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ARABIC JOURNALISM AS A VEHICLE FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

Iraqi Jews in the Arabic press during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Jews were nowhere as open to participation in the wider Arab culture and at home in standard literary Arabic as in Iraq in the twentieth century. There was a strong connection between the Iraqi Jews’ involvement in the canonical Arab culture and their participation in Iraqi press and journalism. Trying to integrate into the local society, Iraqi Jews founded their own Arabic newspapers and served as editors and journalists in many other Iraqi periodicals. However, due to the gradual demise of Arab-Jewish culture because of the conflict in the Middle East, the involvement of Jews in Arabic press and journalism is coming to an end. The distinguishing feature of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis was that the great majority of Jews under Islamic rule adopted Arabic as their language. This symbiosis does not exist in our time because Arabic is gradually disappearing as a mother tongue mastered by Jews.

Introduction

The first periodical publications carrying news written by and for Arabs appeared in the first part of the nineteenth century. Most of them were governmental and served official purposes—for example, al-Waqā‘i’ al-Misriyya (Egyptian Gazette), whose first issue appeared in Cairo in December 1828 in Turkish and Arabic. In Iraq, however, the major developments in the field of Arabic press occurred only in the 1870s and 1880s, like the government bulletin al-Zawrā‘ (an old name for Baghdad) initiated on 16 June 1869 by the Ottoman governor Midḥat Pasha (1869–1872), the leading advocate of Ottoman tanzimat reforms.¹ It was at this time that Jews began to take an active part in founding, editing and writing for Arabic newspapers, periodicals and professional journals in various parts of the Arab world,² first in Judeo-Arabic dialects (‘āmmiyya) and only later in standard Arabic (fuṣḥā). The main centers of journalistic activity by Jews in the Arab world until the mid-twentieth century were Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut, Alexandria, Damascus and Tunis.

The major breakthrough in Jewish participation in mainstream Arabic journalism occurred only in the twentieth century, especially in Iraq and Egypt. Only rarely did newspapers founded by Jews acquire readers outside the communities in which they were published. The circulation of Jewish newspapers was limited, generally not exceeding 2,000–3,000 copies. Most of these newspapers were ephemeral and did not
survive more than several months, while some even failed to publish more than a few issues; however, there were also periodicals that prospered for decades.

There was a connection between the involvement of Arab Jews in canonical Arab culture and the development of the Arabic-Jewish press and journalism: wherever Jews tried to integrate politically, socially and culturally into society (e.g., in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria), there were active Jewish owners of Arabic newspapers and periodicals, as well as editors and journalists writing in standard literary Arabic. Yet wherever Jews showed no significant interest in the canonical cultural activities of their society (e.g., North Africa), only periodicals in Judeo-Arabic dialects written in Hebrew letters are to be found (in addition to newspapers in other languages). More than a few of these periodicals appeared in both Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic. Usually mouthpieces for Zionist views, the Hebrew ones were mostly intended for circulation among Jewish communities throughout the Arab world, and it was through them that Arab Jews were kept informed about Zionist developments as well as Jewish affairs in Palestine, Europe and the United States. Among the total number of newspapers founded by Jews, fewer appeared in standard Arabic than in the local Jewish dialects.

The development of the Arabic press among the Arab Jews was not unrelated to the emergence of Jewish and public opinion in Europe following the Damascus affair of 1840 and the growth of Jewish journalism in Hebrew and other languages. For example, the Hebrew newspapers of the Enlightenment (Aufklärung; Haskalah) were read in Middle Eastern and North African Jewish communities, who were thereby kept abreast of various developments in the Jewish world. Before 1840, only Germany and, to a lesser extent, France had well-developed Jewish presses. The proclaimed purpose of the European Jewish press was to report on the progress of emancipation and modernisation of Jewish life, but it also kept German and French Jews well informed about the unfolding events of the Damascus affair and provided a forum for wide-ranging discussion of their significance (see Frankel 239–240). This affair was of great importance both for bringing the conditions of the Arab Jews to the attention of their co-religionists in the West—with the aim of “regeneration” of the Arab Jews and breaking “the all-encompassing apathy” prevailing among them—and for heightening their awareness of Jewish developments in the West and in Palestine (Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews, 7).

The aims of the Arabic-Jewish press included serving local communities, encouraging their members to integrate into the surrounding society, strengthening religious identity and supporting Zionism. It was the rare Jewish-Arabic periodical that was simply a business venture; most of the publications represented certain distinct ideological or cultural views. However, Jewish newspapers published in Arabic generally had a single aim in common: promoting modernisation of Jewish life in Arab societies and encouraging Jews to become acquainted with the achievements of Western civilisation. The fact that Arab-Christian intellectuals at the time considered the Arabic press to be an important tool for creating a modern secular civil Arab society did much to encourage Arab-Jewish intellectuals to take a greater part in the Arabic press. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, journalistic activities among the Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewish communities also accompanied and supported the activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), whose first article of its statutes spoke of “working everywhere for the emancipation and moral progress of Jews” (Rodrigue, Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition, 7). There was also symmetry between “emancipation” and “regeneration” of the Arab Jews. It was through the creation of
schools that “the emancipated Occident will have paid its debt to the regenerated Orient” (Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 24).

One can hardly speak of any major contribution of the Jewish press in Arabic to the emergence of modern Jewish culture or to the Zionist revival. Alan Mintz’s statement that “much that was new and important in the creation of [Jewish] culture appeared in journals, newspapers, and miscellanies” (Mintz 1) does not reflect the Jewish involvement in Arabic press. On the other hand, the role played by Jews in the history of Arab journalism is much more important for the history of the relationship of the Jews to Arab culture than for the history of the Arab press, even if during the 1930s Jews were still considered major potential contributors to Arab mainstream journalism. In the conclusion to his four-volume *History of the Arab Press*, the pioneer scholar of Arabic journalism Philip de Ţarrāzī writes about Islam, Christianity and Judaism as “the leading religions to which the Arabic writers of the world belong” (Ţarrāzī, IV 486–487). A classification of the founders of Arabic newspapers according to their religions from 1800–1929 reveals that 48 newspapers and periodicals were founded by Jews, compared to 1,469 founded by Muslims, 1,137 by Christians, 37 by members of other religions, 241 by anonymous persons and societies, and 94 official journals. In other words, from a total of 3,026 newspapers and periodicals published during that period, fewer than 2 per cent were founded by Jews compared to over 48 per cent by Muslims and more than 37 per cent by Christians (Ţarrāzī, IV, 504–511). An analysis of these figures leads to the conclusion that Jews can hardly be considered as having a seminal influence on the development of the Arab press; however, their involvement in this field prior to the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict stemmed from the notion prevailing among Arab Jews that they were an integral part of Arab society and culture.

In modern times Jews were nowhere as open to participation in the wider Arab culture and at home in standard Arabic as in Iraq in the twentieth century. Therefore, the participation of Iraqi Jews in Arabic press and journalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the gradual demise of these activities after the establishment of the State of Israel, are of special interest.5

### The cultural background

The involvement of Jews in wider Arab society in Iraq was the outcome of the process of secularisation of Jews that started in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much earlier than their Muslim, or even Christian, compatriots, the Iraqi Jews were aware of the need to master European secular culture and modern science as a means of achieving modernisation, while defining their religious faith as a matter of personal belief. Other Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa went through similar processes, which led to their interaction in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, but only in Egypt can we also find some significant involvement in Arab-Muslim culture (see Bezalel, I, 279–310).6 From the point of view of the Arabisation of the intellectual elite, however, the Iraqi case was unique. Living in the country without interruption since Babylonian captivity some 2,500 years previously, Iraqi Jews tried to develop a sort of Andalusian vision of integration in the new Iraqi nation-state during the first half of the twentieth century. The vision had its roots in the previous century, especially during Midḥat Pasha’s tenure as governor. Also, the foundation in 1864 of the
AIU School in Baghdad, where education was predominantly secular with a Western cultural orientation, played a major role in the modernisation of the local community, which gradually became more open to the outside world than did local Christians and Muslims. Visiting Baghdad in 1878, Gratian Geary, editor of the *Times of India*, wrote that the instruction in the AIU School was of the best modern kind. “Arabic is the mother tongue of the Baghdad Jews,” wrote Geary, and “the pupils are taught how to write and speak that language grammatically.” Many of them “spoke and read English with wonderful fluency,” and “they speak French with singular purity of accent and expression” (Geary, 132–133; cf. Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs*, 264).

Due to the close relationship with European intellectuals, cultural barriers between Jews and the wider Arab society broke down in Iraq (mainly in Baghdad) much more quickly than in other Arab countries. The fertile ground for this was the location of the Ottoman Empire between East and West, making Baghdad a kind of crossroads of various religious and cultural influences. Jewish intellectuals were among the first enthusiasts for the Arab periodicals distributed in Baghdad during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Isaac Lurion (Yitzhak Luria), the principal of the AIU School in Baghdad, was among the four Baghdadi personalities who received the first issue of the Lebanese *al-Muqtaf* (The Selection) in June 1876 in order to seek their opinion about this newborn periodical. Two Muslim scholars, one Sunnì and the other Shi‘î, who had also received the issue, expressed indifference—both agreeing that their religious communities did not need such publications at all. Only Christian and Jewish scholars expressed their enthusiasm: Lurion immediately subscribed to the journal (see al-Jâbiri 129–132; cf. Kenny 143–144).

Baghdadi Jews also functioned as correspondents and representatives for European Jewish newspapers such as *Hamaggid* (1856–1903), the first Hebrew newspaper established in Europe. Furthermore, wealthy Jews would send their sons to be educated at European institutions where they were influenced by the atmosphere of the European Enlightenment, which encouraged cultural integration. Sâsun Hiskîl (Sassoon Yehezkel) (1860–1932), for example, pursued Oriental studies in Vienna where many Jews spoke High German, adopted German names, and dressed and acted like Austrians and Germans (Rozenblit 234). In 1909, Sassoon Afandi, at the time one of the representatives of Baghdad in the Ottoman parliament, gave an interview to the Hebrew newspaper *Ha’olam*, published in Vilna, and expressed views inspired by ideas prevalent among European Jews: “Mr. Sassoon wants to be assimilated,” wrote the interviewer, “and since he does not see any positive aspect which would unite the Jews, besides religion, he would not mind assimilation even with the Arabs” (*Ha’olam*, 10 March; emphasis added).

Also significant were Jewish European travellers who visited Baghdad, bringing to the Jews the conception of Enlightenment and directing them towards modern civilisation. Although these travellers came from a European society where the categories of East/West and Arab/European mostly prevailed, the view that these European Jews did not follow the Kantian conception of Enlightenment, moreover positioning “themselves as guides and supervisors and hence did not permit the Iraqi Jews to independently manage their affairs” (cf. Bashkin 100–101), cannot be applied to all of them. Kant (58) argues:

> Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding
but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.

Isaac Lurion did not try to position himself as guide and supervisor; on the contrary, by establishing the AIU school he hoped that “in few years Baghdad will be a miracle and glory to all the surrounding towns” because the “generation of Enlightenment (Haskalah) is a light which will shine to the generation of success” (Hamaggid, 5 April 1865, 108).

Some four years later, an Iraqi-Jew, Rabbi Shelomo Bekhor Ḥusin (1843–1892), wrote that following the success of the enlightening efforts, the Baghdadi Jews were planning to “export” enlightenment and contribute to the improvement of the situation of other Jewish communities such as those in Persia and Kurdistan whose members had not yet observed “the light of Torah, wisdom and science and are still bound by the shackles of stupidity and foolishness and are still ignorant” (Hamaggid, 16 December 1868, 387).

The Austrian scholar Jacob Obermeyer (1845–1935), who lived in Baghdad from 1869–1880, did all he could to convince the Iraqi Jews that they were able to manage their own affairs independently no less than the European Jews. Through his reformist ideas he tried to modernise the religious framework of the local community and introduce a certain leniency into Jewish law; he wrote reports that were published in Hebrew periodicals and read by hundreds of local Jews. The strong opposition he faced from leaders of the local community testified to the revolutionary nature of his ideas; in his eagerness he even challenged the Baghdadi religious leader Ḥakham Yosef Ḥayim (1832–1909), who forcefully condemned Obermeyer’s innovations. The communal leaders united in putting him into herem (exclusion from communal participation) and the proclamation was read aloud in every synagogue in Baghdad. Although Obermeyer retracted his criticism and begged forgiveness, it seemed that he, together with other Jewish immigrants, was accelerating a process that would later encourage Iraqi Jews to behave in many ways like middle-class European Jews who felt more German or European than Jewish. The Jews lived and worked in Baghdad, especially from the 1920s, in close symbiotic contact with the wider Arab-Muslim culture, and for most of the members of the emerging intellectual secular Jewish elite, their Arab identity was uppermost: they were “Arab Jews” or “Arabs of the Jewish faith”.

First journalistic attempts

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Baghdad, aware of the importance of the press as a tool for modernisation, were reading newspapers, and some of them served as representatives for Hebrew-Jewish newspapers from abroad. In 1871, Barīĥ ben Moshe Mizrahi, at the time owner of the first Hebrew lithographic printing press in Baghdad, was appointed the authorised representative of the Hebrew journal Ḥaḥavazelet (1863–1864, 1870–1911). Jacob Obermeyer, local agent of Hamaggid, reported that apart from the latter, the Hebrew periodicals Halevanon (1863), Hatsfira (1862–1934) and Hamelits (1860–1904) were read in Baghdad. They published reports about Jews in Palestine, Europe and the United States with special emphasis on personalities who were active in promoting the Zionist cause. Obermeyer reported that Hamaggid had some twenty subscribers and was read by hundreds (Hamaggid, 20(6)
These journals helped to bring the messages of the European Enlightenment to Iraqi-Jewish readers. According to Aharon Sassoon ben Eliahu Naḥum (1877–1962; called Hamoreh and considered to be the first Iraqi Jew to be attracted by the new ideology of political Zionism), Hebrew periodicals were an important factor in promoting the emergence of support for Zionism among the Baghdadi Jews. In 1863, Barūḵ ben Moshe Mizrahi published the first Hebrew periodical in Baghdad—Hadover or Dover mesharim, which appeared in Rashi characters until 1871 for only 17 issues, occasionally using articles from other Hebrew periodicals. This periodical was similar in content to Hamaggid, testifying to the fact that the Iraqi-Jewish community was not at all isolated from general Jewish and international affairs. In 1884, Shelomo Bekhor Ḥūsin founded the first Jewish printing house, and in 1889 he submitted a request to the Ottoman authorities for establishing a Jewish newspaper in Arabic and Hebrew, but his request was rejected (Hatsfira, 16(109), 446).

During the nineteenth century, Iraqi Jews were also active in Arabic journalism in India. From the eighteenth century onward, Iraqi-Jewish immigrants began to settle in India, many merchants among them taking part in international trade (see Timberg). Strong cultural and religious contacts remained between Jewish-Iraqi communities in India and the Baghdadi Community. One of the expressions of these contacts was the emergence in India of periodicals written in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect. The first was Doresh tov le’amo (464 issues; Arabic title: Tālib al-Kahyir Li-Qawmihi; English title from issue 11: The Hebrew Gazette) (1855–1866), which appeared in Bombay, edited by David ben ayyim. David Sassoon (1792–1864), son of Sheikh Sassoon ben Salih (1750–1830), the Nasi’ (President) of the Baghdadi Jewish community for almost forty years, was instrumental in its publication.

Other periodicals appeared in Calcutta in Rashi characters in the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect: Hamebasser (The Jewish Gazette, Maebussar) (1873–1878, 185 issues), owned and edited by Yehezkel ben Sulaymān (Ezekiel Solomon); Perah (The Jewish Gazette, Pairah) (1878–1889, 542 issues), edited by Moshe ben Mordeḥai Meyuḥas and Eliyahu ben Solomon, later by Eliyahu ben Moshe Eliyahu Moshe Shim’on Duwek Ha-Cohen; Maggid Mesharim (1888–1901), edited by Shelomo Tuwayna (1855–1913, 533 issues); and Shoshanna (1901–1902, 24 issues), edited by Sulaymān ben Yehoshua ‘Ezra Yehuda. All these publications served the local Iraqi-Jewish community, with some pages dedicated to news about births, deaths and marriages. An outstanding feature of all of them was the information they published about the trade system, including movement of ships from Iraq to various ports in Asia and Europe. Above all, these periodicals served as agents of Enlightenment among the Iraqi Jews in India; we see this, for example, in the titles chosen for the periodicals Hamebasser and Maggid mesharim, inspired by the Hebrew Hamevaser and Hamaggid, by the selection of material published and its inclusion of translated material published previously in European-Jewish periodicals, especially Hebrew ones, which served to propagate the Enlightenment among European Jews. Shelomo Tuwayna translated the novel Ahavat tiyon (The Love of Zion, 1853) by Avraham Mapu (1808–1867), one of the first Eastern European maskilim, into Judeo-Arabic. After Shoshanna ceased publication, no other Judeo-Arabic Jewish periodical appeared in India, whereas Jewish periodicals in English were published after 1913.

In 1906 we find in a letter to a Hebrew periodical in Palestine by a Baghdadi Jew complaining anonymously that “in our town there is not even one newspaper in which
we can talk about the affairs of our community and of its members” (Hashkafa, 8(39) (1906), 4). However, with the new atmosphere of freedom, tolerance and equality that prevailed in the Ottoman Empire towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the involvement of Jews in the Arab press was accelerated and three newspapers appeared in Arabic and Turkish in Baghdad: al-Zuhūr (The Flowers), Bayn al-Nahr-ayn (Mesopotamia) and Tafakkur (Thinking).

On the whole, the community of readers among Iraqi Jews during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was multilingual, reading newspapers in Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, English and French. One can see this multiculturalism as part of the nineteenth-century renaissance (nahāda) in the Middle East. The cosmopolitan cultural identities of the Baghdadi Jewish elite had simultaneously made them an integral part of the Ottoman Empire before its decline. The First World War and the British occupation of Iraq, which slowed the development of Jewish journalism, signalled the gradual transformation of this multilingual society (mostly its intellectual elite) into a society that privileged literary Arabic beside English, the language of the British administration. Because of their Western education and their knowledge of Arabic and English, the Jews became the professionals of choice for the new British administration.

A revival of their journalistic activities followed their economic success and prosperity in the early 1920s. On 15 July 1920, the first Zionist association was founded in the guise of a “Jewish Literary Society” (Jam‘iyah Isrā‘īliyya Adabīyya) aimed at promoting the study of the Hebrew language and Jewish literature. In November 1920, the society published the first issue of the literary weekly Yeshurun, half in Hebrew and half in Judeo-Arabic, edited by Shayyūn Adhrā‘ and Ya‘qūb Shayyūn, with the manager being Aharon Sassoon. In order to create Zionist awareness among the local community’s members, the weekly published Jewish news, poems in Hebrew and various essays on the peculiarities of Jewish history and culture. After five issues, however, publication ceased due to what were described as “technical difficulties”.

Jewish journalistic activities were an integral part of mainstream Arabic journalism during the 1920s, in part following on from the government’s educational and cultural efforts to create a specific Iraqi-Arab national community for all religious and ethnic groups. This fostered a strong patriotic awareness among the Jews. Jewish educational institutions placed heavy emphasis on teaching Arabic; Salmān Darwīsh (1910–1982) wrote that Arabic language and literature had “penetrated our very bloodstream”. Arabic became, according to Ishāq (Isaac) Bār-Moshe (1927–2003), a “decisive fact of life”. The fluent Arabic style of the Jews was more than once judged superior to that of their non-Jewish counterparts. The Syrian ʿAlī al-Tantāwī (1906–1999) noted that one school administration, perturbed by the Jews’ excellence in Arabic studies, decided to combine Arabic literature instruction with instruction in Muslim studies. This still did not prevent the Jewish students from excelling in the new curriculum.

**Journalism as a vehicle for integration in the Iraqi-Arab society**

On 10 April 1924, the first issue of al-Mišbāḥ (The Candlestick) appeared; its owner, editor and most of its writers were Jews. As the first periodical representing the tendency to integrate into general Arab culture, al-Mišbāḥ was founded by the lawyer
It regularly appeared until September 1926, publishing 112 issues; after that only 15 additional issues were published, the last of them on 6 June 1929. Its editor, Anwar Shā’ul (1904–1984), wrote under the pseudonym “Ibn al-Samaw’al”, an allusion to the pre-Islamic Jewish poet al-Samaw’al ibn ʿAdiyā’, proverbial for his loyalty. al-Miṣbāḥ, with Shā’ul as its editor, opened the way for the active participation of Jews in mainstream Arabic literature and journalism. From the outset, Jewish-Arabic literary writing was secular in essence and inspired by a cultural vision with the most eloquent slogan “al-dīnu li-llāhī wa-l-watānu li-l-jamāt” (“Religion is for God, the fatherland is for everyone”) (Shā’ul 119, 223). Presumably due to a difference of opinion with the owner of the journal, Shā’ul abandoned his position as editor after less than a year and founded a new journal, al-Hāṣid (The Reaper; English title: AL-HASID, Weekly Literary Review) (1929–1938). First published on 14 February 1929, the journal soon became one of the most influential literary journals of the 1930s in Baghdad.

A number of other newspapers and periodicals appearing in Baghdad (whether owned by Jews or with Jews playing key roles as journalists and on editorial boards) illustrated their integrationist aspirations. Many of those who participated in mainstream Arabic journalism—such as Menashe Za’rūr (Za’roor) (1901–1972), who worked at al-ʿIrāq (Iraq)—joined newspapers owned by Muslims. The Christian owner of the newspaper, Razzūq Ghamānī, was known to be virtually illiterate and had no part in its actual editing or production; therefore, Za’rūr (who had long experience in journalism and of working in close association with Muslims) did most of the work, putting out al-ʿIrāq single-handedly every morning. According to first-hand testimony of the Iraqi-Jewish journalist Nissim Rejwan (Rajwān) (b. 1924), Za’rūr collected the news from the Information Department’s handouts, agencies and radio broadcasts, wrote the headlines, proofread, wrote the lead article, and edited articles contributed by outsiders (Rejwan, The Last Jews in Baghdad, 109–110).

Another prominent journalist, Na’īm Qaṭṭān (Naim Kattan) (b. 1928) worked for ʿawl al-Māhālī and was a dominant figure in the cultural magazine al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth, established in Baghdad in 1945 by Jamīl Ḥammūdī and published until 1947. Among his essays in the magazine was the first study on surrealism published in Iraq (1946). In 1947 Qaṭṭān left Baghdad to study in Paris, but, due to the political circumstances, he did not return to Iraq, settling instead in Canada where he edited Le Bulletin du Cercle Juif for the Canadian Jewish Congress and headed the writing and publishing section of the Canada Council for the Arts for 25 years. In 1975 he published his autobiographical novel about his life in Iraq, Adieu babylone (1975), which was also published in English and Arabic translations (Farewell, Babylon, 1980; Wadāʾ an Bābil, 1999).

An interesting phenomenon was the Arabic wall-newspaper published by Jewish schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s; two of them are worthy of mention: al-Bābār (The First Fruit) was a weekly published by students of the intermediate classes of Shammāš School in Baghdad in 1951 (ten issues from 3 January to 7 March). According to the introduction to the first issue, written by the headmaster of the school, Meir Zakariyyā (d. 1993), the newspaper aimed to give expression to thoughts and feelings of students at a critical stage in the life of Iraqi Jews. Another wall-newspaper was Wahy al-Talaba (The Students’ Inspiration), published in 1951 by the school’s secondary classes, which also put out a wall-newspaper in English. Similar newspapers in Hebrew had already been published by the Shammāš School during the 1930s, such as Shemesh (Sun).
Jews were also active in the Iraqi-English press; for example, Nissim Rejwan wrote almost exclusively in English, contributing mainly to the *Iraq Times*, which had been established by the British soon after they took over Iraq and whose readership consisted mainly of local British people and Iraqi intellectuals. Rejwan also ran a bookstore specialising in the importation of English publications and functioned as a kind of cultural club where intellectuals and journalists would discuss cultural and literary matters, thus providing ready-made material for their literary and journalistic work. Rejwan’s friend, Elie Kedourie (1926–1992), was appointed by G. Reid Anderson, the editor of *Iraq Times* at the time, to contribute a weekly book column. Kedourie’s first reviews were highly sophisticated and rather acerbic. Later, at Kedourie’s suggestion, Rejwan served as a film critic (1946–1947), and wrote under the pseudonym of “The Nightwatchman”. When Kedourie left in 1947 to study in London, Anderson asked Rejwan to assume the book column as well. Since his intellectual interests had, by that time, become almost purely literary—and since “politics” was not a safe subject to write about in the Iraq at the time—the books Rejwan selected for review were primarily *belles lettres*, with only a few that dealt with social, philosophical and political subjects.

The circumstances in which Rejwan stopped contributing his regular reviews to the *Iraq Times* in August 1948 concerned the first Arab-Israeli War. While Kedourie became a renowned professor of political science at the London School of Economics, Rejwan left for Israel with the mass immigration. One of the few personal papers he managed to bring with him was a letter from Anderson, dated 31 January 1951 (less than two weeks before his departure) stating that Rejwan’s work “was of a very high standard”. In Israel, Rejwan began by writing journalistic pieces in Arabic; he edited the government newspaper *al-Yawm* (*The Day*) and also worked with Israeli radio in Arabic. However, his main journalistic activity was in English, particularly as a contributor to the *Jerusalem Post*.27

Due to the escalation of the conflict in Palestine in the late 1930s and the 1940s, the place of Jews in Iraqi journalism became a sensitive issue. Already in September 1933 the Iraqi authorities banned the circulation of two foreign Zionist weeklies in Arabic: the Egyptian *Isrā’īl* and the Lebanese *al-‘Ālam al-Isrā’īlī*.28 In the late 1940s many Jews wrote for Iraqi newspapers, but without bylines. When their involvement was significant, the authorities were quick to arrest them. In the first instance, in 1946, a group of Jewish members of the Iraqi Communist Party published *al-‘Usba* (*The League*), an organ of *`Ushbat Mukāfahat al-Siyāsah al-Ziyanīya* (The League for the Struggle against Zionism), which had a daily circulation of 4,000–6,000. The editors were Yūsuf Hārūn Zilkha (b. 1921), the head of the League, and Masrūr Şālīh Qaṭṭān (b. 1913), with some non-Jews among the writers. Six months later, the newspaper was banned and the editors imprisoned.29

In the second case, in April 1948, another group of Jewish journalists, among them Idwār Shā‘ul, Meir Mu‘allim (1921–1978) and Richard Shammas, established *al-Barīd al-Yawmī* (*Daily Post*), but in May 1948, after 28 issues, the editors were arrested and publication of the newspaper ceased.30 This was part of the Iraqi authorities’ attempts at the time to remove all Jewish influence, much of it communist, from the local press. Muṣṭafā al-‘Umari, the Minister of the Interior, even pointed out to Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedhouri (Khaḍījūrī) (1886–1971) that “it was quite wrong that the Jews should be subsidising newspapers and taking such an active and objectionable part in internal politics”.31 Yet Jewish involvement in journalism even found its way into Iraqi prisons. While in prison following charges of subversive activities against the regime, the Marxist
Jewish writer and economist Yeḥeskel Kojaman (b. 1921) edited the prison weekly Șawt al-Sājīn al-Thawrī (The Voice of the Revolutionary Prisoner).33

Iraqi-Jewish journalistic activities after 1948

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish newspapers in the Arab world almost ceased to exist even though during the 1950s Jewish journalists remained on the staffs and editorial boards of local newspapers, especially in Iraq. The political circumstances, the limitations imposed on journalistic work by Jews and the immigration to Israel of most of the Jewish intellectuals rendered Jewish involvement in Arab journalism practically nil. At the same time, it was only natural that after the mass immigration of Arab Jews to Israel many of the journalists among them would serve the Arabic press and electronic media sponsored by the Israeli establishment. Owing to the fact that Arabic and Hebrew were Israel’s official languages, the need to publish newspapers and periodicals in Arabic was urgent. Jewish immigrants from the Arab world, especially from Iraq, were considered prime candidates to edit and write for these publications. For example, the Israeli government issued al-Jar da al-Rasmiyya (The Official Gazette) in 1949 to publish legislation and other official matters. It was replaced in the same year by al-Waqā’i’ al-Isrā’i’liyya (Israeli Gazette). Also, the need to cope with the challenges posed by the Israeli Palestinian minority led to the publication of many periodicals by Zionist parties in the conviction that this minority would tend to integrate into Israeli society. For example, the ruling party, Mapai, published Darkenu (a Hebrew word transliterated into Arabic) from 1950–1954 for 25 issues. Mapai also published Bi-Šarāḥa (Frankly) (1961–1965), an organ of Mapai’s cooperating parties. The weekly al-Ḥurriyya (Liberty) was published between 1954 and 1959 by the rightist Herut (Liberty) Party. Though not political, the weekly al-Aqwāt al-Isrā’i’liyya (The Israeli Times), published from 6 February 1956, inclined to rightist politics. The Liberal Party published al-Risāla (The Letter, 1961). The leftist Mapam (The United Workers Party) published al-Miṣrād (The Ambush, 1951) and Șawt al-Ma’ābir (The Voice of the Transit Camps, 1955).

However, their circulation was limited among Israeli Palestinians who found refuge in the periodicals of the Communist Party of Israel (MAKI), almost the only national Palestinian journalistic framework inside Israel during the 1950s and 1960s. These periodicals were outstanding for their quality and wide circulation, particularly al-Ittiḥād (The Union, from 1944) and al-Jadid (The New, from 1953).34 Jewish communists were deeply involved in the Israeli Arabic communist journals. A short memoir by Nājī, Sha‘ūl published in al-Jadid in 1955 expressed that fervor in describing a festival celebrated by Communist prisoners in 1952 in the Iraqi prison of Naqrat al-Salmān to commemorate the October Revolution. The festival ended with the hymn of the Iraqi Communist Party calling their compatriots to liberate the homeland and “crush the tyrants”.35 Anyone reading the text in Israel during the 1950s could not ignore the evident parallels (purposely alluded to by the author) between Iraq and Israel and then draw the necessary conclusions.

The Communist Iraqi-Jewish journalists devoted their literary energies to the intellectual struggle, focusing on three central concerns: the manner of absorption of the new Arab-Jewish immigrants, the inequality between them and the Ashkenazi population, and the fate of local Israeli Palestinians. The journals propagated a dualistic worldview.
of oppressive rulers and oppressed masses, and espoused the belief that social justice was a necessary condition for a better future and peace among peoples. To illustrate the deep involvement of Iraqi Jews in communist-organised Arabic cultural activities in Israel during the 1950s, one need only to follow the literary activities of Sami Michael (Sāmī Mīkhā’īl) (b. 1926). From December 1956, during al-Jadīd’s first three years of publication, Michael published ten stories under the pen name of “Sāmīr Mārid” (Sāmīr, a rebel), the greatest number of stories published in that journal by a single writer. During the same period, by comparison, the Palestinian Hanna Ibrāhīm (b. 1927) contributed five stories, the next highest number.

The literary-journalistic activity of two young Jewish poets, David Semah (1933–1996) and Sasson Somekh (b. 1933), may also serve to illustrate this aspect of activity. After immigrating to Israel in 1951 without knowing any Hebrew, they responded to al-Jadīd’s journalistic venture to encourage local Arabic literature by founding the Club of the Friends of Arabic Literature in Israel, which later became the Hebrew-Arabic Literary Club. The club, whose activities encompassed the transit camps (ma’ābarot), set itself the goal of becoming a “bridge between Hebrew and Arabic literature” while working for mutual understanding “despite the barriers of bloodletting.”

Considering the gap between their literary standards and those of their target audience, they helped, through the Communist periodicals, to bring to local Arabic readers—Jews, Muslims and Christians—news concerning Arabic, Hebrew and world literature, as well as specific topics from the medieval Arab tradition.

The activities of Semah, Somekh and their colleagues were characterised by protest, including solidarity gatherings calling for equal rights and social justice. They were a seismic register of Israeli Palestinian sentiment and occasionally an articulation of its collective consciousness whose direct expression was muzzled by the military administration’s political censorship. For example, Semah’s Arabic poem “Sawfa Ya’ūdu” (“He Shall Return”) was one of the first poems published in the Communist press in reaction to the massacre of scores of innocent Palestinian men and women at Kfar Qasim on 29 October 1956. As in “Bat harav” (“The Rabbi’s Daughter”) by the Hebrew poet Saul Tchernichovsky (1875–1943), Semah represented the tragic event through a poetic dialogue between a mother and her daughter about the father who has been killed. The daughter, stunned by the realisation that her father would never return, consoles the mother by assuring her of future redemption through a vision of a sweeping revolution that will bring a total change to the existing order. She alludes to the concluding words of Marx and Engels’s Communist Manifesto: “[T]he proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains.” Semah’s poem represents one facet of the literary-journalistic activities of the leftist Jewish writers—an immediate reaction of protest, chiefly through poetry, to what they considered to be injustice toward the Israeli Palestinian minority. Another facet was expressed in a powerful longing for a utopia of social justice and peace among peoples, as we find in a poem Semah dedicated to Somekh, along with the latter’s response. In another poem, entitled “Despite the Chains I am Free,” Somekh draws an analogy between the oppression of African Americans and of Iraqi Jews in Israel. The poem was dedicated to the singer Paul Robeson (1898–1976), a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union during the 1950s.

What strikes one in both literary and journalistic trends is the sharp black-versus-white dichotomy. For those close to the establishment this dichotomy had a nationalist character, contrasting the dark past of a minority degraded in Iraqi exile with the joyous
present of Jewish independence in the homeland. For the Communists, the dichotomy was social and universal, counterposing the dark present of oppression with a utopian future ruled by justice, all this mingled with nostalgic allusions to their past in Iraq. This difference in worldview can be seen in the concept of “spring” so frequently used by both sides. For the Zionist writers, their hopes had already been realised in the Jewish state, as we find in the opening words of Salīm Murād Sha’shū’a’s first poem in his collection Fi ‘Ālam al-Nūr (In the World of Light) (1959): “The spring has arrived” (qadima al-rabī‘). By contrast, for the Communist writers the battle was still to be waged and their eyes were fixed firmly on the future: Ḥattā Yaḥī‘ al-Rabī‘ (Till Spring Comes) was the title of ʿSemāh’s poetry collection. During the 1950s, all the Jewish writers in Arabic preached co-existence, peace and brotherhood and expressed confidence in their vision. However, for Zionist writers such a vision arose in the wake of the Jewish victory, while among left-wing writers it emerged from a sense of sympathy with the defeated Palestinians. It was a response to the call of Palestinian Communist leaders who emphasised the obligations of Arabic literature in Israel, in the words of the Palestinian Emīl Ḥābibī (1921–1996), to “carry the banner of Jewish-Arab brotherhood”. They stressed Jewish-Arab cooperation in the past, such as in al-Andalus, and for the present and future as well, praising the contribution of Jewish writers to Arabic literature.46

Several attempts were made by the authorities to counter the emergence of nationalist culture among Israeli Palestinians and to stem the growing number of left-wing newspapers, journals and publishing houses. Specific government sections were entrusted with the task of controlling the minority culture and keeping it on the “right” path. Also, the Ministry of Education and Culture tried, through its curricula and by means of literary festivals, prizes and competitions, to emphasise Hebrew and Jewish teachings and marginalise the Muslim, Arab and Palestinian heritage. To achieve this, Arab-Jewish journalists, mainly from Iraq, edited many newspapers and periodicals in order to gain the trust of the minority; however, most of these were biased publications that failed to realise their aim. Among them were al-Yawm (The Day, 1948–1968), the monthly al-Mujtama‘ (from 1954), which, though edited by the Palestinian Mishīl Haddād (1919–1997), was sponsored by the Israeli establishment and had many Jewish writers. In 1955, at the behest of the government, Haddād initiated the Association of Arabic Language Poets, headed by Salīm Murād Sha’shū’a. There was also the feminist journal Kalimat al-Mar’a (The Woman’s Voice, 1964) and the bilingual Hebrew-Arabic literary magazine Liqā‘-Mifgash (Encounter) published by the Jewish-Arab Institute at Beit Berl (1964). Periodicals for teachers, children and schools were also published. From the late 1960s, most Iraqi-Jewish journalists who immigrated to Israel gradually cut themselves off from any journalistic activities. Also, the Israeli establishment was realising that the attempt to produce a “positive culture” had failed. The last government daily newspaper was al-Anbā‘ (The News, 1968–1985). The Iraqi Jews’ involvement in the left-wing press has also disappeared, one of the last left-wing Jewish journalists being Na‘īm (Na‘īm) Gīl‘ādī (Gildi; b. 1929), who brought out the weekly al-Hawādith (The Events, 1971) that preached brotherhood between Jews and Palestinians. In 1992, Giladi published a book that recounted episodes from his journalistic career and included the accusation directed at the Zionist underground that its members bombed Jewish gatherings in Baghdad in the early 1950s in order to compel Jews to leave Iraq.47

As well as being involved in establishment-sponsored newspapers and periodicals, Iraqi-Jewish emigrants have also worked in Arabic electronic media supervised by the
Since the inception after the creation of the State, Dār al-Idhāʾa al-Isrāʾīliyya (Israeli [Arabic] Broadcasting House) has been dominated by Arab-Jewish writers, especially from Iraq. Although Palestinian journalists have worked in the Arabic electronic media as presenters and news broadcasters, they have never held key positions like news editorships. The general directors of this service from its inception have been Iraqi Jews; outstanding among them being Shaʿul Bar-Ḥayim (b. 1924), Yaʿqūb Ḥazma (1924–197?), David Sagiv (b. 1928) and the current director Imdūn Isḥayyiq (b. 1944). The Israeli Arabic Broadcasting Service has been accused more than once of broadcasting propaganda and serving Israeli political and military aims. Although this is untrue, at least with regard to the news bulletins, these accusations generally were based on the activities of the political department, which propagated the official political agenda.

On the academic level, the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Haifa has been publishing the scholarly annual al-Karmil: Abṭath fī al-Lugha wa-l-Adab (al-Karmil: Studies in Arabic Language and Literature), founded in 1981 by David Semah, who served as editor-in-chief until issue 10 (1989). The current editor is Shimon Ballas; thus far, 27 volumes have been published.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s there has been a sharp decline in Arabic journalism by Jews; in fact, such involvement is now coming to an end. There are exceptions among Iraqi-Jewish immigrants working in the Israeli Arabic electronic media or who have sporadic involvement in the Arabic press in Israel or abroad. For example, Samīr (Moshe) Naqqāš (1938–2004) contributed articles to al-Muʿtamar (The Congress), published in London from the 1990s as the organ of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), which was the Iraqi opposition to the regime of Śaddām Husayn. In 2002, Naqqāš was appointed a member of the editorial board. In April 2003, after the coalition forces had overthrown the Iraqi regime, the newspaper ceased publication. Mention should also be made of The Scribe: Journal of Babylonian Jewry, published by the Jewish Exilarch’s Foundation in London. In its first issue (September–October 1971), the founder and editor Naʿīm Dankūr (Naim Dangoor) (b. 1916) declared that the purpose of the journal was “to strive to bring to the light the latent spiritual and cultural treasures of a glorious past in which invaluable contributions to the development of Judaism and Jewish life had been made. In this respect this journal is a modest attempt to fill a gap long existing in Jewish journalism.” It is not accidental that Dankūr mentioned only the “contributions to the development of Judaism and Jewish life” and that the language of the journal has mainly been English, only rarely publishing texts in Arabic with or without English translation.

It is anticipated that in time to come the Arabic press and journalism will be totally devoid of Jewish participation; in fact, we are currently witnessing the demise of Arab-Jewish culture. A tradition that began over fifteen hundred years ago is vanishing before our eyes. The distinguishing feature of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis under the Arab cultural umbrella up to the twentieth century was the adoption by the great majority of Jews under Islamic rule of Arabic as their language. This symbiosis does not exist in our time because Arabic is gradually disappearing as a language mastered by Jews as a mother tongue.
Acknowledgements

The nucleus for this article was the entry “Press, Arab-Jewish” which I was invited to contribute to Glenda Abramson (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Modern Jewish Culture (London/New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 697–704). It is the first encyclopedia of Jewish culture that has incorporated entries on the cultural activities of the Arab Jews in modern times.

Notes

1. On Arab press and journalism, see Ṭarrāzī; Ayalon.
2. On the Arabic-Jewish press and journalism in general, see Snir (“Arabic in the Service of Regeneration of Jews”).
3. On Hebrew periodicals in Arab lands and relevant references, see Ilan.
5. Details about the newspapers and periodicals in this article have been taken from various libraries and archives, as well as from printed sources. Apart from Ṭarrāzī’s aforementioned book, I have also used the following sources: Yaari; Moreh (Arabic Works by Jewish Writers); Ben-Yaacob (The Jews of Iraq in Eretz Yisrael, 379–417); Kazzaz (145–155); Salmān ’Abd Allāh al-Mashhadānī.
6. On the cultural and literary activities of Jews in Egypt, see Snir (“A Carbon Copy of Ibn al-Balad?”).
7. On the educational institutions of the Jews in Iraq, see Mudhi (The Origin and Development of the Iraqi-Jewish Short Story, 35–44). On the role the AIU played in the field of Jewish education in the Middle East, see Cohen (105–156).
8. On the AIU educational system in Iraq, see Yehuda. By 1930 about 7,200 pupils were attending the ten schools under the Alliance administration; thanks to the high educational level, 90 per cent of the candidates from Iraq for the London matriculation examination were Jews (Landshut 44).
9. Ḥaʾolam, 10 March 1909 (emphasis added). Later, Ḥiskīl would occupy the post of Finance Minister in several Iraqi cabinets of the 1920s (on Ḥiskīl, see Baṣrī (I, 28–37)).
10. See Ben-Yaacob (The Jews of Iraq in Modern Times, 196–202). On other European Jews who inspired the Baghdadi Jews in their Westernisation and secularisation process, see the historical novel by Barbara Taufar entitled Der Uhrmacher.
11. On Obermeyer’s criticism and the opposition he faced from leaders of the Jewish community, see Obermeyer (43–46). For a more detailed presentation of my ideas concerning the process of opening the minds of Iraqi Jews to the European Enlightenment, see Snir, Arabness, Jewishness, Zionism, 468–474.
13. On these contacts, see Ben-Yaacob (The Immigration of Babylonian Jews).
14. On Shelomo Tuwayna, see Avishur (The Hacham from Baghdad).
15. On the Judeo-Arabic periodicals in India, see Avishur (“Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic Books”).
16. On this process, see Simon; Zubaida.
17. Darwīsh (200). On Darwīsh, see Moreh and ’Abbāsī (86–87).
20. On Salmān Shīna, see his autobiography From Babylon to Zion.
22. On Rejwan, see his autobiography The Last Jews in Baghdad.
23. On Kattan, see Benson and Toye (588–589).
24. On the Jewish student newspapers published in Iraq, see Meir (307–309).
25. On Kedourie, see S. Kedourie.
26. Details according to Rejwan (The Last Jews in Baghdad) and personal communication with the author.
27. For Rejwan’s activities after his immigration to Israel, see his Outsider in the Promised Land.
28. See a circular by the Iraqi General Management of the Mail and Telephone Authority, 5 September 1933 (Central Zionist Archives, S25/3531).
29. On al-’Ubā, see al-Rawī. On the League in general, see Akira.
30. Meir Mu’allim wrote about the trial and imprisonment of the editors in In My Way into the Prison.
31. On Chief Rabbi Khedhourie, see ḨMAR.
32. According to Sir Henry Mack, the British Ambassador at the time (see E. Kedourie, “The Break between Muslims and Jews in Iraq”, 39).
33. On Kojaman, see his “My Memories in Iraqi Prisons”.
34. On these journals and others, see Moreh (Bibliography of Arabic Books and Periodicals, 91–110).
36. On Michael, see Berg.
37. On Semah, see Snir (“‘Forget Baghdad!’”).
38. On Somekh, see his autobiography Baghdad, Yesterday.
40. Al-Jadīd, November 1954, 45.
41. Such as Semah’s participation in the solidarity gathering with the Algerian people (al-Jadīd, April 1958, 51–55).
42. The poem was completed approximately two weeks after the massacre. It was published for the first time in al-Ittihād (31 December 1956), and was later included, with slight revisions, in Semah’s Hattā Yajī’ al-Rabī (see also Robinson).
43. Somekh concluded a poem in memory of the October Revolution with similar words (al-Jadīd, November 1959, 48–49).
44. The two poems were published in al-Jadīd (March 1954, 18–19). They were reprinted with some changes in Semah’s Hattā Yajī’ al-Rabī’.
46. Al-Jadīd, January 1954, 42.
47. See Giladi (142–255); see also Gat (175–191). According to Yehuda Tagar (b. 1923), an Israeli agent who operated in Baghdad, at least one activist from the Zionist underground, Yosef Beit-Halahmi (Habaza), apparently did carry out several terror attacks after the arrest of his comrades in the hope of proving to the Iraqi authorities that the detainees were not involved in these actions. This is the first time someone involved in the episode confirms that members of the Zionist underground did commit bombings in Baghdad. The interview with Tagar, who spent about ten years in an Iraqi prison, appears in Neslen (58–66).
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