

Ari Alexander ~ The Jews Of Baghdad And Zionism: 1920-1948



The Old Jewish Quarter of Baghdad

Introduction

The Jewish community in Baghdad virtually disappeared with the mass exodus of 120,000 Iraqi Jews to Israel between 1949-1951. This Jewish community lived in Iraq for approximately 2,500 years and my thesis looks closely at the years between 1920- 1948 in order to gain as much insight as possible into the complex set of economic, political and religious factors that coalesce to form the lived experience of Baghdadi Jews during this period. It is my contention that during this time, an historic and thus far irreversible break in Arab-Jewish relations occurred, and that Baghdad is a crucial arena to observe this shift as it unfolds. This thesis is a study of the impact of anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism and anti-imperial 'Britishism' on the Baghdadi Jewish community.

Aside from the obvious hatred sown by the conflict between Palestinians and Jews in Palestine, the relationship between Muslim, Christian and Jewish Arabs more generally was destructively altered by the Zionist project. This thesis aims to contribute to a body of literature that illuminates what went wrong in relations between Arabs and Jews in the modern Middle East. It is framed by the contemporary question of whether or not Zionism alone accounts for the deep-seated hostility towards Jews that is currently so widespread in the Arab-Muslim world. This question is of relevance to Zionist historiography, which is notably narrow in its interest in the subject. And it is also of interest to the uninformed

public, which tends to hold an opinion—either that Arabs pathologically hate Jews or that Zionists are to blame for all of the troubles in the region.

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The complete thesis: <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/Alexander.pdf>

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Jordan Salama ~ From Exile To Exodus: The Story Of The Jews Of Iraq

Jewish Virtual Library ~ Jews Of Iraq



One of the longest surviving Jewish communities still lives in Iraq. In 722 B.C.E., the northern tribes of Israel were defeated by Assyria and some Jews were taken to what is now known as Iraq. A larger community was established in 586 B.C.E., when the Babylonians conquered the southern tribes of Israel and enslaved the Jews. These Jews distinguished themselves from Sephardim, referring to themselves as Baylim (Babylonians). In later centuries, the region became more hospitable to Jews and it became the home to some of the world's most prominent

scholars who produced the Babylonian Talmud between 500 and 700 C.E.

During these centuries under Muslim rule, the Jewish Community had its ups and downs. By World War I, they accounted for one third of Baghdad's population. In 1922, the British received a mandate over Iraq and began transforming it into a modern nation-state.

Iraq became an independent state in 1932. Throughout this period, the authorities drew heavily on the talents of the small well-educated Jews for their ties outside the country and proficiency in foreign languages. Iraq's first minister of finance, Yehezkel Sasson, was a Jew. These Jewish communities played a vital role in the development of judicial and postal systems.

In the 1936 Iraq Directory, the "Israelite community" is listed among the various other Iraqi communities, such as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and Sabians, and numbering at about 120,000. Hebrew is also listed as one of Iraq's six languages.

Yet, following the end of the British mandate, the 2,700-year-old Iraqi Jewish community suffered horrible persecution, particularly as the Zionist drive for a state intensified. In June 1941, the Mufti-inspired, pro-Nazi coup of Rashid Ali sparked rioting and a pogrom in Baghdad during the Jewish Feast of Shavuot. Armed Iraqi mobs, with the complicity of the police and the army, murdered 180 Jews and wounded almost 1,000 in what became known as the Farhud pogrom. Immediately following, the British Army re-entered Baghdad, and success of the Jewish community resumed. Jews built a broad network of medical facilities, schools and cultural activity. Nearly all of the members of the Baghdad Symphony Orchestra were Jewish. Yet this flourishing environment abruptly ended in 1947, with the partition of Palestine and the fight for Israel's independence. Outbreaks of anti-Jewish rioting regularly occurred between 1947 and 1949. After the establishment of Israel in 1948 Zionism became a capital crime.

In 1950, Iraqi Jews were permitted to leave the country within a year provided they forfeited their citizenship. A year later, however, the property of Jews who emigrated was frozen and economic restrictions were placed on Jews who chose to remain in the country. From 1949 to 1951, 104,000 Jews were evacuated from Iraq in Operations Ezra & Nechemia (named after the Jewish leaders who took their people back to Jerusalem from exile in Babylonia beginning in 597 B.C.E.);

another 20,000 were smuggled out through Iran.

Read more: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-iraq>

On Friendship/(Collateral Damage)

We have decided to follow up the art manifestation *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) III - The Third GaLUT: Baghdad, Jerusalem, Amsterdam* with an exchange of ideas in this separate section '*On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)*'.

On Friendship/(collateral Damage) III - The Third GaLUT: Baghdad, Jerusalem, Amsterdam (7th of September 2019 - 19th of January 2020) artist Joseph Sassoon Semah shares his lost rich Jewish Babylonian cultural heritage through art and culture at 36 location in Amsterdam.

(see <http://www.josephsemah.nl/onfriendship3/index.html>).



By exchanging research, cultural heritage, art, exhibitions, performances, round-table discussions, interviews and video reports, articles on internet and an English version publication, knowledge, opinions and experiences have been shared, generating attention for a different outlook than the dominant Western one. By returning to the source of rich Jewish Babylonian traditions, the history of art and culture has been freed of one-sided information and interpretation. Awareness has specifically been raised for a Judaism where not only the Holocaust is a central issue, but a Judaism that also does justice to the rich Mizrahi culture.

Exile and the meaning of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, identity crises, the urgency for diversity and the necessity of refocusing on cultural heritage in museums and cultural institutions have been put on the agenda.

One thing we have learned hardly anyone knows anything about the Mizrahi heritage, that is the museums, the cultural institutions and the public. It is important that the underexposed histories and perspectives become part of

Western history and its future. It needs a lot of attention to put the issues relating to Judeo-Arabic heritage on the agenda.

Artists, writers, poets, thinkers and researchers are invited to reflect on the underexposed histories and perspectives that would suit this new section *On Friendship / (Collateral damage)*. We like to integrate two important subjects: the cultural, political issue and the artistic activities. We are also determinate to integrate poetry: every month a different poet. Mati Shemoelof is the first one. And every month we shall add a new chapter in *The Art of Cooking* by Jom Semah.

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