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

Goldstein, S.R.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jewish Education in Iraq

In the previous chapters I discussed changes that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century regarding communal reorganization, migration and new forms of transnational Jewish solidarity. Arguing that Jews in Baghdad inexorably became intellectually, political, and economically entwined with other Jewish communities around the globe. This chapter and the chapter preceding it expand on the discussion as to how non-elite Baghdadi Jews could have engaged on different levels with Jewish transnational networks, particularly in the period between 1920–1951.

For example, a 1921 article in *Paix et Droits* mentioned with pride that the students of the AIU schools were sufficiently prepared in French and English to take up employment in the flourishing Jewish communities of East Asia, India, Marseilles and Manchester without any linguistic or cultural barrier. The article continued by discussing the emigration plans of these students and the exciting positions they would take up abroad, made possible by their AIU education.[1] These students would primarily take up positions as clerks in banks and commercial firms indicative of their position within the Baghdadi middle class.

Prior to the 1920s it was mainly the intellectual elites and leadership that saw themselves as part of the larger Jewish world. For the majority of the population, the extended Jewish world was restricted to the Baghdadi satellite communities. In the period between 1920–1951, however, this changed, primarily due to secular Jewish education in Baghdad having put Jews in Baghdad from all social strata in contact with the global Jewish public sphere.

In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of foreign Jewish groups in developing the secular education infrastructure. This chapter looks internally at role of communal schools for the Jewish population in Baghdad. I argue that the Jewish schools demonstrate how the community could simultaneously engage with both Iraqi nationalism and the Jewish public sphere, strengthening the Jewish community's ties to the emergent Iraqi nation while also fostering ties to transnational Jewish networks through their engagement with foreign philanthropic Jewish organiza-

1 "Ecoles: Mesopotamie—Baghdad," *Paix et Droits*, December 1, 1921, 16.

tions. In this chapter I will discuss how the schools became a public platform for the community to show its integration into the new state and its desire to participate in its construction while leveraging and strengthening its ties with Jewish communities outside Iraq. By looking at the evolution of the Jewish schools in Baghdad during the formative years of the Iraqi state, this chapters aims to demonstrate how the community positioned itself between the state and other Jewish communities, cultivating both its national and transnational allegiances.

These national and transnational allegiances were not mutually exclusive. Reflected in the development of the Jewish schools they represented a synergy of empowerment for the Jewish community of Baghdad. From the perspective of the Iraqi state, the Jewish community's success in leveraging its international connections to build an impressive modern school system before this was possible for the entire nation was seen as having great benefit for the nation as a whole. For the Jewish philanthropic organizations, the high level of integration of the Iraqi Jews and their important place within the Iraqi civil service was perceived as a testament to the success of transnational Jewish philanthropy. As such, Jewish transnational networks could be a source of pride for the Jewish community, demonstrating to the Iraqi state its willingness to participate in the Iraqi public sphere, while at the same time placing Baghdad Jewry within the Jewish public sphere via their involvement with transnational Jewish organizations.

1. The Development of a Jewish School Network

The first modern schools in Baghdad teaching secular subjects were primarily established under the authority of religious communities. This may seem ironic when measured against twenty-first century ideas of modernity and the role of modern education but, as previously discussed, secular society in Baghdad was only emerging in the nineteenth century.[2] Thus it is not surprising that the first schools teaching secular subjects were projects primarily organized by religious communities, the one exception being the military academy built by Midhat Pasha in 1870. It was only after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 that a few state schools were developed. By the Mandate period the oldest of the Jewish schools were well established institutions

2 Ceylan, *Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 204–213; Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Searching for Common Ground: Jews and Christians in the Modern Middle East," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere*, 3–38.

in the city, well known in all of the religious communities. These schools fostered an attachment to the Iraqi state, and facilitated the development of ties with the larger (non-Jewish) society while strengthening a communal identity and presenting the idea of a transnational Jewish consciousness. In one space, namely the schools, students developed a simultaneous awareness of both the communal, the public, and the transnational.

Although the type of education offered by these schools was diverse in nature with different actors playing central roles in different schools (such as the AIU, AJA, lay council, the Rabbinate, Iraqi State, etc.) I consider them as a single unit both because of their dependence on the lay council for financial administration and the ideological significance of their falling within the jurisdiction of the lay council. Officially, there was no singular unified Jewish school system but rather a grouping of schools that had varying attachments to either the rabbinate or the lay council, the two main official organs of the Jewish community which controlled a community budget derived from the *gabelle*, *mahlul* (real-estate endowment) and *awaqf* (monetary endowments). These councils were also responsible for liaising with the Iraqi government on the Jewish community's behalf. From the 1920s onward, all of these schools were under the official jurisdiction of a school committee which reported directly to the lay council.[3] The school committee made decisions primarily related to the distribution of funds, but it also controlled some key decisions on curriculum and the hiring of faculty—most notably in appointing Lionel Smith to act as advisor. The school committee also appointed sub-committees which worked to develop libraries, laboratories, sports, summer camps, and other social activities.[4]

Communal reports from 1930 and 1935 describe five types of Jewish schools in Baghdad:[5]

1. Religious schools, such as the Midrash Talmud Torah established in 1932, which was a religious school with elementary studies in Arabic. After 1840 the Yeshiva of Bagdad[6] offered religious education and, beginning in the early twentieth century,

3 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East*, 122–123.

4 Yosef Meir "Traditional and Modern Education", in *Annals of Iraqi Jewry*, 223.

5 These reports were prepared for the AJA by the lay council, to account for financial contributions of funds, and help make the case for allocating additional funds to the Baghdad schools. CAHJP Iraq File—6382; MS 137 AJ/37/4/5.

6 Orit Bashkin, "'Religious Hatred Shall Disappear from the Land' Iraqi Jews as Ottoman Subjects, 1864–1913," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), 308.

limited secular education. The Midrash Menashe Saleh school was founded in 1935 and offered both religious and secular subjects on a par with the Iraqi national curriculum.[7]

2. The AIU girls' and boys' schools, based on a French curriculum.
3. The community schools that followed a modified government syllabus teaching biblical Hebrew and Jewish history instead of Islamic studies, and added extra hours to the school week for English lessons (in comparison to the government schools).
4. Communal schools that offered vocational training to poor and orphaned students. These school were often part of larger AIU or traditional communal schools.
5. The Shamash school, a community school based on the English curriculum and supported by the AJA.
6. The State schools built by the Iraqi government in the Jewish quarter at the end of the 1920s. The primary audience for these schools were the Jewish residents of the neighborhood.[8] The curriculum at all these schools was state mandated with the lay council having no jurisdiction over the teaching of core subjects. The lay council, however, paid the rents on the buildings and supplied teachers for classes in biblical Hebrew for the state schools. Additionally, the majority of the teachers in these schools were Jewish graduates of the communal schools.[9]

The argument that the education available in the Jewish school system both enabled intercommunal understanding and prepared Jews to participate in Iraqi society has been discussed in great detail by authors such as Orit Bashkin, Abbas Shiblak, Aline Schlaepfer and Nissim Rejwan.[10] Learning to read and write classical/standard Arabic was key to this participation. With access to Arabic literature and culture, Jewish students were able to engage with the emergent society as a whole, a phenomenon that Bashkin defines as practicing Arab Jewishness.[11] These schools as institutions, however, were opportunities for the community to demonstrate its commitment to the nation and thereby become public spaces themselves. Furthermore, these schools were the central conduit for the develop of a transnational Jewish consciousness

7 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East*, 115.

8 CAHJP Iraq File—6382, 6.

9 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*.

10 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; idem, *The Other Iraq*; Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*; and Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*; Schlaepfer, *Les Intellectuels juifs de Bagdad*.

11 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*.

among the few members of the middle and lower classes who did not have close family contact with Baghdadis abroad. Therefore, these schools epitomized the idea that Jewish communities in this period could organize themselves locally while also cultivating their transnational ties.

In many respects, the education Jews received in these schools acted as the bridge to Jewish participation in Iraqi society, by providing a multilingual education that included Arabic they allowed middle class Jews to participate in pluralist Iraqi society during the Hashemite period. Some striking examples are found in autobiographies from the Mandate period in which we begin to find references to beloved children's books in Arabic and subscriptions to Arabic literary magazines.[12] This is also the period during which the first Arabic language periodicals appeared in Iraq, most notably *al-Ḥāṣid* and *al-Misbāḥ*, whose Jewish editors were graduates of the AIU schools.[13] By receiving an education in formal Arabic, Jewish youth were exposed to *fushā* (literary Arabic). The students were also exposed to the local Muslim-Baghdadi dialect by their non-Jewish teachers[14] and other dialects of Arabic from Jewish teachers from other areas of the Arab World,[15] each of which was distinct from the Judeo-Baghdadi spoken in Jewish homes, and this exposure prepared them for a life beyond the community. It allowed Jews who later joined the Iraqi civil service or foreign companies to converse in a style similar to that of their non-Jewish colleagues.[16] Finally, neither the faculty nor the student body of these schools was homogenous in composition, with the exception of the Midrash Talmud Torah. Records indicate that non-Jewish children, particularly those from the Chaldean community, were welcome among the student body. This tapered off in the 1930s as more Christian schools were opened, as the Iraqi government began to open more state schools, and as the general level of public education improved.[17] Finally, non-Jewish teachers were regularly employed in the Jewish schools, particularly for the study of Arabic. The interactions with non-Jewish students and faculty gave the Jewish students regular meaningful contact with individuals outside their community.

12 Ibid, 23, 244.

13 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East: 1860–1972*, 125.

14 See thesis introduction for a greater discussion on the linguistic differences between Judeo-Baghdadi and Muslim-Baghdadi. Also see Blanc, *Communal Dialects in Baghdad*.

15 Shamash, *Memories of Eden*, 38–39.

16 Kattan, *Farewell Babylon*, 11–16. This is evidenced in an anecdote he tells of a Jewish friend who speaks in the Judeo-Baghdadi dialect among their non-Jewish friends.

17 MS 137 AJ37/4/5.

The schools were also tools for the community to show its loyalty to the monarch and the state, often by active participation in the pageantry of the state. At the invitation of the community, King Faisal visited the AIU Laura Kadoorie girls' school in 1924 with Ja'far al-'Askarī then prime minister of Iraq; they made a similar visit to the Rachel Shahmon community school a year later. Prince Ghazi, the minister of education at the time, attended the graduation ceremony of al-Wataniyya community school in 1925.[18] As Aline Schlaepfer discusses, the AIU school in Basra publicly mourned the death of King Ghazi in 1949 with teachers fashioning black armbands for the students and faculty to wear.[19] These examples demonstrate the ways in which the schools, as institutions, were used to further the idea of the Jewish community as an integrated sector of Iraqi society.

As Hannah Mueller-Sommerfeld mentions in her work on the role of the League of Nations during the Mandate in Iraq, Jewish communal leaders, although initially desiring British citizenship,[20] accepted the idea of being citizens in an Iraqi state, urged the community to be loyal citizens, and stressed integration as opposed to segregation. This is evidenced by the above-mentioned very public overtures within communal space, and yet, "Arabization" is only one side of the coin. The Jewish community also officially asked for the preservation of the "free opportunity for economic and educational development" as the main pillars of their community, which guaranteed the preservation of their history and communal life in Iraq. As a point of comparison these requests were relatively mild compared to refugee communities such as Assyrian and Armenian hopes for independence, but were certainly in line with the rights that other religious and ethnic communities hoped to gain in the new state such as the Chaldeans, and also essential for the community to continue its relationships with organizations such as the AIU, AJA, and JDC.[21] It was this balance between participation into the new Iraqi society and the preservation of their communal identity, that was key to the flourishing of the Jewish schools of Baghdad.

Jewish transnational networks were at the center of this new conception of both citizenship and preservation of a communal identity that went beyond the borders of Iraq. In this way, the schools worked to forge what can be considered a secular Jewish

18 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 39.

19 Aline Schlaepfer "The King is Dead Long Live the King" in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere*, 185–204.

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

21 Hannah Müller-Sommerfeld: "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932)" in *Modernity Minority and the Public Sphere*, 258–283.

identity, i.e., one not grounded in religious practice and belief or family bonds but based on a transnational Jewish solidarity with values similar to those expressed by the AIU and AJA in their roles as Jewish organization in France and the United Kingdom. Thus, the schools taught students about foreign Jewish communities, included foreign Jewish newspapers in their libraries and gave students the opportunity to study abroad both in Jewish and non-Jewish schools, often with the help of scholarships from foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations. By understanding the fluid role of the schools in forging both Iraqi and Jewish identities in their students we can begin to understand how the Jewish community as a whole constantly navigated between the emergent pluralist Iraqi civil society and participation within transnational Jewish networks.

2. Modern Jewish Schools

On the eve of the Mandate the Jewish community was the oldest and most organized provider of secular education for boys and girls in Baghdad. Although Jewish education in Baghdad had a long tradition, beginning with the fabled Abbasid-era yeshivot,[22] these schools had ceased to exist by the eighteenth century, in part due to the general decline of a city prone to plague and political instability up through the mid-nineteenth century. It was not until 1832 that a new religious school opened, the Midrash Talmud Torah (which educated 2,049 students divided into 27 classes); this was followed in 1840 by the Baghdad Yeshiva for students wishing to continue their education. These schools focused on religious instruction, teaching such as subjects as the Talmud, Zohar, and other religious works, but notably they also provided education in elementary Hebrew and Arabic.[23] Prior to attending the Midrash, young boys were sent to some thirty *ustādh-s*, one-room school houses often attached to synagogues where young boys received religious education by rote until they were old enough to help support their families or continue their education at the Yeshiva.[24] The curriculum and hierarchy in these types of establishments was similar to the Muslim and Christian educational options of the time: limited to boys whose parents could

22 Yaron Ayalon and Ariel I. Ahram, "Baghdad," EJIW.

23 Sawdayee, *The Baghdad Connection*, 25; Sassoon, *The History of the Jews in Baghdad*, 17.

24 The term *ustādh* (Arabic—master/teacher) is the Judeo-Baghdadi equivalent to Kuttāb in other parts of MENA and the Eastern European *heder*; Rachel Simon, "Kuttāb," EJIW.

afford the school fees, they were organized either by schoolmasters in private homes or by the religious leadership in larger institutions and endowed by a waqf set up by wealthy members of the community.[25] Other options for education included apprenticeships for those entering trade and private tutoring for the wealthy. Although girls were permitted to attend the *ustādh-s* (but not the Midrash Talmud Torah), few if any girls ever attended.[26] More likely, upper class girls received private tutoring, as the existence of correspondence by women from the nineteenth century demonstrates that some had the ability to read and write in both Hebrew and Latin scripts, although this was surely the exception.[27]

For the Jewish community this limited choice in education began to change when the AIU, at the request of members of the community who had heard about the recently opened Alliance boy's school in Tetouan, Morocco, opened its first school in Baghdad in 1864. By way of comparison, the first elementary school teaching secular subjects to Muslim boys in Baghdad was established in 1869 by Midhat Pasha.[28] By the time of the British Mandate the Jewish community had developed the most extensive network of schools, but the importance of modern education also had advocates in other religious communities in nineteenth century Baghdad (although access to these schools was limited to a privileged few). The AIU school—later named in honor of Albert Sassoon—was originally met with limited success; it closed shortly after it opened, then reopened in 1872. As protests from the religious authorities regarding the concept of secular education were relatively mild, it is possible that the rabbinate did not feel threatened by the AIU because of its small size and high school fees. The Midrash Talmud, by comparison, was less costly and better established. Any possible conflict between the AIU school and the rabbinate came to an end when Rabbi Abdullah Somekh sent his son to the AIU school, although he himself was head of the Midrash Beit Zilkha, a branch of the Midrash Talmud Torah.[29]

The most well-known later religious opponent of the AIU was Rabbi Shimon Agasi (1852–1914), a close associate of Rabbi Yosef Haim and a respected Torah sage in Baghdad. His objection was specific to the AIU and his perception of them as emissaries

25 The annual financial reports of the Jewish schools, commissioned by the AJA and written in English refer to the endowments of the schools as *waqf* opposed to *heqdesh*.

26 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle* East, 114.

27 Meir "Traditional and Modern Education", 215. The Sassoon archives boxes 31 and 35 have nineteenth-century correspondence from women in both Judeo-Arabic and French.

28 Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 181.

29 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 55. Schlaepfer "The King is Dead, Long Live the King," 185–204.

of European culture which he feared—perhaps rightfully so—would distance the community from the social norms of the Iraqi environment and traditional Iraqi Judaism. Agasi was not against secular education for either girls or boys and never pressed for the schools to be closed, but instead advocated for greater rabbinic presence in all Jewish schools. In fact, Agasi was such a supporter of practical education that in 1906 he founded his own school which dedicated half of the day to vocational training and half of the day to the study of Torah, thus offering another option for Jewish youth.[30] In this way Agasi is representative of much of the controversy in the Jewish community surrounding education. The question was not whether secular education was useful, but how best to develop secular education and define the ultimate objectives. These objectives included general cultivation, integration into Iraqi society, Westernization, and improve employment prospects. These questions were asked both in regard to girls' and boys' education, although the objectives were often perceived as quite different.

When an AIU girl's school opened in 1893, it was the first of its kind in Iraq. By 1920 Jewish schools enrolling both boys and girls had been established in Basra, Mosul, Hilla, 'Amara, and Kirkuk. Parallel to the expansion of the AIU schools, the Jewish communities in Iraq began to build their own modern schools beginning with what was initially a coed school, Noam (also referred to as Haron Saleh) in 1902;[31] they also slowly integrated more secular subjects into the curriculum of the religious schools.[32] The opening of these schools was in large part a response to the lack of satisfaction with the rigidity of the AIU curriculum and the perceived AIU superiority complex. Over time these new options diminished the role of the AIU as compared to many other Jewish communities in the Islamic world,[33] where often the Alliance schools were the only Jewish education option.

Although early enrollment figures at the AIU schools are available, it is difficult to place this information within a larger context as there is little reliable demographic information for the province of Baghdad from the Ottoman period. Despite these uncertainties, we can assume that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth

30 Shaul Regev, "Agasi, Shimon," EJIW.

31 This information comes from a 1924 letter from the office of the chief rabbi written in response to Judah Magnes's request for information on the Jewish community of Baghdad for the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. The letter describes the functioning of the Jewish community of Baghdad, and gives detailed information on its revenues and expenditures. CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, tables, p. 2.

32 The chief rabbi's office makes a note of this fact in its letter to Magnes.

33 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 186.

century secular education remained limited to a privileged few. In 1900 there were 296 boys and 166 girls enrolled in all of the AIU schools in "Mesopotamia," the term the AIU used when referring to the region prior to the formation of the Iraqi state.[34] The community's decision, however, to open its own schools with lower enrollment fees, in addition to the expanding capacity of the AIU schools during the first two decades of the twentieth century, demonstrates the communal desire to reach a wider social spectrum of students. This desire is clearly stated in an English language report from the 1930s entitled "Report of the Jewish Schools Committee on the Jewish Schools in Baghdad 1930".[35]

To understand the centrality of the Jewish schools to the community itself and to place the evolution of the Iraqi education system between 1920 and 1951 in context, it is important to compare the size of the Jewish community with that of the general population both as a whole and in relation to those who had access to education. In the early 1920s the population of the city of Baghdad was approximately 200,000 people.[36] Of the general population there were somewhere between 65,000 and 80,000 Jews living in the province (opposed the city) of Baghdad, at least 55,000 of them living in the city of Baghdad itself.[37] Proportionally, this means that a least a quarter of the city's population was Jewish, making the Jewish community the single largest religious/ethnic group in the city and as Nissim Rejwan (among others) argues, the best educated as a communal whole.[38] In 1920, the Jewish community of Baghdad lists seven primary and secondary schools plus three vocational schools educating 4,030 boys, 1,481 girls for a total of 5,521 pupils.[39] By comparison, in 1920 in the whole of Iraq there were only 88 primary and 3 secondary schools (for a total of 8,110 students) for a national population of around 3 million.[40]

This means that during the 1920s a large percentage of those who received a modern education were Jewish and, as the Jewish schools dedicated more hours to the study of foreign languages, the Jewish students had a strategic advantage over those

34 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972*, 117.

35 Jewish schools report 1930 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464.

36 This number refers to the province of Baghdad, as opposed to the city itself.

37 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 3.

38 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 210–211. Other groups included Sunnīs, Shīʿīs, Persians, Kurds, and Chaldeans.

39 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464.

40 Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 35; Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East: Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1949).

educated in the public schools who received less training in English and French. One consequence of this was that the graduates of Jewish schools greatly benefited from the British Mandate, due to a sharp increase in white-collar employment opportunities with the increase in foreign companies in Baghdad, and an expanded civil service.

By the 1930s, educational opportunities for the general population had increased. The national population had grown to over 4.5 million inhabitants[41] and Iraq now had 335 primary and secondary schools with 27,467 male pupils 6,573 female pupils and an additional 293 children in coeducational kindergartens. The Jewish school system had also grown along with its population, but not at the same speed as the nation. For a population of around 65,000 Jews in Baghdad, in the 1930s there were ten primary and secondary schools with 5,031 boys and 2,151 girls plus an additional 700 poor girls receiving vocational training.[42]

Based on the growth of the public schools between 1920 and 1930 one could postulate that the Jewish schools became less central to the community and the nation as a whole. This idea was suggested by scholars such as Shiblak and Twena,[43] the main argument in support of this claim being the newly founded government schools. This assumption is corroborated by a 1930 school report from the Jewish lay council, which notes the establishment of a public boys school in the Jewish quarter[44] and the relative stagnation in the number of boys attending the Jewish schools.[45] Until this point those students unable to pay school fees or secure scholarships could only attend the Midrash Talmud Torah or a vocational program, neither of which offered the possibility to prepare for entrance exams for secondary schools, which in turn opened up the possibility of employment in foreign firms or the civil service—both channels to social mobility. And yet, as the table below indicates, the Jewish school system continued to expand. Therefore, it is impossible to argue that the Jewish schools lost their relevance in the wake of expanded public education. Among the multiple reasons for the continued relevance of the Jewish schools are their higher academic standards, a result of the lower student-teacher ratio and the larger proportion of

41 Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 40.

42 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464.

43 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 41.

44 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 2.

45 The overall number of Jewish students increased between 1920 and 1930 as the small decline in the number of boys was offset by an increase in attendence by girls.

teachers with a secondary education.[46] For secondary education the Jewish schools were among the few institutions that offered students the possibility to prepare for the French Baccalaureate (AIU schools), or the London matriculation examinations (in Shamash school); other options in the city were non-state, primarily Christian, institutions with comparable school fees.[47] Up until the dissolution of the community the AIU schools and the Shamash school remained the gold standard for both primary and secondary education in Baghdad. This was particularly true in the opportunities they presented for girls. Finally, the continued communal investment resulting in lower school fees and the free vocational opportunities for poor children and orphans both helped the schools remain relevant. Even during the uncertainty of the 1940s and World War II, the *Farhud*,[48] and general political tensions between the Jewish community and the state, six new communal schools were built, including two in 1948 and 1949,[49] indicating clearly that the Jewish schools remained crucial to the community. The opening of public schools worked to further expand the educational opportunities for Jewish youth but did not reduce the student base of the Jewish schools, which continued to grow steadily as demonstrated by the table below.

Schools under the supervision of the Jewish community in Baghdad (primary and secondary)

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils
1920	8	5,511
1930	11	7,182
1935	12	7,911
1945	14	10,021
1949	20	10,391

See table in Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972*[50]

46 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972*, 121.

47 Matthew and Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East*, 209–213.

48 The *Farhūd* was the anti-Jewish riot that broke out in the wake of the coup d'etat in 1941; in it approximately 180 Jews were killed and millions of dollars in damage was sustained.

49 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 40.

50 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972*, 123.

Schools in Iraq (Primary & Secondary)[51]

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils
1920	91	8,111
1930	335	36,595
1940	791	104,490
1945	949	108,945

See table Matthew and Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East*[52]

The continued expansion of the Jewish schools and the increase in students in the early twentieth century meant that Jewish schools faced challenges similar to those of the state-run schools, namely a lack of funds and a lack of trained teachers.[53] In a 1924 letter from the office of the chief rabbi to Judah Magnes (the first chancellor of Hebrew University), the secretary to the chief rabbi carefully explains the finances of the community. In the case of the Jewish community the most significant revenue came from the *gabelle*, essentially a tax levied on the sale of kosher meat. In addition to this, the community also received money from the rents on three buildings they owned and the sale of sheep intestine casings from slaughtered animals, all traditional sources of communal revenue.[54] For the purpose of financing education the community solicited financial aid from wealthy Baghdadi Jews residing in the East Asia and from foreign Jewish philanthropic agencies, specifically the aforementioned AIU, AJA, and JDC, thereby reinforcing their links to foreign Jewish communities. They also received regular contributions from the Iraqi government, but these funds were extremely limited, representing less than 4 percent of the annual budget.[55]

Education was one of the main expenditures of the Jewish community.[56] The communal organization of schools became more structured as the Rabbinate yielded considerable power to the lay council, which by 1920 was composed of white-collar

51 These numbers show the total number of students (regardless of confession) nationally. I was unable to find figures which only included schools in Baghdad, nor was I was able to find figures for Jews students enrolled in public schools or non-Jewish private schools.

52 Matthews and Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East*, 140.

53 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 8; Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950*, 110.

54 The chief rabbi's office makes a note of this fact in the letter to Magnes, CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 19.

55 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 40. CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 1–3.

56 CAHJP Iraq File P3/2464, 20.

professionals and merchants, the majority of whom were graduates of the AIU and community schools.[57] By the end of the 1920s the Jewish community had a mature established school system, while the national education system of Iraq was still in its infancy. This is partially because the Mandate government allocated insufficient funds to education in Iraq for fear of developing an educated class that would be unable to find suitable employment.[58]

In addition to these challenges, the Iraqi ministry of education faced challenges that were not shared by the Jewish community, dealing with a larger, more diverse population both geographically and culturally. Thus, the Jewish school system was able to grow and expand their services faster to a larger segment of its population than the general school system; they built new schools, lowered general school fees, and provided more scholarships to meet the demands of the community. Even with the loss of students that resulted from some opting to attend public schools for financial reasons and others attending non-Jewish private schools after moving to new middle-class suburbs during late 1930s and 1940s,[59] the number of Jewish schools and students enrolled in them continued to grow up until the dissolution of the community at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s.

The Jewish schools consistently employed trained teachers who brought an international flavor to the profile of the schools. Initially, in the nineteenth century, the trained teaching staff in the Jewish schools had been comprised of a few Europeans. At the turn of the century the schools began to receive Jewish teachers from other parts of the Muslim world who had been trained at the AIU teacher's school in Paris. Once the community had its own graduates, they too began to fill the ranks of faculty in the schools, although some had little more than primary school training. In the 1920s the Jewish community took several steps to improve the quality of teaching in schools by sending local teachers to secondary education evening classes, but the presence of foreign Jewish teachers remained common in the schools well into the 1940s. Examples of this include the hiring of an orthodox Jew, Mr. A.G. Brotman, in 1926 to assist the schools' committee and oversee education, and in 1928 two additional teachers were recruited for the Shamash school, one from England and another from Beirut. Brotman was succeed by Emile Marmorstein, another English Jew, who would

57 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 45.

58 Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 193–194.

59 An example of this is Sasson Somekh, whose family moved to Bustan al-Khass in 1937 where he attended a private elementary school run by a Christian woman for a few years until he later transferred to the Shamash high school. Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 47.

serve as head master of the Shamash school in the 1930s.[60] Beginning in 1925 the community invited Jewish teachers from Palestine to Baghdad to instruct students in Hebrew language, literature, and Jewish history. Avraham Rozen, who arrived in 1929 to teach at Shamash, also organized clubs for students to promote modern Hebrew.[61] All of the teachers from Palestine were eventually deported when in 1935 the ministry of education prohibited the study of Modern Hebrew and Jewish history education in the communal schools; in addition, the teaching of Zionism was banned.[62] Even the local Jewish teachers brought an international flavor to the schools as many of those with higher education had been educated in Europe, elsewhere in the Middle East or even the United States.[63]

By the 1920s the faculty of the Jewish schools also began to include non-Jewish teachers, due in part to the dearth of Jewish teachers skilled in teaching Arabic language and literature. It appears, however, that well into the 1940s, the schools hired only Jewish headmasters, many of them trained in the United Kingdom or France. The AIU continued its policy of employing former students from other areas of the Muslim world who had studied at the ENIO in Paris, while the Shamash school employed a series of British schoolmasters. Even as the Jewish schools began to hire more non-Jewish teachers, the public schools were pressured to employ Jewish teachers, particularly in the schools where the majority of students were Jewish. This diversity of faculty gave the students varying perspectives on the world at large, as the examples below illustrate.

Sasson Somekh received his introduction to Iraqi politics from his Arabic language and literature teacher at the Shamash school, Muhammad Sharara. Somekh recalls Sharara eschewing semi-official government textbooks in favor of lectures in which he could share his leftist political views—this was in the late 1940s when those suspected of having communist affiliations were imprisoned or even executed.[64] Teachers also brought the concept of Jewish nationalism into the classroom. Violette Shamash, who attended the AIU Laura Kadoorie school in the 1920s, remembers her teacher Mme. Sabbagh, from Paris, teaching the children *Hatikva*, the then unofficial anthem of the Zionists in Palestine; it was only later in life that she learned the significance of the song.[65]

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60 Snir, *Who Needs Arab Jewish Identity?*, 92.

61 Hakak, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Literature in Babylon*, 190.

62 Ibid, 19.

63 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 59.

64 Ibid, 77–80.

65 Violette Shamash, *Memories of Eden*, 35–36. Shamash mentions the teacher being from Paris although

In this period Zionist ideas reached Baghdad through informal channels. In particular, during the first half of the 1930s Jewish schools employed teachers from Palestine who organized clubs and activities related to the ideas of socialist Zionism.[66] As Esther Meir-Glitzenstein notes, prior to the 1940s those interested in Zionism "came from the lower middle class, and most of them were bordering between Jewish tradition and modernity [...] Their activity may also be viewed as a means of achieving social and political mobility within the conservative framework of the community."[67]

The influence of teachers on students was also found in the public schools that were partially financed by the lay council. In his biography, Nissim Rejwan recalls the days he attended Madrasat Ras al-Qarya, one of the public boys' schools in the Jewish quarter that catered almost exclusively to Jewish students. Madrasat Ras al-Qarya, mostly employed Jewish teachers and received financial support from the lay council.[68] Rejwan recalls a teacher named Dawood Afandi who taught Hebrew Bible[69] and, according to Rejwan, devoted a whole lesson in the spring of 1933 to a discussion of the need to boycott German products in solidarity with the Jews of Germany.[70] This anecdote illustrates how even in a government run school a classroom could become the place of a communal discussion on Jewish transnational solidarity. Furthermore, the idea of boycotting Germany had developed outside Iraq and was imported by Zionist circles present in Baghdad, demonstrating just how interconnected Jewish populations were by the 1930s. It also offers an example of a teacher discussing a very sensitive political subject even as certain factions in the Iraqi government began to profess Nazi sympathies, primarily in protest against British colonialism.[71]

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given her last name and the average profile of an Alliance teacher it is more likely that she was originally from somewhere in North Africa and was educated at the ENIO in Paris.

66 Hayyim J. Cohen, *Zionist Activity in Iraq* [In Hebrew], (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library and Hebrew University, 1968/69), 59–84.

67 Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 8.

68 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, n. 41, 250.

69 Rejwan refers to the teacher as Dawood Afandi, however it is likely that Afandi simply refers to his title.

70 Rejwan, *The Last Jews in Baghdad*, 59–60.

71 Schlaepfer, *Les Intellectuels Juif de Baghdad*, 100.

3. Curriculum: Multilingualism and Modernity

The first AIU school in Baghdad followed the Franco-Ottoman education model. Neither Arabic, the local language, nor Ottoman Turkish, the language of the administration, were central to the curriculum although both were taught in varying degrees through the 19th and early 20th century. Not surprisingly, when the AIU girls' school was opened in 1893, Arabic was not part of the curriculum as during the Ottoman period the language of instruction in the Muslim schools was Turkish.[72] Even in 1919, of the 75 public primary schools in Iraq only 56 taught in Arabic, 11 taught in Turkish, 7 taught in Kurdish, and one taught in Persian.[73]

In the 1920s the Iraqi state began to mandate the study of Arabic in schools. In 1924, in written correspondence from the office of the chief rabbi to Magnes in Jerusalem, we see notes that the government was pressuring the schools to teach in English and Arabic, but that the AIU schools were slow to deviate from their francophone bias. Although by this time the majority of Jewish schools were already teaching some Arabic, this educational legislation—and the growing importance of Arabic in commerce and civil society—led to an increase in Arabic instruction throughout the Jewish schools. By 1930 all Jewish schools in Baghdad taught Arabic and all but one taught English. The one school not teaching English was the AIU girl's school, Laura Kadoorie, where French continued to be the main language of education, and Arabic was a distant second. If Laura Kadoorie represents one extreme in language division, it is also far from the exception: instruction in Arabic was inconsistent throughout schools, grades, or genders, with schools allocating anywhere from 6 to 20 hours a week towards the study of Arabic.

The lay council report of 1930 provides a clear breakdown of the subjects studied, divided by language, and providing the number of hours dedicated to each language for all but the Midrash Talmud Torah. By 1930 four schools were being administered by the AIU: Albert Sasson (founded in 1863), Nouriel (founded in 1902), Noam (founded in 1902), and Laura Kadoorie (founded in 1895). At the AIU boy's schools, Albert Sasson and Nouriel, the curriculum was divided between Arabic, French, Hebrew, and English, with French and Arabic being the dominant languages. Below are four charts that compare the hours of study allocated to each language based on the numbers provided from the 1930 report.

72 Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 197.

73 Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950*, 110.

CHART 1A *Hours Allocated to the Study of Languages by School and Class (Arabic)*[74]

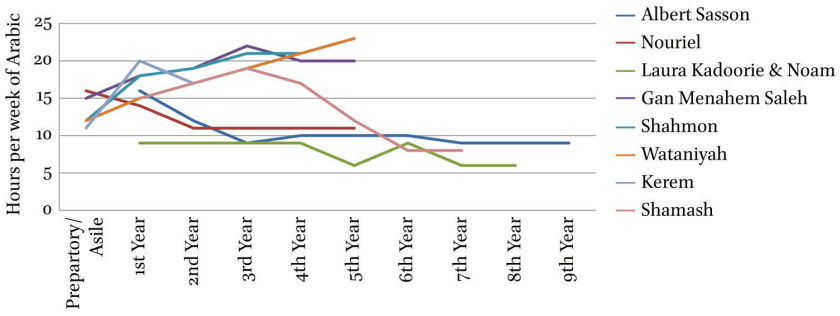
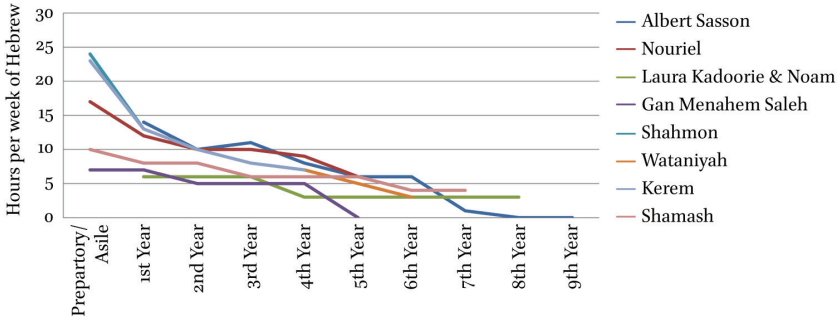


CHART 1B *Hours Allocated to the Study of Languages by School and Class (Hebrew)*



The allocation of hours per language was such that as a student neared matriculation, the time allocated to French would increase and the time for Arabic would decrease. For the less dominant languages, Hebrew and English, hours allocated to Hebrew would decrease as hours allocated to English would increase. The AIU girls' schools operated in a strikingly different manner. At Laura Kadoorie and Noam the dominant language during the entire duration of study was French, with Arabic second, and Hebrew far behind.

From their inception, in the community run schools there was significantly more Arabic in the curriculum, regardless of gender. In addition, all of the schools dedicated substantial time to the study of Hebrew and English. The only communal schools which offered hours in French, and then only in the final two years, was the girls' school Gan Manehem Daniel Saleh (founded in 1910); it offered four hours per week

74 CAHJP Iraq File—6382.

CHART 1C *Hours Allocated to the Study of Languages by School and Class (French)*

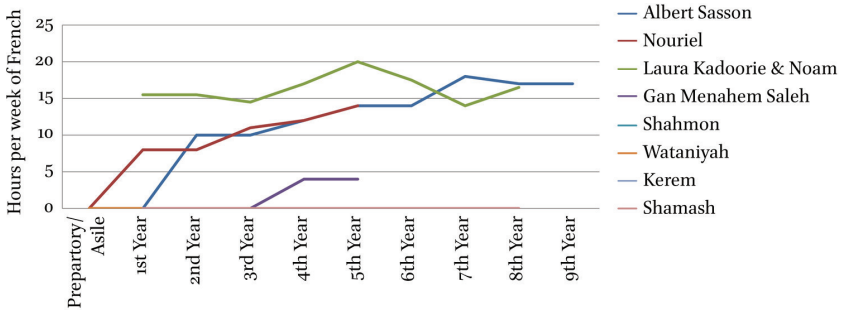
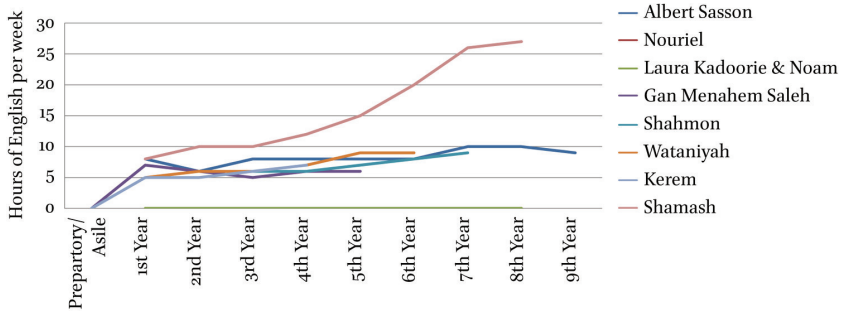


CHART 1D *Hours Allocated to the Study of Languages by School and Class (English)*



in the final two years, most likely to prepare girls who wished to continue their education through year eight at the Alliance Laura Kadoorie school, the only Jewish girl's school offering courses for the final three years of secondary education. For the boy's community schools, Shahmon (founded 1909), Wataniyya (founded 1923), and Kerem (founded in 1924), Arabic was the dominant language. In the first years of education more time was allocated to English, though this slowly reversed as students progressed. Finally, Shamash (founded in 1928), which was a community school with an objective of preparing students to take the London matriculation exams, focused almost exclusively on English in the later years.

When grouping the AIU and communal schools together, the clearest differentiation in curricula is between the sexes. Arabic was not universally included in the girl's curricula until much later, a point discussed in Sasson Somekh's autobiography when he writes about the experience of his parents at the Alliance schools. Born in 1909 Somekh's mother learned to read and write in French and English at the Alliance girl's school in Basra, but was never taught to read or write Arabic. His father, born in 1900 and educated at the AIU boy's school in Baghdad, studied European languages in addi-

tion to Arabic.[75] This contrast illustrates the fundamental differences between boys and girls' education in the Jewish community. Boys were educated to be successful in their chosen careers, have the means to support their future families, and participate as active citizens of the state, while a woman's role was much more limited. The impetus behind educating Jewish girls were the ideas of nineteenth and early twentieth century bourgeois society in western Europe and America. As a girl's education was supposed to develop the qualities she needed to become a wife and homemaker, girls were essentially educated in domesticity. For women, education was synonymous with social prestige, making an educated girl a more desirable match on the marriage market. Overall, girls in the Jewish schools were groomed to be educated wives and homemakers, capable of raising the children of their secularly educated enlightened husbands, their education justified by their predetermined domestic roles.[76]

Girls' education began to change in the 1930s when some professions such as teaching and nursing became open to women and some girls, particularly in the 1940s, attended state schools or studied with boys at the Shamash school, however these instances were exceptions that reaffirmed general trends in girls' education.[77]

The difference in focus between boys' and girls' education, however, is still evident when looking at the gender divide in the curricula of 1930. The clearest indicator of this is the importance of the Arabic language in boys' education compared to girls' education, but there were other differences as well. Boys had three to six more hours of class time per week than girls and more time was dedicated to the "hard sciences," whereas girls dedicated significant time to subjects like embroidery, sewing, hygiene, and home economics.

These differences in and of themselves are not particularly surprising, given the role of women in Iraq (and the majority of the globe) at the time. However, if we consider standard Arabic as one of the main facilitators and markers of national identity, it is noteworthy that this was deemed more important for boys than for girls. This suggests that, initially, the study of Arabic was not ideological but pragmatic—it was necessary for employment in the civil service and in commerce in the 1920s and early 1930s, a point confirmed in many communal reports and also the main source of contention with the AIU and its rigid curriculum.[78] As upper and middle

75 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 55–56.

76 Sciarcon, *Educational Oases in the Desert*, 14; Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 117–118.

77 Bashkin, *New Babylonias*, 87–88.

78 IJA 3787.

class women were not expected to work, the necessity of mastering Arabic was seen as less important, thus the French curriculum and the AIU were central to women's education and social development. This idea is demonstrated in a 1924 letter written by David Sasson,[79] then a teacher at the Alliance girl's school, in which he deplores the fact that families prefer their daughters to learn English over Arabic, even though English has less practical use for these women, noting that girls who are not taught to read Arabic will become women completely dependent on their fathers and spouses.[80] Eventually this changed: by 1930 Laura Kadoorie had dropped the study of English in favor of Arabic, although only 6 to 9 hours a week were allocated to the language.

In the 1930s the only girls who received a comprehensive education in Arabic were those attending the one community girl's school, Gan Menahem Daniel Saleh. These girls received up to 22 hours of Arabic a week, making it the dominant language of their education. Gan Menahem Daniel Saleh represented a minority of those girls who received an education, however, as the school only had 306 students compared to the two AIU girls' schools that enrolled, in total, 1,826 students.[81] As Arabic became a symbol of the nation, representing unity and integration, the number of hours dedicated to Arabic for girls increased, particularly in the 1940s. We cannot know whether the increase in Arabic instruction was designed to facilitate women's integration into Iraqi society, if the community wanted to demonstrate its commitment to Arabic, or whether it was a result of pressure from the government ministry of education. We do know, however, that it was an example of the growing importance of Arabic as an Iraqi national symbol.

Beyond the gendered differences, the other major difference in curricula was between the "religious" and the "secular" communal schools. Although all of the secular Jewish schools taught Hebrew, Jewish history, and religious studies, a point regularly mentioned in the Jewish schools' report, they remained focused on a secular education. The two branches of the Midrash Talmud Torah, obviously, had a very difference perspective: linked directly to the rabbinate and only open to boys, they offered the least "modern" education. The 1930 lay council report does not discuss the curriculum of the Midrash Talmud Torah in the same detail as it does the other schools, yet it does mention that in addition to being a religious school it offered elementary studies in Arabic. The teaching of Arabic was most likely due to

79 Sasson (no relation to the Baghdadi Sassoon Family) was a Persian born Jew educated at the AIU school in Tehran and the AIU ENIO in Paris.

80 Monique Nahon, *Hussard de l'alliance* (Paris: Editions du Palio, 2010), 84.

81 Jewish School Report CAHJP—Iraq File—6382, 3.

government pressure as, in the 1920s, the members of the communities attempted to persuade the rabbis to include more secular subjects, but the initiative was largely unsuccessful. In general, the Talmud Torah was considered to provide the lowest quality education among the Jewish schools, due not only to the lack of breadth in the curriculum but also to the overcrowded classes and the lack of qualified teachers, little of which changed in the school over the course of a century. Although they were also the most isolated from Iraqi society, the religious schools did not close and continued to have overcrowded classes until the 1950s. Knowing that the general bias of the community was toward modern education it is surprising the Midrash continued to attract students. Somewhere between 1925 and 1930 the Midrash abolished all school fees, thereby providing an option to those who could not afford the fee-based Jewish schools and were weary of sending their children to public schools. The abolishment of fees was perhaps an attempt by the rabbinate (who controlled the school) to remain relevant in the wake of the secular Jewish schools and the free public schools. It was not until 1935 that a modern Talmud Torah was opened that offered a traditional religious education, taught secular subjects from the state curriculum and prepared students to take entry exams for secondary education. This school was relatively successful, and is an indication that it was not opposition to religious education that turned people away from traditional education, but a desire for their children to receive a modern education. Thus, the modern Talmud Torah illustrates how modernizing forces entered the most traditional corners of Jewish society in Baghdad. The student body, however, continued to be made up of boys from poor families, from which we can infer that the Midrash was not the first choice for schooling among most Baghdadi families.[82]

4. Linguistic Creativity and Cultural Diversity

Beyond the defined curriculum, these schools were social spaces that allowed creativity to flourish in all languages, providing exposure to cultural norms outside of the hierarchical gendered Iraqi society. The school was a place that allowed students to interact with others beyond their family circle, to practice languages not regularly spoken at home, to learn about activities in foreign Jewish communities and to read publications not widely distributed elsewhere. This diversity was displayed through

82 Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East*, 115.

the material available in school libraries, the publications of the schools themselves and the activities and celebrations undertaken by the schools.

Although I have primarily focused on the study of English and French versus Arabic, Modern Hebrew also flourished in Iraq. This is due in great part to its instruction in the Jewish schools which, although formally forbidden to teach it after 1935, continued its instruction as "Biblical Hebrew".[83] Lev Hakak's book on modern Hebrew creativity in Iraq offers many examples of students experimenting with the Hebrew language during the 1920s and 1930s, the best example being the Shamash school's Hebrew language periodical, Shemesh. The school newspaper, written in Modern Hebrew, only lasted three years, but throughout that time was read widely among members of the Jewish community.[84] This type of publication also reinforced the idea of the transnational nature of the Baghdadi community in the 1930s. For example, in the third issue of Shemesh a student at Shamash wrote about his time living in Burma and his experience in the Baghdadi Jewish school in Rangoon.[85] Furthermore, the journal, although short lived, was distributed throughout Jewish communities in the Middle East and to a few Hebrew language journals in Europe, enabling the students at Shamash to receive congratulatory responses from Jewish students in Jerusalem and Beirut upon publishing issues, and the journal was even remarked upon by the editor of a Hebrew journal in Poland.[86]

Linguistic creativity in Arabic in the schools is perhaps best demonstrated through the "pageantry of the state," the official ceremonies referenced earlier, in which students would read poems by famous Arab poets, sing traditional Arab songs, and give speeches demonstrating their loyalty to the nation and the monarchy. In some cases, students composed their own poems, a tribute to the high level of Arabic they had been taught. It was also a tradition to invite notables such as local consuls, government officials, and other elites to attend the public examination of students.[87] The multilingual education benefited Iraqi society as a whole, and these ceremonies were an ideal way to put this on display. One legacy of this education is that the graduates of these schools were responsible for translating many of the great works of European literature and history into Arabic.[88] This linguistic creativity and cultural

83 Hakak, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Literature in Babylon*, 189–190.
84 Ibid, 18–20.
85 Ibid, 195.
86 Ibid, 203.
87 *Paix et Droit*, September 1, 1924, 12.
88 Snir, *Arabness, Jewishness, Zionism*.

pluralism as seen through language use was also important in fostering the idea of a modern Jewish identity by connecting Jewish youth to transnational Jewish networks and topics discussed in the Jewish public sphere. As mentioned in the previous chapter the knowledge of family and friends living in the Baghdadi communities abroad and the ever-present role of foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations disseminated the concept of the transnational Jewish community.

As for the role of French culture, the AIU archives are replete with elegant essays written in French by students comparing themselves to heroes and heroines of French literature or comparing the Iraqi Jewish experience to the French Jewish experience. For example, one young woman from Baghdad even tied herself to French history by stating that "we the Jews" had most benefited from French emancipation in an essay about the French Revolution.[89] Other ideas brought from Europe included plans for Jewish scouting groups modeled on *les éclaireuses et éclaireurs israélites de France* and the Jewish Scouts of the United Kingdom, which became popular activities attached to schools in the 1920s and 1930s, with each school having its own troop until all scouting was banned in 1941.[90]

The libraries of the AIU, AJA and community schools contained a diverse assortment of book and periodicals from abroad, with some estimates stating that the combined libraries contained over 18,000 volumes.[91] Although the exact contents of these libraries are unknown, AIU and AJA archives refer to ordering English and French language books and subscribing to foreign periodicals for these libraries.[92] Given the importance Jews played in translating French and English books into Arabic one can assume a preponderance of foreign language works in these libraries.[93] Zionist emissaries to Iraq imported Hebrew books for the schools, and even the Talmud Torah had a library containing works of Modern Hebrew by 1930.[94]

89 Esther Molino "Adieu à ma maison": Sephardi Adolescent Identities, 1932–1936 *Jewish Social Studies*, Volume 15, Number 1, Fall 2008, 131–144.

90 Photograph 'Scouts of the Midrash Talmud Torah, Baghdad Early 20th Century,' *Annals of Iraqi Jewry*, 209; Photograph AIU archives Iraq, Baghdad, Scouts in the Alliance school of the Jewish in Baghdad in the 1930s; Scouting was relatively common during this period there were many Assyrian Scouting troupes in Iraq as well, for a comparison with Syria see Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, 291–298.

91 Meir, "Traditional and Modern Education," 223.

92 IJA 3753; MS137 AJ37/4/5.

93 Some of the most well known of these translators were translators were Anwar Shā'ūl and Mir Basri. Reuven Snir, "Shā'ūl, Anwar," EJIW; Shmuel Moreh, "Baṣrī, Me'ir (Mīr)," EJIW.

94 Hakak, *The Emergence of Hebrew Creativity in Babylon*, 18–20, 190.

Copies of many Jewish periodicals were kept in these libraries and students were known to write to foreign periodicals thus participating the global Jewish public sphere. We know that the *Jewish Chronicle* was sent by the AJA to these schools in the 1920s and 1930s, in addition to many families taking out personal subscriptions.[95] One can assume that it was read by many Jewish school children in Iraq as they would write to the *Jewish Chronicle's* youth supplement, Young Israel. Each month the Young Israel section would announce its new members and nearly every month included names from Baghdad, and Baghdadis abroad. The Young Israel page was devoted "to uphold and promote both publicly and privately the best traditions of Judaism and the Jewish people." The majority of the section was taken up by brief discussions of how to be a moral Jew through acts of charity and generosity, thus reinforcing lessons from school. The rest of the pages were taken up by questions from Jewish children around the globe. On December 30, 1932, the editor of the section who referred to herself as Auntie wrote, "I am getting quite a big contingent of nephews in Baghdad but they are not very frequent correspondents." This was perhaps due to issues of censorship and concerns of parents having their children's names in a foreign Jewish newspaper. In the letters which were published, Iraqi school children usually requested pen pals and mentioned interest in meeting other Jewish children, in particular from England, the United States, and Australia.[96] Similarly, Jewish school children in Iraq occasionally wrote for the AIU newspaper *Paix et Droit* providing reports of school events. Thus, the Jewish Press available to children in school, and possibly in their homes, reinforced this idea of a transnational Jewish community with English and French as the main languages of correspondence. Iraqi Jews read foreign Arabic language Jewish newspapers as well. In particular the Beirut based *Al-ʿAalam al-Isra'iili* and the Egyptian based *Isra'il* which regularly reported on Jewish events in Baghdad.[97] I have not, however, come across similar correspondence from Iraqi youth in these newspapers.

For young women these schools were especially important in exposing them to diverse languages and culture. In the first half of the twentieth century, this would often be the most freedom they would enjoy in their lives as they were groomed to be housewives and mothers, the pretext of their schooling being to gain an advantage in the marriage market. As Esther Meir-Glitzestein notes in her discussion of women's education in Iraq in relation to motivations for joining the Zionist movement:

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95 MS137 AJ37/4/5.

96 JC, 7 April, 1933, 48; JC, 28 October, 1932, 38; JC, 30 December, 1932, 38.

97 Guy Bracha, "A letter from Iraq: the writing of Iraqi correspondents in al-ʿAlam al-ʾIsra'ili and Isra'il", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 52:1, (2016) 102–115.

> As young Jewish women in Iraq discovered that other societies and cultures offered women more equal lives, they become aware of their inferior status [...] it could not change so long as the values of the society in which they lived remained the same. Under these circumstances, the expectations that the women picked up along with their knowledge and education were demolished repeatedly by the frustrating reality.[98]

Pictures from the period show young women in modern dress playing tennis at the Laura Kadoorie school and in the AIU's social club in the 1930s,[99] organizing charity events for the community, attending parties at school[100] and performing plays.[101] These activities are an indicaton of changing societal norms, if only for the few years until they were married. That these activities were accepted by the community and the parents of the girls was a testament to the trust in the schools and their importance in the community. These activities also demonstrated the large amount of social flexibility and openness within the communal schools and social organizations, which in some ways provided oases from the more complicated social interactions within Iraqi society as a whole.

If the schools represented freedom, there were limits to women's liberation in Iraqi society. As Longrigg notes, in the 1940s, although some Muslim women had discarded the veil but, "circles ... where women were strictly secluded were still considerable, and included the households of many leading notables and the royal family."[102] Conflicting reports as to whether it was socially acceptable for Jewish women to appear unveiled in public as late as the 1940s speak to constraints of living in a traditional Muslim society.[103] A 1937 article in the *Jewish Advocate* stated that more Jewish women were appearing in public unveiled but that the practice was still more common among Christians.[104]

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98 Meir-Glitzenste, *Zionism in Iraq*, 118.

99 *Paix et Droit*, Friday, 1 March, 1929, 13.

100 Jewish Girls at a School Party in the Laura Kandoori Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) of Baghdad, Iraq in 1931. http://diarnaphotos.tumblr.com/post/147846900297/jewish-girls-at-a-school-party-in-the-laura.

101 Photograph "Girls from the Laura Kadoorie School performing 'Le Prince Perdu' sometime in the 1920s", *Scribe*, September, 1996, 37.

102 Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, 386.

103 Ruth Bondy, *The Emissary: A Life of Enzo Sereni* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 199–200.

104 A.I. Notiv, "The Struggle in Baghdad: Nearly 100,000 Jews Are Caught Between Forces of Oriental Reaction and Emerging Progressivism", JT, December 1937, 6–7,12.

Young Jewish women's social circles were primarily limited to visiting family and close friends, schools and Jewish social clubs and marrying daughters at an early age remained the norm.[105] Sasson Somekh mentions that his AIU educated mother who helped him with his English, French, and math homework "did not leave the house often," and when she went shopping she would "usually wear clothes that completely covered her arms and legs … and her face would be covered by a *pushi*, a thin veil that barely hid her facial features."[106] This lack of social mobility paired with the focus on European languages meant that girls, unlike boys, were restricted in their exposure to Iraqi society.

Various factors suggest that for Jewish women cosmopolitan Western society represented a tantalizing alternative to the traditional socially restrictive Baghdadi society. Photographs from this period further demonstrate the new opportunities which the schools and social clubs represented for women showing pictures of tennis matches, tea dances, theater performances, piano lessons and parties.[107] The Jewish schools became a special place for young women in that they were a communally sanctioned space that offered a socially acceptable form of female modernity similar to women in Western bourgeois societies. Although the cloistered nature of women's spaces shows the limits of female integration in Iraqi society this was not particularly different for Christian or Muslim women.

5. Conclusions

The Jewish community of Baghdad during the Mandate and early years of the Iraqi state continued to function with the large measure of communal autonomy that it had enjoyed for decades, even as its constituents became more integrated into the new Iraqi nation. The lay council—as opposed to the Rabbinate—continued to levy taxes, to act as the official representative to the community for the Iraqi government and to work with foreign Jewish organizations. Most significantly, they invested heavily in the development of communal educational institutions. It is evident that the public policy of the Jewish community was to embrace the idea of the new Iraqi nation and the Jewish community's place in this new nation. The Jewish schools were a tool

105 Ibid.

106 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 25.

107 *Paix et droit*, February 1, 1924, 5; *Alliance Israelite Universelle Ecoles de Bagdad 1864–1932: Hommage des Ecoles a leurs bienfaiteurs* (Paris: AIU Archives Paris, picture book, 1932) unpaginated.

to demonstrate this ideology both in their principles but also as physical spaces in which the community could learn about and engage with the greater nation. Recent scholarship on Jews in Iraq has reinforced this idea by primarily framing these schools as incubators for Iraqi citizens and Arab identity. These discussions, however, do not often adequately address the other phenomena which were occurring in these schools, particularly the construction of new forms and understandings of Jewish identity. The schools strongly supported the idea of a transnational secular Jewish identity and the possibility of a life beyond the borders of Iraq.

Although united under the administration of the lay council, the schools were not uniform in their curricula: students receivd varying levels of access to Arab, secular Western, and Jewish culture. The differences between individual schools were most clearly delineated in the number of hours dedicated to the study of different languages and the importance placed on secular subjects. Although it is clear that the schools were agents of Arabization, and in this capacity acted as public spaces, this is only one aspect of their objective. It is more accurate to state that Jewish students were given the tools to participate in the new state and society that was being built, and they were also exposed to Western ideas and Jewish culture. The extent of their exposure to these different cultures and ideals, however, varied based on gender and socioeconomic status. In very broad terms, middle class males received the greatest exposure to Iraqi society either by attending the community schools or, in the later period, community supported public schools. This is reflected in the autobiographies of men such as Sasson Somekh, Nissim Rejwan and Naim Kattan, who describe the ways in which they participated in Arab culture and felt part of the nation in their youth. This is also the sector of Jewish society which has written the most on their personal experiences during the Mandate and early years of the Iraq state and is therefore the most documented.[108]

The Jewish schools of this period were remarkable in that they were able to produce Iraqi citizens who identified with Arab nationalism. Iraqi Jews participated in the nascent secular society but also at times became active architects of it through their participation in the civil service, journalism, literary culture, and commerce.[109] Not all students, however, received the same degree of exposure to Arabic or the ideals of the new state, and not every student was inculcated with this strong sense of Iraqi

108 Mark R. Cohen, 'Historical Memory and History in the Memoirs of Iraqi Jews' in *Ot LeTova: Essays in Honor of Professor Tova Rosen* eds. Eli Yassif, Haviva Ishay, Uriah kfir, Mikan Vol. 11, June 2012, 114–116.

109 Schlaepfer, *Les intellectuals juif de Bagdad*.

citizenship. The most striking difference, as mentioned earlier, is one of gender: on average, less of the curriculum for girls was dedicated to Arabic and they were taught by fewer non-Jewish teachers. Girls also tended to leave school earlier than boys, often to marry, and this abbreviated education combined with the reduced hours for the study of Arabic limited their participation public debates.

Furthermore, boys were able to engage with the Iraqi society in the streets and coffee shops while most girls socialized at the Jewish clubs or the family home. Perhaps this explains why Iraqi Jewish women were less prolific in Arabic letters than Iraqi Jewish men and the lack, within the autobiographies from this period, of women writing about their engagement as Iraqi citizens.[110] It is also possible that those Iraqi girls who were educated in Jewish schools were disappointed by the roles Iraqi society offered them, with limited opportunity for respectable employment outside the home and a patriarchal family organization in which young women were subordinate to men, a status no different than in Christian and Muslim Iraqi homes.[111] Anecdotal evidence suggests liberating alternatives to life in Iraq for young women included possibilities of emigration to Israel, studying in Europe or joining family in the satellite communities.[112]

The other difference in education was subtler, and relates to socioeconomics. Although the school committee was cognizant of the prohibitive expense of schools and endeavored to provide scholarships and a sliding scale for tuition, it never altogether abandoned fees for the AIU or the community schools. Therefore, families not able to afford these fees and not offered scholarships were faced with diametrically different options, either the free religious school that offered little by way of secular education, or the public schools that were outside the community and provided less exposure to foreign languages and, therefore, Western society. The fact that the religious schools continued to exist is evidence that some families still chose to forgo a secular education and exposure to secular society in favor of having their children attend a free Jewish school. Even in this construction, however, there was flexibility: it was not unheard of for children to change schools throughout their studies or to hire tutors for religious education.[113]

110 For a list of leading Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals, writers, and artists see Snir *Who Needs Arab Jewish Identity?* 231–234. Out of 130 names only 9 are women, two of which were born outside of Iraq after 1950. See also, Snir, *'Ariviyut, Yahadut, Tziyonut*.

111 Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 116–131.

112 Ibid; Benjamin, *Last Days in Babylon*, 235–237.

113 Schlaepfer, "A Bagdad je resterai!" 42.

The poorer families were more likely to send their boys to the free Midrash Talmud Torah, the program with perhaps the least external exposure to communal vocational and apprenticeship programs for boys and sewing or embroidery classes to allow girls to work from home. These programs depended heavily on foreign Jewish philanthropy not only for teachers and school material but also to feed and clothe children, thus reinforcing the idea for the most vulnerable in the Jewish community of dependence on both communal leadership and transnational Jewish philanthropy opposed to the Iraqi state. A picture dating from World War I shows the Aron Saleh Jewish children assembled with a prominent plaque carrying the name of the AIU as the administrator of the orphanage and the JDC as the financier of the orphanage.[114] Similarly, one explanation for the massive exodus of poor Jews from Iraq between 1950–1951 was their dependence on this communal and transnational Jewish infrastructure which they saw dissolving before their eyes as the Jewish elites left and the Iraqi state became more restrictive to its Jewish citizens.[115]

Taken as a whole, these schools and the possible experiences of the thousands of pupils who attended them over the decades were representative of the different intellectual projects which were being considered by different Jewish groups in the period between the two world wars. Although the schools espoused local nationalist ideals, like the AIU and AJA, they did not perceive nationalism or secularization as a rejection of Judaism or contrary to the idea of situating one's self within a transnational Jewish community. In fact, these schools relied on the concept of a transnational Jewish community as they depended on it for qualified teachers and money. Nor were the schools anti-religious, as all schools dedicated some time to the study of Jewish History and biblical Hebrew and many schools were physically attached to synagogues. Within the schools all types of teachers were present, on one end of the spectrum there were teachers who were ardent Zionists and tried to instill this Jewish nationalist idea within their students, on the other end of the spectrum there were Muslim communists who transmitted their love of Arab literature and the hope of a secular Arab society. One could still find others who were religious European Jews who believed that the future of the Jewish people depended on finding a balance between secular nationalism and confessional transnationalism. Finally, for young women these schools were spaces to experiment with new kinds of freedom which modernity could offer.

114 Photograph, 'Children at the Aron Saleh Jewish Orphanage', *Annals of Iraqi Jewry*, 198.
115 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 191–192.

Many aspects of Jewish education in Iraq were similar to the experience of MENA Jewry elsewhere, such as the differences in approach and objectives towards girls' versus boys' education.[116] These secular schools connected the local Jewish students to the greater Jewish world through their study of Jewish history, access to multilingual modern libraries and the composition of their teaching staffs, including a mixture of foreign and local Jewish teachers. By the Mandate period only two schools in Baghdad, Laura Kadoorie (Girls) and Albert Sassoon (Boys) were affiliated with the AIU and following their curriculum. By the 1930s, the curricula of all the schools were decided by the school's committee of the Lay council in close consultation with Jewish philanthropic organizations, but also influenced by the Iraqi government who had requirements as to the minimum of hours of education in Arabic. As such the Iraqi schools dedicated more time to the local language (Arabic) than other areas of MENA where relatively little Arabic or Turkish, if any, was taught.

The hallmark of the Jews education in Baghdad was the size and diversity of the school system. In 1930 the Baghdad Schools Committee managed 11 schools, a number which jumped to 20 by 1949. In most cities in the Muslim world—Istanbul being an exception—there were only one or two modern Jewish schools, the majority being part of the AIU network. Also, in Baghdad few students attended Christian missionary schools, most likely explained by the fact that the Christian community of Baghdad was smaller than the Jewish community and there were fewer Christian schools. Hence, the choice in schooling was generally between a Jewish school and a public school which specifically catered to Jewish students.

In summary, the Jewish education network in Baghdad was a source of great pride for the Jewish community and central to the communal organization, serving several functions. Within the course of a few decades, it allowed the Jewish community to greatly improve its socio-economic status, it was an important tool in integrating the community within the emerging modern Iraqi national identity while maintaining a communal identity and it offered a bridge to a global Jewish society accessible well beyond the communal elites.

116 Sciarcon, *Educations Oases in the Desert*, XXVII–XXVIII.