Tradition and Modernity...
What it meant to be an educated Baghdadi Jew in the late nineteenth to early-mid twentieth century

Tania Korin
Integrated Studies in Education; Culture and Values

McGill University, Montreal
August, 2007

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Integrated Studies in Education, Culture and Values

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-51387-3
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-51387-3

Abstract

The late 19th and early 20th century was a time of change for the Jewish people of Baghdad. Cultural influences from Europe and North America were making their presence felt and some Jewish Baghdadis actively sought to incorporate these into their personal and professional lives. To facilitate this process of acculturation, the Jewish community established schools that provided both a western education and a Jewish one. This essay studies these schools and considers the larger challenges that the community faced in seeking to be both western and Jewish while living in the Arab world. A brief history of the Jews of Baghdad and their standing in the city through the ages is also included.

Le dernier 19ème et au début du 20ème siècle était un temps de changement pour le peuple juif de Bagdad. Les influences culturelles de l'Europe et de l'Amérique du Nord rendaient leur présence estimée et un Baghdadis juif a activement cherché à incorporer ceux-ci dans leurs vies personnelles et professionnelles. Pour faciliter ce processus d'acculturation, la communauté juive a établi des écoles qui ont fourni tant éducation occidentale qu'un juif. Cet essai étudie ces écoles et considère les plus grands défis que la communauté a fait face dans la recherche à être tant occidentale que juif en vivant dans le monde arabe. Une histoire brève des Juifs de Bagdad et de leur réputation dans la ville par les âges est aussi incluse.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the advice and support of my advisor, Professor Eric Caplan for his feedback and for keeping me focused on my research. The comments and time he gave have greatly improved and clarified this work. Thank you to Professor Sasson Somekh, for his excellent advice and time and to Mr. Sami Sourani for all of his support and inquiry responses. I am also grateful to Professor Naim Kattan of Montreal, and to Yaacov Zamir of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage center in Or Yehuda, Israel. Many individuals from the Iraqi Jewish community of Montreal and Israel have shared their personal experiences with me and I am particularly thankful for their continued input. Finally, I owe a lot to my family, my grandparents in particular who initially inspired my interest in this subject

Table of Contents:

Introduction

The subject of education among Jewish Baghdadis at the end of the 19th and beginning to mid 20th century is a truly significant topic, worthy of research. This population believed that a high quality, superior education, more specifically an education derived from European and American cultures, was the foundation of success in life even though the mainstream society did not, for the most part, approach education in this manner. Some might say that the Jewish people of Baghdad attempted to revolutionize education in Iraq's capital city. It is also a topic worthy of research because although the Jews of Baghdad stem from one of the most ancient Jewish communities in the world, with the rise of this form of "Western" education, they were quick to move away from the traditional framework of religious schooling and towards the language, math and science based schooling popular in Europe and America. This population is unique in and of itself as no other Arab Jewish population is as old, yet by the same token, as modern. It is a population that managed to maintain its Jewish identity even with the rise of secular, non-religious education. Jewish Iraqis alive at the time in question have an abundance of significant and distinctive information and experiences but are aging and dying off; their voices should be heard without delay.

The Baghdadi Jewish community is one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world. The community began with the exile from Judah in 586 BCE and existed until the first Gulf war in the 1990s. The demography of the Jews in Babylon changed continuously. Jews came from surrounding areas of Europe and the Middle East and settled in the region. Towards the 19th and 20th centuries the Jewish population in

Baghdad expanded and was an estimated 20% of the greater population of the city. This community influenced Iraqi society in a variety of ways. In the first half of the 20th century, some Iraqi government officials were of Jewish origin. When the British rose to power in 1917, they employed many Jewish people in areas such as translation and communication.

The foremost reason why so many Jewish individuals were given the opportunity to attain positions of authority and influence was because of their highly respected education system. The Jewish education system underwent a revolution in the 1860s when the Alliance Israelite School first opened its doors in Baghdad. The school brought with it a pedagogy that reflected the original Alliance school in Paris. It included instruction in a variety of languages and in subjects such as Math, Science and Geography. Great emphasis was placed on learning to read, write and understand French and English. The teachers that the school employed were not Baghdadi in origin. The English teacher was British, the French teacher was a native of France, the Turkish teacher (during the Ottoman empire Turkish was also a language taught at the Alliance Israelite school) was brought to Baghdad from Turkey. These teachers imparted more than language. The French teacher, for example, conveyed to the students a wealth of knowledge of life in France. The Jewish students in Baghdad attending these schools thus developed an understanding of the culture and the values of the societies outside of Baghdad. The non-Jewish population in Baghdad (with the exception of some wealthy Muslims and Christians, some of whom attended the Jewish schools) was not educated in this way. Non Jewish Baghdadis were more likely to attend religious institutions or schools that taught Arabic and very little English and French. The Jewish community's

approach to educating its young was similarly traditional until the arrival of the Alliance school. There were small religious Cheders and Isthads, comparable to the European Yeshivot (seminaries) that only taught Jewish subjects. Many Jewish people were also educated in the home or in the synagogue by a rabbi or student rabbi. With the arrival of the European education methods, the Jewish way of life, way of thinking, and manner of approaching education changed. Religion, although not totally sidelined, was no longer the central concern.

Additional Baghdadi Jewish schools which opened in the 20th century, such as the Shammash School and the Frank Iny School, followed the Alliance in employing educators from Europe and the United States. These schools gave the Jewish people in Baghdad additional venues to learn the languages, customs and ways of life of Western society. They prepared the Jewish students for a world outside of Baghdad. An interesting notion that existed among many Jewish people in Baghdad during the early 20th century was that they were going to emigrate. "Most of us had it in mind that we were not going to stay in Iraq. All my life I had this idea that eventually we would leave." [1] This assumption did come true in time, with the vast majority of the Jews leaving Baghdad for Israel in 1951, followed by several smaller emigrations continuing until the 1990s. The education system of the Jews in Iraq allowed them to live an enriched life in Baghdad and later on in various corners of the world.

Early Babylonian Jewry is famous for the Babylonian Talmud and for the great rabbinical figures that it produced in the early middle Ages. Throughout the Twentieth Century most of the Jewish people in Baghdad still attained a basic level of knowledge and understanding of Torah (bible) and Jewish history/identity, mostly in the home and

[1] Personal Interview with Linda Ischayek,

synagogue. The emphasis in the schools, however, was to prepare the Jewish students of Baghdad for a life outside of this city and for a world beyond their small community.

Research Methodology:

The following paper relies on a thorough review of the existing literature and films about the Baghdadi Jewish community and on a series of personal interviews that I conducted with Iraqi Jews who came of age in the first half of the Twentieth Century. While conducting a literature review for this thesis, I became aware that that there is very little written about Jewish education in Baghdad in the late 19th and 20th century. An abundant literature exists exploring the Jewish immigration to Israel from Baghdad in 1951 and the lives of the Jews in pre-modern Babylonia. Poetry in Arabic, Hebrew, English and French written by Iraqi Jews is also plentiful as are historical biographies. Although Norman A. Stillman refers to the Jews of Baghdad in his work *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity*[2] he does not give a detailed examination of this subject matter. In his book, he states that printed material on the topic is scarce[3]. It became clear to me that I could not fully determine why and how the Jewish people of Baghdad moved so rapidly from a religiously centered education to a secular language/math/science centered one without interviewing people who lived through this transition. Accordingly, I interviewed 90 former Baghdadi Jews (formally and informally) between the ages of 52 and 98 who currently live in Israel and Canada.

---

[2] Interestingly, he describes the way in which Baghdadi Jews and their rabbinical leaders were on many occasions accepting of technological advances. He gives the example of the chief Rabbi of Baghdad, Chacham Abdulla Somekh (1813-1889) who approached new technological advances in what appear to be a liberal manner. When asked by a Jew if riding the railway on Shabbat and holidays was permitted, Rabbi Somekh responded that within the city limits it was permitted to ride on a train, however, it was forbidden to travel on the railway between cities. This response by the chief Rabbi of Baghdad is a strong example of the tolerant manner in which the Jews of Baghdad accepted technology and modern western changes.

[3] Stillman, N. A., (1995) p.18.
Stillman conveys that in order to find information about the chief Rabbi of Baghdad sending his grandson to the Alliance school, he had to rely on oral communication.

My primary mode of research, however, is still literature and film. I reviewed many academic books, journal articles, unpublished manuscripts, masters and doctoral dissertations and biographies. I later interviewed some of the authors of the works that I read, including Professor Sassoon Somekh, a Professor Emeritus at Tel Aviv University, and an expert on Arabic literature and Iraqi Jewry and winner of the prestigious Israel Prize, and Naim Kattan, an independent researcher and winner of the *France-Canada Prize* France's prestigious *Legion d'Honneur,* as well as the *Prix Athanase-David.* I also interviewed Yaacov Zamir, the chief librarian of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage center museum in Or Yehuda, Israel.

Interviews were conducted in English, Hebrew and Arabic and at times one interview could combine all three languages. Interviewees included Iraqi Jewish community leaders and members, former students at various Baghdadi schools and the daughter of the principal of one of the Baghdadi schools. Some of the people left Baghdad in 1951 for Israel, others left in 1963 for Canada, some emigrated in the 1970s to Canada, England, Israel and the United States. A number studied in North America and England at varying times while maintaining Baghdad as their primary address. I interviewed one woman who left Baghdad in the 1990s. I have chosen to incorporate several excerpts from these many interviews into the body of this paper to substantiate arguments made in the literature and to provide additional information when necessary. In addition to these research methods I also conducted Archive research at the Babylonian Jewish Heritage center museum in Or Yehuda, Israel.

Chapter One:

Jewish Life in Iraq before the modern Age

The focus of this work is the education of Jews in Iraq from the end of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. Nonetheless, to place this era in context it is imperative that the reader understands the history of Babylonian Jewish education and the life of the Jewish people in Baghdad leading up to this time. There are certain aspects of their life under Muslim rule that had an influence on their identity and on their system of schooling in the twentieth century. For example, the *Dhimmi* (partially protected) status given to them by the Muslim state from the 7th century until the 20th century, limited their ability to live as total equals in the society in which they lived. Traditional Islam tolerated the Jewish religion, because Jews shared their belief in one G-d and because Islam recognizes the holiness of the Old Testament. However, while the Jewish religion was tolerated, towards the middle of the 20th century, Zionism was not[4] and Hebrew language education was prohibited except for religious purposes. This history section makes it easier to understand why Jews, who lived alongside Arab neighbors, did not quite feel Arab and identified instead with the Jewish nation. It also explains why Jews were so ready to embrace new forms of education that provided the linguistic and cultural tools required to forge meaningful connections to civilizations outside of Iraq. Jews in Baghdad prided themselves on their modernity, western-mindedness and western educational practices; characteristics that will be addressed in this section.

---

[4] Zionism became a modern, political movement at the end of the 19th century due in part to the influence of Theodore Herzl

This section is not an account of all aspects of the lives of Iraqi Jews. As previously mentioned, there are other works, utilized in this essay, that do this. This section concentrates on historic and cultural issues. It shows how Baghdadi Jews lived in Babylon through the ages and how they suffered at the hands of their neighbors during the Farhud (1941). It also demonstrates the desire of many Jewish Baghdadis to live a modern western-minded existence in the political and geographical world of Islam, while maintaining their Jewish identity albeit in a less overtly religious key. Although few Jews in twentieth century Baghdad kept the Sabbath or a Kosher home (two factors associated with traditional Judaism), intermarriage was shunned and a respectable level of Jewish cultural literacy prevailed. Whether he or she kept the laws or not, the Baghdadi Jew generally identified as a Jew.

By contrast with the modern Jewish population that this paper focuses on, the Jews of Babylon[5] were historically devout and maintained a religious identity throughout the centuries. Jews first arrived in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, captured the territory of Judah and exiled all of its inhabitants. Babylon was a very fertile area. Jews apparently became well established, though the Book of Psalms indicates that they maintained a deep emotional attachment to Jerusalem:

> "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion"
>
> "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you,

[5] *Babylon:* The term Babylon describes the ancient local which is present day Iraq. The people of the area were called Babylonian. Current Jewish Iraqis often refer to themselves as Babylonian Jews, as the term asserts the fact that the population existed since ancient times. Take for example the name of the Education center in Or Yehuda, Israel- *The Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center*

if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour. [6]

Yehoyakim (or as the Babylonian Jews called him, Yekhonia) King of Judah was exiled with the rest of the people. Nebuchadnezzar's son released him from prison and made him the leader of the Jews in Babylon. He was in charge of the administration of the exiled people and collected taxes from the Jews for the Babylonian King [7]. Although the major exile started in 586 BCE[8], earlier, in 597 BCE, nearly 10,000 Jews from Jerusalem (including king Yehoykim) were exiled and settled in Babylon with the Prophet Ezekiel (who was exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE as well). Accordingly, when the second wave of exiled Jews arrived, estimated at over 50,000, they found a well organized community. Ezekiel preached about Diaspora as a new way of life. He inspired hope in a depressed people and encouraged faith in Judaism and G-d[9].

Jewish education has existed in Iraq (ancient Babylon) in varying forms since this time. Babylonian Jews valued Jewish learning above all else and the foundations for extensive education were laid by the Jews of ancient Babylon. The early rabbis stated that "If one acquires for himself knowledge of Torah, he has acquired life in the world to come"[10]. Learning was never considered to be confined to a single stage in the life cycle of a Jewish person; it was a continual process. The pursuit of Torah knowledge for its own sake (*Torah Lishmah*) was the absolute goal that continued throughout the life of a

---

[6] Psalm 137: This biblical idealization expresses the longing of the Jews for their homeland. In fact, in 536 BCE, when the new overlord of Judah, King Cyrus of Persia, issued an edict allowing for the Jews to return to their former home to "rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel" (Ezra 1:3), only 42 360 Jews (plus 7 337 slaves) actually returned. Rejwan (1985) p. 15.

[7] Dallal (1998), Rejwan (1985) p. 13, 14.

[8] This is generally accepted as the final date of exile. Many authors cite it as the date of the exile from Judah, for example: Rejwan (1985), Patai (1971), Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996), Shulewitz (1999), Elazar (1989), Meyer (2003).

[9] Rejwan (1985) p. 13, 14.

[10] Perkei Avot/ Ethics of the Fathers 2:7

Jew. This is evident in the rabbinic anthology, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), which states "One must constantly seek to increase his knowledge; never to be satisfied with the learning he has already done"[11].

The exiled Jews in Babylon established three Yeshivas (houses of study) in Babylon: Sura (219 AD to 1034 AD), Nehardea (219 AD to 260 AD) and Pumpadita (260 AD to 1038 AD)[12]. It was in these schools that the Babylonian Talmud, a cornerstone of the rabbinic tradition, was compiled and written between the years 200 and 500 AD[13]. The academies were named after cities in Babylon but these names often had additional meanings. For example, in Hebrew, Nehardea means "the river of knowledge". This indicates the respect that the Jews of ancient Babylon had for their academies. The head of each academy was called a "Gaon."

Jewish historians often refer to the years between 800-1250 AD as the Gaonic period in deference to the central role that the heads of the academies played in Jewish life at this time. The *Gaonim* were consulted on matters of law and faith by Jews throughout the world thereby increasing the power and influence of their academies. A number of the scholars who graduated from these institutions went to Israel, Egypt, Asia Minor, North Africa and eventually to Spain.[14] The Babylonian Rabbis expanded their influence by issuing Responsa- answers to questions directed to them by Jewish scholars or laymen throughout the Jewish Diaspora concerning a Jewish law, or ritual practice. The Babylonian Jewish community became the intellectual center of the Jewish world at

[11] Perkei Avot/ Ethics of the Fathers 1:13
[12]Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996) p. 19, www.jewishencyclopedia.com (December 12, 2006).
[13] Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996) p. 19. While I cannot say for certain what percentage of the Jewish population attended these Academies, it is certain that they were extremely influential to the Jews in Babylon as well as around the world.

[14] Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996) p. 20 Sourani, (2004) p. 5.

the time and the Babylonian Jews were quite learning oriented. Babylonian ascendancy can also be traced to the rapid decline of Jewish institutions in Roman Palestine during this time period. Babylon remained the center of intellectual Judaism for hundreds of years until new centers of Jewish learning and culture arose in North Africa and Europe.

In the thirteenth century, Mongol invaders took over Babylon and the Jews were either persecuted or dispersed. [15] It is commonly believed that the Jews of Babylon were dispersed throughout North Africa and Spain. These Jews held on to their Babylonian religious traditions. At the same time, Ashkenaz (European) Jews were living in the Roman Empire -- Persia's great enemy. The Europeans more naturally adopted Palestinian customs (rather than Babylonian), thereby giving birth to the different and distinct traditions that comprise the Ashkenaz and the Babylonian/North African/Sephardic cultures until this day. [16]

In addition to having a rich scholarly tradition both within and outside the Jewish world, the Jews of Babylon also played major roles in local trade and government. Under Muslim leadership, which started in the seventh century, they even managed to reach high positions in the courts of the caliphs. The Muslim leadership created the position of Rosh Hagola (i.e.: the head of the Diaspora). He represented the Jewish people in Babylon. This position was upgraded to the level of Minister in the Court of the Caliph. The Rosh Hagola was also referred to as "the representative of our grand master King David".[17] This indicates that the Jewish community saw its leadership as in some way continuing the monarchy of the biblical period. The non Jewish community recognized and honored the Rosh Hagola as being from the lineage of this respected King, who along

[15] Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996) p. 19-21.
[16] Gubbay, L. and Levy, A. (1996) p. 22.
[17] Levin, I. (2001) p.2, Sourani (2004) p. 9.

with his son King Solomon, is mentioned in the Koran as a great prophet. The Jews were also able to communicate with the Arabs with great ease. The Jews at that time spoke Aramaic, the international language of the day. Hebrew was the language of prayer and not usually used for communication. Arabic, the language of the Arab invaders is somewhat similar to both Aramaic and Hebrew. Thus, it was very easy for the Jews to adjust. In this new era, we assume, therefore, that Jews spoke Aramaic among themselves, used Hebrew for prayers and spoke Arabic with the Arabs. [18]

Even though the Jews appeared to get along well with the Muslims, there was a dhimmi status[19] or "Ahl al-dhimma" which required the Jews to pay special taxes and restricted them in their business activities because they were Jewish[20]. Islam was not simply a religion. It was the basis of law in Iraq throughout the time the Jews lived under Muslim rule. Even with the dhimmi status, the Jewish community managed to remain well established. They even had a bank, headed by Jacob Murashu and Sons. This is of note because it was an international bank therefore signifying the international reach of the Jews of Babylon.[21]

The Dhimmi factor:

After the death of Muhammad, the Arab-Muslims expanded into many lands that were originally Christian and based their laws and belief system on the Koran and the Hadiths (words and acts attributed to the prophet Muhammad). According to this belief system and the classical doctrine of Jihad (religious war of conquest) that emerged, the right of rule belonged to the Muslims, or the Umma (the Islamic community as a

[18] Dallal (1998), Sourani (2004) p.9.
[19] Dallal (1998), Rejwan, N. (1985) p. 85-87, Stillman (1979) p. 17.
[20] Levin, I (2001) p. 2.
[21] Rejwan, N. (1985) p. 27, Sourani (2004) p. 3.

whole)[22]. It is said in the Koran, (III, 106) about the Muslims that "You are the best nation ever brought forth to men". People who do not believe in the revealed scriptures of Islam are considered to be infidels and are deemed inferior.[23] Among the "infidels" differentiations are made: those who believe in nothing or multiple G-ds (the Pagans) must convert to Islam or be killed; Christian and Jewish monotheists who believe in the Bible, which is understood to be a distorted version of the Koran, are considered worthy of a measure of respect and are therefore protected. The dhimmi status is granted to them. They could practice their religion, but in order to remain protected (i.e., to be allowed to remain alive without converting to Islam), they had to submit to the Muslim rulers conditions. These rules allowed the faith communities to exist while maintaining the economic and religious superiority of the Muslims in the area.

The following were a few of the rights:[24]

- Right to economic prosperity and advancement. Because of the positive economic influence of the Jews and Christians on the region, they were encouraged to succeed.
- The right of the Jews and Christians to maintain autonomous communities.
- The right of the Jews to maintain Jewish learning and religious worship and education.

The following were a few of the restrictions:[25]

- A dhimmi could not testify against a Muslim in a court of law.

---

[22] Shulewitz; Bat Ye'or (1999) p. 33, 34.
[23] Shulewitz; Bat Ye'or (1999) p. 34, 35.
[24] Hourani, A. (1992) p. 44.
[25] Ibid

- Dhimmi could not bear arms, and were prohibited from marrying Muslim women.[26](Islam is a patrilineal society. It rules that the child's religion goes according to that of the father. If the father is a Jew, then the child will no longer be a Muslim, but a Jew.)

During the Ottoman rule in Baghdad (1534–1918), laws regulating Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians (the third population affected by the dhimmi condition) became lax, because the Ottomans willed a less extreme Islamic state. For example, Jews were not always required to pay the Jizya (Special dhimmi tax) and were oftentimes allowed to own land.

It is likely that in twentieth century Baghdad, the dhimmi level placed upon the Jews was less severe than earlier in history. Nevertheless, the dhimmi status affected the education of the Jewish people. The restrictions in the economic realm made certain types of education restricted. Later in this paper I will relay personal experiences of Iraqi Jews in the twentieth century not being allowed to study civil law, or medicine. The bans were usually not quite overt, but an extreme quota was certainly there. It is also important to understand that while the Islamic world, after the rise of Zionism in the 1900s, continued to allow Torah study, it limited Hebrew language education.[27] In fact, after 1951 (and the mass immigration of the Jews of Baghdad to Israel), even Torah study was restricted to the home and was not allowed in the schools[28].

---

[26] Hourani, A. (1992) p. 43.

[27] This is because of its ideological connection to the rising presence of Jews in the land of Israel, which they were opposed to. According to Yaacov Zamir, the chief librarian at the Babylonian Jewish Heritage center in Or Yehudah, Israel, (Personal Interview, October 27th, 2005)"After 1936 the Zionist movement was banned and feared. Therefore Hebrew learning had to become limited, almost non-existent"

[28] As I indicate later in this paper, before 1951, in schools such as the Alliance Israelite, Jewish students learned Hebrew up until the fourth grade.

> We couldn't learn the Hebrew language in school because it was against the teachings of the land. We had... a private teacher come to our house to teach us torah stories.[29]

Even when the rulers in Iraq were extremely liberal, the people with dhimmi status remained insecure and exposed. The threat of new restrictions was a continuous fear felt by the Jews. Many of the Jewish people were simply waiting for the second shoe to drop.

> We were never loved, us Jews; we were tolerated. Some of us rose to positions of power, but we knew that our potential was limited. We were sometimes treated like second class citizens and we knew that if there was a problem, we would be blamed.[30]

This seems to have been a normal part of the life of every Jew living in an Islamic country. The Jewish people were used to it and accepted it. They lived very well in Muslim Baghdad, but they would always be second class citizens in the land of their birth, even though they were there long before Islam existed.

In spite of this, as noted, the Baghdadi Jewish community was prosperous and successful.[31] Their Jewish identity was strong and they excelled in trade and crafts.

> Growing up, we were very wealthy. My mother had three maids and slept in a beautiful room. I had a white bed with a net over it, like in the old movies. My father was a business man, as were my uncles and cousins. We lived well until we left because we were scared because we were Jewish.[32]
>
> My mother didn't really work. We had maids. The maids did the cleaning, the washing, and the cooking. We had San-Yees (maids). My father was a co-owner

---

[29] Personal interview with Vivian Belboul
[30] Personal Interview, Evelyne Shah

[31] Levin, I (2001) p. 2.
[32] Personal interview with Doris Basa,

of a very successful company. He had to be a co-owner because he was Jewish. His partner was a Muslim. He was good to us. My father worked extremely hard.[33]

[33] Personal interview with Carmen Kor

Chapter 2:

Jewish Life in Iraq in the 20th Century

After the First World War of 1914-1918, the British, having defeated the Ottomans under the leadership of General Maude, became the ruling power (from March 11th, 1917 until October, 1932 when Iraq gained her independence)[34]. The League of Nations granted the area to the United Kingdom as a British mandate.

The actual percentage of Jews in Baghdad when the British took over is debated. whereas Sick, Spector Simon and Tejirian claim that the Jews comprised 20 percent of Baghdad's population[35] and Gubbay and Levy believe that the Jews constituted about 25 percent of the general population of the city[36], Sasson Somekh[37] suspects that the Jews made up one third of the population.[38] There does not seem to be too much debate, however, as to the influence of the Jews. They were the dominant forces in areas such as trade, business and crafts. Their level of education was high due to the elite Western-style Jewish schools which will be detailed in the following pages.

Around 1917, the Jews (especially males) were literate in several languages, while most citizens only spoke Arabic and many of them could not read or write the language. In the preceding years many of the Jewish people had managed to make strong business ties around the Orient and Europe. Because of these connections and their

[34] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p 79, 97.
[35] Sick, Spector Simon, (2004) p. 38.
[36] Gubbay, L., and Levy, A. (1996) p. 20.
[37] In a personal interview
[38] It is estimated, that in 1917, when the British took power, there were 140,000 people in Baghdad. By 1932, there were 358,840 people. http://lexicorient.com/e.o/baghdad.htm January 2nd, 2007

knowledge of the culture and language of the English, the British employed many Jewish people. Jews were especially valued as translators and writers.[39] Some of the wealthy and educated Jews even managed to be appointed to positions in government, and some even served as members in the Senate and Parliament[40]. Their dhimmi status was seemingly a non-issue at this time. [41]

It must be noted that some in the Jewish community originally reacted negatively to the growing British presence in their community. One of the reasons for this was that the first emissaries of British culture were Christian Missionaries who came in 1846. The religious leadership was extremely wary of them and issued an edict that the Jews should not be allowed into their homes. In a letter from one of these British missionaries to the British Ambassador to the Turkish Court at Constantinople in 1846, the missionary writes that the sages tried to curse them because they feared assimilation. On the other hand, the missionary also emphasizes the great desire of many Jews to learn about British Western society. In the words of Major H.C. Rawlinson (1846):

> Lately I have had as many as nine Jews in our house for an evening, most of them anxious to learn English...Several of those Jews who have come to me for instruction in English are most anxious to visit England and there to improve themselves in literature, professions, trades and manufacturers...Almost all who used to come and were making progress in reading and writing English are prevented by fear of course, or intrigues. [42]

---

[39] Kattan, N. (2005) p. 56.
[40] Gubbay, L., and Levy, A. (1996) p. 73, 74.
[41] There is a list taken from the Public Records Office in London[41] that lists Mr. Yoosef Ezrah and Mr. Yamin (both listed as Jews) as bankers employed as Servants of the Residency and Consulate. It lists Mr. Saleh Yoosef (also listed as a Jew[41]) as a banker for the British company, Messrs. Stephen Lynch and Co.
[42] Shulewitz; Bat Ye'or (1999) p. 34, 35.

This demonstrates the conflict that began to arise between traditional Jews and the more modernizing sectors of the Jewish community. This conflict continued throughout the 20th century. The Rabbis were extremely fearful that the Jewish connection to trade, the learning of languages and the familiarization with other cultures, coupled with the fact that the Jews were occasionally being taught by Christian missionaries, would lead to assimilation. In truth, although religious literacy declined, the people maintained their Jewish identity.

> Our identity was first Jewish. We were Jewish. Everything about us was Jewish. We studied secular subjects in school, like languages, geography, history, math and science. My father worked with non Jews, we were living in a non-Jewish country, but at the end of the day, we were Jewish. We would never dream of marrying a non-Jew, it would have been unthinkable. [43]

> The Iraqis in general are not religious. The Muslims, for the most part, like the Jews, were not very religious but the way of life of the Jews of Iraq was Jewish. Barely anybody would eat anything other than kosher. It was looked down upon not to eat kosher. The best food was Jewish in our opinion. Nobody would think to buy food from the Muslims. My father went to synagogue every Shabbat. He did the Shabbat Kiddush (Traditional blessing over the wine) at home, there was no question about what it is to be Jewish. We were Jewish; it was a way of life. The Jews of Baghdad were not intellectually Jewish. When we wrote, we didn't write about Judaism, we wrote about anything else, we were a part of general life. I published my first short story when I was 13. I was very proud of it. It was in Arabic. I was the best student at school in French, English and Arabic. [44]

> I was never kosher, my father was not kosher. He ate bacon and ham [when he traveled abroad]. He did not fast on Kippur [Day of Atonement]. I knew that I was Jewish, though; it was important to me.[45]

---

[43] Personal interview with Vivian Belboul.
[44] Personal interview with Naim Kattan.
[45] Personal interview with Sassoon Somekh, Out of everybody I interviewed, only Sassoon Somekh's family did not make it a priority to eat kosher food. Everybody else I interviewed grew up eating kosher and fasting on Yom Kippur.

As Naim Kattan states, the Iraqi Jews, for the most part were not very religious. Their priority was succeeding in the secular world. This being the case, however, just as these three individuals knew first and foremost that they were Jews, the Iraqi Jews as a collective knew that they were Jewish and this identity was sacred to them.

The Alliance Israelite School played a major role in imparting to Baghdadi Jews the ways and customs of the modern-western world including the knowledge of science, math, geography and languages. A branch of the Alliance Israelite system which originated in France and spread throughout the Arab Jewish world was commissioned by French Jews. Its existence and popularity demonstrate the strong interest the Jews had in the outside world. They sent their children to foreign-commissioned schools because they wanted them to be connected to the life and culture of these countries and saw this as a key to financial success.[46]. The public schools in Baghdad could not provide this quality or breadth of education. Upper class, secular Muslims also gravitated to this educational model and some sought to be educated in these Jewish schools.

> Until I left in 1990, the general people of Baghdad never spoke foreign languages well. Not even English, not French. They did not speak anything well as they did not learn it in their schools at the same level as we did in ours. The Jews, in their schools, studied it (foreign languages). It was a culture. This was known, and because of this, there were some well to do Muslims in our schools.[47]

There was not very much Judaism taught in the Alliance school.[48] As I explain below, Hebrew education was only until fourth grade.

---

[46] Kattan, N. (2005) p. 56.
[47] Personal interview with Mouzly Shashoua
[48] Personal interview with Marcelle Core

> Up until grade four the education consisted of French, Arabic and Hebrew. In grade three we reached the Hebrew level of the Chumash. Chumash translated in Arabic to Al Kown. At the end of grade three we were reading- *Bereishit barah elokim et hashamayim ve'et haaretz-* (translated in Arabic to) *allah chalaka al arth wal samaa el ahad.* In grade four they omitted the Hebrew, it was replaced by the English, it was considered more important. [49]

There were also some Jews who attended non-Jewish schools, often for reasons of convenience (the schools were closer to their homes). These schools mostly consisted of Jews and wealthy Muslims, Christians and Armenians.

> I went to public government school. I went there from grade one until high school. All the teaching was in Arabic except a little English language. I also learned Math, science, geography, history. My Jewish education was all in the small school in the synagogue. I learned there until I was a Bar Mitzvah boy. I went there twice a week after school. Five days a week, Friday and Saturday there was no school in Iraq.[50]

> I studied at the Mme. Adelle Elementary school. It wasn't a Jewish school and there were all kinds of people there. All the rich Muslims, some ministers kids, Armenians and Christians. The brother of the ex president came to the school. He came in a limousine—Razz Eliyahu was the president at the time and his relative, Hamid Eliyahu, came to the school with me.[51]

Iraqi nationalism and its effect on the Jewish Community:

The arrival of the British in 1917 generated two trends within the Iraqi community; On the one hand, a desire to assert Arab uniqueness in the face of the conqueror's culture, on the other, an attempt to blend Iraqi nationalism with British modernism. The Baghdadi Jews and their schools were affected by both of these trends.

---

[49] Personal interview with Evelyne Shah
[50] Personal interview with Anwar Shah
[51] Personal interview with Sami Sourani,

During the 1920s, the Iraqi and Baghdadi governments instituted a new curriculum that reflected growing nationalist sensitivities. There was a desire to unite and create a sense of solidarity amongst the many peoples of the land in order for Iraqis to be united against foreign interference.[52] In 1921, national education fell under Iraqi control. The government was now taking an interest in the schools, including the private ones (which in the past it had ignored). This new nationalist trend stressed Arabic in schools, including the privately managed Jewish ones. Arabic reading and writing had always been taught in the Jewish schools, however, how Arabic culture and history needed to be taught as well. The Jewish schools complied with these changes without a fight. They didn't want to create any problems in the host country where they were the minority. There were also new courses relating to moral and civic duties and the patriotic obligations of students. These were called *Madaniya* (citizenship). The Iraqi flag was raised ceremoniously on the schools' flagpoles and the boys and girls would sing the national anthem of Iraq as well as other patriotic songs. Sometimes an Iraqi inspector from the Ministry of education would come and watch how patriotic the students actually were. Students as well as their parents wore the *Sidara*[53] to show how they were in solidarity with the Iraqi people. They took the official exams that placed heavy emphasis on the new nationalism.

> In order to keep this private school [The Alliance Israelite], funded by foreign resources, the school had to abide by the government rules- to teach Arabic and Iraqi nationalist ideals. At one time we were studying Arabic history, Iraqi history and French history. We studied geography of Iraq and some other Middle East countries and we studied the geography of France and the poetry of France (in

[52] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 173.
[53] A Sidara is a traditional Iraqi cap commonly made of black velvet, black lamb's wool, or black felt. It is brimless, has a crown at the center, and folds like a pocket around the crown of the cap. This cap at one time was very popular with middle-class, upper-middle-class, and elite members of Iraqi society.

> order) to pass the exams that were sent from France. We studied Arabic poetry as well. We tried to pass (I passed both) the Brevet from France and the Matawassita, the Iraqi government exam. [54]

The students who attended the elementary and intermediate Jewish schools and took the exams averaged a rate of success "far higher than the national average".[55] There were more and more Jewish students entering public exams and doing well on them. One of the reasons that the number of Jewish students taking these exams was so high was the strong desire to delay conscription to the military and to improve their position in the army once drafted. It was possible to be drafted as early as 14 and if a student got into a university program he/she could attend and avoid or delay the draft. Military service usually took about two years to complete and had a reputation for being very rough and discriminatory to Jewish people. High school graduates were eligible to be officers after a short course of only three months. In addition to the Army connection, Jewish students also took these exams to get into new universities and colleges which were being established in Baghdad. The following are examples of these: The college of Pharmacy, the Royal College of Medicine, The College of Engineering, the Higher Teachers College, as well as Law school.[56] Eventually, the Iraqi Ministry of Education restricted the number of Jewish people who could be accepted to there and demanded higher grades from those who were accepted. These restrictions pertained to all people deemed dhimmi. For this reason many Jewish students left Iraq and attended university in other countries. The following is an account by an Iraqi Jew born in 1925 in Nasiriya.

---

[54] Personal interview with Evelyne Shah
[55] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 88-90.
[56] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 90.

> At the age of 18 I left Nasiriya and went to Baghdad. I applied to many colleges but was refused...because I was Jewish. I applied even to attend college in Syria but I did not get a passport because I was Jewish. They came up with all kinds of excuses. The excuse they used for me was the eye exam. I passed the medical exam, however the eye doctor refused to allow me to pass. There was nothing wrong with my eyes. This was a very common excuse. The university would cause someone to fail the eye exam so he could not get accepted to the university. This type of thing occurred in all the universities. The universities let them [Jewish students] apply, but then refused them... My older brother Nazim was accepted in the Medical faculty because there was once a senator in the Iraqi parliament- Ezra Menachem Daniel, a Jew, and my father was his agent in Nasiriya. So when my brother applied to Medicine, Ezra Daniel worked with the university and pushed for him to be accepted and he was accepted and became a doctor. [57]

The following is a list of the various colleges and the number of Jewish students who graduated from them between 1921 and 1951[58]: Medicine (245), Law (205), Pharmacy (165), Teaching (78), Engineering (154), Economics (92) and other (38). This comes out to 977 Jewish graduates from various colleges in the aforementioned years. The number of graduates from university is relatively high considering how many were turned away due to the quota. These estimates also do not take into account all the Jewish students who left Iraq to go study abroad in European universities, in other Middle Eastern colleges and in the West. After 1951, quite a few Iraqi Jewish students actually went on to study in Israeli colleges and never returned to Iraq.

As a result of the integration of Iraqi language, history and religion in Jewish elementary and high schools, the general atmosphere of national pride among Iraqis and Baghdadis in particular, and the Jewish encounter with Iraqi elites in the secular colleges, identification with Iraqi nationalism became fashionable among some Jewish people after

---

[57] Personal interview with Anwar Shah
[58] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 90.

Iraq became independent in 1921. Young Jews desired to be Iraqi in every respect[59]. Slowly, some moved away from religious Judaism and embraced a more secular life. As previously shown, this move towards a secular way of life began in the late 19th century, but it became more common-place, in the 1920s and 30s. This identification with Iraq was not seriously undermined by the quotas. The hope was that through this identification with Iraqi nationalism, they would become accepted in society and the unofficial quotas would be lifted. This hope was shattered by the Farhud and its aftermath and the rise of Zionism (discussed below).

Jewish religious Life:

According to Professor Sasson Somekh approximately 10% of the Iraqi Jewish population became secular between the end of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. He noted that he did not grow up religious and that he had a relative who didn't eat kosher. "My father wasn't kosher, he ate bacon and ham. He didn't fast on [Yom] Kippur"[60]. Of the remaining 90%, a large portion gradually veered away from aspects of Jewish observance. Synagogue attendance dropped during the week, Shabbat ceremonies were only sometimes observed and there were a number of Jews in the community who did not observe daily Jewish practice, for example, all of the restrictions of Kashrut. Some began to work on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Smoking on Saturday became

[59] This need to be connected and accepted as an Iraqi, was strong in the Jewish youth, even with the university quotas and the unequal regard that many Muslim Iraqis had for the Jews. They tried hard to be accepted and to succeed as Iraqis, much like the Jews in Europe before the time of WW2 who viewed themselves as- German, or Polish, above all else. Like the Jews in Europe, eventually the Iraqi Jews also had to recognize that even if they strayed away from their religion, their Jewish birth connected them to the Jewish people. In the case of Iraqi Jews, the resentment towards them was not anti-Jewish, it manifested as anti-Zionism. Even though the Jews did manage to integrate and succeed in Iraq, they eventually (1951-1990s) had to leave and had to realize that something like a *university quota* was not an isolated issue. It reflected the dhimmi attitude that many Iraqis had imbedded in their minds. An attitude that with Zionism slowly and subtlety became a problem for the Jewish people.

[60] Personal interview, Sasson Somekh

more acceptable. The most important thing in those days for many Jewish youth was succeeding in school. Foreign languages and math were seen as more immediately useful.[61]

The main two factors that led to this gradual estrangement from religion were the Arabization of their identities (described previously) and the modern cultural influence of the British. These two trends were reinforced by the Jewish schools that taught English and French, math and science. There were similar secularizing trends amongst wealthy Muslims. There were Jewish Iraqis, who frequented cafes, and discussed politics, modernity, writing and the like with this group of Muslims and befriended them. Naim Kattan, a prominent Canadian writer and author of the book "Farewell Babylon" claimed, in a personal interview, that he was:

> ...connected with the Muslim population as well (as the Jewish one), because I wanted to be a writer. I published my first short story when I was 13. I was very proud of it. It was in Arabic. I was the best at school in French, English and Arabic. I started to write and was very much curious about the Muslim community. So I got in touch with people who published periodicals. I started two periodicals with a group of Muslims. And was the editor of one of the dailies. I introduced a lot of French and European culture in my writing.

It was simply easier for people like Mr. Kattan, to meld with Muslim Iraqis if they were no longer religious. He wanted to be as *Iraqi* as possible but a certain type of Iraqi, part of that elite group that had their eyes on Iraqi culture but also on the cultures of the west. While these Jews continued to see themselves as Jewish, it was equally important to blend in with society at large and to move forward in their struggle to fit in with the western world. As Kattan told me, because of this interest in the west, many of the Iraqi

---

[61] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 78.

Jews who arrived in Israel in 1951, were generally the more modernized of the Sephardic Jews who came to the country. [62]

An additional reason for the Jewish distancing from religion and the strong connection to western modernity was the large number of new job opportunities that opened to young Jews after the British occupation. When the British came to Iraq, the Jews were the intermediaries between them and the Arabs. The Jewish people knew English and French as a result of the Alliance schools and were able to translate for the British. [63] [64]

The Jewish people in Iraq prior to the British occupation were mostly self-employed. Many were either merchants or artisans, such as craftsmen, tailors, laborers, etc... Once the British entered and opportunities to join the British administered Iraqi government opened, many Jewish people changed fields. They became attracted to administrative and clerical jobs in both the private and public sectors. They were particularly interested in the new western and British banks that opened. The Jews soon became indispensable to the new administration. [65]

The Jewish schools, such as the Alliance, the Shamash school and the Frank Iny School (as indicated below) helped in the creation of secularism and modern lifestyles. These schools stressed the importance of secular subjects above the importance of religion.

> I remember it was so important for my father that I excelled in math and science. I *hated* math and science but I had to learn them and excel in them. Society, school, our parents felt that math and science would make us succeed in the world and in

[62] Personal interview with Naim Kattan
[63] Ibid.
[64] Personal interview with Sasson Somekh
[65] Personal interview with Naim Kattan

> life. It was a given that we needed English and French. Those two were not even debated. Judaism was something we knew we had. We knew we were Jewish, we didn't need it to be so apparent in our education or our life practices. Schooling was the most important even over synagogue. [66]

This quotation raises an essential point; that the Jews of Baghdad were not worried about losing their Jewish identity and maintaining it because Judaism was already so integral to who they were. They were more concerned with learning the elements of western education and being a part of cutting edge culture.

While secular education was a priority for the Jews in Baghdad, generally speaking, they did know about their traditions, even if they did not keep all of the religious observances.

> We maintained the Jewish identity at home- not severely- we maintained it in the big feasts and religious dinners. Our parents went to synagogue and sometimes we accompanied them, sometimes not. There were some people who were very religious, not too many, but some. We didn't eat kosher [outside the home] – when I was a little girl our house was kosher- and we didn't keep Shabbat. We wrote on Shabbat. [67]

> Sukkot [the feast of tabernacles]... we had a sukkah, or tent, at my grandmother's house....we loved to eat our meals in the sukkah...Hanukkah... I remember the ceremony of kindling the Menorah candles on eight consecutive evenings. Since my father did not follow in particular customs and traditions of the day, the ceremony usually took place at my grandmother's house conducted by my religious cousin Jacob...[68] On the 15th day of Shebat, we celebrated the early spring budding of the trees... one month later, it was our beloved Purim, a one day feast in memory of the Jewish queen Esther...Pesach...the baking ceremony of the matzah took place in our house... [later] we had no choice to buy our matzah from one of the Jewish bakeries [they had to get rid of the oven]...

---

[66] Personal interview with Lydia Sour
[67] Personal interview with Lisette Ades
[68] The fact that he notes that he had a religious cousin is an interesting point because it implies that he differentiated between himself and his cousin and didn't consider himself to be religious.

> Those among us who were not religious and did not abide by the rules did not spare the non-kosher food either. Of course, enjoying some favorite non-kosher food in a restaurant was one thing, but to bring home such food was entirely a different story.[69]

The primary vehicle for expressing one's Jewish identity was the home and within the confines of one's own community. Outside of the community many Iraqi Jews looked like everyone else (your average European) and took pride in that. Their roots, however, were Jewish and they held on to that. Modernity and Judaism were able to be merged and mixed. While many of the Jewish rituals were maintained, as seen from the above quotes, the level of observance definitely dropped.

Names and Modernity

Iraqi Jewish interaction with society (of the west and local surroundings) is not only evident in their cultural practices and in the schools they chose. It is also manifest in the very names they gave their children and in the family name that they took in imitation of western norms.[70] A famous quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet asks, "What is in a name?" The simple answer is, "a lot". One can tell a lot about a person or society by the names given to children. We can learn about history, culture, and in the case of a Jewish community, we can also learn about interactions with the non-Jewish world.[71] In modern Israel, for example, children born at the beginning of the Jewish state, in 1948, were often given names of heroes or biblical figures, such as Moshe (Moses), or David (reminiscent of David, the ancient king of Israel). The names of biblical and military heroes were

---

[69] Stevens, J. (1997) p. 28-31.
[70] The adoption of family names allowed Jews to apply to universities where one's family name was requested.
[71] Sabar Yona (2003) p. 11, Nehardea, No. 14

significant to israelis starting a new country. Modern Israelis oftentimes name their children according to the area in which they live, or where they were born, in order to illustrate their connection to that place. This is a connection that is not necessarily evident to Jews who have lived in Israel for a short time. Take the example of my cousin who lives in the Negev desert. His name Reem (meaning Ram) is after the desert animal. There is the common name Ayelet (deer) which many Israelis living in the desert give to their daughter.[72] Iraqi Jews were no different. They often possessed names relating to their Arabic surroundings.[73]

Before and up to the 19th century, most Iraqi Jews had Jewish names. Boys had names such as Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Solomon and David. Sometimes an Arabic Jew's name was reflective of the time in which he was born. Parents would name their child for the holiday. For example, Nissim (Miracle), indicated the child was born on Hanukah because of the miracle of lights associated with the festival. Bekhor (first born), indicate a child born on Passover when the Egyptian first born were killed. There were also names like Hanukkah and Pesach (which literally indicate the name of the holiday in which the child was born). Iraqis also oftentimes named their children for prophets who were believed to be buried in the area, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, Nahum and Jonah. Women were often called Miryaam (Miriam) or Serah.

Towards the middle of the 19th century, some Iraqi Jews began to give their children names that reflected the Arab world they were living in, such as Abdullah, Fuad,

---

[72] More modern urban Tel Aviv citizens, often disregard Hebrew names all together and opt to name their children English or American names, such as Tommy or Michael (instead of Micha-el), or Jonny or Michelle (instead of the Hebrew Yoni or Michal). These are children often born to parents who want their children to have western names because they are influenced by American or western culture.

[73] In the 1940s, with the negative feelings among many Muslims towards Israel, giving Jewish children Arabic names became much rarer.

Idris, Habib, Sa'id, Ramzi, Nuri, Khzuri, Salih; Gurjiya, Tuffaha, Latifa and Habbuba. They did not, however, give their children names that were strongly associated with Islam. There is no record of Jews named Muhammad, Ali, Husein or Aysha.[74] Iraqi Jews born in the 20th century often possessed English or French names, depending on which culture was most influential at the time. During the period of the Alliance school's popularity, many Iraqi Jews had French names, such as Marcelle, Lydia, Lisette or Vivian (some examples of names of individuals I interviewed who are quoted in this paper). Professor Sasson Somekh gave the following examples, "Esperance, Georgette, Pauline, Albertine and Odette. (The latter two are the names of young and adored women in the work of Marcel Proust...)"[75] I do not mean to ignore the tradition of naming a child after an older or deceased relative. This occurred in Baghdad as well. Professor Somekh, a descendant of Chacham Abdullah Somekh (chief Rabbi of Baghdad), writes in his book, *Baghdad Yesterday*[76], that his own name comes from his grandfather, Sasson Somekh.

The British presence brought about some royal English names. The name Victoria, (after the Queen) was a common female name among middle class girls and was a symbol of English patriotism which began to slowly find its way into the homes of the Jews at the end of the 19th century. With the culmination of the Second World War in the 1930s and 40s, and the popularity of America among Baghdadi Jews, names that were originally French, became anglicized. Accents shifted and spelling changed slightly. For example, Maurice (Maureece) became Morris, Rachelle became Rachel, Edmond (Edmonde) was Edmond, and Suzanne became Susan.

---

[74] Sabar Yona (2003) p. 11, Nehardea, No. 14
[75] Somekh, Sasson (2004), Baghdad Yesterday, "Whats in a Name section" [Hebrew]
[76] Ibid.

Another thing that became more common as Jews tried to fit into the western world were last names. Up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most Baghdadis did not have last names. People were usually called by their father's names. Sometimes they were called according to identifying factors on their face, or according to their profession. Yona Sabar notes that as a child, in school, he was called Yona Ibn (son of) RaHamim.[77] Some people were called according to their physical characteristics, for example, One-eyed Shlomo, Moshe the Tall one, Moshe the Short One. As times changed, with western education, military services, the rise of bureaucracy and taxation, it was necessary for all Iraqis (including non Jews) to have a formal family name, to make it was easier to identify the individual. [78] Those Jewish parents who wished to send their children to a school such as the Alliance or Shammash schools, needed to have a last name in order to register for the French Baccalaureate exams. Likewise students who wished to attend university needed to have last names. The formalizing of a person's name, from one that was recognized solely within a community to one that could be recognized in the international world, was a big turning point for the Baghdadi Jews.

Many of the last names are reflections of aspects of Judaism and Jewish communal activities. It is important to note that when a family member converted to Islam, Jewish society gave them the name *Meshummada* (somebody converted). This is a further sign of the emphasis the community placed on Jewish Identity. People gave their children names that they thought would help them to succeed in areas like business and international relations. Girls were named modern western names in the hope that they

---

[77] Sabar Yona, p. 11, 2003, Nehardea, No. 14

[78] These last names often formalized the previously informal designations. For example, Sasson (son of) Daud (David) became Sasson Daud. Somebody born in Kirkuk, would become a Mr. Kirkukli. A person who sold pickles would become el-Tirshi (the pickle seller).

would find men from likeminded modern and educated families to marry. The westernized names were especially common in the upper and middle class Baghdadi Jewish families whose children were educated in the Alliance and Shamash type schools. The shift to western naming did not signal loss of Jewish identity, however; as previously noted (in terms of ritual) a Jew was still a Jew even though he was now called Albert.

Modernity brought a lot of changes for the Jews of Baghdad and, as the above section shows, the Jewish people, save for a few religious leaders who at the start were concerned with the modernizing trends, welcomed modernity with open arms. They wanted to be as modern as possible in order to have more opportunities. The schools that were emerging in the late 19th and early 20th century, that the Jews sent their children to, reflected the cultural influences of the west and helped these influences proliferate. These new modern schools are described below.

The Farhud of 1941 and Anger over Zionism:

On the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, which fell on Sunday, June 1st, 1941, a disaster befell the Jews of Baghdad. There was a pogrom, a farhud (in Arabic), a massacre of Jews. Under normal circumstance, Jews would have been celebrating the happy holiday by visiting family and friends, however this spring, things were different. The tragic events left a deep scar in the hearts of the Jewish minority and were to remain in their memories as the worst nightmare they had ever experienced during their lengthy and relatively peaceful existence in Iraq.[79]

[79] Stevens, J. (1997) p. 37.

Over 180 Jews were murdered[80], 2000 injured and hundreds of homes plundered. Many women were raped and some non Jewish Muslims who tried to help their fellow Jewish neighbors were murdered as well. How did this happen to a community that lived among its Arab neighbors in relative peace? It actually came as a shock to most Jews at the time. They always knew that they were a minority living amongst a majority. They were dhimmis, they were not quite equal. Given this, however, they were still not prepared to be murdered in cold blood.

Indeed in the 1930s, the Jews had reason to believe that their position in Iraq was improving. Great Britain formally recognized the full independence of the kingdom of Iraq. [81] Iraq was accepted as a member of the League of Nations on the basis of its commitment to the equality of all its citizens, including the stipulation that:

> ...differences of race, language or religion will not prejudice any Iraqi national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil and political rights... unrestricted, free use was guaranteed of any language, in private intercourse, in commerce, in religion, in the press or in publications.[82]

But there were other developments on the ground which in time undermined the values stipulated in this document. In September 1933 King Ghazi, a weak ruler and what Nissim Rejwan calls a "nationalist enthusiast" came to power in Iraq after his father, King Faisal I died. According to Rejwan, King Ghazi encouraged the Sunni nationalist forces in Iraq and allowed them to conduct political actions, such as protest actions and riots against the British. Iraq was becoming something of a refuge for Arab nationalists

---

[80] This number is debated. Some suggest 300 were murdered; this larger figure seems to include non-Jews. According to Stevens, J, (p. 37), 120 or so non Jews, such as rioters, security people and Muslims who tried to defend their Jewish neighbors and friends also died.
[81] Rejwan, N. (1985) p. 217-224.
[82] Rejwan, N. (1985) p.217.

from Palestine and Syria, which was the first Arab country to gain independence from the British monarchy. Some of these political activists and anti-Jewish propagators attained positions in schools as teachers, or in political arenas. In fact, the former mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin El Huseini, who was kicked out of Palestine for having collaborated with Hitler and for posing threats to the Jewish people, found refuge in Baghdad. He began to propagate anti Jewish rhetoric and many Iraqis followed him. In addition to Haj Amin El Huseini, Dr. F. Grobba, the German envoy to Iraq, disseminated Nazi propaganda while moving up the echelon of power and influencing people in high places, such as senior officials, director-generals and even ministers. Up until 1939, when King Ghazi was killed in a car accident, there were numerous uprisings and five military revolts against the British. Life was not easy for the Jews of Baghdad at that time due to rising anti-Zionism. Hebrew instruction in Jewish schools was limited to the reading of the Bible- without even translation and interpretation. This explains why there are many Iraqi Jews today who can read Hebrew prayers and Bible stories, but do not know what the stories actually mean. Jewish people who wanted to travel to Palestine often became targets of government persecution. Many of these anti-Jewish stipulations were "informal", perhaps because they openly contradicted the principles to which Iraq was accepted by the League of Nations.

In September of 1936 a group calling themselves the Committee for the Defense of Palestine, delivered a manifesto accusing the Iraqi Jews of lending support to the Palestinian Zionists. These accusations were in fact true at least at the individual level. Many Jewish people in Iraq had family who had moved to Israel (Palestine at the time) and sent telegrams back and forth, including money. Three days after this manifesto was

delivered, on the eve of Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year), two Jewish individuals were shot to death leaving a social club. The next day was declared 'Palestine Day' by the Committee for the Defense of Palestine. There were protests, demonstrations (in mosques and other public areas) and two more Jews were assaulted, one critically. Ten days later, on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), a bomb was thrown into a crowded synagogue. Luckily it did not explode. As a result of these occurrences, Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kadoori, the head of the Jewish community in Baghdad, along with some other leaders in the community issued a declaration disassociating the Jewish community in Baghdad from Zionism.[83] This was a necessary step in order to save the Jewish people of Baghdad from being seen as Zionists and, as a result, as criminals. Even though the community denounced Zionism, individual contact did not stop, but the communication now had to be conducted with great care.

Regardless of the Jewish community's efforts, turmoil and unrest continued. There were intensifying individual attacks on Jews. In a further attempt to defuse the rising hatred, a group of thirty three Jewish dignitaries sent a telegram to the British Colonial Secretary and the League of Nations expressing opposition to Zionism. They pledged, in this telegram, that they were loyal to Iraq as their one true homeland. Jewish writers, scholars and journalists wrote articles in the Baghdadi press pledging their loyalty to their homeland of Iraq and reiterating the words of the telegram. They stated that they were not in any way associated with Zionism. This step prevented full blown outrage against the Jews. At the same time, though, the declaration that Zionism, or support for Israel, was a criminal act remained problematic for the community. This is because many Jews did have family in Israel and merely associating with them would

[83] Rejwan, N. (1985) p.219.

have been considered a Zionist crime. To avoid being arrested, communication within families had to be conducted cautiously. The following is a quotation from a personal interview with a Jewish Baghdadi woman currently living in Canada. Part of her family had moved to Israel in 1951 and the rest was supposed to follow. In her interview she described how the family in Israel used coded messages in a letter that they sent with a trusted friend via Switzerland to tell the remaining family members to remain in Baghdad. Although this letter relates to the 1950s, similar mechanisms were used in the 1930s.

> My grandparents, uncles and aunts left Baghdad in the early 50's during the mass immigration to Israel...We too were supposed to follow, however a couple of months after my grandparents left, we received a letter from them via a friend in Switzerland, telling us to come visit for Lydia's wedding. I [Lydia] was only six years old at the time and we were able to decipher that this was a coded message telling us not to move to Israel. [84]

The message had to be delivered through a friend in Switzerland and could not be mailed directly. Even so, it still had to be written using a coded message in case anti-Zionist Iraqis found the letter. This is just one example of the precautions that the Jews in Baghdad took while communicating with family in Israel.

In 1941, the Nationalist leader Rashid 'Ali came to power with a cabinet that supported a complete removal of the British from Iraq and denied the British troops access to any of the military bases in the country. On the 18th of April, 1941, Rashid 'Ali formed a cabinet that included Nazi and anti-Jewish ideologues and elements. In response, he declared a state of war against Great Britain. This declaration triggered a month of war in Iraq and led to increased harassment of the Jewish people. Jews were

[84] Personal Interview, Lydia Sour

accused of signaling British planes flying overhead in order to help them bomb Iraqi military bases. There are thirteen known cases of Jews who were murdered around the country for unfounded accusations such as these. [85] The following is a statement of a Baghdadi Jewish woman who lived through this period:

> Once I was with my mother at my friend's house, and my mother in law was there. We were on the roof, we used to sleep on the roof. And there was an airplane passing overhead. And there was a Muslim across the street who shouted at her; Shouted 'what are you signaling [at], [for] the plane to come and drop bombs on us?! It was a scary time [86]

On May 29th, Rashid 'Ali and his troupes were defeated and fled the country. The British and opposition forces were almost in Baghdad. On this same day a group of Iraqi officers created "The Committee for Internal Security". Their intention was to fill, before the British troupes entered Baghdad, the political void created by the fall of the government of Rashid 'Ali. They ordered the British to not enter the city in order not to offend the Iraqis. The Iraqi opposition forces that accompanied the British, however, were allowed to enter the city. In order to protect the Jews, on May 30th, 1941, Colonel Yunis al-Sab'awi, Rashid 'Ali's only remaining cabinet member in Baghdad, asked Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kadoori to notify the Jews of the city that they were not allowed to leave their homes for the following three days- beginning Saturday May 31st.[87] Those days fell on the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost). The Jewish people complied and barely left their homes. The only times they went out were to synagogue or relatives houses in their own Jewish neighborhoods. On Sunday, some of the Jews finally felt sufficiently secure to go out into the streets of Baghdad. This is when the trouble started. The Jews were

---

[85] Rejwan, N. (1985) p.221.
[86] Personal Interview Chafika Saleh
[87] Rejwan, N. (1985) p.222, 223, Personal interview with Anwar Shah

dressed in their best clothes as a result of the holiday and some Muslim people got the impression that the Jews were celebrating the defeat of the Iraqi Rashid 'Ali by the British. A number of Jews returning home from celebrations were accosted by soldiers. One Jew was murdered and sixteen others wounded, in full view of the military police (who did nothing to stop the attacks). Jews were then attacked in the main roads of the city and in some poor neighborhoods. Many were killed and wounded. The following two days were horrible for the Jews. Acts of murder and pillage and rape spread. Riots occurred and the lives of Jewish people were in jeopardy. The "Committee for Internal Security" which had taken on the responsibility of securing the safety of all the Baghdadi inhabitants refused to take action against these attacks.[88] After this event, the Jews began to question their place in Iraqi society. They were truly a minority and an unwanted one at that. They were the scapegoats.

School children started to feel the wrath of their peers and many parents who had sent their children to other schools started sending their children to Jewish schools so they would be surrounded by Jewish children and would not be faced with anti-Jewish sentiments. Examples of Jews who left the American school for the Alliance or Shamash school are detailed below. One former American school for girls' student relayed to me that the students in her school were mean to her and said that she was a Zionist and that she would eventually leave for Israel. She remembers that all Jewish students were taunted in this way. "They said to me, you! You will go! You will go to that country! You will desert us! You are a traitor! You are a Zionist! You should go!" A few days

[88] Rejwan, N. (1985) p.222, 223.

after this outburst she transferred to the Alliance school.[89] Thus we see once again how the general historical circumstances impacted on the educational life of the community.

The Farhud was the first time that the Jewish people of Baghdad actually felt full blown wrath from their Baghdadi neighbors. Not all of these neighbors participated, however, and many came to the support of the Jews. Jack Stevens relays two such stories:

> My aunt Pauline, her husband and their four children lived at that time in a house in the south end of the city (al Karrada)... It was a mixed area populated mostly by middle class Muslims, Christian and Jewish families (it was rare for Jews to live in mixed neighborhoods). During the two days of the riots, two Muslim gentlemen, armed with loaded guns, came out from their houses and stationed themselves at each end of the street. They told their Jewish neighbors not to be afraid, that they would defend them against any possible attacks by rioters, and that they would not hesitate to use their weapons to do so. Under the prevailing conditions, that was truly a heroic stand.
>
> A similar example I heard from my dear friend Avner Meiri... His family lived in a mixed neighborhood (al Mahdiya) near the centre of Baghdad. Their neighbors were the Muslim family of Haj Moosa al Jewad. They invited Avner's whole family to stay with them at their house until conditions were back to normal. They stayed there three days and two nights. [90]

The above section is one which includes the positive aspects of living in Baghdad; wherein the jews enjoyed freedom of religious practice and education and the low points; such as the dhimmi status whereby the Jews were treated as second class citizens and the Farhud, during which time the Jews were persecuted because of their religious association with Israel and Zionism. Throughout the high and low points, the Jewish people tried to make the best of the situations and see the good. The above quote by Jack Stevens embodies this last point. The Jews were suffering, but he was still able to find examples of Muslims who helped their fellow Jews. Throughout history the Jewish

---

[89] Personal interview with Doris Basa
[90] Stevens, J. (1997) p. 38, 39.

Baghdadi was always able to find a level of comfort and enjoyment in his life, though he was a minority within a Muslim majority. This is what kept the Jew in Baghdad for so long.

Chapter 3:

Jewish Schooling in Iraq

The following chapter begins with a description of educational institutions in pre modern day Baghdad up until the 20th century. I describe the schooling of Muslims, Christians and Jews and illustrate the differences between the ways that these populations educated their youth. I then describe more recent schools that the Jewish people attended at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. One school in particular, the Alliance Israelite School, brought cultural influences from Europe to the Jews of Baghdad. This school is one that many Jewish alumni credit for the options that were available to them after leaving Baghdad (options such as future success in the international business world or in esteemed fields such as academia, law and medicine).

Islamic Educational Institutions in Baghdad: 12th century-20th century

A brief overview of pre modern schools of Muslims, Christians and Jews is important to demonstrate the great transformation that the modern schools of the 20th century signify.

After 1258, with the fall of the Abbasid Empire, there was a very low level of education in Iraq[91]. Iraq was not a center for Islamic studies like Cairo and Istanbul were. There were only a small number of Madrasahs (theological seminaries for higher studies) and elementary schools connected to mosques in Baghdad, Basrah and Mosul (three major Iraqi cities). Until the mid 19th century, most Baghdadis only received an

[91] Because of the many terms used to reference this area of ancient Mesopotamia, I will continue to refer to it as Iraq.

elementary school education, including the Jews. The Kuttab and the Mullah schools as well as the Madrassah schools dealt with the ideals of enlightenment very peripherally. [92] The traditional elementary schools were usually one room attached to the mosque.

The teaching methods were not conducive to intellectual stimulation. Traditional education in Iraq consisted of reading and reciting the Quran by rote. There was no interpretation or meaning taught, nor was there a grammatical analysis. This was the technique used for Quranic study throughout the Muslim world.[93] Some traditional Iraqi schools did teach Arabic calligraphy and elementary arithmetic. A student was able to graduate from the Kuttab when he could read the entire Quran accurately[94]. If the student wanted to undergo studies in Islamic philosophical law, he could attend the Madrassah. During the 19th century there were eight Madrassahs in Baghdad. The most famous one was the Al-Dawudiyah, founded in 1818 by the last Ottoman Mamluk Vali of Baghdad, Dawud Pasha. The curriculum in this Madrassah was noteworthy because it also included a study of grammar, syntax, logic, geometry and astronomy. The students were all male adults who were already working or practicing a trade. They left their work on occasion to attend a class. [95] There were few Muslims interested in higher education because the population was largely comprised of craftsmen and farmers and they had little interest in higher education. Their Islamic values were of the utmost importance to them, not western- secular education. The purpose of this education was to preserve and maintain the continuation of Muslim traditions. This system was primarily religious and paid little, if no attention to the secular aspects of life. When a student studied in the Madrassah for

---

[92] Antonius (1965) p. 37-40.
[93] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 177.
[94] Ben Jacob (1965) p. 306-308.
[95] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 23.

about eight to ten years and was able to read through the religious texts, he was considered a qualified graduate and was presented with an ijazah (permit) to practice among religious scholars. He was able to be appointed to be a mufti (Muslim scholar who interprets the Shaariya- Islamic law) or another type of religious leader. [96]

When the British entered Iraq they encountered a population that they perceived as ignorant. The Ottoman government had created a limited system of primary and secondary schools with a western focus. They also created a law school, one or two industrial schools and a school of civil administration but these were very poorly attended, chaotic and under funded.[97] After the First World War, the government, under the leadership of King Faisal, initially influenced by the British occupation and later by the impact the British had left on society, tried to improve the education system. About 10% of the national budget was allocated to education. From 1921 to 1958 the number of state supported schools increased from 88 to 1700. The number of teachers increased from 500 to 10 000, the number of pupils (which in 1921 was only 8000 in all of Iraq) increased to 333 000 by 1958. In 1939 it was recorded that the number of students in higher level educational institutions were only 1000, but by 1958 this number had increased to 5 500. [98]

The Iraqi education system in the first half of the 20th century only touched a certain part of the population. It did not reach the greatest percentage. Even the primary schools, by 1958, received less than a quarter of the children of school age. Primary education was compulsory by law but the state was never in a position to enforce it. Firstly, they did not have enough teachers, and secondly, enforcement would have caused

---

[96] Ibid.
[97] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 173.
[98] Ibid.

a lot of hardship to the many parents who were too poor to make do without their children working. Even the academic level and method of teaching hindered the progress of these schools. The technique that had been used for Quran study was transferred to modern subjects. The type of education existing in the Iraqi schools was therefore memorization of facts and concentration on examinations. The intellectual curiosity of students and capacity for logical, critical and original thought was shortchanged by learning only by rote. Some students and teachers triumphed over the shortcomings of this system, but they were few. Accordingly the majority of the population by 1958 was still largely illiterate (as over three quarters of the population did not even attend school)[99]

Christian schooling:

After the First World War, the Christians were also welcome in these same state endorsed schools that I mention in the previous paragraphs, although like the Muslims, there was not a great level of attendance. Up until the late 19th century the schools of the Christians were similar to those of the Muslims and Jews of the time. They learned in traditional religious seminaries and education consisted of learning the bible and holy books. Since the inception of the Christian settlement of Iraq there were three main sects of Christianity in Baghdad and surrounding areas. The Childani Church existed from around 200 AD. Its members claimed to be the original settlers of Iraq and they lived there even before (and perhaps alongside) the Jews. They were affiliated with Rome, but were not Catholic. Assyrian Christians who lived mostly in northern Iraq (around Mosul) and were very devout and settled around the shrine of the prophet Jonah. The Greek

[99] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 177.

Orthodox sect was originally the smallest of the three but grew in size when the Armenians came as refugees from Turkey during and after the First World War. These religious Christian sects were highly observant and like the Jews were given freedom to live and learn in a Muslim country because they were people of the book and believed in one G-d. They, too, had a dhimmi status.[100]

During the late 19th and first half of the 20th century, various Christian missions came into Baghdad and tried to affect the local Christian community. They were educated Western people who arrived with the aim of spreading Roman Catholicism among the Christians of Mesopotamia. The missions also offered educational services. The missionaries emphasized the importance of education. In their attempts to spread Catholicism, the missions also gave an entrée into the Western world by teaching the languages of Europe and America, such as English, and by sharing their own experiences and customs with the students with whom they interacted. The Christian missionaries set up four private schools in Baghdad- the Baghdad College (high school for boys), the American Jesuit secondary school for boys (founded in 1932), the American Jesuite primary and secondary school for girls, and the School of the Presentation (École de la Présentation), which was a French primary school and secondary school for girls, founded in 1928.[101]

Although the schools were run by devout Catholics, they were open to members of other religions and did not seek to convert them. As such, a number of Jews attended these schools. A Jewish student who attended the American school for girls recalled that

---

[100] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 181-188, 204-206, Personal interview with Sami Sourani, March 19, 2006

[101] Longrigg, S. and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 181.

"they even let us go home for the Jewish holidays. We weren't obliged to be there"[102]. Barely any Jews actually converted to Christianity because of these schools, and no Muslims did (if they had converted openly they would have been killed). These schools were undoubtedly Christian schools, however. As the daughter of a former American school for girls' student relayed, "my mother had to pray every morning Christian prayers- the Lord's Prayer."[103] These missionaries had little influence on the religious life of the local communities, though, because the communities were very attached to their own religious practices.

Outside these missions, the education method in the Christian community in Mesopotamia mirrored what was available in the Moslem world. They learned to memorize and repeat, not to interpret. The goal was to teach the students to read during church services. The students learned Arabic and Aramaic. They studied the Psalms and the Gospel. With the help of the missionaries, an excellent student could be sent to Rome to continue his religious training[104].

By the 1940's, perhaps in response to anti-Zionist sentiment, the missionary schools were no longer open to Jews and the Jewish students ended up going to the Jewish run schools.

> I went to the American school for girls [operated by Roman Catholic Nuns]. In this school there were Jews, Arabs [Muslims] and Christians. I went there for elementary school. There was anti-Semitism there, though. The teachers differentiated between the Jews and non Jews, and swore, and told them [the Jews] to leave. There were negative words towards Jews. So Jews left school. I left school and didn't continue high school. I studied at the American school until

---

[102] Personal interview with Marcelle Core
[103] Personal interview with Carmen Kor
[104] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 24.

grade eight. The American school stopped accepting Jewish students in the early 1940s. [105]

I went to the American school at first. I learned English and French there. Then because they [the teachers and the students- many of whom were Muslim and rich] were talking against the Jews they [the Jews] left the American school. I left and went to the Alliance school for Jewish girls.[106]

Traditional Jewish education in Baghdad;

The Cheder and Midrash Talmud Torah:

For most of the 19th century the education of the Jews focused mainly on the teaching of Jewish observance and text. Jews studied the Gemara and the Zohar and other traditional texts. They were educated in the Beit Midrash, within synagogues. A prime example of such a school was the "Midrash Talmud Torah", the first non-private Cheder[107] in Baghdad. It was supported by the community and therefore open to all students regardless of their economic background. The school was founded in 1833. In time even this school, like the other Midrashot, included Math into the curriculum and taught Turkish language[108] and elementary Arabic[109]. This again shows the growing openness of the community to secular studies in the late 19th century. In 1908 the Midrash had an enrollment of approximately 2200 students and there were about fifty other privately owned chadarim at the time with a collective enrollment of 2000. These schools, however, continued to emphasize religious instruction over secular studies.

---

[105] Personal interview with Doris Basa
[106] Personal interview with Marcelle Core
[107] The word *cheder* comes from the Hebrew word meaning *room*. The cheder schools were rooms in which rabbis and rabbinical students taught young male pupils about Judaism, torah (bible) and Jewish law and Rabinical scriptures.
[108] Meir, Y. (1989) p. 23.
[109] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 25.

> The first school I went to was Midrash Talmud Torah. There I learned Torah and I learned to pray. I prayed everyday since I was five years old. It was very difficult but we learned only a few things-After torah we studied the Perekei Avot (ethics of the fathers), Neviim (prophets), Ketubim (writings). We also learned a little Math and Arabic. I must have learned a little Turkish, but I don't remember it. . The synagogue was three steps away from our house. I went early morning with my father before the sun rose. We had to finish praying before the sun rose[110]

According to Longrigg and Stoakes, these schools also taught the Hebrew alphabet, reading, translation, and some interpretation of the Bible, and Gemara.[111]

Along with these types of schools (the Cheder and the Midrash Talmud Torah) there were the Istadhs; elementary schools that were conducted in open courtyards (it was also common for Muslim schools to be conducted in the open). They were scattered all over the Jewish neighborhoods. There were about thirty Jewish Istadhs in Baghdad. They were mostly attended by boys from the age of three to fifteen. The students learned Hebrew until they were physically strong enough to enter the workforce. This indicates that segments of the Jewish population, like their Muslim neighbors, also struggled to balance the education of their children with economic necessity. About 40-60 pupils attended the average Istadh and some larger Istadhs would accommodate between 80-120 kids. There was no fixed tuition and it usually varied between fifteen to fifty cents per month, depending on the financial situation of the parents. These schools, like the other forms of traditional religious schooling that I have just discussed were unusual by today's standards. Morris Cohen, an English teacher from the Baghdad Alliance school in 1879 notes that [the children] "squatted on the floor and were huddled together like sheep. The

---

[110] Personal interview with Naim Core– this man was born around 1908 in Baghdad and is the oldest person I interviewed. He attended the Midrash around 1915. While he grew up going to synagogue and keeping Shabbat, he relayed to me that when he grew a bit older he stopped keeping Shabbat and kashrut. He said that he had to in order to keep up with the times. This is detailed further in the essay.

[111] Longrigg, S., and Stoakes, F. (1958) p. 177.

worthy master [the teacher] was found either in a corner or in the midst of his pupils.[112]" The teaching approach by the teachers was quite undisciplined[113]. Although memorization and repetition were evident in the curriculum of the Jewish schools, they placed greater emphasis on interpretation than the comparable Muslim institutions.

Like most teachers in Iraq, the teachers at the Midrash Talmud Torah were not well paid. The wages they received were between two and five dollars a month and they took all their meals with the students. Given these salaries it is not surprising that the teachers had no formal training and they ruled the classes with a very heavy hand. Sami Sourani[114], drawing from his own experiences and from those of his uncles and other family members, describes school life as follows:

> In most of the cases teachers were very cruel. They hit the student with the bamboo; whoever was disruptive, or lazy. Students who were lazy got a dunce cap. The teachers took small balls of cotton, stuck it in *sylan* [date syrup, placed these on their bodies] and took them [the students] around the school. The teachers then stuck them [the students] in the basement, which was a damp place with mice and bugs. This was a punishment for disruptive or lazy behavior. Sometimes the students had to write lines, hundreds of lines saying 'I am a lazy boy'. This was up until the 1920s. They stopped later, but still continued beating students. Some students lost their hearing ability, because the teachers slapped them so hard. Throughout the years it became less and less commonplace. Towards 1951 it was much less common to punish in this manner, however I did experience beatings at the hands of my teachers, as did my fellow students. It was accepted by the parents. This was "discipline": teachers were never wrong in taking disciplinary action.

Lydia Sour, a Jewish Baghdadi now living in Ottawa, Ontario, who attended the Frank Iny school in Baghdad in the mid 1950s relates just how much of an impact the idea that

---

[112] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 25.
[113] While this is the personal view of Sawdayee, Rejwan, N. (1985), and other reports and testaments from people I interviewed [who were talking about how their parents or grandparents were educated], have confirmed that this is how schools were organized in the late 1800s.
[114] Personal Interview, Sami Sourani

the "teacher is always right when disciplining a child" had on her and relays that this discipline factor was common in the Arab world.

> When my daughter was in elementary school in Ottawa, she had a teacher who used to scream at her in class for no reason, and really made her life miserable. Coming from the Baghdad mentality of the "teacher always being right" I did not know that I could approach the teacher and tell her to stop harassing my child. It took a few months until a fellow mother told me that I really should do something, until I realized how different the mentality was in Canada- how free a parent or a child was in talking to a teacher. This was very different in the Arab world where a teacher was free to discipline a child however he/she saw fit. [115]

In the 1930s in Baghdad, the status of the cheder, more specifically the private chadarim, began to weaken. Some Jews in the community began to send their children to European schools. This can be attributed to the arrival of the British as well as to the success of the other schools in the city that were run by western standards. Disciplinary standards remained strict, however. Religious education continued to be characterized by rote repetition although more creative pedagogies were used in secular subjects. Teachers in the modernized Jewish schools and in the American and missionary schools were flown in from Europe and the United States and became vehicles for spreading western culture.

In addition to these midrashot and Istadhs, two central yeshivot existed in Baghdad. Yeshivat Beit Zilcha was the veteran Yeshiva (the other was Meir Eliyahu, founded in the first decade of the twentieth century) [116]. Many great Rabbis and scholars studied there. These yeshivas only taught religion. There was no secular teaching available.

---

[115] Personal interview with Lydia Sour
[116] Meir, Y. (1989) p.28.

The Alliance Israelite school:

The Alliance Israelite School was a groundbreaking school for the Jews of the Arab world, specifically in Baghdad. The school taught European languages, business, science, math, Jewish studies, geography and history (of France). It acted as a beacon to the community and helped its members realize that they could attain the knowledge and opportunities of the west. With its arrival and success at spreading secular education people were inspired.

The first school of the Alliance Israelite Universelle was founded in Paris in 1860 by Jews who wanted to create a school that promoted western values and modern education. At its founding, the Alliance set as one of its goals to spread this form of education throughout the Jewish world. This essentially meant that the Jews in Paris wanted the Jews in other parts of the world, including Baghdad, to have schooling that would allow them to study in universities and work internationally. The Alliance school sought to provide a western education to broaden their horizons. Its founding documents speak of "working everywhere for the emancipation and moral progress of the Jews" and "lending effective assistance to those who suffer because of their being Jews."[117] These French people felt a kinship with the Jews in the Arab countries and did not want them to lack in opportunities and they saw education as essential to avoiding this. This can be seen as a manifestation of the traditional Jewish view that, "*kol Yisrael Areivim ze laze*", all of the Jewish people are responsible for one another.

The Alliance schools were an educational network. By the end of the 19th century there were one hundred Alliance schools with 26 000 students operating across the Ottoman Empire. They produced skilled Oriental Jews who were Western-educated and

[117] Stillman (1991) p. 23.

with this education possessed a distinct advantage over Muslim masses who, for the most part, were not given a secular education. The area itself was being pulled into the modern world's economic system because of the British interest in the region and together with some Christian Iraqis, the Jews benefited from this development.[118]

The first Alliance school (for boys) opened in Baghdad in 1864. This can be traced directly to the influence of two European Jews who arrived in the community in around 1850[119]: Isaac Lurion, a watchmaker and Herman Rosenfeld, a tailor. They would talk passionately with Baghdadi Jews at salon meetings about the habits and civilization of Europe. They would often share with these Jews information about world events. To these salon meetings came, among others, Joseph Shemtob and David Somekh, two influential members of the Jewish community at the time. They learned from these two European Jews that the Alliance was founded in France and that it was bringing Western education to isolated Jewish communities in the Levant (the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Egypt). They discovered, for example, that a school was founded by the Alliance in Tetuan, North Africa (Spanish Morocco at the time). This had a very strong impact on Shemtob and Somekh, as well as on others who met with Lurion and Rosenfeld. The salon group decided to explore with the Alliance whether several schools could be opened in Baghdad and wrote a formal letter addressing this. The Central Committee of the Alliance met on January 19, 1864 to discuss this letter. The minutes from this meeting record that

> Some Israelites from Baghdad asked for a subsidy for the creation of a school in that city: they offered a further subscription for the amount of 1,500 Francs

[118] Alexander, A. (2004)
[119] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 19.

> annually. The Committee decided to support their request provided that the Israelites of Baghdad guarantee in advance the amount of the subsidy. [120]

On June 30, 1864, the Alliance's Central Committee appointed the first principal of the Alliance school to be founded in Baghdad, M. Nerson, who was a graduate of the Central Rabbinical School of Paris. On December 10, 1864, during the Jewish festival of Hanukah, the school formally opened. At its opening, the number of students was 43 but by March it was up to 56. [121]

The Alliance catered to a student population of males between the ages of 13 and 25. Many of them were graduates of cheders or isthads. All students studied the same basic secular curriculum, however the Jewish studies curriculum was crafted in response to the needs of the students. For example, those whose basic knowledge of Hebrew was rudimentary could have beginner Hebrew, and those who wanted to study Talmud could do so. The first pupils were impoverished and, according to the principal, were dirty, had neither socks nor handkerchiefs and would constantly try to get out of attending school. [122]

The school also evoked opposition from some religious scholars. Principal Nerson was harassed by what Sawdayee calls an "ignorant local committee"[123] and religious authorities called the school "this temple of false-gods" and protested to no end that the teachings would (according to Sawdayee's account) "Shake the foundations of the Torah". Many Rabbis felt that the emergence of this French-modern school would cause the Jewish people to lose their religious identity because it encouraged non-Jewish

---

[120] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 20.
[121] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 33.
[122] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 20.
[123] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 21.

subject matter (even though there were also some Jewish subjects). This opposition was shared by many religious people wherever the Alliance schools emerged. The truth of the matter is that the Jews of Baghdad, along with the Jews of the rest of the Arab world, maintained a strong connection to their Jewish identity. Many did, however, lose some of their religious orthodoxy.[124] According to the scholar and journalist Nissim Rejwan, an Israeli of Baghdadi origin, the staff of the school were excommunicated and Jewish people were forbidden to have contact with them. The school ended up closing, and the principal fled the country[125]. Sawdayee believes that the communal opposition, in addition to the difficult physical plant and tropical climate, are what led the principal to resign.

The students (many of whom were adults) did not give up, however. Soon after the principal left, they sent a plea, written in French, to the Central Committee of the Alliance in Paris[126].

> We are the children of the school founded by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Baghdad. Evidently you will see that we have already started to write fluently in French. We shall never forget your goodwill in teaching us this language. We announce to you that our principal has left and that we are now without a professor; we beg you to replace him very soon so that we can resume our French studies. We shall be eternally obliged and hope that you will have faith in us. We now started to study the English language. There is a gentleman who volunteered

---

[124] I would say that this secularization of the Jewish people is not necessarily a direct result of the Alliance school, but is rather a result of a series of factors including the desire of the people to succeed in the international world, to become like people in the west in all aspects including dress and fashion. In Baghdad especially, this secularization was not simply because of the Alliance school, but was because of a deep seated desire to be modern. The alliance school came and succeed because the Jews wanted modernity and they came closer to achieving this goal with the alliance school.

[125] Rejwan, N. (1985) p. 185.

[126] *"In French"* - This seems to go against Sawdayee's claim that the principal left because the students were ignorant. One might think that if the students knew French, they could not be ignorant. Their ignorance was not to the language as much as to the Western/European culture and customs. While the students learned these customs from their teachers, they were still coming from a society that was seemingly primitive and ignorant to a European.

> to give French lessons, he is a very busy man because he has a job at the Telegraph Office. [127]

This plea both moved and impressed the Central Committee and not long after receiving the letter they appointed a new principal, Mr. M. Max. The school reopened in 1872, with a new modern building donated by Sir Albert David Sassoon, who was from one of the only wealthy Baghdadi Jewish families of the time. Sir Albert Sassoon was born in Baghdad but his father had established successful businesses in India and Great Britain, which was still uncommon.[128] Sir Albert Sassoon wanted his fellow Jews to have the same opportunities he had enjoyed and knew that this was dependent upon them receiving a westernized education.

Sassoon's actions might also have been tied to the arrival of the Turkish Governor Midhat Pasha in Baghdad, in 1869. He is said to be one of the chief people responsible for the modernization of Iraq. Midhat Pasha paid special attention to education and supported the introduction of modern schools in Baghdad. With the exception of the few Christian missionary schools and the Jewish Alliance School, there were no existing modern schools in Baghdad before Mr. Pasha arrived. He respected the Alliance school and made three visits within three years. He was interested enough to discuss the students studies with them and to say to the members of the school board that "The school is an orchard that produces good and attractive fruits, and the gardener is skillful and self-sacrificing."[129] During one of the Turkish governor's visits, there was a severe sandstorm, and the governor and his men (along with the members of the Jewish community who accompanied them) had to take refuge in the classrooms. When Pasha

---

[127] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 21.
[128] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 18.
[129] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 29.

saw the dilapidated condition of the inside of the school, he urged the Jewish community to build a more decent building. It was then that Sir Albert David Sassoon intervened, partly out of embarrassment and contributed 10 000 dollars towards the construction of the new campus. Because of these funds the school was called College Albert D. Sassoon, but people still referred to it as "the Alliance". The visit of Midhat Pasha, and his attention to the Alliance school, is an example of how the Alliance school benefited from the support of certain powerful non-Jews.

Rejwan believes that the person responsible for the rehabilitation of the Alliance school was the chief Rabbi, Abdallah Somekh, who actually sent his own grandson to it. In fact, according to family recollections[130], he insisted upon it. The grandson still had supplemental Jewish education in the home and from the synagogue, though.[131] The criticism that the school had initially received from the religious community slowly lessened because more religious Jewish Baghdadis like Rabbi Somekh wanted the opportunities that this school offered. From then on, Baghdadi Jews had the opportunity to send their children to a westernized school and many chose to do so. Opposition continued to exist in some circles, however because of lingering fears that the study of secular subjects would be "alienating its pupils from their Jewish roots"[132]

There is strong evidence that the overwhelming majority of Baghdadi Jews and alumni of the Alliance school, Frank Iny and Shammash schools, continued to see Judaism as a core part of their identity. One of the people that I interviewed remembered reciting the following declaration as a young child in one of these schools. *"Ivrim*

---

[130] Stillman, N. A. (1995) p. 18.
[131] Rejwan, N. (1985) p. 185.
[132] Gubbay, L., and Levy, A. (1996) p. 54.

anachnu, ivrit nilmad, ivrit nedaber (We are Hebrews, we shall learn Hebrew, and we shall speak Hebrew)"[133]

Indeed the Alliance Schools taught Judaism and Jewish history, albeit only until grade four.[134] The fact that the Jewish people were all attending the same school also fostered a sense of Jewish community and identity. As two attendees of the Alliance school of the 20th century have said to me, "We were all Jews in school, it was very comfortable. We all knew each other, we were all friends."[135]

> I loved the Alliance school... I am still friends with almost all of my old classmates. Some of us kept Shabbat and some of us didn't. I remember when I was a kid, I was 8 or 9 years old and there were little cartons that we could pass a thread through to make a game- for kids. We were playing the game, and we went back to my friends house with it and her mother got mad at us and said- how come you sewed on Shabbat?!! I didn't know that we weren't allowed to sew, or write on Shabbat. I hadn't kept it. I learned that from my friend's family. It didn't make me any less Jewish than her just because I didn't keep it![136]

Parents chose to send their children to the Alliance school not only because it was one of the best schools but also because they wanted them to be with other Jewish kids.

The Alliance curriculum:

The curriculum included courses in five languages. In grade one the majority of school time was given to languages. Students studied French for two hours, Arabic for two and Hebrew for three. English was introduced in the second grade at the expense of either Arabic or Hebrew hours. Hebrew and Arabic began to take secondary status and diminished throughout the remaining years. The decline in Arabic hours indicates that the

---

[133] Personal interview with Naim Core, March 5, 2006
[134] Gubbay, L., and Levy, A. (1996) p. 54
[135] Personal interview with Marcelle Core

[136] Personal interview with Lisette Ades

school was more interested in preparing its students to thrive in the global community than in the local one where Arabic was the main language. [137] [138]

This inclination can also be seen through the less than serious manner in which Arabic and Turkish were taught. Turkish, for example, was taught on and off, even though it was the official language of the Ottoman Empire. According to the school report of 1881-1882, the Turkish government actually supplied the teachers with an official subsidy so that the language would be spread throughout the region. This was problematic, though, because this official grant to teach Turkish was not paid regularly and was sometimes reduced. Another problem with Turkish language education was that the teacher was not of Turkish origin and did not have the necessary tools to teach Turkish in an acceptable manner. The school did not have the budget to hire a mother-tongue Turk to teach.[139] Arabic was also a problem, apparently. The Alliance school report of 1881 questioned if it was worthwhile teaching literary Arabic "Since nobody talks that language anymore" and indicated that the Arabic teacher may have lacked teaching qualifications.

Hebrew and English were considered to be more practical subjects. The students learned Hebrew by reading the Pentateuch (five books of Moses) in the original and translating it orally into Arabic.[140] Little time was spent on engaging the text philosophically. After grade four, Hebrew was not taught anymore, nor was other Jewish

---

[137] In a personal interview with Sassoon Somekh, he recalled that it was uncommon to find Arabic and Hebrew books in some westernized Jewish people's homes "In our house there were no Arabic or Hebrew books, only French or English ones. Since the British entered, the Jews didn't need Arabic. They became interpreters or go betweens and valued English more than Arabic"

[138] It is also possible that since the students already spoke Arabic, teaching the language was less of a pressing concern.

[139] Gubbay, L., and Levy, A. (1996) p. 54.

[140] This goes back to the Muslim society's way of teaching by rote and dictation. The Jews picked up on the traditions and ways of teaching of the Muslims.

content. Those who wanted to study Hebrew or religion could do so at a Yeshiva while continuing to be enrolled at the Alliance. English was also taught by reading texts and translating them into Arabic. Students learned it quickly enough due to their familiarity with the alphabet from their French classes. After three months of learning to read English the students started working on text translations [141]which eventually lead to dictation and essay writing. The students enjoyed their English lessons and excelled. French, however, was the main language of the school; most subjects were taught in French. Literature, writing, dictation, grammar, composition and conversation were all taught in French, along with science, math, geography, history, chemistry and physics. The ages of the children admitted to the school were quite different from what we are used to in the twenty first century. Oftentimes the first graders were ten or eleven. There were some pupils who stayed in sixth grade for several years, until the age of eighteen or even twenty because they feared that they wouldn't have a good career outside school without additional study. [142]

Even with these challenges, the Alliance began developing a reputation for success. Some rich Muslim families, such as the al-Suweidi family enrolled their children at the Allianc. In fact, Tewfiq al-Suweidi, a graduate of the Baghdad Alliance School, later went on to become prime minister of independent Iraq and was actually instrumental in aiding the Jews emigrate to Israel in the 1950s [143]

A major social barrier existed between the European teachers and the Baghdadi Jews, exacerbated by what seems to be ethnocentric prejudice on the part of the foreign

---

[141] Again, the translation is reminiscent of the Muslim society method of teaching by translation and dictation.
[142] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 43.
[143] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 44.

educators. The previously referenced Alliance report of 1881 includes the following pronouncement:

> The relations among men in this country has nothing whatsoever in common with that in Europe. In this miserable Baghdad there is nowhere a man can take a walk, no social life, no friendship, no reunions, no music, nothing that might attract men as in other parts of the world.[144]

This language upset the community. Many of them avoided enrolling their children in the Alliance school because they felt rejected and embarrassed by the attitudes of the teachers. [145]

The Laura Kadoorie Alliance school for girls and the Jewish woman in Baghdad

Sir Eliezer Kadoorie, a former graduate of the Alliance school for boys, who had made millions of Pounds conducting business in Shanghai and Hong Kong (in part due to the western education he received at the school), contributed 100 000 dollars in 1893 towards the building of an Alliance school for girls in Baghdad. He had a strong interest in the education of girls. He believed that such an advanced education would improve the status of women in Baghdad who were relatively uneducated in the areas of language, math and science and did not work unless the family was poor and needed the money (in which case they either engaged in manual labor, homemaking or prostitution)[146]. He named the school after his deceased wife, Laura Kadoorie.[147] The school opened in 1895. Initially, there were only 48 girls registered, out of a total Jewish population of 35 000. The registration doubled within the first year but the numbers were not as high as were

[144] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 42.
[145] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 43.
[146] Kattan, Naim (1976).
[147] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 55.

hoped. This is largely due to the negative views of Baghdadi Jews towards the education of girls, although the reports indicate that there were also only 210 boys registered in the Alliance school.

During the following years enrollment in both the boys and the girls schools kept increasing. In 1913, the number of girls registered in the schools of the Alliance surpassed the number of boys registered. According to a report published by the Alliance in Paris, there were 731 boys registered and 788 girls. [148] It is possible that since it is men that are primarily required (according to many orthodox Rabbinical authorities) to study Torah, it was less controversial to send girls to a school that emphasized languages and sciences. Other girls were either not educated or were educated in the home by family members or a private tutor.

The differences between the education of Jewish men and of Jewish women were probably influenced by the status of Moslem women. The status of the Muslim woman was in large part determined by the Quran and its interpretations. The higher status of males was based on the following verse from the Quran, Surah 4:34; "Men are the maintainers of women... Allah has made some of them to excel others... So the good women are obedient."[149] This phrase was often interpreted to mean that woman's duty is to obey the man. This is evident within the traditions concerning *mahar* (bride price). From a legal standpoint, the woman is acquired by the man. [150] There are several duties and obligations that the Muslim woman has: she must offer absolute obedience to her husband, she should be confined to the home and should not leave home without his

[148] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 56.
[149] Ali, Maulana Muhammad (2002) p. 205.
[150] Sehayek, Shaul, 2003.

consent, and she is forbidden to speak to other men except through a divider.[151] Since a woman's primary obligation was to serve her family in basic household chores she did not require much education (outside of housework training), and the education was not provided.

During the first part of the twentieth century there came a series of positive changes to the lives of Baghdadi Jewish women. Some of them went from being a wife and mother without an education to being a wife and a mother with an education and the subsequent ability to expand their horizons. The following is taken from an interview of a Baghdadi Jewish woman currently living in Montreal, Canada. She is in her early 60s.

> My grandmother was born in the late 1800s. She was married off at the age of twelve to her first cousin who was at least 20 years her senior. She had no say in the matter and it was not what she would have chosen for herself. It was what was decided for her. She didn't have freedom of choice. She had nine children and three miscarriages with this man. She never called him her husband. When she spoke of him she referred to him as "*abu l'ulad*" (the father of the children). She never went to school. All she could read was the Torah. That was it.
>
> My mother, who was born in the early 1920s, went to school, the American school for girls and then the Alliance school for girls. She got married to my father when she was 25 years old [at the time it was considered old]. She also didn't have a choice in who she married but she had met him before many times, she loved him. He was only ten years older than her.[152]

This relays a cultural shift from one generation to the next. After the arrival of the British, the practice of marrying a woman off at the age of 12 started to be seen as primitive and unacceptable. The interviewee's mother's marriage is something that people in western society would consider more acceptable than her grandmother's marriage.

---

[151] Ashkenazi, S. (1979) p. 102.
[152] Personal interview with Vivian Belboul

These positive societal and educational changes, however, did not transform the social status of all Jewish women. As a collective group they were relatively humble and did not speak in opposition to a male counterpart. In general, a Baghdadi Jewish woman did not have a life outside of the family/home. Her main duty was to be a good daughter, then wife, then mother. Even with the rise of modern education, the Baghdadi Jewish woman remained isolated. These women could not alter the attitude of male society around them, or gain recognition as a separate and equal social factor. This did not change even with the arrival of the British. What did change as a result of the availability of modern, secular education, was women's knowledge of the world and their potential ability to interact with the world outside Baghdad (an ability generally associated with internationally business savvy men).

A Jewish woman's life and education was both similar and different from that of a Muslim woman in Iraq. The Jewish woman, like the Jewish men in Baghdad, lived in a society wherein they were the minority and the Muslim customs and ways of life influenced their way of life. The majority of Iraqi Jews lived amongst Muslim communities and not the Christian communities of Iraq. Close to 90% of Iraqi Jews lived in the big cities, mainly in Baghdad and they adopted the customs of the Muslim population, particularly the customs of confining the woman to the home without any contact with the outside world.[153]

Although Jewish women have been viewed as holy entities by the rabbinic establishment, from a legal standpoint they have been seen as the property of men. The Babylonian Talmud relates that whenever the blind Rabbi, Rav Yoseph Bar Hiyya heard

[153] Sehayek, Shaul (2003).

his mothers footsteps, he would stand up and say, "Let me rise up before the *Shechina"* (divine presence) (B:Qid: 31b). In this instance the woman is given an extreme amount of respect. However, the first clause of Mishnah Kiddushin 1;1, states that "By three means is a woman acquired... by money, or by writ or by intercourse"[154]. A husband had the sole right to his wife's sexuality and had a sense of ownership over it. In fact the Hebrew word for husband is *baal*, literally meaning owner. Medieval Jewish women, like their Muslim counterparts, had primarily domestic responsibilities such as sewing, spinning, weaving and educating the children to do good deeds. The Babylonian Talmud recognized women's basic human rights and physical and emotional needs but it was men who had the primary religious obligations. They were the ones who were commanded to pray and study Torah.[155] As such, there was little need to provide an extensive education to women.

Even though Jewish women were kept from the company of males just like their Muslim counterparts, within their home and within the context of their families they were more independent and enjoyed a more elevated status than the Muslim women. They were also allowed to attend prayer services in synagogue, while their female Muslim counterparts were kept from the Mosque.[156] This is largely due to the differences between the Quran and the Torah and their subsequent interpretations.

Religious life contributed to strengthening the status of the Jewish woman. The religious and traditional duties that a Jewish women had to perform, such as lighting the Shabbat and holiday candles, preparing the table for Kiddush on Shabbat and holidays,

---

[154] Weiss, David Halivni (1964) p. 224.
[155] Baskin, Judith, R. (1999) p. 75-100.
[156] Baskin, Judith, R. (1999) p. 131.

the Nidah rituals (ritual cleanness, family purity and mikveh immersion) and like men, the obligation to make a blessing over meals, had a significant role in ensuring a strong and respectable position for the woman within her family.[157] Not only this, but it was solely up to the woman to ensure the education of her daughter in matters of religious duty and marriage, which were the primary duties of an Iraqi Jewish woman. To the outside observer, the status of the Jewish women in Baghdad seemed inferior but in many aspects of family life the reality was different. Generally, the Jewish woman, especially of the upper classes, enjoyed a respectable, high status at home alongside her husband and her children. Upper class Jewish women's independent status was evident in their ability to interact with tourists, merchants and other visitors from the west who arrived in Iraq in the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as with teachers of the Alliance schools. These contacts solidified their westernization. Some Iraqi Jewish women actually lived in the west for periods of time when they accompanied their husbands who sought business opportunities outside of the country.

The opening of the Laura Kadoori Alliance School for girls significantly contributed to the westernization of the girls who attended it, but the fact that the plight of Muslim women remained unchanged meant that even these young western educated Jewish women found it difficult to bring about changes in their social life and status. This reality did not change radically until the arrival of the British at the end of World War I. After the war, the process of westernization and modernization accelerated along with the beginning of the secularization of young Jews, particularly the educated classes. [158]

---

[157] Sehayek, Shaul (2003).
[158] Coke (1925) p. 204.

The curriculum for the Alliance school for girls in the late 1800s in Baghdad appears to have been the same as that at the Alliance school for boys during that time period. The following two citations were relayed to me by a former Alliance school for girls alumni:

> In grade one and two they started to teach us how to write the Arabic and French ABC. In grade one, we also started Hebrew. We learned Arabic, French and Hebrew language, to write and read all in grade one. We had a whole day of school. Usually it was from 8:30-3:30 as that was the typical Alliance arrangement (except in the summer months). The Iraqi government imposed the Arabic even onto the private schools. Even though the school was funded by the parents and from the Jewish community in Baghdad, we still had to learn Arabic. Up until grade four the education was French, Arabic and Hebrew. In grade three we reached the Hebrew level of the Chumash (Bible). By grade four we had no more Hebrew. We learned English. They brought us English reading books. We had one English teacher, an hour a day.[159]

> I went to the Alliance school. I studied there till I got my Brevet certificate (when I was about 18) and then I got married. In the Alliance school we learned French, English, some Hebrew, Math, Science, Geography, and History… There we learned Hebrew also, until grade four. After we stopped learning Hebrew, we brought a teacher to the house to teach us about the Jewish holidays, Jewish traditions. We had all sorts of Jewish lessons.[160]

The following was told to me by a woman who left Baghdad in the 1990s. She grew up there and lived there her whole life. She is a great advocate for the Alliance school and indicated that the school was better than all other schools in Baghdad (non-Jewish as well) that came after it.

> My mother was educated at the Alliance school for girls. She was born in the late 1800s and was one of the first students here. She was very modern. Because of her schooling, she wrote in French, and so did her husband [who was also educated at the Alliance]. And so did his sister [the same school]. I of course also went to the Alliance. Judaism was not so important in the Alliance, They didn't

[159] Personal interview with Evelyne Shah
[160] Personal interview with Chafika Saleh

> dwell so much on religion. Only about one hour a week[161]. We did have synagogues and friends and many traditions that we still follow today. The Alliance was about schooling -- academic schooling -- languages and science, modern schooling. We were very modern. Our dress was the dress in Europe. Our makeup was that of Europe. We knew of the European culture. The Alliance was really the best school.
>
> [In later life] I got accepted to the French institute [in Baghdad] and studied advanced French [in conjunction] with the Sorbonne. In this school, there were some Baghdadi women, and men studying there with us. They were both Moslem and Christian and some Armenian. They were all middle class or wealthy. They were in their thirties, while we had learned French before *in* the 30s! Our French was so much more advanced than theirs. We were four Jewish women in our 80s and we were such good French students! The four of us had been educated at the Alliance in the 1930s and we graduated with honors. And therefore in the 90s, we were accepted with no problem to the Sorbonne school- because we had a very strong base. [162]

The American (Missionary) schools:[163]

Whereas the Alliance school system placed its emphasis on the teaching of French, the American Missionary School of Baghdad, founded by the American Dutch reform Mission in around 1924/25 under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin K. Staudt, offered an intensive English education. It was known simply as "the American School". The school followed an American syllabus which enabled the graduates to continue their education in American universities (just as students from the Alliance schools could go to European universities).[164] The American school had both an elementary and high school. As in the case of the Alliance, these schools were separated by gender. Many Jewish parents sent their children to these schools. According to the account by Yoseph Meir (an

[161] The interviewee did not mention Hebrew in her comment.

[162] Personal interview with Mouzly Shashoua

[163] I chose to place the section of the American Missionary schools among the descriptions of the Jewish schools rather than in the Christian schooling section above because many Jewish Baghdadis in the 20th century attended this school and for the purposes of this paper it is not in the same category as the other Christian schools discussed.

[164] Sawdayee, Maurice M (1991) p. 88.

Israeli historical writer of Baghdadi origin) it seems that at one point, the American school's administration gave an edict insisting that all students attending the school, including the Jewish students, must attend Christian prayer sessions. Jewish people were frightened by this, and demanded that the community establish an alternative high school in which the new generation would be able to maintain its Jewish identity while learning English. [165]

Essentially, the American school's direct affect on the Jewish community was to break the monopoly of its French schools (the various Alliance schools), and to inspire the Jewish Baghdadis to open an English school of their own. The community's interest in English was not only a product of the British presence in Baghdad; it was also a response to the rise in power and influence of the United States. When cutting edge western culture was associated with Europe and France, Jewish Baghdadis wanted to learn their norms and language. When England and the United States became the dominant cultural influences in the west, the Jewish Baghdadis gravitated there. Here is a comment from a Jewish Baghdadi who attended the American School for Girls:

> In the American school there were Jews, Arabs and Christians. I went there for elementary school. After a while the American school stopped accepting Jewish students. In high school they didn't accept me so I went to the Alliance school for a short time, then I got married. In the American school I learned English. That is where I know English from. Here in Israel I didn't learn it. There was also Quran class for the Muslims, but the Jews left to a break and came back after the Quran class. There was also some Christian praying, that we had to attend. I remember that aside from English we learned Mathematics, geography and sciences.[166]

---

[165] Meir, Y. (1989) p. 42.
[166] Personal interview with Doris Basa

The Shamash School

The community opened the Benjamin Shamash School in 1928 because of the Christian tendencies of the American missionary schools. The school was founded by Yacov Shlomo Shamash. The Shamash family was a Baghdadi family living in Manchester, England. The school's mission was to provide English secondary courses to prepare students for the London University Matriculation exams, so that they would be able to be accepted into the British universities.[167] From the onset, the curriculum included Tanakh, Hebrew language instruction and secular languages such as English and French, as well as sciences and art.

Members of the community were searching for an affordable alternative (the Alliance school required a substantial fee) to the Iraqi public schools which met on the Jewish Sabbath. They put pressure on the community to open a Jewish high school which offered a modernized curriculum. The school building was situated in the ChidrachAna area on Alrashid Street. This location was originally opposed by many in the community because it was a very crowded and populated area in the center of the main street of Baghdad. They feared a potential anti-Semitic backlash from such a high profile location. The opposition, however, came to naught. The school was founded as an elementary school and became a high school in 1941-42. Many students attended and there was concern by the 1940s that the community could not afford two modernized primary schools. The political situation was tense and many people were considering leaving. The Farhood/Pogrom of 1941 (discussed above) had a huge impact on Jewish communal life. The high school was made up of two institutions: a middle school and high school (this reflected the structure of schooling in England). In 1949, the Shamash middle school

[167] Sawdayee, Maurice M (1991) p. 87.

merged with the Frank Iny school and the high school merged with the AlAAdadya AlAhliya school[168]. This school merging was a direct result of the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the large percentage of Iraqi Jews that moved there.

> I left Baghdad with my parents and brothers when I was a teenager. This was in 1951. We were joining relatives in Israel who had settled there several years earlier. We were preparing for the move for a long time. One day we just left. I didn't even say goodbye to my friends at school, I didn't tell them I was leaving. I left. Many of my friends had been leaving, or planning to leave. It was a hard time, it was an uncertain time. We did not know what was going to happen. I had gone to the Alliance school and the Shammash School after that. Many of my friends from the Shammash School joined me in Israel. A lot of us left. [169]

> I didn't continue with the Shamash school and didn't graduate from it because I became ill- there were many demonstrations and riots, every other day, against the Jews because of the hatred towards Israel. That school was located in downtown Baghdad right in the area where they were protesting. I went there for two weeks, and then fell sick, possibly because of the stress of being among riots. The problems just became more and more rampant. During these two years, 1950-1951, almost all the Jews went to Israel.

> I attended the Alliance for nine years of my life. After the Alliance, I was one of the few girls to be able to continue my schooling and I went to the Shamash school which was another Jewish private school in Baghdad. For girls to go to that school was very prestigious. For the first time girls and boys were together in the same school, it was very modern. I was very thrilled to be accepted in this school. It was almost only Jewish people with some very prominent Muslim kids from high class families as well who were rich and prestigious. A person could spend two years in this school in order to receive a high school certificate from the government and a certificate from England. The degree let us go to university in England. [170]

The Shamash school was very highly regarded for the few decades it was in place. According to the account by Yoseph Meir, one of the Shamash school graduation ceremonies was graced by the presence of Prince Gazi, who was the minister of

---

[168] Meir, Y. (1989) p. 41.
[169] Personal interview with Fina Sashou
[170] Personal interview with Evelyne Shah

education. Gazi was joined at the graduation ceremony by other important Iraqis. That year, the students sang songs both in Hebrew and in Arabic to commemorate the end of their school year. The Shamash school was respected in Baghdad as a modern institution that opened seemingly endless career possibilities for its students. This is because the school brought high quality teachers from Europe and the United States to teach its curriculum of language, math, science, geography, history, and world culture. The presence of the prince at the ceremony, as well as the fact that the students sang songs in both Arabic and Hebrew, also relay to us the relative calm and amity between the Jewish people and the Arab government in the 1920s. The prince's presence at the ceremony might also indicate that he believed the school could serve as a model for what could be accomplished by all sectors of society.

As previously noted, in addition to the academic classes the Shamash school provided, the school also offered the students special preparation courses for the London University Matriculation exam. A large number of both male and female students at the Shamash schools passed the Matriculation exams as a result of the extensive and thorough education of the Shamash school. [171] These courses were in the evening and they were supplemental to the studies learned in the standard curriculum. The school was very successful in teaching English to its students. The English teacher, Mr. Edward Rosenthal, wrote a letter to the Anglo-Jewish Association that stated that the "Advantages of learning English are so evident that the boys have a great incentive to study. As a result most British business houses and banks are staffed almost exclusively by our boys." [172] Muslims were welcome in the school as well but did not attend in great

[171] Meir, Y. (1989) p. 42.
[172] Sawdayee, Maurice M. (1991) p. 88.

numbers because they didn't want to go to a school that was run by Jews. However, some wealthy Muslim families who were aware of the power of a good western education and saw that the Jewish schools (the Shamash school in particular) were the best Baghdad had to offer, sent their kids there.

The Frank Iny School

The Frank Iny School was established in 1941 by Mr. Frank Iny, a highly respected Iraqi Jewish businessman, philanthropist and leader. Mr Iny spoke eleven languages and relayed to his grandchildren that education was one of the cornerstones of Jewish life [173]. Born in 1895, Mr. Iny studied at the Alliance school for boys and had both a secular as well as religious educational background. He studied English, French, Arabic and Hebrew and used the Alliance as a prototype for the school that he established. To avoid being drafted by the Ottoman Empire he left the country for India where he lived for forty years. He amassed a large sum of money during his time out of Iraq and when he returned to Baghdad in the late 1930s he sent his sons to the Alliance school.

After the Farhud of 1941, the Jewish people suffered greatly and started to mistrust their Muslim Iraqi co-citizens. The Alliance school, while run by Jews, still had some Muslim students and teachers. The Farhud took place at the end of the school year. Frank Iny knew that students wouldn't want to go back and risk being persecuted. He therefore decided to found a separate school that would only be open to Jews. 186 students attended in the first year. This grew to 483 by year eight. It was the first Jewish

[173] Basri, C. (2000).

school in Baghdad to have equal amounts of girls and boys enrolled[174]. Like the other westernized schools mentioned in this chapter, the school taught English, French, Arabic and a little bit of Hebrew as well as Bible, math and science. The Frank Iny school shared the emphasis of the other schools on secular studies over religious ones and the limited amount of Torah study was attested to by the daughter of the former principal of the school.

> We were supposed to study the Hebrew Alphabet in Arabic as well as the Torah, which we studied minimally and in Arabic. We didn't have the grasp of the Torah, unless we went to synagogue. The school was not affiliated with the Synagogue either and some students did not attend synagogue.[175]

The school aimed to prepare students for the world at large not just the world of Baghdad.[176] The school had top of the line classrooms, labs, libraries and sports facilities as well as very dedicated teachers and principals. The school was very successful and almost all of the Jews who remained in Baghdad after the mass *aliyah* of 1951 attended it. The school remained open until 1973 and was taken over by the Iraqi government in 1975. [177] In 1951, with the departure of many of the Jews from Baghdad to Israel, all the other Jewish operated schools were closed and all the Jewish students were moved to the Frank Iny School.

The Frank Iny school was both an elementary and a high school. According to three former students that I interviewed,[178] the school day went from eight o'clock in the morning, until four thirty in the afternoon. These three former students confirmed that

---

[174] The Shamash school accepted girls, but there were much more boys enrolled. The Alliance school had both a girl's and boy's school but they did not learn together. The Frank Iny School was the first of the Jewish schools that accepted equal amounts of boys and girls in the same classes.
[175] Personal interview, Linda Ischayek
[176] Ibid.
[177] Basri, C., Davis, A., Durr, B. (2001).
[178] Personal Interview, Evelyne Shah and Anwar Shah, Personal Interview with Vivian Belboul

teaching was in English, French and Arabic and explained that by the 1950s there was very limited Hebrew taught. The Hebrew language was considered a Zionist language and due to Iraqi anti-Zionism, was not allowed to be taught in the school. Parents who wanted their children to learn Hebrew had to hire a rabbi or private tutor to come to the house, or they could go to synagogue. Graduates of the school received an Iraqi government certification and a general English certificate (from London, England).

> We studied for the *Certificat d'Etude Primaire* in seventh grade, and for the *Cambridge*- England exam in grade eight. In grade nine we had the *Baccalaureate of Iraq* in Arabic and the *Brevet* for France. In grade ten we studied for the GCE, *General Certificate of Education,* which was for England. At the same time, we studied geometry, trigonometry, calculus (in French), history and we all studied in French, English and Arabic.[179]

The school principal from 1954-1973, Abdullah Obadiah, managed the school in a very strict manner.[180] He remained principal for many years because he enjoyed community support that can be traced to the success of his graduates. [181] In a personal interview with Abdullah Obadia's daughter, she relayed to me just how dedicated her father was to the education of his pupils:

> He [Abdullah Obadia] had a very strong connection to the School and the entire Jewish population of Baghdad knew him. They called me *Bit'l Modir* (Daughter of the Principal). He had a presence, my father. When the classes started he used to go around to see if everything was ok. When the kids would see him they would scurry around to their classrooms.[182]

> My father, worked from morning to night, He worked very late. He taught, he worked in the administration, and I remember that he wrote resumes for students

---

[179] Personal interview, Lisette Ades
[180] Personal interview with Evelyne Shah, Personal interview with Vivian Belboul, Personal Interview with Carmen Kor
[181] Congregation Bene Naharayim, 1999 – Iraqijews.org
[182] Personal Interview, Linda Ischayek.

> who were applying to university abroad. He used to go when travel was open to Jewish people. He traveled to acquire teachers from abroad. He traveled to England and France to bring English and French language educators to the Frank Iny School.[183]

The traveling that Abdullah Obadia did is reminiscent of the traveling the administration of the Alliance schools did, many years before, in order to bring teachers to teach languages properly and without foreign accent. The desire to bring native French and English speaking teachers to the Jews of Baghdad was not a new phenomenon and it demonstrates again just how important the Jews of Baghdad considered the mastery of language to be. This also hints at the deeper insight that the Jewish administrators had after the Farhood: that their students would eventually leave and would need to know these languages in order to succeed in the outside world. Not only was the community interested in French language, but as the following quote demonstrates, it was also interested in French culture: "...It [the Frank Iny School] used to stage theatre in French twice a year; the characters, dressed up in authentic costumes and makeup, rehearsed and acted out whole Moliere and Racine plays."[184]

In addition to being the principal and the heart and soul of the Frank Iny school, Obadia was also a professor of Mathematics at the University of Baghdad where he was highly respected. He wrote books for Algebra and geometry that were studied all across Iraq in the Government schools. A lot of the people who were students in the university where he taught became ministers and thus he possessed many government connections. He was more able to get special treatment for the school than somebody who did not have

---

[183] Personal Interview , Linda Ischayek
[184] Ivy, North London Community, 2002, Iraqi Jews website- come.to/iraqijews

such highly developed connections. Even the prime minister would come to the awards ceremony[185].

> Once a year they also held enormous prize giving ceremonies where top government ministers would grace the podium with a complimentary speech, parents as well as lay leaders would be invited and everyone would sit in the garden along hundreds of rows. There would be a distinguished program of cultural events and readings. I can still remember the excitement of us children decked out in our best rags, scattering about to distribute leaflets and usher in the important visitors.[186]

When the vast majority of the Jewish people left Baghdad for Israel in 1951, the Frank Iny school, which was the center of Jewish life for children at the time, changed as well. The great spectacles previously described were no longer tenable.

> The consensus from the elders was that since we were less liked now, therefore [we] should do nothing to attract attention to our existence - so [we] must carry on like church mice. Thus, [the] Frank Iny School stepped down drastically on the ceremony and pomp that had been its tradition in earlier years.
>
> We had to wave goodbye to the garden parties, the French theatres and the invitations to the dignitaries. Indeed it was decreed that the circular gardens, with their big marble stage, would be cordoned off with wire. We never played there but admired them from the upstairs balconies while, during our lunch walks, the scents emanating from them were also allowed to filter to us.
>
> The school became austere, far too austere. There were no sports or recreation activities, not even a cooking class or a canteen. Any art and drama classes were curtailed during the year as they were taking up valuable time. The only avenue was to concentrate on academia. Six days we toiled at the desk, with a much broader and difficult curriculum than the other Iraqi schools ever dreamed of. It was a spartan existence... but what choice had we but to struggle hard and make it or break it in the only secondary Jewish school in Iraq? [187]

---

[185] Personal Interview Linda Ischayek
[186] Ivy, North London Community, 2002, Iraqi Jews website- come.to/iraqijews
[187] Ibid.

We see from the excerpt that the remaining Jews of Baghdad lived a life in which they tried as hard as possible to blend into society and not to stick out. And yet all of the people interviewed for this paper who attended the Frank Iny School have many good memories of their school years. It was the home base of Jewish life for young kids at the time. They made their friends there and they learned there. They were practically living in the Frank Iny school- a Jewish bubble shielded away in the midst of a country that did not seem to want them anymore. "We didn't know Muslims or Christians from school. We had only a few peers who were not Jewish, those who had minister parents."[188] There was a security to living in this Jewish bubble. "We were all Jews in the school. We weren't scared to say something to the next person. We were all Jewish so we felt more secure."[189] The remaining Jewish youth of Baghdad did not know what existed outside the immediate walls of the school and their family and friends. They knew that it was dangerous to be Jewish and that they were disliked by the majority but they were shielded and felt secure in the enclosed armor that the school walls provided.

[188] Personal Interview, Lisette Ades
[189] Personal Interview, Linda Ischayek

Conclusion:

> Cultural identity, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation. [190]

The collective cultural identity of the Jews of Baghdad is one that changed from one generation to the next. Their education was a vehicle which shaped their identities. As the schooling changed from one generation to the next, to align with changing times, the identities of the Jews of Baghdad evolved. As this paper relays, the earlier cultural identity of the Jews in the region was one imbedded in Talmudic education and a focus on Jewish life. The identity of many Baghdadi Jews during the 20th century was one which combined a connection to Judaism with a yearning for western knowledge. This paper strongly focused on the enlightened Baghdadi Jew who attended institutions such as the Alliance and the Frank Iny schools. The schools were the vehicles which helped the students to form their identities. The cultural identity that Hall identifies in the above quote, is one that the Baghdadi Jews of the 20th Century developed largely because of the Alliance and Frank Iny schools.

> The school was the community center. It had a playground and it was the gathering place of the children of the entire Jewish community. It offered us learning, socialization and play. Our friends were all together at the same school. We were all Jews gathered in one place together. We felt safe and we felt like we belonged. [191]

---

[190] Hall, S., p.225, 1990
[191] Personal interview with Vivian Belboul

The quote above comes from an interviewee who attended the Frank Iny School. She was a student there after the mass exodus of the Jews in 1951 when the Jewish community of Baghdad was quite small. The Jewish youngsters were sheltered in a community bubble and at its core was the school. The Jewish students' socialization process and identity formation occurred at the school and through the school. Their lives revolved around the school and their identities were formed as a result of what they learned and who they associated with on a daily basis in class. The Frank Iny School along with the other Jewish schools that I mention in this paper acted as a socializing agent for the Jewish students in Baghdad. The schools helped them to shape their identities.

"Schools are places where students can find their voices, reclaim and affirm their histories and develop a sense of self and collective identity"[192] . The Jews of Baghdad faced challenging external factors such as university quotas, a Farhud, anger over Zionism, and Iraqi Nationalism. These factors, coupled with the desire to learn about western culture and to slowly veer away from traditional Judaism, might have caused very conflicted individuals. The Baghdadi Jews who I interviewed did not indicate that they had been confused about their identities; they had very secure Jewish and Western identities. They were able to meld traditional Jewish rituals and knowledge with western culture as well as with Baghdadi language and traditions. Their identities are a product of their surroundings but also largely a product of their schools and community centered education.

Education for the Jews of Iraq was something engrained in their identities as being a vital source for survival. The mere fact that the Jewish people of Baghdad knew

[192] Giroux, H., and McLaren, P. (1989) Introduction.

that there was an advanced and rapidly progressing world outside of their community encouraged them to educate their youth in a manner that would allow them to function in this modern world. The Alliance school, the Shamash school and the Frank Iny School were all major Jewish education institutions in 20th century Baghdad that encouraged this modern western form of learning. Languages were of the utmost importance because the Jews of Baghdad knew that so long as they could communicate and write in a language they would be able to work and succeed in a country where that language dominated. They wanted their children to be able to function in European and North American society and to have everything that the children in Europe and North America had.

From my research I discovered that many Jews in Baghdad in the 20th century were quite modern, although traditional at the same time. This fact surprised me because all of the Baghdadi Jews that I know and have met in my life have all had a very strong connection to their Jewish identity. I learned from the many interviews that I conducted just how possible it is to meld western values of education with tradition. Judaism was always a factor in the lives of the Baghdadi Jews. They were extremely connected to their Jewish identity, even those who were not religious. As Stillman explains, "Sephardi and Oriental Jewry made the transition into modern times while preserving its equilibrium"[193]. He gives three examples of the streams of Sephardi Jewish identity; neo-traditionalist, quasi-traditionalist and anti-traditionalist. [194] While the rabbis (and those who were originally opposed to the Alliance school) would fall under the neo-traditionalist label, and somebody like Sassoon Somekh's family (who ate ham and did not fast on Yom Kippur) would fall under the anti-traditionalist label, I believe that the

[193] Stillman, N. A. (1995) p. 2.
[194] Ibid.

majority of the Baghdadi Jews who attended the Jewish run schools in Baghdad, and the majority of those I interviewed for this paper, fell under the middle category, the quasi-traditionalist label. They were able to meld modern western values and culture while still holding onto their Jewish identity. I believe that this is strongly a result of the Jewish run schools that they attended. They attended schools which taught secular subjects but they were able to meet other Jewish people there. They were able to exchange their values and traditions with one another. The Alliance school taught Hebrew (up until the fourth grade) which helped to preserve the language side of the cultural identity, but the Frank Iny School did not teach Hebrew. The Frank Iny students held onto their Jewish identity largely because of the community environment that the school provided.

While conducting this research I was reminded of my own Jewish schooling in the Montreal Jewish day school system[195]. While there are quite a few major differences, such as the amount of Hebrew and Judaica that I learned (which greatly exceeded the amount of Hebrew and Jewish studies taught to the Jewish students of Baghdad), my former school was also a community based vehicle for identity formation. I was a part of a Montreal Jewish bubble for eleven years and all of my friends, traditions, and belief systems came both from my home and from my school. The traditional, yet not orthodox manner in which I grew up practicing Judaism is very similar to the way the "quasi-traditional"[196] Jews of Baghdad grew up practicing Judaism. The emphasis on science and math taking precedent over Jewish subjects in the school is something that any Jewish studies educator in Montreal is aware of. Parents in Baghdad in the 20th century,

[195] I attended Talmud Torah Elementary School and Herzliah High school in Ville St. Laurent from 1987-1998

[196] Stillman, N. A. (1995) p.2.

like parents in Montreal in the 21st century, want their children to excel in secular subjects but also want them to preserve their traditional Jewish identity, which is why they send their children to the Jewish school in the first place. The preservation of Jewish identity relies not only on lessons, but as we have seen from the Alliance, Shammash and Frank Iny schools, on community as well. The Jewish communal environment that the Jewish school provided (in Baghdad) and provides (in the Montreal Jewish schools) is one that shapes the identities of the students and unites them with the collective Jewish identity.

It is my conclusion that being an educated Baghdadi Jew at the end of the 19th to the middle of the twentieth century meant that one was learned in the ways of the western world (culture, languages, math and science, history, geography, religion) but also was solidly connected to his/her Jewish identity and knew the value of religion, Torah, holiday traditions and customs. Their beliefs, their bloodline as Jews was so powerful that people killed them because of it (as occurred during the Farhud of 1941). Yet this population never neglected its Jewish identity. At the same time, however, the Baghdadi Jews were free thinkers and wanted to have all the opportunities that were available in the rest of the world in matters of education. As I attempted to demonstrate in this essay, the schools run by the Jews in Baghdad during this time were the cornerstones of this identity. The schools, along with home life, essentially produced this identity. The school was a major socializing agent that shaped the identity of the educated Baghdadi Jew. Baghdadi Jews of this time period comprise an exemplary population. What they valued in terms of education and identity makes me exceedingly proud of my Baghdadi Jewish heritage.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Leila (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale Univ. Press. New Haven.

Antonius, George (1965) *the Arab Awakening*. Barnes and Noble. New York.

Archives of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (1860-1930). Paris.

Archives of the Foreign Office, Public Record Office (1860-1945). London.

Ashkenazi, Shlomoh (1979). *Women from a Jewish Perspective*.Vol. 1. Tsiyon. Tel Aviv (Hebrew)

Banks, James A. (1991). "Multicultural Literacy and Curriculum Reform," *Educational Horizons* 69.3 135-140.

Baron, Salo W. (1952). *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* Volume 2, Christian Era: The First Five Centuries. Columbia University Press. New York.

Baskin, Judith, R. (1999). *Jewish Women, a Historical Perspective,*. Wayne State University Press. Detroit.

Ben-Jacob, Abraham (1965). *Yehude Babel: 1038-1960 (History of the Jews of Iraq)*. Ben Zvi Institute. Jerusalem. (Hebrew)

Ben-Porat, Mordechai (1998). *To Baghdad and Back, the Miraculous 2000 Year Homecoming of the Iraqi Jews.* Gefen. Jerusalem, New York.

Bensimon, A. (1973). Reflexions sur l'identite Sepharade. *Dans Presence, Organe de l'association Sepharade Francophone.* Vol 2, No 2. Montreal.

Benbassa, Esther and Rodrique, Aron. (2000) *Sephardi Jewry, a History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries.* University of California Press. Berkley, Los Angeles, London.

Caws, P. (1994). *Identity: Cultural, Transcultural and Multicultural in T.D. Goldberg Multiculturalism.* Cambridge: Basil Blackwell. pp. 371-387

Cheny, N. (1975). Qu'est-ce qu'un Sepharade ? *Dans Presence, Organe de l'association Sepharade Francophone.* No. 11, Montreal.

Coke, R. (1925). *The Heart of the Middle East*. T. Butterworth. Great Britain.

Corcos, A. (1997). *Les Juifs et L'Ecole.* Sillery (Quebec): Les Editions Septentrion.

Cowan, P. (1978, May, 20). Jews to adapt- but not at price of their heritage. *Montreal Gazette.* Retrieved from Canadian Jewish Congress Archives.

Cohen, Martin, A. (1993). Sephardim in the Americas: studies in culture and history. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press.

Courts, Patrick, L. (1997). Multicultural literacies; dialect, discourse, and diversity. *Counterpoints*: N.Y. V. 45

Dallal, Sheila. (1998). *A Nostalgic Trip into the History of the Jews of Iraq.* University Press of America. Lanham, New York, Oxford.

Divon, Haim, Halevy. (1991). *To Be a Jew.* Basic Books, a Division of Harper Collins Publishers. USA.

Elazar, D. (1989). *The Other Jews.* Basic Books, Inc. New York

Filion, F.G. (1978). *La Communaute Sepharade de Montreal.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. McGill University, Montreal.

Gat, Moshe. (1977). *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948-1951.* Frank Cass. London, Portland, Or.

Ghosh, R. & Abdi, A.A. (2004). *Education and the Politics of Difference: Canadian Perspectives.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (1989) *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle.* State University of New York Press, New York.

Gubbay and Levy (1996). *The Sephardim; Their Glorious Tradition from the Babylonian Exile to the Present Day.* Carnell Limited. London.

Hall, Stuart (1982) 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies'. In Gurevitch *et al.* (Eds.)

Hall, Stuart (1990)"Cultural Identity and Diaspora" from *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), London: Lawrence and Wishart

Hall, Stuart (1996) "Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity," from *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), London: Routledge, pp. 411-446.

Hall, Stuart, Du Gay, Paul (1996) *Questions of Cultural Identity.* London: Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage publications.

Hirschberg, J. (1989). *Secular and Parochial Education of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish Children in Montreal: A Study in Ethnicity.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. McGill University, Montreal

Hyman, Mavis (1995). *Jews of the Raj.* Hyman Publishers. London.

Ireland, Philip, Willard. (1937). *Iraq.* Alden Press. London.

Johns, C.H.W. (1913). *Ancient Babylonia.* Cambridge University Press. London.

Kattan, Naim (2005) *Farewell, Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad.* Raincoast Books, Vancouver.

Khadduri, Majid. (1960). *Independent Iraq 1932-1958; a study in Iraqi Politics.* Oxford University Press. London, New York, Karachi.

Langlais J. & Rome, D. (1991). *Jews and French Quebecers.* Waterloo : Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley (1953). *Iraq, 1900 to 1950 a Political, Social and Economic History.* Oxford University Press. London, New York, Toronto.

Longrigg, Stephen and Stoakes, Frank (1958). *Nations of the Modern World; Iraq.* Frederick A. Praeger. New York.

Meir, Y. (1973) [HEBREW] *Beyond the Desert, Underground activities in Iraq, 1941-1951.* Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense.

Meir, Y. (1989) [HEBREW] *Hitpatchut chevratit-tarbutit shel yehudei Iraq, meaz 1830 vead yameinu.* Neharayim, Tel Aviv.

Nyrop, Richard, F. (1979). *Iraq, a country study.* The American University. Washington, D.C.

Oates, Joan (1979). *Babylon.* Thames and Hudson. London.

Perkei Avot/ Ethics of the Fathers 2:7

Rejwan, Nissim (1985). *The Jews of Iraq.* Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado.

Rejwan, Nissim (1998). *Israel's Place in the Middle East, a Pluralist Perspective.* University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Rejwan, Nissim (2004). *The Last Jews in Baghdad, Remembering a Lost Homeland.* University of Texas Press. Austin.

Sabar Yona, (2003) *Nehardea, No. 14,* Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center, Or Yehuda.

Sassoon, David, Solomon (1949). *A History of the Jews in Baghdad.* Alcuin Press. UK.

Sawdayee, Maurice Max (1991). *The Baghdad Connection. Impact of the Alliance Israelite.* Sawdayee Pub. Locust Valley, NY.

Sehayek, Shaul (2003). "Changes in the Social Status of Urban Jewish Women in Iraq as the Nineteenth Century Turned", Women in Judaism, Vol 3, No 2.

Shiblak, Abbas (1986). *The Lure of Zion, the Case of the Iraqi Jews.* Al Saqi Books. London.

Shiblak, Abbas (2005). *Iraqi Jews, a History of a Mass Exdus.* Saqi. London.

Shulewitz; Bat Ye'or (1999) *The Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands.* Continuum, Great Britain.

Soldt, W.H. Van (2005) *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia; Papers Read at the 48th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale.* Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten. Belgium.

Somekh, Sasson (2004) [Hebrew] Baghdad Yesterday. Tel Aviv: HaKibutz HaMe'uhad,
----------. "Notes from the Underground." Ha'aretz 15 Aug 2003.
----------. "A Babylonian Boyhood." Ha'aretz 5 Oct 2001.
----------. "Rhyme and Reason at Café Baghdad." Ha'aretz 10 Sept 1999.

Sourani, S. (2004) A Short Anecdotal Journey in the History of the Jews of Babylon/Iraq: The First Diaspora in World History. Unpublished manuscript. University of Ottawa, Ottawa.

Sick, G., Spector, Simon, R., (2004). *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921.* Columbia University Press, New York.

Simon, Reeva Spector, et al. (2003) *"Iraq." In The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Stevens, Jack (1997). *Iraq as I knew it.* Lugus Productions, Toronto.

Stillman, Norman, A (1979). *The Jews of Arab Lands.* The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia.

Stillman, Norman, A (1995), *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity.* Hardwood Academic Publishers, University of Oklahoma, USA.

Stillman, Yedida, K. and Zucker, George, K. (1993). *New Horizons in Sephardic Studies.* State University of New York Press. Albany.

Street, B.V. (1993) Cross-Cultural approaches to literacy. Cambridge: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Weinfeld, M. (1985) *The System of Jewish Education in Montreal: An Overview of Current Conditions and Challenges.* A study Commissioned by the Jewish Education Council of Montreal. McGill University, Montreal.

Weiss, D. Halivni, (Jul., 1964), The Use of knhin Connection with Marriage. *The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 57, No. 3.*
(Jul., 1964), The Use of knhin Connection with Marriage. *The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 57, No. 3.*

Wertheimer, Jack (1992) *The uses of Tradition; Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era.* The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, USA.

Woolfson, Marion.(1980) *Prophets in Babylon: Jews in the Arab World.* Faber & Faber, London.

World Jewish Congress. (1948) *The Treatment of Jews in Egypt and Iraq.*

Internet Sites:

http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/religion1.html

Encyclopedia of the Orient
http://lexicorient.com/e.o/baghdad.htm *(January 2nd, 2007)*

Jewish Encyclopedia online
http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=710&letter=A#1700 *(December 12, 2006)*

Yaphe, J. S., 2003_Middle East Journal, 2003; War and Occupation in Iraq: What Went Right? What Could Go Wrong?
https://www.mideasti.org/pdfs/Yaphe381-399.pdf- *(January 17, 2007)*

Ali, Maulana, Muhammad. (2002) *The Holy Quran; Arabic Text with English Translation, Commentary and Comprehensive Introduction http://www.muslim.org/english-quran/quran.htmRetypeset, redesigned with expanded Index (May 13, 2007)*

Congregation Bene Naharayim, (1999) www.iraqijews.org (July 6, 2006)

Iraqi Jews Website (2002) www.come.to/iraqijews (July 6, 2006)

Film Media:

THE LIFE OF FRANK INY: A GRANDDAUGHTER'S JOURNEY, (US/Iraq) 2000, 35min., Executive Producer: Carole Basri; Writer/Producers: Adriana Davis and Bryan Durr for D-Squared Media.

The Last Jews of Baghdad (USA) 2001, 110 min, Executive Producer: Carole Basri. Writer/Producer: Adriana Davis, Bryan Durr.

The Forgotten Refugees a documentary produced by Isra TV and The David Project (2006)

2,600 years of Judaism in Iraq: a film by Salim Fattal

Archive Consulted

Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center: Or Yehuda, Israel

Personal Interviews Referenced in Essay:

Ades, Lisette, October 20, 2006, Montreal

Basa, Doris, October 27, 2005, Ramat Gan

Belboul, Vivian, March 14, 2006, Montreal

Core, Marcelle, March 5, 2006, Montreal

Core, Naim, March 5, 2006, Montreal

Ischayek, Linda, October 10, 2006, Montreal

Kattan, Naim, March 20, 2006, Montreal

Kor, Carmen, September 11, 2006, Montreal

Saleh, Chafika, March 19, 2006, Montreal

Sashou, Fina, October 30, 2005, Tel Aviv

Somekh, Sasson, March 26, 2006, Tel Aviv

Shah, Anwar, March 6, 2006, Montreal

Shah, Evelyne, March 6, 2006, Montreal

Shashoua, Mouzly, October 20, 2006, Montreal

Sour, Lydia, March 19, 2006, Ottawa

Sourani, Sami, March 19, 2006, Ottawa

Zamir, Yaacov, October 27, 2005, Or Yehuda

Appendix

Appendix A: Pictures

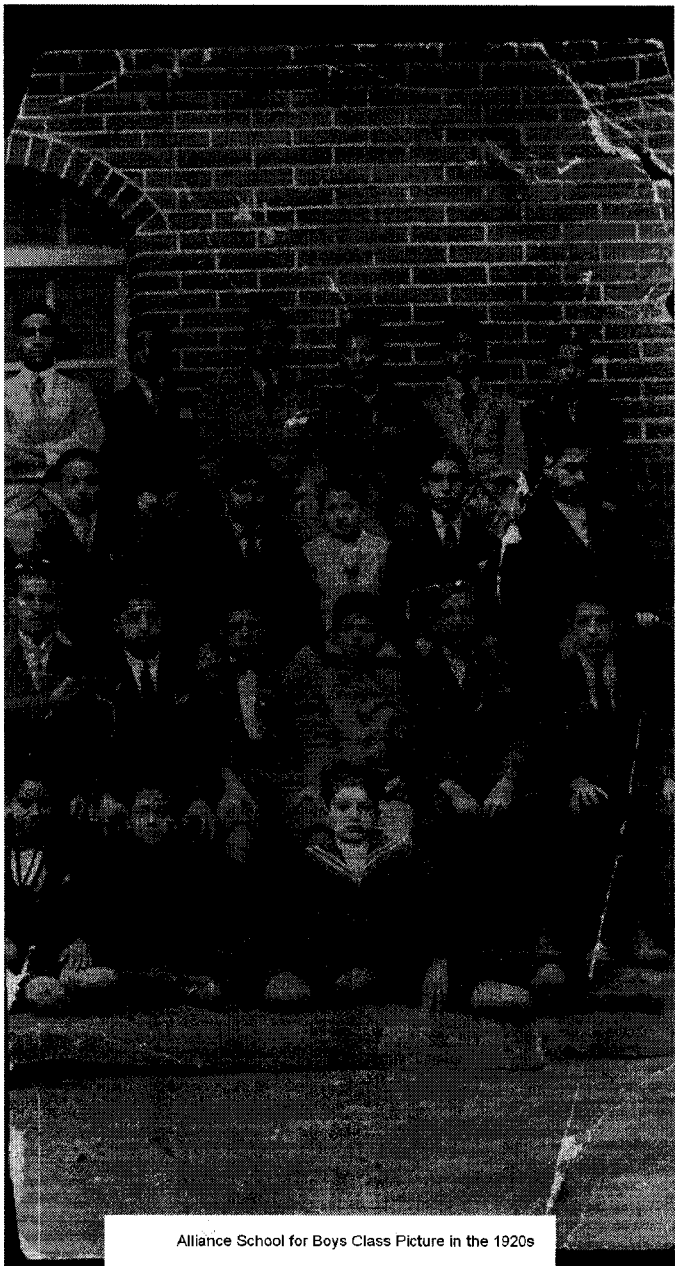
Appendix B: Ethics Report

Appendix A

Aug. 1961

Chief Rabbi Sassoon Kadoori performs a Bar Mitzvah ceremony in 1961

Vivian Belboul gets her French education certificate (1960)
The caption behind the photograph, in French, reads:
"Vivian est la premiere en certificat d'etude"
"Vivian is in 1st place in the education certificate"



Alliance School for Boys Class Picture in the 1920s

Jewish Baghdadi schoolchildren playing in the school courtyard of the Frank Iny school while the schoolteacher looks on.

Lydia Sour gets her Brevet certificate (1961)

Naim Core at his office Desk during the 1940's

Appendix B