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The Jews of Iraq since 1932

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The Jews of Iraq since 1932

Abstract

The Jewish community of Iraq is of great antiquity; it is one of the oldest organized communities of Jews in a foreign land, going back over a period of 2500 years. The greater part of Jews were uprooted and exiled into Babylonia, at the time of the destruction of the first temple of Jerusalem, when the unfortunate exiles, sighing under the rod of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers and taskmasters, stopped in this place, hung their harps on the willows of the brook, and wept bitterly at the remembrance of Zion.

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THE JEWS OF IRAQ SINCE 1932

by

Gershon Rifwan

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Thesis for M. A. Degree in Middle Eastern Studies

Dropsie College

Phildelphia, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

The Jewish community of Iraq is of great antiquity; it is one of the oldest organized communities of Jews in a foreign land, going back over a period of 2500 years. The greater part of Jews were uprooted and exiled into Babylonia, at the time of the destruction of the first temple of Jerusalem, when the unfortunate exiles, sighing under the rod of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers and taskmasters, stopped in this place, hung their harps on the willows of the brook, and wept bitterly at the remembrance of Zion.

Although they lived in a foreign and hostile environment, they kept their unique way of life to some degree, which the foreign influence did not change in its originality.

The majority of the Jews of Iraq are the direct descendants of those Jews who, after the destruction of the first temple 2500 years ago, were led into exile in Babylonia and remained there after some of them returned to Jerusalem with Ezra.

The Jewish exiles in Babylonia, who were active in the political and civic life of their country, secured for themselves some political status as a "state within a state." They were actually ruled by an exilarch (Resh Galuta: Chief of the Diaspora) of their own. The exilarch had high political authority and was vested with the exclusive power to levy taxes. That authority, which enjoyed the recognition of successive Persian and Parthian, i.e. Achaemenid, Arsacid, and Sassanid rulers. They existed for several hundred years, until the Arab conquest and perhaps until the Mongol invasion, an uninterrupted period of

close to a thousand years. In the Talmudic and Gaonic period, under the Arsacids, Sassanids, and Abbasides, Babylonian Jewry grew in power, wealth, and culture. In its golden age, Baghdad was the most influential city in the Middle East. In the Persian Period, 539-331 B. C., the Jews of Babylonia were prosperous. In addition to their work in agriculture, they were artisans and traders. The Persian administration was on the whole tolerated, and the Jews enjoyed considerable autonomy with the exilarch. They had their own secular administration complete with courts of law and with jurisdiction in all fields. They adopted an eastern Aramaic dialect at the time when Hebrew was still spoken in Palestine. In the Greek Period, 331-160 B. C., the Jews began to settle in a large number of new cities. Jews served in the Greek Army.¹ After the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans (70 C. E.), the number of Jews in Babylonia was increased by immigrants from Palestine and reached a million. Another sharp increase occurred after the defeat of Simeon Bar Kochba (d. 135 C. E.), a revolutionary leader who organized a revolt against the Romans which engaged the best Roman forces for three years. The Gaonic Age is a period in Jewish history which embraces about 450 years. The Gaonim generally wrote their works in Aramaic, and later in Arabic, but frequently used Hebrew also. About the year 658 C. E. the head of the Academy of Sura (an aca-

1. "Babylonia," Universal Jewish Encyclopedia . pp. 12

demy which was founded in the early third century near Babylonia and later transferred to Baghdad) assumed the title of Gaon, thus giving to Jewry a religious head as well as a civil head. During this period the Jews dwelt in Baghdad in a special neighbourhood called Dar-El-Yahud (the neighbourhood of the Jews), which was approached by a bridge called the Bridge of the Jews.

Saadia Gaon, the first of the long succession of medieval Jewish philosophers, was called to the Gaonate from Cairo to be the president of the Academy of Sura.

In the Arab Period, 640-1258 C. E., caliph Omer confirmed the authority of the exilarch. Under caliph Othman, all went well. The Jews must have helped caliph Ali since he showed them many favors and allowed Jewish refugees from Arabia to settle in Iraq.

The history of the Jews during the first century of Omayyad rule is obscure because of the continuous hostilities. It is certain that non-Moslems were strictly forbidden to build new synagogues by some caliphs. Caliph Marwan II, the last Omayyad, is said to have executed an exilarch.

Under the Abbaside caliphs, beginning in the year 750, Babylonia was the spiritual center of Judaism, and its influence brought many Babylonian customs into general use. Secular culture increased among both Arabs and Jews. They translated the works of Greek and Latin philosophers. Arabic succeeded Aramaic as the language of the Jews, and in the middle of the tenth century Saadia Gaon made a translation of the Bible into Arabic. The influence of Babylonian Jewry in Jewish cultural life persists to this day. Among the heritages of Judaism that came from

Babylonia are the names of the months, the system of Hebrew vowels and accents. In the stories of The Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights) some Jewish characters are described as rich merchants. It is most likely that the situation of the Jews in that period was prosperous. During the twelfth century the Jews of Baghdad were granted a certain measure of self-government. Caliph Al-Muktafi appointed a layman, Solomon Hasdai, as exilarch. He was succeeded by his son Daniel, at whose death the Baghdad exilarchate came to an end. In 1258 Baghdad was captured by the Mongols under Hulagu. In 1401 many Jews were killed when the city was besieged and destroyed by Tamerlane. The worst period for the Jews was from 1628 to 1639, when Baghdad was the scene of battles between the Persians and the Turks, in which the Turks were ultimately victorious.² Thereafter their situation began to improve. During the Turkish rule, Iraqi Jewry lived the comparatively quiet life of a remote and neglected Ottoman province. The administration generally inefficient and corrupt, did not oppress the Jews. Life has never been secure for the Jews of Iraq, and they constantly sought to emigrate whenever opportunity offered. When David Pasha, a Turkish ruler, persecuted the Jews of Baghdad, a stream of emigration began in the years 1828-1829. Many emi-

2. Ibid., p. 31.

grated to Persia and India (among them was David Sassoon, who arrived in Bombay in 1834 and who soon became the head of the community). Iraqi Jews also settled in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Those who left Baghdad for distant lands spiritually and religiously remained dependent on the teaching and tradition of Baghdad and spoke their own Arabic dialect among themselves.

A number of families emigrated to Australia and England, where they played an important role in public and spiritual life. Some families emigrated to Palestine where they established a Baghdad colony called "Ole Babel" in Jerusalem. In spite of the great distance, they did not fail to contribute to their Baghdad community. In addition to the financial grants, they established public institutions in Iraq. Also in Palestine they established institutions such as Kfar Yeheskel and Kadoori, a famous school of agriculture on Mount Tabor.

Israel Benjamin, a traveler, who visited Baghdad in 1848, reports that there were 3,000 Jewish families in Baghdad, who lived contentedly under a Hacham-Bashi (Chief Rabbi).

During the First World War, however, the Jewish community suffered great hardship at the hands of Turkish governors. Just prior to the fall of Baghdad in 1917, some of its leading members suffered death, torture, and imprisonment. Therefore the Jews welcomed the establishment of the state of Iraq under the British mandate. Many immediately offered their services to the building up of its administration.

The British captured Baghdad in 1917 and set up the king-

dom of Iraq, which was a British mandate until 1932, when it became independent.

In Iraq, liberated from the Turkish rule, and throughout the reign of King Faisal I, under the British mandate (1921-1933), the position of the Jewish minority remained favorable. The Jews benefited considerably from the creation of the new administration. Because of their education and their knowledge of foreign languages, many of them played a prominent role in government service and trade. They were allowed to expand their school system, and Hebrew was taught in addition to Arabic, English, and French. Some of the teachers were from Palestine. Organizations of Jewish youth sprang up and Zionist activity was not interfered with.

Basra, the port town of Iraq and second in size after Baghdad, had 10,000-11,000 Jews until the year 1933. Mosul, a city in the north, had 6,000; Kirkuk, 5,000; and all west of Kirkuk, 2,800. In the Kurdish area, smaller Jewish communities of 1,400 to 2,000 existed in Sulaimaniya, Hillah, Habbaniya, and Amara. Few Jewish families were to be found in remote villages all over the country.²

It is probable that Jews settled in Basra soon after its foundation in 638. A.D.

Jews in the remote section of the country are largely removed from westernizing influences, and have to a great extent retained the language, customs, and religion of their ancestors who settled there many centuries ago.

1. Bureau of Jewish Agency. The Jews of Iraq. p. 5.
2. Ibid. pp. 3-4.

Chapter 1--Demography

A. Baghdad: The origin of the Jews of Kurdistan is mentioned in the Bible. There were approximately 130,000 Jews in Iraq in 1950. 90,000-100,000 were in the capital city, Baghdad.¹ There were no special quarters for Jews in Baghdad; they were found in all parts of the city, though they did tend to congregate in certain streets of different quarters. Among the Jews of southern and central Iraq (mainly concentrated in Baghdad, Basra) there were almost no variations with respect to language, custom, and cultural standards, but there were differences between them and the Jewish population of northern Iraq, who were mainly villager type.

B. Provinces: Basra, the port town of Iraq and second in size after Baghdad, had 10,000-11,000 Jews until the year 1950. Mosul, a city in the north, had 6,000; Arbil, 5,000; the oil town of Karkuk, 2,800. In the Kurdish area, smaller Jewish communities of 1,400 to 2,000 existed in Suleimania, Hilla, Naizra, and Amara. Few Jewish families were to be found in remote villages all over the country.² It is probable that Jews settled in Basra soon after its foundation in 638. A.D. The language of the Kurdish Jew is: Jews in the remote section of the country are largely removed from westernizing influences, and have to a great extent retained the language, customs, and religion of their ancestors who settled there many centuries ago.

1. Research of Jewish Agency, The Jew of Iraq, p. 5.
 2. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

C. Kurdish Jews: physical structure resembling peasants. They

The origin of the Jews of Kurdistan is mentioned in the Bible, describing the exile of Jews to Kelah, Habor, and mountains of Media. This is evidenced in the oral tradition they know and the Aramaic language they still speak until this day.

The Kurdish Jews were almost the only Jewish community who worked in agriculture. There were villages such as Sandur, Akra, Both Nora, etc. entirely populated by Jews who worked in agriculture.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there were Jewish settlements in Nasilin, Amadia, and especially in Mosul where the community was led by an exilarch who was independent from the one in Baghdad. The local sheik (Agha) was responsible for the security of the Jews who lived under his authority. The Jews used to pay for their protection with money, food, and various services.

In 1948, Kurdistan of Iraq had 16,000-18,000 Jews (Mosul, 7,000; Arbil, 2,000-2,500; Karkuk, 300 families; Zaku, 5,000).

The Kurdish Jews lived somewhat apart from the rest of the Jewish community, just as the Kurdish minority lives apart from the Arab population. Both are different from the Arabs in general character and daily habits. The language of the Kurdish Jew is Targum (a form of Aramaic), while those in Mosul speak Kurdish. They were mainly traders in towns. In the Amedia district some of the Jews were engaged in tilling the land. The dress of Kurdish Jews was different from other Jews.

In addition to speaking Aramaic, Kurdish Jews are distin-

guished by strong physical structure resembling peasants. They are capable of work in agriculture and other physical occupations in mountain regions.

Like all countries in Asia, their women yield to the wishes of their husbands and carry alone the whole burden of housework. The young men begin working at an early age. They accompany their fathers in selling, help in cultivation of the land, and work in the workshop. Numerous children--especially male children--were counted a blessing and each pregnancy was welcomed with joy.

D. Institutions of the Community:

Between the years 1849-1932, there were thirteen Chief Rabbis of the Jewish community in Baghdad, who were mediators between the community and the authorities. From the year 1933 onward, this position was called Rais-El-Taifa (head of the community).

Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kedhourri was elected in 1933 as head of the community. The General Council over which he presides consists of sixty members for the city: seven religious and fifty-three lay members. Executive elections are held every four years. The duties of the council are the control and training of Rabbis and matters of doctrine. The Jewish religious court is in charge of marriage, divorce, dowries, separation, maintenance, non-civil wills within the community, and other matters of personal status. The highest court is the Jewish Legal Appeal Commission.

The organization of the Jewish community is defined by the

law passed in 1931, which laid down the composition and functions of the various institutions of the three communities of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. A fourth community, that of Diala, was added in 1932.

The community was well organized. In Baghdad there were a great number of welfare and social services, several hospitals, and about twenty-five schools. By 1930, 7,200 pupils were attending ten schools under Alliance Israelite Universelle administration. Thanks to these services, the state of health and the general standard of education of the Jews are far above the average level in Iraq. Jews comprised 90% of the candidates from Iraq for the London matriculation examination.

A society, "Shomre Miswa," for the promotion of religious life in Baghdad was established in the summer of 1868. Its aim was to improve the education, especially that of the poor.

There were other charitable institutions in Baghdad to maintain Jewish hospitals, to provide relief for the Jewish poor, and to care for the blind.

The income of the community was not derived by direct taxation, but chiefly from a meat tax. A fee of 2 1/2% was charged by the community for marriage contracts and 1/2% for the purchase of property and mortgages.

The budget of the Baghdad Jewish community in the year 1945 amounted to 100,000 dinars (\$400,000). Its main sources of income were hospital fees (26,000 dinars), school fees (34,000 dinars), and a tax on kosher meat. The main expenditures were for schools (47,000 dinars) and hospitals (44,000 dinars).

Holy Places: There are holy places where the Jews used to visit. Near Hella, at El-Kifil, there is a famous shrine of the prophet Ezekiel. This shrine is still visited by the Jews of Baghdad during Pentecost. The Jews of Baghdad and of Karkuk maintain the tradition of visiting Daniel and his three companions who are believed to be buried at Karkuk. The grave of Ezra is found in El Ozair near Basra.

The Jews of Baghdad and of Karkuk maintain the tradition of visiting Daniel and his three companions who are believed to be buried at Karkuk. The percentage among the professionals such as lawyers were members of the Iraqi Parliament; the first and greatest minister of finance, Sasson Haskail, was a Jew. The superiority of the Jews in banking was due to the communal cooperation and solidarity in their families throughout generations. Besides, the prohibition of the Koran in making interest on loans delayed the development of banking among Muslims.

Agriculture was practiced only by the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in the Amadia district.

B. Classes:

Jewish society in Iraq was divided into three classes: upper, middle, and lower.

The class of the wealthy Jews, who were about 17% of the Jewish population, those to live in a different location, mainly in the suburbs. They dwelt in magnificent houses and villas. Most of them worked in commerce or owned banks. Their cultural standard was very high, and they sent their children to study in the universities abroad. At home they spoke English or French. Evenings they spent in their private clubs where they held par-

1. Haaratz daily newspaper, September 13, 1937

Chapter 2--Economic and Social Structure

A. Occupation:

The Jews had a great influence; they controlled the commerce in Baghdad. The percentage of Jews who dealt in import was 70% and in export 40%. Their number was high among those who worked in banks, railways, and in the radio station as musicians. Also their percentage among the professionals such as lawyers, physicians, pharmacists was high.¹ Individual Jews were members of the Iraqi Parliament; the first and greatest minister of finance, Sasson Heskail, was a Jew. The superiority of the Jews in banking was due to the continual cooperation and solidarity in their families throughout generations. Besides, the prohibition of the Koran in asking interest on loans delayed the development of banking among Moslems.

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1. Haaretz daily newspaper, September 15, 1961

ties wearing tuxedos and gowns.

As a result of the prosperity in Iraq, a large middle class was developed which consisted of 40% of the Jewish population. They were scattered in various sections, keeping a distance from the lower class. They dwelt in the Jewish quarters, but in less magnificent houses than the upper class. Their education ranged from the elementary level to college. They were mainly clerks, teachers, and shopkeepers. Some were shoemakers, tailors, and silversmiths. They were interested in having their children receive an education, but their economic situation did not allow them to send them abroad to study. Their dress was similar to those of the upper class but less pretentious.

Like all parts of the Orient, among the Jews of Iraq there was a class who owned nothing either because they did not know how to utilize one of the many opportunities of economic advancement which was available, or they were simply lazy. This class was 43%. Most of them used to dwell in slums or in mixed neighbourhoods where Arabs and Jews lived together. The condition of housing was poor. They had a poor education or none at all. They were not interested in acquiring an education for their children, because they wanted them to help their families. Some of them were pedlers, food salesmen, servants in homes of the wealthy families, etc.

The number of children in a family of this class was 8-9, while the number of children in the other two classes becomes less and less. After hours the head of the family would spend time in one of the local tea shops until late in the evening, leaving the wife at home with the whole burden of house and children.

Chapter 3--Education

A. Literacy:

Up to 1939 about 220 Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic books had been printed in Baghdad. The first Hebrew printing press was established there in 1866. Among the many scholars in Baghdad, outstanding was Hakham Joseph Hayim, 1833-1909, who was the last of the great Rabbis of modern times. He acted as spiritual leader for fifty years. Also he was a recognized authority by the Jewish communities in India and China. Nearly every Sabbath he used to address crowds of people in the Great Synagogue in Baghdad. The fruits of his studies include thirty-two works.

B. Talmud Torah:

Up to 1864 the Jewish education in Baghdad was in Hedarim and Talmud Torah. The oldest was the Midrash Talmud Torah, founded in 1833, with twenty-seven classes and 2049 students. This institution is essentially a school for religious instruction with elementary teaching in Arabic. The curriculum of the Talmud Torah consists of Bible studies and selected passages from anthologies. All subjects are taught in Arabic. Next to this is the David Sassoon School (founded 1864) whose management was transferred by his son Sir Albert Sassoon to the Alliance Israelite Universelle in the year 1874. Sir Eliezer S. Kadouri established a similar school for girls.

C. Schools in General:

In 1937 there were in Baghdad a large number of institutions for Jewish education; some were private, and some were supported by the community funds. Among these was the Shamash High School, where teaching was rendered in English. There

were also some vocational schools. (Daytime) 245

In 1930 a school for teaching accommodating the blind, named Salam Kadouri, was established which provided general education, vocational education, and music instruction. 17

In 1935 the Iraqi government prohibited the teaching of Hebrew. Only after repeated protests, permission was granted for the use of Hebrew, but for religious instruction only.

The Jewish schools used to provide education for boys and girls, out of which only one-third of them were paying pupils. The rest enjoyed free instruction. (They were of a

107 a) Since 1865 Iraqi Jews have largely profited by the educational facilities provided by the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Alliance started its activities in Baghdad in 1865 with one school comprising forty-four pupils. In 1947 there were in the Iraqi capital four schools (two schools for boys and two for girls) with 3200 pupils. Modern education of a Western type and knowledge of French and English have contributed a great deal to the improvement of the Jewish position and have given the younger generation a better chance to succeed in business and the professions.

Western education had already led the children into a new world. It taught them languages and self-restraint. Also the father's position in the family became progressively weaker.

The publication, Government of Iraq, Principal Bureau of Statistical Abstracts, gives the number of pupils in the Jewish schools in Iraq in 1950 as follows:

Baghdad Schools for Boys

Shamash Intermediate and Secondary School 496

Frank Ini Intermediate School (daytime)	245
A. 19 Frank Ini Intermediate School (evening)	232
Albert David Sassoon School	228
Norael Intermediate School	117
<u>Baghdad Schools for Girls</u>	
Lora Kaduri School	286
<u>Basra</u>	
Silas Kaduri Intermediate and Secondary	146

The educational situation among Kurdish Jews was bad. Although there were schools for Talmud Torah, they were of a low standard. The pupils left school at a young age in order to help their fathers gain a livelihood. The girls got almost no education.

After King Faisal's death in 1933, the position of the minorities in Iraq began to deteriorate. In later years, and particularly during the War, the exodus of Syrian and Palestinian teachers and the agitation by the mufti of Jerusalem who had escaped to Iraq, led the people to turn against the Jews.

The very first year of Iraq's full sovereignty was marked by a massacre of the Assyrians, whose tragedy had a strong echo in the Christian world. This was followed by expeditions against the Kurds and the persecution of the Yezidi, people who for centuries had lived in the mountains of northern Iraq. In this atmosphere, the Jews began to feel increasingly uneasy.

The gradual elimination of Jews from government service started as early as 1929 but on a small scale. In 1935, the Minister of Economics and Communications, who was a Jew, was

Chapter 4--Political and Legal Situation and Emigration

A. 1932-1939: *against the Jewish officials.*

When Iraq was negotiating with Great Britain and the League of Nations for its independence, the Jews of the country failed to petition the League for minority rights, as did the Assyrian and other minorities. The spokesmen of the community, representing the wealthier element, claimed that they were Iraqi of the Jewish faith.

During the first decade of Iraq's statehood, the Jews benefited considerably by the creation of the new administration because of their higher standard of education and their knowledge of foreign languages. Many of them played a prominent role in government service and trade.

After King Faisal's death in 1933, the position of the minorities in Iraq began to deteriorate. In later years, and particularly during the War, the activities of Syrian and Palestinian teachers and the agitation conducted by the mufti of Jerusalem who had escaped to Iraq, caused the people to turn against the Jews.

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The gradual elimination of Jews from government service started as early as 1929 but on a small scale. In 1935, the Minister of Economics and Communications was authorized to dis-

miss all employees whom he found unfit. This authorization was utilized fully against the Jewish officials.

The end of the British mandate on Iraq coincided with Hitler's ascension to power. The German Minister in Baghdad, Fritz Grobba, succeeded in creating in Iraq an active and influential center of well-organized and well-financed Nazi propaganda which had influence upon Arabs' minds.

Anti-Semitism was intensified when the Arab outbreaks began in Palestine in 1936. The Moslem world, including the Moslems of Iraq, opposed Zionism and were in sympathy with the Palestinian Arabs. Many cases of murder of Jews and throwing bombs at their clubs occurred during that period.

Although the Jewish community of Iraq, through its official spokesman, Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kedhourî, denied any interest in Zionism and declared that it was solely a religious group, the position of Iraqi Jewry grew progressively worse.

B. 1939-1945:

Rashid Ali Gailani's coup in the spring of 1941 brought to power the most violent anti-Jewish elements in the army and among the politicians. The one-month war against the British (May, 1941) filled Baghdad Jewry with fear. A terrible massacre broke out on the first and second of June. At the very moment when Gailani fled, and the armistice with the British was concluded, a raging mob fell upon Jewish shops and houses, burning, looting, and murdering. The police, far from preventing the rioters from killing and looting, fired on Jewish homes and openly took part in the attack. According to the report of the official investigation commission appointed by the new gov-

ernment. 110 Jews were killed; 240 were wounded; 586 Jewish enterprises were looted, and 911 Jewish houses were destroyed. Unofficial accounts put the number of deaths at 150 and the number of wounded at more than 700, while the material damage was estimated at 750,000 dinars (about three million dollars). Less serious outbreaks also occurred at Basra, Mosul, and other places in the provinces.

In 1941, after a visit to Iraq, Jesse Zel Lurie reported: "The feeling of insecurity prevails; the hopes of assimilation are lost. Only a few of the younger generation think of their future in Iraqi terms."¹

After the riots, the Jews came to the conclusion that it was impossible for them to continue to live among the hostile Arab population. Then they showed signs of unity among themselves. Their spiritual unity was expressed by special prayers and special days for fasting, in which most of the Jews participated.

After the riots of 1941, thousands of Jews decided to leave Iraq, but the Iraqi government did not allow them to emigrate to Palestine, not to leave the country.

Immediately after the riot an underground youth movement was established among the young Iraqi Jews. Messengers from Palestine came to organize the movement and to give military training for self-defence.

A year after the riots life for the Jews returned to normal. The prosperity and high profits of World War II benefited

1. Jesse Zel Lurie, "Jews of Iraq," Jewish Digest, July, 1941.

2. JTA Daily News Bulletin, September 15, 1946.

the Jews who worked in commerce.

C. From 1945:

In November, 1945, the Council of the Arab League declared a boycott of Zionist goods. The wave of popular feeling on the Palestine issue was only beginning to make itself felt as a further cause for cleavage between the Moslem masses and the Jewish communities dwelling in Arab countries.

Prohibiting Jewish emigration to Palestine remained. In 1946, the Iraqi administration refused to permit six Iraqi Jewish girls, who had married Palestinians serving with the British Army in Baghdad, to go to Palestine to join their husbands. The protest issued by the Palestine government was rejected. Iraq insisted that any outside intervention amounted to interference with her "sovereign rights."² Anti-Jewish policy, which affected the economic position of the Jews, was felt at that time. While they had formerly controlled almost the entire commercial life of the country, their number in this field declined markedly. In February, 1945, Baghdad Jews were reported still to be in control of between 75% and 85% of the capital's commercial enterprises and activities. The Jews of Basra told U. S. officials in August, 1946 that before 1914 they had conducted almost 95% of the merchant business of the city, but that by 1933 the percentage had dropped to 85% to 90% and by 1946 it was only 65% to 75%.

When the U. N. was handling the case in Palestine in 1946-1947, a remark was made by Faris al-Khuri, representative of Syria, in the interview he gave to a press representative in New

2. JTA Daily News Bulletin, September 16, 1946.

York on February 18, 1947: "Unless the Palestine problem is settled, we shall have difficulty in protecting and safeguarding the Jews in the Arab world."³ In the summer of 1947 Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, then Iraqi Foreign Minister, remarked to the U. N. committee on Palestine that the fate of the Jews in Moslem countries depended on developments in Palestine.

Government measures to eliminate Jews from the economic life of Iraq are largely expanded by the political parties and the organs of public opinion. As early as December 14, 1947, all Iraqi political groups, from right to left, joined in sending a letter to all the commercial institutions asking them to dismiss their Jewish employees and to replace them with non-Jews. The letter was signed by the secretaries of the Young Moslem Party and the Istiqlal Party, by the Director of the United Moslem institutions in Iraq, the National Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party.

On May 15, 1948, Iraq, together with Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan, went to war against the State of Israel. On the same day, Iraq declared martial law. Officially this step was motivated by the need to secure the rear of the Iraqi Army which was sent into Palestine and to protect the Jews against possible mob attacks. In practice, it was used as a legal weapon for a wave of governmental terror aimed at the destruction of the Jewish community. Four regional martial courts were established in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Diwaniyya. These cared very little for protecting the rights and personal dignity of the defendants. Under the cover of the law, scores of

3. New York Times, February 19, 1947.

Jewish homes were searched, often at night, in the most brutal fashion. Walls were sometimes knocked down, cupboards broken to pieces, and bedding torn. The Jews did not dare protest for fear of antagonizing the searchers and being sent to jail.

310 Jews were arrested by the military authorities in the early days of martial law. 160 were released after questioning during varying periods of detention; 150 were held for further investigation and trial.

Early in July, 1948, forty leading Jewish businessmen were arrested on a charge of trading with the Soviet Union and thus allegedly supporting a Communist regime. Many Moslem commercial firms had engaged in similar transactions, many of which had taken place several years before. These transactions were the direct result of the Soviet-Iraqi trade agreement. But in the case of the forty Jews those factors were ignored. The true motives for their being charged became quite obvious when it was learned that all forty were released on payment of various sums ranging to 10,000 dinars.

On July 14, 1948, the Iraqi House of Representatives passed an amendment to Article 51 of the Baghdad criminal code making Zionism, together with anarchism, Nazism, Communism, and atheism, a subversive and criminal creed, punishable by death, hard labor for life, or imprisonment up to fifteen years.⁴

When the British mandate over Palestine ended, the Palestine administration handed over to the Iraqi Post Office a batch of letters from Palestine addressed to Iraqi Jews. These letters had been mailed before May 15, 1948 but had not been for-

4. New York Times, July 12 and 15, 1948.

warded by the Palestine postal service. The Iraqi government used these letters to persecute its Jewish citizens. Every addressee and every Jew mentioned in the letters was considered a "Zionist" and became subject to prosecution under martial law. Scores of Jews were arrested, detained for months, often mistreated and tortured, and then brought before the courts. Many were sentenced to imprisonment for terms ranging from three to ten years, subjected to hard labor and to fines which ranged generally from 1,000 to 10,000 dinars. The right of Jews to leave Iraq, either to emigrate or to visit abroad temporarily, has always been restricted. Since May 15, 1948, there has been an almost absolute ban on such movements. The prohibition is applied even to children, students, and dangerously sick people who require medical treatment not obtainable in Iraq. In August, 1948, it was announced that all Iraqi Jews who went to Palestine and did not return would be considered criminals who had joined the ranks of the enemy and would be tried by military courts in absentia.⁵ Early in October, 1948, a new wave of persecution, accompanied by acts of brutality and cruelty was reported. According to information received by the government of Israel, the Iraqi police arrested and tortured Jews in order to make them confess that they belonged to the Zionist movement and to the organization responsible for arranging the escape of Jews from Iraq. Over one hundred people were sent to the Abu Ghraib camp, south of Baghdad, and some seventy others were held for investigation.

5. Al-Zaman, August 10, 1948.

Iraq's continued failure of the Iraqi Army in Palestine had provoked considerable popular unrest, and the government was looking for something to divert the mood of the masses and to concentrate attention on a domestic cause celebre. Then came the most spectacular example of Iraq's anti-Jewish "judicial" terror--the trial and hanging of Shafic Ades, a wealthy Basra merchant. Ades had settled in Iraq several years earlier and through diligence and hard work had succeeded in amassing a great fortune. Ades was accused of selling arms which reached the Jews in Palestine. The trial before the military court needed only three sessions, September 11, 12, and 13. There were twenty-four witnesses for the prosecution. All were heard, but the court, which consisted of two military and two civilian judges, decided not to hear any defence witnesses. At the third and last session, the court unanimously sentenced Ades to be hanged, and an indemnity of five million dinars, to be collected from the proceeds of Ades' property, was to be paid to the Ministry of Defence "in compensation for the damage on lives and property which he had caused to the Iraqi Army."⁶ Ades was hanged in the courtyard of his own house in Basra. For days before the execution, thousands of Iraqis began streaming into Basra from all parts of the country. He was hanged at four o'clock in the morning, and by that time tens of thousands had gathered in the neighbourhood.⁷

Jewish merchants have always played a leading role in

6. Liwa Al-Istiklal, September 14, 1948.

7. The Jewish Herald, December 17, 1948.

Iraq's import and export trade. Immediately after the proclamation of the Jewish state, the Iraqi government introduced a licensing system for transactions of both kinds; in September, it imposed a ban on imports and exports of all kinds. Later, importing was resumed, but import and export permits previously granted to Jewish merchants were cancelled, and very few licenses have since been granted. A considerable part of Jewish wealth disappeared as a result of governmental economic discrimination and restrictions. But even more was directly appropriated by the government in the form of Jewish "voluntary donations," fines, and the wholesale confiscation of the property of Jews found guilty of "assistance to Zionism."

When Iraq entered the war against Israel, the government inaugurated a system of outright elimination of Jewish economic activities. On July 17, 1948, Defence Minister Sadek el-Bassam Pasha issued an order prohibiting Jewish-owned banks (the Zelkha Bank, the Credit Bank, the Edward Aboody Bank, the Bank Khar-dith) from dealing in foreign exchange, sending money out of the country, and conducting credit business. This drastic curtailment of the normal bank activity in turn seriously affected Jewish commercial circles.⁸

Since May, 1948, Jewish students without exception were barred from admission to colleges and high schools. No passports were issued to those who wished to study abroad. Students who attended foreign universities before the ban on travelling abroad became too stringent were often forced to return even before graduation since their parents could not send them foreign

8. Al-Ahram, July 28, 1948.

currency to continue their studies. Discrimination in the Medical Profession and the Army: In September, 1948, a committee of the Ministry of Health decided not to issue new licenses to Jewish doctors and not to renew the licenses of Jewish doctors already practicing in Iraq.

Under the Military Service Law, Jews like other Iraqi citizens, are subject to military service. No Jewish applicants were accepted by the Iraqi Military Academy which trained officers, but in the army itself Jewish soldiers were treated on an equal footing with their non-Jewish fellows. However, after May, 1948, Jewish boys who entered the army, instead of being trained for military service, were grouped in special work battalions and given hard labor assignments. Sometimes they were sent to cut thorny plants in the desert or to build mud houses which they were later ordered to destroy and rebuild.

Wholesale Dismissal of Jewish Officials: The Supplementary Service Law authorizes the Council of Ministers to dismiss any government official. After May 15, 1948, the Iraqi government made full use of this authorization. Hundreds of Jewish governmental officials and employees, some of whom had served the country legally and efficiently for twenty to thirty years, were dismissed. The number of people so discharged is estimated at about 1500. With their dependents, they represent about ten thousand persons deprived of their means of livelihood. According to Al-Ahram of October 19, 1948, the dismissal of all Jewish officials and workers in government offices was ordered to safeguard state secrets.

At the same time the persecution and arrest of members of

the Communist Party took place. Many Jewish boys had joined the Party, hoping to find a new life.

The Iraqi government realized that the Jews were not patriots to Iraq, especially after the illegal escape at the border of hundreds of young Iraqi people who reached Israel through Iran and Turkey. The penalty for such illegal border crossing was a fine of seven years imprisonment with hard labor, although the official Iraqi penal law limits the penalty for that type of offence to six months.

Similar to the decision of the Egyptian government, on March 7, 1950 the Iraqi government issued a law allowing Jews to leave the country carrying 50 and thirty kilograms of baggage per adult, upon giving up their Iraqi citizenship. The duration of this law was limited to one year. By the expiration of that law some 105,000 Jews had registered to leave, but only 40,000 had in fact gone. On March 7, 1951 the Iraqi government froze all the property of the Jews who had registered for emigration. Arab sources indicated that the funds frozen amounted to about six million dinars (\$16,800,000). The value of frozen property was estimated to be over twelve million dinars (\$33,000,000). An item in the New York Times of September 23, 1951 estimated the value of the blocked accounts alone (not including other movable and non-movable property) as amounting to \$84 million to \$120 million. All establishments owned by Jews who had registered for emigration were at once put under seal by the police. This law was hard on those Jews who left the country legally before 1948. Only if they returned within two months and claimed Iraqi citizenship cards would their accounts be unfrozen.

Reaction to the new Iraqi law was swift and outspoken in Israel. Nine days after it was enacted, the Foreign Minister told the Kenesset that in freezing property of tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants, "The government of Iraq has opened an account with the State of Israel. There already exists an account between us and the Arab world, an account with regard to the compensation due to the Arabs who left Israeli territory and abandoned their property following the attack of the Arab states who invaded our country."⁹

D. Emigration:

The first Jews to immigrate to Israel were those who had registered early. They travelled by four-engine airplanes arranged by The Jewish Agency. The operation of the immigration of the Jews of Iraq into Israel was called Ezra and Nehemia.

Most of the Jews who registered for emigration were interested in Zionism. Another reason, the children got their passage to Israel, some legally and some illegally, and often over the admonition of their fathers and the tears of their mothers. A house without children was empty indeed. Later many of these families were reunited in a hut in a transit camp in Israel.

The first Kurdish Jews to immigrate to Israel came from the Iraqi provinces whose total Jewish population numbered 18,000. Most immigration came from cities with a mixed population, such as Mosul. Some came from isolated localities, such as Amadiyah, Zakho, and the villages Sidur (a well-known wholly Jewish village), Akra, Dahouk, Bitanura, etc. Many sold their farms and

9. Middle East Journal, Vol. 8, 1954.

properties at reduced rates and marched to the great centers of Mosul and Baghdad, where they waited their immigration papers. Others took the devious and long road to Persia, where they lived under unbearable conditions in the courtyards of synagogues until their turn came for emigration.

The emigration of Jews from Iraq has ended a history of thousands of years. All except 6,000 left Iraq, and most of them went to Israel.

In 1955, the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad estimated the total number of Jews in the country at 5,000. Other sources speak of 4,000, 5,000, and even 8,000 concentrated in Baghdad. The number of Jews in provincial areas is small: Basra had a community of 300, while 80 Jews lived in Diwaniya. The Jews who remained are almost exclusively wealthy importers and exporters who stayed on because they were reluctant to abandon their businesses.

The exodus of the Jews had a damaging effect on the business life of Iraq. A very large proportion of the trained and intelligent workers in the country were thus lost.¹⁰

Jews who were in jail since 1948 for the crime of being Zionists or Communists were expelled from Iraq at the end of the period of imprisonment.¹¹

Though the regime of Premier Kassem is as strongly hostile toward Israel as its predecessors were, Premier Kassem said in one of his speeches that Jews must be treated like all other citizens of Iraq. In 1959 ten Jewish boys and girls were admitted

10. New York Times, January 21, 1951.

11. Mizrah-He-Hadash, Autumn 1953, pp.48.

to the University of Baghdad. The government has also cancelled the legislation abolishing the Iraqi citizenship of Jews who emigrated from the country and rescinded compulsory custodian-ship over their property. According to latest information 450 Iraqi Jews who had left the country returned after the publication of the new decree.¹²

	3,290
1932-1938	2,930
1939-1945	1,532
1946-May 15, 1948	65

In 1951 some 125,000 immigrants were brought to Israel by the ship "Ezra and Nehemiah". The immigration was enormous and so great that the government had to provide enough jobs, workers and social services who could meet the needs of an individual who had arrived in Israel. It was completely possible that all their property had been left in Iraq. After they arrived at the airport, they were taken either to immigrant camps or directly to ma'abarot (transit camps). The immigrants' first view of Israel was clerks behind desks who automatically checked them in an impersonal fashion. Food, clothing, and bedding waited at the end of long lines. Treated as objects, they were overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness and confusion. Soon they accepted their role, becoming passive and dependent. The places to which the immigrants were sent were provided neither with public services nor with opportunities for employment which had a bad effect on the spirit of the immigrants. In the same year the Jewish Agency decided to

12. Jewish Chronicle, April 1, 1960.

1. J. B. Schachtman, In Israel at Last

Chapter 5--In Israel

A. Change in Economic and Social Life:

The immigration to Palestine by Iraqi Jews is shown in the table below:¹

1919-1923	171
1924-1931	3,290
1932-1938	2,930
1939-1945	1,532
1946-May 15, 1948	65

In 1950-1951 some 125,000 Iraqi Jews were brought to Israel by operation "Ezra and Nehemiah." The flood of immigration was so sudden and so great that Israel was unable to provide enough social workers and conscientious teachers who could meet the immigrants as individuals. Most of those who arrived in Israel were completely penniless, since all their property had been left in Iraq. After their arrival at Lydda Airport, they were taken either to immigrant camps or directly to ma'abarot (transit camps). The immigrants' first view of Israel was clerks behind desks who automatically checked them in an impersonal fashion. Food, clothing, and bedding waited at the end of long lines. Treated as objects, they were overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness and confusion. Soon they accepted their role, becoming passive and dependent. The places to which the immigrants were sent were provided neither with public services nor with opportunities for employment which had a bad effect on the spirit of the immigrants. In the same year The Jewish Agency decided to eliminate the immigrant camps, where they were main-

1. J. B. Schechtmann, On Wings of Eagles.

tained, and to send the immigrants to ma'abarot (transit camps), which had been established close to cities and agricultural settlements. There the chances for finding employment for the immigrants who had been brought directly from Lydda Airport were better. The immigrants lived in tents or huts. No social workers of Mediterranean extraction were found to care for the immigrants who came from the countries of the Middle East. To this day, most of the administrative, social, and other workers do not understand the mentality of the Oriental immigrants. The immigrants tended to be close to the big cities and to continue their urban life, which they were accustomed to. In general there was much less inclination to engage in agriculture by the Iraqi Jews, of whom 90% had lived in the big city of Baghdad. While 50,000 Yemenite immigrants established fifty-seven agricultural settlements, the 125,000 Iraqis set up only fifteen. A small percentage of Iraqi entered Israel with capital which was either smuggled out of Iraq and into Israel or transferred through Jewish Agency emissaries in Baghdad who used it to finance the emigration. These individuals have established wealthy Iraqi colonies in Ramat Gan and North Tel Aviv and entered finance and commerce. Educated people found no difficulty in securing employment, especially in banking and clerical work in the government. Among the immigrants are hundreds of doctors and teachers who are working in regions near the border. The young people join the Israeli Army. We find that the unemployed are concentrated in that sec-

tor of Israel's population which occupies the transit camps. They include the former shopkeepers of Iraq who are classified here as unskilled laborers. The Iraqi elite was frustrated at being pressed to accept a status below the status-image they had of themselves. This feeling produced hostility which was largely channeled into charges that the rest of the community was discriminating against them.

Girls were not accustomed to working in Iraq, but in Israel the economic necessity led many girls to accept employment outside of the home. Some who had belonged to the upper classes moved into such occupations as secretarial work, nursing, or teaching, while many of the others resigned themselves to factory work or domestic service. The dowries and arranged marriages existed no longer. Wartime profits in Baghdad sent dowries into fantastic amounts. As a result, marriage became a severe burden upon the girl's family. Israel released the Oriental women from the restraints of tradition. Marriage between Ashkenazi men and Iraqi women has succeeded because the education the Iraqi girls received at school and at home made them obedient. The number of marriages between Iraqi men and Ashkenazi women is smaller.

The Kurdish Jews who came from Iraq made a successful adjustment. They established agricultural settlements. The immigration of Kurds into Israel began before the establishment of the State of Israel. In the mid-thirties the number of immigrants from Kurdistan to Palestine was estimated at 2,500, thus increasing the community of Kurdish Jews in Palestine to over

8,000. When they came to Palestine, some lived in the mud huts of the Arab fellahin and ploughed the land; others did guard duty jointly with the first Hashomer watchmen. Kurdish Jews were also among the agricultural settlers of Kfar Barukh, and there was a wholly Kurdish village named David Alroy, for the famous Jewish hero of Amadiyah. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, Kurdish Jews of Jerusalem established several additional Kurdish settlements, including Kfar Azaria, near Mishmar Eilon.

The number of Iraqi Jews who came to Israel up to 1951 including the Kurdish Jews was 125,000. In the recent census the number of Iraqi Jews in Israel increased to 160,000.

B. Change in Education:

Pupils in the transit camps had a comparatively low level of instruction arising from the refusal of the better teachers to occupy posts in the camps. The values which are taught in the Israel schools are foreign to many Oriental families and their children. The schools teach Hebrew, Zionist literature reflecting the experience of East European Jews, and a history of the European Jews resembling that of European nationalism.

At the high school level the high tuition fee made it impossible for the newcomers to attend. Many parents who themselves had been able to attend the subsidized Jewish secondary schools of Baghdad find it difficult to send their children to Israeli secondary schools. While Orientals account for about 50% of the Jewish population of Israel, they number less than 5% in the secondary school population.

The educational authorities have failed to consider the

importance of inter-ethnic association in the school, and, as a result, one may summarize the status of the average Oriental pupil by saying that he is a problem child in the school. The claim that low intelligence is responsible for the failure of the Oriental pupil is only partly correct. Behind this failure lies the misunderstanding of the social problems of the Oriental pupils. Here also lies the failure of the academic curriculum to furnish the Oriental child with motivation for continuous efforts to improve his own life and his own community through education.

C. Problems of Integration:

The contact between the culture of those who came from Europe and the Oriental Jews has resulted in some problems, tensions, and conflicts.

The differences in linguistic and cultural heritage brought by the new immigrants to Israel are overwhelming in the first generation. They are often pronounced enough to make for mutual distrust and dislike.

In Israel the Oriental immigrants found themselves in an unknown, unaccustomed environment, strange and alien.

Both the European and the Oriental immigrants have to pass through an incisive and mostly painful process of adjustment upon their arrival in Israel. In the case of the immigrants coming from Europe, the change required for a successful adjustment is merely social; in the case of the Oriental immigrant it is cultural as well.

Among the upper class Iraqi immigrants who came to Israel, there are some who did not suffer in Iraq even during riot days.

Those considered Iraq as the ideal place in which to live, but they registered for emigration because of the pressure of their children. Suddenly the Iraqi government froze their wealth and property. Those immigrants have not adjusted in Israel because they never forget the glorious past with the high prestige and status.

Tension developed about the question of distributing honor, prestige, and status. In Iraqi society one could know the value of a man by the family he came from, and particularly in recent years, by the wealth he controlled. By the time the immigrants arrived in Israel, they found the ruling socialist elements in Israel granting status for pioneers. Power was concentrated in the hands of people who insisted upon a pioneering endeavor for the newcomers but based their own right not upon continuing effort but past sacrifices.²

Many cases of close contact between the Ashkenazi Jews and the Oriental Jews resulted in some discontinuation in the Oriental culture. This crisis is manifested in their economic life, ethnic cohesiveness, family life, and education.

The pressure of Western Israeli culture brings a bad effect upon some Oriental Jews to the degree of loss of identity. That creates among the Oriental Jews a type who prefers the company of Europeans and tries to show that he personally has become emancipated from his language, customs, and traditions of his more old-fashioned community. Arabic to him is a barbarous and primitive tongue.

The awakening desire of the Oriental Jews to immigrate to

2. Klausner, Middle East Journal, Autumn 1955.

to Israel has changed the ethnic composition of the state. With the arrival of 125,000 Iraqi Jews in 1950-1951, the percentage of Sephardi and Oriental Jews in Israel reached about 40% by the end of 1951.

The number of the young among the Oriental immigrants is high, so they changed the age structure of the population of Israel.

The history of modern Palestine has shown that in the second generation, or at the utmost the third, these differences tend to diminish and to disappear altogether, mainly as a result of the common upbringing of the children in the schools and the close contact and interaction between members of the young generation.

Schools, with eight years compulsory attendance, and the army in which every person must serve upon reaching the eighteenth year, are potent factors in the cultural absorption of the younger element among the immigrants and in a welding them together into one people.

For the Oriental Jewish youths of both sexes the army becomes the framework, within which they first meet European Jews under equal circumstances, get closely acquainted with them, form friendships with them, and learn their ways.

Conclusions and Summary

Oriental Jews in general, and Iraqi Jews in particular, are good hearted, and they have love for the land and the people of Israel. They are a very useful element in Israel at the present and an essential part in determining the future.

The Iraqi immigrants have strengthened the Israeli economy by providing efficient and important labour power in factories, offices, and agricultural settlements. They are making their military contribution by tremendously increasing the army's source of manpower because the percentage of young men and women among them is high.

Among each group of immigrants to Israel we find a number who did not adjust to the life of the new state and sought another country to immigrate to, using Israel as a jumping board. The number of Iraqi Jews who left Israel is very small and almost nonexistent.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel and rising Arab nationalism, the situation of Jews who lived in Arab countries has been shaken. Arabs and their governments look at the local Jews with suspicion and consider them related to Israel.

Historically speaking, the relation between Jews and Moslems in the Middle East differed radically from that between Jews and Christians in Western countries. Anti-Semitism in the West is a form of cold and theoretical hatred. The Moslems in the Middle East considered the Jews as people of the Book who were under Moslems' protection. In general, the persecution and suffering of the Jews in the Moslem world was much less than

that in the Christian world. ~~that results in this endeavor to bring~~
~~about~~ The fate of the Jews of the Middle East is involved with
 the fate of Israel. While immigrants from other countries to
 Israel are able to go back to their original countries if they
 do not adjust in Israel, the Jews of the Middle East are not
 able to do the same, because their citizenship was revoked. We
 find that most of the inhabitants of the transition camps of
 the hard conditions are Jews from the Near East. Some of them
 have lived in such conditions more than six years. ~~Israeli high~~

A policy which aims at social integration and mutual as-
 similation must work toward activating the social life of the
 Oriental communities.

If Israeli society would show understanding and give time
 to Oriental Jews to ~~accept~~ ^{take the good part of} the Western Israeli culture, that
 might prevent a situation where identity and existence may be
 lost and cause what anthropologists call dysnomia (bad integra-
 tion). Although Oriental Jews have a great many cultural values
 to offer Israel, it is not likely that many of them will be ac-
 cepted. Traditional Middle Eastern culture contains a number
 of complexes which are lacking in Western civilization, and the
 adoption of which into Israeli culture would undoubtedly serve
 to enrich and invigorate it. On the other hand, ~~the culture of~~
~~the Jews of Eastern Europe~~ contains a larger degree of social consciousness which is lack-
 ing in traditional Middle Eastern culture where the Moslem ac-
 cepted the wide gap between the wealthy and the poor as God's
 decree.

The future of Oriental Jews will depend largely on the
 leaders who will arise among them. At present the few Oriental

leaders are the potential social agents in this endeavor to bring about a synthesis of the two cultures and social integration of the two ethnic groups. The number of Oriental leaders is not high, either because of lack of motivation or lack of preparation for leadership for the dynamic Israeli society with many political parties. Although the number of Oriental Jews in Israel is about 50%, the number of Oriental members in the Israeli cabinet has not exceeded two members.

If the low number of Oriental pupils in the Israeli high schools does not increase, the Oriental Jews in the future will be distinguished as a subservient class, a class for drawing water and hewing wood.

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