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Baghdadi Jewish networks in Hashemite Iraq : Jewish transnationalism in the age of nationalism

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CHAPTER ONE

Nineteenth Century Networks and Connections

The transnational networks of the Jewish community during the British Mandate and early years of the Iraqi state were a product of changes that occurred in the nineteenth century. To understand discussions of Baghdadi involvement in twentieth century transnational Jewish networks it is essential to first discuss the economic, political, and intellectual changes which occurred in Baghdad in the previous century. The time period under discussion is from the beginning of the Tanzimat reforms in 1839 until the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. In this period the modernization of Baghdadi Jewry was due to the convergence of several foreign elements: the influence of Western Jewry as expressed by Jewish internationalism, the ideas of the *Haskala*, British imperial interest in the region, and the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms. As a result, changes among the Jewish communal elites led to a new communal infrastructure that was connected to an emergent global Jewish public sphere through access to foreign Jewish periodicals and European Jewish travelers in Baghdad.[1]

1. Secular Jewish Identity and Transnational Jewish Solidarity

Throughout history Jewish communities have rarely existed in isolation from the rest of the Jewish world. The extent and nature of these intercommunal connections, however, is a point which scholars are constantly reconsidering. In the early modern world, these connections were primarily made up of informal networks with no formal ecclesiastical hierarchy similar to Christian groups. From a religious perspective, for example, these connections are demonstrated by rabbis offering guidance in the form of *responsa* literature. From an economic perspective, these links are seen through Jewish trade networks, generally organized around one Jewish sub-group united by

1 For further information on Jewish internationalism from the perspective of western European Jewry see Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006); Green and Viaene, *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*.

a shared socio-cultural identity as designated by appellations such as Ashkenazi, Sephardi, or Maghrebi or possibly via regional networks opposed to being pan-Jewish in nature.[2]

There is little historical evidence that these traditional networks were understood to constitute a "Jewish People" as is understood by the modern Hebrew term *klal yisra'el*.[3] In the introduction to his book, Matthias Lehmann addresses the issue of a transnational identity and the various schools of thought around pre- and early modern Jewish identity. As Lehmann notes, the idea of the holy land was a source of common ground between different Jewish groups, but was not a foundation to any shared identity or understanding of one supra-Jewish community.[4] Instead, the most one can say in regard to pre- and early modern Jewish identity is that in different periods, Jewish communities practiced varying forms of pan-Judaism via different Jewish diaspora networks often connected by charity or economic networks, in addition to scholarly exchange.[5]

The clearest pre-modern examples of interregional and intercultural Jewish interactions were centered around charity. Specifically, *halukka*, funds remitted to support impoverished Jews in the holy land and *shlikhim* (emissaries) who would travel from Palestine to Jewish communities around the world to raise money for religious academies in Palestine.[6] Although examples of *shlikhim* date from the time

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2 For an example of these networks see—Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, (New Haven: Yale, 2009). Matthias Lehmann translates *Klal Yisrael* as pan-Judaism. Lehmann also uses the term sub-ethnic Jewish groups in his book *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, a term I find useful when describing Jewish groups in this context, however the word "ethnic" is problematic, thus I simply use the phrase Jewish sub-group. Matthias Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 4.

3 This term dates from the nineteenth century and was used by early Zionist organizations to describe the Jewish people.

4 Lehman rejects the "telos of Zionist historiography that took for granted a land-of-Israel centric pan-Jewish peoplehood and solidarity." Likewise, he rejects the "post- (or anti-) Zionist reading that claims that modern Jewish nationalism essentially "invented" the idea of a Jewish nation" in the nineteenth century such as in the work of Shlomo Sand. Instead Lehmann's works discusses the way various Jewish sub-ethnic groups interacted and supported each other. Lehmann *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, 5, 277–227n5; Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009).

5 Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, 8–14.

6 Examples of these practices are found in documents the Cairo Geniza, although the practice is most likely much older. A history of emissaries from the land of Israel was compiled by Abraham Ya'ari in 1951. Ya'ari's attempt to show an interrupted connection between the Jewish people to the land of Israel and a historic Jewish unity has been highly criticized his history of *shlikhim* remains the

of the Temple in Jerusalem, the practice was relatively limited as charity was seen as a local obligation, providing for one's own community whether that be geographic or within Jewish sub-groups.[7] Normative Jewish religious law specifies three types of charity; to support orphans and widows, to provide food, clothes, and shelter to Jews visiting from other communities, and the remittance of funds to the Holy Land to support pious Jews residing there. There is little historic precedence for diaspora communities supporting other diaspora communities prior to the middle of the nineteenth century with the exception of ransoming Jewish captives. *Halukka* was de-centralized prior to the nineteenth century as different groups present in the Holy Land competed for financial support by targeting the communities with which they had familial links.[8]

As Nora Șeni argues in her work on the rise of French and English Jewish philanthropy, the radical change in how Jewish communities approached charity and perceived their relationship to other Jewish communities was closely linked to ideas of the European enlightenment and the *Haskala*.[9] These movements modified how Western European Jews viewed their relationship and responsibilities towards both Eastern European and MENA Jewry. Among the reasons Eastern European Jewish intellectuals took interest in MENA Jewry was their search for authentic Jewish practice and a newfound interest in Jewish history. In turn, they wrote about their findings in *Haskala* newspapers making European Jewry aware of the existence of non-European Jewish communities.[10]

When these newspapers began reporting worldwide Jewish events, it planted the seed for the modern Jewish public sphere.[11] The catalyzing moment was the Damascus Affair. In 1840 an Italian Capuchin monk and his servant disappeared in Damascus. Local Christians—assisted by the notoriously anti-Semitic French consul—accused Jews of murdering the men and using their blood to bake matzah. As a result

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reference on topic. Abraham Ya'ari, Emissaries of the Land of Israel [In Hebrew]. (Jerusalem, 1951). For criticism of Ya'ari' work see Jacob Katz "He'arot sotsyologiyot le-sefer histori" *Behinot* 2 (1952) [as cited in] Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, 7–9.

7 Ya'ari, Emissaries of the Land of Israel [In Hebrew], xii.

8 Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land*.

9 Șeni, *Les inventeurs de la philanthropie juive*, (Paris: Editions de la Martiniere, 2005); For a wide discussion on the *Haskala* see Moshe Pelli, *Haskalah and Beyond: The Reception of the Hebrew Enlightenment and the Emergence of Haskalah Judaism*, (Plymouth: University Press of America, 2010), 16.

10 Orit Bashkin, "Why Did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz? Some Comments about the Reading Practices of Iraqi Jews in the 19th Century," *Journal of Semetic Studies* (2005): 108–109.

11 Green, "Old Networks, New Connections: The Emergence of the Jewish Internationals", 58.

of the blood libel the leaders of the Jewish community in Damascus and the chief rabbi of the city were arrested and tortured, events which were covered throughout Europe in both the Jewish and general press. As Jonathan Frankel demonstrates in his seminal work on the Damascus Affair, this event and its coverage in the European Jewish press inspired an international Jewish mobilization as European Jews tried to pressure their governments to intercede in the plight of the Jews of Damascus.[12]

This concern for their co-religionists went beyond simple solidarity as there was general concern that these anti-Semitic incidents—particularly the resurrection of medieval style blood libel accusations—would return to Western Europe due to influence from Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire.[13] These events were of concern to 'enlightened' European Jews who not only felt an obligation to help their co-religionists but to protect the already acquired rights of Jews in their home nations, laying the foundations for modern international Jewish solidarity movements through the establishment of organizations dedicated to the plight of world Jewry. In Baghdad, the three most important organizations were the French *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) found in 1860 and the English *Anglo-Jewish Association* (AJA) founded in 1871.[14]

Baghdadi participation in Jewish internationalism during this period has focused on iterations of these intellectual changes particularly in reference to debates about Arabic speaking Jews' participation in both the *Haskala* and the *Nahda*. In particular, Orit Bashkin's article "Why Did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz? Some Comments about the Reading Practices of Iraqi Jews in the 19th Century," provides an overview of the reading trends of Baghdadi Jews in the nineteenth century and postulates on the reasons for changes in their reading habits. On the subject of culture and modernity, Lital Levy's 2005 thesis "Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914" dedicates a great deal of space to Baghdad in demonstrating what she calls Arab Jewish modernity.[15] Both of these pieces advance our understanding how Baghdadi elites were intellectually linked to European Jewry and their awareness of issues being discussed

12 Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*.

13 Green, "Old Networks, New Connections: The Emergence of the Jewish Internationals", 53–81.

14 The Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden was also nominally active in Baghdad during this time however their contribution in regard to the development of infrastructure was significantly smaller and therefore I have not addressed them in this chapter.

15 Bashkin, "Why Did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz?," 95–110; Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914".

in the global Jewish press.[16] However these important contributions do not analyze the influence of Jewish internationalism on communal structure and leadership as this is not their focus. Bashkin asserts these foreign intellectual connections eventually fell away in the twentieth century for a variety of reasons, but in particular due to a lack of social and political relevance compared to the emergent local Arabic language press beginning after the Young Turk Revolution.[17] The one study which discusses the convergence of modernization and communal infrastructure is Yaron Harel's[18] *Intrigue and Revolution: Chief Rabbis in Aleppo, Baghdad, and Damascus 1744–1914*. This work focuses on the changes the rabbinate experienced during this period from both intellectual and political perspectives. It does not, however, specifically address secular leadership or secular intellectual endeavors as its focus is on the position of the rabbinate. This chapter discusses the emergence of secular Jewish leadership in Baghdad from intellectual and political perspectives so as to highlight the centrality of Jewish transnational networks within the local communal organization.

2. Economic and Political Reforms

Prior to the Ottoman period we have little knowledge of Jewish life in Baghdad and even less knowledge regarding communal organization or leadership. At the border between the Ottoman and Persian Empires, Baghdad was regularly the theater for disputes between these two powers, leading to economic and political instability for all residents of Baghdad and causing many Jews to leave the area for Syria, Persia and Kurdistan.[19] The situation in Baghdad began to improve in the eighteenth century when the Mamluks brought some stability to the region, governing Baghdad as an autonomous *wilaya* under the Ottoman sultan.[20] The situation further improved politically and economically with the decline of the Persian state, the consolidation of Ottoman control in the region, and the expansion via Iraq of the British East India Company's trade routes to India.[21]

16 Although Levy's work is about "Arab" Jewish Modernity she acknowledges the influence and importance of Europe in general and the Jewish intellectual trends in particular among the Jewish in Baghdad. Ibid. 354.

17 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews Stop writing to their brethren in Mainz?," 108–109.

18 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*.

19 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 30–45.

20 Ibid, 20, 51.

21 Ibid, 43.

Early nineteenth century accounts of Jewish life in Baghdad describe a small community of 6,000–10,000 people.[22] With the exception of a few wealthy Jewish families of merchants and bankers,[23] the majority of the Jews in Baghdad worked as peddlers or craftsmen living in varying degrees of poverty.[24] Sources suggest that a plague in the city in 1742–1743 killed a large portion of Baghdad's inhabitants including many Jewish religious scholars, with the rest leaving for other communities. Thereafter the city depended on Aleppo to provide religious guidance and a supply of rabbis.[25] Baghdadi Jewish networks in the eighteenth and nineteenth century—prior to Baghdad's reemergence as an economic center—were relatively local, either between Aleppo and Persia or Palestine in the case of pious Jews from Baghdad immigrating to Jerusalem.[26] There was little exchange with European Jewry, although occasional foreign Jewish visitors would stay in the city *en route* to another destination.[27]

At the head of the local community was a secular leader, the *nasi*.[28] The *nasi* was responsible for the collection of taxes, the redistribution of communal funds and the maintenance of holy sites. He was not a religious figure and his appointment was derived from his connections with the Ottoman governor as the *nasi* generally held the position of *saraf bashi* (chief financier) to the government in Baghdad.[29] There was little by way of communal infrastructure to support education, public health, or organized services to the poor.[30] Intellectually, the Jews of Baghdad were very much rooted in the same traditions they had subscribed to for centuries, centered around the study of Talmud and classic religious texts in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic. No records suggest that knowledge of the *Haskala* movement in Europe had permeated the community prior to the 1840s and no new religious institution of learning was founded until the rabbinic seminary Midrash Abu Minashi in 1840.[31]

A century later the demographic outlook of the Jewish community had dramatically changed. By the end of the nineteenth century, improvements in the Ottoman

22 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 1.

23 Rejwan asserts that the majority of Jews in Baghdad during this period were relatively wealthy, however he provides no citations for this assertion. Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 167.

24 Shlomo Deshen "Baghdadi Jewry in Late Ottoman Times: The Emergence of Social Classes and of Secularization" *AJS Review* 19, no. 1 (1994): 21.

25 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 20–21.

26 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 46–49.

27 For example, Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel in the early nineteenth century.

28 Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 122.

29 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 23.

30 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 65.

31 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 21.

administration and the British use of Baghdad as a nexus for trade between Europe and Asia led to greater political and economic stability. As a result, many Jews from Persia, Afghanistan, and Kurdistan, moved to the city and were incorporated into the Baghdadi Jewish community. In addition to this regional migration, several European Jews moved to Baghdad at this time and brought with them the *Haskala* newspapers of Eastern Europe, which were widely read among the elites.[32]

On the eve of World War I the Jewish population of Baghdad was approximately 60,000.[33] The Jewish community had developed such a diverse infrastructure of social services (i.e. schools, charities, and hospitals) that the *Jewish Chronicle* in London, referring to its schools and hospitals, cited it as a model of "Jewish gentrification."[34] There was a slowly emerging Jewish middle class, which would grow exponentially during the Mandate, due to the growing importance of Baghdad and Basra in British trade routes. Literate Jews in the city, whose numbers had grown due to the opening of secular schools, had access to a myriad of Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals in a multitude of languages from all over Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The Jewish population growth in the city and the establishment of communal institutions were due to a period of economic development linked to globalization brought by improved modes of transportation such as motorized shipping routes along the Tigris (1847), and the opening of the Suez Canal (1869).[35]

The changes were also tied to the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. The reforms included changes in taxation, military conscription and land tenure regulation. Of particular importance for religious communities, the Tanzimat reforms abolished the *dhimmi* status, with the state officially recognizing Ottoman subjects from all acknowledged religious communities as equals.[36] They also included a restructuring of internal communal leadership as dictated by the Ottoman authorities. Prior to the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman state for the most part practiced a form of benign neglect towards Jewish communal leadership.[37] In 1835, the Ottoman government established the position of *haham bashi* of the Ottoman Empire. This position, modeled after the Orthodox and Armenian patriarchates, was meant to

32 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews Stop writing to their brethren in Mainz?"

33 Hayyim J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East, 1860–1972* (New York: Wiley, 1973), 73. By this period a few thousand Baghdadis were living in Satellite communities in India and East Asia, for estimates of these population numbers see appendix.

34 JC, December 7, 1917, 7; See appendix of Jewish communal institutions.

35 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 51.

36 Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 9–11.

37 Ibid. 10.

recognize Ottoman Jewry as an "official" community (millet) empowering the chief rabbi to act as both civil and religious head of all of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire.[38]

The Tanzimat reforms were unsuccessful in unifying Ottoman Jewry. The act of creating a chief rabbi had little success in strengthening the ties among the various Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire. Each Jewish community had its own liturgies, customs and religious leaders, in addition to a great deal of linguistic diversity. These disparate groups showed little desire to unite and thus each Jewish community remained relatively independent.[39]

The Tanzimat reforms did, however, change the communal organization in Baghdad. Over several decades, the reforms led to the incorporation of some community structures into the state bureaucracy. Tthe role of chief rabbi was adopted at the provincial level and in 1849 the Jewish community of Baghdad abandoned the position of *nasi*. In place of the *nasi*, like in other Jewish communities, the Baghdad appointed its own chief rabbi, who was meant to be both spiritual leader and to take over the previously unofficial duties of the *nasi*.[40] It would seem, at first glance, counterintuitive that the abolishment of the position of *nasi*, a post previously held by a lay leader in favor of a religious leader such as chief rabbi, would be part of an agenda to modernize the Ottoman Empire. This change, however, implicitly provoked a discussion over the role of communal leadership. The role of *nasi* had been that of tax collector for the community, with little incentive to take on other responsibilities (such as education and personal status) that were part of the mandate of the religious authorities in the traditional communal organization. The new position of chief rabbi was an effort to merge and organize lay and religious responsibilities throughout the Ottoman Empire and place communal organization within the state bureaucracy.[41] As Yaron

38 Avigdor Levy, "Haham Basi," EJIW.

39 Benjamin Braude, 'Foundation Myths of the *Millet* System' in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* Vol. 1, *Central Lands* (London: Holmes & Meir, 1982), 69–88.

40 Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 105, 122–127.

41 From the Ottoman perspective, it has been argued that the change in official leadership from lay to religious was done by the Ottomans so as to send a message to both the Christian and Jewish communities that they were not national ethnic minorities (with claims to national-territorial rights) but religious minorities. Although this assertion is impossible to prove, the reforms represent an attempt to consolidate communal leadership by integrating it into the Ottoman governing machine. Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and its Contemporary Legacy", *Ethnopolitics*, 15:1, (2016) 24–42; Eliyahu Agassi, "Communal Administration and Institutions," in *Annals of Iraqi Jewry*, ed. Ora Melamed, trans. Edward Levin, (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, 1995), 185.

Harel demonstrates, during the Ottoman period, from a socio-political perspective (as opposed to a spiritual perspective) the majority of Jewish communities in the Levant were directed by parallel forms of leadership: religious and secular. The lay leadership was responsible for tax collection and relationships with the Muslim authorities while the religious leadership was responsible for internal legal issues and (religious) education. The Ottoman objective of consolidating power, with a religious leader as head of the Jewish community, was difficult to accomplish and elevated the friction between lay and religious leadership.[42]

The most important step in the administrative reforms occurred in between 1863–1865, when the Ottoman government invited non-Muslims communities to draft an organizational statute for their communities. The resulting documents, which significantly increased the official lay representation within the communal administration, also resulted in an official system of communal governance not only for the main seat in Istanbul but also for the Jewish communities located in the Ottoman provinces and led to the ratification of an 1865 Tanzimat decree, the *hahamhane hizamnamesi*.[43] This decree stated that the chief rabbi would be supported by a religious council (*majlis al-ruhani*). This new religious council was composed of seven rabbis responsible for enforcing religious laws and regulations. In addition to this overtly religious council, two new official bodies were created: a lay committee (or *majlis al-jismani*) that was composed of nine elected lay officials; and a general council (or *majlis umumi*) that was intended to include sixty laymen and twenty rabbis.[44] These reforms can be perceived as the Jewish lay elite reaffirming their official position within the Jewish socio-political communal hierarchy. It is possible that the informal lay leadership's pivot toward greater contact with, or at the very least, interest in secular European Jewry was also part of this attempt to redefine their role and provide increased relevance to their position within the community. The reforms also split the Ottoman Empire into eight rabbinical districts outside of Istanbul, greater Baghdad being one of these. These districts were supposed to replicate the hierarchy of a chief rabbi who would report to the chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire, and be supported by the religious and lay councils.[45] This new hierarchical structure was foreign to the

42 Harel, *Intrigue and revolution*, 3–4.

43 Avigdor Levy "Haham Basi," EJIW; Avigdor Levy, "Hahamhane Nizamnamesi," EJIW.

44 For Baghdad, in English, the council is referred to as both the lay council and the lay committee, two terms which I use interchangeably. In French language correspondence, the lay council is referred to as the consistoire, a nod to French Jewish communal organization.

45 Avigdor Levy, "Haham Basi," EJIW.; Avigdor Levy, "Hahamhane Nizamnamesi,"EJIW.

traditional organization of Jewish communities (in which each community had its own form of organization and authority, and acted independently from each other). As a result, the implementation of the reforms was slow, uneven and unpopular as it forced individual Jewish communities to give up their autonomy in deference to Istanbul in selecting their religious leader and in tax collection.[46]

With this in mind, the reforms had an important impact on the Jewish community of Baghdad, forcing them to formally organize both their lay and religious leadership. In the Ottoman world, therefore, modernization did not mean an end to confessionalism or sectarianism, only a restructuring through more control from the state. This, in and of itself, is a central difference between Jewish modernization in Western Europe as compared to the Ottoman Empire as there was never any attempt to distance religious authority from state authority. In transforming the religious communities, the Ottoman authorities endeavored to instill greater loyalty and notions of citizenship while maintaining the concept of separate religious communities. As Julia Cohen Philips argues, this was relatively successful among Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire,[47] but there is no evidence of a similar phenomenon in Baghdad during this period or of collaboration between Baghdad and Istanbul in this context. The Ottoman concept and structure of communal organization, however, was maintained during the Hashemite period, at a time in which the Jewish community in Baghdad did become part of the national Iraqi narrative.[48]

2.1. *Religious Leadership in Baghdad*

The position of chief rabbi in Baghdad was highly political and contentious from its outset, and most sources suggest that it never functioned as intended by the Ottoman authorities. The main cause of strife for the Chief Rabbi was his dependence on the commercial elite who ultimately became the main policy makers for the community due to their economic and political connections. Almost every single rabbi to hold the position of chief rabbi became embroiled in scandal.[49] The election of the first chief rabbi of Baghdad, as an example, involved a rivalry between the Aleppan Raphael ben

46 Daniel Schroeter, "The Changing Relationship Between Jews and the Ottoman State in the Nineteenth Century," in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*, 100–103.

47 Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 1–18.

48 The Organic Law of 'Iraq—Passed by the 'Iraq Constituent Assembly July 10, 1924 (Baghdad: Government Press, 1925); Reeva Spector Simon, "Iraqi Constitution (1924)," EJIW.

49 Harel *Intrigue and Revolution*, 1–10; Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 157–164.

Elijah Katzin who was able to gain the support of many wealthy elites in Baghdad, and Abraham ben Obadiah Ha-Levi who was generally more respected by the Rabbinate and also enjoyed support from other factions in Baghdad. Katzin ultimately achieved the post by gaining the support of the chief rabbi in Istanbul and the Sultan.[50] Sassoon also describes these various scandals in detail in his work,[51] as when *Haham Bashi* Sason [sic] Smooha was accused of bribery and embezzlement of the military tax in 1879. The Pasha ultimately yielded to the will of the secular Baghdadi elites and had him removed from his position for twenty days until his petition to the chief rabbi in Constantinople was accepted and he was returned to his post in spring of 1881. Subsequent rabbis were regularly accused of misconduct and actions unbefitting a rabbi, often by secular elites who had other rabbis in mind to hold the position. This observation is confirmed in 1910 when Haron Da'ud Shohet, (dragoman to the British Consul in Iraq) was quoted as saying that the position of chief rabbi had become marginalized to the point where it was 'simply a mouth-piece' or a 'mere puppet' of the lay elite and that the rabbinate 'enjoy no influence over their co-religionists'.[52] Therefore, the position was not one which the leading religious minds in Baghdad wished to hold.

The moral or religious authority of the position is reaffirmed by the fact that the two most prominent Baghdadi rabbis of the modern period—Abdallah Somekh and Yosef Hayyim (also referred to as the Ben Ish Hai)—never held nor publicly petitioned to hold the position of chief rabbi although they were the most notable, prolific and respected Baghdadi rabbis of their time.[53] It was these men who were consulted by Baghdadi Jews abroad when questions of modernity provoked new interpretations of Jewish law.[54] As Sassoon states "the real leaders of the community in spiritual as well as legal matters were the *Hakhamim* whose life and work [...] show the weight attached to their personality and teachings on the one side, and the influence exercised by their saintliness and benevolence on the other."[55] In this analysis Sassoon is distinguishing between the official chief rabbi and the *hahkamim*, sages of the community. Sassoon's analysis is commensurate with the more contemporary observations of Yaron Harel who notes that the "office of *haham bashi* was an explicitly secular and political one

50 Agassi "Communal Administration and Institutions," 186.

51 Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 157–164.

52 Kedourie "The Jews of Baghdad," 355.

53 Deshen, "Baghdad Jewry in Late Ottoman Times," 34.

54 Norman A. Stillman, *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity*, (Reading: Hardwood Academic Publishers, 1995) 24.

55 Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 157.

rather than a religious one, those chosen to occupy it were not usually the greatest Torah sages, but those individuals considered to have the best political talents."[56]

Spiritual authority was directed towards men such as Rabbis Abdallah Somekh and Yosef Hayyim. As the Jewish population in Baghdad grew in the late nineteenth century, for example, there was a shortage of bread produced by Jewish bakers. Past sages had prohibited Jews from purchasing bread from non-Jewish bakers, but to alleviate this crisis, Rabbi Somekh issued a *responsum* stating that Jews could purchase bread from non-Jews. Likewise, Rabbi Hayyim issued a *responsum* to allow for earlier slaughter of fowl before Yom Kippur and for prayer to begin earlier both to accommodate for the growth of the Jewish population in the city.[57] In each of these examples it was the spiritual leaders who were addressing practical responses to religious questions and in answering these questions were also defining communal policy. In fact, Harel goes as far as to argue that "so long as Somekh lived, every rabbi appointed as *hakham bashi* knew that he was working in his shadow".[58] As such, it is important to highlight that religious practice, traditions, and spiritual authority remained important for Jews in Baghdad and questions brought about by the intersection between modernity and religious practice were handled by these spiritual leaders whose readership extended beyond Iraq into the satellite communities of the East Asia.

Modernization of the state thus did not undermine religious authority as it did during the same period in France, for example, where, as Rabbis became civil servants, their powers were significantly weakened.[59] Instead modernization pushed spiritual leaders into informal positions from which they were able to mediate discussions of modernity outside of the state apparatus. As will become apparent in the following sections this point is important as the rabbinic creativity of Somekh and Hayyim for the most part found value in innovation, allowing Baghdadi Jewry to modernize without abandoning its traditions or creating large schisms in the community.[60]

The importance of this in the discussion of communal organization and modernization is twofold. Firstly, official state recognized religious leadership—the chief rabbi of Baghdad in particular—was relatively weak and not entirely successful in its

56 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 6.

57 Deshen, "Baghdad Jewry in Late Ottoman Times," 22–23.

58 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 85–86.

59 Jay R. Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish-Identity in Nineteenth Century France*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) 192–203.

60 Zohar, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, 11–63.

objective to consolidate Jewish communal leadership via religious channels. Although the Ottoman reforms set out to make the Chief Rabbi a strong position that would bypass secular elites, without the support of secular elites in Baghdad or Istanbul the chief rabbi had relatively little power and resources of his own. Although the specific role of the lay elites during this period is unclear due to a lack of source material or official position, it should not be understated and the importance of the lay elite driving communal decision making should be stressed. This long period of transition in the nineteenth century should be understood as the logical precursor to the Mandate period when the lay council essentially took over the majority of the roles which the Ottomans intended for the chief rabbi to hold. Similarly, the position of chief rabbi would remain contentious throughout the Mandate period and during the early years of the Iraqi state.[61] In this discussion of community leadership, I highlight the superficial nature of the chief rabbi in relation to communal policies so as to better demonstrate that within the Jewish community the lay elite held a great deal of power even prior to the creation of the lay council in 1879. The position of chief rabbi was bureaucratic in nature and little in regard to notions of modernity, religiosity or secularization can be understood by only analyzing the communal structure put in place by the Tanzimat reforms.

Changes in communal organizations, instead, need to be understood in concert with increased contact with European Jewry who brought new ideas regarding Jewish emancipation, religious reform, and changing social mores, ideas which interested both unofficial religious elites and lay elites and is the theme of the following section.[62] As such, the changes in communal organization should be perceived as a form of secularization because the spiritual authority of the community was not aligned with the government recognized religious leader whose authority depended on the economic elites of the community. The lack of spiritual authority of the chief rabbi in no way diminished the importance of religious practice and tradition in Baghdad. It was simply separate from the person designated by the state bureaucracy.

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61 See Harel *Intrigue and revolution* for a discussion around the issue up until 1914; See the final chapter of this thesis for further discussion on the topic during the Hashemite period; Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 180–182.

62 The place and importance of the chief rabbi, would continue to be a major area of contention throughout the Hashemite period. The prime example of this being the last Haham Bashi of Baghdad, Sassoon Khadduri while also acting as president of the community (1928–1930, 1933–1949, 1953–1971). Khadduri's mark on Iraqi Jewish History is more as a politician than a religious leader. Reuven Snir, "'Khaḍḍūrī, Sassoon," EJIW.

3. Nineteenth Century European Influence: Iterations of Enlightenment

For Baghdadi Jews, intellectual changes, unlike political changes, were not imposed by the Ottoman authorities, nor was it primarily dependent on intellectual trends within the Ottoman sphere. Instead, the first wave of intellectual modernity was closely tied to Europe and, in particular via the late period of the *Haskala*, the European Jewish response and adoption of the broader ideas of the European enlightenment. The *Haskala* was a broad movement encompassing many, at times conflicting, ideas, but was generally focused on the question of what modernity and enlightenment meant in a Jewish context. Moshe Pelli concisely synthesizes the major trends and concepts which marked the movement as the rejuvenation of Jewish society through self-development, self-cultivation, and character-formation in the spirit of the German *Bildung*.[63] The modernization and revision of Jewish education was greatly influenced by the study of secular material, including sciences and foreign languages. The revitalization of Jewish culture by introducing elements of European culture, Western values, social customs and conventions and giving greater importance to Hebrew letters stands in contrast to earlier generations' attempts at reforming religious ordinances, customs, and folk religious practices.[64]

One difference in the Baghdadi context was the complexity of navigating between both European and Ottoman/Arab/Islamic culture. Questions of participation in a pluralist secular society would only become relevant in the twentieth century and, as a result, many of these questions seemed more inward looking in the nineteenth century. As I will demonstrate, although the intellectual Baghdadi elites were inspired by the *Haskala*, it cannot be inferred that Baghdadi Jews did not develop their own original forms of modernity or thought, nor that their experience with modernity was exclusively dependent on European Jewry; or as Lital Levy would say "subordinating Baghdad to Europe through a hierarchical (and Eurocentric) paradigm of centers and margins".[65] In fact, I argue the opposite, stating that Baghdadi Jewry did not simply imitate European Jewry but choose how they partnered with European organizations, demonstrating significant agency through their engagement with the Arabic language and its literature and in negotiating their relationships with European Jews in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rabbis such as Abdallah Somekh at times offered responses to modernity in regard to uses of the

63 Pelli, *Haskalah and Beyond*, 16.

64 Ibid.

65 Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East," 308.

technology and gender norms[66] which were considerably more liberal than the rabbis of Europe.[67] It is my contention that questions of modernity and the enlightenment entered Jewish Baghdadi circles at this early stage due to contacts with European Jewry, but that elites in Baghdad were defining their own version of modernity using multiple models drawn from Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the Ottoman Empire.[68]

As Nora Ṣeni points out, one consequence of the *Haskala* in Eastern Europe was an increased interest in the origins of Judaism, and the practices of other Jewish communities as part of the European Jews embracing of the idea of *bildung*.[69] This new way of studying Jewish history meant that European Jews were interested in those communities which were felt to practice an "authentic form of Judaism", or those perceived as historically significant Jewish communities. As a consequence, some European Jews traveled to MENA, the three most well-known of these travelers who wrote of their adventures were Salmon Munk, Louis Loewe, and Albert Cohn, who although they themselves never visited Baghdad, traveled to other parts of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. Their writing made European Jewish intellectuals and philanthropists aware of these communities and the obstacles they encountered.[70] In this perspective, Baghdad was an important destination as it was perceived as being the link to the historic community of Babylon.[71] Lesser known Jewish individuals did make it to Baghdad, for example Israel Benjamin (Moldova) in 1848, Wolf Schor (Poland) visited in 1881 and David Semah (Bulgaria) in 1869 to name a few.[72] Each of these men wrote about their travels to Baghdad and their exchanges with the local Jewish community and published their works in Europe.[73] Many impoverished Eastern European Jews temporarily stopped in Baghdad *en route* to North America, Palestine, and Australia as part of the great Eastern European Jewish migration between 1881–1920.[74] A few Eastern European Jews permanently settled in Baghdad, encouraged by the Ottoman reforms (which were opening up new

66 Stillman, *Sephardic Religious Responses to Modernity*, 24–26; Zohar, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, 43–90.

67 Zohar, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, 11–89.

68 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 84–85.

69 Ṣeni, *Les inventeur de la philanthropie juive*, 27–47.

70 Ibid.

71 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews stop writing to their Brethren in Mainz?," 97–98.

72 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 177.

73 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews stop writing to their Brethren in Mainz?," 98, n11.

74 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 74–76.

opportunities to Jews), the economic growth from new trade routes and the wish to escape discriminatory measures in their own countries.[75] As Zvi Yehuda notes, there was never a wave of Sephardic migration to Baghdad similar to what Aleppo experienced. In the 1850s, however, there was a small community of Ashkenazi Jews from Poland, Russia, and Germany who, for a short time, carried out a separate minyan.[76] Those Jews who stayed eventually assimilated into the larger community's religious customs and did not form a separate religious community.[77] The two most notable of these men in the context of Baghdad were Isaac Luria a clock/watchmaker who became the first head of the AIU school in Baghdad, and Hermann Rosenfeld, an Austrian tailor who was also an early supporter of the school initiative.[78]

These travelers and those who settled in the Ottoman Empire brought with them the writings of the late *Haskala* and the earliest mentions of Jewish nationalism. At least four seminal European *Haskala* journals *ha-Maggid* (the speaker/preacher), *ha-Melis* (the translator/advocate), *ha-Havaselet* (The Lily), and *ha-Sefirah* (The Awakening) were commonly read by the Baghdadi Jewish elite during the second half of the nineteenth century.[79] These journals provided a window into the debates of the European Jewry. As early as 1860 *ha-Maggid* expounded on the importance of Jewish resettlement in the land of Israel and advocated a moderate view on religious reform.[80] *Ha-Sefirah* was published in Poland with a main of audience of the local Hasidic community and emphasized the lack of contradiction between religious belief and scientific knowledge, a reassuring idea to the rabbis of Baghdad as secular education would become a major focus of the communal administration.[81] *Ha-Melis*, focused on the political issues facing Jews in Tsarist Russia, focusing on the political, ideological, and social dilemmas these Jews faced due to questions of modernity. *Ha-Melis* also supported the idea of Jewish settlement in Palestine, publishing essays by Ahad Ha'am and was, perhaps, responsible for introducing Baghdadi Jews to the earliest iterations of secular Zionism.[82]

These newspapers, all published in Hebrew, exposed the Jewish elites of Baghdad to the issues facing other Jewish communities, some of which were familiar to those

75 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 181.
76 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 74–76.
77 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 43–46.
78 Also spelled Lurion and Rozenfeld.
79 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews stop writing to their Brethren in Mainz?," 97.
80 Avner Holtzman, "Magid, Ha," YIVO.
81 Avner Holtzman, "Tsefirah, Ha," YIVO.
82 Avner Holtzman, "Melits, Ha," YIVO.

in Baghdad. Questions on the importance of secular education and religious reform were regularly debated, but other issues, such as the future of the Yiddish language, were completely foreign to Ottoman Jewry. They also supplied the Baghdadi Jews with the general news of Europe and other parts of the Ottoman Empire in a language they could access, Hebrew. That the language of communication for these exchanges was Hebrew is significant as it led to secular interaction beyond rabbinic correspondence between Eastern Europe and Baghdad in the second half of the twentieth century.[83]

The journals surely made an impression on the religious and lay Baghdadi Jews as some came to contribute to these journals, giving European readers insight into Jewish life in Iraq. The most prolific of these writers, Rabbi Shlomo Hutsin, wrote for all of the *Haskala* periodicals available in Baghdad during the second half of the nineteenth century.[84] In some pieces, he discussed simple matters such as informing the readership of natural disasters befalling the community. In other pieces, however, he made greater assertions about the state of Baghdadi Jewry. Most importantly, he made the case that the Jews in Baghdad had knowledge of the enlightenment and were, like their brethren in Europe, committed to science and rationalism.[85] Hutsin was also responsible for importing many of these newspapers to Baghdad[86] and went as far as to try to start a local *Haskala* inspired newspaper in Baghdad, but was never granted permission. Instead, Baghdadi *Haskala* inspired newspapers would be published in Judeo-Arabic in the Baghdadi satellites communities located on the Indian subcontinent, where Baghdadi Jews began to settle as early as the 1840s. These journals were distributed with the European *Haskala* journals in Baghdad and received contributions from Jews living in Baghdad and thus acted as a proxy Jewish print culture.[87] The one exception to the lack of local newspapers was a Hebrew publication *ha-Dover* (The Speaker) which was published sporadically in Baghdad from 1863 to 1871 by Barukh Moshe Mizrahi, and was modeled on the style of *ha-Levanon*, an

83 Yaron Tsur makes the same argument in the context of relations between North Africa and Eastern Europe in Yaron Tsur, "Religious Internationalism in the Jewish Diaspora—Tunis at the Dawn of the Colonial Period" in Green and Viane, *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, 186–204.

84 Levy estimates that he wrote over 150 articles between the following journals *ha-Levanon, ha-Dover, ha-Magid, ha-Havatselet, ha-Tsfira, ha-Melis, Perah, and ha-Mevaser*. Lital Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East", 340–352.

85 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 101; Shlomo Behor Hutsin, "Asia-Baghdad", *Ha-Maggid* December 26, 1868; Lev Hakak, The Collected Essays of Rabbi Shelomo Bekhor Hutsin [In Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz ha-Me-Uhad, 2005).

86 Yehuda, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, 74.

87 See chapter two on the Baghdadi satellite communities.

example of the close intellectual affinities between the Baghdadi intellectuals with their brethren of the *Haskala* in Europe.[88]

If the interest in European Jewry newspapers was consistent, the relationship between the European Jews in Baghdad and the local elites was far from straightforward. The European Jews often portrayed the Baghdadi community from what today would be considered an orientalist perspective, presenting themselves as the saviors and instructors of the community, ascribing the community's success to their "civilizing" influences. As these reports were published in journals which Jews in Baghdad were reading they were well aware of how the foreigners positioned themselves. One example of this complicated relationship is illustrated by the treatment of Jacob Obermeir.[89] Obermeir was a Jew of German origin who was an instructor in the Persian court and the local agent in Baghdad for the *Haskala* journal *ha-Magid*. As part of his role as agent for the journal, he wrote a series of articles about Jewish life in Baghdad in which he described the community as backward, and accused Rabbi Yosef Haim of being an impediment to modern education in Baghdad.[90] In her work, Bashkin summarizes the reprisals by the community:

> "The rabbis excommunicated Obermeir, read the ex-communication document in synagogues and wrote letters and petitions to Ha-Maggid and Ha-Levanon on the matter. Subsequently, Obermeir sent letters of apology to the newspapers. Coincidentally, he concurrently received news about his mother's death, which was 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."[91]

As this event shows, the Jews of Baghdad were not ignorant of how they were perceived by other Jewish communities, and they used various tools such as the media and social pressure, to assert their agency. As Bashkin underlines in her piece on the *Haskala* journals, the Baghdadi Jewish elites were engaged with European members of the *Haskala* and were aware of their, at times, orientalist perspectives. The Baghdadi

88 Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East", 327–339; Hakak, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Creativity*, 171–173.

89 Also spelled Obermayer in some correspondence.

90 *Ha-Magid* no. 2, January 12, 1876. Sawdayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 16–18; Bashkin "Why did Baghdadi Jews stop writing to their Brethren in Mainz", 97–98.

91 Ibid.

Jews would also use this narrative when it benefited them, such as decrying poverty when soliciting funds. Their continued reading of and contributions to these journals demonstrate their extended interest in the ideas expounded in these pieces and a desire to participate in these debates.

The question of how these intellectual discussions influenced societal change in Baghdad is difficult to critically assess. In parallel to this intellectual dialogue in print media, we see the Baghdadi intellectual elites founding charities, clubs, and societies all with the objective of improving Jewish communal life in Baghdad. For example the *ḥevrat shomrey mitsvot* (founded in 1868) whose budget would eventually become part of the larger communal budget mixed questions of religious observance such as checking religious parchments and supervising preparation of certain foods with providing support to orphans and widows.[92] An example of the convergence between the writings of the *Haskala* and these societies is an 1868 speech given by Hutsin for the *Hevrat shomrey mitsvot* of Baghdad in which he called for Jewish unity and, in particular, for working to help the Jews of Persia and Kurdistan through traditional charity and, more importantly, education.[93]

Many of the new organizations were partnerships between native Baghdadis and the few European Jews present in Baghdad, especially an initiative in secular education when the Jews in Baghdad decided to transfer administration of their school to the AIU in Baghdad in 1864.[94] This act was significant in that it represented an initiative from two European Jews, the aforementioned Isaac Luria and Hermann Rosenfeld, along with two native born Baghdadi Jews Joseph Shemtob and David Somekh.[95] Additionally it was the first recorded act of an official partnership in Baghdad between members of the Jewish community and a European Jewish organization. Other small initiatives are described by Morris Cohen in his letters to the AJA between 1884–1889 in which he outlines programs relating to small scholarships for deserving students, monies given to open communal libraries and apprenticeship programs for young men.[96]

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92 Ibid.

93 Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East," 351.

94 Zvi Yehuda, "Iraqi Jewry and Cultural Change in educational Activity of the Alliance Israelite Universelle" in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, *1996*), 135, 185.

95 Rejwan suggests that the main impetus came from Luria and Rosenfeld; Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 181. However, most scholars include Shemtob and Somekh in the initial project; Sawayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 19.

96 Morris Cohen was the first English teacher sent by the AJA to Baghdad, he stayed in Baghdad from 1879–1901; MS137 AJ95/ADD/5.

These initiatives were developed on an ad hoc basis, supported by patrons inside and outside of Iraq with European Jews quick to take responsibility for the successes and assign the failures to the local community.[97] Neither the money which funded these initiatives nor the administrative structure was formal. For this reason, many of these clubs and societies were fleeting in nature. Even the first secular school, established in 1864, quickly closed after a few months and was not reopened until 1872. The reasons for this closure were numerous, but were generally attributed to religious opposition, a lack of suitable teachers and a lack of communal support (both financial and political), all of which speak to the incoherence in lay organization for the Jewish community in the mid-nineteenth century.[98]

The majority of initiatives to spread and expand on the ideas of enlightenment stayed within a small educated Baghdadi Jewish elite in the nineteenth century. These elites tried to organize schools, clubs, and charities with a broader scope through scholarships and vocational training. However secular leadership was very much in flux caused by migration into Iraq from Jews in Persia and Kurdistan, and towards the satellite communities. As a consequence, we can assume that long term secular Jewish institutions were difficult to develop considering the short life of many of these initiatives.[99]

In summary, the nineteenth century saw an intellectual rapprochement and strengthened communication between Baghdad and Eastern European Jewry, in part due to the flourishing of the late *Haskala* press and European Jews settling in Baghdad.[100] Returning to Pelli's list of characteristics of the *Haskala*, it clearly becomes evident that the majority of ideals expressed in the *Haskala* were of relevance to the Baghdadi intellectual elites as demonstrated in their actions. For example, the small salons that developed in which local elites would discuss the ideas espoused by the *Haskala* periodicals were very much in the spirit of the German *Bildung*.[101] The modernization and revision in the focus of Jewish education is seen both in the earliest of the AIU schools and continues well into the Mandate period.[102] Elements of secular European culture such as Western dress, naming practices, and language acquisition

97 This bias is clearly demonstrated in the minutes of the AJA from the nineteenth century. MS137 AJ37/5/2/2; MS137 AJ95/ADD/5; MS137 AJ 95/ADD/6.

98 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 185.

99 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 84–85.

100 The satellite Baghdadi communities in East Asia helped to forge this relationship, this relationship is discussed in the two proceeding chapters.

101 MS137 AJ95/ADD/5, December 29, 1885; Sawdayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 19.

102 See chapter four on education for additional discussion.

were adopted by some Baghdadis toward the end of the nineteenth century, but these too were restricted to a small elite. There was even a small flourishing movement in modern Hebrew linguistic creativity, which was linked to European Jewish writers and poets.[103]

Other themes and consequences of the *Haskala* in Europe were less relevant to Iraqi Jews in the nineteenth century. Western European style political and social emancipation, were not yet a reality in the late Ottoman period for the Jews in Baghdad.[104] Instead, these ideas would gain importance only after 1908 with the Young Turk revolution, the *Nahda*, and later the creation of the modern Iraqi Republic.[105] This is in contrast to Judeo-Spanish speaking Sephardic Jews in Salonika and Turkey who appear to have been much more engaged with the concept of Ottoman citizenship in the nineteenth century.[106] Julia Philips Cohen, gives the example of Sephardic Jews holding formal celebrations in 1892 to celebrate four hundred years of Sephardic life in the Ottoman Empire to "reinforce their relationship with the state and fashion themselves anew as members of the civilized world and as citizens of their Eastern empire."[107] I have found no parallel examples for Baghdadi Jewry prior to 1908. One reason for this may be the societal differences as Baghdadi Jewry perceived themselves as an indigenous population in contrast to the Judeo-Spanish speaking Sephardic Jews, who were more culturally and linguistically distinct and thus they felt less need to justify their position within the Ottoman state. Similarly, Baghdadi Jews seem to have had limited exchange with Sephardic Jews during this period. This may partially be attributed to linguistic differences as the Jews in Baghdad spoke Arabic and the Sephardic Jews spoke Ladino, limiting access to each other's periodicals, although they were reading the same European newspapers, engaged with the same Jewish philanthropic organizations, underwent relatively similar processes of modernization, and fell under the same political regime.

The main commonality between Ottoman Sephardim and the Baghdadis was their religious response to modernity. As Matthias Lehmann demonstrates in *Ladino Rabbinic Literature & Ottoman Sephardic Culture* the Sephardic Rabbis did their best to

103 Hakak, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Creativity*, 25–27.

104 Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, "Modernization without Assimilation: Notes on the Social Structures of the Jews of Iraq," [In Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 36 (1988), 3–6.

105 For a comparison of the *Nahda* and the *Haskala* see Lital Levy "The Nahḍa and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform'", *Middle Eastern Literatures: incorporating Edebiyat*, 16:3, (2013) 300–316.

106 Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*.

107 Ibid, 47–48.

legitimize secular subjects within a religious context, by showing value in technological innovations[108] and in this way their work was similar to that of Abdallah Somekh. As Lehmann observes:

> [...] the major difference between modern Sephardic and Ashkenazi halakhah: confronting the onslaught of modernity, the emerging Ashkenazic Ultra-Orthodoxy tend to redraw the boundaries of tradition in terms of increased stringency and rigidity [...] and therefore "it is proper to make a fence around the Torah to be stringent and not add lenient ruling." In contrast Sephardic rabbis "felt free to continue to apply traditional canons of halakhic decision-making processes which enabled, and sometimes even encouraged, encourage intra-halakhic novelty."[109]

As such, Baghdadi Jewry, in comparison to Ashkenazi Jewry, did not experience the stark bifurcation between the traditionalists and those arguing for progress, or fractious reform movements in Judaism. Instead this process of modernization was more gradual and less traumatic in comparison to Ashkenazi experiences. Unlike European Jewry, Baghdadi Jewry exited the nineteenth century relatively intact in regard to religious practice and lifestyle, as Baghdadi society as a whole provided no secular alternative, although the community was, beginning in the 1870s to slowly change.[110] As Shlomo Deshen argues, using sources from period *responsa*, the rabbis of Baghdad did not take action against personal religious transgressions, because they did not believe that these personal transgressions would translate into larger trends of eschewing religious tradition throughout the community.[111] The Rabbis themselves engaged with questions of modernity and saw value in the debates even if they did not accept all of the conclusions.[112] Furthermore, similar to Eastern Europe, only the educated class had a level of Hebrew sufficient to read these European publications in Hebrew and therefore it was felt that those educated enough to read these newspapers

108 Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 187–201.

109 Ibid, 201.

110 Stillman discusses the lack of secular alternative for the whole of MENA Jewry. Stillman, *Sephardic Religious Responses to Modernity*, 3–5, 9–28.

111 Deshen, "Baghdad Jewry in Late Ottoman Times," 37–38.

112 Deshen, "Baghdad Jewry in Late Ottoman Times"; Zohar, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*.

could properly understand their message.[113] Overall, in the late nineteenth century the spiritual leadership of men such as such as Rabbis Yosef Haim and Abdallah Somekh's were not contested by the masses.[114]

Beyond these communal reasons for the lack of internal schisms in the nineteenth century, the central reason for the unity of Baghdadi Jewry in this period is that as there was no structural alternative. In the Ottoman Tanzimat system local confessionalism was in many ways strengthened, and thus communal life and organization was not eroded but instead expanded and strengthened. Additionally, Baghdad remained a relative backwater for the Ottoman administration, although it was becoming important trade route. Baghdadi elites represented one of the most modernized groups in the city. The governor of Baghdad, Midhat Pasha, an advocate of the Ottoman reforms and strong proponent of modernization, modeled some of his larger reforms on the initiatives of the Jewish community.[115] In summary, modernization for Jews in Baghdad was primarily internal in this early phase, and the bureaucratic structure of the Ottoman Empire was not conducive to internal schisms.[116]

As in other areas of the Ottoman World, contact with European Jews was for the most part positive, leading to fruitful exchanges. However, there was some tension between the Baghdadi Jews and the European Jews. As Bashkin notes, the Baghdadis were acutely aware of the Orientalist lens through which many of the European Jews were prone to view the Baghdad community, an issue which was constantly being addressed and renegotiated.[117]

4. The Lay Council: Structural and Intellectual Forces of Modernity

The nineteenth century presented a slow process of transition for the Jewish community of Baghdad as it confronted new ideas which challenged societal norms and restructured communal organization. The lay council was the coming together of the

113 This was not dissimilar to Eastern Europe where Yiddish was the main language of the Jewish community, however reading in Hebrew was limited to the intellectual elites. For example, *ha-Melis* is estimated to have had 150 subscribers in 1860. Eddy Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 6.

114 The official Ottoman *Zewra* estimated that in 1869 there were 9,325 Jews in Baghdad, Ceylan, Ebubekir, *Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 34.

115 Sawdayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 27–31.

116 Eisenstadt, "Modernization without Assimilation" 3–6.

117 Bashkin, "Why did Baghdadi Jews stop writing to their Brethren in Mainz?," 97–103.

structural changes brought about by the communal reorganization of the Tanzimat and the enlightenment ideals espoused by the local Jewish elites. The lay council represented an official apparatus through which the secular communal elites could promote their desire to strengthen ties with foreign Jewish communities and develop secular communal organizations such as schools, hospitals, and charities. In respect to European Jewry the lay council represented a secular partner to act as the main interlocutor for communal policy, dedicated to engaging with modernity, and able to decide who and how they wished to work with other groups. In this way, the lay council was an "agent of modernity," as it had the mandate to make communal decisions, the ability to spread their ideas via secular education and the desire to adopt and adapt to new cultural norms.[118]

Although the foundations for the lay council were enshrined in the aforementioned 1864 Tanzimat reforms of the *hahamhane nizammnamesi*, these decrees were unevenly applied in Iraq and the exact workings of it first decades are not completely known.[119] With the appointment of Midhat Pasha as governor in 1869, Baghdad began to modernize its government and infrastructure in earnest. For example, the city began to pave streets, build public parks, and developed plans for a tramway. For the Jewish community in Baghdad, this had direct consequences in their communal structure as Midhat Pasha strove to apply the Ottoman communal reforms for the organization of communities.[120]

This is first seen through the formation of a general council of sixty businessmen and twenty religious scholars in accordance with the government regulations. From this larger group, a smaller committee of 7 religious leaders and 9 businessmen directed communal affairs although little documentation remains as to how this group functioned.[121] However, it was not until 1879 that Baghdad would establish a separate lay council. This slow adoption of the Ottoman edicts is in line with the fact that the edicts were not followed to the letter of the law. The council's composition varied from what was outlined by Istanbul with the general council being folded into the lay council by including three Rabbis and nine wealthy men at certain times.[122] Overall, communal leadership was far from democratic. Instead it was a representation

118 Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 25.

119 Some scholars such as Zvi Yehuda and Avraham Twena go as far as to argue that they were not fully applied until after the 1908 revolution. Yehuda, *New Babylonian Diaspora*, 102.

120 Daniel Schroeter "Changing Relationship between Jews and the Ottoman State" in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*, 100–101; Sawaydee, *The Baghdad* Connection, 27–29.

121 Agassi, "Communal Administration and Institutions," 186.

122 Ibid, 191.

of the wealthiest and most powerful members of the community who internally vied for power within the community. Rabbinic leadership was picked by these elites, as earlier stated, thus reinforcing the political, as opposed to ecclesiastical, nature of the office of the rabbinate. It would take several decades for the lay council to consolidate its control over the community, as the communal structure had been significantly damaged due to infighting between various pretenders to the position of chief rabbi in the period between 1864 until David Pappo became chief rabbi in 1905.[123]

The first internal document defining the role of the lay council in Baghdad was the "Writ of Acceptance" drawn up to define the council's mandate, upon the council's founding.[124] The document makes no reference to communal reform, or the spirit of the *Haskala*. Instead, the document reaffirms the traditional responsibilities of the communal leaders. It does, however, place the responsibility of communal stability and welfare in the hands of the lay council (rather than with the chief rabbi):

1. Supervision over the income and expenditures of the community;
2. The enactment of regulations for the good of the community and the poor;
3. The determination of communal taxes and the appointment of assessors, trustees, and collectors;
4. Estimating the contribution to be given to emissaries from Eretz Israel [sic] visiting Baghdad and to others passing through the city;
5. Supervision of the *muktars* in the city, who were responsible for the affairs in the Jewish districts.[125]

Although the writ structurally addresses the issue of the poor and developing regulations to help the poor, it is unlikely that this initial writ of acceptance was enacted on. Instead, it is more likely that over time the lay council brought communal charities under its umbrella. Examples of charities which existed prior to the lay council but would come under its jurisdiction within the first decades of its existence include the AIU school (founded in 1865), the Midrash Talmud Torah (founded in 1833),[126] both of which would eventually be run by the schools' committee who

123 Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 110–111.

124 Ibid.

125 Text and translation from Eliyahu Agassi "Communal Administration and Institutions: Autonomy and Self-Rule of Iraqi Jewry", 191.

126 Although the rabbinate would control the curriulum of the Talmud Torah, the lay council was responsible for the allocation of funds to run the school.

reported directly to the lay council. The precursor to the charitable actions of the lay council was the aformentioned *hevrat shomrey mitsvot* (founded in 1868) whose budget would eventually become part of the larger communal budget. In fact, this society may be analogous to the earlier general council as the description of its composition is the same.[127] Smaller charities existed to maintain synagogues, holy shrines and to assist the poor. At their founding, these institutions were not financed by communal funds, but were private initiatives financed by wealthy Baghdadis from both Baghdad and the satellite communities. They were also traditional in nature, with the exception of the AIU managed school. By the Mandate period issues relating to religious observance became the jurisdiction of the rabbinate while the budgets of charitable societies fell under the jurisdiction of the lay council. This process, however, was gradual and the exact evolution is not clear from the surviving documentation.

As the actions of the lay council was slowly extended to cover more areas of civil life, central to its mandate was the administration of charity within the Jewish community. Theoretically, the lay council could have replicated traditional forms of charity (alms giving, housing Jewish travelers, and supporting religious institutions), but over the course of a few decades the focus of the council would shift towards secular education and improvement of public health. By the beginning of the Mandate period one could argue that the lay council was in many respects intellectually analogous with Jewish philanthropic organizations in Europe such as the AIU, the AJA in its desire to educate and "modernize" the community through education and opportunities for personal development.[128]

Beyond simply stating the mandate of the lay council, the other important outcome of the writ of acceptance was that the lay council gained a full mandate for all non-ecclesiastical issues affecting the Jewish community, meaning that the lay council had to become more active and organized. The authority of secular leadership was further strengthened by developing formal relationships with Western European Jewish organizations based on the ad hoc relationships which had already existed for decades.[129] An example of this power shift is a letter sent by the AJA to Menahem Daniel Saleh, a member of the lay council, in 1886 suggesting that he bring to bear pressure on the rabbis (in his role as a secular leader) to abandon their opposition of

127 Sassoon, *A History of Jews in Baghdad*, 173–175.

128 MS137 AJ37/4/5, Summary of Report on Jewish Schools in Baghdad 1925 prepared for the AJA.

129 These organizations are addressed in chapter three.

secular knowledge.[130] Although it is unknown how Saleh reacted to such prodding, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the lay council had complete control of education matters and the importance of secular education was widely respected by the rabbinate.[131]

As to the question of poverty, conflicting material exists as to how the communal leadership viewed and addressed poverty prior to World War I. Some sources imply that charity was not central to the objectives of the lay council while others mention orphanages and funds set aside for widows.[132] More realistically the lay council's role developed in concert with the expansion of the Jewish schools, the growth in number and the expanding wealth of the Baghdadi satellite communities, and the increased support from European Jewish philanthropic aid organizations. An early example of a decision taken by the lay council was the 1885 agreement to pay 100 pounds for the teaching of handicrafts if the AIU and AJA would match the sum.[133] These initiatives were first signs of an ideology bent on communal development which would emerge in the first decades of its existence. These policies focused on developing relationships beyond Baghdad, and the Arabic speaking world.

The lay council developed these relationships with two intertwined groups that mutually reinforced each other, one with European and later American Jewish philanthropic organizations, and the other with Baghdadi Jews residing in India and East Asia who maintained close economic and familial ties to Baghdad and were still deferring to Baghdad for spiritual leadership (and, in addition, regularly remitted funds to Baghdad). Development of these formal relationships were slow in coming to fruition. The lay council lacked a defined vision for their communal initiatives in the late nineteenth century, in comparison to the sophisticated reports on education and communal wellbeing they would commission beginning in the Mandate period. This lack of defined objectives was not missed by the foreign teachers of the AIU School in

130 The letter from the AJA to Menahem Daniel Saleh is not contained in the minute book, only the main points of the letter; MS137 AJ95/ADD/5, Executive Minute Book—March 30, 1886.

131 This is generally attributed to Rabbi Abdallah Somekh's decision to allow his own grandchildren to attend the AIU School. Somekh's grandson Shaul Somekh became the president of the AIU in Baghdad and principal of the boy's school. Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 193–194.

132 It is highly probable that these projects were financed by private donations, not communally controlled funds. In reference to the role of the lay council the teacher of the AIU accused the communal leadership of not focusing its resources on supporting the impoverished; AIU Irak BOB4 178–184. Other sources mention the centrality of charity, for example, Avraham Ben Yaacov, *A History of the Jews in Iraq, from the End of the Gaonic Period—1038 CE–to the Present Time*, [In Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 1965), 268–273.

133 AJ95/ADD/5—Executive minute book, July 15, 1885.

Baghdad. In November 1885 one teacher even remarked about the relative inaction of the lay council regarding education and services to the poor.[134] Even with these pessimistic pronouncements from foreign teachers the lay council slowly became more active, as is apparent in their correspondence with contacts from abroad in the years leading up to World War I. The communal leadership even appointed the English teacher from the AIU School, Morris Cohen, to be part of the lay council in 1886.[135] This act itself was perhaps part of a desire to both demonstrate their willingness to include foreign Jews in their communal leadership and also, in this case, to further strengthen their ties to the English Jewry as the British Empire was emerging as the most important foreign actor in the region.

This foreign appointment to the lay council, the lay council's early exchanges with foreign Jewish organizations, and the general turn for the council to take on a more active role in the education and "moral development" of the community may in part be due to a desire to consolidate communal leadership. The most compelling support for such an analysis is the short lived association *Kaveh Le'atid* (Hope for the Future) founded in 1885 by a group of former AIU students who wanted to take on more responsibility in the community and act as a counterbalance to the infighting between the rabbinate and lay elites.[136] The alumni of the AIU school, with the help educated Baghdadi Jews residing in England, India, and China, formed the society to promote the "moral and material" status of the Jewish community of Baghdad. The initiatives included salon style meetings and a goal of expanding education beyond the communal elite.[137] The society itself was short lived but the ideals it espoused were integrated into the ethos of the lay council which eventually took over responsibility for the types of initiatives announced by *Kaveh Le'atid*.

Although we do not know exactly how the first lay council was formed, beyond the above mentioned 1879 writ, by the 1890s, an official body called the lay council existed as the archives of the AIU and AJA contain correspondence from Baghdad written by the lay council on its official letterhead.[138] Prior to this, correspondence with foreign organizations was handled by various and fleeting committees or individual notables

134 AIU Irak BOB4 178–184, Letter to the President of the AIU signed by Isaac Louria and Morris Cohen. This document could also be interpreted as the teachers defending their personal importance within the community.

135 JC, January 8, 1886, 5.

136 AIU Irak III.E., Bagdad, 75a; Harel, *Intrigue and Revolution*, 11.

137 AIU Irak IV.E, 185–187.

138 The majority of these early letters were addressed to the AJA or the AIU in MS 137 AJ95/ADD/6 Executive committee book 4, 1889–1908.

in an ad hoc fashion, and centered around individuals in Baghdad and abroad pledging funds for a project or asking a foreign group to match these funds.[139] Such was the case in establishing the earliest scholarships and prizes at the AIU School. In none of these examples do the actors from Baghdad present themselves as speaking on behalf of the Jewish community of Baghdad as they would in later correspondence.[140] The 1890s is also the period in which reports in the *Jewish Chronicle* begin to make mention of the lay council in regard to decisions about the funding of schools.[141] These articles are indicative of the strengthened relationship between the lay council and English Jewry via their association with the AJA, as their annual reports and activities in Baghdad were published in the *Jewish Chronicle*.[142]

By the early twentieth century, the activity of the lay council is apparent in the amount of correspondence they undertook with local consuls, the aforementioned Jewish aid organizations, and their personal contacts abroad.[143] Their requests for assistance were numerous, well defined, and show a desire to bring Western style education and medical care to the Jews of Baghdad. These international ties of the communal leadership and the expanded communal infrastructure allowed, over time, for the improvement of the socio-economic position of the Jewish community.[144] As early as 1910, reports to foreign consuls emerge suggesting an important Jewish middle class, (understood as to have had access to some secular education and engaged in white collar employment) continuing to grow well into the 1940s.[145] Foreign Jewish aid both from organizations and individuals played an immeasurable role in this development, without which the community would not have been able to flourish as it did. Although the financial aspect of this aid was central to communal development, aid also came in other forms that were just as instrumental, specifically by providing technical expertise, and political support.

Financial aid is certainly the most quantifiable form of support. Regular donations, special grants from foreign organizations and assistance in facilitating dona-

139 MS137 AJ95/ADD/5.

140 This change in organization is apparent in the references of the minute book of the AJA see—MS137 AJ95/ADD/4 AJA Minute book and the AIU correspondence AIU Irak BOB4.

141 JC, March 7, 1890, 13.

142 JC, July 16, 1897, 22–23.

143 MS137 AJ95/ADD/6; MS137 AJ35/5/2/1; AIU IRAK BOB4.

144 The causes of improved socio-economic perspective generally relate to globalization. In the case of Baghdadi Jews increased access to secular education coupled with new opportunities in business and trade. For more on this see chapter four.

145 Kedourie "The Jews of Baghdad," 357.

tions from individuals in foreign Jewish communities made possible the development of a large and successful network of social institutions developed and managed by the communal leadership. Wealthy Baghdadi Jews living both in Baghdad and abroad were extremely important in providing the funds to build communal institutions and later the Jewish middle class were also active in supporting these institutions. The main providers of financial assistance were the few very wealthy Jews inside of Iraq (the most well-known being Menahem Daniel Saleh), wealthy Baghdadi Jews residing outside of Iraq (such as the Sassoon and Kadoorie families), and Jewish philanthropic aid organizations. However, the Jewish community was also successful in receiving funds on occasion from foreign consuls wishing to expand their spheres of influence in Baghdad, specifically through the study of English and French.[146]

Beyond financial support one of the most important functions of these organizations was assistance in providing or arranging for experts to travel to Baghdad to advise the community. As Peter Sluglett mentions, Iraq had a general penury of educated individuals well into the 1930s as a consequence of an underdeveloped education system, and there was a specific need for instructors capable of teaching Western languages.[147] The Jewish community was able to utilize their international connections to bring foreign teachers, administrators, doctors, nurses, and other experts who were sent by foreign Jewish organizations to either themselves work in Baghdad or to train locals from the Baghdad community in areas where expertise was lacking. Aid organizations arranged for Baghdadi Jewish students to receive training in France, England, and even the United States on condition that they return to their home country or to another country in need of teachers upon completion of their studies.[148]

Of the functions these philanthropic organizations served perhaps the most nuanced was that of political lobbyist, informant, negotiator and, at times, protector. Whereas the financial and specialist aid began in the nineteenth century, this political assistance gained greater importance with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and as the importance of Britain in Iraq grew. Additionally, very wealthy Baghdadis abroad also played an important role in lobbying for the community, liaising with foreign governmental bodies on behalf of the Jewish community of Baghdad. This role as political agent and advisor was the most complicated of the three types of aid provided to the community as these political connections raised questions of

146 CO 730/177/2.

147 Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (London: IB Tauris, 2017), 193–209.

148 MS137 AJ37/4/5—These documents discuss Baghdadi students sent to study in London refusing to return to Iraq to teach as per their agreement. Of particular interest are the files between 1940–1942.

competing loyalty especially when anti-British sentiments grew in Iraq during the post Mandate period. This issue of political support was further complicated in later periods as many of the European organizations and Baghdadis abroad had strong ties to the Jewish community in Palestine. However, these important political connections persisted up until the dissolution of the community.

In the post-Ottoman period the lay council's authority was strengthened by the Iraqi constitution which reaffirmed its mandate as the official representative of the Jewish community.[149] It was this triad of aid that made it possible for the lay council to develop an impressive number of schools, hospitals, charities, and other institutions. One consequence of this relationship was that it bound the Jewish community of Baghdad to other Jewish communities. Eventually these long-established relationships would lead to accusations by the Iraqi state of conflicting loyalty and complicate the position of Iraqi Jews within the Iraqi State. However, in the late nineteenth century these issues were not a concern.

5. Conclusions: Nineteenth Century Networks and Innovations

From the mid-nineteenth century until its dissolution the Jewish community of Baghdad was constantly in social, political, and linguistic transition. As part of this communal evolution a secular leadership apparatus, made up of local elites, emerged which was influenced by both Eastern and Western European Jewry without undermining religious practice or informal spiritual leadership. In the nineteenth century, modernity was expressed by access to European periodicals, new institutions and slow structural changes to communal organization. Modernization was a process by which the community expanded its foreign connections, integrating new ideas and organizational structures. This process was a perpetual palimpsest of transitions that challenged but did not replace traditional societal norms, creating new relationships and networks for the Jewish community.

Baghdad in the mid-nineteenth century remained a relative backwater in the Ottoman Empire, with a small, traditionally organized Jewish community. Western European Jewry, by contrast, had already undergone over a century of transformation via the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and becoming citizens

149 The Iraqi constitution of 1920 extended official autonomy to the Jewish community. Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 251.

in nation states. Through the arrival of European Jews[150] and their newspapers in Baghdad, the literate Jews of the city became more connected with other Jewish communities than in the preceding decades and observed the debates among both Western and Eastern European Jewry on the secularization of education, the adoption of certain western cultural norms, and struggles for Jewish emancipation.[151]

From the perspective of language use in the Jewish public sphere an important change from the use of Hebrew to English and French in this global forum is apparent. The title of Bashkin's piece on Iraqi Jewish intellectuals during the nineteenth century asks the question, "Why did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz?".[152] This could give the impression that Jews in Baghdad stopped interacting with Eastern European Jewry altogether, as her conclusion is that the ideals of Europe and the *Haskala* were overtaken by local intellectual and political movements. Although I agree that the Jewish intellectual culture of Eastern Europe, embodied by the *Haskala*, became less relevant over time to the Baghdadis, I disagree that it was because they were usurped by local intellectual and political movements. By the end of the nineteenth century the Hebrew language *Haskala* newspapers were replaced by English and French publications from the satellite communities and Western Europe due to political and economic affinities.

The connections to Eastern European Jewish intellectuals did not, however, disappear completely. For example, Lital Levy in her piece "From Baghdad to Bialik with Love" analyzes a Hebrew poem written by a 16-year-old Iraqi Jew in 1933 to the poet Haim Nachum Bialik.[153] Although Bialik was in Palestine by this period, this vignette is an example of the mutual interest in Hebrew letters by Eastern European and Iraqi Jewry. Furthermore, Lev Hakak presents other examples of how Baghdadis engaged with the intellectual ideas of the late *Haskala* during the Mandate

150 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 74–76.

151 This process of modernization via print culture shares many similarities with Eastern European and Ottoman Sephardic Jewry. As Sarah Abrevaya Stein demonstrates in *Making Jews Modern*, the experience of Sephardic Jews in the Ottoman Empire had many parallels to Eastern European Jews, in regard to modernity being expressed via newspapers cultures opposed to political and social emancipation which in the Russian and Ottoman Empires ranged from non-existent to limited in nineteenth century.

152 Bashkin "Why Did Baghdadi Jews Stop Writing to their Brethren in Mainz?"

153 Lital Levy "'From Baghdad to Bialik With Love": A Reappropriation of Modern Hebrew Poetry, 1933," *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.3 (2005) 125–154. Lev Hakak presents other examples of how Baghdadis engaged with the intellectual idea of the *Haskala* during the Mandate and Early State periods in Modern Hebrew Creativity.

period, particularly in the areas of poetry, fictional prose and periodicals.[154] Thus, when analyzing the Baghdadi transnational networks from the Tanzimat period until the 1950s one should not discuss these ideas from a perspective of European intellectual or linguistic affinities being a casualty of Arabization or Arab Nationalism, but instead from the perspective of expanded engagement in multiple public spheres in a multilingual and multinational context.[155]

Beyond the changes in language, there are several major differences between the pan-Jewish aid networks of the eighteenth century, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and the late nineteenth century transnational Jewish networks. Firstly, the eighteenth-century networks were focused on helping the Jews in the holy land and thus only looked to other Jewish communities outside of Palestine as benefactors not as potential recipients of aid. Secondly, the eighteenth-century networks were divided into Jewish sub-groups, the most active of which were the Sephardic Jewish networks and geographical networks such as the Mediterranean.[156] One major change in the nineteenth century Jewish philanthropic networks was the rapprochement between different Jewish sub-groups, such as Sephardic and Ashkenazi elites in England collaborating on Jewish solidarity projects.[157] As a consequence these new associations organized themselves along national lines (French, English, German, and American) related to Jews becoming part of civil society as opposed to more traditional groupings linked to religious custom (i.e. Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Baghdadi, Maghrebi).[158] Thirdly, the eighteenth-century networks were relatively conservative in their objectives, aiming only to assist the impoverished in times of crisis, whereas the nineteenth century philanthropic networks aimed to "westernize", "modernize", "improve" and "civilize" the communities they were aiding. Finally, the nineteenth century organizations had strict hierarchies, a bureaucratic apparatus and a defined ideology, a marked difference from the dynamic networks of the eighteenth century.[159] The Jewish philanthropic organizations which emerged in the nineteenth-century were altogether novel both in their nationalist constructions and in their reformist objectives. They were also ideal partners for the emerging Jewish secular elite in

154 Hakak, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Creativity in Babylon, 1735–1950*.

155 See the education chapter for more information on this.

156 Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, 4–5.

157 Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

158 This is apparent in the leadership of all of the Jewish philanthropic organizations. In the case of the AIU and AJA the executive boards included Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. The JDC was represented by bother Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern and Western European origins.

159 Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land*, 11; 14.

Baghdad who had been inspired by the writing of the Eastern European newspapers of the *Haskala* and the possibilities brought by the Tanzimat reforms.

These changes in Baghdad and the relationships between disparate Jewish communities are part of a broader tide of change throughout the nineteenth century European and North American Jewish Diasporas as they considered the question of Jewish identity. Specifically, this period marks the beginning of a transition from sub-Jewish groups grounded in either a specific geographic location or specific religious customs (such as Sephardic, Maghrebi, or Eastern European Ashkenazi) towards the idea of a unified Jewish people in which many Jews began to imagine themselves as part of one global community.[160] This identity-oriented change was not limited to Baghdad or its communal leadership, instead Baghdad was part of a fundamental reengineering of Jewish communal perception that began in the nineteenth century with changes in global Jewish networks.

In regard to the geographical diversity of the Baghdadi leadership's network, this analysis is consistent with Nora Șeni's work on the development of modern Jewish philanthropy. In her work, Șeni demonstrates how much of the intellectual capital which drove the initial development of the Jewish philanthropic network of Western Europe came from the Eastern Jewish intellectuals.[161] Șeni's analysis completes the triangle of influence between Eastern Jewry, Western Jewry, and MENA Jewry during this period and gives further insight into the Eastern to Western shift in pan-Jewish relationships for Baghdadi Jews. The triangle between Anglo-Jewry and Eastern European Jewry is also apparent in the work of Abigail Green, who notes that Moses Montefiore's traveling companions and advisors were often Eastern European Jewish intellectuals who served as advisors and translators.[162] In Baghdad, there was a fourth group which was also important in this global Jewish rapprochement of the late nineteenth century: the Baghdadi satellite communities on the Indian Sub-Continent and East Asia who engaged in a triangle of influence between Baghdad, Asia, and Western Europe. These Jews would straddle the Anglo-Jewish sphere and the Baghdadi Jewish sphere, adding another avenue through which Baghdadi Jews collaborated with Europe, and provide much of the capital to build communal institutions. Their importance in Baghdad is the subject of the next chapter.

160 Ibid, 1–14.

161 Șeni, *Les inventeurs de la philanthropie juive*.

162 Green, *Moses Montefiore*.