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.

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**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’.1 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.2 Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Iraq served as a centre to Persian, Indian and Yemenite Jewry as Iraqi rabbis like ‘Abd Allah Sömekh (died 1899) published important religious and liturgical works. During the nineteenth century, Jews opened charity clubs and societies. Following the initiative of the

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1 I thank Amy Motalag.
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Russian Isaac Luria and the Austrian Herman Rosenfeld, the Jewish French society, Alliance israelite universelle established in 1869 the Alliance school in Baghdad. Nonetheless, Jews tried to emulate the journalistic activity of their Muslim neighbours; Rabbi Barukh Mosheh Mizrahi published a paper called Ha-Dov× (The Orator) in Judeo-Arabic between 1863 and 1871. Rabbi Sholomoh Bekhor Husin strove to obtain a license from the Ottoman authorities to print his own newspaper but was refused. Consequently, the Jewish community sought to read papers published outside of Iraq. Jews read journals published in Lebanon and Syria such as al-Muqtaṭal, whose editors mentioned Baghdadi Jews as one of their first groups of subscribers in Iraq. Likewise, their command of Hebrew enabled them to read the Hebrew press published in Europe and Palestine. Meanwhile, Iraqi Jewish immigrants who settled in India distributed local publications in Judeo-Arabic that were purchased by Baghdadi readers.

In what follows, I explore the participation of Iraqi Jews in the European and Indian journalistic enterprises in order to examine the role the foreign press played in the Jewish Iraqi community, to consider the various images of enlightenment presented in these papers and to scrutinize the ways in which Iraqi Jews defined their

identity vis-à-vis their Muslim neighbours on the one hand, and European Jews on the other.

The European Journals

Jacob Obrermer, who was the local agent of the journal Ha-Maggid (The Speaker), reported that Ha-Maggid, Ha-Seferah (The Awakening), Ha-Melish (The Intercessor) and Ha-Havaseot (The Lily) were commonly read by Jews in Baghdad. These journals are usually categorized as part of the haskalah movement, an assortment of literary, philosophical and cultural currents, which began in late eighteenth century Germany. The intellectuals of haskalah called for a rational understanding of Judaism, for assimilation into the European communities, and advised Jews to familiarize themselves with scientific and global innovations.

Iraqi writers and readers of the haskalah journals can be divided into two groups. The first group was comprised of European merchants and teachers who settled in Baghdad whereas the second group was of Baghdadi Arab Jews. The accounts of the first group closely follow the orientalist 'imaginative geography' utilized by European travellers. The interest in Iraq was common in orientalist literature because of its

7 Ha-Maggid (1856–1903) was published in Lyck (Eastern Prussia) and in Berlin and edited by the Russian Eliezer Lipman Zilberman, and later by David Gordon and Jacob Samuel Fox. Ha-OTH (1895–1907) was published in Eastern Europe (Köln, Vilna, Odessa, London and Berlin) and was an official organ of the Zionist movement. Ha-Melish (1860–1904) was published in Odessa and Saint Petersburg and edited by Alexander Zederbaum and later by Aaron Isaac Goldblum and Judah Leib Gordon. Ha-Seferah (1862–1934) was edited by the mathematician Haim Selig Sulimanski and later by Nahum Sokolow and was published in Warsaw. Ha-Havaseot (1863–9, 1870–1911) was published in Palestine and edited by Israe Beck, Michael ha-Kohen and Dow Frankum. Ha-Havaseot was probably the newspaper with which Iraqi Jews most identified, because it was produced in the Ottoman Province, Palestine and related to familiar themes — problems Jews had with local walls and their relationship with their Muslim neighbours. I chose to include it because it enjoyed both European and Iraqi readership, contained stories by Iraqi Jews and accounts by Jewish European travellers.

8 Kazazz, Jews, 146.

9 I use in this paper the definition of haskalah as employed by Uzi Shavit. As Shavit notes, the term gradually evolved from Moses Mendelsohn's initial conceptualization to encompass such terms as Bildung, Aufklärung, culture and enlightenment, but I prefer to apply the term haskalah for the purpose of this paper. See Uzi Shavit, ha-Seferah, Haskalah, Poetry and Modernity (Tel Aviv 1996), 7–37 (Hebrew). See also: Ismar Schorsch, From Text to Context: the Turn to History in Modern Judaism (Hanover 1994); Michael A. Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jews: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824 (Detroit 1967); David Sorkin, The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840 (New York 1987).

10 As suggested by Edward Said, 'imaginative geography' is the universal practice of "designating, in one's mind, a familiar space which is "ours", as opposed to an unfamiliar space, which is "theirs". Moreover, imagined geography inscribed not only the characteristics of an unspecified space, but also the features of the traveller's essence, for the process of constructing recognizable and
significance to both Biblical and Islamic history and its prominence in famed texts like the Arabian Nights. Iraq had momentous impact on Jewish culture for its place in the Biblical tradition as the homeland of Abraham and the place of the first Jewish exile. Subsequently, Jews travelled to Iraq during the nineteenth century and composed their own travel literature.11

The first orientalist theme recurrent in the Hebrew journals was a growing interest in archaeological excavations in Iraq and in its depiction as a land standing in perpetual rain. Jacob Obermeir provided general historical information about Baghdad’s Sassanid and Abbasid histories and frequently described his visits to Babylonian and Assyrian sites. In his portrayal of such sites, he was aided by the works of travelling like the Jewish Benjamin of Tudela and the Muslim Ibn Batuta. He often referred to Biblical heroes that lived in ‘Babylon’: Jonah, Nimrod, and Ezekiel, whose famous tomb is found in Iraq.12 The accentuation of the ancient was part of the haskalah’s desire to produce a scientific study of the Bible based on archaeology. Nonetheless, Jacob Obermeir believed that the ruins of Baghdad, once the centre of empires, were part of a divine plan to punish the descendents of the Babylonians: ‘The Almighty has paid the daughter of Babylon for what she has done to the sons of Jacob. Blessed be He, who destroyed the evil Babylon’.13 This narration colours the orientalist motives with specific Biblical and Jewish overtones.

The second characteristic in the writings of the Jewish-European group was the depiction of Baghdad as the antithesis to an enlightened community. Ha-Havaselet reported that ‘most Babylonian Jews are mindless and ignorant’. The Jews of Kurdistan were regarded as the worst of these savages:


11 The Lithuanian rabbi David de Seyt Hillel, who hoped to find the lost Jewish tribes, travelled to India and Baghdad in 1827. In 1848, Israel Benjamin, also known as the second Benjamin, originally from Moldova, visited Baghdad and published his travel accounts in 1856 in French. The book was translated into German (1858) and into Hebrew (1859). Wolf Schor (born in 1850, Poland) visited Baghdad in 1881, as part of a tour to India, Syria and Kurdistan, and published his narratives in Peretz Smolenskin’s journal Ha-Sabur (‘the Dawn’) and in journals in Baltimore and Chicago. Yom Tov ben David Semah, a Hungarian Jew came to Iraq in 1869 and published his impressions in French. See Me’ir Benyehu, ‘Introduction – Voyages of Jews to Babylon’, in Meir Benyehu (ed.), Maoz David (by Rabbi David Sulzmann) (Jerusalem 1955), 13–59.


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They are stubborn and impatient and strike each other senselessly and violently for the slightest of causes. Murder and robbery are to them the mildest of offences. Nevertheless, they are all kind-hearted, and act benevolently towards their brothers. However, they are ill-bred and boorish as the rest of the people who dwell in such places, and believe in witchcraft, spirits, devils, charms, talismans and similar nonsense... the boys are raised as wild animals. Torah and education are virtually unknown... They have no knowledge of fine manners or morals. The state of women there is very peculiar. Apart from the regular house-chores, they guard the houses, the donkeys and the sheep... but the men perform tasks in powers unfamiliar to human strength [emphasis mine].14

Iraqi Jews, then, have neither interest in nor knowledge of haskalah. The image of the women as traditional and religious is utilized to characterize the backwardness of Iraqi space. The explanation offered for this horrific state is the resemblance between Middle Eastern Jews and the rest of the Turkish and Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

The Iraqi Jews, however, because of their resemblance to the Arabs, preserve some sort of authentic Judaism, which is not to be found in Europe. The cantors in Baghdad, for example, chant better than any other community and have kept the purest dialect of Arabic, because of their dwelling close to the deserts and because of their commercial relations with ‘the nomad Ishmaelites’. The similarity to the Arabs, in this case, allows Jews to captivate the ancient nature of Hebrew, lost by modern Jews.15

This European literature often exhibited feeling of closeness and sympathy with Iraqi Jews since readers assumed that all Jews were brethren. In consequence, even if the East was essentially different from the West, Jews were somewhat distinct from the rest of their society and thus had a potential to progress. Furthermore, as these writers were denizens of Baghdad and knew their Jewish-Arab neighbours were aware of their publications, they took care to notice the similarities between various Jewish communities. Baghdad was therefore depicted as a model of successful integration of Jews in a non-Jewish society. Seen from this vantage point, the tolerant atmosphere in Baghdad was the antithesis of European anti-Semitic approaches. When the Ottoman governor helped a Baghdadi Jew, accused of blasphemy, Ha-Havaselet noted that the Jews were fortunate that this incident occurred in the lands of Edom (Arabia) for had


it occurred in Europe, it 'would have excited the hearts of the foes of Israel and would have given them an opportunity to spread false rumours about us'.”

Even when European writers depicted Iraq as an uncultured society, they still perceived the potential for change. The first possibility of change lay in Baghdad’s glorious history. Iraq was previously a centre of reason and science, and caliphs like the Abbassid al-Ma’mūn esteemed knowledge and learning. Other venues of change appeared to be the reforms taking place in the Ottoman Empire, particularly the equality between believers of various faiths. The ‘enlightened Ishmaelites’ and the Turkish government ‘had abandoned the thoughts of the past’, endeavoured to follow ‘the principles of tolerance and humanity’ and consequently Baghdadi Jews adopted ‘the spirit of the time’ and ‘resembled the West’. Isaac Luria wrote that public safety prevailed in a Baghdad once known to be ‘the city of thieves and muggers’. The city’s hospital accepts people from all religious and the newly established telegraph lines and train services should make Baghdadi Jews ‘closer to the enlightened people of Europe’. ‘Light would come even to our dark dwellings, because, God willing, all follow the light, and telegraph and trains are the messengers of reason and science’ [emphasis mine]. Reform and science are therefore global and inevitable processes that should and would occur in Iraq.

The most important agency of change, assumed writers, was Jewish-European instruction. Isaac Luria testified that he took it upon himself to school Iraqi Jews ‘in the ways of modern civilization’. As a founder of a new school, he had managed to establish firm grounds for the pursuit of science and education. This newly awakened spirit would enable Baghdad to recapture its past glory. God, argued Luria, had sent him to Baghdad to distribute the seeds of knowledge amongst Iraqi Jews.

This inner Jewish orientalist discourse reflects textual tensions between different sets of expectations. It continuously shifts between the category of East/West and subsequently the racial dichotomy Arab/European, which differentiated between European and Arab Jews on the one hand, and the category of religion, which

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highlights Jewish uniformity and negates the differences between groups of Jews, on the other. Although the Hebrew newspapers embraced the ideas of Enlightenment, European Jews positioned themselves as guides and supervisors and hence did not permit the Iraqi Jews to independently manage their affairs, a feature very relevant to Kant’s definition of enlightenment.

The second group of readers and writers were the Baghdadi Jewish elite. These Arab Jews utilized the press as a global billboard and some, like Rabbi Šelomoh Bekhōr Ḫoṣjn, regularly published letters and news-items. Rabbi Ḫoṣjn reported about plagues in Basra and Baghdad, the sufferings of the Jews in Persia, complained about floods in Baghdad and asked for financial assistance in order to pay to Muslims upon visiting the grave of Ezechiel, Iraqi Jews also used the press to assist their European brethren. Rabbi Ḫoṣjn, for example, followed closely the lot of Mina Hirsch, whose husband left her in Europe and travelled to North Africa. He read about the case, and when the treacherous man reached Baghdad, Ḫoṣjn wrote to Ha-Maggid about his whereabouts and that ‘he had promised Isaac Luria to return safely to his wife’. Regrettably, Mr. Hirsch did not keep his promise and hence the Baghdadi Jews tried to pressure him to divorce his wife. Ḫoṣjn informed Mina over the pages of Ha-Maggid that if she wished to obtain any further information about her husband or the divorce, she should contact him via the press or a private letter.

Baghdadi Jewish readers underlined the fact that enlightenment had indeed reached Baghdad. They announced their commitment to better the ways of those who do not observe the light of science and are bound by the shackles of stupidity and ignorance. Ha-Maggid published on its front page a letter by Ḫoṣjn informing readers about the commitment of Baghdadi Jews to promoting innovation in the study of the Torah based on manuscripts never published before.

22 According to Kant, enlightenment indicates a type of maturity, a stage in which a man is able to use his own intellect and reason without being guided by others. See Immanuel Kant, ‘Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Auklärun?‘ (1784) in E. Bahr (ed.), Was ist Auklärun?: Thesen und Definitionen (Stuttgart 1974), 7–19.
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However, Iraqi Jews occasionally accepted the orientalist narrative, especially when asking for financial help. 'Unlike our European brethren, who reside in perfect peace for freedom has already been established in their lands, we the people of Babylon, reside in the bitter Babylonian exile, tortured and tormented'. Furthermore, when Iraqi Jews sent letters that seemed contradictory to the haskalah's ideas, editors used them as evidence to the backwardness of Iraqi Jews. For example, Baghdadi rabbis published a petition against the opening of a school for girls, labelling it as 'objectionable to laws of decency' and threatened to reprimand girls who attended the school by not writing their marriage contracts. The editors added to this item that: 'this is the preaching of intolerance' that 'reached the Gates of Babylon'.

Nonetheless, since European Jews also published stories about struggles within the European world, between the old and superstitious rabbinical and Hassidic leaders and the enlightened modern Jews, Baghdadi Jews accentuated that the Jewish world was divided not between Eastern and Western Jewry but rather between enlightened and ignorant Jews. Moreover, the majority of Iraqi readers responded rapidly to stories they felt portrayed their community as primitive or traditional, and supplied evidence to reaffirm their claims.

An item that aggravated Iraqis was letters to Ha-Maggid sent by Jacob Oberneir critiquing Rabbi Yosef Hayim (born 1835) for standing in the way of reforming the Jewish educational system. The rabbis ex-communicated Oberneir, read the excommunication document in the synagogues and wrote letters and petitions to Ha-Maggid and Ha-Levanon on the matter. Subsequently, Oberneir sent letters of apology to these newspapers. Coincidentally, he concurrently received news about his mother's death, which were seen by the community as divine punishment. No Jew agreed to pray with him during the seven days of mourning and finally, he publicly requested the community's forgiveness.

The reluctance of Iraqi Jews to be placed within orientalist rubric is fully articulated in Ha-'Olam's interview with Yehziq'el Sasun (Sasun) (born 1860), who served as an Iraqi representative in the Ottoman Parliament. The reporter was impressed by Sasun's physical features:

Sasun Effendi is tall (he is the tallest of the Turkish Parliament member). His face attests to his enormous spiritual endeavours and when he converses, his eyes penetrate the soul of his companion and an unexplained smile, combining contempt and self-satisfaction appears. His dark skin certainly conforms to his Baghdad origin, especially seen against his short white beard. Despite his European manner, Arab influence is obvious in the way he talks and moves.

It seems, at first, that Sasun accepts an orientalist European discourse as he bemoans the state of 'Mohammedan fanaticism' in Baghdad and the 'half-savage' features of Muslim culture. Yet, he differentiates between Islam and Arab culture, which he cherishes and in which he desires to integrate. Sasun Effendi accepts the reporter's assumption regarding the profound influence of Arab culture in Iraq and argues that Jews emulate every aspect of Arab life. The 'Muslim fanaticism' consequently is recognized as an obstacle in the way of complete integration in Arab society. The reporter accordingly laments that Mr. Sasun 'sees no purpose in studying Hebrew, for he considers it a liturgical language. ... Zionism is utterly strange to him ... He wished to demonstrate to me that there is nothing that ties together Jews of different nations'. The text echoes tensions between Sasun's desire to adopt a European orientalist discourse regarding the nature of Islam and his pride in Arab culture, and between the reporter's admiration of Sasun, who achieved a position coveted by many European Jews and his puzzlement at an Arab Jew entirely contemptuous of the Zionist project.

At that time when the terms 'Jew', 'citizen' and 'Oriental' were negotiated both in European imperialist, nationalist and racial theories, and in the Ottoman Empire following the Tanzimat, Iraqi and European Jews had likewise defined their identity vis-a-vis an assortment of others (Christian/Jewish, Muslim/Jewish, European/Arab) in the pages of the Hebrew journals. These publications generated a continuous dialogue between producers of orientalist literature and the objects and subjects of these descriptions for nearly fifty years. The orientalist nature of these journals, however, had encouraged Iraqi Jews to publish elsewhere, in their own language, in India.

26 Yehziq'al David and Solomon Buchir Housh, 'Asia-Baghdad', Ha-Maggid 7:11 (12/3/1863), 84.
27 'Baghdad', Ha-Hapayot 16:31 (7/5/1881), 248.
28 Ben Yacov, 190–6.
Jews from Baghdad and Basra immigrated to India when Iraqi trade integrated into the world system and settled in Bombay, Surat and later in Calcutta. The Iraqi Jews in India continued speaking and publishing in Judeo-Arabic and maintained strong religious and cultural links with the Baghdad community to whom they turned for advice. The Sassan family of Bombay, for example, brought tutors from Baghdad to David Solomon Sassan (1880–1941) that provided instruction in the Bible, Hebrew and Arabic. When one teacher travelled to Baghdad, other Baghdadi teachers would replace him. This cultural exchange initiated the movement of texts from Iraq to India. Synagogues in Bombay contained religious scripts produced in Baghdad. As the Indian-Iraqi community became wealthier, Jews published texts in Judeo-Arabic in India and owned printing houses. The texts published in these printing houses included liturgical literature, such as stories mimicking the Muslim genre of Qisas al-anbiyya (tales of the prophets) about Jewish prophets, rabbis and martyrs and popular literature like the anthology Qisas al-Mathal, a collection of 500 popular proverbs. Gradually, texts were produced first for the Indian market and then sent to Baghdad.

Jewish journals in India included the following publications: Tālib al-Khayr li-Qawānī – Dīwān Tūrī 'Āmīd (‘Seeker of Good for its People’), Perah (‘Flower’), Maggīl Meyṣārīm (‘Speaker of Truth’), Šērāmāb (‘Rose’) and Ha-Mevasar (‘The Announcer’). The papers considered themselves Jewish publications. Tālib al-Khayr added the title The Hebrew Gazette to its front page and Perah and Ha-Mevasar added the subtitle The Jewish Gazette. Tālib al-Khayr likewise published details about weekly prayers. As Ben Yaacov notes despite differences in length, quality of paper and level of Arabic all journals shared common features.

The first and most obvious feature of these papers is the linkage between the emergence of the press and the colonial trade system as indicated in many items about rates, merchandise, prices, shares and the British commercial interests in India. Perah, Tālib al-Khayr and Ha-Mevasar included in their opening pages details about the movements of ships to and from Basra, Bombay, Liverpool, London, Rangoon, Shanghai and Singapore. The following advertisement was placed by Molek de Ya'qob Abū 'Arīż in Perah.

Trade had extended as a result of the linking of peoples to each other, by money or by reason or by knowledge. People come from land and sea, selling their goods, as the sea of trade widens immensely. Since the city Calcutta, which I have chosen as a home to my family, is an important point of the trade coming from all the Indian states, I hereby take the honour of informing the readers of this new journal, and particularly my friends and relatives in the cities of Europe and Syria, that I am ready to serve them in all my capacities. I am well known amongst the small and large merchants.

The importance of local trade was attested by the fact that Ashkenazi Jews bought ads in Perah, presumably because they believed middle class Jewish readers would be interested in their merchandise. Herr Bernard Schnich, for instance, who identified himself as an Ashkenazi Jew, asked his brethren to come and assist him by shopping at his clothing shop. Another example is Herr Moses Williams who offered his services for merchants as a ‘commercial informant’ knowledgeable in European languages. Jews, then, were aware of the fact that they were living in ‘the age of empires’. This term, adopted from Eric Hobbsawm’s work, specifies that in the years 1875–1914 distant parts of the world were interwoven into an economic mechanism.


32 Dīwān Tūrī (1855–66). Biweekly, Bombay, edited by a club associated with the Sassan family. It was later converted into a weekly.

33 Perah (1878–89). Weekly, Calcutta, edited first by Rabbi Melekh Meyhvas and in its third year by Melekh Shinn'on Kohon of Syria.


37 The Arabic of Tālib was quite horrifying at times, and Jumblād Ḥeṣdā and ‘Smā‘īs. The first page of the first issue suggests that people wrote in the same way they spoke. Thus, we find the title the Tālib al-Khayr li-Qawānī (instead of Qawānī) and the noun of al-falah! The Arabic of Perah resembled the normative classical Arabic, although colloquialism often surfaced in commercial and advertisements.

38 Ben Yaacov, ibid.

39 Perah 1:3 (6/7/1878), 4.

40 Perah 1:2 (6/6/1878), 4.

41 The add reads: ‘The undersigned offers himself as commercial informant for Austro-Hungary, Germany and Switzerland. Writers in English, French or Hebrew. Moses Williams, University of Vienna, Austria’. See Perah 11:32 (18/11/1889), 1.
of trade and communications. Readers thus saw the journals as commodities travelling in this world, which helped them to locate themselves in the imperial system and to gather information about its various components.

Secondly, these journals aspired to emulate in their structure the Hebrew journals. The inclusion of columns like 'Jewish News' and 'World News' was probably inspired by the structure of the Hebrew press. Indian editors translated stories and news from Ha-Melis, Ha-Maggid, Ha-Havaslet, The Jewish Chronicle and Der Israelit (Mainz). They were possibly inspired by the Hebrew Ha-Mevaser and Ha-Maggid when choosing titles for their own publications. The journals' self-perception as products of science and education also resemble the European products.

One of the aims of Taḥāf al-Khayr was to propagate Jewish education. Perāh had sections dedicated to global news (akhbār al-bulkān) and to 'the news of the Jewish community' (akhbār khayṣat al-yahūd) reporting about Jews residing in England, Italy, Spain, Eastern and central Europe. Like the haskalah journals, the papers offered Biblical studies, but, unlike the Hebrew journals, also older methodologies of explicating the sacred texts, namely the sharḥ and translations of liturgical works into Judeo-Arabic. The importance of the sharḥ literature is attested in a letter published in Ha-Mevaser.

To the man of high wisdom and astuteness, our beloved brother and friend, the publisher of Ha-Mevaser ... We know that your intelligence, knowledge and reason have given you the reputation of an important man, and we wish your journal to prosper for the benefit of the Israelite nation, for your mission is that of the Heavens — to increase wisdom, science and reason ... Many desire to read and to see the shining light of biblical interpretation in the language of Arabia known to the people of Babylon, and their branches in Eastern India. I was therefore awakened and published in Livorno a Bible with commentary.

Hillel Yosef, who wrote this ad, explains that his translation is vital for people who have not mastered classical Arabic, since the translation will also elucidate the meaning of incomprehensible Arabic words. Making the holy scripts accessible to the reading public was significant to writers. Interest in translation was not reserved to sacred texts. Perāh's literary section incorporated translated stories from Hebrew,

French, German and classical Arabic. Some translations from German and French were adaptations from Hebrew translations originally published in the Hebrew journals. Perāh printed the story Ibn al-ḫaṭāmī (the thief's son), from the Arabian Nights. Often times, Jews who contributed to these publications were rabbis, although they considered themselves part of a scientific and enlightened movement. They saw no contradiction between science and religion and identified themselves as an elite, eager to make use of textual and economic innovations offered by Ottoman, British and European elites, while preserving their Iraqi, Arab and Jewish characteristics.

Thirdly, the Iraqi-Jewish journals produced in India were seemingly Iraqi publications since their language and themes mirrored the life of the Baghdadi community. Baghdadi and Indian Jews also used this press as a billboard to announce the deaths, births and weddings of members of the community, both in India and in Iraq. Baghdadi addressed their brethren for help in the struggle against floods and diseases. Perāh had a section devoted to the news of Baghdad (akhbār baghdādī). As Abraham Ben Yaaqob notes the paper devoted considerable space to discussing Ottoman Baghdadi politics and stories of crime in Baghdad. The journals praised wālis like Midhat Pasha (1869–72), known as the 'father of peace' (avr ha-šalām), for his reforms and Hajji Hasan Rañq Pasha for threatening to banish any Muslim who falsely accused a Jew of blasphemy.

Maggid Meyšartūn published three letters from Sydney, Australia written by Iraqi Jews that appeared in issues 46 (26/8/1897), 47 (2/9/1897), 48 (9/9/1897). The letters narrated the history of the Sassūn family in Baghdad and its escape to Persia and then to India. The accounts include information about the tyranny of the last Mamluk governor of Iraq, Daʿūd Pasha (1816–31), as well as about the leaders of the Jewish community and their relationship with the Jewish leadership in Istanbul. Such publications could not have been published in Arabic. For example, they tell the story of Abraham Šalām, who converted to Islam and changed his name to Ibn YAY. He informed Daʿūd Pasha about the fortunes of affluent Jews, thus making them a target for Daʿūd’s confiscation policy. The reason for his conversion, we are told, was his

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43 Sharḥ – the translation and clarification of biblical texts into Judeo-Arabic.
45 The Arabian Nights was printed in Bombay in Judeo-Arabic in 1886 in order to teach the reading audiences useful and practical lessons. See Avidar, 'Literature', 108–9.
46 Ben Yaacob, Jews 151–6.
infatuation with a Muslim woman, whom he obsessively visited, carried publicly and shamelessly on his shoulders and bought her everything, 'even vegetables'. The writers were sure that Ibn Yayy was struck by the evil eye and wished he would be burned in hell.\textsuperscript{48} Such a negative portrayal of a converted Jew would have been extremely problematic if published in the Ottoman province, but the location of the press outside of Iraq and in Hebrew characters allowed writers to freely voice their criticisms.

These news items were read differently by various audiences. The reports on crime in Baghdad indicated to Baghdadi readers that the Jews in India were interested in their misery and simultaneously assured the Indian Jewish community that their decision to immigrate to India was correct. The English press read by Jews, which had its own stereotypes regarding the negative nature of Muslim governments might have inspired the accentuation of the hardships of Jews under the Ottoman-Muslim government in Iraq. Religious ties to Baghdad were vital to the Baghdadi immigrants predominantly because in the linguistic, religious and ethnic Indian milieu, such ties provided a sense of identity that distinguished the community from both the Indian Jews and from their Muslim and Hindu neighbours.\textsuperscript{48}

Fourthly, as the community established itself in the Indian locale, the press became less and less relevant for Iraqi Jews. Commercials for the local opera house or for athletic shoes bought only in Calcutta\textsuperscript{49} reflect a middle-class community looking towards assimilation with Britain, rather than with Baghdad. Indian, colonial and international affairs were important to readers. For example, the war in Kabul and its aftermath occupied the front pages of \textit{Perah}.\textsuperscript{50} In 1887 \textit{Perah} produced a letter by D. Sasin to the Chief Clerk of the High Court of Justice on behalf of Jews who refused to serve on jury duty on Saturdays. ‘Jews are by their religion precluded from attending to any description of work or business on that holy day ... when compelled to serve on a Jury on Saturday they are forced to break one of the most solemn ordinances of their creed’. Therefore, the British defy their own enlightened principles that allow perfect freedom to subjects in matters of religion.\textsuperscript{51} In response, the clerk of the court allowed the Jews not to attend the court meetings on Saturdays. This story was important for Baghdadi Jews for it indicated that enlightened governments permit freedom of faith, a very topical issue in the Ottoman Empire at the time. For Indian readers it demonstrated the degree of their successful integration, epitomised also in the power of the Sasin family.

The Indian press in Judaeo-Arabic corresponds to Benedict Anderson’s conceptualization of print capitalism, as it is closely linked to markets and involves shipping news.\textsuperscript{52} Yet, Judaeo-Arabic did not characterize either the language of the colony (India), or that of the metropolis, but was rather a language uniting Baghdadi Jews in India and Iraq. What determined the relationship between the Judaeo-Arabic reading communities in India and in Iraq was their position in the imperial system. The middle-class Indian Jewish elite shared both its language and its religion with the Jews of Iraq, and this brought about the vision of Iraq as a cultural centre. Nevertheless, as the Baghdadi community was established in India and became pro-British, the Arab nature of the Iraqi press was negatively perceived. By the 1920s the Jewish Indian press continued to exist, but mostly in English.

Conclusions

Following the Young Turks Revolution (1908), Jews began to publish Ottoman Arabic journals in Baghdad. After the establishment of the Iraqi State, Iraqi Jews became avid readers and contributors to the Arabic press.\textsuperscript{53} With the rise of the Iraqi nation state, and the gradual Zionization of the Hebrew journals, the Judaeo-Arabic press virtually disappeared. The nineteenth century Jewish Iraqi community of readers was multilingual. In the Ottoman Empire, Arabic script (used for Arabic, Ottoman and Persian) was a sacred form of writing, linked to sacred dynasties and holy practices

\textsuperscript{47} A translation and commentary of the texts appeared in Ben Yaacov, \textit{Immigration}, 127-35.
\textsuperscript{48} The Arab Jews in India were reluctant to integrate into the older existing Indian Jewish communities, i.e. the Bene Israel and the Jews of Cochin, and often refer to them as ‘black Jews’. There were hardly any marriages between the two communities because Baghdadi Jews questioned the religiosity of their Indian brethren.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Perah} 3:46 (13/3/1881), 1; see also \textit{Perah} 20:25 (10/12/1880), 1, a commercial for Victoria’s Theatrical Company.
\textsuperscript{50} ‘News of the War from Kabul’, \textit{Perah} 1:32 (31/1/1878), 1; ‘News of the War from Kabul’, \textit{Perah} 1:31 (24/1/1879), 1; ‘News of the War from Kabul’ \textit{Perah} 1:27 (3/1/1879), 1; ‘News of the War from Kabul’, \textit{Perah} 1:29 (10/1/1879), 1.
\textsuperscript{53} Editor Anwar Sha’ul and publisher Salman Shina printed the journal Al-Mishbah in Arabic (1924-8). In 1929, Sha’ul edited the Arabic journal \textit{al-Hoja}, which lasted for almost a decade and was an Arab rather than a Jewish publication.
such as pilgrimage. For the Jewish Iraqi community, Arabic was an ingredient amongst other imperial languages, the other being Ottoman Turkish and English (administrative and imperial languages in Iraq and in India) and French (the language taught in the Alliance schools). Hebrew was not only a liturgical language, but also an imperial language because it functioned as a means to converse with and respond to the writings of European Jews.

It seems to me that all writers, both in the European-Hebrew journals and in the Judeo-Arabic publications attempt to answer the question “What is Enlightenment?” They all relate to the complex historical processes, which shaped their daily lives, and to ‘types of political institutions, forms of knowledge, projects of rationalization of knowledge and practices’. Surely, they did not provide such sophisticated answers as Kant’s, but they do expose and critique such processes as colonial trade, education systems and print capitalism. Given their Iraqi, Ottoman and Arabic nature, these publications can be seen as part of the cultural revival of the Middle East in the nineteenth century, specifically the Arabic nahiya. Rather than searching for the specific moment when the nahiya began or constructing a particular order for its spread (first in Egypt and Lebanon, later in Palestine and Iraq), it is preferable to explore the nahiya as an ethos, as movements of ideas concurrently coming from diverse centres. Different people, at different places in the nineteenth century, spoke of science and progress, although they had very different conceptions of who was enjoying the rays of light, and who was to remain in darkness.

Arabic Books Printed In Malta 1826–42: Some Physical Characteristics

Geoffrey Roper

The Arabic press run by the English Church Missionary Society in Malta between 1825 and 1842 produced over a hundred editions of Arabic and Turkish books, tracts and newspapers for readers in the Middle East at a time when indigenous printing was still in its infancy. These included not only Christian texts and tracts, but also secular educational texts intended for Muslim, Christian and Jewish pupils in the new schools and colleges of the Middle East, as well as a newly literate adult population. These text-books dealt with the Arabic and English languages, mathematics, geography, astronomy, zoology, history and art; also translations of English literature, and a periodical in the style of a newspaper.1

They were distributed in quite large numbers: figures from the missionary archives and records indicate that a total of over 150,000 Arabic and Turkish books and 8,600 ‘newspapers’ from Malta arrived in the Middle East and North Africa between 1825 and the mid-1840s.2 At the time, this represented a drastic increase in the availability of reading material: neither traditional manuscript production, nor the earlier imports of European printed books, nor the output of books from most of the local presses can have approached these levels in a comparable period of time. Only the Bulaq Press in Egypt exceeded the Malta production figures;3 but their output was aimed at a quite different readership, the already educated adult elite.

The main destinations of the Malta books were Egypt and Lebanon, where missionary educational establishments were in operation, and which, in the Muḥammad ‘Ali period, were relatively open to foreign influences. But significant quantities were also distributed in the Maghrib, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Turkey, with some copies also finding their way to the Hejaz, Yemen and Eritrea.4

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1 For a history of the press, and a full bibliography of its Arabic and Turkish publications, see Geoffrey Roper, Arabic Printing in Malta 1825–1845: Its History and Its Place in the Development of Print Culture in the Arab Middle East, Ph.D. Thesis, (University of Durham 1986).
2 Ibid., 270–2.
4 Roper, Arabic Printing, 272–302.