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

Goldstein, S.R.

CHAPTER FIVE

Twentieth Century Networks

This chapter considers different ways Jews engaged with and were impacted by Jewish transnational networks between 1920 and 1951 through three cases studies. The first case study looks at a controversy which arose in Basra due to the founding of a Jewish theosophical society. It considers the importance of foreign Jewish intellectual trends in Baghdad, and twentieth century religious Jewish networks. The second tells the story of a Jewish bookseller from Baghdad who was imprisoned in Iraq for writing an article which defamed the Iraqi State in the *Manchester Guardian*. In this case foreign Jewish and non-Jewish media served Iraqi Jews as a forum to appeal to global Jewish public opinion. The final example looks at the private correspondence of a member of the Iraqi Jewish elite Ibrahim Nahum, with his Kadoorie cousins in Shanghai and Hong Kong and considers how Nahum participated in both Iraqi and global Jewish civil society.

Together these three case studies are indicative of the diverse ways Iraqi Jewry participated in the global Jewish public sphere. In each instance, I highlight different types of exchanges between Jews in Baghdad and other Jewish communities, primarily through private correspondence or print media. More importantly, these examples demonstrate the Baghdadi interest and participation in intellectual and social projects of other Jewish communities. In doing so I argue that these networks demonstrate the fluidity of Baghdadi identities, constantly being redefined due to space, time and context. The examples presented in this section are not dissimilar from the participation of Jews in the pluralist Iraqi public sphere as presented in the work of Bashkin and Schlaepfer and thus, when paired with their research on Jewish Arabization in Iraq, provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of identity formation and participation in both Jewish and Iraqi public spheres.[1]

Each discussion takes into account the cultural and linguistic landscape of the general Jewish population of Iraq between 1920 and 1951, as described in the preceding chapters. Specifically, I look at a few examples from Baghdadi Jewish society during this period from the perspective that an expanded transnational Jewish network played an important role in driving social change and responding to communal

1 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*; Schlaepfer, *Les intellectual juif de Baghdad*.

crisis. The incidents I have chosen demonstrate the delicate balance between the community's Jewish and Iraqi affinities. One issue that is central to the second and third case studies is the issue of Palestine. By analyzing the relationship of Iraqi Jews to Zionism and Palestine within the framework of their participation in the larger Jewish public sphere, these case studies aim to show the nuanced ways Iraq Jews responded to the Palestine question beyond what has been presented in Zionist and Anti-Zionist historiography.

1. Theosophy: Challenging Rabbinic Hegemony

For the Jewish community of Iraq, the British Mandate (1920 to 1932) represents a "golden age" of social and cultural integration into Iraqi society as defined by the participation of Jewish intellectuals in the pluralist culture of the Iraqi public sphere.[2] In this period, the community experienced upward socio-economic mobility enhanced by an extensive (Jewish) community-sponsored education system and an increase in white-collar employment opportunities in both the civil service and with foreign firms. It was also a time of relative intellectual freedom with little government censorship and increased access to foreign print media.

The first case study discusses the rise of theosophy in Basra between 1921–1935. This episode traces how the flow of ideas from India to Iraq could ultimately challenge the official religious leadership in Baghdad and demonstrates the ways in which religious leadership used transnational networks to support and defend their positions. As discussed in chapter one, the Jews of Baghdad did not experience the deep religious schisms which plagued Ashkenazi Jewry as it modernized. In the nineteenth century, there are virtually no examples of public breaks with normative Jewish practices. Of course, there were private religious transgressions such as smoking on the Sabbath, eating non-kosher food, or not observing certain religious duties. There is evidence that this increased during the Mandate period as more Jews began to work on the Saturday and holidays, or attended non-Jewish schools which taught on Saturday.[3] Furthermore, the position of unofficial spiritual leadership which had previously been so central seems to be less importance in the Mandate period as Iraqi Jews became

2 Schlaepfer, "*The King is Dead, Long Live the King!* Jewish Funerary Performances in the Iraqi Public Space", 189; Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*.

3 Rabbi Eliyahu Agassi addressed this issue in his sermon in 1913, Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972*, 160, 195 n. 6.

more secular in their private lives. The official religious and secular structure of the communal authority, however, remained unchanged as the Iraqi state maintained the Ottoman regulations wherein the Rabbinate continued to control the religious courts, marriages, divorces, and the synagogues.

In the 1920s, several attempts at change were made by individuals wishing for a more transparent and democratic running of communal institutions. Although some of these insurgents were successful in getting elected to the lay council in 1926 and 1928, their tenures on the council were short lived and changed very little within the communal leadership.[4] The secular side of communal leadership was also rigidly controlled by a strict social hierarchy based on the wealth and connections of the communal elite. As a result, the communal structure, as defined in 1879 with the formation of the lay council, remained intact through the Mandate and State periods.[5] The most important change affecting official communal leadership came in 1931 from the government with law 77 that allowed the position of chief rabbi and president of the community to be held by the same person, a post which Sassoon Khadduri would hold from 1931 until his death in 1971,[6] and thus the two branches of communal leadership were fused.

Although the communal structure was barely modified, those in positions of responsibility were regularly criticized in private and public through the Jewish press as evidenced from the discussions in *al-Hasid*, *al-Misbah* and *al-Burhan* in the 1920s and 1930s.[7] The Baghdadi newspapers, both in Baghdad and in the satellite communities, all discussed the need for religious reform, the importance of secular education for rabbis, and the general importance of secularization, education, and Westernization within the community.[8] These written records suggest that intellectually many Baghdadi Jews were interested in the concept of religious reform. Foreign Jewish

4 For an extended discussion of these two elections see Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 102–105.

5 Cohen argues that the Iraqi Chief Rabbi had greater power in the Hashemite period as he was no longer subservient to the chief rabbi of Istanbul. However, the level of subservience of the Baghdadi chief rabbi towards the Ottoman chief rabbi is debatable given the lack of success that the *millet* system had in organizing Ottoman Jewish communities. Cohen, *Jews of the Middle East 1860–1872*, 65.

6 Technically Khadduri was Chief Rabbi of Iraq from 1928–1930, 1933–1949, 1953–1971. The gap in leadership between 1949–1953 is due to his resignation in 1949 precipitated by a lack of confidence in his ability to handle the communal crisis brought on by the creation of the State of Israel. Reuven Snir, "Khaḍḍūrī, Sassoon," EJIW.

7 Yehuda *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 104.

8 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 62–64; Al-Hasid, 1:11, April 18, 1929, Al-Hasid, 1:12, May 9, 1929, [as cited in] Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 248 n. 27; Editorial, IM, December 2, 1932.

publications provided Baghdadi readers an avenue to follow debates on religious reform in other Jewish communities, particularly in the Anglophone Jewish sphere where the concept of modern orthodoxy and reform Judaism were beginning to gain traction in the 1920s and 1930s.[9] As discussed in chapter two, the Baghdadi satellite communities had great respect for the religious institutions in Baghdad, but also enjoyed the autonomy and freedom their geographic distance gave them from the religious authorities. This religious autonomy allowed the Baghdadi community of Shanghai, for example, to ally themselves with secularly educated Rabbis such as Rev. Joseph H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Moses Gaster, a Romanian-born Sephardic rabbi in London, and Leo Jung, one of the architects of modern orthodoxy in America, without interference from Baghdad.[10] In Iraq discussions on religious reform rarely went further than editorial pieces in newspapers as religious practice in the home was a private matter and religious authority was generally uncontested, although regularly criticized. Thus, one can safely argue that literate Baghdadi Jews were aware of Jewish religious reform movements, but did not actively seek to import these movements into Iraq as an alternative to the normative religious hierarchy and practice.

There is one exception to this trend of theoretical debate with little success regarding either religious or communal reform: A group of Jews in Basra founded a lodge of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists. This movement was started in New York, became popular in Ashkenazi Jewish circles and was picked up by Baghdadis in the satellite communities as early as the 1880s. It came to Iraq via Baghdadi families, spread out between Iraq and India. At the height of the controversy, Jewish newspapers on four continents were publishing reports and editorials about the Theosophic Society in Basra. To quell the Basra theosophists, the Chief Rabbi in Baghdad eventually leveraged his international contacts, including the Jewish Philanthropist Elly Kadoorie in Shanghai, Rabbi Hertz in London, and Rabbi Jung in New York, to publicly condemn the theosophists and put pressure on the Basra community to renounce theosophy.

This controversy is particularly interesting because it is the only time in the twentieth century that the Jewish community in Iraq was challenged to such a degree that the elected officials became publicly active in delegitimizing their opponents,

9 Meyer, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Whangpoo*, 108–109.

10 Ibid, 36–37.

sparking a controversy within Baghdadi Jewry throughout Iraq and the satellite communities. The controversy was also followed in the non-Baghdadi Jewish press and the Arabic press.[11]

The center of this religious debate revolved around the question as to whether one could be a Torah observant Jew and study/practice theosophy, a pantheistic examination of religion. The issue, however, which caught the attention of the religious leadership in Baghdad was the establishment of a theosophical society which founded its own synagogue and employed a butcher, demonstrating the permeability of a fringe Jewish intellectual project, and how fringe intellectual projects could challenge both the religious and secular establishments. The controversy is often mentioned in the literature on the Jews of Iraq and the history of theosophy.[12]

I link the theosophy controversy to the growing intellectual connectivity between Baghdadi Jews and other Jewish groups arguing that external Jewish contacts could lead to contestations of power within the Jewish community in Iraq. The debates over the practice of theosophy in Iraq were carried out, for the most part, within the foreign Jewish press of the satellite communities and other English language Jewish press as disseminated through the Jewish Telegraph Agency. These articles were also picked up by the pro-British English language newspaper in Basra, *The Mesopotamian Times*,[13] and through the publication of two Arabic booklets published by Isaac Said

11 Menasche Anzi "Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra: Jews, Muslims and Booklets in Arabic" (Paper presented at International Conference Jews in Muslim Majority Countries: History and Prospects, Berlin October 25 2017).

12 Hayyim Cohen's piece traces the history of the debate drawing conclusions on why it arose and a few conclusions about Baghdadi Jewry during the period—Hayyim Cohen, "Jewish Theosophists in Basra" [in Hebrew]. *Ha-Mizrah haHadash* [The New East], 15 (1965): 401–406. Likewise, the book by David Sagiv, Judaism at the Meeting of the Rivers: The Jewish Community of Basra 1914–1952 [In Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2004) also discusses the Basra theosophists. Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 65; Roland, *Jews in British India*, 47, 73, 97, 99, 285.58; Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 107; Musleah, *On the Banks of the Ganga* page 73. Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 108–109. For examples relating to the study of theosophy, the work of Boaz Huss, conducted in the framework of the research project "Kabbalah and the Theosophical Society (1875–1936)," funded by the Israel Science Foundation (grant no ≠774/10). I am grateful to Prof. Huss for sharing his sources with me in preparation of this section.

13 JTA February 27, 1927; JTA, July 28, 1932; *The Iraq Times* was a pro-British English Language daily newspaper published in Iraq from 1914 until 1964. It was originally founded in Basra in 1914 as the *Basra Times* publishing articles in Arabic, English, Turkish, and Persian. In 1916, the paper became a purely English publication called *The Times of Mesopotamia*. The name was changed again in 1918 to the *Baghdad times* when the press was moved to Baghdad. Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*; Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 288–290.

Nathan in Basra in 1931 and 1932.[14] The actual resolution of the controversy only came about due to the intervention by members of the Baghdadi satellite community, particularly the philanthropist Elly Kadoorie and Ashkenazi Rabbis, including Great Britain's Chief Rabbi, Dr. J.H. Hertz, and Rabbi Leo Jung of New York.[15]

1.1. *The Origin of Theosophy—the Jewish Theosophists*

The term theosophy has been used in various periods to refer to different philosophical movements. This case refers to the Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875 with the motto "There is no Religion Higher than truth". At its origin the society professed a mystical philosophy that aspired to break down barriers and create a coherent universe. Inspired by Greek, German and American philosophy, its followers believed in a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, or color.[16] The movement gained popularity among American and European Jews. In the late nineteenth century theosophy became popular in the Baghdadi communities of Bombay and Calcutta. Articles in *Perah* from the 1880s make mention of theosophical meetings attended by Jewish intellectuals, who most likely learned of the philosophy from European Jews residing on the Indian subcontinent. Baghdadis in India formed theosophical societies, meeting regularly in social settings to discuss the importance of these ideas.[17] The formation of these societies did not elicit any comment from the Rabbinate in Baghdad, understandable as they did not challenge communal conventions and were restricted to only a few members.

Theosophy arrived in Iraq via Baghdadis who regularly traveled between the Indian satellite communities and Iraq, and a theosophy lodge was founded in Basra in 1915.[18]

The official journal of the theosophical society, the *Theosophist*, cites Dr. Jacob E. Solomon, a Baghdadi Jew from India, as the founder of the Basra chapter. One source even states that the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad was present at the inauguration of

14 Menasche Anzi "Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra."

15 JTA, July 28, 1932; Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 289.

16 Ainslie T. Embree, *India's Search for National Identity*, (New York: Knopf, 1972) 56–58; Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 107.

17 Musleah, *On the Banks of the Ganga*, 73; *Perah* 8:22, 153.

18 Boaz Huss, "'Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews:" Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbala," *Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah*, in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss eds. (Beersheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2016) 140.

the lodge.[19] The club existed until 1917 when it lapsed for unknown reasons.[20] Little is known as to what became of these followers of theosophy; it seems to have drawn little attention from Jewish leadership in Baghdad as they were probably more occupied with the dire situation in Baghdad during World War I. Theosophy continued to attract followers among Baghdadi Jews in Basra and the satellite communities for almost a decade, until the mid-1920s, with little mention in the Jewish press or commentary from the office of the Chief Rabbi.

In December, 1925, at a congress of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India, twelve Jewish delegates from India, Europe, the Middle East and the United States founded the Association of Hebrew Theosophists. The organization's underlying principles were: 1) to study Judaism in light of Theosophy and Theosophy in the light of Judaism; 2) to spread Theosophical teachings among the Jews; and 3) to undertake any other activity which could aid in the realization of the objects of the Association.[21] As an outgrowth of the new Association of Hebrew Theosophists, Kedourie Ani, then president of the Jewish community of Basra, founded a branch of the association in the city in 1927. Kedourie Ani had come to theosophy a decade earlier via his brother Reuben Ani, who lived between Baghdad and Bombay.[22]

Initially the theosophical society, a novelty in the community, functioned with little note in a building attached to the synagogue. Many of its early members were youths from the community who had been educated in secular Jewish schools, chose to dress in Western clothes, and who were at ease in mixed gender social settings. The association, therefore, was not just a philosophical society but also represented a new type of secular communal space, similar in nature to Jewish social clubs in Baghdad which had opened around the same time. As Basra was a much smaller city than Baghdad, there were fewer spaces to socialize for the Jewish youth and this alone may have been motivation enough for the youth to become interested in the society. Furthermore, as Zvi Yehuda suggests, many people became involved in theosophy not because they were interested in its philosophy, but because they saw it as potential force of modernity within the conservative communal framework.[23]

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19 "The Persecution of Hebrew Theosophists" in *The Theosophist*, June, 1931, 365.

20 Ibid, 363.

21 The three aims of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists appear in many sources. See for example: Gaston Polak, "Appeal to Members of the T.S." *The Theosophist* 47 (April 1926): 103–104.

22 Cohen, "Jewish Theosophists in Basra," 401–402.

23 Yehuda, *The New Babylonian Diaspora*, 104–105.

1.2. *Conflict in Basra*

Between 1927 and 1931, *Israel's Messenger*, the newspaper of the Shanghai Baghdadi community, ran several articles, book reviews and editorials dealing with theosophy and the theosophical movement in the satellite communities and in Basra. Although *Israel's Messenger* was skeptical of theosophy, as a journal dedicated to communal dialogue it covered both sides of the theosophy debate. For example, *Israel's Messengers* took the time to review a booklet published by the Hebrew Theosophist Society of Seattle, sent to the journal by its author who was a former resident of Shanghai but was currently residing in San Francisco. The journal attempted to review the booklet in a neutral manner but ultimately took a very skeptical position on the possible role of theosophy in Judaism.[24] Another article discussing theosophy in *Israel's Messengers* simply stated that "modern theosophy is too poor to stand comparison with the great Jewish teaching" and treated the debates as trivial and without any consequence or threat to Judaism.[25] These mild debates about the possibility of theosophy spiritualizing Judaism continued in the Baghdadi press until Kedourie Ani ran into conflict with another notable from the Jewish community in Basra and was forced to resign president of the community.

The situation escalated in March, 1931 when the office of the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad published a letter in Hebrew, to be read publicly in the synagogue in Basra, condemning the theosophists.[26] The letter was addressed to Hakham Heskell Sasson, the acting Chief Rabbi of Basra as a directive from the Chief Rabbi of Iraq. It states that the rabbis of Baghdad, after consulting several sources including the Chief Rabbi of London, have come to the conclusion that theosophy represents a new belief which differs from the Jewish faith. The letter further states that the lodge should be removed from communal grounds, and that those in the Jewish community who continue to practice theosophy should not be permitted to participate in prayer or hold positions of leadership within the Jewish community. The letter is signed by three members of the lay council.

The theosophists did not accept the ruling of the Chief Rabbi; they argued that theosophy was not a religion but a philosophy. Subsequently, Kaduri Ani and his

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24 IM, April 1, 1927.

25 IM, March 6, 1927; IM April 1, 1933.

26 The article notes that the letter is written in Hebrew, however this may mean that the letter was written in Judeo-Arabic. I have not been able to locate an original copy of the letter. "The Persecution of Hebrew Theosophists" in *The Theosophist*, June 1931, 364–365.

theosophist supporters formally split with the Jewish community of Basra, setting up a community in parallel to the official Jewish community in forming a separate *minyan*, overseeing kosher slaughter, and carry out its own burials.[27] This act was perceived as an attempt to undermine the Baghdadi Rabbinate as the theosophists successfully employed respected Jewish butchers who became theosophists. This meant that the theosophical congregation could now sell kosher meat without charging the *gabelle*, an important communal source of income for funding schools, synagogues, and charities. As the price for the meat under supervision by the theosophists did not include the *gabelle*, it was less expensive than that that of the regular kosher meat, yet still came from a respected butcher and was popular in the wider Jewish community. This gave credibility to the theosophists and caused the Rabbinate in Baghdad to fear that the Jewish community of Basra could secede from the Jewish communal organization of Iraq, or that the theosophical trend could spread to Baghdad and further erode the authority of the chief rabbi.

As a reaction, the Rabbinate in Basra—in conference with Baghdad—excommunicated the Basra theosophists. The published notice stated that all those who take part or visit the theosophy club will be considered as followers, so as to discourage other Jews in Basra from becoming involved out of curiosity.[28] In their public denouncement of the theosophists, both in the Jewish and non-Jewish press, they published endorsements of their stance from an Ashkenazi Orthodox American rabbi, Leo Jung. Jung published his condemnation of theosophy in *Israel's Messengers*,[29] and the article was distributed by the JTA to Jewish newspapers around the world. The controversy sparked a flurry of correspondence in the satellite newspapers, with people from both sides of the debate, inside and outside of Iraq, debating whether it was possible for someone to be both a Torah observant Jew and a theosophist.[30]

On September 4, 1931 the JTA ran an article from *Israel's Messenger* entitled 'Theosophy Making Inroads Among Jews in Iraq.' Its author, anonymously, stated that, "Iraqi Jewry is facing its severest crisis in many years. Appeals for aid have been made to Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz of England and Rabbi Leo Jung of New York, among others, but as yet the efforts of Iraq Jewish leaders have proved unavailing against the danger of apostasy that threatens them."[31]

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27 Cohen, "Jewish Theosophists in Basra," 401–402.

28 Cohen, "Jewish Theosophists in Basra."

29 IM July 28, 1932; JTA July 28, 1932.

30 JA, May 1931, 167; IM, June 1, 1931, 23; IM, April 1, 1932, 8–9; IM, April 1, 1933, 13.

31 JTA, September 4, 1931.

What is surprising in this notice is that appeals were made to rabbis in America and England, the connections coming via the Shanghai satellite community who had distanced themselves from the Baghdad religious authorities in favor of these Western rabbis. Jung, an occasional contributor to *Israel's Messenger*, had even arranged via N.E.B. Ezra, the editor of *Israel's Messenger*, to bring young men from Basra to New York to study at Yeshiva University. The hope was that these American-trained Iraqis would encourage the development of a generation of enlightened Iraqi Rabbis.[32] Ultimately, only one young man was sent to New York, Rahmin Sion. It is Sion and Ezra who brought the issue of the Basra theosophists to Jung's attention. Thus, it is surprising that the Baghdad Rabbinate would turn to these non-Baghdadi Rabbis for legitimacy, as at its outset the idea to train rabbis for Iraq outside of Iraq would have been perceived as an attempt to undermine the religious authority of Baghdad. However, in the context of the Basra theosophists, Sasson Khadduri found himself with unlikely and important allies: anglophone Ashkenazi rabbis.

As a reaction to Jung's article, the brother of Kadurie Ani, Reuben Ani, a resident of India who regularly traveled between Iraq and the satellite communities, published several articles in the *Jewish Advocate* defending theosophy and the lodge in Basra.[33] Beyond the reassertion that theosophy was a philosophy, not a religion, he accused the Rabbinate in Baghdad of trying to sow seeds of discord between Jews, stating that many Jews in the West participate in theosophy without creating an issue for religious authorities. He also clarifies that the Basra theosophists were not trying, "to form a section of the liberal Jews in Iraq." Similarly, in October, 1932, writing in *Israel's Messenger*, a Mr. S.S. Cohen, residing in Ceylon, attacked the letter of Leo Jung denouncing theosophy. He insinuates that the Rabbinate's interest in attacking the theosophists in Baghdad could be a way of deflecting attention from accusations that the Rabbinate had misappropriated communal funds.[34] In this case the newspaper made the point of issuing a clarification that the lay council controls communal funds and that the Rabbinate is not under investigation. Although the newspapers carried both sides of the debate, they generally tended to be pro-Rabbinate and anti-theosophy.

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32 Archives of this correspondence are contained in Yeshiva University in the Bernard Revel collection of papers. Shulamith Z. Berger, ""*Pumbeditha Traveled West!" Yeshiva College's First Iraqi Student*", (Yeshiva University Blog, April 5 2004).

33 JA, May 1931, 167.

34 IM, October 1931.

The resolution of the conflict was anticlimactic. In October, 1935 Elly Kadoorie offered to donate 30,000 dinars if "all confrontation and hate will be removed from the community,"[35] which meant disbanding the theosophy lodge. Following this announcement, on February 24, 1936, Sassoon Khadduri and other respected members of the lay council traveled to Basra and forged an agreement with the theosophists whereby they would disband their society and its institutions. An official declaration was made, stating that, "In the light of the agreement between the theosophical movement and the rest of the Jewish community in Basra, the restrictions against the theosophical movement are hereby lifted. All followers of theosophy are considered fully committed to their Jewish belief and shall therefore enjoy all the rights entitled by this religion [Judaism]."[36]

1.3. *The End of the Controversy*

This incident illustrates the high level of interconnectivity between Baghdad, the satellites communities and the greater Jewish world, well beyond philanthropy, education or concerns for the security of the Jewish community. Whereas the Rabbinate in Baghdad framed the issue of theosophy around the theological issue, those supporting theosophy framed the debate as a power struggle between the religious leadership and secular members of the community, even as those who supported theosophy and those who were against it used the writings of Jews in Europe and the United States to support their claims. Further, this incident demonstrates the Rabbinate's high level of awareness of trends in the other Jewish communities, particularly liberal Jewish movements in other countries and the work of anglophone Orthodox rabbis. This is consistent with the 1927 request to the AJA by the office of the Chief Rabbi to send a secretary to handle English language correspondence. One wonders if this was motivated by an understanding that in the modern world the Chief Rabbi would be required to correspond in English with foreign Jews and keep abreast of foreign news via English language newspapers.[37] In the theosophy case the condemnations of the Basra theosophists from Rabbis Hertz and Jung were written and disseminated in English, not Hebrew.

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35 This is a translation of the statement from Cohen "Jewish Theosophists in Basra," 405. Thank you to Liron Berdugo for her help with the translation.

36 Ibid.

37 MS 137 AJ37/4/2/2—March 15, 1927.

In retrospect, the controversy revolved around questions of money, power, and modernity more than spirituality, as the theosophists had existed in Iraq for over a decade and were primarily concerned with philosophical discussions. The Rabbinate condemned them when the theosophists formed their own synagogue and began to slaughter kosher meat, reducing the collection of the *gabelle* and undermining the communal infrastructure in Iraq. Cohen notes that the theosophy group was limited to Jews in Iraq and that the theosophists remained respectful of traditional Judaism.[38] He attributes this to the conservative nature of the local Muslim society.[39] Specifically, that the theosophical association met in the mixed company of men and women, with Jewish women appearing unveiled.[40] Furthermore, as Menasche Anzi argues, the local Muslim society perceived the theosophist movement, imported to Iraq by pro-British Westernized Jews, as a threat to monotheism and as a threat to Iraqi independence.[41] As a result, the theosophy controversy was largely a Jewish communal affair in which the Iraqi government and the Rabbinate were in agreement. Cohen frames the controversy as a power struggle between a traditional older generation and a younger, more modern generation. This point is confirmed by newspaper debates from the period, one of which refers to the youth who joined the theosophists as, "the young generation … drifting from one precipice to another".[42] This statement alludes to the idea that those involved in the controversy were concerned that the youth would use their secular education to stray from Judaism.

Cohen, however, does not develop the role of the international Jewish networks in his analysis, such as, the roles Rabbi Jung of New York, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire and Chief Rabbi Ouziel of Tel Aviv.[43] That the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv weighed on this controversy is significant, as it shows the Baghdadi Rabbinate's desire to obtain a widespread consensus on their ruling (and that consulting with Jews in Palestine was not perceived as problematic in this instance). As such, it is possible that the Rabbis in Baghdad wanted further religious agreement not simply limited to Ashkenazi halakhic opinion on the matter. If this was the motivation for including Rabbi Ouziel, it attests to Zvi Zohar's observation that from a halakhic perspective the

38 Cohen "Jewish Theosophists in Basra," 407.
39 Anzi, "Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra," 7.
40 Cohen "Jewish Theosophists in Basra," 407.
41 Anzi, "Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra," 7.
42 IM, August 1, 1931, 8.
43 Ibid.

"Babylonian Rabbis identified themselves as Sephardic."[44] Finally, this affair provides a small window into the transnational network of Sasson Khadduri, who is generally associated with his staunch 'Iraqi Orientation.'

This transnational factor in the controversy demonstrates that local communal affairs in Basra and Baghdad were not only of interest to those with no filial connection to Iraq, but that the writings and ideas outside of Iraq were also of importance to the Iraqi Jews. In fact, the English writings of Jung against the theosophists were translated into Arabic and published by a Yemenite-born Jew, Isaac Natan, who had immigrated to Iraq, possibly to reassure non-Jewish Iraqis that the communal leadership was anti-Theosophy.[45] Cohen attributes the failure of the theosophists to the weakness of the younger generation, an analysis with which I only partially agree. The younger generation was not unified in its view of theosophy, as demonstrated by Rahamim Sion, a Yeshiva University educated young man from Basra who was critical of both the Baghdadi Rabbinate and the Basra Theosophists.

This incident is indicative of many other trends within the among Baghdadis during the Mandate. Technically, the controversy was between the Chief Rabbis of Basra and Baghdad and the breakaway Jewish Theosophical society in Basra, but the controversy had many Jewish global actors who expressed themselves through the Jewish press. As my next case study demonstrates, the Jewish (and non-Jewish) foreign press were also an important forum of discussion for conflicts between the Jewish community and the Iraqi state.

2. E. Levy: Zionism, Foreign Press, and Censorship

The second case study is situated in the aftermath of the Mandate period, which ended in 1932 and was followed by the death of King Faisal in 1933. The 1930s were an uneasy time as the new state experienced political instability and unrest. Although not to be compared with the political turmoil and violence of the 1940s, for the Jewish community of Baghdad there was a perceivable difference in state policy after the Mandate ended. These changes included more government intervention in Jewish

44 Zohar, *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East*, 63.

45 Nattan had lived in India where he studied English, he then immigrated to Iraq, studying at Beit Zilkha and later teaching at the Wataniya school in Baghdad and the AIU schools in Basra and Amara. Anzi "*Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra*," 4.

schools, unofficial quotas for Jews employed in the civil service, the official banning of Zionism (in 1935) as an ideology, greater anti-Jewish sentiment in the local press, and the censuring of both Jewish periodicals and mail from abroad destined for Jews residing in Iraq. This case study looks at the events surrounding the arrest and trial of E. Levy,[46] a Baghdadi bookseller, who in 1934 was thrown in jail for defaming the Iraqi government in a British newspaper, demonstrating the importance of foreign Jewish and non-Jewish press to members of the community and the sensitivity surrounding access to these foreign newspapers. It demonstrates the continued importance of imperial and non-state actors for the Jewish community regarding their relationship with the Iraqi government.

I have used internal correspondence from the British Foreign office that discusses the incident to understand how the Jewish community reacted on an official level to these new restrictions and how they used their connections with foreign Jewish communities, foreign governments, and the Iraqi government to protest the Iraqi state. To understand the reaction of the communal leadership, I have used a yet unpublished, secret report written by a member of the Baghdad Jewish lay council delegate to the Iraqi parliament, Ibrahim Nahum. Nahum had the letter smuggled out of Baghdad by an unnamed non-Jewish English friend. The letter is unique in that it presents Nahum's detailed views of the Jewish situation in Iraq divorced from concerns of censorship.[47]

Close government control of newspapers and censorship had always been part of print culture in Iraq, causing local writers and publishers to self-censor. The Iraqi state used the Ottoman Laws regulating print culture almost word for word, only changing the currency stipulated for fines, from Lira to Rupee, and finally to Dirham. As Bashkin explains in *The Other Iraq*:

> Every publisher had to submit a memorandum to the Ministry of Interior stating the titles of the newspaper or periodical, place of issue, and the subjects under discussion; the name, age, residence, and nationality of its publisher and editor; and the language of the publication in which it was the paper would be published. Publishers had to send two copies of each newspaper,

46 In the English language press and private correspondence both Levy's first and last name appear in different formats. Publications refer to him as Ephraim or Eliahou and his last name as Levi, Lewi, Lawee.

47 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15, see appendix C.

> daily, or periodical to the Ministry of the Interior. Sellers of newspapers, books, pamphlets, pictures or other printed material needed permits from the state.[48]

Failure to abide by these laws put publishers and booksellers at risk of having their businesses shut down. Further, a set of defamation laws was put in place, citing defamation of religious communities, the nation, state officials or anything going against public morality. Transgressing these laws would result in jail time and possible fines.[49] This meant that although printing and publishing flourished during the Mandate and early years of the state, the scope of public discourse was heavily weighted toward pro-government publications, literature and areas not perceived as politically sensitive. Due to this the foreign press and particularly the non-Arabic press became extremely important in providing information on areas which the government was susceptible to censor.

If a large portion of Iraqi Jews by the 1930s were able to read in multiple languages, this was due to the sizeable portion of the Jews in Baghdad who had received instruction in French, English, Hebrew and Arabic (to varying degrees),[50] making the community significantly more literate than the general Iraqi population of the time.[51] Given the multilingual nature of Jewish education in Baghdad it is not surprising that many members of the Jewish community subscribed to both Jewish and non-Jewish foreign press, in addition to the local press in both Arabic and English. Based on the list of censured Jewish newspapers from 1934, we know that there were at least sixteen foreign Jewish newspapers with subscribers in Baghdad that year. Of these newspapers, nine were published in Hebrew, four in English, one in Arabic and, surprisingly, one in Yiddish.[52] The majority of these newspapers came from Mandate Palestine, and others were published by Jewish communities in Beirut, Cairo, London, Bombay, and Shanghai. In particular, the periodicals of the satellite communities had a specific interest in Jewish life in Baghdad carrying original reports on Iraq, opposed to syndicated pieces from the JTA. Many of these special pieces on Iraq were anonymous and it is highly likely that they came from Jews in Iraq.

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48 Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 37–38; Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

49 Ibid.

50 Goldstein-Sabbah, "Jewish Education in Baghdad."

51 Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 44.

52 CO/733/275/4.

By 1934 there were no longer any self-described Jewish newspapers. This is most likely a consequence of the heightened censorship in the post-Mandate era and concerns of accusations of conflicting loyalties. During the Mandate period, although censorship existed, there are no records of censorship specifically targeting members of the Jewish community or the foreign Jewish press. Examples of Jewish newspapers in the 1920s include *al-Burhan* (1928–1930), *al-Dalil* (1929), and *al-Misbah* (1924–1929). In the case of *al-Misbah*, its second editor, Salman Shina, was an avowed Zionist and identified *al-Misbah* as a Zionist paper without causing scrutiny from the censors.[53] In the 1930s, numerous literary reviews continued to be owned and edited by prominent Jewish intellectuals within Baghdad, but there was no official publication of the Jewish community or a publication specifically dedicated to reporting Jewish news in Baghdad within Iraq by 1934.[54]

Due to the lack of a local Jewish newspaper I argue that Iraqi Jews went to the foreign press for information on news related to the Jewish world, and specifically to gain information about topics sensitive to the Iraqi state and therefore not often discussed in the Arabic language press. Additionally, many Jews subscribed to the English language *Iraq Times*, a paper often cited in this period as the primary print source for general foreign news in Iraq. While Arabic newspapers were also widely read and subscribed to, particularly ones edited by local Jewish intellectual elites, these are rarely cited as a source of news. Instead they were referenced for their interesting discussions of Iraqi society and innovative literary styles.[55] By 1934 it was becoming more difficult to get foreign Jewish journals into the country due to an increased vigilance for anything purported to have Zionist sympathies. British foreign office reports first mention the censoring of foreign Jewish publications in Iraq in September, 1934,[56] stemming from inquiries sent to the Foreign Office by the editors of Jewish newspapers from London and Palestine. These newspapers had received notifications that their Iraqi subscriptions had been cancelled due to a ban on the publications. Although no exact reason was given by the Iraqi authorities, all parties infer that the issue is transmission of Zionist ideology. During the same period, the Bombay-based *Jewish Tribune* wrote directly to the Postmaster General of Iraq, the

53 Bashkin, "Misbah (Baghdad), al-," EJIW.

54 For example, *al-Hasid* a weekly literary periodical. The editor, Anwar Sha'ul openly attacked the Nazi and fascist ideas in Europe, but the periodical did not specifically represent the Jewish community. Orit Bashkin "al-Hasid (Baghdad), al," EJIW.

55 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*.

56 CO/733/268/6.

Minister of the Interior and other Iraqi officials in regard to their paper not being allowed into the country. The *Jewish Tribune* never received a government response.[57] That it is the publishers of these newspapers inquiring about their importation status suggests that the subscription numbers were significant as it is unlikely that the canceling of a handful of subscriptions would have raised any notice from the publishers.

Upon request from the publishers of the Jewish newspapers and the AJA, the British Foreign office began to make inquiries into the status of the foreign Jewish press in Iraq. This was carried out discretely so as not to draw attention to a sensitive subject, the standard approach by foreign and local Jewish groups when making possibly controversial inquiries of the Iraqi government. The issue of foreign Jewish newspapers being prevented from entering Iraq became public on October 2, 1934 when a letter sent to the editor of the Manchester Guardian regarding the same concern was published. Unlike the abovementioned inquiries this letter came directly from a Jew in Iraq:

> Sir, – Iraq has become an intellectual prison; liberty of thought and belief have become a myth. Apart from the strict censorship and muzzling of the local press, all letters from Palestine are opened by the postal authorities before being delivered to their owners.
>
> Anti-Zionist and hence anti-Jewish, feeling (all Jews are suspected of Zionist tendencies) is running high. A whole sale [sic] ban has been placed on Jewish papers or on papers in defense of the Jews from all over the world. Papers from England, America, France, Egypt, and Palestine have been confiscated without legitimate reason. All books written in Hebrew are also suppressed. Books addressed to the Chief Rabbinate of Bagdad have been confiscated.
>
> The banning of Communist propaganda literature and of books of an obscene nature is quite understandable; but to ban all Jewish papers published in England, America, and France is an outrage which no-liberal minded individual can tolerate. – Yours, &c, E. Levy.
>
> Al Rashid Library, Bagdad, Iraq September 24

Levy, the letter's author, was the owner of the Al Rashid bookstore in Baghdad, and the letter itself is surprising in its candid description of censorship targeted at the

57 "Iraqi Consulate Established in Bombay: Special Interview with Consul-General for India", JT, March 1935, 34.

Jewish community of Baghdad. Looking beyond the very direct message the letter communicated, it also provides information about Levy, the Jewish community of Baghdad, and Iraqi society at that time. Although little personal information about Levy is available beyond that he was a modest bookseller of Persian origin.[58] This fact is relatively unremarkable as many Jews living in Iraq at this time were of Persian origin. I have included this point only because it was explicitly noted in the Foreign Office files. we can assume several points. We can assume that he was generally well aware of foreign press as his bookshop was responsible for importing the censured Jewish newspapers. It is also probable that, given his profession and ability to write in English, he received a secular education. Finally, we can assume that he is squarely positioned in the middle class. As the owner of a bookstore, he would not have been considered a member of the elite, a spot reserved for those who controlled large import/export businesses or the few who held important government positions. This characterization of Levy is confirmed by descriptions of him in British Foreign Office correspondence and by Ibrahim Nahum.[59] Had he been a member of the elite, it is unlikely that he would have opted to protest the policies of the state in such a public manner, choosing instead to discretely approach government officials himself or, perhaps, opted to lobby the government through back channels by requesting help from foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations or local consuls, which is the course the lay council was taking when Levy's letter was published.[60]

The communal leadership was hesitant to publicly criticize the state during this period, or link themselves as individuals or on behalf of the community with anything related to Zionism. The clearest example of this can be seen in a letter written by Sassoon Khadduri in the local newspaper *al-Istiqlal* in which he condemns Zionism and shows support for the Arab population in Palestine. That letter was sent less than a year after the Levy letter was published in the *Manchester Guardian*.[61] Despite this public declaration of support by the Chief Rabbi, in private the community continued to maintain links with individuals associated with the Zionist movement both in Mandate Palestine and elsewhere. Many Iraqi Jews, for both business and leisure, continued to travel to Palestine until the dissolution of the community, and Solal Boneh, the Jewish construction firm associated with the *Histadrut*, sent

58 CO/733/268/6.

59 Ibid. See next section on Ibrahim Nahum.

60 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

61 *Al-Istiqlal*, October 8, 1936. Reproduced in English in Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 389.

hundreds of Jewish engineers and technicians to Iraq to work on British contracts.[62] The public language of the community remained nationalistic and patriotic during this period, but in private correspondence individuals appear much more conflicted by the political reality and their individual affinities to both the Iraqi state and the Jewish people.[63]

A more central question is what prompted Levy to act as such a maverick in writing this letter, and why to the *Manchester Guardian* in particular? What did he hope to gain from writing such a critical piece in such a public space? Did he think that this would lift the ban on Jewish newspapers or that the government would stop opening letters addressed to Jews from abroad? And was he concerned that there would be consequences in publishing a letter so critical of the Iraqi state? Although none of these questions can be definitively answered, by beginning to explore them we can understand how members of the very diverse Jewish community of Baghdad negotiated the shifting political scene and public opinion of the Jewish community in Iraq.

In hindsight, Levy's letter to the *Manchester Guardian* was a complete folly as the letter was published under his name.[64] That Levy chose to sign his name to the letter makes it unique as other letters like his had been published before and after this particular incident, but they were published in Jewish newspapers with a smaller readership base and, more important, usually appeared as anonymous letters under signatures such as "an Iraqi Jew" or "Well Wisher",[65] even for much less contentious letters such as the suggestion that Iraq should have its own Jewish newspaper.[66] Levy's letter is unique but there is never any doubt of its authenticity in private correspondence, government records, or newspaper articles.

The JTA reported that Levy sent his letter to the *Manchester Guardian* only after it had been rejected by all the Arabic language newspapers in Baghdad.[67] While it is possible that some newspapers in Iraq were sympathetic to Levy's stance, none were willing to risk the repercussions that would have ensued from publishing such a letter under the strict censorship laws regarding defamation of the state. Publishing the letter in a foreign Jewish newspaper would also have been an affront as Jewish

62 For information on Solal Boneh in Iraq see—Bondy, *The Emissary*, 192–206.

63 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 15–57.

64 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15; CO/733/268/6.

65 These two examples come from letters to the editor in the December 1936 issue of the Jewish Tribune, Bombay.

66 Ibid.

67 JTA, November 7, 1934.

newspapers were very receptive to these types of letters. In fact, once the story was picked up by the JTA, copies of Levy's letter were republished in the *Jewish Chronicle* and in the Hebrew and English language Zionist press in Palestine. It is unclear whether this was Levy's doing or if the newspapers simply copied the letter from the *Manchester Guardian*.[68] It is my belief that Levy specifically sent this letter to a non-Jewish foreign newspaper as a result of his frustration in being censored in the Iraqi press, and also to protest to the Jewish communal leadership which was not publicly addressing the issues of censorship or challenging the state to reform its policies regarding the opening of mail. Finally, as Levy had a vested interest, central to his livelihood, in the importation of foreign Jewish press, he had more to lose from a financial perspective. As Nahum notes when discussing Levy, his "business has severely suffered through the suppression of certain Jewish newspapers in Iraq."[69] Unlike others who were imposed on by these bans but founds ways to smuggle letters and newspapers in and out of Iraq using non-Jewish friends and colleagues, Levy's business depended on the importation of Jewish newspapers,[70] a point recognized by Nahum in the above quote.

Levy's letter, very precise in its focus on censorship, stated that he found the current government policies unfair in equating Jewishness with Zionism, but that he did not find the idea of government censorship as a whole to be problematic. Positing that the banning of communist and obscene literature was understandable gives the impression that he wanted to demonstrate that he was not against the Iraqi state and its policies in their entirety, only their specific targeting of the Jewish community on this particular issue, which he found misguided. Additionally, he chose not to bring up other issues afflicting the Jewish community, notably the dismissal of some Jewish civil servants, the denial of travel visas to Palestine for Jews and a sharp rise in anti-Jewish writing in the Arabic language Iraqi press.[71] All of these issues were noted by the British Foreign Office and Nahum, grouped together with the issue of censorship, as hardships befalling the Jewish community. The construction of the letter is such that one wonders if Levy was naïve to the gravity of the situation and the possible consequences, an opinion which Nahum would have most likely supported

68 JTA, November 18, 1934.

69 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

70 For example, Ibrahim Nahum smuggled his report on the state of Iraqi Jewry to the Kadoories with the assistance of an English acquaintance. KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

71 This anti-Jewish writing is also technically illegal under the Iraqi censorship laws. Bashkin, *The Other* Iraq, 36–39.

as he called the letter "a folly".[72] Another possible explanation is that Levy was testing the limits of personal freedom of expression in Iraq, hoping his letter would incite international criticism of Iraq's censorship policies and pressure the Iraqi government to reconsider its actions.

2.1. *Consequences of the Manchester Guardian Letter*

Levy was successful in drawing attention to the Iraqi state's treatment of the Jewish community, inciting international criticism of its policies. Shortly after the publication of his letter, many Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers published related stories.[73] The other immediate outcome of his letter is that Levy was thrown in jail and charged with "intended libel and defamatory remarks damaging to Iraq's integrity".[74] His arrest was covered in the Jewish and non-Jewish foreign press and by the Arabic language press in Baghdad. The foreign press sympathized with Levy and the local press defended both the state's actions in regard to Levy and its general policies in regard to censorship. On November 7, 1934 a short article was distributed by the JTA regarding the Levy letter. The piece noted that Levy had been arrested and jailed after publishing his letter in the *Manchester Guardian*. It went on to note that Levy had sworn affidavits from a number of Jews on the banning of Jewish newspapers and on the opening of registered mail sent to them from other countries.[75] Finally, it mentioned that the president and council of the Baghdad Jewish community had protested to the government against the anti-Jewish tone of the Arabic language Iraqi press. However, the Iraqi government took no steps to halt the anti-Semitic agitation.[76]

The key point in the JTA story was that Levy was not alone in his complaint. The article notes that Levy had sworn affidavits stating that his accusations were true, meaning that others were willing to confront the government over this injustice, although no names were ever given in print. Further, the piece raised an additional issue confronting the Baghdad Jews, namely the anti-Jewish tone of the Arabic press, an issue which Levy exacerbated by publishing his letter, playing right into the initial

72 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

73 Jewish newspapers carried information through JTA syndication. Many English periodicals also followed the story such as the *Manchester Guardian* which ran the original letter and the *Daily Telegraph* which published the letter on November 16, 1934.

74 'Arab Teacher in Iraq School Beats Children,' JTA November 7, 1934.

75 Ibid.

76 The letter specifically refers to the term anti-Semitism; KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

Zionist accusations of the Iraqi press.[77] Although the article went on to note that the community president and lay council were protesting the anti-Jewish tone in the Iraqi press, there was no defense of Levy's actions from the lay council. In private, Nahum, a member of the lay council, shows frustration with Levy's piece stating that:

> [...] no sooner than published, the vernacular papers have immediately translated the letter with storms of criticism, much of which were furious attacks against the Jews. Among the criticism, the Jews here were convicted of Zionism, their fidelity of national feeling was seriously doubted and condemned. This conviction [Levy's] has now become the common guilt of the Iraqi Jew.[78]

In private, many Jews probably admired Levy for standing up for his beliefs and questioning the state in such a public forum. This point is confirmed by the aforementioned affidavits supporting Levy and anonymous letters defending him written by Baghdadi Jews published in foreign Jewish newspapers.[79]

This conflicted nature of Baghdadi Jewish reactions to the letter is also evident in Nahum's letter. Although he stated that Levy's actions were inappropriate, further aggravating a tense situation, he did not defend the state's actions but only noted that the consequences of Levy's actions were as to be expected. Nor does Nahum question the validity of Zionist ideology, but only mentions that he understands why Zionism is unacceptable to the greater Arab population. Nahum also asserted that the foreign press were sensationalizing the whole event, although it is unclear in his letter whether he actually believed what he was saying or was simply trying to reassure the Kadoories (and possibly himself).

The British Foreign office also made inquiries to the Iraqi government about the Levy case and the censorship issue, the origin of the inquiries coming from the AJA. I have not found any documents in the AJA archives regarding the impetus for contacting the foreign office, but the most likely scenario was that they received a request from the lay council to help de-escalate the situation with the Iraqi government.[80] This construction was not unusual as the lay council regularly asked the AJA to intercede with the Foreign Office on its behalf.

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77 'Arab Teacher in Iraq School Beats Children', JTA November 7, 1934.

78 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

79 JT, March 1935, 33.

80 CO/733/268/6.

Beyond the inquiry from the British Foreign Office, the Iraqi government was most likely concerned about foreign newspapers' continued interest in Levy. Two days after the JTA piece, the *Manchester Guardian* provided an update on the Levy case,[81] giving additional information not mentioned in the JTA notice of Levy's arrest. The *Manchester Guardian* contacted the Iraqi legation in the United Kingdom for comment on the Levy affair, and the legation stated that their only knowledge of the case was derived from newspapers and they were thus unable to comment on the matter. It is plausible that they had been informed not to make any public statement as an attempt to de-escalate the incident. The newspaper also contacted the Foreign Office, and they too stated they had no information, noting that they would not be informed on the matter as Levy was not a British subject. Archival records suggest that the Foreign Office was lying about their knowledge of the affair: their records include a private narrative of the Levy case that contradicts the public narrative given in the press.[82]

The correspondence from the Foreign Office on the foreign Jewish press ban in Iraq prior to the publication of the Levy letter was bundled with general observations on the increasing difficulties faced by Jews in Iraq such as dismissals from the public service, harassment in the street and, in a few cases, trouble in immigrating to Palestine, none of which were mentioned by Levy in his letter.[83] As reports from F.H. Humphreys of the British embassy in Baghdad made clear, both the Foreign Office and the Jewish communities of England and Iraq, using the Foreign Office as an intermediary,[84] were closely watching the situation and negotiating with the Iraqi government about these restrictions. After the letter's publication and during Levy's subsequent trial, the Iraqi government did not intervene when the Iraqi press criticized Levy or the Jewish community of Iraq. Although criticizing a particular religious community was forbidden under the censorship laws, the government initially chose not to react either in defending the Jews or publicly commenting on the situation.

The one exception I have found to this in the English language press is an article summarizing an interview with the Consul General for Iraq in India, for the *Jewish Tribune*, which discussed the unease of the community. The *Jewish Tribune* in Bombay interviewed Iraq's Consul General in India on the subject of the Levy case, asking

81 *Manchester Guardian*, November 16, 1934, 14.

82 CO 733/275/4.

83 CO 733/275/4; KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

84 CO/733/268/6; FO 371/20016.

questions about the anti-Jewish sentiment in the Iraqi press, and more generally about anti-Jewish sentiments in Iraq.[85] This interview demonstrated the interest amongst Jewish communities abroad in events in Baghdad, but was also an example of the Iraqi government's desire to improve how they were viewed in the foreign Jewish press. The interview revealed a certain openness, but also a lack of coherence from the Iraqi government in that they were willing to allow the consul to be interviewed by a Jewish newspaper that had previously been banned in Iraq under the pretense of Zionist sympathies. The Iraqi state most likely underestimated the international reaction to the Levy case and therefore the interview can be interpreted as an attempt to de-escalate the tension surrounding the censorship issue.

In the article, the interviewer questioned the Consul General on the censorship of the Jewish press, the Levy trial and Zionism. The interviewer also stated that 'the Jewish situation in Iraq concerned the Jews of the world, more particularly those in India, as the majority of Jews in India either hailed from Iraq or descended from Jews who were at one time born in Iraq.'[86] The response from the consul general was extremely limited. On the censorship of newspapers he replied that he was unaware of the bans or the protestations from the community surround these bans; on the Levy trial he stated that he "had no business criticizing his country in the columns of a foreign paper," and he refused to discuss Zionism.[87] Thus this interview was typical of the Iraqi government's attempts to de-escalate the growing unease outside Iraq toward the treatment of the Jews in Iraq, without actually addressing any of the issues.

In his report to the Kadoorie family in Asia, Nahum postulated that the "silence of the Government, whether from weakness or negligence, to counteract the press has developed an extreme position".[88] In the summer of 1934 Prime Minister Jamil al-Mafdai resigned after less than ten months in office and 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayubi accepted the position of Prime Minister. Jawdat came into office barraged by pressing issues, particularly growing sectarianism from tribal groups. There was also the issue of managing a new king who was considered less capable than his father and finally there was ongoing discussion over Iraq's relationship with Britain.[89] Compared to these topics, the problems of the foreign Jewish press were minor.

85 JT, March 1935, 33.

86 'Iraq Consulate Established in Bombay: Special Interview with Consul-General for India', JT, March 1935, 33.

87 Ibid.

88 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

89 Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950*, 238–240.

The initial ban on Jewish newspapers and the reaction to the Levy letter must therefore be understood in the context of a weak government trying to manage many potential crises. It is possible that the initial ban on foreign Jewish press had been a poorly conceived attempt from the state to minimize any Iraqi Jewish involvement in the Zionist movement and shield the Jewish community—albeit in a paternalistic fashion—from accusations of disloyalty. Given the negative press this policy garnered from abroad after the publication of the Levy letter, however, it had the opposite effect by drawing attention to the Iraqi Jewish community and giving the local press fodder to accuse the Jews of Zionist leanings, further degrading the Jewish position in Iraq. After the publication of the letter, the Iraqi government most likely wanted to de-escalate the situation as quickly and as quietly as possible with a goal of minimizing sectarian tension and drawing as little negative attention as possible from the West.

2.2. *The sentencing of Levy*

The actual sentencing of Levy was indicative of this desire to de-escalate and the government's incapacity to do so in a diplomatic manner. Levy was first sentenced to one year of hard labor followed by one year of police surveillance.[90] This sentence, on appeal, was then litigated and retried several times in the months following the initial conviction.[91] After he was released, the case was reopened when an Iraqi merchant residing in London claimed that his business suffered due to Levy's letter, resulting in the loss of 2000 pounds sterling. The Iraqi High Court chose to fine Levy an additional 75 pounds in damages.[92] The case was again reopened when Levy appealed, and the charges were dropped at one point and then revised. Finally, in June, 1935, eight months after publication of the letter, the fine was dropped and his prison stay was shortened to six months, three of which had already been served after his initial conviction.[93] That Levy was able to appeal his case and that his punishment was consistently changed, was indicative of the governmental chaos during this period and, in particular, the ever changing policies towards the Jewish community.

Throughout the trial the official government message was consistent: Levy was tried as an Iraqi citizen for his public critique of the state. Although directly after the publication of the letter the government did not censor the Arabic language press in

90 *Israel: Hebomodaire Juif Independent*, Cairo, May 5, 1935, 3.

91 *Palestine Post*, Jerusalem, December 24, 1934, 5.

92 CO 733/275/6.

93 *Israel: Hebomodaire Juif Independent*, Cairo, June 20, 1935, 4.

their attacks on the Jewish community, as the affair dragged on the government took measures to assuage the fears of the Jewish community and key diplomatic partners, such as the British government, about the safety of Jewish life in Iraq. This included temporarily banning, due to its anti-Semitic articles, the Arabic language newspaper *Hedaya* and closing down another anti-Jewish newspaper, *al-Ikab*, ten weeks after its founding.[94] These actions reassured the Jewish community that the government was responding to the complaints which the lay council had articulated over unfair coverage in the press.[95] These actions also were intended to calm international concerns. From a pragmatic perspective, the Jewish community was one of the most visible and internationally connected minorities in Iraq due to their transnational networks and commercial importance. If the government needed to demonstrate to that it was a reliable and stable developing country, it was essential to end the conflict quietly.

Both Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers reported the banning of the anti-Jewish newspapers, interpreting this as a symbol of the government's desire to protect the Jewish community. Within a global context, these actions were particularly significant when compared to the opposite actions at the same time that Germany was taking towards its Jewish community, a point not missed by the Jewish and non-Jewish press.[96] Specifically, the Iraqi state was seen as taking measures to protect the Jewish community by shutting down anti-Semitic factions in the press and, in general, distancing itself from anything that could be perceived as anti-Semitic. This could be seen, moreover, as an attempt by the Iraqi government to prove to Europe that it was capable of maintaining a pluralist nation in which all minorities had equal rights as citizens.

In March, 1935, the short-lived Jawdhat government dissolved, and after a two week return to office by Mafdai, his government fell as well, events that confirmed the instability of the Iraqi government and helped explain the regularly changing policies on censorship. In April, the JTA noted that the new government, under the leadership of Yassin Pasha al-Hashimi, "consists of broad-minded ministers many of whom are very friendly and disposed toward the Jews," a point confirmed in internal documents from the British Foreign Office which concluded that the Levy crises was coming to a close. It also noted that it was now possible for the banned newspapers to be allowed back into Iraq. And yet, whatever minimal impact Levy's letter may have

94 JTA, December 4, 1934.

95 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

96 CO 733/275/4—JTA bulletin 94.

had on censorship policies, the changes were short lived as new bans on the foreign Jewish press were issued in March, 1936. The new ban, as part of the new laws against Zionism, focused on newspapers with a Zionist philosophy. Levy's letter, ultimately, was unsuccessful in its objective of lifting the ban on Jewish periodicals.[97]

The Levy case demonstrates the agency one man in Baghdad had by bringing to an international audience what he perceived as a social injustice. His letter forced both communal elites and the Iraqi government to publicly address the issue of the Jewish community's relationship to other Jewish communities, especially in Palestine, which was growing in importance. It is unclear if Levy knew of the communal leadership's lobbying the Iraqi government in regard to the censorship of Jewish newspapers or the inquiries made by the AJA via the British Foreign Office on behalf of both the foreign publishers and the lay council. Had he known, perhaps, about their work he may not have risked compromising himself by writing such a critical public letter. The international attention should not be perceived as emboldening the Jewish community as no one in Iraq besides Levy published signed letters protesting the actions of the Iraqi government. Instead the Levy case should be seen as highlighting the shared media space between Iraq and foreign Jewish communities and the reticence of official the Jewish leadership to make public declarations in this period.

The incident also forced members of the Jewish community to consider how the Iraqi nation would evolve in the post-Faisal era. For all of the pluralist discourse of the state, this incident reminded the Jewish community of its relative weakness as a religious minority and the limits of the help their brethren abroad could offer in mediating such situations. Finally, this incident demonstrates that by 1934 Palestine had already become a central issue in the Iraqi public sphere and was influencing the Iraqi perception of the Jewish community.

On a larger scale, this event illustrates the complicated predicament entangling the Jews of Iraq both on a communal and an individual level. Years of cooperation with foreign Jewish organizations had built strong ties to foreign Jewish communities, some of whom were benefactors for local charities and many of whom interceded with the Iraqi government on the community's behalf. In particular, the AJA during the Mandate had become an important political advisor and negotiator for the lay council. In the post-Mandate period, however, certain factions of the Iraqi government began to consciously distance themselves from Britain. That the Jewish community maintained their strong ties with Britain—particularly via the AJA and Baghdadis

97 Ibid.

residing in the British Empire—was another factor beyond Zionism leading to their loyalty to the Iraqi state being called into question.

The story of Levy's public protestation of Iraqi government policies and the conflict that ensued illustrated the emerging dichotomy of the Iraqi Jewish identity, whereby being an Iraqi citizen and a Jew—with transnational Jewish connections—increasingly were seen as mutually exclusive. The censorship of Jewish newspapers and the opening of letters was not only ideologically upsetting, and from a security perspective unsettling, but potentially problematic for commercial interests. This incident shows the complexity of how the Jewish community interpreted the changing political scene in Iraq and their desire to reassure themselves of a stable long term outcome. For example, anti-Jewish articles in the Iraqi press led the Iraqi Jews to compare their predicament to the political situation of Jews in Germany (and later Europe as a whole). The Iraqi Jews were reassured when the Iraqi government took steps to protect the community by banning local anti-Jewish newspaper.[98]

Finally, this episode shows that the Jewish communal leadership, although generally loathe to engage in public political statements or directly confront the government, was willing to defend members of the Jewish community even regarding sensitive subjects a testament to their feeling of responsibility for all Iraqi Jews. Ironically, in many ways Levy's letter was successful in that it led some members of the Jewish community and the Iraqi government to confront the issue of Zionism. The letter contributed to a temporary lifting of the newspaper ban and the censorship of foreign Jewish mail. And yet the outcome was frustrating in that it never fully addressed reconciling two loyalties which were quickly coming into conflict: those of the nation (Iraq) and those of the transnational Jewish community.

3. Ibrahim Nahum: The Kadoorie Agent in Baghdad

Throughout this thesis I have made mention of Ibrahim Nahum, a nephew of Elly Kadoorie (1867–1944) and a cousin of Lawrence and Horace Kadoorie. Unlike the Sassoon family, who used a non-Jewish British subject (Mr. M. Maynard) to manage their assets and charities in Iraq, the Kadoorie's employed Nahum to represent them in Iraq, the Levant, and Iran.[99] Nahum's correspondence with his Kadoorie uncle and

98 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15, December 25, 1934.

99 KA B4A1/ November 1945 to January 1957, December 19, 1951.

cousins in Shanghai and Hong Kong is unique. Over the course of two decades one can read of the changing fortunes of the Baghdadi Jews from both the personal level, in regard to his family's future in Iraq, and the communal level, in regard to his leadership role in the community. Nahum was part of the ruling elite and he enjoyed many additional privileges as the agent of the Kadoories. His important position within the community as a member of the lay council and as a member of the Iraqi parliament gave him access to government officials and he most likely had greater ease in obtaining travel visas. Intellectually, however, Nahum can be considered representative of many middleclass Baghdadi men who did not subscribe strongly to any one political ideology—such as Zionism, Communism, or Arab Nationalism—but was active in both Arab and Jewish civil society.

Unlike men such as Ezra Haddad, Anwar Shaul, Mir Basri and Heskell Sasson, he published no written works and made no public political statements. Beyond correspondence with his cousins, he left no writing of any note and there is very little on him in the public record.[100] Nahum represents the generation of Iraqi men who spent most of their adult lives within Iraq and came of age during the early years of the Mandate, a generation that preceded men like Sasson Somekh, Nissim Rejwan, and Naim Kattan. Thus, Nahum's reflections on the events unfolding around him were those of an adult aware of the full implications of the changing tides in Iraq. Unlike the autobiographies of the men cited above, Nahum's reflections cited in this section were written contemporaneously with no knowledge of how the future would unfold.

Although the details of Nahum's life prior to the 1930s are relatively vague, some biographical facts are known.[101] In his years-long correspondence with his cousins, he indicates that he was educated at one of the AIU boys' schools, perhaps Albert Sassoon, sometime in the 1920s. In addition to his role as the Kadoorie's agent in the Levant, Nahum participated in many other social, political and commercial activities. His letterhead stated that he maintained a *Khan* for importing and exporting goods. Nahum spoke and wrote easily in French—although his spelling and grammar cannot be considered fluent and the style makes clear that he never lived in a francophone

100 Nahum is mentioned once in an article in *Paix et Droits* in relation to the opening of an AIU school and once in issue 70 of *The Scribe* October 1998. However, his name does not come up in the IJA archives.

101 The Kadoorie archives are not complete; much was lost first during the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in late 1941 and later during the Communist Revolution in China beginning in 1946 when much of the Shanghai archives were destroyed.

country—he was able to read and speak English,[102] and if his cousins are to be believed, he also spoke some Hebrew.[103] Prior to working for the Kadoorie family he worked as a portfolio manager and chief cashier at the Ottoman Bank.[104] Nahum was married to Lulu, who managed the Laura Kadoorie Atelier in Baghdad for 25 years, but no other biographical information about her parents or siblings are mentioned. Like Nahum, she came from an established Baghdadi family which had spread around the globe. They had two children, a boy named David and a girl named Rachel, each of whom was educated in the AIU and AJA schools. David died in his late teens of an unnamed illness, but his sister emigrated to Israel with their parents. In Israel she married a fellow Iraqi Jew who had lived for a few years in Egypt. Nahum's profile and what we know of his life is similar to that of Sasson Somekh's father as they each received a similar education, held similar bank jobs, read the same newspapers and had similar experiences upon resettling in Israel and finding work.[105]

Ibrahim Nahum acted as the Levant-based eyes and ears of the Kadoorie family for most of the 1930s and 1940s, as his correspondence with the family demonstrates. He began working for his cousins in Asia sometime in the mid-1920s,[106] subsequently taking on a more official and structured role as the years progressed and the Kadoorie philanthropic activities in the Levant and Iran expanded. A 1932 article in *Paix et Droit* mentioned that Nahum attended the placing of the cornerstone for the Kadoorie AIU School in Damascus on behalf of his uncle, whom he was regularly asked to represent at public gatherings.[107] In 1938, he was granted power of attorney for the Kadoorie family and in the same year he was appointed commissioner for foreign affairs in the Iraqi Parliament.[108] His responsibilities included managing the financial and legal affairs of the Kadoories in the Levant, negotiating land purchases and arranging trusts, wills and other official documents.[109] Nahum also acted as a trustee for several synagogues and *awaqf* which he had set up for the Kadoories in Baghdad.[110]

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102 In his correspondence with the Kadoories he cites the English language *Iraq Times* as his primary source of news.

103 The Nahum files contain no Hebrew documents. When referring to Hebrew documents it is unclear whether the author is referring to Hebrew or Judeo-Arabic. KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—August 14,1951.

104 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-002 December 22 1937; KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—August 14, 1951.

105 Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday*, 19–26.

106 KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952, October 12 1951.

107 *Paix et Droits*, September 1, 1932, 5.

108 *A Philanthropic Tradition*, 13.

109 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003.

110 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003—December 12, 1937.

Well-traveled, Nahum and his family regularly went to the mountains in Lebanon for their holidays, as did many Iraqi Jews.[111] In his capacity as the Kadoorie's agent in the Levant, Nahum traveled throughout the region visiting AIU schools in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.[112] These journeys were intended to help develop new AIU schools and assure that the Kadoorie family money was used responsibly, and his routine correspondence with the directors of the AIU schools put him in regular contact with many Jewish communities in the Middle East, Europe and Asia. He also made several trips to Palestine, mainly to visit schools[113] and to take his wife to see medical specialists at Hadassah hospital, which Nahum stated was very common for Baghdadi Jews with chronic illnesses unable to be treated in Iraq.[114] Nahum's correspondence shows that he had intimate knowledge of these Jewish communities and close ties with individuals in Palestine.

3.1. *The Lay Council & Iraqi Politics*

In the 1930s, Nahum became a member of both the lay council of the Jewish community and a deputy of the Iraqi Parliament.[115] He was thus heavily invested in both Jewish life in Baghdad and Iraqi civil society, his roles in both positions in many ways inextricably linked. He was granted audience with King Ghazi—as a representative of the Kadoories—to try to convince the king to preside over the opening of the Reemah Kadoorie Hospital.[116] On a more personal level, in a letter on a trip to Tehran to visit the Kadoorie AIU schools, Nahum mentions paying a visit to his "*ami intime*", the Iraqi ambassador to Iran, immediately upon arrival. The visit was intended to discuss the AIU school in Iran and the role of the Iraqi diplomatic presence in the country.[117] He mentions in another letter, when discussing issues surrounding building permits for a new Jewish school building in the province, that the governor of Basra is a close friend.[118]

111 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003—June 23, 1937.

112 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—August 17, 1938.

113 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—April 15, 1935.

114 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—August 7, 1934; KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—July 8, 1935.

115 Nahum officially represented Mosul, although I have found no record that he ever lived in either the province or the city.

116 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—January 1, 1935.

117 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—November 6, 1938.

118 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-002—January 31, 1938.

In 1934 Nahum wrote to the Kadoories that before the dissolution of the parliament in 1934 he had been approached by Nouri Pasha to become a deputy in the Iraqi Parliament. Elly Kadoorie replied that he found the idea "neither to your advantage nor ours if you are elected". Kadoorie then went on to present many reasons to avoid entering politics including financial, personal and social conflicts, but ended by stating that this was his private opinion, wishing Nahum much luck and success if he decided to accept the offer,[119] Nahum did not heed his uncle's suggestion. The act of agreeing to join the government suggests that in 1934 Nahum still believed in Iraqi democracy and his personal agency as a government official, despite the crisis around censorship and Zionism as discussed in the previous section.[120] Nahum would be reelected to the Iraqi Parliament in 1937 under Premier Jamal al-Mafdai, evidence of his ability to be perceived as neutral while maneuvering the complex political terrain of the 1930s.[121]

In his correspondence with the Kadoories it is clear that he was closely monitoring the situation in Palestine, often noting that the trouble in Palestine was affecting the wellbeing of the Jewish community in Baghdad.[122] The first crisis discussed in the surviving correspondence is the Levy case (1934–1935) that was discussed in the previous section.[123] Nahum states in his report to the Kadoories, that issue of censorship could be resolved, but that he felt that the Palestine issue would not go away. The years of the Arab revolt in Palestine (1936–1939) galvanized pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic movements, further increasing tension for local Jewish communities around MENA, Iraq being no exception. Palestine had thus become an ever present source of stress for Iraqi Jews by the late 1930s. In Nahum's correspondence, the focus is on the general state of Iraqi Jewry, beyond the political tensions caused by Palestine.

Nahum's concerns came from larger, disconcerting trends he saw emerging within Iraq that led him to question the future value of the Jewish community in Iraq to Iraqi society as a whole. As Nahum noted, with the improvement of public education and a growing Arab Muslim[124] educated middle class, there was less need for Jews in the civil service, a process he saw as already having started with the dismissals

119 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—September 27, 1934.

120 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-001—November 9, 1934.

121 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-002—December 22, 1937.

122 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003—December 23 1937.

123 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

124 Nahum, in his writing, generally refers to Arab Muslims as Arabs. I interpret his use of the term Arab here to only refer to Arab Muslims and not Arab Christians who he refers to as Christians.

of Jewish government officials in the 1930s.[125] According to Nahum, this trend would spill into the private sector as other Iraqis began to speak European languages, leading to a decrease in the need for Jews to act as cultural bridge. Furthermore, Nahum noted that, "I think it is important that we should not forget that the Government of Iraq is an Islamic Government, and by nature it must be inherently inclined to give appointments to people of its faith rather than trusting them to people of another creed."[126] This quote suggests that Nahum doubts the true integration of the Jewish community in the eyes of the Iraqi state.

And yet, even with the pessimism expressed in his letter, when considering the problems which faced the Jews of Iraq, he reaffirms the place of the Jewish community in the Iraq nation, essentially stating that Jewish communities elsewhere had bigger problems. He argued that the situation of Jews in Baghdad had been sensationalized by the foreign press, citing Muslim newspapers in Syria and Palestine as examples, giving the West an inaccurate perspective. He also mentioned the persecution of Jews in Germany, a constant theme throughout the Levy affair, insisting that the situation of Jews in Iraq was nothing like that of the Jews in Germany. Nahum's letter to the Kadoories was contradictory in nature. In the first paragraphs it recognized the troubles facing the Jewish community and questioned the future of Jewish life in Iraq. Later in the letter Nahum tried to downplay those problems by providing excuses and justifications for the predicament of the Jews.[127] This contradiction of ideas was perhaps an attempt by Nahum to process these events in Iraq as they unfolded. Furthermore, I would argue that in the 1930s the idea of a mass exodus of Jews from Iraq was inconceivable to most Iraqis, and thus in recognizing the problems facing the Jewish community he still believed that solutions could be found to ensure their future in Iraq.

Following the Levy case, the reports from Nahum indicated a cycle of uncertainty and violence, followed by moments of calm and renewed hope in a better future for the Jews in Iraq. In times of trouble Nahum found ways to smuggle messages out of the country, regularly avoiding the postal censors by using non-Jewish friends and acquaintances. He notes with malice the secret police surrounding the Laura Kadoorie club, ostensibly for the protection of its members but more likely to survey their

125 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

126 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

127 Similarly, Levy's letter is conflicted in that it compliments certain aspects of the Iraqi government and only choses to address one of the issues facing the Jewish community opposed to discussing the deeper issues causing the recent censorship.

actions.[128] Nahum's letters displayed an oscillating pattern in reporting the situation of the Jews in Iraq, which according to him is either in decline or improving. His letters, therefore, provide a personal barometer of the political insecurity the Jewish community felt between 1932 and 1951.

The dual role as member of the lay council and deputy in the Iraqi government became progressively more difficult for Nahum due to the issue of Palestine. The clearest example of this is the 1938 invitation Nahum received from the president of the Egyptian parliamentary commission for the defense of Palestine to discuss the situation in Palestine as one of the Iraqi representatives at the World Parliamentary Congress of the Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defense of Palestine.[129] In October, 1938 Nahum wrote the Kadoories about the situation, explaining that the Iraqi government had chosen a fifteen-person delegation, including thirteen Muslims, one Christian, and one Jew (Nahum). Nahum was upset about the invitation, noting that the conference was clearly anti-Jewish. Furthermore, he was perplexed that they invited him despite knowing his communal allegiances, citing his predicament as an example of the complicated situation of the Iraqi Jews. The letter further stated that the others appointed to the Iraqi delegation were people he appreciated, and this point makes him all the more uncomfortable. Ultimately, Nahum declined the invitation to the Cairo meeting, giving poor health as the official reason for his absence.[130]

Only two weeks after the invitation to the Egypt conference, he wrote to the Kadoories about anti-Jewish violence in Baghdad, a bomb had been thrown at the Shamash school on October 15, and there had been a bomb attack at the Laura Kadoorie school on October 22, in which several people were injured. Although Nahum praised the government as doing its best to protect the Jews, he notes that "Le peuple est empoisonné, et ce n' est pas seulement pour la question de la Palestine, mais une haine générale contre les juifs". Nahum partially attributed this as being inspired by Nazi propaganda on the Iraqi radio, but one gets the impression from his writing that

128 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—September 19, 1938.

129 The World Parliamentary Congress of the Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defense of Palestine was organized by King Faruq of Egypt in late 1938- early 1939. Its objective was to strengthen pan-Arabism through Muslim unity, with the Palestine issue used as a rallying point for Muslim unity. James Jankowski, "Egyptian Regional Policy in the Wake of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty 1936: Arab Alliance or Islamic Caliphate" in *Britain in the Middle East in the 1930s: Security Problems, 1935–1939* ed. Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 90–91. KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—October 3, 1938.

130 Ibid.

he felt the tide quickly changing for the Jews in Baghdad.[131] Nahum mentioned in another letter that a bomb was thrown in a synagogue in Beirut around the same time, but that contrary to Baghdad, in Beirut the French immediately found and prosecuted the culprit.[132] The tone was already different from that of letters a few years earlier in which he described the Levy case. In Nahum we can witness the disappointment of a grown man as the threads of Baghdadi society began to unravel, although he did not abandon his communal work. For over a decade after these events he would continue to work to support and expand the communal infrastructure.

Sometime during World War II communication was cut off between Nahum and the Kadoories, and between 1940 and 1946 many documents of the Kadoorie archives were lost, leaving us with little knowledge of the actual contact between Nahum and the Kadoories during the war years. However, as Bashkin has demonstrated, the Jewish situation temporarily improved directly after the war.[133] In the case of both Nahum and the Kadoories they recommenced making plans for new schools, which suggests that they perceived an amelioration in the Jewish position in Iraq as well. The main reason that communal infrastructure projects slowed in the post-war period is not due to a lack of confidence in the future of Jews in Iraq, but instead relates to the state for world Jewry, as previously suggested. The Kadoories reallocated many of their resources to help the European Jewish refugees in the post-war period.[134] In fact, in 1946 Nahum, while in Israel on Kadoorie business, helped arrange transit to Iraq for some young Jewish Iraqi students who had been stranded in France during World War II, and sent to Palestine after the war.[135] Thus as late as 1946 middle-class Baghdadis still believed their future was in Iraq rather than Palestine. Furthermore, Nahum was still traveling around the Levant managing the Kadoorie funded Jewish schools and planning new projects, but this would change quickly in the next two years.

By June, 1948 the situation of the Jews in Baghdad was dire but correspondence still showed some signs of hope with smuggled letters stating that "when things will return to normal in Iraq," communal infrastructure could continue to expand.[136] By

131 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—November 2, 1938; KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—November 13, 1938; KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—November 22, 1938.

132 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—August 31, 1938.

133 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 136.

134 KA A02/15-SEK-8C-002—March 26 1938.

135 See conclusion for more about this incident. Rachel Mahlad-Goren "The Late Jacob Mahlab" in *The Scribe*, No. 70, October 1998, 22.

136 KA B4A1/ Nov. 1945 to Jan. 1957—July 18, 1948.

1949 the situation had changed for the worse. Nahum saw the community dissolving and he was clearly distressed by his predicament and that of the community as whole. He informed the Kadoories of his situation by engaging a friend traveling to France to send a letter informing them of the situation and asking them to keep their direct correspondence with him as brief as possible.[137] After this, letters regarding the state of the schools and the accounts in Baghdad cease and correspondence turns to speaking in code about ways to liquidate holdings, and options for settling in another country. His letters from this period used the weather as a stand in for the situation of the Jews in Baghdad, referred to his family's health as code for their personal situation and boxes of Baghdadi sweets as symbols for assets and the various ways they were being transferred into other people's names or smuggled out of the country.[138] Clearly anticipating the demise of the community Nahum acted accordingly to the best of his abilities by trying to liquidate his own investments, transferring real-estate titles into the names of the Kadoories as they were English not Iraqi citizens, and finding ways to move important communal artifacts such as Torah scrolls out of the country. This all took place over a period of several months in 1951.[139] He arranged for an Iraqi Muslim, Farid Samra, to manage the Kadoorie affairs and did his utmost to smuggle all important artifacts and deeds of the Kadoories out of Iraq.[140] As soon as he was able to arrange a travel visa for his family, in the summer of 1951 they left Iraq for Italy under the guise of a taking a family holiday and, eventually, decided to emigrate to Israel in October, 1951.[141]

3.2. *Language and Identity*

Nahum was an adult for the entire arc of the Iraqi Jewish experience from 1920 to 1951, and was actively involved in building both the Jewish community and the Iraqi nation as whole. In Nahum's correspondence with the Kadoories there was no sign of a strong Iraqi nationalist sentiment or of a strong attachment to the Arabic language,

137 KA B4A1/ Nov. 1945 to Jan. 1957—December 15, 1949.

138 There is extensive discussion in the correspondence between 1950–1951 of sending and receiving boxes of Manna which goes beyond the usual correspondence of care packages sent from Iraq to China in the earlier period. It is my contention that Nahum used the boxes of sweets as a code word for important documents and letters. N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—March 1, 1951.

139 KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—August 1, 1951.

140 KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—March 1, 1951; KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—July 26, 1951; KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—July 30, 1951.

141 KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—November 22, 1951.

even though he was a member of the Iraqi Parliament. As previously cited, in one letter discussing the Iraqi government dismissing Jewish civil servants he noted, "I think it is important that we should not forget that the Government of Iraq is an Islamic Government,"[142] but his allegiance is first and foremost to the Jewish community of Iraq and the Kadoorie family. Nahum's feelings about language are most clearly seen in the approach he took to the education of his children. That he spoke Arabic and that his children spoke Arabic was a given, as this was both the home language and the language of the civil administration. He never professes in his correspondence, however, any attachment to the language or its importance to the Jewish community in Iraq, but instead focuses on the importance of knowledge in foreign languages. It is surprising that Nahum a member of the Iraqi parliament places little attachment to the Arabic language in contrast to Jewish intellectuals, such as Ezra Haddad and Anwar Sha'ul who ardently professed their love of the Arabic language. The position of Nahum highlights the difference of approach between he political and economic elite in comparison to the intellectual elites.

When writing to the Kadoorie's about his son's studies, he noted that instruction in Arabic was mandatory, but that as soon as his son had completed the mandatory certificate in Arabic from the Ministry of Education he would prepare for his London matriculation exam with the objective of attending university in England.[143] This exchange occurred in 1938, a time of great tension for the Jewish community in Baghdad, but Nahum's intention was not for his son to settle in England as he stated that being the only male offspring, he and his wife wished him to engage in commerce, as opposed to engineering, so that he could stay close to them in Iraq. Nahum felt that English was the most important language for his son's future professional success and there was no suggestion that his son should continue studies in Arabic once he had fulfilled the government requirements.

This view of English may have been a function of Nahum's social class, but I believe his opinion was typical of the majority of the middle class in Iraq (of any confession) at the time, especially those who had commercial interests. Put differently, learning foreign languages was perceived as a vital tool necessary for Iraqi socio-economic mobility. This choice was made for pragmatic reasons—as opposed to ideological ones—the Jewish community is an example *par excellence* of this phenomenon.

142 KA SEK 8C-001 A02/15.

143 His son also passed the French matriculation exam in 1940; KA E02/16-SEK-8C-005—June 6, 1940; KA E02/16-SEK-8C-004—July 7, 1938.

Nahum was also influenced by his time at the AIU, which cemented his attachment to French culture. In 1937 Nahum was awarded the Cross of the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* by the French ambassador to Iraq, Paul Lépissier. The honor was awarded to him for his "work in supporting French in Institutions in Iraq."[144] In his letter to the ambassador accepting the honor he wrote:

> Il m'est agéable de vous dire que je considere comme un devoir sacré de travailler par tous mes modestes moyens a la deffusion [sic] de la langue Française, seul véhicule des plus nobles pensée que l'humanité ait put concevoir.
>
> Mon seul désir est de voir le français comme base d'enseignement dans toutes les institutions que l'éminent Sir Elly Kadoorie construit. Je me consacrerai entierement a la realisation de cet ideal.[145]

Given the context of the award and the knowledge that Nahum pushed his own son to pursue higher education in English not French, this speech naturally included a great deal of hyperbole. Similarly, the letters which his daughter wrote to the Kadoories showed an exceptionally high level of written English, so we can assume she received an education similar to that of her brother.[146] Thus we know that Nahum valued European languages for their pragmatic uses. Also, Nahum respected both the French and English empires as they were in many ways responsible for his personal success. These sentiments never appeared to conflict with Nahum's position as an Iraqi national and as a native speaker of Arabic. I would venture to say his ideal was a world where the Jews of Iraq could flourish in the city they had inhabited for generations under the protective eye of Western empires.

In contrast to these lukewarm feelings about Iraqi nationalism, Nahum wrote of great sympathy for the Jewish people and, particularly, for the Baghdadi Jewish community as is illustrated both in his letters and the letters of friends which were smuggled out of Iraq to the Kadoories. An anonymous friend of Nahum's writing to the Kadoorie's on his behalf stated, "the Jews of Iraq are grateful for all your family has done for them and for the other Jews in the East".[147] Nowhere in Nahum's correspondence does he seem to consider himself a Zionist. He consistently, however,

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144 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003—October 10, 1937.

145 KA E02/16-SEK-8C-003—October 25, 1937.

146 The Kadoories go as far as to congratulate her on her exceptional command of English in their correspondence. KA N.2-A-1/-1946–1952—December 19, 1951.

147 KA B4A1—July 18, 1948.

shows empathy for the Jews in Palestine and the Jews in Europe discussing possible ways to help German and Austrian Jewish refugees find work in either Iraq or the satellite communities.[148] Nahum held many different professional positions, each of which put him in the constant service of the Jewish community of Baghdad. In view of the overall argument of this thesis, Nahum's story provides an interesting case study as he was not an intellectual, but a representative of the secular elite. Nahum's later letters suggest that even given the loss of status and ongoing hardship, he was relatively happy in Israel, most likely because he had been able to reconstruct his social circle and no longer had to live in constant political uncertainty.

For Nahum, negotiating Jewish transnational networks was a way of life. He had family and professional relations on four continents, his livelihood was dependent on these networks, and he worked to improve the material and political status of the Jews throughout the Levant and Iran. None of this took away from his identity as an Iraqi citizen, but without these connections his life had little meaning. As the situation in Iraq became dire he left, both because his community was disappearing and because his nation had turned on him and his community.

4. Conclusions: Multiple Networks & Connections

In this chapter I have looked at specific of examples of how Jews in Iraq used transnational Jewish networks and the global Jewish public sphere to address local issues within their community such as reading and writing—in multiple languages—in the Jewish press, and engaging in intellectual debates about the nature of Judaism, Jewish modernity and Jewish identity while identifying as an Iraqi citizen and valuing this other aspect of one's identity through participation in the Iraqi society. Although this phenomenon had been observed among Iraqi Jews in the late nineteenth century, as discussed in chapter one, few researchers have looked at the ways in which Iraqi Jews engaged with transnational Jewish networks after World War I. Through these three case studies I have endeavored to provide a sampling of the ways Jews in Baghdad engaged with the greater Jewish world. My observations are intended to add to other scholars' work on Jewish participation in the Iraqi state and society by integrating the knowledge of how Baghdadi Jews used transnational Jewish networks to further our understanding of the complex position of Jews within Iraqi society.

148 KA SEK-8C-005—February 19,1940.

These case studies represent the arc of history for Baghdadi Jews from 1920 to 1951. The first, the controversy over the theosophical society is in the context of the Mandate period. It dealt with a communal matter: the role of the Rabbinate in defining Judaism and Jewish life in Iraq. There was little consideration of the place of Jews in Iraq as it was largely taken for granted, and transnational Jewish connections did not pose any issue with the state. The origin of the controversy was theological and the power struggle was internal to the community. The debate centered on the right of the Rabbinate to control Jewish communal organization, and their reaction to the influences of foreign Jewish communities. Of particular note is how the Iraqi Rabbinate used their own foreign connections to legitimize their position in the controversy. Although Sassun Khadduri was best known for his strong stance against Zionism and anyone remotely related to Zionism, this case demonstrated his connections to foreign rabbis, including a rabbi in Tel Aviv and his awareness of Jewish intellectual trends outside Iraq.

The Levy case dealt with the role of the media, foreign states and non-state actors at a time of political unease, but not crisis. This case study examines the inevitable decline of Baghdadi Jewry from the perspective of transnational Jewish connections, and the role foreign networks played in interceding on behalf of the community, both privately via the lobbying of the AJA and publicly through the coverage of the event in the Jewish press. Similarly, Zvi Yehuda provides examples of nineteenth century appeals to global Jewish public opinion, to intercede on behalf of Iraqi Jewry. These appeals were carried out in the Hebrew language newspapers of the *Haskalah*.[149] In what can be seen as a similar act, Levy's letter was published in both the general and Jewish foreign press, the only difference being the language of publication. Each of these appeals is an example the dynamic entanglement between the Jews of Baghdad and foreign Jewish communities.

Nahum was an archetypical non-intellectual upper class Baghdadi, heavily invested in the lay council, in the Iraqi state through his election as a member of the Iraqi parliament, and to the transnational Jewish World as the agent of the Kadoories in the Levant. Through Nahum we can see that his public spheres were highly intermingled politically, socially and economically, but still represent spheres which were at times at odds with each other. That Nahum, as late as 1946, was traveling to Palestine on behalf of the Kadoories to negotiate the repatriation of Iraqi Jews to Baghdad demonstrates that even in a time political chaos on all fronts, most Baghdadis still saw a future for Jews in Baghdad.

149 Yehuda, *New Babylonian Diaspora*, 230–237.

These three cases have a few elements in common. The first is language: in all three instances English and French, not Arabic or Hebrew, were the main languages for transnational Jewish communication. In the case of the theosophy controversy, the Jews in Iraq became aware of theosophy through their brethren in the satellite communities, via literature from European Jews, and through the English language Jewish press. In the Levy incident, he published his editorial in English because it was censored in Arabic. The majority of press coverage decrying the situation and following progression of the trial was also in English, although the case was also covered in French, Hebrew, and Arabic. Finally, in the case of Nahum, his decades of correspondence, communicating with individuals in Asia, Europe and America, was in a mixture of English, French, Arabic and occasionally Hebrew, but in none of the three cases was Arabic or Hebrew the central language. Although Zionist historiography often presents Hebrew as the unifying language of the Jewish people, in the period between 1920 and 1951 this was certainly not the case. For Baghdadi Jews, their linguistic connection to the transnational Jewish world was primarily in English, and to a lesser extent French, just as Arabic served the same purpose in the Arab public sphere. Without the ability to read and write in English, the Jews of Baghdad would not have been able to interact at such a high level with the Jewish World beyond the borders of MENA.

Both Levy and Nahum positioned themselves as Iraqi citizens and as part of a larger Jewish community. Each man's livelihood depended on his connections to Jews from other communities, Levy via the importation of Jewish press and Nahum from his employment by the Kadoories. In their writing, private government documents and the press, words such as "race", "minority", and "religious group" were interchangeably used in reference to the Jewish community of Baghdad. Their link to Iraq as a place—and also to the nation—was never questioned. Their identities, both as ascribed by others and through self-description, was never clearly defined, and Nahum was constantly changing his vocabulary based on language, audience, and current events.

The level of awareness of various actors in different Jewish intellectual projects. The theosophy controversy was about religious reform within Judaism. Levy defended the idea of being simultaneously interested in Zionism and a loyal citizen of another state. And finally, Nahum, the prototype of the upper-middle class Baghdadi Jew who is torn between his native homeland and the reality that Jewish life in Baghdad was coming to an end, ultimately chose life in Israel over offers to immigrate to Hong Kong or France. These conundrums, transposed in Jewish communities in Europe, Asia or North America would have been recognizable in other Jewish communities at the same period.

In each of the case studies the satellite communities were ever present. For the theosophy controversy, the foundational ideas came directly from Indian communities, and much of the discussion over theosophy played out in the newspapers of the satellite communities. It is remarkable that Elly Kadoorie of Shanghai became involved in de-escalating the conflict over the Basra theosophists despite his family's general avoidance of local Iraqi-Jewish politics. His knowledge of theosophy and of the Basra conflict mostly likely came from *Israel's Messenger*, that closely followed the controversy, as it was the local Jewish newspaper in Shanghai. In the Levy case, discussions about the trial and the state of Jews in Baghdad is found in the periodicals of the satellite communities.

The overlapping of issues and actors is also apparent in the sources. The only private records I came across discussing the events of the Levy case are in the Kadoorie archives. I suspect that if we discover other private family archives containing correspondence with Baghdad, they too will demonstrate the multi-layered connections between Baghdad and the satellite communities.[150] It is a shame that the Kadoorie archives only begin after the resolution of the theosophy controversy, because one can assume the Basra theosophists would be discussed as Nahum would likely have arranged for the funds to arrive in Basra.

This overlapping of individuals, events and sources highlights another theme which is often not contextualized. The Baghdadi Jews never numbered more than about 120,000,[151] a community small enough that an issue like Levy's imprisonment or the controversy in Basra would have been known to most members of the Jewish community. The involvement of foreign rabbinical opinions and appeals to foreign Jewish communities to intercede on issues of censorship would have been known throughout the community, thus reinforcing the communal awareness of the connection to other Jewish groups.

These case studies demonstrate ways in which Iraqi Jews were engaged with the larger Jewish world, and they also tie together the themes of the first four chapters—the importance of communal infrastructure, the role of the satellites, philanthropy, and secular education. The Jews of Baghdad between 1920 and 1951 lived in an environment dependent on and influenced by people and events outside the borders of Iraq. Many of the Jews in Baghdad had personal and commercial

150 The Sassoon Archives in Jerusalem also contain correspondence with Baghdad from abroad as does the IJA, however neither of these archives have been fully catalogued.

151 This estimate includes the satellite communities but excludes the Neo-Aramaic speaking Jews. See appendix for population figures.

ties to other Jewish communities, but since Iraqi independence had grown to see themselves culturally, linguistically, and socially as members of the Iraqi nation. It is unlikely that the majority of the population would have been willing to sacrifice one identity or relationship for the other, necessitating a constant effort to maintain an equilibrium between the two. The situation became impossible, however, and the Jewish community of Baghdad rapidly disintegrated between 1949 and 1952.