By 1948, Palestine had made important strides toward developing its own publishing industry. Where a mere handful of presses had existed in 1900, dozens of them were now running. Where bookstores had been rare, scores of them were now engaged in lively trade countrywide. Other changes, not discussed in this paper, were equally vital in this development: the expansion of the periodical press, a promoter of books and a public trainer in reading; the emergence of social-cultural clubs, loci of literary activities; and, perhaps most important, the dynamic spread of education. These changes provided indispensable underpinnings for the publishing edifice. On the whole, however, the achievements were modest at that early stage, as reflected in the meagre local printed harvest (this was especially conspicuous when juxtaposed with the immeasurably richer output of the country’s smaller but better educated Jewish community at the time).37 Such limited accomplishments should be hardly surprising, given the very low point of departure and the mighty impact of literary activity in neighbouring countries. The fateful events of 1948 befall Palestine while still laying the foundations for its own publishing trade, cutting short what seemed to be a promising beginning.

The Emergence of the Public: Arab Palestinian Media in British Mandate Palestine 1929–1945: Arab Palestinian History and the Arab Press as a Neglected Subject

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Compared to the nearly endless literature on Mandate Palestine, studies dealing primarily with the political, economical, social and cultural history of the Arab community, and such studies making wide use of Arab primary sources in particular, are — with some remarkable exceptions — under-represented. This is not a new phenomenon and has arguably, apart from obvious practical explanations as the language barrier facing western scholars, a lot to do with political realities. In his famous book The Arab Awakening that was published in 1938, George Antonius complained that Arab sources were frequently disregarded in contemporary accounts of the Mandate Period. While writing about the Permanent Mandate Commission in Palestine he refers to the Arab newspapers in Palestine:

Even such sources as the Arabic Press of Palestine, which provide a valuable body of comment on the operation of the mandate as it affects the Arab population, are not used. Petitions and memoranda drawn up in Arabic have to be submitted at Geneva in translation. It requires more than mere transposition to turn good Arabic into readable English or French, and the Arabs of Palestine are so notoriously unskilled in the art of presenting their case in a foreign language that the rendering is usually a travesty.¹

The under-representation of Arab sources in different accounts of the period also concerns the later years of the Mandate and the period of the Second World War in Palestine; there is something like a tradition of excluding Arab experiences during the Mandate from historical accounts. While often obviously disregarded for political reasons, many sources were lost in the turmoil Palestinian Arabs were forced to live in after 1948. Years of occupation and displacement did not only handicap the

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37 Cf. the somewhat hasty but still telling comparison by Ishaq Musa al-Husayni between Arab and Jewish publishing in mandatory Palestine. Husayni contrasted the 209 Arabic books published between 1919 and 1946, which he had managed to trace, with 349 Hebrew books published in the country in one year, 1913-4. Ishaq Musa al-Husayni, ‘`Awdat al-Safina (Jerusalem 1945), 37-40. In the same vein, see E. Mills, Censuses of Palestine 1931 (Alexandria, Printed for the Government of Palestine by Whitehead Morris, 1933), E214, 219.

development of an Arab Palestinian historiography, but also brought with them the loss and expropriation of primary source material.

The history of the Palestinian Arab community in the later Mandate years, when several members of the traditional elite, especially the circle of the Palestine Arab Party (PAP) around Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni, had left the country or had been forced out by the British administration after the violent escalation of Arab protests during the years 1936–9, has often been characterized as a chapter of a society left leaderless, inactive and disoriented. On the other hand quite an effort was made to analyse Arab Palestinian activities in exile, foremost concerning Hajj Amin and his collaboration with the Axis Powers. However, Arab Palestinians obviously did not — literally and symbolically speaking — disappear from Palestine during the War years. Even with prominent leaders being out of the country and much of their own public life being tightly controlled by the British Authorities — without any doubt an ‘Arab Public Sphere’ and an ‘Arab Public Opinion’ continued to exist and even further developed, with the Arab Press being a central factor during these years. Only recently a literature on Arab Palestinian cultural and social history ‘from below’ - reaching beyond the common political narratives has started to develop. Most of the older studies dealing with Mandate history focused on British and Zionist policies as the progressive and decisive forces ‘making’ history in Palestine.

The history of the Arab community in Palestine has in this regard mostly been referred to as a history of failure: the failure of a passive player to formulate and execute its own policies to counter-balance the Zionist state project and the failure of an ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘back-ward’ society to keep up with the immense speed of modernization and change in Palestine. Additionally, as the most common narrative goes, the two large communities, Arabs and Jews, are presented as two isolated entities without contact and exchange. Only in recent years has this picture been changed by new studies in the field of Mandate history, with a trend to ‘write Arab experiences into history.’ Such new impulses came for example with the studies of

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3 Zachary Lockman, Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine 1906–1948 (Berkeley 1990); Deborah Berenson: Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine (Albany 2000).


5 Also compare the article by Ami Ayalon in this volume.

6 Muhammad Sulaymán, Al-Sibák al-Filasîtîyya wa-Qawādat al-In tidâb al-Barâji (Nicosia 1988).


common ideas, symbols and vocabulary that hold together this constructed community.  

Following up on this thought, I will try to outline the cultural and social context of the Arab Media in the later years of the Mandate and analyse its role regarding the emerging concept of the ‘Public’ in Palestine between 1929 and 1945.

Some remarks on the concepts of the ‘Public’ and their relation to the Arab Palestinian case

In a recent book on public opinion Slavko Splichal commented that

it has been symptomatic since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century that all dissertations on public opinion begin with a note that there is an extensive literature on the public and on public opinion, but clear and unequivocal definition of the concepts are not to be found.  

If we keep the state of the academic literature on Mandate Palestine in mind and ask for concepts of ‘public’ in Mandate Palestine, it becomes clear that we bring together two fields with an extraordinary amount of literature, that has however little to say about the question of public opinion and the public sphere in Palestine.

Classical theories on the concept of the ‘public’ usually reviewed emerging concepts of the public in Western European society. While Hannah Arendt defined the public in her political philosophy in a very general way as ‘everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity’ 11 Habermas’ groundbreaking study on the ‘Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere’ examines the western-liberal societies from a historical perspective; however he does not present a universal concept. The ‘public sphere’ in his understanding is linked to the democratic age and the western enlightenment project. In this context Habermas gives the following, well known definition:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the legal rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedents: people’s public use of their reason.  

This is a description of the beginning of civil society in Europe during the 18th century; it includes several of the main attributes and ambiguities of the terms ‘public’ and ‘publicness’: The private-public dichotomy, the original feudal character of the public as ‘representative publicness’ and the opposite implication of publicness as a democratic or civic power if used ‘from below’. Generally, the concept of the ‘public’ has different connotations and changed its meaning in different historical contexts and their specific economical, social and cultural conditions. However, the emergence of the public in a modernist sense is clearly linked to the development of the press and the media sector as an independent factor. Many of the changes, that took place in Europe between the sixteenth and nineteenth century, were experienced in Palestine in a very condensed form during Mandate times. While it would be ignorant to deny the origins of public life and the press during Ottoman times, the Mandate and its specific quasi-colonial situation created an environment of external modernization that ultimately led to an unprecedented social transformation of Arab society. ‘Traditional’ and ‘modern’ concepts of the public continued to coexist during the Mandate: if one uses the concepts derived from Habermas, this includes the existence of a representative publicness, the creation of a bourgeois sphere and elements of a liberal economy and the emergence of a critical public:

- The ‘authoritarian’ publicness or representative publicness that is generated by the British Mandate Administration (jurisdiction, public administration, representative character of the Mandate Commissioner and his government) and corresponds with Habermas’ concept of Representative Publicity.

- The publicness of the traditional old Arab Society that has a partly private character (the family, the private household, coffee houses, the Jinnam, the religious institutions)
- Habermas: Private Autonomy.

- Finally a publicness generated by a politically alert and economically more independent social group of Arab writers, journalists, intellectuals, businessmen and other professionals mainly in the urban centres that includes members of the traditional elite and of a new middle class — Habermas: Bourgeoisie/Civil Society.

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The press is the most important agent of this third type of a newly emerged independent public sphere. Especially in the latter part of the Mandate after 1929 this new Arab public sphere was created due to internal and external developments influencing Arab society.

Similar to other historical cases (e.g. colonial India) this public sphere was built up under the ambiguities of the colonial situation, and the ambiguities of the colonizer’s policies, that ultimately oscillated between restricting and encouraging public activity among the colonized.

Modernization, Social Change and the Rise of the Media

In addition to the British institutionalised public sector, such as the educational or health care sector, and the traditional loci of Arab society there was a new public sphere created from within Arab society and shaped by the Arab media. This sphere was dominated by certain circles of the Arab elite and professionals in Palestine and constantly expanded in the period of the Mandate. Social developments in the Arab community, such as growing literacy and the desire to read contributed to this trend. One of its main expressions was the founding of political clubs, that finally lead the way to the newly founded Arab parties of the 1930s: even if these organizations partly represented traditional social (i.e. clan or family) divisions they were an expression of this new public sphere and of ‘private people coming together as a public’ (Habermas). The more or less openly party affiliated newspapers also were an important step towards a more differentiated and structured discourse.

While in the first period long before 1929 Palestinian consciousness and identity had been constructed, as Khalidi has shown, the late Mandate years brought its consolidation and heterogeneity at the same time. The press in Palestine played an important part in both processes. Anderson’s idea of the imaginative construction of the nation also brings in the role of the press as a decisive factor: a constructed community depends on the constant reassurance and equal distribution of its common imagination and ideas, and in the ‘age of technical reproduction’ (Walter Benjamin) it is the media that executes this function. At the beginning of the century there was no publishing industry in Palestine. By 1929 this situation had significantly changed: not only had a wide range of Arab press items been established, also a readership, a recipient and consuming public had been created in a few years, a process that elsewhere took centuries. Palestine finally had entered an era that is usually referred to as the ‘age of mass communication’ which was further comforted by modern technical standards of communication, such as the telephone, telegraphy, and the broadcasting system. Additionally, distribution and transportation facilities were improved and contributed to rising circulations. The degree to which the media was influential on society thus significantly rose after 1929.

The years after 1929 also were a time of rising unrest and conflict in Palestine and especially a time of unprecedented change within Arab society in Palestine. The external modernization process influenced by the British administration and the Jewish organizations had, as already mentioned, ambiguous effects on the Arab Palestinian community.

This process comprised a quickly growing population with a marked trend to urbanisation and industrialisation, the latter especially during the war years, when around 100,000 Arab wage workers were employed. The population rose from 800,000 in 1929 to 1.2 million Arabs in 1945 (Jews 160,000 to 570,000). In spite of this rapid growth some ‘progress’ was made in the field of education, although British educational policies far from satisfied the growing Arab demand for education. However, secondary education was increased and the number of boys’ schools raised from 283 to 398 and girls’ schools from 31 to 80, still leaving female education far behind.13

In the first 15 years of the Mandate, Government schools only included a two-year secondary education period, while from 1935 on this education was extended to a four-year period. Apart from the Governmental schools and colleges the importance of private schools was constantly increasing too, as for instance such foreign teaching institutes as the British run St. George College or the American University in Beirut. The expanded literate public was now no longer a specialized and purely intellectual elite — from the 1920s on, an increasing number of Arab Palestinian citizens was making use of the information spread by the media.

The technical modernisation process in the country had changed the communication landscape and also transformed the role of the recipients as readers,

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listeners or consumers of this new kind of information. Finally the emergence of a younger generation forming a group of professionals, such as lawyers, administration officials and businessmen, that were partly educated in the West or in Western style institutions, plays an important role. This new social group — whether it is called a ‘New Middle Class’ or not — also started to erode the vertical political cleavages of the elite and the old concepts of legitimacy derived from family or clan origin (that nonetheless remained an influential factor).

The development of the media and its growing influence on society was closely connected to this changing social environment. The rising level of education and literacy contributed to a rising demand for newspapers and information in general, while on the other hand obviously the increased circulation of papers contributed to a stronger demand for study and education.

1929–1939: Newspaper Expansion

In the 1920s some 20 newspapers existed in Jerusalem, with a small circulation and their impact on the public being relatively limited. Although British authorities — until 1921 through military rule, then with the help of the newly established Mandate government — controlled the Palestinian press, censorship did not play such an important role as in later years: as long as the political situation was quiet, the British administration took little interest in Arab journalistic activities, even if new Press laws were issued by the Mandate Authorities in 1923 to replace the old Ottoman regulations. Thus there was relatively free room for the development of the Arab press until 1929, when it entered a new stage: Rising tension between Arabs and both Jews and the Mandate power increasingly turned the press into a motor for mobilising public opinion and into a political factor that was now more closely and suspiciously watched by the British government.

Traditionally, Zionist policies and Jewish immigration had formed a central subject for all Arab newspapers in Palestine. But with rising polarisation within the Palestinian political landscape newspapers also became the mouthpieces of the various political groups, increasing tendencies of social, religious and political factionalism.

The Mufti and his followers, at the beginning of the 30s still powerful, but harshly criticized by a growing opposition were supported by al-Jāmi’ā al-‘arabīyya and the nationalist and Islamic al-Jāmi’ā al-islāmīyya (circulation approximately 2,000) and produced their own newspaper, al-Liwa’, which was edited by Jamal al-‘Hasaynī, a cousin of Hajj Amin. The opposition, usually referred to with the Arab term mu’āradha, consisting of other families struggling for power and influence with the Mufti, was largely represented by the 1921 founded Filastin, which had a circulation of 4,000–6,000 and was edited by Ḥāsā al-‘Isā and his brother. A new party, the younger generation’s istiqāl was supported by al-Dīlah with a circulation of approximately 4,000–6,000. However the number of effective readers was significantly higher, because newspapers were shared and sometimes read out publicly to the illiterate, i.e. in rural areas.

In these years modern technology, like the quickly expanding telephone system (after 1920), with higher mobility, optimised ways of distribution and improved communication channels, whilst raising the effectiveness of the Palestinian media. The constantly improving form and content of the newspapers also contributed to its importance in public discourse. It is in these years, one could argue, that finally an attentive ‘Palestinian public’ was created through these developments: the politically active and educated ‘reader’, who was not only a consumer of feature pages on Arab poetry and arts or a distant follower of political events, but was himself an active part of a new kind of political discourse within Arab society. By 1935 the newspapers had become an irreversible factor for producing opinion and political attitudes in the Arab community. British and Jewish observers also acknowledged that. Filastin quoted an article on the Arab press from the Jewish newspaper ha-Davar that had commented on its progress:

Since 1929 till now the Arab newspapers in Palestine have made huge steps towards internal and external progress and improvement and concerning their circulation as well. It is not long since there was no daily Arab newspaper in Palestine and now there are in Jaffa alone three large daily newspapers. Filastin is perceived as an important, while independent and sometimes oppositional voice in the national struggle, whose high quality and accuracy in

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14 Circulation of Arab Palestinian newspapers: PRO CO - 323 34010.
reporting are acknowledged in the article. The British administration was also fully aware of the power of the media and its role in the growing tension of the 1930s. The Central Investigation Department (C.I.D.) emphasized the importance of the Palestinian newspapers:

In this connection it must be stated that in shaping public opinion the press is becoming increasingly an important factor. The Arab reading public is on the increase and some peasants in their villages read newspapers. That this is so is perhaps obvious from the fact that the public now supports three daily papers.16

Especially during the Arab general strike and the violent protests between 1936 and 1939 the newspapers voiced the concerns of most Arabs in Palestine: the growing Jewish immigration, the Arab land sales, the economic decline and the opposition to the policies of the Mandate power were the subjects that unified the different Arab factions and dominated public opinion. The press in this regard realised a function attributed to the media in the classical modernist enlightenment sense: the public sphere and public opinion that the Mandate power tried to generate and control, was actively recreated and partly claimed by the Arab media and the Arab community itself. This clearly posed a threat to British rule in the country, so that strict censorship and control was introduced. During the violent period of 1936–9 some Palestinian newspapers were closed down or temporarily suspended. This especially concerned the Muslim owned organs of the Mufti-faction and the Islamic authorities, while more moderate newspapers like al-Difa‘ and Filastin had a slightly easier time. The distribution of Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi newspapers, which were imported by air and widely read in Palestine, was also controlled.17 In 1938 eleven newspapers were suspended for periods between one week and six months, among them the moderate Filastin (one week) and the Christian al-Karmil al-Jadid (the former Karmil) for six months.18

The Propaganda Battle, Broadcasting in Palestine and the War 1939–1945

At the same time efforts were made to prevent an imminent foreign infiltration of Palestinian media, especially from Italy and Germany. While Italy openly tried to promote its propaganda goals in the country, increased German activities started in 1938, when the newspaper al-lami‘a al-islamiyya was supported by the German News Agency Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro (DNB) and its representative in Palestine, Dr. Franz Reichart.19

Printing techniques and new means of communications were not only used by the newspapers and the official media in Palestine, other groups understood and used the modernised channels of mass communication: thus the printing of propaganda leaflets — outside of the institutionalised press — became an important means during the rebellion of 1936, making propaganda an important element in the inner-Arab struggles as well as in the conflict with the Mandate authorities and the Zionist institutions. A famous propaganda campaign was directed against the old traditional Ottoman Turbah headgear in favour of the national Kaffiyah, which also voiced threats against anyone ignoring the appeal.

Even records were produced in this propaganda battle for public opinion under the most adventurous circumstances: organized by Arab Palestinian leaders, recordings were made in Aleppo, Syria, with nationalistic songs written by Arab Palestinian songwriters. These nationalistic songs were pressed on wax discs, and then sent to London for professional editing in 1939, where they were produced by Columbia Records and then distributed throughout the Near East to strengthen the nationalistic struggle against the British authorities.20

With the propaganda war between the Axis and the Mandate Power, the importance of broadcasting in Palestine also rose. The Italian Service from Bari and later the German service put pressure on the Palestine Government to improve their own programme.

According to a memorandum by the Colonial Office from autumn 1933 approximately 1,000 Palestinians were listening to overseas broadcasting, most of them to the Bucharest station, which was easy to receive with an ordinary wireless set. This memorandum also emphasized the need for a British station in Palestine as ‘one of the few colonies under civilized administration which possesses no system of wireless broadcasting’. Moreover it would have a special significance due to the high

16 PRO CO 733 - 257/11 8.9.1933, report by H.P. Rice.
17 PRO CO 733 - 346/10.
18 PRO CO 733 - 375/16.
20 PRO FO 644 - 12.
illiteracy among the Arab population, especially in the rural areas, where only 200 schools, mainly boys’ schools, existed for more than 800 villages, with girls receiving less or no school education at all. The memorandum mentions the Soviet Union as an example, where ‘every village, school or factory possesses a radio set’. In December 1933 a Broadcasting Committee was formed by the HC and only a year later a transmitter station was erected near Ramallah, while programmes were produced in studios in Jerusalem. The programme consisted of English, Hebrew and Arabic programmes and was directed by a British director with two additional sub-directors. The Arab Palestinian poet Ibrahim Tuqan was the first Arabic Sub-Director. Apparently the reception of the program among the Arab population was remarkable: the station received letters from listeners as far away as Istanbul and Aden; in Palestine itself there were around 8,000 Arab license holders, suggesting that the number of listeners was remarkably higher than that. Some coffee shops had receivers to serve their customers. According to Foreign Office Reports, Arabs in Palestine generally welcomed the British Service in Palestine and kept sending ‘encouraging reports, comments and suggestions’. A majority of the Arab community in Palestine preferred the British produced news to foreign transmission, i.e. the German broadcasts from Athens and Berlin and the Italian station, that were largely taken for what they were — Axis propaganda programmes.

There was a remarkable number of Arabs committing themselves in support of the British War effort by working for the broadcasting service. One of these journalists was ‘Ajji Nuwayhid, who wrote about his experiences in his memories. When he was approached by the British broadcasting director and asked to lead the Arabic department, he presented a number of conditions to the director: he was only willing to lead an independent Arabic department, with a free choice of employees and a secure budget, and without any British control over the broadcasting. While this proposal was rejected by the British side, Nuwayhid was approached again after the beginning of the war with his conditions accepted: the news should only have to be checked by an administration official, who was moreover an old associate of the Istiqlal Party. Moreover the history of the broadcasting service, similar to the press

and other printed publications of the time shows, that Arab Palestinians had created an independent public opinion within the public sphere of the Mandate administration, that could even be maintained during the World War.

With the beginning of the War, Britain introduced a most restrictive policy in Palestine that also affected the press. Only three of the traditional daily newspapers were kept open by the British authorities during the Second World War:

Filastin, edited since 1911 by 'Isa al-Tsai and his brother Yusuf, al-Sirat al-Mustaqim, with its editor 'Abd Allah al-Qalqili, and al-Difa' whose proprietor was Ibrahim al-Shami; some other publications appeared during the war, such as the newspaper of the communist party (al-Istihaq) and others. But the atmosphere in Palestine had lost its violent anti-British tone not only due to British military and administrative pressure and the expulsion of nationalist leaders, but also due to the firm conviction among opposition circles, that co-operation with the British side for the duration of the War would serve Arab Palestinian interests best. The moderate daily press supported this view during the war, and public opinion in Palestine was now clearly influenced by that — even if anti-British sentiments still existed.

There was a clear consciousness among Arab Palestinians, that the developments in Europe and in the war also had a strong relevance for the future of their own country. The existing newspapers, especially Filastin and al-Difa' took a moderate view in these times, including a resolute stance against the Axis powers and Nazism. Another paper in Jaffa, al-Akhbar, that approached Nazi-Germany with numerous very critical reports throughout 1937 and 1942, was later closed down. In February 1942 the newspaper under its editor Bandali Hanan al-Gharrab and its editor-in-chief Doctor Muhammad Najib characterized Hitler as 'the greatest enemy of humanity'. The most traditional Palestinian Arab newspaper Filastin had also published critical articles since 1933 and provided its readers with accurate and very detailed information about the course of the war, partly through news agency notices and also reports by several of its own correspondents.

However, the readership during the war still comprised only a limited part of the Arab Palestinian public. In the rural milieu — at this time with approximately 55 to 65 percent still a majority — these dailies were scarcely read, although news used to

21 PRO CO 733 – 244/6/10.
22 PRO FG 371 – 23251.
23 'Ajji Nuwayhid: Sittin 'Amman ma'a al-Qafis al-'Arabiyah [Sixty Years with the Arab Caravan] (Beirut 1993).
24 Al-Akhbar, 18.2.1942, 1.
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spread fast through oral communication channels and the public announcement of news and information.

Arab Media and the Emergence of the Public Sphere

It is obvious, that the press played a central role in the consolidation of Arab Palestinian identity as an imagined community as described by Rashid Khalidi. But in the 1930s and 1940s, in interdependence with the immense external and internal changes to this community, the media had another importance more than merely distributing national symbols; it gave a main impulse for the creation of a genuinely new Arab public sphere and the platform for a rational discourse. This becomes clear through the discussion on the war events and the cooperation with the Mandate power in the war against the Axis. Moderate Arab circles in Palestine actively supported the British war effort, although opposition against Jewish immigration and the respective British policy was at the same time widespread.

The leading newspapers, the participation in the broadcasting service or the foundation of new organisations and unions during the last phase of the war show this rising degree of Arab political participation; this process, that might have been the key for the formulation of an effective Arab Palestinian policy after 1945, was however halted by the turbulences of the post-war development. While in the 1930s and 1940s a new form of Arab Palestinian public had been established, these structures were largely destroyed with the events of the year 1948, i.e. the expulsions and the difficult conditions for Arab Palestinians in their new host countries, where it was impossible to rebuild their own public sphere and difficult to take part in the public life.

Why Did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz? – Some Comments about the Reading Practices of Iraqi Jews in the Nineteenth Century

Orit Bashkin

Introduction

This paper examines a community of Jewish readers in nineteenth century Iraq, whose literary and cultural artefacts were produced not only in Baghdad but also in India, Eastern Europe and Palestine. Such an inquiry requires us to deconstruct an Arab and an Iraqi national discourse, which depicts the Ottoman past as an era of bleakness and decline. This national discourse correspondingly ignores the linguistic and cultural realities of the late Ottoman era during which Iraqi intellectuals were immersed in Ottoman, Central Asian, Arabian and Indian intellectual traditions and ‘privy to the debates on reform current amongst scholars of these areas’.

The Zionist narrative imagined the Oriental backwardness of Iraqi Jews, thus perceiving their immigration to Israel as a liberating exodus. Finally, the categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’ limited previous historical studies on the nature of readership in Iraq as scholars found it difficult to envisage a reading community whose literary products circulated between Baghdad, Berlin, Bombay and Odessa.

The Jewish-Iraqi community in the nineteenth century was relatively affluent because Iraqi Jewish merchants were engaged in global trade, particularly in the trade with India.

1 Dina Riki Khoury, State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834 (Cambridge and New York 1999), 17


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