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

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Summary

This thesis traces the participation of Baghdadi Jews in Jewish transnational networks from the mid-nineteenth century until the mass exodus of Jews from Iraq between 1948–1951. Each chapter explores different components of how Jews in Baghdad participated in global Jewish civil society through the modernization of communal leadership, Baghdadi satellite communities, transnational Jewish philanthropy and secular Jewish education. The final chapter presents three case studies that demonstrate the interconnectivity between different iterations of transnational Jewish networks. Although chapters are presented thematically opposed to chronologically there is a mild chronological progression from the first chapter which deals primarily with the nineteenth century to the last chapter whose case studies are from the Hashemite period.

Chapter one focuses on the nineteenth century forces of modernization among Baghdadi Jewry. Beyond the *Tanzimat* reforms, which influenced all communities in Iraq, this chapter pays special attention to the rise of Jewish internationalism in Europe and its influence on Jews in Baghdad. Although limited to communal elites in the early period, I discuss the ways European Jewish intellectual projects developing in both Eastern and Western Europe had relevance for Jews in Baghdad. Furthermore, this chapter links the modernization of the Jewish community to changes in Jewish communal infrastructure and leadership in Baghdad. In particular, the evolution of transnational Jewish networks from the informal contacts of Jewish elites towards a formalized relationship with foreign Jewish organizations after the establishment of the lay council in 1879 would have important implications for the Jewish community during the Hashemite period.

Chapter two discusses the impact of the Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora by tracing its beginnings in the nineteenth century and presenting examples of its continued importance in the development of the communal infrastructure in the twentieth century. I also consider the importance of informal Baghdadi networks relating to family and trade and their influence on the Jews of Baghdad. This chapter argues that the satellite communities provided a model for Jewish modernization for the Jewish community of Baghdad. Finally, this chapter presents the idea that the Jewish community of Iraq and that of the satellites communities imagined themselves as one community, opposed to disparate groups, as they were bound culturally, filially, and economically.

Chapter three explores the role of transnational Jewish philanthropic organizations in Baghdad. Focusing on the roles of the three-leading actors in Baghdad the

Alliance Israélite Universelle (France), the Anglo-Jewish Association (United Kingdom), and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (USA) I provide histories of each organization's actions in Baghdad. I also analyze the role of foreign financial aid using communal budgets from the period between 1920–1950. This chapter demonstrates the continuity of the foreign Jewish organizations' participation in the development of communal infrastructure in Baghdad. It also discusses how the communal leadership in Baghdad used these organizations to further their agendas relating to education and social welfare for the Jewish community, challenging the idea of a top-down relationship between the aid organization and the Jewish community of Baghdad. Finally, this chapter contests the idea that the Jewish community in Baghdad willfully distanced itself from other Jewish groups in the 1930s by demonstrating the unbroken links to foreign Jewish organizations from their arrival in Baghdad in the 1860s until the dissolution of the community in the 1950s.

Chapter four discusses the history of secular Jewish education and what can be understood of Jewish society in Baghdad from its network of schools. This chapter discusses the different types of schools available in the Jewish school system in Baghdad and the public schools partially financed by the Jewish community. By analyzing the curricula of each school type and in particular the different languages emphasized in the different schools I draw conclusions on the status and usages of Arabic, Hebrew, English, and French in the period between 1920–1950. Through my discussion of the centrality of the Jewish school system in Baghdad, this chapter advances the idea that the Jewish community of Baghdad used its school system to assert its importance and distinction within Iraqi society.

Finally, Chapter five is a compilation of three case studies from the period between 1920 and 1950. Each case study presents a different way in which Jews in Baghdad engaged with Jewish transnational networks. The first case study discusses the theosophy controversy in Basra in the period between 1927–1936. The second case study looks at the role of censorship and the importance of Jewish foreign newspapers in the early years of the Iraqi state. The third and final case study examines the life of Ibrahim Nahum the Iraqi agent of the Kadoorie family and member of both the lay council and the Iraqi Parliament. Beyond highlighting the interconnectivity of the themes of the first four chapters (communal organization, Baghdadi satellite communities, Jewish philanthropic organizations and secular Jewish education) these case studies demonstrate the centrality of multilingualism, foreign Jewish periodicals, and participation within the global Jewish public sphere for Jewish society in Baghdad.

In conclusion, Iraqi Jews were constantly embracing multiple identities as Baghdadis, Jews, Arabs, Iraqis and everything in between. These identities were fluid and

rarely seen as contradictory. Furthermore, investigating the intersectionality between these multiple identities and their networks demonstrates the sophisticated ways Iraqi Jews were active participants in global Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century. It is my suspicion that more attention to the systemic cooperation of Jewish groups in MENA with transnational Jewish organizations and participation in the global Jewish public sphere will yield valuable knowledge of MENA Jewry's agency in these networks and provide greater understanding of how Jewish identity, religiosity, solidarity and belonging were transformed in the first half of the twentieth century.