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

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CHAPTER THREE

Transnational Jewish Philanthropy

Jewish transnationalism had many antecedents but modernity and globalization brought a fundamental shift in the nature of these relations and their effects on individual communities. The relationship between the lay council and foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations illustrates the Jewish networks that formed the basis for Jewish transnationalism. This analysis sheds light on the objectives of the Jewish communal leadership and challenges notions that foreign benefactors—as opposed to local elites—were key decision makers in the development of communal infrastructure and institutions in Baghdad. By analyzing the motivations behind transnational Jewish solidarity and providing an overview of the history of the main foreign Jewish actors in Baghdad—the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), and the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) I reevaluate the relationship between imperialism and Jewish philanthropy, and the power differential between European and Baghdadi Jews.

Jewish philanthropy in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is closely associated with the objectives of French and British imperialism.[1] In both France and Britain, Jewish elites used their transnational Jewish networks to influence Jewish communities in their nations' spheres of influence. These actions were philanthropic in nature but also served imperial interests by grooming a local minority population to be sympathetic towards imperial powers. The transnational philanthropic networks allowed French and British Jewry to show their loyalty to their nation by acting as linguistic and cultural emissaries to the local Jewish populations. In the case of Baghdad, the Jewish leadership was not idle in defining these partnerships. By comparing and contrasting the histories of these organizations in Baghdad we can gain greater insight into the political and linguistic choices made by the communal leadership during the mandate and early years of the Iraqi state. Although the histories of these organizations in Iraq are each worthy of their own volumes, the objective of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive history of these organizations in Iraq but to shed some light on the history of Baghdadi Jewish

1 For further discussion on Jewish participation in French and British imperial networks see Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore*; Lisa Moses Leff, *The Sacred Bonds of Solidarity*; Nora Șeni, *Les inventeurs de la philanthropie Juive*.

cooperation with foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations by considering what can be learned about the community through its transnational connections.

1. Foreign Partners

The main foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations active in Baghdad—the French Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), the English Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), and the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC)—unlike the Baghdadis Jews in India and East Asia, did not have a special connection to Baghdad and much of their initial information on the community came from their foreign representatives in Baghdad, the consuls of their respective countries, or from Eastern Baghdadis active in the organizations. For these aid organizations, the Jewish community in Baghdad represented one community amongst many that were vying for help across Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East as part of this new idea of transnational Jewish solidarity. In Baghdad, the Jewish aid organizations provided aid in the form of financial support, professional expertise, and political assistance to the Jewish community of Baghdad for almost a century.

From an administrative and a structural perspective, all three organizations relied heavily on their local governmental representatives in Baghdad. For example, the AIU relied on French consular representatives to monitor progress in schools during the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century to administer official French exams.[2] The AJA hired members of the British bureaucracy in Baghdad to write reports on Jewish education the city.[3] The JDC relied on American consular support both to distribute aid to Baghdad after World War I and to monitor the political position of Jews in Baghdad in the 1940s.[4] Thus, transnational Jewish solidarity and the advent of a transnational Jewish identity was predicated on imperial networks and the national ties of each Jewish organization. For this reason, the Jewish elites in Baghdad actively courted the American, French and British diplomatic missions in the city as they saw the immense benefits these connections could have.[5] In 1918, at a pivotal period

2 AIU BOB4.

3 E.C. Hodgkin "Lionel Smith on Education in Iraq" Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), 253–260.

4 JDC NY_AR1418/00003; JDC NY_AR45/54–516.

5 Foreign diplomatic delegations also provided scholarships and other types of support, particularly to promote secular education within the Jewish communal schools. The British government provided

when Baghdad was transitioning from being part of the Ottoman Empire towards the uncertain position of falling under British mandate, a report by the British India Office described a dinner held only one month after the lay council (unsuccessfully) petitioned the British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad to bestow British citizenship on the Jews of Baghdad.[6] In this report we see how the Jewish communal elites actively courted both Jewish and non-Jewish foreigners by presenting their communal values as analogous to those of the foreign guests. Below is an excerpt from the report:

> On the 10th October Jewish Community entertained to dinner several members of America relief commission, the US consul, French consul, and several officers of Civil Administration (UK).
>
> After dinner followed songs and recitations by Jewish school children exceedingly well done with several speeches by leading Jews in English and Arabic highly flattering to the present regime. As an expression of their earnest feelings the speeches were followed by an auction of some jewellery [sic], presented by a Jewish lady, for charitable purposes: the auction realized some Rs. 30,000, Jewish ladies present spontaneously made further offers of jewelry.
>
> At the close of evening it was announced that proceeds would with the permission of G.O.C. in chief be devoted to relief of poor in Mosul without distinction of creed wherever that place was??? [sic] either before or after end of war. My American friends found above entertainment very instructive.[7]

In this instance, the Jewish community was entertaining the three main foreign presences in Baghdad relevant to the Jewish community, the French, British, and American, most likely using the event to present themselves as a Westernized community with values in line with the foreign countries represented. It is likely that those in attendance were trying to position themselves as allies to these representatives who were often navigating unfamiliar cultural, linguistic and political terrain. As the report notes this event showed educated children, community leaders who spoke English and Arabic, Jewish women publicly mingling with men, and a non-

small donations to the English Language Shamash School in the 1930s and 1940s. The French government provided scholarships for students to study in Paris. CAHJP—Iraq File—6382; MS 137 AJ/37/4/5; Kattan *Farwell Babylon*, 211.

6 Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 256–258.

7 The question marks in the second paragraph are in the original text. The writer of the letter, apparently, is not aware of the location of Mosul. IOR/L/PS/11/139 P 4484/1918.

confessional philanthropic action, all of which were exceptional for Baghdad in 1918. This is similar to the position taken by communal leadership when corresponding with Jewish philanthropic organizations and the Eastern Baghdadis. This particular report was sent to the UK foreign office, which in turn was known to forward similar reports to the AJA, and it is very possible that reports on this event made it into the hands of the AIU and the JDC as similar style reports exist in all of the organizations' archives.

In addition to the general reports on the state of the Jewish community in Baghdad, all the Jewish philanthropic organizations used their local governmental representatives for the transfer of funds, to oversee the distributions of these funds and, at times, to collect receipts from the lay committee or the schools committee, sending them back to the organizations, thus clarifying the highly nationalist nature (British, French, and America) of these organizations.[8] Additionally, local governmental representatives often attended events organized by the schools on behalf of the organizations sending reports to attest to the level and quality of education, and to confirm that the financial aid had been put to appropriate use. In this way the relationship between the foreign Jewish organizations and the local diplomatic representatives worked to forge relationships between the local Jewish community and foreign governments.

Beyond these similarities in the workings of each organization, their roles in Iraq differed as well. As I will expand on below, the AIU's focus was primarily on education. The AJA, particularly during the Mandate, would be a more active partner in the community, acting as a liaison for the Jewish community to both the British and Iraqi governments. The AJA also helped to raise money from Jews in the UK to support the Jewish Institutions in Baghdad, and was instrumental in the overhauling of the Jewish schools in the 1920s.

1.1. *Alliance Israélite Universelle*

The AIU was founded in Paris in 1860 as an outgrowth of Jewish emancipation in France and a desire to advance Jewish emancipation and moral progress wherever Jews were in peril. The immediate event which prompted its founding was the 1858

8 This would change in the 1930s and 1940s when international transfers became more reliable. The Jewish community would use the Eastern Bank or Bank Zilkha, many of whose executives also held positions within the Jewish communal administration. Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper*, 15–17; JDC NY_AR1418/00003.

Mortara Affair in which a Jewish boy in Bologna, Italy was removed from his home after a former servant claimed to have secretly baptized the boy.[9] At its outset the primary goal of the AIU was not to import 'Western Civilization' to the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East through the opening of schools, the initiative for which it would become the most well-known. Instead the initial aim was more local, to help French Jews who had not yet benefited from the economic and social opportunities that the founders of the AIU had been fortunate enough to receive through emancipation. The AIU looked to Judaism as a moral guide that would "*mettre d' accord dans l' homme, la foi, la raison, et le coeur*" in the modern emancipated, secular world.[10] The idea of extra-territorial Jewish solidarity, as already mentioned, was born out of concern in the wake of such incidents the Damascus Affair[11] and other acts of violence against Jews in the Muslim World. In turn, this led to education beyond French borders quickly becoming one of the AIU's main activities and certainly its most important legacy. In working with Jewish communities abroad, the AIU were not religious missionaries trying to save the souls of those they were aiding. Instead they saw themselves as missionaries of modernization and Jewish regeneration or, as they referred to themselves, '*missionaire laiques*'.[12] The AIU saw itself as a partner in development providing resources and expertise to successfully run a modern secular school. It demanded both financial and intellectual collaboration with the Jewish community (or members of the community) for whom it was opening a school.[13]

Baghdad was one the first cities in which an AIU school was opened. The original request for a secular Jewish school predates the formation of the lay council by fifteen years and was a private, not a communal initiative. As previously stated, two European Jews residing in Baghdad, Isaac Luria and Hermann Rosenfeld, along with two Baghdad-born Jews, Joseph Shemtob and David Somekh, wrote to Paris stating their desire to help the Baghdadi community form a school which would instruct boys in secular subjects and asking the AIU for help in this endeavor. The letter notes their awareness of the school that had recently been opened for Jewish boys in Tetouan, Morocco and their belief something similar would be ideal for the Jewish community of Baghdad. The letter also states that members of the Jewish community had pledged

9 Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity*, 244.

10 Perrie Simon-Nahum, "Aux Origines de l'Alliance," in *Histoire de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 à nos jours*, ed. André Kaspi (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 11–52.

11 Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*.

12 Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition*, (London: University of Washington Press, 1993), 105.

13 Ibid., 227–228.

money to support the school.[14] On December 10, 1864, the Alliance school opened with Isaac Luria becoming the first director of the school.[15] This early initiative in secular education sidestepped the religious elites of the city, but was well received by those who saw the value in sending their sons to a secular school. By January of 1865 the school had 43 students, and 75 by June of the same year.[16] The school's initial objective was to teach both secular and religious subjects, making it a direct rival to the Midrash Talmud Torah, the only other option for Jews wishing to obtain higher education in Baghdad.

Tension between religious elites and the emerging secularly educated lay elites is illustrated by a letter sent to the students of the AIU school in 1869 to the French Consul in Baghdad, three years after the original school was opened.[17] The students explained that the Rabbinate was falsely accusing them of irreligion and threatening excommunication. They were writing, therefore, to request help and protection from the French Consul to defend their right to a secular education and to prevent the school from being closed, indicative of the power struggle that was occurring between the religious and secular elites in Baghdad during the late nineteenth century. It is interesting to note that students were writing to the French consul, this suggests that the students thought that the French consul would have sufficient influence to calm concerns of the Rabbinate, an assumption due perhaps to the strong French nationalist bent of the students' AIU education. The students were wrong, however, and the school was closed in large part due to pressure from the rabbinate. Although the first experience with a secular AIU school was relatively short lived, the school eventually re-opened. When Baghdad established a Jewish lay council in 1879 a formal relationship between the Baghdadi Jewish elites and the AIU was established.[18] As the majority of the communication to the AIU in regard to the schools went via the consul general de France, this relationship helped strengthen Jewish communal relations with the French administrative presence in Baghdad. The relationship with the AIU was relatively detached as the vast majority of teachers and school directors did not come from France but were instead AIU educated Jews from other MENA countries, keeping the direct presence of the AIU to a minimum.

14 Sawdayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 20.

15 Ibid, 20.

16 *Bulletin de l'Alliance* 1864, 4.

17 AIU Irak IV.E, 8–9.

18 Zvi Yehuda, "Iraqi Jewry and Cultural Change in the Educational Activity of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, 134–145.

The relationship between the AIU and the Jewish community in Baghdad was relatively tense.[19] The Jewish communal leadership was happy to accept the expertise, money, and political support of the AIU as they were committed to the instruction of foreign languages and other secular subjects, an objective they could not achieve without the AIU assistance. Even those Iraqi elites dedicated to secular education and modernization, however, were skeptical of the cultural superiority of Western civilization that the AIU professed.[20] As early as 1872, members of the Jewish community were pressuring the AIU to modify their standard curriculum, including suggestions for an increase in the amount of time dedicated to Arabic and Hebrew, and the idea to possibly change the language of instruction to English.[21] These requests are in contrast to the AIU's practices in North Africa, which had no emphasis on Arabic or English as the schools functioned entirely within the sphere of the French Imperial bureaucracy. This different approach in Iraq should be understood from the perspective of Iraq's role as a nexus of trade linking Europe to India and that France was less important politically in the region (as compared to North Africa). This was particularly true for the Jewish Baghdadis whose trade networks already stretched from Manchester to Singapore. In addition, Arabic was an important language of commerce in the late nineteenth century Levant and the ability to read and express oneself would have been an important skill long before the language became a symbol of Arab nationalism. Although the AIU never fully acquiesced to these requests, they were forced, due to communal pressure, to modify the curriculum in Baghdad. These unique curriculum modifications at the AIU schools illustrate the Baghdadi communal leaders' high level of agency and engagement in these schools. This communal skepticism of the AIU's cultural superiority is therefore a case of conflicting imperial influence, wherein the narratives of the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire were more relevant and compelling to Baghdadi Jews than the French imperial narrative.

Up until World War I, despite the ongoing cultural tensions, the AIU was the most active foreign Jewish organization in Baghdad. The AIU maintained the two largest pre-Mandate Jewish schools: the Albert Sassoon boys' school and the Laura Kadoorie girls' school, each named after wealthy Eastern Baghdadi benefactors who had donated the land and set up endowments which would partially defray each

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid, 139.

21 AIU Irak I.E, 3, report of the committee meeting, 24 December 1872, cited in Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 140. This request appears again in correspondence to the AJA on December 30, 1890 in MS137 AJ 95/ADD/6.

school's operating expenses. Other AIU schools utilized their revised curriculum, but received less financial and teaching support than the first two schools. The success of these schools in the period before the Mandate meant the first generations of Baghdadi Jews receiving a secular education were strongly influenced by their francophone perspective, which can be seen in the correspondence between Baghdadi Jews and Anglophone Jews well into the mid-1940s. Those who received an AIU education presented a strong bias towards writing in French although they were able to understand written English. This French/English mode of communication is seen in the correspondence between Anglophones Lawrence and Horace Kadoorie in Shanghai and Hong Kong with their agent in Baghdad, Ibrahim Nahum, in the 1930s and 1940s. In this case the AIU educated Nahum would write in French—his preferred written Western language—to the British educated Kadoorie brothers who would respond in English.[22] Similar patterns are also apparent in later correspondence with AIU educated Jews from Baghdad writing to the AJA.

After World War I, the importance of AIU diminished significantly due to several convergent factors. Other education options became available to the lay council through the development of Jewish community schools not attached to the AIU—or willfully separating from the AIU—and the government schools that were completely free.[23] This single factor, however, does not fully explain why the AIU's presence in Baghdad declined, especially when considering that the AIU continued to send teachers and school administrators to Iraq well into the 1940s. The AIU girl's school Laura Kadoorie remained the premier girl's school in Baghdad until the 1950s. I contend that the community's distancing from the AIU is not linked towards a desire to separate itself from foreign Jewish organizations but is instead a question of linguistic and political pragmatism.

As Zvi Yehuda notes, "the AIU pursued its efforts to acculturate the Jews of Mesopotamia in two central spheres: 1) setting the curriculum in community schools, in which the French language was used, and 2) changing the customs and traditions of the students in the spirit of France and the West."[24] In the twentieth century, even

22 In correspondence between Baghdad and East Asia in the Kadoories archives Ibrahim Nahum, the Kadoorie agent in Baghdad, writes in French and Lawrence and Horace Kadoorie write in English. It is assumed that attended the AIU school before the Mandate as he worked in the Ottoman Bank in the early 1920s; KA A02/15-SEK-8C-002 December 22 1937; KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—August 14, 1951.

23 Yehuda, "Iraqi Jewry and Cultural Change in the Educational Activity of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," 143; Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 40.

24 Yehuda, "Iraqi Jewry and Cultural Change in the Educational Activity of the Alliance Israélite Universelle", 133.

before the Mandate, the objectives and the French ethnocentrism of the AIU became less attractive as the importance of the French language declined in post-Ottoman Iraq, while English, because of increased trade with British controlled India, grew in importance. This shift can be seen from the increase in requests from members of the Baghdad community that English and Arabic be the dominant languages of education, with French taking a back seat.[25] Technically, the Jewish community of Baghdad took over management of the AIU schools between 1918–1921, becoming responsible for both financing and curriculum. Their desire was to focus more on Arabic and English. This project, as outlined in 1921, actually took over a decade to achieve due to the complex problems of overhauling a curriculum and finding suitable teachers.[26] In practice, many of the schools still retained their AIU nature with a curriculum biased towards French, a focus on French cultural production, hiring francophone teachers and working towards French school certificates.[27] Although the desire to separate from the AIU is apparent in the correspondence between the AIU, AJA and the lay council, achieving this objective took time and involved careful diplomacy between all parties as the AIU and AJA collaborated in many of their initiatives, and the Eastern Baghdadis were influential in both organizations.[28] Thus, the dominant factor in the shift away from the AIU is the growing relationship between the lay council and the Anglo-Jewish Association, which was in part, driven by the Baghdadi Diaspora's close ties with Britain.

Although the AIU played an important role in developing secular Jewish schools in nineteenth century Baghdad, it had relatively little to offer in financial or political assistance during the Mandate and the early years of the Iraqi state, nor did it desire to be involved in that way. The financial assistance offered by the AIU was predominantly from Baghdadi Jews based in India and the Far East who had their own agents in Baghdad and were thus able to support the community independently of the AIU, or via the AJA if they preferred to work through an organization. As for political support, the French presence in Iraq was considerably less than in other areas of the MENA. Furthermore, the AIU's lack of flexibility in regard to curriculum changes was off putting to Baghdad elites who wanted a curriculum adapted to the linguistic

25 Georges Weill, "Les structures et les hommes" in *Histore de l'Alliance de 1860 a nos jours*, 60. MS 137 AJ37/4/5—Jewish schools report 1925.

26 MS 137 AJ37/4/5—Jewish schools report 1925—pp. 2–3.

27 Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah, "Jewish Education in Baghdad: Communal Space vs. Public Spate," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere*, 96–120.

28 MS137 AJ37/4/2/2; MS137 AJ37/4/5.

needs of the new Iraqi state.[29] By the 1920s, an English language partner to assist the community was a more pragmatic choice than a French language partner, and thus by the end of the decade the AJA had almost completely usurped the position of the AIU as the main foreign organizational partner for the Jewish community in Baghdad. The AJA would hold this position until the dissolution of the community, slowly bringing the AIU under its wing in Baghdad.

1.2. *Anglo-Jewish Association*

The Anglo-Jewish Association is almost as old as the AIU, created in 1871. Originally founded to be the British version of the AIU, the AJA quickly developed its own mandate and ideology, working independently from the AIU.[30] This distancing from the AIU is apparent in its official publications in the first half of the twentieth century as it elides the AIU's role when discussing the AJA's founding, preferring to assert it was founded "to aid in promoting the social, moral and intellectual progress of the Jews" and "to obtain protection for those who may suffer in consequence of being Jews" without mentioning the AIU anywhere in the text.[31] These two statements represent the position the AJA would take in Baghdad, promoting social, moral and intellectual progress relating to education, and the willingness to act as political intermediary for those suffering as a consequence of being Jewish. The first involvement of the AJA in Baghdad, however, was supporting the AIU by sending an English teacher to the AIU boy's school in 1879, and agreeing to cover the cost of the teacher's salary.[32] Shortly after the appointment of an AJA sponsored English teacher, Silas E. Sassoon[33] presented the AIU with a trust bond of 5000 rupees to be put toward English instruction, thus assuring the continuation of English at the school.[34]

Unlike other areas of the Muslim world in which the AIU served as the main link between the local Jewish community and the West, in Iraq the AJA became an

29 Yehuda, "Iraqi Jewry and Cultural Change in the Educational Activity of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," 142–143.

30 Zosa Szajkowski, "Conflicts in the Alliance Israelite and the Founding of the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Vienna Allianz, and the Hilfsverein," *Jewish Social Studies* 19 (1957) 29–30.

31 MS137 AJ37/4/5—Ledger of School involvement—Draft Statement of Aims, November 28, 1943.

32 MS137 AJ95/ADD/4—14 May, 1879.

33 Silas E. Sassoon is most likely from Bombay, it is unclear where he was residing at the time of his gift.

34 MS137 AJ95/ADD/5—16 March, 1882.

increasingly important partner of the Jewish communal leadership as the relationship between the United Kingdom and Iraq became stronger upon the establishment of the Mandate. Even before the Mandate, however, as early as 1890, the AJA minutes note that D. Sassoon in Baghdad had requested that the AJA and the Jewish Board of Deputies in London make inquiries into the new governor general in Baghdad in regard to his attitudes toward Jews.[35] Another important event in the strengthening of relations between the AJA and the lay council was the AJA's support of the Jewish community in the controversy over the 1889 burial of Abdallah Somekh who had died during a cholera outbreak.[36] The Jewish community was prevented by the local Muslim population from burying Somekh near the Tomb of Ezekiel, which is venerated by both Jews and Muslims. The AJA and Jewish Board of Deputies agreed to intercede with the governor on behalf of the Jews in Baghdad in an attempt to resolve the conflict.[37] Although in this incident the efficacy of the AJA can be debated,[38] it was still perceived as more positive and proactive than the AIU, which did not contact its consul in Baghdad.[39] Thus, even before the Mandate period the AJA showed a willingness to lobby the Ottoman government on behalf of the Jews of Baghdad, and although the AIU remained the dominant foreign figure in Jewish education in Baghdad prior to World War I, the AJA had already proven itself in the nineteenth century as the Jewish community's main foreign partner in political matters.

The AJA's large role in Baghdad was motivated by two interwoven factors: Britain's growing role in Iraq, motivated by a desire to protect the trade route to India and the Indian Ocean[40] (in fact the only other place the AJA was as active was in Palestine, a point the AJA refers to in a 1943 summary of its history and objectives);[41] and perhaps more importantly, many Baghdadi Jews on the Indian sub-continent and in the Far East became culturally and linguistically "Anglicized",[42] with many eventually gaining British citizenship. Yet, not surprisingly, these Jews for reasons enumerated

35 MS137 AJ 95/ADD/6—28 January, 1890; 11 February, 1890.

36 Sassoon Archives Box 35.

37 MS137 AJ 95/ADD/6—October 11, 1889; February, 1890.

38 Yehuda, *New Babylonian Diaspora*, 210–220.

39 The AIU relationship with the French consulate in Baghdad in the 1890s was severely strained due to a wave of anti-Semitism in France after the publication of Édouard Drumont's anti-Semitic book *La France Juive* in 1886. Ibid., 221–224.

40 Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 2–4.

41 MS137 AJ37/4/5—Ledger of School involvement—Draft Statement of Aims, November 28, 1943.

42 See chapter two.

in chapter two continued to feel an obligation towards Iraqi Jewry making the AJA an important channel for this demonstration of solidarity as it also confirmed the "Englishness" of these Jews.

One important example of an anglicized Baghdadi is Sir Elly Silas Kadoorie (1867–1944). Born in Iraq, he would live most of his life in Bombay, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. A naturalized Englishman, he was president of the Hong Kong and Shanghai branch of the AJA.[43] Kadoorie was an active supporter of both the AIU and the AJA, not uncommon in his time as the AIU had a larger network of schools. The Kadoorie family invested heavily in the Jewish community of Baghdad, providing funds to found several AIU schools, one of which bear the name of Sir Elly's wife Laura Kadoorie and hospitals, one of which would bear the name of his mother Reema, in addition to their financial support of the AJA.[44] Kadoorie's attachment to Iraq, his faith in work of the AJA and the future of Britain in the Middle East was so great that in 1924 he set up a residuary trust that gave one third of his fortune to build schools in Mesopotamia and Palestine, and one third of his fortune to the AJA to be used for the purpose of education.[45]

The Sassoon family was also an important donor to the AJA, with many family members holding positions in its leadership. One important figure in the AJA was its treasurer, Ellis Franklin (a member of the Sassoon family).[46] The AJA had four major funds dedicated to Baghdad—the Kadoorie Educational Bequest, the Kadoorie Charity Bequest, the Stafford Sassoon Prize Fund and the Baghdad School Trust Fund (Benjamin Shamash), each of which was established by Baghdadis no longer residing Baghdad.[47]

As this Eastern Baghdadi bridge between Baghdad and London was an extremely important diplomatic connection, the financial relationship between AJA and the lay council was a perpetually sensitive issue. One recurring tension was that the lay council directly solicited donations for their philanthropic work in Baghdad from co-religionists in Great Britain. Numerous correspondence between the AJA and the lay council show the AJA diplomatically suggesting that the lay council restrict its fundraising to Iraq so as to avoid overlapping efforts.[48] These exchanges suggest that

43 *A Philanthropic Tradition: The Kadoorie Family*, 6.

44 Ibid.

45 The final third was left to his brother, Eleazar Kadoorie—MS137 AJ31/3/2/1 1924–1943 1 of 3.

46 Georges Weill, "Les structures et les hommes," 56.

47 The only other special fund was for Jerusalem's Evelina de Rothschild School for Girls, MS137 AJ37/5/2/4.

48 IJA 2994, this file shows correspondence in English, French, and Arabic between the AJA, AIU, and the various Baghdadi committees surrounding fundraising for schools between 1924–1935.

the AJA, which depended on private donations to undertake its charitable works, saw the Baghdadis in Baghdad not only as a partner but also as a competitor in raising money, with misunderstandings often assuaged by Baghdadis residing outside of Iraq. This would suggest that the lay council was working to assert its independence and to be viewed as a partner rather than as a simple aid recipient.

The AJA, for its part, functioned with a board of directors in London who made decisions as to which philanthropic initiatives they would support. This board was in close contact with the Jewish Board of Deputies in London, the British Foreign Office, and the local Jewish communities they supported. Within Baghdad, the AJA depended on the English teachers they sent to the city and the local British diplomatic corps to ensure their financial support was being put to its assigned use. Beginning in the Mandate period, the AJA appointed a director of education in Baghdad who also served as the representative of the AJA in the city a testament to its involvement within the Jewish community in Baghdad.[49]

The two most important factors which drew the lay council in Baghdad to work with the AJA were the aforementioned inclination to support the community politically and the desire for English education in the Jewish schools. Although the Jewish schools flourished like none other in Baghdad prior to the 1920s, the French curriculum, as already stated, left something to be desired in the eyes of Baghdadis who saw their future in Arabic and English.[50] The watershed moment in the curriculum shift from the AIU system to a hybrid Iraqi/British system was achieved in the mid-1920s when the AJA arranged for the Jewish community to have Lionel Smith unofficially act as director of the Jewish schools. Smith was the British advisor to the Ministry of Education from 1923–1931. Smith's later writings suggest serious frustration in working with the Iraqi government, feeling his suggestions fell on deaf ears, which perhaps explains his willingness to dedicate so much time to the Jewish community.[51] Smith was charged with assisting the lay council and schools committee in reorganizing and improving the Jewish school system.[52] Originally, the AJA offered Smith 600 pounds per year to be at the disposal of the Jewish community.[53]

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49 The two most important directors of the AJA in Baghdad were Adolph Brotman from 1926–1934 and Emile Mamorstein from 1937 until sometime in the 1940s. Brotman would go on to become secretary of the AJA and later general secretary of the Jewish Board of Deputies. MS137 AJ37/4/2/2; MS137 AJ31/3/2/1 1944–1949 2.

50 MS 137 AJ37/4/5.

51 E.C. Hodgkin "Lionel Smith on Education in Iraq", 253–260.

52 MS137 AJ37/4/2/2—March 24, 1926.

53 Ibid.—October 26, 1925.

Smith declined the money, preferring to advise on an unofficial level as he did not want his work being brought to the attention of the government.[54] Although Smith wrote of troubles in Jewish education, such as teachers resisting attending additional training, his correspondence with the AJA and the lay council presents him as having a positive role in improving the quality of teaching and updating the curriculum.[55] This type of assistance—in which a British colonial official unofficially worked for the Jewish community—would have been impossible without the connections the AJA was able (and willing) to provide.

The reports commissioned by the AJA and written by Smith, other foreign teachers and members of the lay council, were consistent in their critiques of the Jewish education in Baghdad. These letters state that although the Jewish schools in Baghdad represented the highest level of education available in the country they were still lacking in several areas. Reports in the 1920s criticized the AIU's language centric approach to education, stating that four languages left insufficient time to the study of math and science. The most important of these reports attributed to the Baghdad Schools Inspection Committee was likely written by Smith himself. The report suggested that Arabic become the dominant language of instruction with English as the primary second language, essentially confirming the decades long requests of the lay council and offering practical help in achieving this objective. For the schools run by the lay council the report addresses two other major issues: infrastructure (having adequate buildings) and qualified teachers. To address these two issues the AJA was ready to help the lay council financially support and secure better building and, in regard to teaching, the report proposed to work with the teachers college to develop a special training program for the Jewish school teachers.[56] In summary, the report outlined the direction the Jewish schools had begun to take in 1921 and provided a realistic roadmap of partnership between the AJA and the lay council which would ultimately be undertaken in the period between 1925–1935. This report is a powerful example of the synergy between the lay council and the AJA. It is also an example of how two national Jewish organizations, the AJA and the lay council could collaborate under the banner of transnational Jewish solidarity.

The report also addressed the role of the AIU and, although critical of their privileging the study of French over Arabic, the report is diplomatic and pragmatic in regard to the AIU and its place in Iraq. It states that "there was no competition

54 Ibid.—December 14, 1925.

55 Ibid.—April 26, 1926; AJ37/14/2/1—School committee correspondence 1921–1926.

56 MS137 AJ37/4/5.

between the A.J.A. and the Alliance, but that we both worked together, and in Baghdad there was plenty of room for both bodies."[57] Later in the report, in reference to reforms for the Jewish school in Basra, we see a more explicit hint that although this change in orientation from the AIU to the AJA should be smooth, there is some underlying tension: "I hope and believe that anything we may do there will be with the cordial concurrence of the Alliance and that we shall work together …"[58] This report is indicative of the changing tides in Baghdad, not only in regard to language instruction but also of the rising dominance of AJA as the main interlocutor with the lay council. In private, this formal change in the school administration must have caused some tension between the AJA and the AIU, as Brotman was sent to Paris in February of 1926 to meet privately with Jacques Bigart (the secretary general of the AIU) in attempt to smooth things over after the report was published and the lay council made their education plan official.[59]

Lest one think that the AJA was acting unilaterally, the plans outlined in these reports by the AJA were a response to a proposal made by the lay council in 1925 that AJA find a British Jew to act as director of schools. The lay council outlined their own proposal for the position, which included two days per week teaching English in schools in addition to administrative responsibilities. It also included a proposal that the new director of schools (under the direction of Lionel Smith) was to devote time to the organization and improvement of the curriculum in all the schools with the exception of Laura Kadoorie and Albert Sassoon (the two AIU schools). He should be recognized as the executive officer of the community's schools' inspection committee and his duty would be to report to the lay council (after consulting with Lionel Smith) what improvements it would be desirable to effect. The new director would be both an employee of the lay council and the AJA representative in Baghdad. The lay council suggested that the AJA pay two thirds of his salary and the contract for the director would be with the AJA. Finally, careful not to cause tensions with the AIU, the proposal notes that the new position should not affect David Sasson's position as head of the AIU in Baghdad nor the two main AIU schools (Albert Sassoon and Laura Kadoorie).[60] This proposal from the lay council and the official plan laid out by the AJA are indicative of the types of negotiations and policy decisions made by the lay council in collaboration with the AJA. The proposal of the lay council demonstrates their desire to further

57 Ibid, 3.
58 Ibid., 4.
59 MS137 AJ37/14/2/1—1921–1926.
60 Ibid—September 4, 1925.

consolidate and professionalize Jewish education in Baghdad and their recognition of the need for foreign assistance in all areas to achieve their objectives.

The high value placed on English education by the communal leadership is demonstrated by the founding of the Shamash school in 1928, the first school to use a majority English curriculum. This school would usurp the place of AIU's Albert Sassoon boy's school as the most prestigious Jewish school in the city. The Shamash school was heavily supported by the AJA both through their supplying of teachers and administrators and by providing annual subsidies. Ironically, the person who set up the endowment for the school, Benjamin Shamash, was a Baghdadi Jew residing in Nice, France, and a graduate of the AIU school in Baghdad.[61] His desire to establish an English language Jewish school in Baghdad, and the support and thanks he received from the lay council is thus a testament to this preference of English over French.

The position of the AJA, the Eastern Baghdadis, and Jewish community of Baghdad in regard to financial assistance and education is best summarized in a letter sent by the president of the AJA, Claude Montefiore, to Sir Elly Kadoorie on May 17, 1932. The letter is a response to Kadoorie questioning the level of engagement of the AJA and the level of English being taught in Baghdad for which Kadoorie was deeply invested. Montefiore in his response states that:

> For boys [...] good knowledge of English is essential. The AJA in realization of this helps as far as its means allow, the Shamash school, which is designed to give Baghdad boys a secondary education in English. The present policy of the AJA in this regard is apparently appreciated by Baghdadis in England and elsewhere, for they have entrusted more than 3,000 pounds within the last year or two, earmarked for the Shamash school.[62]

Although most of the AJA staff was slowly downsized as individuals were recalled in the late 1930s, firstly due to the growing political instability in Iraq, and later due to World War II, the AJA continued to work with the lay council in Baghdad up until 1951.[63] In 1936 they lobbied the British Foreign Office to intercede with the Iraqi government in lifting a ban on certain Jewish periodicals coming into the country.[64] Even after

61 MS137 AJ 37/3/2/2.

62 MS137 AJ37/4/2/2—May 17, 1932.

63 MS137 AJ37 6/1/4—Foreign affairs committee progress report April 21, 1950.

64 Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah, "Censorship and the Jews of Baghdad: Reading between the lines in the case of E. Levy". *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 7:3 (2016), 283–300.

WWII, the AJA remained active, to the best of its ability. They continued to help direct funds to the Jewish schools, whenever possible trying to arrange for teachers. Finally, in the period between 1947–1951, with the help of the British government they closely monitored the deteriorating position of the Jewish community in Iraq and worked with the JDC to, ultimately, get the Jewish community out of Iraq.[65]

1.3. *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*

Of the three most important foreign Jewish organizations active in Baghdad the last to be established was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Formed in November of 1914, the JDC came into being as the result of a merger of the American Central Relief Committee for the Relief of Jews, the American Jewish Relief Committee and a few other small aid organizations. The JDC, based in New York, had an initial objective to "provide aid to starving Jews in Palestine and Europe".[66] Unlike the AIU and the AJA, the JDC in its first decades worked on a global scale mainly to distribute funds to impoverished Jews in crisis situations, but it did not directly work to develop Jewish communal infrastructure until the late 1920s.[67] This point is highlighted by the founding in 1915 of a transmission department to deliver personal remittances to those areas in Europe and Palestine where established transmission agencies were unable to function under war conditions. The JDC also allowed American Jews to deposit small amounts of money—typically $5 or $10, but up to $100—for the JDC to remit to relatives overseas. As the JDC was an aggregate of several organizations with different religious and philosophical affiliations and a relatively narrow initial focus, unlike the AIU and AJA, at its outset the JDC was less ideologically grounded in the values of communal development or Jewish emancipation. Instead, the JDC was formed to address the pragmatic need to consolidate American Jewish aid organizations. Thus, of the three organizations the JDC was the least ideological, focusing less on the issues of socio-economic mobility beyond basic subsistence needs and crisis management in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the JDC would over time change its mission to include initiatives similar to the establishment of schools and clinics built by the AIU and AJA, this occurred after the exodus of Jews from Iraq.

As the JDC's focus in its early years was providing monetary assistance to those in dire situations due to war or acting as a private bank to help individuals remit money

65 MS137 AJ37 6/1/3; MS137 AJ37 6/1/3 f.2.

66 JDC Website consulted on February 18, 2015 http://www.jdc.org/about-jdc/history.html.

67 Yehuda Bauer. *My Brother's Keeper*, 19–56.

to family members abroad, it is surprising that the JDC became involved in Iraq—or Mesopotamia as it is referred to in the pre-1920 correspondence of the JDC archive—at all. Although much hardship was felt there, Iraq was believed to have suffered less damage than Europe during World War I and there are no records from this time of Iraqi Jewish families in the United States remitting money via the JDC to the Jewish community of Baghdad, nor any specific lobbying by US Jewry to aid Iraqi Jews. And yet, as early as 1917, the Baghdadi communal leadership was already in contact with the JDC via the United States diplomatic corps for the Ottoman Empire.

The development of a relationship between the JDC and the Jewish community in Baghdad—and for that matter any of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire—should be attributed to two American diplomats: Abram I. Elkus and Oscar S. Heizer, the former a member of the board of directors of the JDC.[68] The earliest surviving correspondence between the JDC and the lay committee is from the United States consul in Baghdad, Heizer, who wrote to Elkus, then the United States ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, on August 4, 1917. The letter makes clear that the Jewish community of Baghdad had no specific knowledge of the JDC, and that the JDC had had no communication with any members of the Jewish community of Baghdad. Unlike the founding of the relationships with other philanthropic organizations, the direct connection is not made by Ashkenazi Jews who have settled in Baghdad (as in the case of the AIU) or Eastern Baghdadis bringing in the organization (as in the case of the AJA). Instead, the lay council inquired of the United States consul, Heizer, as to whether there was a "a philanthropic Jewish society in America" which could help support the social actions of the lay council.[69]

In his letter to Elkus, Heizer mentions that the Jews are aware of the American schools in Constantinople, Beirut, and Asia Minor and that they are hoping something can be done "for the larger number of Jewish children in Baghdad." Heizer also notes that a Baghdadi Jewish notable, Menahem S. Daniel, is keen to impress the need for the expansion of girl's education, as it was still considered of secondary importance compared to boy's education. Given the relatively modest number of female students enrolled, this is yet another example of the lay leadership's attempt to present the communal leadership's education policy in a modern light, in addition to further demonstrating the needs of the community.

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68 Elkus was an active member of the JDC. It is impossible to confirm that Heizer was Jewish, my assertion is based on JDC records in which he is cited by the Jewish Relief Committee of Baghdad as "our co-religionist". JDC NY AR191418/4/20/1/154.2.

69 Ibid.

The lay council had two specific requests in this first letter. Firstly, they hoped that an American philanthropic Jewish organization would be willing to remit money to them to help support the schools which were constantly in need of funds to maintain and expand education. The letter also referenced that the schools are supported by the AIU with principal funding coming from Paris and London. As the Jewish community of Baghdad was an unknown quantity for the JDC, this point was surely added to provide credibility both to the schools and the communal leadership, demonstrating they already had the support of other foreign Jewish philanthropic agencies who the communal leadership assumes were known to the JDC. The lay council, however, stretches the truth in that the schools were never principally funded by the AIU or the AJA.[70] Secondly, they asked whether "there is not some philanthropic Jewish society in America which could take up this work and send out here teachers to reorganize" one of the community schools. One of the AIU teachers, Madame Bassam, specifically asked "if an American lady teacher can be sent out". The letter further stated that their objectives were to modernize the community via secular education, emphasizing the issue of education for girls, saying that if space were made available "there were no less than 2000 Jewish girls in Baghdad who desire to attend school," but don't for lack of space. These formulations and requests show that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Baghdadi Jewish communal leadership knew how to approach organizations and entice them with projects which would be considered as having value, the result being that in most cases these requests did not fall on deaf ears.

A little less than a year after this initial contact, a letter was sent to the JDC by Heizer confirming the receipt of $1000 which he distributed to various Jewish organizations in the city. This marks the formal beginning of a relationship between Jewish communal leaders in Baghdad and the JDC that would last until the dissolution of the community.[71] Heizer notes that he personally oversaw the distribution of the funds, and in particular comments that the orphans of the Aaron [sic] Saleh Orphanage sang a song after lunch each day expressing gratitude for the help for the JDC. The staff and communal leadership were fully aware of this aid and in their letters to the JDC state that the teachers in these schools constantly reminded the young orphans of the kindness and generosity of foreign Jewish communities to the community in Baghdad. The lay Council sent a letter dated June 23, 1919 thanking the JDC for providing funds to war orphans at the Aron-Saleh orphanage. Included with the letter

70 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464; IJA 1446; IJA 2062.

71 JDC NY AR1921/00016; JDC NY AR1921/00773.

of thanks was a speech given in Arabic (an English translation is provided), which was read by one of the teachers during the distribution of summer uniforms to the children.[72]

For the JDC, $1000 was a relatively small sum in relation to their almost 6 million dollars in expenditures for 1918, but it was significant to the Jewish community in Baghdad contributing to the feeding and clothing of orphans, aid for families of soldiers killed in battle, funds for the marriage of 38 orphaned girls, and feeding poor students throughout the Jewish schools.[73] Similar financial aid would continue through the 1920s, but there is no record that the JDC fulfilled the request for teachers, nor did it become engaged in the political issues facing the community in the same way that the AJA would become involved. This is not to say the JDC was not interested in Baghdad, but they generally deferred to the AJA as the dominant presence in Baghdad due to the AJA's geographic proximity, political, and social ties to Baghdad and the JDC's minimal staff in the Middle East.

This financial aid would decline in the 1930s primarily due to hardship caused by the Great Depression. This economic reality is mentioned in this letter from the JDC office in Berlin to the JDC office in New York city dated March 27, 1931:

> "We have considered the situation of the oriental Jews very often lately—not only those of Syria, the Irak [sic] and Mesopotamia, but also of those in Algeria, Morocco and Tunis as well … We have stopped our relief work in Europe because we lack sufficient funds. In the East help is usually wanted for schools and hospitals, for neither of which we can do anything …. The work of the Foundation is now being confined as far as possible to those countries in which we have already started function. In view of the present economic distress in all the countries concerned we must anticipate a hard struggle this year to preserve the institutions which are already in existence."[74]

As this letter demonstrates, the Jewish community in Baghdad continued to request funds from all three of these aid organizations but, as these organizations were affected by the Great Depression, they were forced to make choices in their philanthropic focus, Iraq not being one of the areas of emphasis. Additionally, Iraq had

72 JDC NY AR1921/00016; JDC NY AR1921/00785.

73 In 1918 the total income for the JDC was 5,813,751 USD and the total in expenditures was 5,894,687. Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper*, 305–306.

74 JDC NY AR2132/00106.

flourished economically during the British Mandate and the Jewish community, because of their multilingualism and trade networks, had benefited more than perhaps any other religious community. Therefore, it is fair to assume that they were no longer considered among the neediest cases. The majority of assistance by the JDC throughout the twentieth century was either monetary assistance or, later, emergency relief and aid but never structural development. This may be because the JDC saw themselves as a partner to the more established AIU and the AJA. The JDC was also keen to point out the growing interconnectivity of various communities throughout the Levant, stating that "it is impossible to select only one town or section in the Orient, without simultaneously working in Beirut, Baghdad and other cities".[75] This further demonstrate the actions of transnational Jewish networks, disconnected from political Zionism, during the inter-war years, but strongly linked to Jewish solidarity which focused on supporting and defending established communities.

The financial reality of the JDC is illustrated by the summary of income/expenditures in comparing the period prior to the Great Depression, roughly 1919 to 1929, with the period from 1929 to 1939. Although neither the expenditures nor the income of the JDC was static during this first period, the JDC gave on average around 10 million dollars per year during the 1920s. Post-1929 these amounts were closer to one million dollars on average with contributions only beginning to increase in 1937. This increase may have been a result of an improved economy but was more likely a reaction to the increasingly desperate situation of Jews in Europe as there is relatively little direct contact between the JDC and the Iraqi Jewish leadership, compared to preceding and later periods between Hitler's ascension to power in 1933 and the *Farhud* in 1941.[76]

In fact, the situation for Jews in Europe was so dire that the JDC began calling on Baghdadis both inside and outside of Iraq to aid their beleaguered brethren in Europe. Although at first glance it appears that the Jews in Baghdad were able to do little to help their co-religionists in Europe, a 1938 letter between the JDC and the German Jewish aid committee mentioned that "the Baghdadi Jewish community [...] counts among it some very wealthy families, but there are thousands and thousands of almost starving Baghdadi Jews, and all the charity of the Baghdadi community is therefore directed to assist members of their own kind."[77] The letter was written

75 JDC NY AR2132/00110 April 10, 1931.

76 In 1918 the total income for the JDC was 5.813.751 USD and the total in expenditures was 5.894.687. Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper*, 305–306.

77 JDC NY AR1933/44 711 Council for German Jewry Bombay October 12, 1938.

in the context of the JDC's near bankruptcy and the need to aid Germans Jews seeking refuge in India in particular and is especially focused on the Baghdadi community.

It should be noted that the statement by the representative of the JDC was not entirely correct in regard to Baghdadi Jews trying to help German Jews. There were efforts by Baghdadis both in Iraq and India to assist German Jewry. The Jewish community of Baghdad arranged for a few German Jewish refugee doctors to settle in Baghdad on the pretext of staffing needs for the Meir Elias Hospital, Reema Kadoorie Eye Clinic and Dar al-Shifa Hospital.[78] Many other German Jews were welcomed by the Baghdadis in India.[79] The Baghdadi community in Shanghai decreased it remittances to Baghdad from 1938 until the end of the war because of the large assistance they were providing to Ashkenazi Jewish refugees arriving in Shanghai.[80] Finally, the letter also does not take into account the growing political instability in Iraq which made illegal remitting funds to American or European Jewish organizations with ties to the Zionists in Palestine. The Baghdadis, in both Iraq and in the British colonies, were politically too weak to arrange for mass visas for European Jews fleeing the Nazis. They did their utmost, however, to aid those who managed to escape and found themselves in their communities. Therefore, though the letter was incorrect in stating that Baghdadis were only interested in helping "their own kind", it did however provide another example of the two main reasons for the reduction in aid to Baghdad from all of the Jewish philanthropic organizations: the political troubles in Europe and the faltering global economy. The reaction of the Baghdadi Jews to the plight of German and Eastern European Jewry was also an example of how they were active agents in transnational Jewish philanthropy, not just recipients.

In the 1940s the JDC would assume increased relevance as the political position of the Jews in Baghdad declined and the externally perceived needs were not focused on education or health care, but security and, finally, immigration. In 1941, in the wake of the *Farhud*, the JDC was one of the few Jewish organizations in position to offer aid. Working through the AJA, the JDC offered the Jewish community of Iraq approximately $60,000 in aid. They also were ready to send their field worker in Jerusalem, Harry Viteles, to Baghdad to help the Jewish community rehabilitate

78 JT, May, 1941, 9.

79 Joan Roland, *Jews in British India*, 220–225.

80 JDC NY AR1933/44 711 May 29, 1936. For a history of the Shanghai Ghetto and the role the Baghdadis played see, Irene Eber, *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe: Survival, Co-existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

itself.[81] The offer was declined under the pretense that the community "with the help of its neighbors" would be able to support itself with local resources.[82] This marked a major break with past offers of aid which had been generally gratefully received. Upon closer inspection, it is likely that given the rising radicalization of the Iraqi political scene—as demonstrated by the *Farhud*, and the related political coups in the government—the Jewish communal leadership felt a strong need to distance themselves from any foreign Jewish organization even remotely linked to Jews in Palestine or the Zionist movement, making the acceptance of any foreign Jewish aid impossible. The one exception to this was the aid from Baghdadi Jews in India and the East Asia which was accepted on the grounds that it was based on family connections, thus strengthening the argument that the Baghdadis mutually imagined themselves as one community.[83]

In the years immediately following the *Farhud*, life for the Jews in Baghdad temporarily improved due to greater political stability and a strengthened economy, making the Jews of Baghdad far better off than their brethren suffering in war torn Europe and Asia. Although the AIU schools continued to function in MENA, the staff of the central offices of the AIU in Paris had dispersed by June, 1940.[84] By the end of 1941, neither the JDC nor the AJA, given the immediate needs for Jewish refugees in Europe, were in a financial position to remit regular funds to Baghdad for educational purposes. The AIU went as far as to ask the AJA to manage their affairs in Palestine and Iraq, which the AJA declined due to lack of resources.[85] Although this message most likely did not make it to Baghdad, as the teachers of the AIU schools sent reports in 1941, 1942, and 1943 on the state of English instruction.[86] Even as the schools and hospitals continued to function with remaining teachers and funds from local endowments, the lay council continued to press for teachers and money (although the majority of these requests fell on deaf ears due to lack of resources).[87] None of the organizations had the financial means to support Baghdad at the same level as they had in the decades before the war. Additionally, travel between the continents was almost impossible so no new teachers could be sent. This does not mean, however, that the organizations

81 JDC NY AR1933/44 714 February 12, 1942.

82 JDC NY AR1933/44 714; Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 133–134.

83 Ibid.

84 Catherine Nicault, "Dans le tourmente de la Seconde Geurre mondiale (1939–1944)" in *Histoire de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 a nos jours*, 295–330.

85 MS137 AJ37/4/5—Ledger of School involvement November 5, 1940.

86 MS137 AJ37/3/3/8.

87 Ibid; AJ31/3/2/1 1944–1949.

ignored the disintegrating situation of the Jews in Baghdad. The AJA and the JDC kept themselves apprised of the situation in Iraq, receiving regular reports via the local consuls.[88]

By 1948 the situation of the Jews in Iraq had become dire, especially after Iraq sent armies to fight against the establishment of the state of Israel and military rule was established in Iraq. Jews were no longer able to leave the country without their families posting bond, enrollment in higher education was no longer possible, Jews employed in the civil service were dismissed, and individuals could be accused of Zionist activities for letters which had been sent or received from family members in Palestine from as far back as the 1920s (when Zionism was not illegal).[89] The combination of these conditions made it clear to the Jewish philanthropic organizations that the future of Jewry in Iraq was in question, perhaps even before the community itself realized emigration was imminent.

There was, however, a major difference between this new form of aid and the previous decades of assistance. For the first time philanthropic aid to Baghdad was aimed at dismantling the community and transporting it to Israel, whereas the earlier aid had been intended to build the communal infrastructure and assure the place of Jews within the Iraqi nation. Where previous assistance had represented a partnership between foreign agencies and communal elites, the last act of foreign Jewish work in Iraq was orchestrated by the JDC in concert with the Iraqi government and the Israeli government, taking the established Jewish communal leadership out of the decision-making process.[90] Notes from both JDC and AJA board meetings from this period in reference to Iraq no longer mention discussions with the lay council, but instead speak of intelligence reports from their respective countries on the state of the Jewish community.[91]

This exodus was quite complicated and not as organized as Zionist historiography presents, when referring to the immigration as Operation Ezra and Nehemiah.[92] In late 1949, when thousands of Jews wanted to leave Iraq, their motivations, as Esther Meir-Glitzenstein notes, included, "some (who) were Zionists who wanted to move to Israel for ideological reasons; others had simply despaired of Jewish integration

88 JDC NY AR45/54–516; JDC NY AR45/54–707; FO 371/75182; FO 371/45334; FO 371/75185.

89 Bashkin, *New Babylonian*, 187.

90 The Iraqi Jews were represented by Iraqi born Israelis trained in the Zionist underground. Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 239–241.

91 MS137 AJ37 6/1/3 f.2 1949–1950.

92 Daphne Tsimhoni, "Operation Ezra and Nehemia (Ali Baba)," EJIW.

in Iraqi society."[93] Thus, when military rule was lifted and the border was opened, thousands crossed into Iran. Neither the Iraqis or the Israelis were prepared for this, and the mass immigration caused political and economic turmoil in Iraq.[94] As a result, on March 4, 1950 the Iraqi Senate passed Law No. 1 of 1950 which allowed Jews to renounce their citizenship in exchange for the right to emigrate.[95] The JDC played an important role in this process, financing the emigration, the transit camp in Iran, and the airlifts to Israel in 1951–1952 and also acting as an intermediary, at times, between Israel and Iraq.[96] The airlift was estimated to cost the JDC 2.3 million dollars.[97]

In conclusion, the JDC's role in Iraq was markedly different from those of the AIU or the AJA. Unlike the AIU and the AJA, the JDC's position in Iraq was not linked to nationalistic concerns or imperialist ambitions as during the interwar period United States foreign policy was relatively isolationist. Until the 1940s, the JDC's involvement in Iraq was occasional, generally supporting orphanages or providing scholarships to underprivileged students. It had, however, relatively little direct contact with the Jewish community, working almost exclusively via the AJA or the United States consul in Baghdad. It was not until the situation for the Baghdadi Jews became dire that the JDC stepped in to coordinate their emigration from Iraq. This change in philanthropic leadership, notably, parallels the changes within the world order. The United States was ascending in global leadership as Great Britain was largely concerned with decolonization. In the ensuing decades, the JDC would take on many initiatives in other countries similar to those which the AJA and the AIU had undertaken in Iraq prior to World War I. Over time, the JDC's philanthropic philosophy evolved to encompass community building in Jewish communities and humanitarian support for non-Jewish communities in crisis. Even today, the JDC supports the institutions of the dwindling Jewish community in Morocco and has a budget which is most likely several times larger than that of the AIU and the AJA combined.[98]

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93 Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 240.

94 For a full discussion of the process of mass emigration see Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 239–254.

95 FO 371/82479 Dispatch No. 55 (1571/8/50). A copy of this ordinance appears in Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 171.

96 JDC NY AR45/54–517—March 28, 1950; Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in Iraq*, 231.

97 JDC NY AR45/54–517—June 1950.

98 The JDC's budget in 2015 was almost 340 million dollars. Exact numbers for the AJA or the AIU in 2015 were impossible to find but given the scope of their activities today it is unlikely that the budgets come close to that of the JDC. JDC Annual Budget, 2015 https://www.jdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AR21061.pdf, 24.

Thus, the difference in role between the JDC in Iraq in comparison to the AJA and the AIU is also connected to the decline of France and England as post-war imperialist powers.

2. Communal Budgets: A Mosaic of Actors

The three main Jewish philanthropic organizations present in Baghdad were not individual islands of aid but different nodal points in a large network of Jewish solidarity that became more complex and more tangled as the decades progressed. This interconnectivity is apparent when one considers how the finances of the Jewish community functioned. By analyzing the budgets of the schools, it becomes evident that the aid organizations and the lay council were not the only actors. The Iraqi State, foreign consuls and individuals were also contributors in this network of aid. Financial support being central to all charitable projects, all of the organizations made monetary contributions, as did the wealthy elites in Baghdad and the satellite communities.[99] Support by each of the individual actors, however, varied heavily on local economies, political considerations, and the specific needs of the Jewish community in Baghdad. Additionally, the budget of the lay council would change considerably over time with some charitable projects, such as the hospitals, becoming profitable. This surplus could be used to support the general budget of the community (specifically education, perennially the largest expenditure of the community).[100] These various sources of revenue were hinted at by D.S. Sassoon in 1910, although he did not mention the role of the aid organizations. Sassoon's reference to the Eastern Baghdadi communities implied that some of their charitable giving was funneled through the official philanthropic organizations:

> "Midrash Talmud Torah is also supported by the community, from the meat tax called "gabella", and it also received donations at weddings and brit mila [sic] ceremonies. As this source of income is inadequate, and therefore, the midrash Talmud Torah is dependent on contributions from the Baghdad Jews in India, Singapore, Penang, and Rangoon, who likewise have collections made

99 IJA 1446; IJA 2062; IJA 2740.
100 Ibid.

> especially on the occasions of Jahr-zeits [sic].[101] With this money, they provide mid-day meals and sometimes clothes."[102]

These varied sources of revenue, and specifically the aid organizations, were also spoken of in a letter sent by the head of the Alliance school in Basra, A. Zilberstein, in September, 1918 when, in the wake of the instability caused by World War I, many families fled Baghdad for Basra creating great financial strain for the school.[103] The letter was addressed to the president of the AJA, stating that as of yet they had not received financial support from the AJA. The letter went on to express the hope that the AJA will be amenable to supporting the school. The letter is relatively standard and many examples of similar letters exist. What is more interesting is that the letter was forwarded to Jacob Schiff of New York (who would forward the letter to the JDC), E.D. and David Sassoon in Bombay, Nathaniel Rothschild in London, and Ellis Kadoorie in Hong Kong, demonstrating the full arc of fundraising initiatives and importance of the Eastern Baghdadis' support when requesting funds from these organizations. Had Zilberstein's main objective in sending multiple copies been to pressure the AJA, he most likely would have only sent the letter to the Sassoons and Kadoories, as they held positions of importance in the AJA and were deeply invested both in Baghdad and Basra. However, he sent the letter to someone affiliated with the JDC so we can assume that Zilberstein hoped other recipients would send him funds and speak positively of the aid initiatives in Basra to the leadership of the JDC.

The clearest example of this diversity of funding (and fundraising) is shown through school budgets over the first half of the twentieth century. In 1900 Baghdad had two secular schools, one for boys and one for girls, and a religious yeshiva: the Midrash Talmud Torah.[104] The Midrash Talmud Torah was financed by the rabbinate and the lay council, a trend that would continue as foreign Jewish organizations gave very little beyond providing food and clothing to poor students attending religious Jewish schools in Baghdad. For the AIU schools, the AIU in Paris provided about forty-five percent of the funds for the boy's school and fifty percent of the funds for the girl's school. The second largest source of revenue was school fees and the third was

101 It is interesting to note that Sassoon uses the Yiddish term Jahr-zeit when referring to death anniversaries. This term would not have been used in Baghdad.

102 This quote is from page 20 of a manuscript draft of David Sassoon's *A History of Jews in Baghdad*. This paragraph is not included in the published volume. Sassoon Archives Box 35.

103 JDC NY AR1418/00003; JDC NY AR1418/03463.

104 *Bulletin de L'Alliance Israelite Universelle*, 1900, 136.

the AJA contribution that represented twenty-one percent of the budget for the boy's school and eleven percent for the girl's school. The rest of the budgets were covered by small donations from Jewish charities and a miniscule amount of government support. The contributions of the Eastern Baghdadis were less formalized, but just as important. The land and the buildings that housed the AIU schools were donated by wealthy Eastern Baghdadi Jews. The Sassoons donated the land for the Albert Sassoon boys' school in 1874 and the Kadoories donated the land for the Laura Kadoorie girls' schools. The Eastern Baghdadi communities (and wealthy local notables) also provided smaller forms of assistance that most likely did not appear in the reports ledgers, in line with what Sassoon alludes to in the above quote, such as small donations for specific projects like books for the libraries or meals for poor students.

Two decades later, in 1920, Baghdad had seven schools. The AJA was not listed as supporting any of the schools, and the AIU was only supporting Albert Sassoon, its expenditure representing less than ten percent of the school system's budget. The Laura Kadoorie School had become almost completely self-sufficient thanks to school fees (although private individuals provided scholarships to needy students), and the other new schools were being supported by the lay council and special *awaqf* set up for individual schools.[105] By 1930, the situation had changed yet again, with AIU contributing to the budgets of both the Albert Sassoon and Laura Kadoorie schools. The lay council provided subsidies to seven of the ten Jewish schools then open in Baghdad, and the AJA opened the Shamash school, for which they would provide twenty-five percent of the budget in its initial years. The rest of the money came from school fees, the lay council, and the endowment set up by Benjamin Shamash.[106] Unfortunately, I have not come across any school budgets from the 1940s. I suspect that the financial donors would have included very few foreign donors, due to both the financial strain of World War II, and the difficulty of wiring money internationally.[107]

The subsidy from the lay council came directly from the money raised by the Jewish Schools Relief Committee in Baghdad. This committee was active in raising money not only in Iraq but also in the Baghdadi satellite communities and in Britain via the AJA. Although the AJA is not listed as a specific donor (with the exception of its

105 Reports in English and Arabic consistently refer to Jewish charitable endowments as *waqf* and to land grants used for schools as *mahlul*, traditional Islamic legal terms for charitable structures. In the Iraqi republic, these charitable constructions were used by Jews in Iraq as they related to the Iraqi tax code for charitable trusts. Jewish schools reports 1930—CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464.

106 Ibid.

107 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004.

contribution to the Shamash school), their help in raising money for the lay council fund directly supported the schools. Finally, all of the schools benefited from private benefactors, either wealthy Jews in Baghdad or from abroad, as is mentioned in the notes for each school.[108] Local contributions were always a sensitive issue for the aid organizations who often felt that the local community was not generous enough in supporting their own institutions.[109] This report differs in that it asserts that, as the local contributions are at full capacity, the AJA, the AIU and the Iraqi government should be providing more financial support to the lay council for the Jewish schools.[110]

Although the objective remained to make the schools as financially independent as possible, with the majority of the budget being covered by school fees, this was never achieved in any school. Subsidies were highest for the schools with the poorest students: the Midrash Talmud Torah (one hundred percent of the costs were funded by the lay council by 1930) and Noam/Haron Saleh (less than ten percent of the budget was covered by fees). Even at the Laura Kadoorie School in 1930 only a little over half of the cost of running the school was covered by fees, and at Albert Sassoon and Shamash it was only twenty-five percent. Thus, as the schools continued to expand they accepted more children unable to pay fees and the issue of continuous fundraising remained crucial. This explains the renewed AIU subsidy in 1930 for the Laurie Kadoorie school, specifically earmarked to provide scholarships to poor girls, although the AIU was taking a back seat to the AJA in all other areas of Jewish life in Baghdad.

The budgets also list smaller donations from other actors such as the Iraqi state. Significant as this is, the amount remained pitifully small, accounting for between two to four percent of the yearly budget for the Jewish schools.[111] These contributions were relatively negligible in the greater financial picture, and it does not appear that the community undertook any special fundraising or lobbying to gain more financial support from the Iraqi state. In fact, the government schools in the Jewish quarter (which ostensibly were mostly educating Jewish children)

108 CAHJP Iraq File—6382 tables 1–3.

109 Paul Dumont, "Jews, Muslims, and Cholera" in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*. page 354–358. Archives AIU, Irak XIIE 112a, letter of S. Somekh date January 21st, 1889.

110 Report of the Jewish Schools on the Jewish Schools in Baghdad 1930 CAHJP Iraq File—6382; Paul Dumont, "Jews, Muslims, and Cholera: Intercommunal Relations in Baghdad at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed Avigdor Levy (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), 353–372.

111 In 1925 the Iraqi government gave 5.600 Rs. and in 1930 11.250 Rs. in subsidies to the Jewish schools, the overall budget of the Jewish schools was 294.127 Rs. in 1925 and 303.875 Rs. in 1930. Rs, refers to Indian Rupees, they were replaced by the dinar in 1932; CAHJP Iraq File—6382.

were actually financed in part by the Jewish community through the paying of rents on the buildings housing the schools, and by supplying these schools with Hebrew teachers.[112] Thus these schools, which represented a partnership between the community and the government, indirectly received funds from foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations and foreign Jewish donors via the schools committee. The communal/government construction became increasingly prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, many Jews thought that government schools such as Ras al-Qarya, Al-Firdos, and Rafidiyan were Jewish schools as these schools were run by the government with Jewish communal funding. It's ironic that although the Iraqi government was becoming increasingly more anti-British and paranoid about Zionist ideas infiltrating the Jewish community via the Jewish school networks, they themselves depended on these same foreign Jewish networks to supply funding and teachers for their public education system.

3. Conclusions: Philanthropic Diversity and Continuity

The relationship between the Baghdadi Jewish community and foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations in the nineteenth is indicative of the importance of imperial networks in forging relationships between European and MENA Jewry. In the twentieth century this relationship evolved, became more sophisticated and less top-down as communal infrastructure evolved. The secular Jewish lay elite in Baghdad began to participate in Jewish networks as Iraqi citizens working for the betterment of both their religious community and their nation. This differs from earlier patterns where Ottoman subjects would request protection for their religious community from foreign powers. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how the Jewish network of schools was used by the communal leadership to demonstrate the Jewish community's importance and integration in Iraqi society.

By comparing the working model of the AJA to that of the AIU it becomes apparent that the AJA was less intellectually wedded to the propagation of British culture than the AIU was to spreading French culture. Whereas the AIU was a staunch proponent of the teaching French as the dominant language in their schools, the AJA saw greater value in Arabic. The AJA also showed greater enthusiasm and flexibility in working with the local Iraqi curriculum than the AIU, thus making cooperation with the AJA

112 CAHJP Iraq File—6382, 7.

easier. Zvi Yehuda asserts that the AIU's hiring practices sought to acculturate the Iraqi Jews, without consulting communal leadership. This is in sharp contrast to the AJA who sought to hire individuals whose level of religious observance, for example, was commensurate with religious observance in Iraq.[113] With this difference in mind, in many ways the relationship among the AJA, the British government in Iraq and the Jewish community parallels the work of the AIU in North Africa during the French protectorates.[114]

Interestingly, although transnational Jewish solidarity brought disparate Jewish groups together, it also strengthened nationalist rhetoric and identity of each Jewish group by reaffirming each group's relationship to their respective nation. The AIU, the AJA, the JDC, and the lay council all functioned as organizations attached to specific political states. Each organization stressed its national allegiance and the desire for Iraqi Jews to be full and productive citizens of Iraqi society. For the organizations and for the Baghdadis these connections represented a way to help greater Iraqi society by providing an educated and skilled elite ready to participate in the newly constructed nation, and thus fit nicely into the nationalist Iraqi mood of the 1920s.

However, each of the organizations had projects in Palestine and from the mandate period onward, Baghdadis working for these organizations or representing the Jewish community were occasionally sent to Palestine for training, to attend meetings or to acquire supplies such as Hebrew language books.[115] It is only later, when the foreign aid organizations began to have a stronger presence in Palestine and increased their engagement with the "New Yishuv," that the relationship between Baghdad and these organizations became more sensitive. This point plays into a larger theme, namely that up until World War II Zionism remained one ideological project amongst many within the Jewish World, and thus Baghdad's apathy toward the project was unremarkable. Furthermore, prior to WWII the world Zionist organization did not see emigration to Palestine of MENA Jews as part of its agenda, its focus being on Jews from places like Poland and Galicia imbued with Zionist ideology and ready to work the land.[116] Baghdadi Jews by this period were largely middle class, working either as merchants or in white collar office jobs. In the Levant prior to World War II, Baghdadis

113 In 1926 the AJA hired Adolph Brotman an Orthodox Jew to teach English in Baghdad; MS137 AJ37/4/2/2—Communications March 3, 1926 to September 18, 1934.

114 Michael M. Laskier, "La Protection des Juifs en Afrique du Nord" in *Histoire de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 a nos jours*, 116–140.

115 E02/16-SEK-8C-004.

116 Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 40–51.

going to Palestine for a short stay had little political motivation, instead enjoying an occasion to visit family,[117] go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem or a seaside holiday.

The amount of financial aid given to communities in MENA and also in Eastern Europe by American and Western European Jewry, makes clear that Zionist ideology and the establishment of Jewish settlements in Palestine was minor within the full spectrum of philanthropic activities in the 1920s. After 1933, the global focus of transnational Jewish aid shifts from community building to getting Jews out of Germany and Austria, and later all of Europe. The Iraqi government did not comment on Iraqi Jews boycotting German goods or trying to arrange for European Jewish refugees to settle in Iraq or the satellite communities. The relationships between the Jewish community in Baghdad and foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations, however, only became problematic (in the eyes of the Iraqi state) in the wake of a more proactive political Zionism aimed at Iraqis. Although the battle against Zionism within the Iraqi public sphere had begun as early as the 1920s and only became tenser in the 1930s after events such as the Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936–1939).[118] Prior to this, the Iraqi State generally took a positive stance on the work of the AIU, AJA and JDC in Iraq.

It has been argued that the Jewish community of Baghdad began to distance itself from foreign Jewish entities beginning in the 1930s.[119] Based on the sources I have presented in this chapter, I argue that there is no solid case for this. This purported cooling of relationships is often attributed to differences of opinion over Zionism and a desire for more communal independence vis-à-vis foreign Jewish organizations, primarily based on anti-British Imperialist stance taken by some members of the Jewish community.[120] The transfer of the administration of schools to the lay council, however, did not begin in the 1930s, having grown out of a desire for greater control of curriculum as early as 1908. The decision was ideological, in that the Jewish leadership felt it important to have a greater emphasis on local languages (such as Turkish and later Arabic) as opposed to French, not to mention adding English. Ideologically these changes had nothing to do with issues of Jewish nationalism as Hebrew was consistently taught as a liturgical language and there was little discussion regarding the importance or level of Hebrew instruction. Thus, the decisions surrounding language instruction were most likely being made for pragmatic reasons.[121]

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117 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 125.

118 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 103.

119 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 39–54.

120 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 116–120.

121 See the following chapter for additional information on language instruction.

The sharper changes we see in the 1930s, such as the decrease in foreign funds and foreign expertise, can be attributed to growing concern for German Jewry (and later European Jewry as whole) on behalf of the foreign Jewish aid organizations, forcing them to shift their resources towards the situation in Europe. This argument of global political and economic developments affecting the transnational Jewish ties of the Baghdad community is even more resonant in the early 1940s. By 1941 the AIU central offices had been completely shut down due to the Nazi invasion of Paris, and the AJA and JDC were desperately doing everything in their power to save European Jewry. And yet, with that in mind, after the *Farhud*, the JDC immediately offered help to the Baghdadi Jewish community, and the AJA continued to offer support where possible via the channels of the British foreign office. Although the flow of aid towards Iraq was diminished due to the dire needs of European Jewry, the Jewish community of Baghdad still maintained its ties with these organizations as they too tried to aid their co-religionists in Europe via the sending of money, a boycotting of German goods (beginning in the 1930s) and a mostly unsuccessful attempt to help European Jewish refugees settle in Iraq. In fact, the philanthropy of the wealthy Baghdadi Jews (both inside and outside Iraq) was so well known within Jewish philanthropic circles that one JDC official as early as 1925 mused that the Jews of Baghdad and Calcutta should also being doing their part to aid European Jewish War orphans.[122]

The Jewish communal leadership of Baghdad consistently sought cooperation with foreign Jewish organizations up until the 1950s, regardless of the general political climate in Iraq. Their usage of these networks suggests an acknowledgement of the importance of the role of transnational solidarity, an idea which had not existed before the nineteenth century. Over time, the communal leadership became more sophisticated and formal in their partnerships, writing five and ten years plans for education and investing massively in communal infrastructure.[123] The Jewish leadership of Baghdad positioned itself as equal to the Jewish elites of Europe and were linked by familial ties to the Baghdadis of East Asia. It is in this capacity that the Baghdadi elites embodied both the sentiment and the moral obligation "to promote social, moral, and intellectual progress among Jews," an idea embraced by the AIU and the AJA.[124] These objectives, as perceived by both foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations and the Baghdadi Jewish elites, were grounded in the nineteenth

122 JDC NY AR2132/03128.

123 MS 137 AJ37/4/5; CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464.

124 *A philanthropic tradition: The Kadoorie Family*, 13.

century European ideals of Jewish Internationalism but functioned up until the late 1940s as modern transnational networks with an optimism about the future of Jewish life in the new Iraqi nation.