to someone from the United States. The distance between the dream

and the reality was too great.

He returned to New York and buried the dream of immigrating to Israel, but his link to Israel and what was happening there remained always in his thoughts.

Eventually, in the 1960's, when I often used to meet him in New York, when I was there in the capacity of my work in the Israeli Foreign Service or in my many visits afterwards, I was surprised each time anew by his detailed knowledge of what was happening in Israel, and by his strong opinions on each and every issue.

Ephraim was not at all religious, and did not give his children any religious education, but he was a Jew to his fingertips, and his ties to the Jewish people and the State of Israel were strong and solid.

He suffered a great deal because of his eyes, apparently as a result of defective treatment he received during his youth in Baghdad in the early days of the 20th century, and there were periods when he suffered from complete blindness. But with his strong self discipline, he would get up early each morning, sit upright at his table and listen to all the news broadcasts on the radio, particularly anything concerning events in Israel, and for many hours would listen to recordings of books on topics of Judaism and Jewish history.

Whenever I visited him he would shower me with questions, not only about what was happening in Israel, but also about chapters of the history of the Jewish people, and would show signs of anger and disappointment if my answers did not seem sufficient, or if I showed my ignorance of some parts of our long history.

Ephraim was a fighter. Nothing came easily to him, but only after effort, perseverance and stubbornness. Even in his last struggle with illness he did not give up. The last years of his life were difficult years of continual struggle, which caused him great physical and mental suffering. But as usual he refused to give in or surrender, and fought his illness with all his strength, with his last ounce of strength.

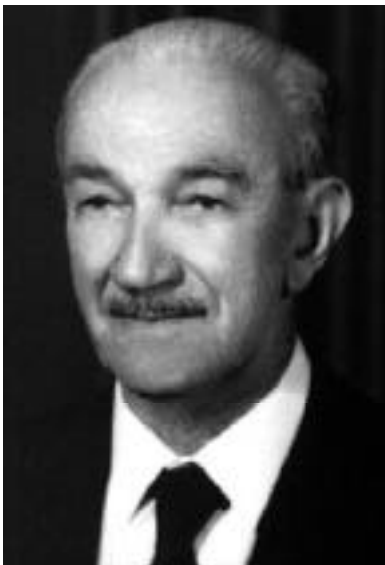
By now he could not walk or see, and Parkinson's Disease had badly affected him, but I remember him from my visits, even in this condition, sitting from early morning in his wheelchair next to the table, listening to the radio or a tape recorder with additional chapters from the history of the Jewish people, that he so loved to hear.

Finally he surrendered to the angel of death, knowing that he was surrounded by a family that loved and admired him, in spite of his strictness, and perhaps because of his strictness, which they knew how to appreciate. His wife, his four sons and his grandchildren knew that underneath this strictness was a husband, father and grandfather with a loving and sensitive heart, who was ready to do anything for his family and his people.

May his memory be for a blessing.

Naim Dangoor writes: I was closely associated with Frank for many years. In 1936, on my return from London I was with him frequently in Tel Aviv where he once rushed to my help when I was in difficulties while swimming in the Mediterranean. During the war, we did an extensive trade between Turkey and the United States and in 1948 during our stay in New York on our long honeymoon, René and I were very grateful for the help and attention that Violet and Frank gave us.

NAJI ELIAS



Obituary by Meer Basri

Reuben Naji Elias was born in 1910. His father Sasson Elias was a landowner in Bagubah, a township east of Baghdad on the road to the Iranian border.

He studied in Baghdad and went into business with his late brother Yehuda. With an Arab partner they built the first cinema house in Bagubah.

He continued his commercial

enterprise for many years in Baghdad. He became interested in the Jewish communal affairs and was elected a member, and then Vice-Chairman of the Jewish Council. When Meer Basri left Baghdad in October 1974, he became President of the Jewish community and continues to hold this office until he finally left Iraq in 1997. He went to live in Amsterdam with his family, but he visited London often.

He died in Amsterdam on 27th August 2000.

Tribute to David M Schayek MC, MA (Cantab) - died 1 October 1999

by: Percy Gourgey MBE

Brought by his parents as a young child from Baghdad where he was born on 29 December 1919, David Schayek went to Harrow Public School and later studied law at St Catherine's College in Cambridge University from 1937-40. After the war he became a successful solicitor. He had celebrated his barmitzvah in the house of the renowned Mrs Flora Sassoon, in Bruton Street, Mayfair, London.

He had a distinguished war career, winning the Military Cross while serving as a junior officer in the Royal Inniskillen Fusiliers. He singlehandedly captured a German machine gun emplacement in Italy. The award citation read: "Lieutenant Schayek led his platoon with distinction onto the first objective - a low ridge known as Hill 40 - which he was the first to reach. Single-handed he attacked one of the enemy machine-gun posts and with his tommy-gun killed the crew. Although wounded twice himself, he continued to command and lead his platoon until the objective had been finally cleared. Lieutenant Schayek had previously shown himself as a courageous and inspiring leader, both in the North African and Sicilian campaigns."

He married in 1949 and with his wife, Lillian, celebrated their golden wedding in June 1999. He was a popular and well-liked among the Iraqi Jewish community in London and was knowledgeable about its history and customs. He was devoted to his family and is survived by his wife, daughters Valerie and Deborah and grandchildren. After his retirement he remained active and worked voluntarily for the Third World charity, "War on Want".

VICTORIA BASHI



I am enclosing a picture of my sister Victoria who passed away in New York recently at age 93.

She was pre-deceased by her husband, Sassoon Aboody Bashi, who was a senior financial officer at the Rafidain Bank in Baghdad until forced out during the purge of Jewish employees by the Iraqi government.

After moving to the States, Victoria continued her academic studies and received a scholarship from the US government. She also took up artistic painting as an avocation.

She is survived by her three children, Betty (Angele) Shear of the UK, and Abbood and Menashi of the US and her grandchildren.

Montreal

Naim S Mahlab

Tribute to Maurice Nathan who died in London on 28 October 1999

by: Percy Gourgey MBE

Maurice Nathan was born in Basra in 1920 but as a child attended the Cathedral Boys High School in Bombay. In 1946 he worked in London before going to Israel in 1949 where he married Rebecca who was born in Baghdad. He served in the Israel Army. Later he and his wife and children eventually settled in Stanmore, London. He was much respected by his colleagues in his business life, and ex-students from Bombay who had settled in England, Israel, Australia and the United States. A well-known Talmudic dictum summarised his character: "Say little, do much and receive all with a cheerful countenance".

He will be sorely missed by his devoted family and a wide circle of friends.



Above : The late Lord Runcie chatting with Naim Dangoor at Lambeth Palace
 Below : The late Dr Robert Runcie on a guided tour of Lambeth Palace.



Lord Robert Runcie

Lord Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury, died of cancer at the age of 78. He was likeable and pragmatic and led the Church of England through a difficult time.

When I had dinner (strictly kosher) at Lambeth Palace some eleven years ago I was received at the door by Dr Robert Runcie, (later Lord Runcie) and when I told him that "I am greatly

honoured to meet you" his reply was "I too am greatly honoured to meet you". Then we spent some time chatting and I told him that I was writing an article on free will and wanted his opinion on the subject. His reply was "As a Christian," he said, "I believe in free will; as a philosopher, I don't. It is a dilemma."

At the dinner was the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn as well as the Chief Rabbi and the atmosphere was very friendly and jovial.

SALMAN SHINA

From *ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM*
 New Edition

Sent in by Prof. Shmuel Moreh

SALMAN SHINA (1898-1978), was Iraqi Jewish journalist, lawyer and a member of the Parliament. Born in the Jewish quarter of Baghdad, he received a conventional religious Jewish education in a Heder (Stadh) and then continued his primary and secondary studies at the secular Jewish school of the Alliance Française Israélite in Baghdad, and excelled in languages. Later, he joined the Ottoman Secondary School in Baghdad and was recruited to the Ottoman Army as a reserve officer during the First World War, as an adjutant and interpreter to the German General von Becker at the Turkish Headquarters.

After the defeat of the Ottoman army in Iraq he was taken prisoner, but refused to join the British forces on the grounds that the Ottomans had always helped the Jews, especially after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. He became a prisoner of war in India, but was re-patriated to Iraq in February 1919.

In 1920 he joined the Law College in Baghdad. On 10 April 1924 his weekly magazine *al-Misbah* was first issued, subtitled in Hebrew letters *Ha-Menorah* ("The Candelabrum"), with its Jewish emblem. This was the first Jewish literary and cultural weekly magazine published in literary Arabic in Arab script in Iraq. Shina edited his magazine, writing its main articles and translated many news items and articles from European and American magazines concerning Jewish and Zionist activities and achievements, in the Holy Land and abroad. The young poet and writer, Anwar Shaul joined him in editing the literary part of the weekly, and many other young Jewish poets and writers became contributors. Their works were among the first romantic poems and short stories published in Iraq, being influenced both by European literature and by the Arabic Mahdjar school in the USA. Shina and Anwar Shaul also encouraged theatrical activities among the Jewish community in Iraq, and among the plays performed was an Arabic translation of Corneille's *Le Cid* (1925). He also established, with other Zionist activists, The Hebrew Literary Association as a club and library, where Jewish journals in Hebrew, English and French were received.

In 1925 Shina started practising as a lawyer, serving the Jewish

community and defending its interests after the rise of the Nazi and Palestinian national activities in Iraq, where there were many Palestinians headed by the Mufti Amin al-Husayni who were later, in October 1939, joined by their leader. Their activities culminated in the *coup d'etat* of Rashid Ali al-Gailani, defeated in May 1941 by the British Army, followed by the Pogrom against the Jews of Baghdad on 1-2 June 1941.

In 1947 Shina was elected a member of the Iraqi Parliament and served until 1951, the most critical years in the history of the Jews of Iraq, which ended with their mass immigration to Israel. Shina himself resigned from the Parliament and emigrated to Israel, where he worked as a lawyer, serving his community and protesting against what he termed "discrimination against the Jews of Iraq, whose properties were frozen in Iraq and who were without community leaders in the new Israeli society. In 1956 he unsuccessfully stood as a candidate for the Knesset. He continued as a lawyer and activist until his death at Ramat Gan in 1978.

The Grave of Ezra Horesh

As you are publishing the "Horesh" family tree I thought your readers might be interested in how we found the grave of my paternal grandfather, Ezra Horesh, who was born in Baghdad in 1850.

A devout and orthodox Jew he emigrated from London about 1930 for Palestine as it was his wish to be buried there. He was buried on the Mount of Olives 29th Adar 1938, aged 90.

We were worried that the grave had been desecrated by the Jordanians during their occupation. So about 1992 we started making enquiries and eventually made a search. The problem was enormous because originally we did not know the exact date of death. Furthermore, the burial registers do not show the location of the graves, there are no row numbers and graves are not dug in chronological order.

We were told it was an impossible task as there were some 10,000 graves in just the most likely section of the Mount of Olives.

We persevered with our enquiries and in October 1997 I was accompanied by my son, Michael, Shlomo Bendahan (with pistol as the area

was dangerous) and a Mr Zevulun Erez who had a considerable knowledge of the cemetery, and we proceeded to the Mount of Olives. Mr Erez said "We will start here" and within ten minutes he had found the grave, which was in perfect order. Unfortunately we could not gather a minyan but a Hashcabah was said.

The grave was in an area which had not been desecrated, but from about three metres to the left the whole area had been destroyed. Had my grandfather been buried about two years later then his grave would have been destroyed.

The following is the text engraved on the tombstone:

מ"ק
של
הזקן הישיש הכשר
רודף צדקה וחסד הנ"פ בשם טוב מהעולם
עזרא (בן) יהושוע (בן) עזרא
ב"ח (בן חכם) אליעזר חורש
נלכ"ע בערב ר"ח ניסן
(נלכח לבית עולמו)
תרצ"ח
ת.נ.צ.כ.ה.

London **Joshua Stanley Horesh**

A VISIT TO RHODES ISLAND

Going on a holiday in this Island does not sound much of a historic destination let alone, of a Jewish connection. It is the largest of the Dodecanese Islands. Its history goes back to four thousand years when, according to their mythology, a fortune teller told the King of Crete that he will be murdered by his son. The son, who loved his father very much, was horrified, fled with his family and friends northwards, and settled in Rhodes. He surrounded his area by magic silver bulls that bellowed whenever the island was in danger of attack.

His father, growing old and hearing that his son was living in Rhodes came to look for him. It was dark when the bulls started bellowing and the prince mistook his dad for a pirate and lopped off his head. So sadly, the prophesy came true.

The Colossus of Rhodes was a splendid bronze state of Helios, their Sun G-d. It stood 100 feet high at the entrance of the harbour, one foot on each side. Its building took twelve years circa 280 BCE. It was recognised as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and was destroyed by an earthquake in 227 BCE. Alas, it cannot be retrieved from the bottom of the sea as thieves had stolen its pieces and sold them as scrap.

Being a small island in an important trading seaway, it was occupied by all the powers that dominated the area. Including Alexander the Great, The Byzantines, Haroun al Rashid, the Crusaders, and the Italians of Genoa who sold it to the Knights of St John in 1306 after the defeat of the Crusaders. In 1522 it became part of The Ottoman Empire. The Italians took it back in 1912 until World War Two. We saw the house built for Mussolini at the top of a mountain, where he spent several holidays. In 1943 the Germans rounded up all the Jews, about 2000, and sent them to Auschwitz. There are now 40 Jews in the city and one synagogue that we saw, being looked after by an old Jewish lady who speaks Ladino.

One of the highest mountains in the Island is called Prophet Elias. I don't know of any other prophet with that name but ours.

Rhodes is infested by poisonous snakes. In old times the farmers brought deers into the island to kill the snakes. It seems that the deer, being afraid of the snake, kicks it until it kills it! Therefore deers are sacred and no-one is allowed to kill them.

The largest tourist group who occupy the best hotels are, believe it or not, Israelis! Many signs in the shops and hotels are in Hebrew.

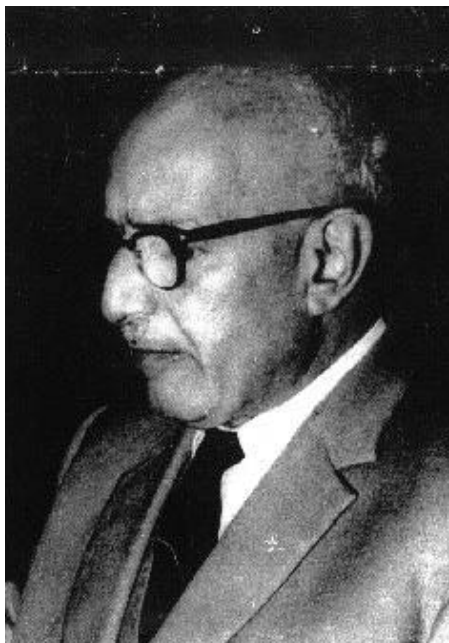
London **Elias Dangoor**

I am a Senior Writer with the American newspaper, The Wall Street Journal. I write feature stories. I have an interest in Judaism, because I was raised Jewish. Harry Korine who is a professor at the London Business School, and is of Iraqi descent, told me about your Scribe newsletter. I am writing to ask if you might send me a few copies. I am curious about the Iraqi Jewish community for its historical roots in Jewish history.

London **Gregg Pascal Zachary**

EZRA HADDAD - AUTHOR, HISTORIAN AND EDUCATOR

by Avner Meiri (Fouad Saigh),
Canada



Dr Ezra Haddad 1900-1972

The first time I met Ezra Haddad was in 1947. I had just graduated from the Jewish High School Al-I'dadya, and was recommended by the late principal, Meir Zakaria, to teach in one of the Jewish Community's Primary Schools.

One day I was called by Mr Haddad, the principal of Al-Watanya School, to meet with him in his office. When we got together, his first question was, how old I am? I responded, 17 years old. He said that I shall be teaching many students who are two years younger than me and that I was lucky to be tall. He suggested that I do not tell the students my age, and also to be firm, but a gentleman with the students, as it was my job to educate them and thus increasing their knowledge. At that time I was impressed with Ezra Haddad's personality, knowledge in many aspects of life and his sense of humour.

During the three months of the summer holidays, most of the teachers would come to the Al-Watanya School almost every day for a few hours, not making preparations for the next school year, but rather to listen to Ezra Haddad tell stories and anecdotes about Babylonian Jewry, his visits to Europe and Palestine.

In fact, Ezra Haddad was a great educator, a leader, an historian and a researcher. In addition to the Arabic

language, Haddad was in full command of English, Hebrew, French, German, Turkish and Farsi.

Haddad's knowledge about the history and culture of the Iraqi Jewish people during the last two centuries was vast. He was born in Baghdad in the year 1900, from a traditional family with low income. His parents sent him to study Torah and the Talmud with the greatest Rabbis in Baghdad. In 1917, he joined the Teacher's Seminar in the city. A year later he was appointed as a teacher at the Talmud Torah School. A few years later, a new school was founded in the quarter of Abbas Afandi, which was called Al-Watanya, and Ezra Haddad was appointed to be its headmaster. It is interesting to note that amongst the teachers of this school were Anwar Shaool, Murad Michael, Baruch Mizrahi and Eliahou Samra.

During the 1920's, Haddad wrote many articles and studies in the early Iraqi magazines AL-MISBAH and AL-HASSED, which were both owned and edited by Iraqi Jews. He translated to Arabic many articles and books dealing with social, political and historical subjects.

In 1945, he translated from Hebrew to Arabic, the famous book, "The Journey of Benjamin of Tudella", the great Jewish traveller from Spain. The introduction to this book was written by the well-known Iraqi historian, Abbas Al-Azzawi. The book was translated in the genre of Arab travellers' tales from the Middle Ages. The book was welcomed by Arab scholars all over the Arab world.

In 1947, Ezra Haddad published the book, "Chapters From the Bible" to be taught at the Jewish schools in Iraq. He wrote many books, amongst them, "The History of Jews in Iraq and Their Folklore". He also translated to Hebrew part of the book "Ruba-eyat Umar Al-Khayam." It is known that at Haddad's home in Baghdad, he had an extensive and famous private library consisting of Arabic, Hebrew, English, French and Turkish language books.

In 1951, Ezra Haddad immigrated to Israel. Soon, he was active in the political and social life of the country. He was elected to the executive committee of the labour union, the Histadrut, and also to the Congress of the Zionist Movement.

In addition to his public activities, Haddad devoted a lot of his time to his favourite literary pre-occupations. He published a book of short stories from the Iraqi Jewish

folklore, and Arabic-Hebrew dictionary, and he also translated to Arabic many articles from Hebrew literature. In 1971, he published his last book in Hebrew, "Milestones, The History of the Jews in Babylon-Iraq", which covered the history from the Babylonian captivity in 597 BCE to the mass exodus to the State of Israel, in 1951 CE.

Ezra Haddad passed away in 1972, leaving us with great memories as an individual, who devoted most of his life to promote education, culture, and Zionism to three generations of Babylonian Jewry.

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF HONG KONG A Resource Guide

The above book by Dr Caroline B Pluss is being published by the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong.

Early Hong Kong Jewish history centred predominantly around the same Baghdadi families who were to be found throughout the Far East and who came to Hong Kong mainly from Bombay. The Sassoons were the mainstays of Jewish life for many years, donating the first synagogue and the land upon which it still stands. They and other Jews from Baghdad, mostly in their employ, formed the core of religious life not only in Hong Kong but also in Shanghai, Burma, Singapore and other far-flung trading posts in the region.

In its over 150 years' existence, the Jewish community of Hong Kong has evolved from a small, distant outpost of the Diaspora into the hub of Jewish life in East and Southeast Asia.

The book on the history of the Jews in Hong Kong has been very thoroughly researched by Dr Caroline Pluss, starting from a very slim base of documentary evidence in the archives in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, most documentation did not survive the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during the Second World War.

We will, of course, send you more about the book when it has been published and is available for purchase.

**Judith LGreen
Director**

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ROSH HASHANA SERVICES AT OHEL RACHEL SYNAGOGUE-SHANGHAI

From *Points East*, a publication of the Sino-Judaic Institute, California

Jeffrey Bernstein is General Manager of *EverReach Logistics* in Shanghai, China. He informed us that two Rosh Hashana services were held this year at the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, one in the morning and one in the evening. Lubavitch rabbis officiated. Men, women and children attended. A meal followed Friday services. The Shanghai community torah was kept in the ark throughout Rosh Hashana Shabbat. It is important to point out that the Ohel Rachel Synagogue was opened only for Rosh Hashana. After that it was closed to the public. Other services and Yom Kippur prayers took place in a hotel. Mr Bernstein described the Shanghai Rosh Hashana celebration in an e-mail to his parents who live in California. They kindly agreed to share its contents with our readers.

"Happy New Year to you from the other side of the world. We wish you all a happy and healthy New Year, filled with many momentous 'firsts'."

We started with a first in Shanghai. The Ohel Rachel Synagogue (one of Shanghai's 7 original synagogues) was opened to the Jewish community for Rosh Hashana services. This is the first time since 1949 that Shanghai Jews could celebrate the High Holidays in their own house of worship.

As we walked past the ivy covered walls of the building that had not been used a Synagogue for the past 50 years, the strong symbolism of the moment struck us. Although the outside walls were darkened by layers of soot, the inside was bright and clean, displaying its old grandeur for the holy days. We are grateful that the Shanghai City's Bureau of Education, who occupied the building, had respected its original architecture and carefully preserved the original state of its interior.

It was exciting to be part of this important day. We felt we were experiencing history in the making."

East or West, home is best

Wherever it is, and however far you may travel from it, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

DISCOVERY OF OLDEST SYNAGOGUE IN THE AMERICA'S

One of the most unusual archaeological projects ever undertaken in Brazil is under way: the excavation and reconstruction in Recife of the first synagogue built in the New World.

The synagogue, Kahal Zur Israel, or Rock of Israel, flourished in the mid-1600's when the Dutch briefly controlled this part of north-eastern Brazil and the sugar and tobacco plantations that made it rich.

Evacuation began in September 1999 but because the Inquisition had done everything possible to obliterate all signs of the Jewish presence, the dig began with some doubts.

"We were certain we were in the right place when we came across a mikvah," the ritual bath used by observant Jews.

With the support of the Brazilian government and several foundations, the small Jewish community here plans to turn the site into a museum and Cultural Center of the Jewish Presence in Brazil. Reconstruction of the building's interior is to be completed this year.

Brazil's Jewish population today, around 170,000, is barely one-tenth of 1 per cent of the country's 170 million people. "There is no doubt that Jews contributed greatly to the construction of Brazil", especially in the crucial early years of Portuguese colonial rule.

The first Portuguese expedition to land in Brazil, 500 years ago included a Polish-born Jew as its chief interpreter, as well as astronomers and mapmakers who are believed to have been of Jewish origin. Early settlers included many so-called marranos, Jews from the Iberian Peninsula who had converted to Christianity under duress but were eager to escape the clutches of the Inquisition to resume openly practising their faith.

By 1590, however, the Inquisition had installed itself in Brazil and begun persecuting these "new Christians". So when the Dutch seized the colony of Pernambuco in 1630 and announced a policy of religious tolerance, those who moved to Recife included not only a Rabbi and cantor from Amsterdam but many Jewish families from territory under Portuguese control.

"At the height of the Dutch period, Recife may have had a larger

Jewish presence than Amsterdam itself". "The most reliable calculations indicate about 1,400 Jews, nearly half its population of free white civilians".

But in 1654 the Portuguese drove out the Dutch, and fear of reprisals led to the dispersion of the Jews here. A group of 23 returning to Amsterdam were landed at a fledgling Dutch colony called Nieuw Amsterdam. They were the first Jews ever to enter North America.

Their difficulties did not end when they reached what is today New York City. Peter Stuyvesant, governor of the settlement, sent a letter to the Dutch West Indies Company recommending "most seriously that such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ, be not allowed further to infest and trouble this new colony."

The response he received ordered that the newcomers be permitted "to live, trade and travel" freely and be given a burial ground of their own, which was established near what is today Chatham Square. It came to be known as the Brazilian Cemetery. But it was only after the English displaced the Dutch that the Jews from Recife were permitted to build a synagogue. The congregation, Shearith Israel, still exists, with its synagogue now at 70th Street and Central Park West, the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue. There are still some people in Brazil's interior who believe they are Jewish because they have a menorah or prayer book handed down to their grandparents by their grandparents before them, or following family customs that fit squarely within the Sephardic tradition."

The ability of elements of faith to persist for so long in such isolation is truly an amazing thing.

From New York Times

I have just discovered you. I have one of the largest Sephardic genealogy websites on the net which you are welcome to visit. I will be adding a link to your website under my section for Iraq.

Please consider reciprocating and let me know if you decide to do so.

Jeff Malka

"Resources for Sephardic Genealogy" website:

<http://www.orthohelp.com/geneal/sefardi.htm>

(Jewish Agency for Israel TOP TEN; Britannica 2 STARS)

Dayan Toledano with the King of Morocco - July 2000



At the request of the King, Dayan Toledano blessed him in Hebrew and in Arabic. The King spoke about Israel and he promised he would carry on the work of his father, namely that a solution should be found between Israel and the Palestinians. Afterwards, the delegation was taken to the Mausoleum where the kings of Morocco are buried. Dayan Toledano recited Hashcaba, Memorial Prayer, for the King's grandfather, Mohammed V and his father, Moulai Hassan II. Dayan Toledano wore special robes which the Dayanim of Morocco have been wearing since time immemorial.

Dayan Toledano was also taken to visit the cousin of the King who is not well, as well as to visit the Jewish leaders in Rabat.

Correction :

The caption of the picture at the bottom of page 21 was incomplete of the last issue (No. 72).

The people appearing in the photograph are Moroccan Jewish leaders with King Mohammed V (father of the late King Hassan II) in the circa 1950's:

Left to right: Rabbi Barouch Abraham Toledano (father of Dayan Pinchas Toledano); lay leader, Rabbi Raphael Barouch Toledano; Sidi Mohammed V; Rabbi Joseph Messas, lay leader.

Note that the King was standing on a step, to make him appear as the biblical King Saul, first King of Israel, "head and shoulders above the rest".

Busiest men find the most time

People who do a lot are the people who have most energy. However busy they are, they can usually manage to do something more.

REUNION OF THE FRANK INY SCHOOLSTUDENTS OF THE CLASS THAT GRADUATED IN 1962

A reunion was held in London last May of the Frank Iny students of the class that eventually graduated in 1962. The group stayed overnight at Danesfield House, Marlow-on-Thames and then attended a Barbeque lunch at David Gabbay's house in Marlow.



Shown above left to right: Standing:

Ann Shamash; Lisa Hoory; David Gabbay; David Shamash; Sylvia Koreen (née Ibrahim); Desirée Dellal (Shina); Rita Tricot; Sami Tricot; Olivia Shashou (Sheena); Gilda Aslan; Edna Shamash; Laurette Kashi (Nourallah); Ibtisam Shaul (Heskel); Emma Ghazal; Layla Shalom (Rahamim); Jack Shemtob; Faiza Vasely (Jacob); Suad Yohanan (Ibrahim); Joyce Gabbay; Ketty Cohen (Shohet); Emile Cohen; Ingrid Samra (Bekhor); Marsha Yamen (Sassoon); Lydia Jiji (Dabby); Isabelle Bar-Moshe (Twaig); Michael Cowan; Jack Atraghji; Olivia Cowan (Timan); Karim Timan; Ruth Timan; David Shamash; Gilda Shamash; Estelle Shohet; Shoua Jiji; Tommy Vasely; Sami Balass; Aslan Aslan; Yamen F Yamen; Samir Ghazal; Sabah Shamash; Charles Timan; Saïd Hoory; Ferial Balass (Mussaffi); Sasson Yamen; Samir Samra; Samir Shohet; Jimmy Shamash; David Dellal.

REINCARNATION IS AN ALIEN BELIEF, ARGUES RABBI DR JEFFREY COHEN

The former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Ovadiah Yossef, was at the centre of a furore last week over his nauseating suggestion that the six million who died in the Holocaust were "reincarnated sinners".

Behind his preposterous theory lies the mystical doctrine of gilgul, where the soul is reincarnated or "transmigrated" to reach a new level of perfection or to atone for some gross imperfection in a previous earthly existence. This idea, however, did not originate in Jewish sources and is not found in the Talmud, though it was widespread in early Christian circles from the second century.

Scholars variously trace it to early Gnostic sectarian teaching, to Greek, Platonic or neo-Platonic thought, or Indian philosophy. It was later promoted by Anan ben David in Baghdad, the eighth century founder of Karaism (the dissident Jewish sect which accepts the Bible but not the Talmud), who may have borrowed it from the Islamic Mutazila sect, and it entered Jewish Kabbalistic literature in the late 12th century work, *Sefer Habahir*.

Though it met with trenchant opposition from our major medieval philosophers, this did not prevent its becoming a cardinal doctrine in the later kabbalistic system of Isaac Luria, leader of the 16th century Safed circle of mysticism. It was even defended by such sages as Moses Nachmanides and Menasseh ben Israel. With the rise of Chasidism in the 18th century, belief in reincarnation was, as it were, reincarnated.

Over the years the *gilgul* concept underwent various developments, such as the notion of the transmigration of a soul into the body of lower forms of nature; or the doctrine of *ibbur*, "impregnation", when a reincarnated soul *may* enter a host body in later life as an attachment to, or impregnation of, the existing soul.

Its residence, for but a brief period there, is in order to enable some restless, righteous soul to compensate for any particular mitzvah that it neglected to perform in its original incarnation, and so attain spiritual perfection.

A large body of opinion, however, did not view transmigration so positively. Rather, it was seen as a

punishment imposed upon those inferior souls that had failed to stop their previous bodies from perpetrating particularly heinous (especially sexual) sins. Out of this came the idea of a dybbuk, a malevolent spirit possessing a person, often to seek some personal retribution, a theme taken up in Yiddish literature from the 17th century onward.

There is a great danger in mysticism: that unless one has a firm grounding in normative Judaism, it can totally distort one's faith and undermine one's observance. This is what happened to the followers of Shabbetai Zvi, the 17th century false Messiah, and to those of Jacob Frank (mid 18th century), who was regarded as Shabbetai's reincarnation.

The Frankists paraded outwardly as Orthodox Jews, but were committed to a belief in Shabbatcanism which prompted them to initiate a widespread attack on the Talmud and Jewish law. Under the influence of the Zohar, the main kabbalistic work, and some distorted Jewish mystical ideas, they ignored the Torah's sexual prohibitions, adopting at first a synthesis of Jewish and Christian principles, and the celebration of avowedly religious orgies, and ended up embracing Catholicism.

The result of their attacks on the Talmud was that the Church authorities carried out a systematic burning of cartloads of Jewish religious works. In addition to the rabbinic cherm, or excommunication, imposed upon the sect. Isaac Luria's recommendation that kabbalah should not be studied by those under the age of 40 was vigorously enforced.

In our own day, alternative religions and cults have mushroomed, some using brain-washing techniques on recruits, estranging them from their families, and subjecting them to fearsome regimentation. Ruined lives, sometimes even suicides, have been the result.

Popular mysticism is generally incomprehensible to those who merely dabble in it, leading to their potential manipulation by charlatans who seek to control the minds and pockets of their followers.

As for the courses in mysticism being promoted by some in our own community, while there is no evidence of any of the above excesses, our response should be to spell out, at the very least, their philosophical pitfalls.

There is a lifetime of spiritual stimulation in our own traditional

sources, which are far more elevating and compelling than any of the alternative traditions on offer.

Like the communication of G-d to Moses, the truths of our tradition are framed, according to the Torah, "mouth to mouth, with clarity and not in riddles, so that the nature of G-d may be clearly perceived."

Our sources hold that the everyday life that G-d would have us lead can be invested with the beauty of holiness; that our rational mind is sufficient to think spiritual thoughts; and that our need to interrelate ethically with our fellow-man is far more important than a leap into the whirlpool of mystic speculation.

Rabbi Cohen is minister of Stanmore Synagogue

From *The Jewish Chronicle*, London

Rabbi Dr Jeffrey Cohen's article confirming that reincarnation is an alien belief is a shining light in the current darkness of superstitious and magical beliefs still propagated by some Orthodox rabbis in this country, Israel and other parts of the world.

The late Ernest Wallis Budge, who was a leading Hebrew scholar and keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum, made it clear in "amulets and Superstitions" that the Kabbalah, as we know it today, is also foreign to authentic Jewish belief. He wrote: "The Kabbalah of Middle Ages represents a mass of beliefs and traditions which the Hebrews adopted from the Egyptians, Babylonians and Assyrians, Syrians, Zoroastrians, Gnostics, Greeks, Arabs and even European peoples."

The tragedy for Judaism in this country is that Rabbi Cohen is one of the few Orthodox rabbis who has the integrity and courage to speak out about the challenge superstitions impose on the future of authentic traditional Judaism.

London Maurice J Summerfield

Isaac Luria's idea that G-d had to withdraw from part of his Creation, to make room for man's independence is untenable. The presence of G-d is everywhere in the Universe. The only concession that G-d made to man was to give him a measure of free will.

Et Tu Switzerland?

from: Albert Khabbaza MD

A panel of independent historians has concluded that wartime Swiss officials refused entry to thousands of Jewish refugees even after it was known that they faced almost certain death in Nazi Germany.

By the summer of 1942 at the latest, the historians said in their detailed 350-page report, the Swiss authorities were aware that Jews were being annihilated by the Third Reich.

The historians also said there was no evidence that accepting many more asylum seekers would have put neutral Switzerland in danger of "invasion by the Axis or caused insurmountable economic difficulties." They thus rejected an argument advanced in Switzerland's defence after earlier disclosures of the country's treatment of Jews trying to escape the Holocaust.

Rather, the report cited anti-Semitism and an entrenched fear of foreigners in Switzerland as the reasons the authorities turned away more than 24,000 Jews.

Swiss officials "became involved in the crimes of the Nazi regime by abandoning the refugees to their persecutors," Jean-Francois Bergier, the Swiss historian who headed the panel, said at a news conference today.

The study is part of a larger historical inquiry, commissioned by the Swiss government, that produced another report last year on Switzerland's gold transactions with Hitler's Germany. Earlier this week, a separate report by Swiss banks and American Jewish groups found that 54,000 Swiss bank accounts might be linked to Holocaust victims.

The latest report was prepared during the last two years by nine historians from Switzerland, Israel, the United States, Britain and Poland who had unprecedented access to the Swiss national archives as part of Switzerland's effort to come to terms with its wartime history. Jewish groups praised the new report, but there were complaints from the government and from some private groups that the sharply critical study failed to measure official actions against the troubled international situation at the time.

Although the report did not delve deeply into other countries' treatment of World War II refugees, the historians said at the news conference that Sweden, also neutral during World War II, had been significantly more helpful than

Switzerland. Sweden, like Switzerland, had limited Jewish immigration between 1938 and 1942, but reversed its policy after officials learned of the mass killings of Jews.

Switzerland followed suit only in July 1944, when it declared that persecution for being Jewish was a valid ground for granting asylum.

Switzerland's governing body, the Federal Council, issued a statement today saying the country's asylum policy "was marred by errors, omissions and compromises" - renewing its 1995 apology for wartime refugee policy. "Nothing can make good the consequences of decisions taken at the time, and we pay our respects before the pain of those who were denied access to our territory and were abandoned to unspeakable suffering, deportation and death," the seven ministers said.

But the ministers said the report ignored "fears generated by the threat facing Switzerland, the uncertainty of maintaining, foreign trade to ensure the country's survival."

Switzerland took in 51,000 civilian refugees during the war, including some 21,000 Jews, although many of those had slipped into the country illegally and were then allowed to stay.

There were some heroes among Swiss officials, particularly among consular employees who "were very liberal in granting entry visas," but the report details specific instances of serious "human suffering" to highlight the impact of Swiss refugee policy.

The study cited as particularly egregious the Swiss push for a requirement, enacted in 1938, that German passports for Jews be stamped with a "J." It also cited the closing of the border with Germany in 1942 to refugees persecuted solely because they were Jews.

"Without Swiss pressure, the passports would not have been stamped until later, perhaps not at all," the report concluded. "This would have made it less difficult for refugees to find a country willing to accept them."

The report was particularly critical of the 1942 decision to close Swiss borders to Jews even though senior officials were "aware of the fact the refugees sent back were being threatened with deportation to Eastern Europe culminating in death."

Although there was some public protest, the Swiss authorities stepped up rejections of asylum seekers - even denying most the right to pass through the country to other destinations -

declining to "help people in mortal danger," the report said.

Scribe: The action of the Swiss Government in denying entry to Jewish refugees was to satisfy the greed of Swiss bankers who saw in the German persecution of Jews an opportunity to grab their assets which they had trustfully salted away in Switzerland.

Pope's visit to the Western Wall

Pope John Paul II made a special visit to the Western Wall and as is customary on such visits, he slipped a piece of paper containing a wish and a prayer. It was asking G-d for forgiveness for those who caused the Jewish people suffering and pledging 'genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant'.

I think that this prayer is an important turning point in the inter-action between Christianity and Judaism and that everybody should know about it.

Thank you very much for your regular sending us our beloved Scribe which we enjoy very much.

Ramat Gan, Israel

Dr Raouf Semah

Scribe: The Pope first asked the Jewish people to forgive and forget the horrors and the crime of the Holocaust. When he was told that we can't forget, and that we have no authority from the 6 million victims to forgive, he apparently decided to turn to G-d for his forgiveness.

We are not sure if our G-d recognises the Pope. Forgiveness can only be obtained from true and genuine repentance, but anti-semitism is as strong as ever among Christians and in the Church.

At a recent updating of the website for "Resources in Sephardic Genealogy" a link has been placed to your website at the following location:

<http://www.orthohelp.com/geneal/sefardim.htm#Iraq>

e-mail

Jeff Malka

I have just finished reading (for the third time) "If this is a man". I found your article to be a moving summary, and would like to thank you for its information.

e-mail (UK)

Rachel Spires