

Jewish  
Subjects and  
Their Tribal  
Chieftains in  
Kurdistan

A Study in Survival

Mordechai Zaken

B R I L L

Jewish Subjects and Their Tribal  
Chieftains in Kurdistan

# Jewish Identities in a Changing World

*General Editors*

Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yosef Gorny

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# Jewish Subjects and Their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan

A Study in Survival

*By*

Mordechai Zaken



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## PREFACE

With the completion of this book, I would like to express my appreciation to those who helped me in the pursuit of this research. I am grateful to my mentor, Prof. Moshe Sharon, whose excellent scholarship has inspired me, and to Professors Gideon Goldenberg and Benjamin Z. Kedar of the Hebrew University and Norman Stillman formerly of SUNY Binghamton for their kind and attentive guidance. Much gratitude goes to three outstanding scholars who kindly enriched me with their knowledge: Prof. Joyce Blau, previously from the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* in Paris, Dr. Michael Chyet, currently the Middle Eastern Language Cataloger at the Library of Congress and Prof. Yona Sabar of UCLA.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the informants interviewed for this book, for sharing with me their reminiscences and for making me feel welcome for more interviews and clarifications. Without them, I could not have completed this book.<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to those who encouraged me in various ways, notably my friend Professor Joshua Korzenik, who hosted me twice at Yale University and the late Patricia and Ernest Worth who hosted me during research conducted in London. Special thanks go to the English readers of the manuscripts: Carol and David Pileggi, Janice Karnis, Professor Eddie Levenston and Leigh Ann Lanir.

At last, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents Batyah and Saleh and to my beloved wife Riki and children, Tzah, Tahel and Ohad; much of the research and the actual writing of this book were conducted on time they were deprived of.

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<sup>1</sup> See the names and details of fifty-six informants interviewed specifically for this book, in the Bibliography. Prof. Yona Sabar of UCLA interviewed Yona Gabbai (I# 7) of Zakho in the mid 1960s and kindly allowed me to use it. Susan Meiselas, a photographer and author, interviewed Hertzal and Majid Gabbai of Khawaja Khinno family from Aqra (I# 9 & 10). I would like to thank Susan Meiselas for allowing me to use this interview.



## TRANSLITERATION NOTES

Terms and names cited in this manuscript come from several languages, notably Arabic, Hebrew, Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic, as well as Turkish and Persian. Since the use of more than one set of rules of transliteration may have caused inconsistency, the following rules have been observed, for reasons of convenience.

1. Usually, the most common form of a proper name is used, preference being given to the Arabic form, for reasons of familiarity. However, several names were given in their Kurdish form, with the first name ending with *ezafe* (means “addition,” a suffix which binds two words into noun phrases).<sup>1</sup> In Kurdistan, persons are called by their name + *ezafe* + their surname, which may be their father’s name, or the name of their clan or tribe, or a place name, such as Tâhirê Hämzani (Tâhir from Hämzan), or Salimê Mistê (Salim the son of Mistê).
2. Terms that have become arabicized were rendered according to their Arabic spelling.
3. Titles that have become part of the name, as Agha or Hâkham, were not italicized.
4. This manuscript adopts the most common term used in the literature. For example, the term for ‘cleric’ in Kurdish is ‘mela,’ but the Arabic term ‘Mullā’ is more common even in reference to the famous Kurdish leader Mullā Muştafâ Barzânî.
5. In some instances, uniquely Kurdish terms were preferred. Usually, the common set of Latin transliteration could represent these terms, for instance, “*hawar!*” (help!), “*shale-shapik*” (Kurdish men’s trousers and vest), or “*firar*” (an escapee, an outlaw). Other terms required the Kurdish transcription, as in “*koçke*” (a guesthouse), “*qaçax*” (smuggled), “*kafir-kuşt*” (killing of infidels), or “*dîwanxane*”

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<sup>1</sup> P. Pikkert, *A Basic Course in Modern Kurmanji*. Genk (Belgium): Alev Books, 1991: 14; Michael Chyet, *En hîni Kurmançî dibîn*. Unpublished manuscript, Washington DC. 1998–2005; Kemak Sido-Kurdaxi, *Sprachführer-Kurdisch*, Marburg: Blaue Horner Verlag, 1994: 20.

(guesthouse or reception hall). Note the main differences between the Kurdish and the Arabic transcription and Romanization. For instance (ç = چ; p = پ; v = ف) do not exist in Arabic; (x = خ is) corresponds to both *kha* and *ghain*; (ş = ش) and c = ج) have the same pronunciation, but their Romanization is different. For a complete chart, see the table of transliteration below.

6. The feminine form *ō* (*tā marbūṭa*) is not indicated.
7. The abbreviation b. within two names signifies “son of,” based on the Neo Aramaic usage *bir* or the Arabic usage *bin* or *ibn*.
8. The glottal stop (ء) or *hamza*, is not indicated at the beginning of words.
9. Note that names of places in Kurdistan may have more than one form in the local languages.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Chāl (Kur.) vs. Chala (NA); Betanur (Kur.) vs. Betanura (NA). Consult the list henceforth for the variety of transcriptions and forms of names of places. Usually, the first form is the one used in this manuscript.

*List of Names of Places (and Tribes) in Kurdistan*

Amadiya: ‘Amādiya, Amadiya (Kur. ‘Amêdî), ‘Amidya (among the Jews).

Aqra: ‘Akra, (Kur., Akrê).

Arbil: Arbîl, (Kur., Hewlêr), Arwil (among the Jews).

Berwari: Berwarî.

Chal: (Kur.), Chāl, (NA), Chāla.

Diyarbakir: Amed, Diyrbekîr, Dîyarbekîr, Diyarbakîr.

Dohuk: Dōhuk (Kur., Dihok).

Hakkari: Hakkārî, Hekarî, Culemerg, Çolemêrg, Hekkarî, Hakkārî, Hakkārî.

Hājjān

Halabja: Helebce, Helepce.

Jezira: Jezîra (Kur., Cizîra Bota, Cizre) Gzîra, Jezîra, Jazîrat b. ‘Umar.

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<sup>2</sup> One reason for the multiplicity of names is the policy of the governments in which boundaries the Kurds live, to substitute Arabic, Turkish or Persian names for the Kurdish ones.

Khanaqin: Xaneqî, Khānaqîn.  
 Kirkuk: Kirkûk (Kur., Kerkûk), Karkuk.  
 Koy-Sanjâq: (Kur.), Koye.  
 Mahabad: Sablax, Sauj Bulaq, Sâûjbolâgh, Mahabâd.  
 Mizuri: Mizûrî.  
 Nisibin: Naşîbîn, Nusaybin, Nişşēbin.  
 Nakada: Nexede, Naghadah, Naqade.  
 Qamishle: Qamişlok.  
 Rawanduz: Rewandîz.  
 Salmas: Salmās.  
 Shaikhan.  
 Sharnakh: Şirnex.  
 Shino: Şino, Ushnu, Ushnû, Ushnûya.  
 Sindi: Sindî, Sindî, Sindi: Şindî.  
 Sinna: Sinne, Senna, Sinna, Sanandaj.  
 Slivani: Silêvanî, Slêvânîs.  
 Sulaimaniya: Sulaimānîya (Kur., Silêmanî).  
 Tiyari: Tiyārî  
 Urfa: Riha, Reha, al-Ruhā.  
 Urmiya: Wurmi, Urmia, Rezāūiya, Urūmiye.  
 Van: Wan.  
 Zakho: Zaxo.  
 Zibarî: Zibari, Zêbarî

*Note on Translation*

In translating excerpts from the interviews, I attempted to remain loyal to the original phrasing and terminology. Frequently, lengthy oral interviews make for redundancies, which are not essential to the subject. In order to grasp the essence of not only the wording but also the context and the subtext, slight modifications were at times necessary. Mumbling and repetition were omitted; at times, phrases were adjusted to fit the real meaning. One apparent example is the interchange of 'Kurds' and 'Arabs' by Kurdish Jews in Israel. They often use 'Arabs' in reference to Muslim Kurds, probably because in Israel Muslims were actually Arabs, or because 'Arabs' has become the collective noun that includes all Muslims.

*Note on Oral and Unpublished Sources*

Fifty-six informants were interviewed in the course of the research conducted for this manuscript. They are signified by their name and a cardinal number from I#1 (i.e., informant no. 1) to I#56 (i.e., informant no. 56) in parenthesis. A complete and detailed list of the informants, including names, places of origin and residence and their age, appears in the Bibliography. Another source of unpublished interviews of Kurdistan Jews is the Oral History Division, the Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The list appears with file number, names of interviewees, their origin and date of interview. Details of other archival and unpublished sources are provided in both the preface and bibliography.

*Abbreviations*

Arab. = Arabic  
Heb. = Hebrew  
Kur. = Kurdish  
NA. = Neo-Aramaic  
Tur. = Turkish

## TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Latin	Arabic	Kurdish	<b>Vowels</b>
A	اء	ئا / ا	a    ئا / ا
B	ب	ب	e    هه / ه
C	ج	ج	i
Ç		چ	i <sup>1</sup>
Ç'		چ	u
D	د	د	û/û    وو / و
Dh	ذ		o    و
E		هه / ه	ö    وئ
E'		هه / ه	î/î    ی / یx
Ê		ی	ü    وئ
F	فی	فی	ê    ی
G		گی	
H <sup>2</sup>	ه	ه	
Ĥ	ه	ه	
KH/X	خ		
I			<b>Diphthongs</b>
Î/Î'	ی [vowel]	ئ ی	aw
J	ی	ژ	ai/ay
K	ك	ك	iyy (î at the end of words)
K'	-	ك	uw (û at the end words)
L	ل	ل	
L	ل	ل	
M	م	م	
N	ن	ن	
O		و	
P		پ	
Q		ق	
R	د	د	

<sup>1</sup> Central vowel, represented by dot less i.

<sup>2</sup> Represented as “t” when in a construct state.

R	د	د
S	س	س
Sh/Ş	ش	ش
S/(Tz) <sup>3</sup>	ص	ص
Ḍ	ض	ض
T	ت	ت
Ṭ	ط	ط
U	و	و [vowel] / ئو
Ū/Û		ئوو/وو
V		ف
W	و	و [consonant]
X		خ
X		ح
Y	ي	ي [consonant]
Z	ز	ز
‘	‘	ع

<sup>3</sup> “Tz” is sometimes preferred to represent the Hebrew ז especially in names.

## FOREWORD

The Kurdish society described in this study does not exist anymore in situ. The Kurdish Jews have migrated to Israel; many of the Assyrian Christians have migrated into many western countries;<sup>1</sup> and the Muslim Kurds lived through upheavals and wars that have changed the map of Kurdistan; many of them migrated too. For these reasons, I suspect that this work could not have been written elsewhere.

The study of minority groups enhances insight into the structure and functioning of the society as a whole and clearly reveals “a society’s cohesion and integration.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars of diverse disciplines have dealt with Middle Eastern secondary groups, although peripheral communities, such as the Kurds, have not received as much attention as larger communities.<sup>3</sup>

The main obstacle in conducting this research was the general lack of written sources, which drove me to explore a range of sources and methodologies.<sup>4</sup> I made use of publications of missionary organizations such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in the pursuit of data on the Jews and Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Some records came from Hebrew sources, such as *Responsa* Literature.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>1</sup> Ulf Björklund, *North to another Country: the formation of the Suryoy Community in Sweden*. Stockholm: University of Stockholm. Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Humphreys 1991: 255.

<sup>3</sup> Consult Hourani 1947; F. D. Andrews, ed., *The Lost peoples of the Middle East: Documents of the Struggle for survival and Independence of the Kurds, Assyrians, and other Minority Races in the Middle East* (Salisbury, North Carolina: Documentary Publications, 1982); Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-expression* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Consult J. Vansina, *Tradition: A study in Historical Methodology* (London 1965), which is a valuable monograph on oral tradition and oral history.

<sup>5</sup> See the list entitled “Archives Searched and Cited,” in the Bibliography. Also, consult Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1872–3) and C. C. A. Jensen and J. Einar, *The Messengers of God: the Mission to Kurdistan and Neighbouring Area* (Minnesota: Lutheran Orient Mission Society, 1950).

<sup>6</sup> *Responsa* Literature (i.e., questions by Jews and answers by authoritative rabbis, both of which provide data and insight into the experience of the Jews in the Diaspora). On the importance of the Hebrew *Responsa* Literature consult Lewis (1984: 80–81) and the Jewish Encyclopedia, under “*Responsa*.”

all written and archival sources provided a small amount of data or insight regarding the Jews of Kurdistan.<sup>7</sup> The limited written sources have driven me as other modern researchers to resort to oral history.<sup>8</sup> During the early stage of the research, in 1987, M. van Bruinessen, an authority on Kurdistan, wrote to me the following on this matter:

Interviewing old people about their life in Kurdistan, seems a quite important thing; because of the relative scarcity of written materials on the Kurdistan Jews, oral history is about all one can do—and within a few years there will be no longer any one to tell us how things were.<sup>9</sup>

From 1987 until 2002, I interviewed fifty-six Jewish informants originally from Kurdistan, conducting each interview over one to seven sessions. I then transliterated, translated, interpreted and classified the contents of the interviews. Analysis and substantiation of the data followed, through cross-references and other means. I have compiled the data carefully, evaluating the oral data with supplementary written or oral data. This process facilitated the depiction of more coherent themes regarding the experience of the Jews in Kurdistan. Careful reading and scrutiny of the data allows insight beyond the surface. For instance, it reveals occasions in which informants provided non-flattering personal data or disapproving personal self-image, based upon which it may be argued with confidence that they presented trustworthy reminiscences concerning their life experience. I conducted the majority of these interviews before 1992, and only after continuing the search for more written material, following several years of detachment from the informants, did I approach the actual writing of the book. The contribution

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<sup>7</sup> There are several exceptions, such as Rand and Rush (1979) and the project of the Oral History Division, the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, Catalogue no. 5, 1979, (henceforth OHD). Regrettably, the original recordings of these interviews were deleted after they had been transcribed. These transcribed interviews were used in this book mainly in the referendum.

<sup>8</sup> On Oral history, consult R. J. Grele, "Private Memories and public presentation: the Art of Oral history," in *Envelopes of Sound*, R. J. Grele, ed. (Chicago, 1975): 242–72; William Culter, "Accuracy in Oral history Interviewing," *Oral History an Interdisciplinary* etc. (see below), D. K. Dunaway and W. K. Baum, eds., *Oral History: an Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, 1984); David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (New York, 1982); J. Margolis "Remembering," *Mind*, 86, 1977: 186–205; J. A. Neuenschwaner, "Remembrance of things past: Oral Historians and long-term memory," *Oral History Review*, 1978: 45–53.

<sup>9</sup> In a personal letter from Martin Van Bruinessen to the writer of this book, in 1987, the former outlines the options for pursuing research of the Jews of Kurdistan.

of the oral sources to the present manuscript is significant as they illuminate themes that written sources failed to explore, thus enabling to sketch the social and economic history of the Jews of Kurdistan and their relationship with their tribal aghas during the first half of the 20th century.



## HISTORICAL SETTING

### *The Land and the Peoples*<sup>1</sup>

The term *Kurdistān*,<sup>2</sup> i.e. “the land of the Kurds,” was coined by the Seljūqs who ruled ‘Irāq and western Persia between 1038 and 1194 C.E. Ancient sources in Sumerian, Assyrian, classical Greek and Latin, notably in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (401–400 B.C.E.), mention the Kurds in various appellations.<sup>3</sup> In Aramaic, this region was known as *bet kardu* (the house of *Kardu* or Kurdistan) and in the Bible (Gen. 8:4) it was known as *hare Ararat* (the mountains of Ararat), identified in the *Onkelos* Aramaic translation from the 4th century C.E. as *ture-kardu* (the mountains of *Kardu* or Kurdistan).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in the 6th century C.E., the *Talmud* makes a few other references to *kardu* and *karduyyim*.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the origin of the Kurds has not yet been established.

Kurdistan was never a sovereign state,<sup>6</sup> though the area with an ethnic and linguistic majority of Kurdish population is defined as

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to references cited henceforth, consult the “Existing Bibliographies on the Kurds,” in the Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Simko (1992: 104) indicates that the name is a combination of the ethnological Kurd and the territorial suffix “-istan.” Allegedly, the prophet Zoroaster first used the term “-istan” in 850 B.C., to denote the dwelling place of the people, and the soil to which they are bound to and from which they obtained their livelihood. Almost all known countries of the ancient world derived in this manner, such as Balluchistan (the land of the Balluchi), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Hindustan, Arabistan. Most of these names are still in use in modern maps.

<sup>3</sup> *Anabasis* by Xenophon, translated by Henry Graham Dakyns, Project Gutenberg Release #1170 (January 1998). Xenophon (c. 444–357 B.C.E.) participated in the expedition led by Cyrus against his older brother, the emperor Artaxerxes II of Persia, in 401 B.C., in which Cyrus employed many Greek mercenaries. Eventually, ten thousand Greeks found themselves deep in hostile territory, near the heart of Mesopotamia, far from the sea, and without leadership. They fought their way north through Armenia to Trapezus on the coast of Black Sea and then sailed westward and back to Greece. Xenophon’s record of this expedition and the journey home was titled *Anabasis* (“Expedition” or “The March up Country.”) Xenophon lists the governors of the several territories of the king, which were traversed by the army during the expedition, and then some independent tribes, such as the Carduchians or Kurds.

<sup>4</sup> Sabar 1982: xiii n.4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii n.5.

<sup>6</sup> The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad did not live up to its founders’ expectations. It ceased to exist less than a year after its creation in 1946. Consult Roosevelt 1947; Eagleton 1963; Gunter (1993, 1994); McDowall 1996: 231–247 and Schmidt 1964.

Kurdistan.<sup>7</sup> Curzon (1892) referred to the Kurdish mountains as “a name somewhat vaguely applied to the frontier highlands inhabited by the Kurds.”<sup>8</sup> The Encyclopedia of Islam sets the total area of Kurdistan at approximately 151 square miles. Other studies, some of them by Kurds, estimate the size of Kurdistan at around 193 square miles.<sup>9</sup> The land of Kurdistan is a highland of numerous parallel mountain ranges that form the eastern extension of the Zagros and the southwest belt of foothills above the Mesopotamian plain. These two systems join at Lake Van in Turkey, at an altitude of 5,000 feet (1,500 meters).<sup>10</sup>

The Kurdish language belongs to the Iranian group and is thus part of the Indo-European family of languages. It originates from either the northwestern or the southwestern branch of the Iranian family, and is distinct in its grammar, syntax and vocabulary. The Kurdish language is testimony to a remarkable cultural survival, considering that until the end of the 19th century, the Kurds had little written literature.<sup>11</sup> For many centuries, the Kurdish developed merely as an oral language and the Kurdish alphabet was molded only around the turn of the 19th century.<sup>12</sup> There are three main groups of Kurdish dialects. The first one is the northern/northwestern dialect, commonly known as Kurmanji, which is written primarily in the Latin alphabet. The central group, spoken further south, generally known as Sorani, is written in Arabic script based on Persian characters. These two groups have both developed literature and historiography, especially towards the end of the 20th century. The southern group, spoken further south in the Kermashah province of Iran has not yet developed a literature. The dialects known as Macho-Macho, or Zaza, spoken in Turkey, and Gorani, spoken in Iran, do not belong to the Kurdish group of Iranian languages.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that Kurmanji is spoken in five countries while Sorani is used only in Iraq and Iran.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On the question of the ethnic identity of the Kurds, see Izady 1986.

<sup>8</sup> G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1 (London, 1892), rep. 1966: 516.

<sup>9</sup> Graham 1991: 1. The Kurdish leader Ghassemlou (1965: 14) gives a similar size to that of the EI<sup>1</sup>, 409,650 km square. Other Kurdish scholars cite higher figures; see Simko (1992: 113): 530,000 km square, the same figure given by Joyce Blau 1965: 5.

<sup>10</sup> Hassanpour 1992: 1–12.

<sup>11</sup> Izady 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher 1978: 108–11. On non-Arab minorities in Iraq in the early 20th century, see Rassam 1931.

<sup>13</sup> Kinnane 1964: 3–4. *Gorani* is also spelled *Gurani*.

<sup>14</sup> More on the origin of the Kurds and their language, see Wahbi (1965, 1966); Driver 1923; Mackenzie 1961 and Chyet (1995, 2003).

Apart from several exceptions, both Jews and Christians in Kurdistan spoke Neo-Aramaic, which, to quote Krotkoff, is “the surviving remains of the once widespread Aramaic language of antiquity.”<sup>15</sup> Aramaic has been a living, literary and official language for three thousand years, and has evolved through three phases: “Ancient Aramaic” (1000–300 B.C.E.); “Middle Aramaic” (300 B.C.E.–1000 C.E.); and “Neo-Aramaic” (1000 C.E.–present).<sup>16</sup> The prefix “Neo” merely indicates that Neo-Aramaic is new in its written form, though the oral form has a much longer history.<sup>17</sup> Recently, the study of the Neo-Aramaic has been established as an “autonomous field of study.”<sup>18</sup> Some Jewish Neo-Aramaic speakers name it *lishmd hozaya*, “the language of the Jews,” or *lishna deni*, “our language,” or as referred by Jews from Urmiya region, *nash didan*, “our people,” i.e., the people who speak our language.<sup>19</sup> As noted by Heinrichs, the sketching out of Neo-Aramaic languages on a map of the Middle East creates an archipelago of islands, large and small, approximately between Lake Van and Lake Urmiya in the north and the cities of Damascus and Ahvaz in the south. The current state of research indicates four branches of Neo-Aramaic, one of which is Eastern Neo-Aramaic. It is represented by three dialects named after the main cities in which they were spoken: Zakho-Amadiya, Arbil-Kirkuk and Urmiya-Bashqala.<sup>20</sup> In all three groups, there are Jewish and Christian dialect subdivisions, and Heinrichs rightly stresses “the phenomenon of communal dialects,” i.e. that in towns such as Zakho, Urmiya and Sinna, where both Jewish and Christian speakers of Neo-Aramaic lived, “their dialects were different from each other, sometimes extremely so.”<sup>21</sup> There are two main communal dialect groups, Jewish and Christian. Jewish dialects had been spoken in Turkish, Iraqi and Persian Kurdistan

<sup>15</sup> Hopkins 1993; Krotkoff 1982: 2.

<sup>16</sup> Sabar 1988: 88–89.

<sup>17</sup> Consult Heinrichs 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ix. Although this language is becoming extinct, its dialects are still spoken, especially among Assyrian and Chaldean Christians in the Diaspora as well in Kurdistan.

<sup>19</sup> Recently, a Jewish philanthropist, Yoseph Khakshouri, originally from Urmiah, supported the publishing of the *Torah* in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Urmiah, *Five books of Torah from Heavy* [venerated] *Aramaic into Easy Aramaic* [*nash-didan*], translated by Rabbi Hayim Yeshurun (Holon, Israel: ca. 2003).

<sup>20</sup> The Urmiah dialect has been given different names: Modern Syriac, Vernacular Syriac, Modern Assyrian, Modern Chaldean, or Fellihi, which is restricted to the dialects of the plain of Mosul. Consult Rubens Duval, *Les Dialectes Néo-Araméens de Salamas* (Paris: F. Vieweg, Libraire-Éditeur, 1883) and Garbell 1965.

<sup>21</sup> Heinrichs 1990 (introduction): x–xii; Sabar 1988: 87–88; Krotkoff 1982: 2.

and in Persian Azerbaijan. Almost all Jewish speakers of Neo-Aramaic immigrated to Israel in the mass migration from Kurdistan of 1951–52. The majority of Jews spoke vernacular Neo-Aramaic at home and only a small portion of them spoke Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish or Persian in their daily life.<sup>22</sup> Sabar further divided these dialects conveniently into three sub-groups,<sup>23</sup> the second of which is spoken by Assyrian Christians. Until World War I, the Eastern Christian Neo-Aramaic, known in its written form as Neo-Syriac, was spoken in an almost coherent area, which included the following regions: the plain of Mosul, the plain of Urmiya, the mountainous region of Hakkari, the provinces of Siirt and Van between Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan as well as some places southeast of that area, such as Sanandaj.<sup>24</sup>

Following the Arab conquest, the Kurds adopted Islam. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, Kurdistan became the arena for the struggle between the Ottoman Sultāns and the Safavid, Persian Shāhs. This created a favorable environment in Kurdistan for the expansion of a feudal order, which the *Sharafnāme* (1596 C.E.) portrayed reliably.<sup>25</sup> Only in the late 15th century did Kurdistan begin to be stabilized, with the establishment of two regional empires, the Ottoman and the Persian. From that time until the beginning of the 20th century, the borders, and therefore the area of Kurdistan, experienced only small geo-political modifications. Following World War I, the land commonly known as Kurdistan was divided among five sovereign states: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and the former Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup>

For many years, the tribe was the main political organization of the Kurds. In the middle ages, the Kurdish tribes were grouped into approximately thirty principalities, located between the rival Turkish and

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xii–xiii; Sabar 1988: 89–90.

<sup>23</sup> Sabar 1988: 93–94.

<sup>24</sup> Heinrichs 1990: xii–xiii. On the Christians of Hakkari, see M. Chavalier, *Les montagnards chrétiens du Hakkâri et du Kurdistan septentrional*, Publications du Departement de Géographie de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 13 (Paris, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> F. B. Charmoy, *Chêref-Nâme au Fastes de la Nation Kourde*, par Chêref-au'ddîne, Prince de Bidlîs, dans l'Œillet d'Ârzeroume, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: 1868–1875).

<sup>26</sup> On the Kurds in the different countries, consult the bibliography, especially H. Arakélian, "Les Kurdes en Perse." *Verhandlungen des XIII Internationalen Orientalischen Kongresses*, Hamburg (September 1902): 148–150; Hassan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (London: 1964); Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: An historical and Political Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); Van Bruinessen (1989); Van Bruinessen and H. Boeschoten 1998; Graham 1991; Gunter (1993, 1994); Izady (1990, 1992); Kreyenbroek and Sperl 1992.

Persian Empires. The author of *Selīm-nāme* (The Book of Selīm), Hakīm Idrīs, relates that the Sulṭān Selīm I (ruled 918–926 H. /1512–20 C.E.) asked him to go to Kurds' land (*bilād-i akrād*), “from Urmiya and Ushnū<sup>27</sup> to Amīd and Malātiya” in order “to win over the princes and rulers of Kurdistān.” Hakīm Idrīs established pacts with Kurdish nobles and Selīm I recognized their hereditary right to rule their ancient principalities.<sup>28</sup> The Turkish victory combined with diplomatic wisdom gained the loyalty of local Kurdish rulers and enabled the inclusion of most Kurdish regions into Ottoman lands.<sup>29</sup> The independent principalities and tribes remained intact until the 19th century and played a part in the recent national and political movements in Kurdistan.<sup>30</sup>

Rural and non-tribal Assyrian and Jews usually spoke Neo-Aramaic, or Syriac, with its distinctive characteristics, in addition to the Kurdish language spoken by all the inhabitants of Kurdistan. Christians and Jews also adhered to different religious observances and had different holidays from the majority Muslim population. The Kurds are non-Arab mostly Sunni Muslims; sixty percent belong to the *Shāfiʿī madhhab* (school of thought) and some follow the *Hanefī* School.<sup>31</sup> Several *Ṣūfī ṭarīqas* (mystical orders, or brotherhoods) exercised influence on the Kurds, mainly the *Baktashī*, *Naqshbandī*, *Qādirī* and *Nurbakhshī* orders.<sup>32</sup>

The largest group of local Christians was the Armenians, residing all over northern Kurdistan and farther beyond its northern and western boundaries. The Syrian Orthodox formed the second largest group. They are also known as Syrians or *Sūriyamīs*, or as Jacobites, after Jacob Baradaeous, an important saint who lived in the 6th century C.E. The third group is the Assyrians, or *Ashūrīs*, also known as Nestorians.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> Ushnū, also spelled Şino, Ushnu, Ushno, hence after referred as Shino.

<sup>28</sup> Selīm-Name, MS of the Bib. Nat. Pers. 285, fol. 109, v; Bedr Khan, 1959: 249; quoted in EI.

<sup>29</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 161.

<sup>30</sup> See Kamal M. Ahmad, *The National Liberation Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan 1918–1958* (PhD thesis, Russian Academy of the Near and Middle East, Moscow-Baku, 1969). On the Kurdish tribes, see Khurshīd 1979; Sykes (1908, 1915); Lamb 1946; Minorsky 1945 and Soane 1918.

<sup>31</sup> On Iraq after the Muslim conquest, see Morony 1984.

<sup>32</sup> See Mirella Galletti, “Kurdistan: A Mosaic of People.” *Acta Kurdica* 1 (1994): 43–52; Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshabandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Die Welt des Islams* 22 (1982): 1–6; A. J. Arberry, ed., *Religions in the Middle East* (Cambridge, 1969). Also, consult van Bruinessen (1978, 1991); Driver 1922; Blau 1985; Hakim 1984; Hourani (1972, 1981); Madelian 1969; Trimmingham 1971; Singer 1973; Tavakkuli 1979.

<sup>33</sup> These Christians are also called “Easterns,” as opposed to “Westerns,” by which

Christians of various denominations composed the largest non-Muslim community, although there are different estimates of their population numbers.<sup>34</sup> The Christian Jacobites lived mainly in Tūr ‘Abādīn<sup>35</sup> and Jezira, as well as in many towns in northern Kurdistan.<sup>36</sup> The Assyrians, or Nestorians, under the supremacy of the Patriarch Mār Shim‘ōn,<sup>37</sup> lived in central Kurdistan, mainly in Bahdīnan<sup>38</sup> and Hakkari, as well as around Urmiya, while the Catholic Chaldeans lived in Kirkuk, Arbil

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they denote Latin Catholics, Orthodox, Monophysites, and Protestants. The Anglicans have called them the “Assyrian Church,” a name that can be defended on archaeological grounds. F. E. Brightman, in his *Liturgies, Eastern and Western, and English Rite* (1915),<sup>37</sup> includes Chaldean Catholics and Nestorians under “Persian Rite,” and Bishop Arthur MacLean of Moray and Ross (Anglican) who was the best living authority on the Nestorians at the beginning of the 20th century, calls them “East Syrians,” which is perhaps the most satisfactory term, the Catholic Encyclopedia (1913). See A. S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> There has been a problem of figuring out the accurate figures of local Christians in the region. On the difficulties in obtaining accurate numbers of Christians in Iran, because of the mixture of ethnic identity with religious affiliation, see for instance Sanasarian 2002: 44. The number of Assyrians fluctuates according to the sources and motives of the contributors. See F. W. Ainsworth, “An account of a visit to the Chaldeans inhabiting Central Kurdistan and of ascent of the peak of Rowandiz (Tur Sheikhiwa) in the summer of 1840.” *JRGS* 11:21–76; F. W. Ainsowrth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia*, 2 vols (London: John W. Parker, 1842); Riley 1889: 452; Racho Doneff, “Assyrians in Turkey: disappearance of a culture?” *Assyrians after Assyria’s Conference*, 1999; H. J. Buxton, “Some Notes upon the present situation of the Assyrians in Iraq,” December 30, 1931; G. A., *The Assyrians, Mosaic*, 1985: 50; *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (Roma) 4 (1938): 272–4; Dodge 1940:302; Rockwell 1916; Joseph (1961, 1983, 2000); Armalah 1926; Stafford 1935; Malek 1935; Dr. Gabriele Yonan, *Massacre of the Assyrian People, completely unknown until today 1915–1918* (Sweden: Nsibin Publishing House, N.D.); *Patriarch Mar Esay Samcun, the Tragic End of Syriacs* (Sweden: Nsibin Publishing House, N.D.); *Atrocities conducted by Kerboran in the Turkish Mesopotamia* (Sweden, Nsibin Publishing House, N.D.); and Ishaya Arian and Eden Naby 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Tūr ‘Abādīn (NA, lit., the mountain of worshippers). The town is located in southeastern Turkey. See also Hori Süleyman Finno, *Massacre of the Syriacs from Farman Tur-Abdin in 1914–1915* (Athens 1993).

<sup>36</sup> The Syrian Orthodox Church is active in modern Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. The headquarters of the Church are now in Damascus and previously were in Hums (1931–1955), Mardin, Turkey, from the thirteenth century onwards, and in Antioch, from 518 C.E. The official language of the Church is Syriac, though followers may speak other languages.

<sup>37</sup> Also spelled Mār Shim‘ūn and Mār Shimon.

<sup>38</sup> The region of Bahdīnan, which was previously a prestigious principality, is roughly south to the Hakkari region and northeast of Mosul, and roughly between the Great Zab River and the Khabur Stream of Zakho. It includes towns such as Arbil, Amadiya, Zakho, Dohuk and Aqra. More on the region see S. Damulji, *Imarāt Bahdīnān al-Kurdīyya* (Mosul, 1952).

and Mosul in Iraq and in a number of villages, the most famous of which are Tel Keppe and Alqosh.<sup>39</sup>

Three major deportations of Jews from the Holy Land to the Land of Twin Rivers occurred between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C.E. In 724, the major exile from Samaria of the northern Israelite kingdom took place. According to the Biblical narrative, “the King of Assyria came up throughout all the land, went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of *Hoshea*, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away unto Assyria, and placed them in *Halah*, and in *Habor*, on the River of *Gozan*, and in the cities of the Medes.”<sup>40</sup> Brauer found it remarkable that the Jews of Kurdistan who speak Aramaic dialects lived “in an area that represents the perimeter of settlement of the exiles from Israel and Judah” or at any rate “lies adjacent to it.”<sup>41</sup> Sabar suggests a linguistic substantiation, which may associate the early Jews who were exiled to *Habor* with the later Kurdistanian Jews who lived in the surrounding areas. The word for “river” in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of the Jews of Zakho is *Khawora*, originating from *Havor*, or the *Havor/Habor* River, to which the Jews of Samaria were exiled. This is a semantic-shift in which a proper noun (*Habor*) evolved into a common noun (*khawora*), suggesting that the primal speakers of the dialect settled near the river. When they migrated from there to other places, they continued to use the proper noun when referring to a river. In other dialects, the word for river is *nehra*, which in Zakho means “laundry,” which was operated on the riverbank.<sup>42</sup>

The Jews comprised the smallest non-Muslim minority in Kurdistan. Just before the time of their final mass migration to Israel during 1951–52, there were about 25,000 Jews scattered sparsely among about

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<sup>39</sup> Tel Keppe, originally a fortress, literally means (in Aram.) “hill of stones.” Tel Kef, literally means (in Aramaic) “hill of good life.” In the past few decades, many Catholic Chaldeans have left this village and migrated to Baghdad, or to the United States. More on the Catholic Eastern Churches, see Donald Attawater, *The Catholic Eastern Churches* (Milwaukee, 1935) and *The Christian Churches of the East*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1948); Hasluck 1929; and A. H. Grandsen, Chaldean communities in Kurdistan.” JRCAS 34, part I (1947): 79–82.

<sup>40</sup> The Bible, 2 Kings 17:4–6; Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 1980: 246, 247–8. In 1842, P. E. Botta, the French Consular agent, discovered the great castle of Sargon, the home of Sargon II, the King of Assyria, at the village of Khorasad, 7 miles north of Mosul. See also Cuneiform text of Tiglat-pileser III, from Western campaign and Gaza/Damascus campaign 734–733 B.C.E., quoted in Keller 1980: 244.

<sup>41</sup> Brauer 1993: 56; 2 Kings 17:7, Isa. 11:11, 27:13.

<sup>42</sup> Sabar 1988: 91–92, n. 13.

200 villages and several towns. By that time, there were approximately 20,000 Jews of Kurdish origin already living in the State of Israel.<sup>43</sup> Most of the Kurdistan Jews came originally from Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>44</sup> They lived within the boundaries of the provinces of Mosul, in Zakho, Dohuk, Aqra, Amadiya and Zibar,<sup>45</sup> as well as within the provinces of Kirkūk (henceforth Kirkuk), Arbīl (henceforth Arbil) and Sulaimaniya. This book concentrates on the Jews who lived north of the Great Zab River and east of the Tigris valley.

The Kurdish society was mostly rural with traditional tribal villages following a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. During the 19th and 20th centuries, a gradual process of urbanization took place. Even the Kurds who settled in urban centers maintained strong ties with their tribe, holding to its values and rules.<sup>46</sup> Muslim Kurds and some of the Christians belonged to the tribal and militant class, the strongest group in Kurdish society. The remainder of the rural Kurds, most of the Christians and all Jews belonged to the non-tribal class of society, which was dependent on the patronage and protection of tribal chieftains for its survival and physical security in the tribal areas. The Jewish and Christian communities formed religious, ethnic and cultural minorities within tribal boundaries. Three main differences distinguish the Christians from the Jews. First, the Christian population was much larger than the Jewish population. Second, several of the Assyrian groups were tribal, (semi)-independent and combative, in contrast to the Jews, who were non-tribal subjects; and third, the involvement of western powers and Christian organizations left a mark on the history of the native Christians in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>47</sup>

Scholars of Kurdistan noted the widespread rivalry and blood feuds between tribes in Kurdistan. In recent times, special courts have been established to deal with tribal disputes.<sup>48</sup> In earlier times, tribal disputes were brought before a powerful religious shaikh or tribal chieftain for mediation. In this manner, several of the influential tribal

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<sup>43</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 32; Sabar 1982: xv.

<sup>44</sup> Vanly 1980: 153–210.

<sup>45</sup> Harris 1958: 28.

<sup>46</sup> Van Bruinessen and M. Boeschoten 1999.

<sup>47</sup> See Robert Bllincoe, *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 1668–1990* (USA: Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Khadduri 1956: 301. For the procedures and regulations, see “Tribal, Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations” (rev.), in *Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932* 8: 144–156.

shaikhs became more powerful and prosperous.<sup>49</sup> Tension and rivalry also existed between the tribal inhabitants and the government, be it Ottoman, British or Iraqi. The government, the *hukumeh*, to the nomad as to the villager, was equated with tax collection, conscription and arbitrary and meaningless regulations, and was to be feared and distrusted. The fondest dream, therefore, of the nomad and villager was to be left completely alone by the *hukumeh*.<sup>50</sup> Another common type of rivalry existed between races, religions and peoples. A British report from 1911 noted the religious hatred between *Sunnīs* and *Shī'īs* in Persia and hatred between Muslims and Christians in Turkey.<sup>51</sup>

In this book, there is a general differentiation between the tribal society and urban society, between the tribal ruling system and the governmental established system of ruling as well as between rural and urban life. The frequent reference to rural Kurdistan and rural areas in Kurdistan requires clarification. The reference to rural Kurdistan or rural areas in Kurdistan, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, refers to not only the physical environment but also to the very social and fabric of the rural tribal culture. Thousands of small villages that were sparsely inhabited dotted the mountains and valleys throughout the rural areas in Kurdistan. The economy of rural and remote locations in Kurdistan centered on agriculture and these locations suffered from a significant lack of governmental resources and advanced modern technology such as electricity, water supply, medicine and transportation, but at the same time, these communities managed to conserve much of the tribal tradition and way.

### *The Position of the Jews in the Previous Centuries*

The hostility of Islam towards the Jews was not as pronounced as Christian anti-Semitism, but it was nevertheless a reality. This hostility was the accepted attitude of the ruling group towards all ruled groups, and was based on the contempt on the part of the Muslims towards those who were persistent in their infidelity despite attempts to have

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<sup>49</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 59–67.

<sup>50</sup> Khadduri 1956: 118. For a discussion of this subject, consult B. Lewis, "Hukûmet and devlet," *Bellefen* 146, 27 (1982): 415–421.

<sup>51</sup> Rabino 1911: 2.

them accept Islamic truth, and additionally because of prejudice.<sup>52</sup> Bernard Lewis has discussed the Islamic view of Jews in comparison with Christian anti-Semitism, which in his view stems from fear, hatred or jealousy. The Muslim stance stems simply from contempt for the Jews at the social and religious level rather than being based on race and ethnicity.<sup>53</sup> This chapter offers an assessment of the position of the Jews of Kurdistan in earlier centuries.<sup>54</sup>

In some Middle Eastern and Arab countries, the study of the image of local Jewry has been discussed fully in many written sources.<sup>55</sup> Kurdish society, on the other hand, suffers from a dearth of written sources. Two reports by David D'Beth Hillel (1827) refer briefly to the perception of Jews in the eyes of their Kurdish neighbors. In a village near Bashqala,<sup>56</sup> today in southeast Turkey, close to the border with Iran, the residents did not allow David D'Beth Hillel into their homes for fear that he as a Jew would contaminate the houses.<sup>57</sup> Only after begging and paying half a rupee would they allow him to enter.<sup>58</sup> The motive for this behavior may have been religious concerns over ritual impurity, especially among adherents of the *Shī'ā*, who view contact with non-Muslims as the cause of religious impurity, or *najāsa*.<sup>59</sup> In another village, six hours south of Zakho, David D'Beth Hillel noticed that the governor refrained from eating food prepared by the local Jews. The governor explained to David, that the Jews in Turkey, Egypt, the Land

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<sup>52</sup> See G. Vajda, "L'image du juif dans la tradition islamique," *Nouveaux Chaiers* (Paris) 1968: 13–14.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis 1984: 33.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the previous centuries consult Mann 1931; Brauer (1947, 1993); Lewis 1984; Ben-Yaacob 1981; Ben-Zvi (1951, 1955, 1957, 1967); Fischel (1939, 1944, 1949, 1973); Mark Cohen, "The Jews under Islam: from the rise of Islam to Shabbatai Zevi," *Bibliographical Essays in Medieval Jewish Studies* (New York: Ktav, 1976): 169–229. repr. with suppl., Princeton Near Eastern Paper, no. 32 (Princeton, 1981).

<sup>55</sup> See for instance, Shimon Shamir, ed., *The Jews of Egypt* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987). Three essays deal with the image of Egyptian Jewry: Nurit Govrin, "The Encounter of Exiles from Palestine with the Jewish Community of Egypt During First World War, as reflected in their writings": 177–91; Ada Aharoni, "the image of Jewish Life in the Writings of Egyptian Jewish Authors in Israel and Abroad": 192–99; and Thomas Mayer, "The Image of Egyptian Jewry in recent Egyptian Studies": 199–214.

<sup>56</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 130.

<sup>57</sup> Based on the Shī'ite concept of *najīs* or *najāsa* (ritual impurity), any contact with Jews or other infidels, animals or impure items, disqualifies a Shī'ite believer from performing his religious duties unless he undergoes an elaborate ritual of purification. The proximity to Persia may have influenced the practice that was dominant in the Shī'ite State, see Fischel 1939: 229.

<sup>58</sup> Fischel 1939: 239–240.

<sup>59</sup> Lewis 1984: 33. *Tahāra*, EI<sup>1</sup>.

of Israel and Arab [Arabia], were truly “the children of Israel” and therefore it was permitted for Muslims to eat their food. Nevertheless, Kurdish Jews “are not [truly] from the children of Israel.”<sup>60</sup> In Islamic historical writing, there is a clear distinction between the ancient and Biblical Israelites and the Jews of later generations.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the lower image of the Kurdistani Jews may have affected the governor’s perception.

The legal position of Jews in Muslim countries was shaped by Islamic principles.<sup>62</sup> The *Qurʾān* recognizes Judaism and Christianity as “earlier, incomplete, and imperfect forms of Islam itself, and therefore containing a genuine if distorted divine revelation.” The Muslims tolerated the members of these minorities and allowed them to practice their religions, along with granting them considerable communal autonomy.<sup>63</sup> For centuries, Kurdistani Jews performed their religious practices regularly, as suggested by the reports of ancient synagogues in Jewish communities and mass pilgrimages to the tombs of Jewish prophets.<sup>64</sup> Other reports indicate that Kurdistani Jews were not allowed to carry out pilgrimages to certain venerated sites. In one instance, Rabbi Yehiel Fischel (1859–60) could not enter the cave of Abraham in Urfa, “because the Muslims would not allow the Jews to enter the cave.”<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Benjamin II (1848) commented on the economic freedom enjoyed by Kurdistani Jews. The production of wine by Jews in Amadiya, Bahdīnan and Sulaimaniya<sup>66</sup> also indicates Muslim tolerance towards the Jews, since the production and selling of alcohol is strictly forbidden in Islam. The *Qurʾān* explains:

<sup>60</sup> Fischel 1939: 225.

<sup>61</sup> For further readings, see Lewis 1984: 203 n. 6.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion on the position of the Jews under Islam, see Sh. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1974): 62–88; and Lewis 1984: 3–67.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis 1984: 20; C. E. Bosworth, “The Protected Peoples (Christians and Jews) in Medieval Egypt and Syria,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* LXII (1979): 11–36; C. E. Bosworth, “The Concept of Dhimma in early Islam,” in B. Braude and B. Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the Function of the Plural Society*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982) I: 37–51.

<sup>64</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. II): 111; Stern 1854: 216; Fischel 1939: 222. David D’Beth Hillel makes a distinction between the Jews of Mosul and those of Kurdistan.

<sup>65</sup> Ya‘ari 1942: 43, 36, 50; Fischel 1939: 229; Layard 1853: 596. Rabbi Yehiel Fischel was born in 1925 in Eastern Galicia and visited in Iraq and Persia, Syria and Kurdistan as well as in Palestine between 1859 and 1861. Abraham Yaari published his composition in Hebrew under the title *Masaot shelih Zefat be-artsot ha-mizrak* [travels of Zefat emissary in the eastern countries], Jerusalem, 1942.

<sup>66</sup> Fischel 1939: 225–226, 227, 234.

Satan seeketh to sow dissension and hatred among you, by means of wine and lots, and to divert you from remembering God, and from prayer, will ye not therefore abstain from them?<sup>67</sup>

Another explanation for the permission granted to Jews to produce wine, was the habit of drinking alcohol by some Muslim Kurds. They needed alcohol supplies and received it from Jews who either produced it or stored it in their homes or stores.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, three accounts reported by Benjamin II offer a glimpse into the intolerance among Muslim Kurds towards the Jews.<sup>69</sup> The first account refers to an ancient *Torah* scroll that Benjamin found in Diyarbakir. The sacred scroll had been moved from Nisibin to Mardin and from there to Diyarbakir, because of continual plundering and the lack of security.

Formerly it was in the possession of the very large community at Mardin, but as that was exposed to continual plundering, it had been confined to the community of Diarbekr... The community of Mardin had come into possession of the scroll in the following manner: the Jewish inhabitants of Nisibin... being attacked by a horde of robbers, had fled to Mardin, and taken the Pentateuch with them.

The transfer of holy relics suggests the state of vulnerability and fear of the two small Jewish communities, Nisibin and Mardin.<sup>70</sup> Benjamin II expressed “special astonishment” that Muslim intolerance and religious oppression did not stop even at the doorstep of “the house of God.” The second account of Benjamin II refers to the Jews of the lower section of Arbil<sup>71</sup> who wished to transfer the *Torah* scrolls to the new synagogue by way of a traditional outdoor procession. During this procession, Muslims attacked them, “several of them were killed, others were wounded, and the new synagogue was razed to the ground.” Shortly afterwards, the Jews built a second temple, and “the same

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<sup>67</sup> The Qur’ān, sūra 5 (“The Table”): 5.

<sup>68</sup> Fischel 1939: 243.

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin II wrote “prior to the Turks.” Most likely he recorded his impressions of Kurdish life before the Turks were able complete their control over the provinces in Kurdistan, around the middle of the 19th century. The Turks implemented a policy of re-centralization, aimed at the destruction of all (semi) independent tribal entities and at the re-establishing of government control in these regions.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 59.

<sup>71</sup> Arbil (also written *Arbil*, *Erbil* or *Irbil*), or Hewlêr (Kurd), is one of the large cities in Iraq and lies 50 miles east of Mosul. In classical times, the city was known by its Aramaic name Arbela. From 1991 onwards, the city is the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

scenes were repeated,” to which Benjamin himself was a witness.<sup>72</sup> The third account cited by Benjamin II refers to the Kurdish assault on a synagogue in Rawanduz:

On New Year’s Day, when the shofar (the horn, which, according to Mosaic law, is blown on New Year’s Day) sounded in the synagogue, the Kurds rushed into the temple, attacked the women and maltreated them, broke the symbolic trumpet [the shofar], and compelled the Jews to stop their ceremony.

According to Benjamin II, several years later the Turkish authorities eventually ended “such tumult and disorder.”<sup>73</sup>

Most of the Jews of Kurdistan lived in urban centers and a smaller number of Jews lived scattered in many rural villages throughout the Kurdish mountains, where most religious shaikhs ruled. Nevertheless, some of the urban Jews traveled regularly in the rural areas where they were subject to tribal rule. Relations between Kurds and Jews varied according to time and place.<sup>74</sup> In 1834, for instance, Fraser found that the Kurds and Jews in the town of Qaradagh “coalesce together wonderfully well.”<sup>75</sup> In 1848, Benjamin II described the Jews of Mardin who lived in their own quarter “tolerably free.”<sup>76</sup> He noted “the happy condition” of the Jews of Kurdistan, “their freedom from all oppression, and the flourishing state of their circumstances.”<sup>77</sup> Many of the Jews were very wealthy, particularly those families engaged in agriculture that owned land and herds. The famous Jewish traveler observed that the condition of Kurdistani Jews had become more endurable under Turkish dominion.<sup>78</sup>

The available reports from the 19th century indicate that the Jews of Persian Kurdistan had been treated more harshly than the Jews of Ottoman Kurdistan. In fact, compared with the Jews of Iran, “the

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<sup>72</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 89–90. The chaos that was resulted from the new Turkish policy of re-centralization attracted petty chieftains who were eager to fill up the political vacuum, causing more tribal feuds and disorder. Van Bruinessen 1978: 220–221, 288; Nieuwenhuis 1982: 106.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 91–92.

<sup>74</sup> See the following items: Kinneir 1818: 144–145, 265, 314–315; Rich 1836 (vol. I): 120, 153, 208–209, 245; Benjamin II 1859: 65, 70; Fischel 1939: 227, 229, 222–223; Ben-Yaacob 1981: 142–143.

<sup>75</sup> J. B. Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan and Mesopotamia* (London, 1840) 1: 163.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 62.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Jews of the Ottoman Empire were living in paradise.”<sup>79</sup> Blood libels and oppressions occurred in three Jewish communities: in Maragha around 1801–1802, in Urmiya around 1821–22, and later in Salmas.<sup>80</sup> Following his 1827 journey to Ottoman Kurdistan, David D’Beth Hillel mentioned that only in Arbil did the Muslims oppress the Jews. Two decades later, Benjamin II also reported that the Jews of Arbil still lived in a state of oppression. In the Jewish community of Rawanduz, Benjamin found “remains of the old oppression-vassalage,” at times with the knowledge of the local authorities, though the Pasha of Baghdad knew nothing of it.<sup>81</sup> H. A. Stern noted in 1851 that oppression and tyranny had decreased the populations of previously flourishing towns throughout the country.<sup>82</sup> Benjamin II reported that on occasion, Jewish men and women were forced into slave labor, breaking stones, burning lime and making tiles on behalf of their master.<sup>83</sup> Reports that are more recent attest that slave labor was more prevalent in rural villages, but occurred also in urban centers. Several accounts follow regarding the position of Jews in three important Kurdish urban centers. Based on reports by Benjamin II, under the Ottoman Turks the condition of the Jews in Kurdistan was somewhat improved.<sup>84</sup> Before the arrival of the Turks, the Jews of Rawanduz had been “exposed to insult and misery”

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<sup>79</sup> Lewis 1984: 166. On the persecution of Persian Jews in earlier centuries, see Netzer 1980.

<sup>80</sup> Abbās Mirza was the Heir Apparent and the selected son of Fath Alī Shāh of the Qājār dynasty of Tabriz. Apparently, two persecutions and blood-libels occurred against the Jews of Urmiya and Margha. David D’Beth Hillel informs that he helped three Jewish merchants to escape from being lynched in Tabriz, Fischel 1939: 237–240. It is interesting to note that fifty or sixty years later, when Rabbi Ephraim Naymark visited Persia, he noted the hatred of the Qājārs towards the Jews. He reported that while the Heir apparent, sitting in Tabriz, continues to maintain the traditional local hatred towards the Jews, his brother, sitting in Isfahan, “loves the Jews” and maintains warm and good relations with them. Naymark 1947: 77–78; Fischel 1939: 238–239.

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 92. The most famous blood-liable in the Muslim world occurred in Damascus in 1840, when the Jews were blamed for killing a priest and his servant in order to use their blood for baking unleavened bread (*matza*) for Passover. More on this subject see Lewis 1984: 156–159 and two Arabic sources on the subject: Muḥammad Fawzī Ḥamza, *The Jews and Human Sacrify* (Arab.), Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār; and Muḥammad Arif Abu al-Fida’, *The End of the Jews* (Arab.), Cairo: Dār al-ʿItisām. Islamic Web sites are abundant with material related to this belief that Jews use blood for ritual purposes. See for instance the following web-sites (visited recently in 2007): <http://www.memri.org/antisemitism.html>; <http://www.islamzine.com/ideologies/zionism/jrm>; <http://www.jewwatch.com>.

<sup>82</sup> Stern 1854: 205. For Stern’s biography, see Isaacs 1886.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 92.

<sup>84</sup> This happened around the middle of the 19th century when the Turks finally became the actual (rather than the nominal) rulers of Kurdistan.

for centuries. They were subjected to the tyranny of the Kurds; they were “sold like cattle” and Muslims attacked them in their places of worship. The Turks ended “such tumult and disorder.”<sup>85</sup> The narrative of Benjamin II differentiates between the status of the Jews in urban and rural communities. The Jews of the more industrial Koi-Sanjaq were less oppressed from their brethren in the neighboring Rawanduz.<sup>86</sup> Apparently, in urban, industrial communities, the Jews were less likely to be oppressed than in rural communities. The passive manner in which the Jews submitted to their fate surprised Benjamin II:

Our poor brethren think that it is their destiny to suffer, and submit patiently to their fate; the slightest amelioration of which they consider an unexpected happiness.<sup>87</sup>

In an attempt to explain the enduring Jewish presence despite their oppression, Benjamin II explained that economic freedom enabled the Jews to carry on with their lives despite the hardships imposed on them, as “they find a feeble compensation in unrestricted freedom of trade, for therein they are perfectly free and unmolested.”<sup>88</sup>

Benjamin II reported occasional assaults against female Jews of Aqra. Formerly, Jewish women had been exposed to frequent attacks at a small reservoir near the synagogue, used by the Jewish women for ritual purification. A Jewish woman, who was taken by surprise by four Kurds while bathing, seized a large piece of wood and hurled it at the head of one of them, killing him. She paid for the act with her life; the other three assailants killed her. In another instance, a Kurd seized a woman, and she defended herself with the dagger she snatched from him. A passer-by, a friend of the assailant, immediately attacked the woman and stabbed her.<sup>89</sup>

The Jews of Arbil were “much oppressed by the fanatic, rude and half civilized sects of Allah,” according to Benjamin II. Around 1848, a Jewish girl accidentally poured dirty water on a Muslim passer-by. In response, she was given the choice of converting or being killed. The crowd seized the girl, abused her and asked her how she, “the daughter of an accursed race” dare “insult a true believer.” The girl refused to embrace the Muslim faith in order to escape punishment. “They seized

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

her, stabbed her with their knives and killed her before her parents' eyes, and then tore her body to pieces." The community did not even complain to the Pasha of Baghdad, fearing "persecutions and a general massacre."<sup>90</sup> Another bizarre act occurred in Arbil upon the death of an emissary from Jerusalem. The Jews buried him in Arbil, but the following night, the Muslims "tore the body from the grave." They cut off a hand, and "threw the remains into an open ditch, without even a covering." The Jews returned to the cemetery and "filled up the empty grave: that was all they ventured to do." Jews from Baghdad who were visiting Arbil at the time, informed the European consuls in Baghdad of the event. When the Pasha of Baghdad heard of it,

he called upon the perpetrators and asked them whether they knew that graves are prisons, in which God preserves his people until the Day of Judgment. Why do you not respect what belongs to Him?

Once again, the offenders escaped punishment because the Jews of Arbil were compelled to beg for mercy on their behalf. Both David D'Beth Hillel and Benjamin II reported that oppression of the Jews continued in Arbil under Turkish rule, explaining that the daily oppression "has crushed" the Jews "to such a degree" that they fear "greater misfortune" and "submit to anything without a murmur."<sup>91</sup> Another account presents an isolated instance in which the ruler of Arbil "committed evil" against the Jews by doubling their taxes. The Jews opposed the arbitrary tax and sent a delegation to Kirkuk to appeal to the senior minister.<sup>92</sup>

Information regarding the Jews of Kurdistan in the late 19th century is available in letters from urban centers. In one particular instance, the Jewish leadership of Zakho complained that in 1892 the Kurds carried out a pogrom against the Jews of the town, and burned houses and synagogues. Seven Jews were killed and many others were imprisoned and tortured and the taxes levied from the Jewish community increased drastically. These tragic events were further worsened by heavy rain and

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 88–89.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 35–36; See also the Responsa literature of Rabbi Yoseph Hayim, *Rav-Pe'alim*, Yore-De'a, mark 33 [note, henceforth, that I used the term "mark" as equivalent with the Hebrew term *סימן* within the original responsa literature]. A similar case is reported about the community of Mosul in the Responsa literature of Rabbi Abraham b. Yitzhak Antebi, *Mor ve-Ohalot*, Hoshen Mishpat, mark 9.

snow, which inundated the town and destroyed 150 Jewish homes.<sup>93</sup> It is possible that this event of great magnitude was an isolated incident, because it gained publicity, just as the murder of seven Jews in Sandur, fifty years later, attracted attention and was extensively reported.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> This letter is quoted in Ben-Yaacob 1981: 209–211. Originally, it appeared in an Indian (Calcutta) Jewish weekly, *Magid Yesharim*, 6th year, no. 9, 1895. In 1895, pogroms occurred among the Jews of Sulaimaniya. Jews were killed and tortured, Jewish women were violated, and stores were looted. Ben-Yaacob 1981: 111–113.

<sup>94</sup> On the murder of seven Jews in Sandur, see below, pp. 207–212.



PART I

URBAN JEWS AND THEIR TRIBAL AGHAS



## PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE TRIBAL KURDISH SOCIETY

### *A. The Division between Urban and Rural, Town and Tribe*

Jews lived in urban centers in Kurdistan for centuries. It is important to note that some urban Jews spent part of their time in rural areas, subjected to tribal rules and practices that affected their life in Kurdistan. They were indeed urban dwellers but for practical reasons, their experience may be dealt as well within the tribal framework. The following preliminary remarks are worth noting in regards to the position of both urban and rural Jews in Kurdistan mainly during the first half of the 20th century, though some remarks are applicable earlier as well.

In February 1943, Shmaryahu Guttman (1909–1996), one of the first emissaries of the Jewish community in Palestine (the *Tishuv*) to Iraq noted that Kurdistan Jews were different from the Jews of Baghdad.<sup>1</sup> He noted that Kurdistan Jews would tend their own cattle and sheep in contrast to the wealthy Jews of Baghdad who gave their livestock to Muslim shepherds and divided the profits with them on customary terms. Similarly, there was a difference between urban and rural life in Kurdistan itself. Urban Jews often traveled in rural areas where they were subject to tribal rules. At the same time, part of the urban population was composed of migrants from rural villages. In some urban centers such as in Arbil, the division between the two groups was more obvious. The following incident illustrates the difference between the established Jewish community of Arbil that spoke Arabic and lived in a separate neighborhood and the Aramaic-speaking newcomers from the Kurdish mountains who also lived in a separate neighborhood. A Kurdish boy, from the newcomers to Arbil, was betrothed to a local girl. Eventually, the girl asked that the local religious court dissolve the engagement, but the stubborn boy refused. In an attempt to force a

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<sup>1</sup> Bibi (1988, part I: 175) quotes from a report by Shmaryahu Guttman dated 4 February 1943.

solution, the community of Arbil prohibited its butchers from buying the cattle of the Kurdish newcomers, most of whom were owners of livestock. The result was that the boy was forced to agree and dissolve the engagement. A. J. Braver, who was present in Arbil at the time, explains:

the Kurds [the newcomers] speak with their own community members not in a soft language using moral arguments as we did in that evening, and the stubborn boy was forced to obey their order.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars of Iraq stressed another social dichotomy that has played a profound role in Iraq's modern history: the division between town and tribe. During the first half of the 20th century, nomadic, semi-nomadic, or settled tribes surrounded the handful of cities and towns. They controlled the country's communication system and held nine-tenths of its land.<sup>3</sup> In 1933, a year after the independence of the new Iraqi State, approximately 100,000 rifles were in the hands of the tribesmen and 15,000 rifles in the hands of the government.<sup>4</sup> In modern times, only a few tribes were fully nomadic. Nevertheless, the majority of the settled population of the country was tribally organized. Whether it was Arab or Kurdish, the population maintained tribal codes and traditions. According to Marr,

Loyalty to family and tribe has dominated Iraq's social and political life. Intense concern with family, clan, and tribe; devotion to personal honor; factionalism; and above all, increased individualism—which does not easily brook interference from central authority—are among the legacies of tribalism in Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

Marr explains that the “only significant counterbalance to tribalism has been the economic and political power of the cities.” In other words, there were two forms of government in Kurdistan. The inhabitants often faced two separate systems, the official government on one hand and the tribal agha on the other.<sup>6</sup> The tribal agha was the main ruler of the

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<sup>2</sup> When Braver (1935: 246–47) was in Kirkuk, he stayed at the residence of the British Political Officer (PO) who was well informed about Kurdistan. The PO must have been Wallace Lyon. See Fieldhouse 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Marr 1985: 12; Longrigg 1953: 22.

<sup>4</sup> Marr (1985: 12) quotes from *majmu'at mudhākkirāt al-majlis al-ta'asīsī al-Iraqī* [Compilation of the Proceedings of the Iraqi Constituent Assembly]. Baghdad: Dar al-Salām, 1924.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> An urban agha was a tribal chieftain who lived in an urban center, but his influence in the tribal region was significant.

tribal society and part of the adjunct urban population. Not only the tribesmen, but also non-tribal Muslims, Christians and Jews, regarded the agha as their main ruler. To the non-tribal Jews, especially in the rural area, but also in urban centers, the authority of the agha was more powerful than the authority of the government officials. Indeed, because of his authority, the agha had the power to overrule government acts, generally for the inhabitants who referred to him and often preferred his ruling mechanism to that of the government agencies.<sup>7</sup>

### B. *The Dual System of Government*

The dual system of government affected urban Jews more than it affected rural Jews. As town dwellers, urban Jews were exposed to official agencies within the town. While traveling out of the town, they were subject to the tribal system reigning in the region. Rural Jews were dependent solely on the tribal agha for protection within the tribal region. They rarely had any connection with official agencies as their contact with the government was usually made through the mediation of the tribal agha. In their daily life, the village agha was the practical ruler and only rarely Jews would need the involvement of the chief agha who was the supreme ruler. The following instance illustrates one of the differences between the town and the village in Kurdistan. Around 1948, Levi Mordechai Yaacob (I#27) described the relations with the Muslims in Dohuk as “good,” thanks to the presence of the government in town. “Nobody could have hurt the Jews,” he argued, “as whatever happened would be reported to the government.” In other words, the presence of government agencies provided the Jews with a safer life than in rural villages, where “there was no [official] government.” Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5) of Amadiya explained that stealing or robbing occurred only in the mountains. In the city, no such danger existed, as the government allowed no such behavior. Someone who committed evil “would be caught immediately and would be taken to jail,” he argued. In the village, when the Jews were hurt, the government could not do anything about it. In practice, there was no government,

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<sup>7</sup> On the conflict between the state and the tribe, see Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Tribes and the State of Iran: The Case of Simko’s Revolt,” in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*. Richard Tapper, ed. London: Croom Helm, 1983; Claude Cahen, “Tribes, Cities, and Social Organization.” In *Cambridge History of Iran*, Cambridge University Press. R. N. Frye, ed. Vol. 4 (1975): 305–328.

nor police in the tribal region, and the agha was the sole authority for the Jews. He was the government, the police, the court, all embodied in one person. The ability of the agha to influence the life of his Jews was therefore decisive. In the village, the relationships between Muslim Kurds and Jews were affected, or rather shaped, primarily by the attitude of the agha towards the local Jews. In the town, the status of the Jews was based not merely on one person but rather on several components. Among them were the control of the central government, the competence and the financial standing of the Jewish leadership and its alliances with the town and the tribal aristocracy.

### C. *Patronage of the Jews by Kurdish Aghas*

The patronage of the Kurdish chieftains was one of the key instruments that made Jewish survival possible in Kurdish towns and villages throughout the generations. The patronage, or the protection ‘treaty’ between the tribal agha and his Jewish protégés was based first and foremost on the tribal protection granted by the agha to his subjects and on various forms of services and financial support granted in return by the Jews to their tribal agha. Edmonds has classified the dues that the agha claims from his non-tribal subjects into four main categories. First, basic dues justified or understood as customary, on items such as agricultural yields. Less justifiable dues were the “cash exactions” such as fines for misbehavior. Third and less objectionable were fees for settling a dispute, or marriage fees. Worst of all, according to Edmonds, was forced labor on behalf of the agha.<sup>8</sup> Kurdish Jews indeed paid dues of all four categories, but the most important dues paid to their agha were related to the first category. The Jewish protégés actually paid or rewarded their agha for his patronage. Within both urban centers and rural communities, Kurdish Jews reported payment in various forms for the protection granted to them by the agha. The patronage of the agha enabled the Jews to travel safely and make their living by trade in the surrounding areas. Jewish merchants and peddlers, who traveled regularly through the tribal jurisdiction, would occasionally give their aghas gifts as well as dues, and provide them with other kinds of services. Urban Jews would pay commission known as *aghatusa* or *aghawusa*

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<sup>8</sup> Edmonds 1957: 224–25.

(referred in Kurdish as *aghatiy*). These Neo-Aramaic abstract nouns are formed from the noun “*agha*” with the suffix “*tusa*,” or “*wusa*.” They denote the right of the *agha* to receive taxes, portions of merchandise, fees or commissions, which were related to his patronage and chiefdom. The *agha* would therefore receive dues for measurable and significant merchandising, which took place under his jurisdiction. These taxes were linked to the core of the relations between the tribal chief and his non-tribal subjects. Each tribal or village *agha* usually controlled or had knowledge of the main business transactions that occurred in his jurisdiction. At times, the village *agha* would personally supervise the deals or the bids, especially those of seasonal merchandise such as wool, gallnuts and other agricultural produce. The merchant buying the merchandise or winning the bid was expected to pay *aghatusa* to the village *agha*. The later in turn would transfer the dues or part thereof to the main tribal *agha*. Edmonds has given an incredible account of relations between an *agha* and his non-tribal subjects. This account narrated by Shaikh Muhammad Agha of the Balik tribe in the Rawanduz region, heightens the value of the *aghatusa*. Once, his father,

as a disciplinary measure, had cut off the hand of one of his ryots [*ra'yas*, subjects] for theft and had put off [out] the eyes of another for some more serious offence; the incident came to the ears of the Turkish *qaimmaqam*, who summoned the victims to Ruwandiz to give evidence; in spite of every kind of pressure and [per]suasion they resolutely denied that the shaikh had had anything to do with their misfortunes; in recognition of their loyalty they and their descendants had ever since been excused from all [the] various dues and services commonly demanded by *aghas* from their subjects and known as *aghatiy*.<sup>9</sup>

A Jewish peddler from Zakho who traveled extensively would often pass through *galid* (the mountain pass of) *Pezaghaye* where he would visit his tribal patron, Şālāḥ Agha, and bring him a few gifts, telling him:

These *p'elave* [Kur., footwear] are for you; this headscarf is for your *khānum* [Kur., lady]; and this sugar is for your *dîwanxane* [Kur., guesthouse, reception hall], to testify to my love for you and to show how sweet you are in my heart.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 223–24. For more on this subject see below, “*Aghatusa* or *Srixusa*—the Agha’s rightful Dues or Corruption (82–93),” and “the Question of Dues and the Regulation of Taxes.”

<sup>10</sup> Gurji Zaken (I#17).

Another Jewish merchant from Zakho had similar reminiscences. His family had dealt with lumber trees for many years. As a family of merchants whose livelihood required extensive trade in the rural area, members of the family would often travel to the villages to bring different commodities, such as sheep, sheep-wool, and lumber. They would go to villages in the tribal jurisdictions of Berwari, Gulli and Sindi. Regarding the payment to the tribal aghas, the merchant said that the Jews would give them money and textile. "If someone needed money for a dowry, textiles for his wife, they would come to us and we would give them." Since his family trade was extensive, they were obliged to associate with various aghas and heads of clans and villages in whose jurisdiction they worked.<sup>11</sup>

#### D. *Social, Economic and Religious Institutions*

Urban Jews usually resided in separate neighborhoods or quarters. In Zakho, for instance, the Jewish neighborhood was known as *maḥallt hozayē*<sup>12</sup> (NA.) and as *majalah cûleke* (Kur.). Around their neighborhoods and synagogues and within the framework of their communal institutions, the Jews organized their specific religious, spiritual and mundane life. The following accounts indicate that throughout the time, the Jewish communities established themselves as a strong component in the Kurdish urban centers.

Another aspect of urban Jewish life ought to be discussed in relation with Jewish aristocracy, that of the role of the Jews in the municipal administration. The municipal administration itself operated based on a new municipal law of 1929, which superseded the previous Turkish regulations.<sup>13</sup> Several Jews had served as members of the Municipality Councils, notably in Zakho, Aqra, Dohuk and Sulaimaniya. Naḥum Ḥanah of Dohuk was a member of the *majlis idāra* (Arab., the administrative council) of the *qāmmaqām* in Dohuk during the early 20th century. The council included four members: two Muslims, one Jewish and one Christian representative. His son Sasson Naḥum (I#31) became a member of the Municipality Council of Dohuk in 1919, representing

<sup>11</sup> Me'allim Abraham (I#15).

<sup>12</sup> *Maḥallt* (NA., the quarter of) *hozayē* (the Jews). *Maḥalle*, a term commonly used in Ottoman administration for a ward or quarter. See "Maḥalle," EI<sup>2</sup>, vol. 5, 1222–3.

<sup>13</sup> Longrigg 1953: 203.

the Jewish community. Four Muslims and one Christian representative served with him in the Council under the *ra'īs al-baladiyya* (Arab., mayor) Alī Effendi. Sasson was replaced by another Jew in the Council, Shlomo b. David Salmān, whose father was one of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community in Dohuk. In Sulaimaniya, Reuben Bar-Amon's great (great?) grandfather was allegedly the first president of the Jewish community. Bar-Amon's uncle, Yom-Tov Bar-Amon, was the head of the Jewish community following World War I, and served as a member of the Municipal Council until his immigration to the Holy Land in the middle of the 1940s.<sup>14</sup> In Aqra, members of the Khawaja Khinno's family served as members of the Municipal Council. Aryeh Gabbai (I#6) remembered vividly how his father, Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno (1895–1976) used to go with his pistol to the police station. He was a member of the council of the *qāimmaqām* in Aqra. When he could not attend the council meeting, the *qāimmaqām* would ask him to sign and approve the minutes. If he had reservations, he would come to see the *qāimmaqām* in person to discuss the matter. Another member of the family, David Khawaja Khinno (d. 1977), was a member of the Municipal Council of Aqra. In Zakho, Sasson Tzidkiyahu served as a member of the Municipality Council of Zakho until his immigration to the holy land or *Eretz-Yisrael* in 1930.<sup>15</sup> Upon his election, the Jewish congregation honored him with the *Sabbath Torah* reading, inviting him to read an honorific *parasha* (Heb., weekly portion of the *Torah* reading), the portion of *Shirah* (Exodus, 15, “The Song”).<sup>16</sup> Traditionally the honored Jew would then invite the congregation to his home for a celebratory meal and drinking. When Sasson Tzidkiyahu was called to the *Torah* reading, the family of Ḥoja started a fight in the synagogue “as a protest against the transferring of the honorable privilege” from the head of their family, Shalom Hoja, who had served previously as a member of the Municipal Council, to the new elected member.<sup>17</sup> Another member of the Municipal Council of Zakho was the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community of Zakho, Moshe Gabbai. He served as a member of the Municipal Council towards the middle of the 20th

<sup>14</sup> Reuben Bar-Amon, (1985): 34.

<sup>15</sup> Tzidkiyahu 1981: 27. *Eretz-Yisrael* (Heb., the land of Israel) is the preferred name by Jews to the Holy Land, the land of Zion, the Ottoman province of Palestine or British Palestine.

<sup>16</sup> This *parasha* (the weekly portion of the *Torah* reading) was dedicated to the singing of Moses and the Israelites of a song of glory to the Lord (Exodus: 15).

<sup>17</sup> Tzidkiyahu 1981: 27–28.

century. The British, when ruling Iraq, noted that Iṣḥāq Effendi, a merchant and a sound businessperson, the main representative of the Jewish community in Kirkuk, is “a member of the municipal council and a friend of many in the financial striate.”<sup>18</sup>

All urban Jewish communities had a communal leader, known as the *mukhtār*, or *raʿīs tāʾīfā*, (*Arab.*, head of the religious minority), a salaried position paid for by the authorities. The *mukhtār* served as liaison between the Jewish community and the local authorities and functioned as a governmental position linking the authorities and the community (*tāʾīfā*). One of his main tasks was to ensure that all those enlisted in the army from the community would report to the recruiting officer. Other tasks of the *mukhtār* were to represent and convey the announcements and demands of the authorities to his community.

The Jews of Kurdistan are different in several ways from their Jewish brethren in the rest of the Middle East and differences were noted between the Jews who lived in villages and those who lived in urban centers. It is worthy noting the difference between the organization of the urban Jewish community and the almost complete lack of organization in rural Jewish communities. Most rural Jewish communities were composed of a small number of families (usually one, two or three families), generally connected to one another. In these kinds of communities, there was hardly any social or religious organization, no synagogues, no Jewish education, no rabbis, teachers or slaughterers of animals. It should be stressed that the craft of slaughtering was essential for the survival of one of the main characteristics of the Jewish community, as it enabled the Jews to eat kosher meat according to the Jewish dietary laws. Urban Jewish communities, however, had several internal institutions, which managed the administrative, social, cultural and religious aspects of the community. The synagogue was the most important institution, functioning not merely for the public prayer, but in fact, it housed all the religious activity of the community. The synagogue also housed the Jewish school for the children of the community and provided the Jews with a substantial part of their educational, social and religious experience. The importance of the synagogue could be inferred from the existence of two synagogues in some urban communities, such as Zakho or Amadiya. At least in these two towns the synagogues were the source of internal rivalry within

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<sup>18</sup> Personalities 1923: 45.

the community or facilitated such rivalry.<sup>19</sup> The significance of the synagogue for the Jews of Zakho could also be inferred from the large number—dozens of synagogues—built in Jerusalem alone, where most of the Jews of Zakho settled, from 1951 onwards, during the first years after the immigration to Israel.<sup>20</sup>

The synagogue, and in fact the whole community, housed several important functions of individuals who served the community. The most prominent function in the synagogue was the gabbai (Heb. collector), or the treasurer of synagogue, which was usually reserved for one of the wealthiest and prominent persons in the community. The gabbai handled the budget of the synagogue, the income and the expenses, which were usually equivalent to the budget of the community.<sup>21</sup> This honorary function was voluntary. Another function in the synagogue was the ḥakham (a Hebrew title granted to learned people in Middle Eastern Jewish communities, similar to the title “Rabbi”) who led the services and prayers. [Ḥakham is a Hebrew title granted to learned people mainly in Middle Eastern Jewish communities and is similar to the Rabbanite title “Rabbi”] who led the services and prayers. The ḥakham usually functioned as the slaughterer of animals, the teacher of the Hebrew and religious school for the children and as the circumciser of the male Jewish babies.<sup>22</sup> Another important institution was the hevra qadisha or the burial society, which handled the washing and burying of the dead. Interestingly, this voluntary function earned the members of the burial society in Zakho, the honorary title of “Shaikh” that throughout the time became a surname for members of the burial society. In this manner, the Jewish community honored the buriers for their courage in handling the burial, equating it with the honorific title of shaikh in Muslim Kurdish society, which was a title that was given to esteemed and important religious and spiritual leaders of the Sūfī orders within the Kurdish society.<sup>23</sup>

The social organization of the Jewish community was structured around the Jewish quarter or neighborhood. The basic social structure was that of the nuclear family. The common form of residence in the Jewish quarter was composed of several nuclear families, in which the

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<sup>19</sup> Zaken 1985: 11–12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

father and the mother and their unmarried children as well as their married children with their wives and children, lived in the same house. This was a patriarchal social organization: all its entire members shared the common budget and the economy was managed as one unit.<sup>24</sup> This framework gave the individual a sense of security. Urban Jewish communities had been organized as *millet*, a religious community recognized by the Ottoman Empire and then by Iraq. The *mukhtār* (elected head) and *Hakham Bashi* (chief rabbi) had been recognized and were usually paid by the government. In Iraq, four seats in the parliament had been reserved for the Jewish community, one of them to the northern region, representing the district of Mosul. Within the town administration, Jews served both as members of the municipal council and in the council of the *qāmmaqām*, the administrative officer of the district or province. A small number of Jews served as clerks and male-nurses who acted as deputy physician, but generally, the Jews hardly worked as government employees. In daily life, there were usual dealings between government agencies and the Jews of Kurdistan. Jews used government agencies such as the municipality and the post office and at times, they would appeal to the courts of law. Nevertheless, there was hardly any direct contact with the regime or with the body politic of the Empire, the state, or the district, unless in times of troubles. The Jews of Kurdistan were faced with the dual government administration, and because of the significance of the tribal society, they often needed the safeguard and benevolence of powerful aghas. The aghas often associated with the leaders and the wealthiest individuals in the Jewish community, who would need their influence in the wild tribal region.

The question of the type and quality of the relationships between the Jews and the authorities is dealt with extensively throughout this manuscript. Overall, two types of relationships are worth noting. The individual members of the Jewish community had been in official relations with different government agencies, such as the army, the police, the court system, the municipality and central and local tax systems. The second set of relations existed with the tribal authorities, or the aghas, who granted protection for the Jews and provided similar, alternative functions. Law and order were provided by heavily armed tribesmen who guarded their tribal jurisdiction; the justice system was provided by the chief agha of the tribes. On the other hand, the tribe had its

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. See also Zaken 1991, 2003, 2005.

own mechanisms of collection of taxes and other dues. The relations between the government and the communities were channeled through the nominal leaders of the community, through the *mukhtār*, or *raʿīs tāʾifā*, or the spiritual leader of the community, usually the local rabbi. The tribal aghas had associations mostly with individual members of the Jewish community, such as merchants or peddlers and other businesspersons, who needed protection in their daily activities. These members were the protégés of particular aghas. The aghas channeled another course of relationships—with the prominent, natural leaders of the community, who may have represented the interests of their own families in addition to the interests and concerns of the community, as can be seen in many instances below.

The following six chapters examine the relationships between urban aghas and the Jews in six Kurdish urban centers during the first half of the 20th century: Zakho, Aqra, Dohuk, Amadiya, Sulaimaniya and Shino. The first five cities are located within the ethnic boundaries of central (and Iraqi) Kurdistan though Shino is located within Eastern (and Persian) Kurdistan, some 30 miles from the Iraqi-Persian border.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The inclusion of Shino from Persian Kurdistan, with the five urban centers from Iraqi Kurdistan, could be justified on three grounds. See below, p. 113.



## CHAPTER ONE

### ZAKHO

Zakho (Kurdish: *Zaxo*)<sup>1</sup> is situated sixty miles northwest of Mosul and near the border with Turkey. Built partly on a rocky island in the Khabur River, Zakho had been for centuries home to a sizeable Jewish population.<sup>2</sup> Around the middle of the 19th century, the Jews reportedly comprised between a half and two-thirds of the total population. In 1848, about 300 Jewish families were reported to be living in Zakho; in 1851, the Jews occupied 100 houses out of 150;<sup>3</sup> in 1859, there were about 200 Jewish houses and a similar number of non-Jewish ones.<sup>4</sup> Between 1880 and 1906, the number of Jewish families reported in Zakho was between 250 to 300 Jewish families totaling 1,500 to 2,400 souls. At the end of World War I, 2,400 Jews lived in Zakho. In 1929, Zakho had a total population of 4,000;<sup>5</sup> in 1930, only 1,471 Jews remained in Zakho, because of a wave of migration. In 1940 and 1945, the town contained 2,500 Jews, though the official census of 1947 listed 1,394 Jews. According to the last reports before the mass migration to Israel (1950–51), more than 1,800 Jews lived in Zakho.<sup>6</sup>

#### A. *The Family of Shamdin Agha*

Following World War I, the British intelligence reported on the main tribes and chieftains in Zakho district, among them the following

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<sup>1</sup> The etymology of Zakho in Kurdish is composed from *za*, the past stem of the verb *zan* (to be born) and *xo* [*kho*], a dialectic version of the pronoun *xwe* [*khuwa*], self. Thus, Zakho means *self-born*.

<sup>2</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 61–62; supplement: 24–25; Yona Sabar, “Zakho,” EI<sup>2</sup>. For more details about Zakho, see De Goeje 1906: 149, 139; Gertrude L. Bell, *Amurath to Amurath*. 2nd ed. London, 1924: 287, and Edmonds (1957: 426–27) who gives a vivid description of the town and its Jews in early 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Stern 1854: 221.

<sup>4</sup> Ya’ari 1942: 45.

<sup>5</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929.

<sup>6</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981 (Supplement 24–25). Between 1912 and 1942, 285 Jewish families had immigrated from Zakho to Palestine. This gradual migration, mostly for economic reasons, placed another 100 Jewish families from Zakho in Baghdad.

personalities and tribes: Hājji Şadiq Biro and Slaimān Agha of the Gulli tribe;<sup>7</sup> Jamil Agha of the Şindī tribe;<sup>8</sup> Muḥammad Agha of Zakho of the Slevani Tribe;<sup>9</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Agha<sup>10</sup> and Alī Khan of Sharnakh.<sup>11</sup> Other written accounts and records of Jewish sources provide further information on the tribal society of Zakho and its surroundings. Jews from Zakho reported many events involving the main tribal chiefs and the relationships between aghas and Jews, as reported below.

Me‘allim Abraham (I#15) recorded the names of the aghas with whom his family members were associated. In addition to the Şindī leaders, he mentioned Ḥamid and Aḥmad, the sons of Khalīfa of the Ajamo clan, Ḥassan and Aḥmad Agha of the Chunkis (NA., Chuniknaye); Na‘matê Sharīf of the Muchelnaye;<sup>12</sup> Nazim Beg and Aḥmad Beg of the Berwari (Aḥmad Beg’s daughter, or sister, was married to Hājji Agha, the mayor of Zakho). Hārūn Judo (I#16) of Zakho was born into a family of merchants. Following World War I, the young boy began working as a peddler, roaming with a donkey or two loaded with firewood for sale. He did well, he testified, and traveled to many villages, among them Darhauza, the village of Abd ī Agha, Bersibi (Bersivi), Darkara, Avle, Pirbala, Banike, Upper Banike, Sharanesh and Bandiro, the village of Ḥamîdê Khalīfa.<sup>13</sup> These villages were located between one and eight hours’ walking distance or donkey ride from Zakho. Hārūn Judo established relations with the aghas who gave him protection on his wide travels. One of these aghas was Ḥamîdê Khalīfa from Bandiro who “was a thief of camels and horses” and “cultivator of wheat and barley.” Generations of this family had been aghas; his father Aḥmed was agha before him and Ḥamîdê Khalīfa had only one son, Ne‘matê Khaifa. British military intelligence gives similar report. The Khalīfa clan was part of the Şindī tribe in the Zakho district and Ḥamîdê Khalīfa was a Şindī chieftain who lived in Darakar in the

<sup>7</sup> See below (“Hājji Şadiq Biro and His Jewish Protégé Naḥum Sabto”): 52–58.

<sup>8</sup> See below *Tribal Aghas and their Jewish and Christian Subjects*;” and (“The murder of Assyrians in Bersibi and Kestaye”): 44–51.

<sup>9</sup> See below (“a vineyard changing hands”): 244–245.

<sup>10</sup> See below (“Loyalty of the Jews”): 159–163.

<sup>11</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 478.

<sup>12</sup> “Muchelnaye” is the NA form; the Kurdish form of this clan is not certain.

<sup>13</sup> “Ḥamîdê Khalīfa” is the Kurdish form of Ḥamid the son of Khalīfa.

early 1920s.<sup>14</sup> He attained his position by brigandage and was friendly with the Christians of Bersibi (Bersivi) whom he protected during the War.<sup>15</sup> The Khalifa clan belonged to the larger clan of Ajamo<sup>16</sup> and ruled over all the villages mentioned above.

According to an oral tradition transmitted by Me'allim Levi (I#23), Zakho was established in 1568 by Slivani tribesmen,<sup>17</sup> whose territory was south of the town.<sup>18</sup> The family of Shamdin Agha came originally from the Slivani tribe, settled in Zakho, and became prominent in the town and its surroundings. From the late 19th century onwards, the family of Shamdin Agha ruled "all the Muslims, Jews and Christians of Zakho and its surroundings."<sup>19</sup> The first person in the family to gain prominence was Isef Pasha. His son, Hazim Beg (1895–1954) became the most powerful man in Zakho.<sup>20</sup> He was the wealthiest man in the region and an entrepreneur who owned a hundred shops in Zakho besides extensive lands outside the town. He was a politician who served several times as *mandūb* or Member of Parliament and in *majlis al-a'yān*, the Iraqi Senate or the Upper House. For a short time, Hazim

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<sup>14</sup> Both Me'allim Abraham (I#15) and Hārūn Judo (I#16) mentioned his village as Bandiro.

<sup>15</sup> Personalities 1923: 39.

<sup>16</sup> The Jews called them (in NA) "Be-ʿAjamo," and (in Kur.) "Malā ʿAjamo," i.e., the family of ʿAjamo.

<sup>17</sup> Before the creation of the modern state of Iraq, it covered three provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Based in Istanbul, the Ottoman rulers viewed Iraq primarily as a buffer protecting their Anatolian heartland from Iranian incursions. The Ottoman conquest of Iraq began in 1514 and ended in 1535 with the capture of Baghdad. At the conclusion of this war, the Ottomans signed a peace treaty with the Safavid government of Iran in which the Safavid recognized the Ottoman victories. War between these two empires resumed often during the next century, usually followed by treaties. They signed treaties in 1555, 1568, 1590, 1613, and 1618. During this period, the Ottoman rulers allocated local princes and tribal leaders to rule in the peripheral provinces such as Kurdistan. This is a possible way to view the settlement of the Shamdin Agha in Zakho, in 1568, following the conclusion of the war and the signing of treaties with the Safavids. Consult van Bruinessen 1978: 161–172.

<sup>18</sup> For this book, 18 Jewish informants from Zakho were interviewed, though the current section includes excerpts mainly from nine interviewees. The information gathered from other interviewees has been interwoven into the general themes presented below.

<sup>19</sup> This notion cited by Me'allim Levi (I#23), was repeated by several Jewish interviewees.

<sup>20</sup> Sykes (1915: 353) argued: "Zakho has increased in size—an improvement entirely due to the efforts of the late Yussuf Pasha, the Agha of the Slivani Kurds, a man of considerable intelligence... His successor, Hājīr Agha, is not likely to carry on the works of building and improvement taken by Yussuf Pasha."

Beg served as *wazīr bilā wizāra* (Arab., a minister without portfolio) in the Iraqi government. Some of Hazim Beg's uncles and cousins were also influential. His uncle, Muḥammad Agha, had been mayor of Zakho and a Member of Parliament, until his death in 1923/4 in a plane crash.<sup>21</sup> His son, Ḥājji Agha, replaced him as mayor of Zakho. Another cousin of Hazim Beg and Ḥājji Agha was 'Abd al-Karīm Agha, the son of Ḥājji Rashīd Beg. He was not as influential official as other members of the family, but he was the best-liked agha among the Jewish community of Zakho, based on the reasons discussed below. Shamdin Agha was in practice the ruling family of Zakho, forming its political and financial elite. Members of the family did not pursue friendships with the Jews of Zakho, but they appeared to respect the Jewish leaders. Hazim Beg would stand up to show honor to Moshe Gabbai, the wealthy Jewish *mukhtār* of Zakho; 'Abd al-Karīm Agha referred to Murdakh (the Neo-Aramic pronunciation of Mordechai) Mīro Zaken as *khālo* (Arab., maternal uncle), because he was "the Jew," or the Jewish protégé, of his maternal uncle, Jamīl Agha, the chief agha of the Ṣindī tribe.<sup>22</sup>

### 1. 'Abd al-Karīm Agha, Patron of the Jews

The Jews regard 'Abd al-Karīm Agha as the greatest benefactor of the Jews. He was son of Ḥājji Rashīd Beg, a cousin of Hazim Beg and Ḥājji Agha. Reportedly, he held no official title, although in practice he acted as the commissioner supervising the market place. 'Abd al-Karīm Agha maintained direct, everyday contact with the Jews of Zakho, many of whom were merchants and shopkeepers in the market.

The duality of government and the tension between government officials and tribal rule must be kept in mind. The expansion of bureaucracy and its spreading out into the periphery increasingly eroded the administrative position of tribal leaders. Urban, educated men gradually filled many positions of local authority, as the central government reduced tribal autonomy. Tribal leaders became increasingly dependent upon government agencies "for favors and benefits that had hitherto been his [theirs] to bestow,"<sup>23</sup> and gradually, the balance of power shifted from the tribe to the central government. For the Jews, Shamdin

<sup>21</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 323.

<sup>22</sup> Yehoshua Mīro (I#25).

<sup>23</sup> Marr 1985: 63.

Agha was the most powerful family in Zakho, more important than all the government agencies. The following account, which became a myth, reflects this view. A new judge came to town.<sup>24</sup> ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha had benefited from a good working relationship with the previous judge. As a mediator, he often settled matters outside the court. He wanted to meet the new judge, but the door attendant refused to admit him, because the new judge did not know him. ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha returned to his home frustrated and discussed the incident with his father, Rashīd Agha. The following morning, Rashīd Agha, paternal uncle of both Hazim Beg and the mayor Hājji Agha came to the market and sat down in the coffeehouse of Şadiq. He asked the *çayçi* (Tur., tea-server, waiter) to alert his attention when the new judge approached. The following incident occurred in public and many reported that they were eyewitnesses or had heard of it. The new judge was well dressed and used to walk with a cane. When he approached the coffeehouse, the *çayçi* told Rashīd Agha:

Agha, here is the judge. Rashīd Agha looked at him closely and [then] grabbed him by his tie, telling him, ‘You hurt ‘Abd al-Karīm’s heart.’ He hit him about his face... throwing him on the floor and pulling him by his tie and hitting him with his *gopala* [NA., walking stick]... the crowd gathered around them, including police officers, begging [Rashīd Agha] to stop, and when they managed to rescue the judge from his hands, he was covered with blood and mud...<sup>25</sup>

The judge was taken home to recuperate and clean himself up. The rumors were that he consulted and learned that Rashīd Agha was the father of ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha whom he had refused to admit to his office. Eventually, a kind of reconciliation settled this quarrel; the official remained in his office and ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha recovered his standing. Another version of this account, told by Naḥum Sharabi (I#40), placed this event around 1935.<sup>26</sup> A new *qāmmaqām* came to Zakho. He was a Sorani Kurd from Arbil or Sulaimaniya. All the important men of Zakho had personal meetings with him and ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha also

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<sup>24</sup> One informant suggested the name of Fahmī al-Umarī but he was not certain. Two versions about the time span of these events indicate that it took place either during the late 1930s or around 1946.

<sup>25</sup> Gurji Zaken (I#17) presented this version, but it was common knowledge amongst the Jews of Zakho.

<sup>26</sup> He was in school in Mosul, so his knowledge may have been based on someone else who saw it with his own eyes.

wanted to visit him, but the *qāimmaqām* refused. ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha returned upset to his father’s house. The rest of the details were similar to those of the first version. Finally, he met with ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha, aware of his genealogy and influence. “This was the power of the agha,” Naḥum Sharabi said. He had control over the government; if a government representative “acted according to the government rules,” there would be a clash. Therefore, “he had to compromise, to bend,” said Naḥum Sharabi.<sup>27</sup> The Jews of Zakho were familiar with the story that illustrates the power of the local agha over government officials.<sup>28</sup> ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha was always visible; he roamed around the market and the public arena in a supervisory capacity and ensured that all was running well in the town. By his presence, he guaranteed the safety of the Jews. The Jews of Zakho looked upon him as their main protector, someone to whom they could appeal for help at any time. Testimonies of Jews from Zakho confirm that ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha was supportive in times of need. The Jews praised him and even bestowed upon him the title of “righteous gentile,” a term reserved for a grand protector or rescuer of Jews in the Diaspora during times of trouble. ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha was a tall man who carried a walking stick and “no-one was able to fool around with the Jews” in his presence, according to Jews of Zakho. Me’allim Abraham (I#15) argued:

He loved us [the Jews] very much. If someone caused problems for one of the Jews and ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha learned of it... he would come to the market and hit this person, and no one could save him.<sup>29</sup>

Jewish youths and elders or helpless individuals were occasionally subjected to provocation. These events occurred mainly during the last years of the Jewish existence in Kurdistan, following the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>30</sup> Several reports indicate that in Zakho, a major rescue came from ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha, one of the tribal patrons of

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<sup>27</sup> The two accounts differ on three details: (1) whether the official was a judge or a *qāimmaqām*; (2) whether he was as an Arab or a Sorani Kurd; (3) whether the time was the late 1930s or the mid-1940s.

<sup>28</sup> The British military literature is abundant with examples of tribal chieftains who mistreat the *qāimmaqām*. For instance, Ḥamu Sharu, the chieftain of the Yezīdis of Jabal Sinjar, was extremely un-pleasant to the new *qāimmaqām*, Yūssuf Effendi, in the summer of 1921. He realized that with this appointment, his own position must suffer. *Personalities 1923*: 40.

<sup>29</sup> Several Jewish informants described the same scene.

<sup>30</sup> See part IV below, the section entitled “Effects of the Establishment of the State of Israel,” pp. 310–336.

the Jews in town. The positions of his first cousins, Ḥājī Agha and Hazim Beg; his father, Ḥājī Rashīd Beg; and his brother, who was an officer in the Iraqi army, enhanced his authority and status. ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha believed that the Jews of Zakho were entitled to the patronage of the Shamdin Agha family and he acted accordingly as a representative of his family. In fact, he extended his support for the Jews beyond the boundaries of the family tradition. ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha played an important role in protecting the Jews of Zakho, preventing Muslim Kurds from plotting against them. Several Jewish informants reported that thanks to him, some Kurdish Muslims known for their abhorrence of Jews did not dare harass the Jews in his presence. If someone harmed a Jewish civilian and the news reached the ears of ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha, he would deal with the matter aggressively, even sometimes harming the offender physically.

One day in 1943–45, Yehoshua Mīro’s (I#25) cousin, Obadiah, who was nine or ten years old, bought a melon in the market from a woman selling fruit. Subsequently, a child from the Jiksi family accused Obadiah of stealing the melon from their fruit and vegetable store. Several Jewish informants mentioned that the Jiksi family, displayed anti-Jewish attitudes. They caught and hit the boy. Yehoshua Mīro reported that Obadiah came to his store crying, telling him what had transpired.

I went to the market where every one knew me. I asked, ‘Why did you hit the boy?’ The children of Jiksi<sup>31</sup> and others incited the crowd [against me] saying, ‘Hit him.’ They attacked me [physically], and when some persons came out of their stores, I managed to escape from them and run away. I came to my store, where I used to sell, among other things, dynamite fingers [plastic explosive] TNT, used for fishing... I took four fingers and tied them together with a stone, to increase the force and the propulsion. I wanted to throw it at them... [The informant became excited and blushed as if he was reliving the humiliating experience.] I was nervous... I was shaking. If I had thrown it at them, many persons would have been killed, but they would have exploited it to kill many Jews in response. Suddenly I saw ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha approaching the market. I approached him hiding the dynamite in my pocket. I told him, ‘Agha, this is the story.’ He came with me to the market and began cursing them and shouting, cursing the followers of Muḥammad. They saw us

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<sup>31</sup> Reportedly, members of this family were rivals of Shamdin Agha, and they participated in anti-government (and anti Hazim Beg) demonstrations during the economic hardship of World War II. See below, pp. 220–222.

approaching the market and escaped... Jamīl Agha was a friend of my family... He used to call my father ‘*khālo*’ [maternal uncle] because Jamīl Agha, who was the agha of my father, was his uncle. He was the brother of his mother [Rashīd Agha’s wife]... When I saw him, it deterred me. I decided to tell him what had happened... Therefore, he left the villagers who accompanied him and approached the *gumreg* [Tur. *gümruk*, custom-house]. He asked, ‘Who hit the son of Murdakh Mīro [Yehoshua]?’ They escaped just as they saw us coming near. He began cursing them with strong curses, cursing all the Muslims, also their religion, asking, ‘Why are you hitting the Jews? The Jews are defenseless; they do not mess with any one. Why are you hitting them?’

Yehoshua Mīro was an experienced merchant who traveled widely in central Kurdistan, yet this was a memorable event in his life. His account reflects his frustration at the limits placed on Jews, on their vulnerability, especially the youngsters, when attacked by incited mobs. As in other similar events, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha came to the rescue of the harassed Jews and silenced the mob. Worthy of particular note is Yehoshua Mīro’s comment that if he had employed the bomb and kill residents, “the Kurds would have exploited it and killed many Jews in response.” Other Jewish observers also explained that Jews generally refrained from fights and from responding to assaults, in order to spare other Jews from becoming involved. The Jews of Zakho told many stories about ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha. The following three accounts further illustrate ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha’s conduct in Zakho.

Like many tribal and urban aghas, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha made part of his income from mediation between rival civilians. The Jews of Zakho respected him highly as an arbitrator, and knew him as someone who pursued cooperation with the Jewish community. In other words, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha earned part of his living from his association with the Jews and from his reputation as their benefactor. Jews often appealed to him to solve their disputes with Muslim Kurds and ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha would often become the arbitrator or representative of Jews in disputes. For the Jews, it was complicated to confront a Kurdish rival on equal footing either in court or by mediation. In the Kurdish social setting, the Jews were considered inferior to Muslim Kurds. Therefore, if a Kurd owed a Jew some money resulting from a business transaction, and the Kurd declined to pay, the Jew could take him to a civil court. Alternatively, he could request the arbitration of a local agha. Many times Jews would acquaint ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha with their difficulty, and he would go to the Kurdish debtor and tell him:

Why are you not paying your debt to the Jew? Are you not ashamed of yourself? If he is a Jew, does it mean that you have to ‘eat up’<sup>32</sup> his money [not to pay back his debt]? Finally, under pressure from ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha, the Kurdish debtor would promise to pay his debt.

At times, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha would insist that he pay his debt immediately. After the debt was paid, the Jew would give ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha his share, in the form of commission or a collection fee, known as *aghawusa*, but in this instance, unlike others, he earned his share justly.<sup>33</sup> ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha mediated between persons of all faiths and social ranks in Zakho. His influence may have reached at times that of a local court of law in Zakho. He used his connections with the court to strengthen his position as an arbitrator in Zakho. Thanks to his ability and manipulation, many plaintiffs preferred his arbitration methods to the court of law, as exemplified by the following account. Before the mass migration to Israel, in the early 1950s, a Jew named Slaimān sold his house to a Kurd named Ḥājjī Khaḍer for seventeen dinars. The Kurd paid Slaimān five dinars, but avoided paying the remaining sum. Finally, Slaimān sought help from ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha. He verified with Ḥājjī Khaḍer that he indeed owed money to Slaimān and then paid Slaimān ten dinars out of his own pocket. At last, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha notified Ḥājjī Khaḍer that he had already repaid his debt to Slaimān and that he consequently expected him to pay him. It is most probable that Ḥājjī Khaḍer repaid the money the following day. ‘Abd al-Karīm earned two-dinar commission performing this service.<sup>34</sup>

‘Abd al-Karīm Agha was a powerful urban agha and held much influence over the Jews that he often managed to impose his position on them, to suit his own interests, as illustrated in the following instance. Naḥum Sharabi (I#40) narrated the following account that occurred in 1935–36.

I used to work as a shopkeeper in the family store. Once I sold two pairs of stockings on credit to Aḥmad ‘Abbāsī, [a Kurd] from a small town called Abbasi(yya).<sup>35</sup> He promised to pay the money, one dinar, a week later,

<sup>32</sup> The Neo-Aramaic verb “to eat” (‘-x-l), in reference to money, means “eats up” (someone’s money). He did not pay back debts of people; he ate up people’s money (NA., *xillāle pūr nāše*). See also Sabar 2002: 95.

<sup>33</sup> Compare with the commissions taken by Sa‘īd Agha and his son Dewali, for instance, in the section on Dohuk: 65–90.

<sup>34</sup> Gurjī Zaken (I#17).

<sup>35</sup> Mackenzie (1962: 357–59) reported of the village of ‘Abbāsī, located higher up than Zakho, near the Abbaside Bridge.

but two weeks passed and he did not return. He was from Abbāsīyya, a new town inhabited by Muslims and only one Jewish resident built his home there. It was located across the bridge leading to Zakho [so] I decided to go to his house. His wife came towards me and told me, 'My Jew, I have no money.' She was ashamed and handed me back the two pairs of stockings. The next day, her husband, Aḥmad 'Abbāsī, came to my store. He was very tall and I was a young boy, not even married yet. He grabbed me, pulled me from the store, and hit me [about] twenty times with a stick that he held in his hand... Afterwards, I filed a complaint at the police station and they sent me to the doctor who gave me 'sick leave' for ten days, and arrested my assailant for ten days. [Later], in the evening, 'Abd al-Karīm Agha visited us. He knocked on the door, came inside, pulled up a low stool, and sat down. He asked me, 'You have put an agha in jail?' I told him [in a low and appeasing voice]. 'Look, he hit me; he 'killed' me...' 'Abd al-Karīm Agha decreed: 'Go and release him. I earn my living from him. You are my Jew. [You should go and] release him.'

At the time of the interview with the informant, Naḥum Sharabi's voice softened and became apologetic as he relived his conversation with 'Abd al-Karīm Agha. When he quoted his part of the conversation, it affected his intonation. Immediately after 'Abd al-Karīm Agha's visit to his home, Naḥum Sharabi went to the police station and canceled his complaint against Aḥmad 'Abbāsī, accepting the request, or rather demand, of 'Abd al-Karīm Agha. Aḥmad 'Abbāsī had probably escaped from his original habitation. He took refuge in Abbāsīyya near Zakho where 'Abd al-Karīm Agha granted him his patronage. He may have been one of his robber-messengers, according to Naḥum Sharabi. Being somewhat young and seemingly naïve, Sharabi acted inappropriately for a Jew, firstly by going in person to the house of a tribesman, Aḥmad 'Abbāsī, and demanding the stockings from his wife, and secondly by filing a complaint against him at the police station. In any event, 'Abd al-Karīm Agha made him withdraw his complaint from the police, because as a Jew who received his patronage, he could not possibly hurt his interests.

The appreciation and admiration of the Jews of Zakho for 'Abd al-Karīm Agha was immense, even in Israel, decades after the emigration. During the final migration of the Jewish community in 1951–52, 'Abd al-Karīm Agha escorted the three groups of Jews who left Zakho via Mosul to Baghdad. He would ride in his own car back and forth with each caravan. Yona Gabbai (I#7) recalled how

the precious 'Abd al-Karīm Agha would ride with each caravan [convoy that left Zakho] all the way to Mosul... He used to tell the Jews, 'Go,

my Jews, you may go, on my head, you are going out from our hands... *‘Rizqê we jî nik me çû’* [Kur., your livelihood has gone from us, i.e., we are no longer responsible for your livelihood].

This gesture appeared to be prompted by ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha’s desire to safeguard the final departure of the Jews from Zakho. The Jews, in retrospect, viewed this gesture as a symbol for his commitment to the Jews. Before the departure of the last group of the Jews, ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha took it to heart. Remembering ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha and his merits, Yona Gabbai said:

‘Abd al-Karīm Agha [figuratively] died, he exploded because of the Jews. Seven hundred times pity on you, ‘Abd al-Karīm, seven hundred times pity on you!<sup>36</sup> He died from sorrow [because of] the [departure of the] Jews.<sup>37</sup>

### B. Tribal Aghas and Their Jewish and Christian Subjects

Most of the adult Jewish males in Zakho worked as merchants, peddlers, raftsmen and muleteers (i.e., mule drivers). They worked in and around Zakho city and traveled extensively in the tribal region, enjoying the patronage of prominent tribal chieftains who ruled in the region. Zakho was situated in the heart of a tribal region. South of Zakho was the tribal jurisdiction of the Slivani; to the north and northeast laid the tribal areas of the Şindī and Goyan; the tribal jurisdiction of the Doskī lay to the southwest, and that of the Gulli to the northeast. In 1820, Rich mentioned that the Gulli tribe had eight villages, the Şindī twelve villages and the Slivani had fourteen villages and the town of Zakho its capital, the Doski had eighty villages and the small town of Dohuk.<sup>38</sup> The Şindī aghas, who lived in the region called *Pezaghaye*,<sup>39</sup> have been the tribal masters of many Zakho Jews, mainly merchants and peddlers who roamed in their area of jurisdiction. The Şindī chieftains during the last four generations were Aqūb (Ya‘qūb) Agha, his son ‘Abd Agha, ‘Abd Agha’s two sons, Jamīl Agha and Şalīh Agha (d. ca. 1945) and Jamīl Agha’s sons, ‘Abd Agha and Bishār Agha.

<sup>36</sup> The informant used the expression “*mxabin talox*” (NA, similar to the French “c’est dommage pour vous”).

<sup>37</sup> Yona Gabbai (I#6).

<sup>38</sup> The C. J. Rich Manuscripts, the British Library. MSS.Eur.A.14: 31–2.

<sup>39</sup> Ra’ūf Katna (I#36).

The Şindis granted their patronage to many Zakho Jews. Hārūn Judo (I# 16) from Zakho remembered ‘Abd Agha who was the chief agha of the Şindis in the early 20th century. He had owned a herd of three thousand sheep and goats and used to entertain and host between ten and thirty guests every day in his *dīwanxane*.<sup>40</sup> Jamīl Agha replaced his father as the chief of the Şindis. He lived in Darhoza, but spent his summers in Sarrukat or Marasis, in the mountains near the Iraqī-Turkish border. British military reports confirm that he was quiet in the early years after World War I, “but became disaffected in the spring of 1925” during his visit to the Mosul boundary.<sup>41</sup> Like his father, Jamīl Agha hosted many guests in his *dīwanxane*. During his visits to Zakho on holidays, he would reside at the house of his sister, Sharezadeh, who was married to Ḥājī Aḥmad. He would also visit Ḥājī Agha the mayor of Zakho in his *koçke*, located above the store of a Jew named Şāliḥ b. Gharīb. Ra’ūf Katna recalls that his father, Sasson Kitāne, “an able conversant on local and world events,” was one of the guests Jamīl Agha liked to host [as an entertainer] in the *koçke*.<sup>42</sup>

Many urban Jews traveled widely in the tribal domain and therefore needed the patronage of the aghas in whose jurisdiction they roamed. The tribesmen usually knew the Jewish protégés of their chief agha and respected their freedom of passage. Indeed, the Jews received no physical escort per se while traveling, but when they stopped for the night, they received shelter and food in the home of the village agha or in that of one of the Kurds with whom a mutual relationship had been established over the years. These Kurds hosted these Jewish travelers and on occasion accompanied them part of the way on the mountain roads. Similarly, many Jews from Zakho traveled through the jurisdictions of the surrounding tribes. At least half of them earned their living from trade of various types, which necessitated frequent business travel. Since travel in the tribal region was impracticable without the patronage of the aghas, this patronage was an essential instrument in the relationships between the Jews and their aghas, sustaining the business activity of the Jews. Some of the associations between aghas and

<sup>40</sup> The guesthouse is called in Kurdish “*dīwan*,” “*dīwan-xāne*,” “*dīwanxane*,” as well as *koçke*. For more details, see Van Bruinessen 1978: 82–88; Leach 1940: 28–31.

<sup>41</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 325.

<sup>42</sup> On Ra’ūf Katna’s father, see Abraham Shubi, “On the Characters of Sasson Kitāne and Menashe Baruch Abu Tamer ‘Abu Yūnes’,” *Minḥat Ashur* 9 (October 1997): 42–43 (Hebrew).

Jewish families from Zakho go back two, three or four generations, as far back as within the living memory of the Jewish informants. The ‘treaty’ between the Şindî chiefs and Jewish families from Zakho such as the family of Mîro b. Işhâq b. Naḥum b. Murdakh (Mordechai) Be-Zaken<sup>43</sup> was initiated during the 19th century, if not earlier, as the family tradition goes back several generations and refers to the bond between Aqūb Agha Şindî and the patriarch of the Jewish family, Işhâq.<sup>44</sup> The Şindî aghas granted the Jews of Zakho patronage that enabled them to roam through their tribal region. The following account may reflect the view of the Jews regarding their chief agha and the relationship between the agha and his Jews. When the son of Jamîl Agha, ‘Abd Agha, was married around 1945, several Jews from Zakho were invited to the wedding. Several Jewish informants counted this wedding as one of the social highlights of their lives; they considered it a high honor that they were invited to be guests at the wedding of their agha’s son. This wedding was such a memorable event that the Jewish guests would often talk about it to their children and grandchildren. Even in Israel, more than forty years after their immigration, the Jewish informants viewed this invitation as a bestowal upon them of great respect by their aghas. Likewise, when the son of Şalāḥ Agha, Bishār Agha, married his second wife of the Hājġān tribe, one of the pre-wedding festivities was celebrated at the home of the Jewish family of Murdakh Mîro Be-Zaken in Zakho.<sup>45</sup> They viewed this wedding celebration with pride and as a sign for their good relationship with their aghas, though this was the second wedding of Bishār Agha, a wedding that was no match for the first wedding ceremony of a tribal agha.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Naḥum was born about 1830–50, Işhâq was born about 1840–60, Mîro was born about 1860–80 and Murdakh (Mordechai) Be-Zaken was born in the late 19th century. The writer of this book is a descendant of this family.

<sup>44</sup> Işhâq Be-Zaken (born about 1840–60) had three brothers and seven sons, who in turn each had large extensive families. These seven branches of the family multiplied and grew into thousands of members at the early 21st century. Compare to the tradition about the deeply rooted connection between the Jewish family of Khawaja Khinno in Aqra and the tribal leaders of the Barzānî tribe.

<sup>45</sup> This family, known as *Be-Zaqen* (Heb., lit., the house of the old man), similar to surnames such as Alterman, Alter and Altman, in East European Jewish Communities. In Israel, this name is spelled as Zaken.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the patronage of tribal aghas over their Jewish subjects, see part II, 135–37.

C. *The Murders of Assyrians in Bersibi and Kestay*

The Şindî tribal chiefs were the patrons of the Jews of Zakho and the surroundings. Aqûb Agha, his son ‘Abd Agha, his two sons Jamîl Agha and Şalâh Agha had been the main aghas of this region throughout the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. ‘Abd Agha, the chief of the Şindî tribe in the region of Zakho, was much more able to protect the Jews of Zakho than the government. During the early 20th century, Wigram considered the Shaikh of Barzân and ‘Abd Agha of the Şindî and the Gulli the most important tribal chiefs of the region, comparing them with the Mîr<sup>47</sup> of the Berwar and the agha of Chal (called by the Jews, Chala) who were minor tribal chieftains.<sup>48</sup> According to Wigram in the following description of the Şindî and other aghas of Zakho region,

‘Abdî Agha of the Şindî-Gullis is perhaps the better off; for he has a stronghold of the most magnificent description, to which no government troops have ever penetrated, and which is a fair set-off against [balance for] the religious prestige of his neighbor [the Shaikh of Barzân]. This stronghold is the lofty tableland of Tanina; a great plateau among the mountains where there are wood and water for the whole tribe, and pasture in abundance for all their sheep the whole summer through. It can only be approached, the tale goes (as no foreigner has ever been allowed to visit its summit), by three easily guarded ascents; and when once the tribe are on the top, they can afford to laugh at any force the Government of the district can send against them. A large force set blockade the place could not be fed in the district, while small detachments, guarding the “ports” could be overwhelmed in detail. No doubt, resolute troops could storm it; but the cost would be heavy. The only weakness of the sanctuary appears to lie in this, that neither man nor beast can live on the top of it during the winter. When the autumn gales and early snow begin, come down they must; and in this fact would lie the opportunity of a Government that really cared about the enforcement of order.<sup>49</sup>

In the early 1920s, Jamîl Agha of Zakho district was the chief of the Şindî tribe. He lived at Darhoza (Darhozan) and spent the summer in Marasis. The British described him as “quiet and not very effective,” though he prevented his Şindî tribesmen “from giving any trouble.” His father, ‘Abd Agha, “was a really big man,” but Jamîl’s influence

<sup>47</sup> *Mîr* is the Kurdish form representing prince, or emir.

<sup>48</sup> Wigram 1914: 311–12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

was limited. He was an adherent of Shaikh Nūr.<sup>50</sup> Jamīl Agha and Ṣalāḥ Agha, were brothers and rivals. The Jews of Zakho tell the following symbolic anecdote that alludes to the differences between the two brothers:

The government summoned Ṣalāḥ Agha and asked him, ‘What would you do if you met your brother Jamīl Agha lying on the road?’ He said, ‘I would cool his face with a fan; I would prepare for him cold water and food for when he would wake up.’ They summoned Jamīl Agha and asked him the same question. He said, ‘I would stab him with a knife.’<sup>51</sup>

British military reports are full of details regarding the rebellious and problematic Jamīl Agha. In regards to his brother, Ṣalāḥ Agha, one report only mentioned that he once participated in the raiding activities of his brother during 1925. He subsequently submitted and the British allowed him to return home. Since then, he had been quiet. The report concludes with the statement that Ṣalāḥ Agha is “said to be more virile than most of the Ṣindī aghas.”<sup>52</sup> Jamīl Agha and Ṣalāḥ Agha wielded much power over many of the Jews of Zakho who received their patronage and roamed frequently in their tribal area, north and northeast of Zakho. The rivalry between the Ṣindī brothers heightened their seeming differences; Ṣalāḥ Agha was considered pro-British; Jamīl Agha was considered a communist.<sup>53</sup> At any rate, he was a rebel who caused troubles for the Jews and Assyrians of the region, as well as to the authorities.

A British Military report reveals that in April 1925 Jamīl Agha ambushed a police patrol near Sharanesh.<sup>54</sup> He subsequently fled to Turkey and “carried on intermittent raiding in the Zakho neighborhood, using Turkish territory as his base.”<sup>55</sup> Me‘allim Abraham (I#15) recalls that Jamīl Agha quarreled with the government and became fugitive. He spent some time in Navro‘e in Turkey, from where he would send his men to the surrounding villages asking for supplies such as sugar,

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<sup>50</sup> Most probably Shaikh Nūr Barīfkani. *Personalities* 1923:48; *Military Report on Iraq (Area 9)* 1929: 325.

<sup>51</sup> The importance of this tale is that it conveys the differences in character of the two brothers, as conceived by Zakho Jews.

<sup>52</sup> *Military Report on Iraq (Area 9)* 1929: 335.

<sup>53</sup> A reference as a communist was often a slander in this society at the time.

<sup>54</sup> Sharanesh is a village of mixed population north of Zakho. Recently (early 2000’s) it was described as one of many Christian villages that needs reconstruction.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

flour, grains and the like from the *mukhtārs*.<sup>56</sup> Allegedly, Jamīl Agha's envoys asked for grain and six mules in Bersivi, a Christian village fifteen miles northeast of Zakho, but the Christian *mukhtār*, Misho b. Ziro,<sup>57</sup> refused their request. He hoped that the hunt of Jamīl Agha by the authorities would keep him away and would prevent him from raiding Bersivi. At that time, in Bersivi, several inhabitants used to work as muleteers (Kur., *qatircis*), supplying lumber to Jewish merchants of Zakho, for lumber was one of the main commodities of merchants in Kurdistan. Jewish merchants would buy young trees from a certain grove or forest, and when they had grown sufficiently, they would cut them down and sell them. It must be noted, that around the time of the above incident, in 1925, after cutting down the trees, a train of forty mules each loaded with four *spindare* (poplar trees), headed from Bersivi to Zakho, led by several Christian muleteers. On their way, in a valley called *Newalā Diftanqe* (Kur., valley whose edge is full of mud), the Christian muleteers were ambushed and axed to death. The trees were discarded and the mules stolen and taken allegedly by Jamīl Agha's men. A Jew from Zakho,

Ephraim b. Bino, was *en route* from Zakho to meet the mule coach. When he reached *Newalā Diftanqe*, he became terrified at the sight of six butchered men. Within two days, as the picture became clear, we understood that Jamīl Agha had murdered them [by his men].<sup>58</sup>

A British report includes some big Christian villages within the Şindīs; the most important were Bersivi, Sharanesh, Naşārah, Sinat and

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<sup>56</sup> Several observers mention this practice of tribal chieftains in need who would ask non-tribal subjects to provide them with provisions. Layard (1954) mentioned before the middle of the 19th century, the famous tribal leader Bader Khan Beg who reportedly requested provisions for his men, before his campaign against the Assyrians of Hakkari. Mullā Mustafā Barzānī asked his Jewish protégés in both Shino and Diana to provide him with supplies. See below (“Shino: Mullā Mustafā and the Jews”): 113–120; and (“Providing Ammunition to Barzānī”): 164–66.

<sup>57</sup> There is another account on Misho b. Ziro in 1946, related to the wedding festivity of ‘Abd Agha, the son of Jamīl Agha. This account by Ra’ūf Katna (I#36) from Zakho portrayed him as loyal and caring for his agha. Misho b. Ziro is described as a generous man whose house was always open to the Muslims Kurds, a man who was respected by them. He brought several Christian women to help in the cooking for the wedding and attempted to collect and return the gifts given to the guests, in order to cut the expenses. Since the gifts were bought from Jewish merchants in Zakho, the Jewish guests at the wedding pulled their hand from the affair and Misho b. Ziro said, reportedly, that he would come to Zakho on the next Sunday and sort out this matter.

<sup>58</sup> He was the uncle of Me’allim Abraham (I#15).

Alanish.<sup>59</sup> The British report relates to Jamīl Agha's formal surrender in January 1927. His section of the Šindī tribe, the Pezaghayē, "was disarmed, and Jamīl Agha agreed to pay the fines and compensation to the relatives of the [six] policemen who lost their lives in the 1925 ambush."<sup>60</sup> It is likely that these are two different reports referring to a single event, just as it is possible that the victims were former or active Assyrian Levy soldiers. It is also possible that these were two different incidents. A few years later, the government was willing to grant Jamīl Agha amnesty, if he agreed to cease his subversive activity and if a ransom payment of 5,000 rupees would be paid.<sup>61</sup> Jamīl Agha asked several wealthy men, among them Jews and Christians from Zakho and the surrounding area, to help him with the ransom payment. Murdakh Mīro Zaken was one of the Zakho Jews who provided a good portion of the ransom money. The commitment to cease his subversive behavior and the payment of the ransom enabled Jamīl Agha to return to his village, Darhoza, 4.3 miles northeast of Zakho, where he remained until his death from illness.<sup>62</sup>

Some urban Jews had a warmer relationship with their aghas than the regular relationships between the patron agha and his protégé. One of these Jews was Hārūn Judo (I#16) of Zakho who was an astute merchant. The close association between Jamīl Agha Šindī and Judo enabled Jamīl Agha to ask Judo for help in committing a murder, a task usually undertaken by his tribal assassins. His involvement in a murder crime on behalf of Jamīl Agha endangered the status of Hārūn Judo who was capable theoretically of incriminating Jamīl Agha. Consequently, Jamīl Agha ordered the killing of Judo, but Judo was saved because of his very friendly relations with the agha's assassin. Hārūn Judo narrated: "In 1931" (probably in 1933),

On the day of the massacre of the doomed Christians, I was passing near the *qishle* [police station, in Zakho], when I came across Jamīl Agha. He was the agha, the master, of my family [Zaken family].... I went [towards him] and gave him my regards, when a Dihi<sup>63</sup> began cursing him aloud

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<sup>59</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 289.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 288, 325.

<sup>61</sup> *Rupee* was an Indian currency introduced in Iraq by the British Army after World War I.

<sup>62</sup> Among the informants: Yehoshua Mīro (I#25), Me'allim Abraham (I#15) and Gurjī Zaken (I#17).

<sup>63</sup> According to MacKenzie (1962: 356–357) Dihis were Armenians originally from

in public... Jamīl Agha drew a *khanjār* [Arab., curved-bladed dagger] and wanted to stab him, but [in public, near the police station] he could not do it... Well, two or three years have passed. One night, Miḥe<sup>64</sup> Mecholi knocked at my door. He had brought his wife with him requesting that she stay for the night at my house, explaining that if she remained in his village, Avle, ‘everybody would sleep with her’ [in his absence].

Miḥe said that Jamīl Agha asked him to come and take Judo with him. They traveled together to Darhoza, to the residence of Jamīl Agha. Judo recalls that Jamīl Agha addressed him as agha (master).

‘I am not your agha,’ I told him, ‘you are my agha. If you need something, just utter your wish and I will execute it.’ Jamīl Agha told me, ‘Take Miḥe Mecholi and show him the house of that Christian [Dihi, i.e., of an Armenian origin] who cursed me. You remember him, right?’ I said ‘Yes.’ We traveled to Kestayeh,<sup>65</sup> [where the Christian foe of Jamīl Agha lived]... When we arrived at the house of the Christian, Miḥe said, ‘I will hold him and you kill him.’ ‘Bastard,’ I told him, ‘Even if you die I will not do it.’ Miḥe subsequently suggested, ‘You hold him and I will kill him.’ I did not agree. At the end, he himself held him down and murdered him in his sleep. The wife of the Christian opened her eyes, but Miḥe threatened her that if she opened her eyes he would kill her. She closed her eyes. They had a *barmala* [NA., a coarse rug, used for covering the beds]; he took the *barmala* and came out with it. ‘Why did you take this?’ I asked him. ‘I will bring you five of these’ [why do you bring with you evidence against us?]... We walked back to Darhoza, to the house of Jamīl Agha. When we arrived at the *qasra* [NA., palace] of Jamīl Agha, we realized in the light [of dawn] that our clothes were covered with blood. Jamīl Agha looked at us and ignited a fire on the second floor of his palace... Eventually, we went to the riverfront to wash the blood off our clothes.<sup>66</sup> By the time we had washed our clothes and ourselves, it was dawn. Jamīl Agha served us enough food for twenty persons... We remained there all day long...

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a village named Dihē in Turkey, who came as refugees to Zakho, probably during the massacres of the Armenians.

<sup>64</sup> Miḥe is the Kurdish form of the Arabic name Muḥī al-Dīn. Miḥe Mecholi was a member of the Mecholi section of the Şindīs. As one of Jamīl Agha’s hit men, he may have been involved in the following incident. It was reported that while Jamīl Agha was still a fugitive in Turkey, in May 1926, a party of the Mecholi section “fired on an Iraqi army patrol wanting one man.” Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 289.

<sup>65</sup> A Christian neighborhood at the outskirts of Zakho.

<sup>66</sup> There is some inconsistency in the account of ‘Judo.’ He said that he refused to take part in the murder, but eventually, his clothes were full of blood, perhaps from being near the murder place or the murderer. At any case, when he was telling this account, 50 years or so later, he seemed reliable and honest. If he had been actively involved in the act of killing, why bring this account voluntarily in the first place?

At midnight, they headed back home. Judo recalls that some persons asked him where he had been. “I said that [I was away] because Mihe Mecholi had brought herd and we had to send them to Mosul,” explained Judo his absence. Two or three years passed and Hārūn Judo continued his routine life and business activity. The repercussions of the murder, however, were not late in coming, as Judo recalls:

One day in 1935, I was sitting in Pirbala... from a distance of fifteen houses, someone called out my name. It was Mihe Mecholi. When he approached, I saw him weeping. I had a handkerchief in my hand, so I asked Mihe, ‘What happened, why you are crying?’ He said, ‘Sit down.’ I asked him, ‘What happened? Tell me frankly.’ He said, ‘I cannot tell you...’ Finally, he revealed, ‘Jamīl Agha sent me to kill you.’ I said, ‘Why are you worried? Are you in need of bullets? I will give you some.’ Mihe Mecholi replied, ‘You are killing me by talking like this.’ ‘Here,’ I said, ‘take two rupees and buy some bullets.’ He started slapping himself on his face. He said that there were nine men in his gang, ‘but if any of them would dare hurting you, he would be killed.’ [Eventually] he suggested, ‘you had better leave this place’ [Kurdistan]. I said, ‘I cannot leave; many persons owe me money, about 20,000 rupees. Furthermore, I bought more than 3,000 *spindare* [poplar trees] which have not matured enough to be cut down.’

The intimate relations between Mihe and Judo are expressed clearly in this dialogue. Eventually, Mihe Mecholi allowed Judo an extension of time and vowed in his *ṭalāq* (Arab., divorce) that during the next three months he would not cross the border from Turkey into Iraq.<sup>67</sup> Jamīl Agha had a long history of defying the authorities. He possibly felt that he could not permit himself to entrust his fate into the hands of a Jew, and thereby endanger his political and legal status. He ordered the ‘removal’ of Judo, but Judo’s sincere relations with Mihe Mecholi enabled him to escape and to organize his departure. During the three-month period, he collected as much debt-money as he could and then immigrated to the Holy Land.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ṭalāq* in Arabic means divorce. Taking an oath in the *ṭalāq* means that if this vow were untrue, the person who took the oath would be obliged to divorce his wife. On the oath for the divorce by Kurds, see Hay 1921: 76–77.

D. *Hājji Şadiq Biro of the Gulli Tribe and His Jewish Protégé Naḥum Sabto*

Hārūn Judo was neither the first nor the last Jew to migrate to another country in an attempt to save himself from the vengeance of his agha. Some of the Jews of Zakho had patron aghas other than the Şindīs. Naḥum Sabto emigrated from Zakho because of a fierce quarrel with his tribal agha, Hājji Şadiq, the chief agha of the Gulli. The following excerpt is from a report of the British army in Kurdistan on Şadiq Biro in 1929. He was

the most important of the Gulli aghas. Winter quarters: Khuk Gulli; summer quarters: Bahnuna. [He] was, like his father, a notorious brigand. [He] went [came] out against us after the Amadiya rising in 1919. Bahnuna was destroyed by our troops. He remained out until September 1920, when he surrendered and has been moderately well behaved since. Not on good terms with the Şindī aghas.<sup>68</sup>

Another British report does not hesitate to argue that his surrender in July 1920 was mainly the result of “a bad attack of venereal disease.”<sup>69</sup>

The present account of Gurgo Naḥum Sabto relates in some details to the above report by the British Air Ministry. During World War I, Gurgo Naḥum’s father, Sabto, migrated from Zakho, in an attempt to avoid compulsory army service.<sup>70</sup> He first lived in the village of Baijo in Turkey (33 miles from Zakho, near the Turkish-Iraqi border). A year or two later, they migrated to Bahnuna under the jurisdiction of Hājji Şadiq Biro who was the chief agha of the Gulli tribal district. The contact between Naḥum Sabto and Hājji Şadiq Biro continued for twenty years, until Naḥum Sabto immigration to Palestine. Indeed, the very reason for his migration in 1935 was the clash between Naḥum Sabto and Hājji Şadiq Biro outlined below. The following account illustrates likewise, how decisive the role of the tribal agha was in the life and destiny of his dependent Jewish subject. When the war ended, Naḥum Sabto returned to Zakho like most of the Jews who had left the town. In the following years, Şadiq Biro, like several other Kurdish chiefs, rose up against the government, but the British government caught Hājji Şadiq Biro and brought him to Zakho “tied up on a mule” as “they were going to hang him.” This was merely an expression, but it

<sup>68</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 334.

<sup>69</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 5: 278.

<sup>70</sup> View the discussion in part IV, entitled “Evading Military Service,” pp. 276–284.

is certain that Şadıq Biro was opposed to the new British rule, as were other tribal leaders. A short time later, the government was willing to release Şadıq Biro if he could provide a guarantor. The guarantor was to be held responsible if Hājjī Şadıq Biro violated the terms of his release. According to Gurgo, Şadıq Biro gave the name of a Zakho resident, but he declined, telling him, “I cannot be a guarantor for you, because if tomorrow someone informs on you or testifies falsely against you, I will have to go to prison [in your place].” Consequently, Şadıq Biro suggested, “Call upon Naḥum Sabto, he is my Jew.” They called upon Gurgo’s father and according to Gurgo,

The governor asked him, ‘Are you willing to be guarantor for him? You should be aware that your head would be required instead of his. This man is very powerful. If he is released from prison and commits a crime, you would have to take his place.’ My father said, ‘I would be ready to replace him. Release him now.’

Finally, Hājjī Şadıq Biro was released from prison, thanks to the guarantee of Naḥum Sabto from Zakho.

In the years following, Gurgo witnessed how Hājjī Şadıq Biro used to come to Zakho and visit their house “once or twice every month.” Apparently, Hājjī Şadıq Biro exploited Gurgo’s father far beyond the tradition of mutual visits and hospitality. According to Gurgo, during his visits to their house,

Four or five, at times as many as ten men accompanied Hājjī Şadıq Biro. My late father would prepare food for all of them. This was the kind of connection between us and the agha... everything was for free, food, drinks, feeding [them] and storing their animals in a stable for two or three days... [Indeed] we also used to go to Hājjī Şadıq Biro, sit two or three days at Bahnuna [his village of residence], then we would depart... on trade trips to other villages and come back to his village and continue from there in another direction...

This relationship between Naḥum Sabto and Hājjī Şadıq Biro continued until 1932 when Naḥum Sabto was severely injured in an accident. After a treatment by a traditional physician, he was able to walk, but only with the help of a walking stick. Naḥum Sabto was no longer able to roam the surrounding villages on trading trips. According to Gurgo, despite his father’s loss of income and inability to work, Hājjī Şadıq Biro continued to “overuse” his “hospitality.” Gurgo elaborated that the practice of mutual hospitality was the custom. “My father would go” to the agha. He would stay, eat, and drink there. As a result, the

agha would pay reciprocal visits. My father “did not mind [continuing to host him] as long he had money, but [eventually] he did not have any money left.” As his injury prevented him from traveling in the mountains, Naḥum Sabto opened a store in the market of Zakho, in which Gurgo also worked. Nevertheless, Gurgo explains, “if a store does not have someone who can run around and bring merchandise from the villages [as his father had done in the past], it is useless.” While working in the store, Gurgo experienced in person the mistreatment of Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro. On four occasions over a short period,

Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro came to the store and took several items without paying for them.<sup>71</sup> I gave him stuff worth three or four dinars. He came once again and I gave him [some other goods]. After the third time, I told myself, ‘this matter has no end. He does not pay and I am too shy to ask him for the money and tell him to pay.’

Gurgo and his father Naḥum Sabto felt exploited, but the chieftain seemed indifferent to the medical and financial difficulties of his Jewish protégés. The clash between the two sides was imminent. Gurgo decided that if it happened another time, he would firmly confront Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro. When he came in the fourth time, Gurgo told him:

We have no [money] any longer... [As you know] my father was injured. He is limping now and can no longer earn his living and support his family [as in the past]. The entire burden is on my shoulders, but the business is not very profitable... Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro told me [how dare you] ask for money? You still owe me money, ten thousand [rupees] that I gave your father. I told him: I do not know anything about it. When did you give money to my father? He left the items at the store and went away immediately... to file a complaint...

Since Zakho was also the name of the district with the same name, the complaint was probably addressed to the *qāmmaqām*, the district officer. Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro told him:

There is a Jew named Naḥum Sabto who owes me ten thousand [rupees]. I demand it back. The *qāmmaqām*, a smart person, told him, this kind of thing does not work merely according to your demand. We have to ask him too. [He suggested an arbitration jury to which] you will choose three

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<sup>71</sup> Gurgo was not a merchant but rather a student who was obliged to work as a shopkeeper because of his father’s injury. It is clear that he was not successful in this business, and hence the difficulties in facing Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro.

witnesses a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian and the defendant will choose three witnesses [all six would serve as board of adjudicators]. They will all sit together in one place and determine the verdict. Whatever they decide, I will execute it. I cannot do it otherwise.

Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro agreed with the terms of the official conducting the inquiry.<sup>72</sup> Half an hour later, a police officer named Sa'īd came to Gurgo's store and informed him of the official complaint and the legal procedure that was about to take place. He accompanied Gurgo to inform his father: "Ḥājjī Sadīq Biro complained that you owe him ten thousand [rupees]." His father prepared himself and walked slowly, with the help of his walking stick, to the headquarters of the *qāimmaqām*. At the office, the *qāimmaqām* asked Sabto Naḥum what had happened to him and Sabto explained that he "fell from the roof at night and these are the results." The *qāimmaqām* began to investigate the details and, according to Gurgo, he sensed that Şadıq Biro was lying, but was unable to tell him bluntly, "after all, he was a respectable man."

The *qāimmaqām* asked my father, 'Do you know this person?' My father replied, 'He is my agha. Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro is my agha. I am his Jew...'. He told my father, 'Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro said that you owe him ten thousand rupees. He demands the money back...'. My father answered, 'I do not owe him a penny. If anything, he owes me.'

The two contenders, Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro and Naḥum Sabto, chose each three men to form the customary jury, whose task was to determine the verdict. Naḥum Sabto declared that if he won, he would not take the money from Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro. Gurgo recalls, "The *qāimmaqām* was very delighted with my father, from his [conciliatory] speech." The six-man jury convened in Zakho at the home of Ḥājjī Aḥmad, who was "a very respectable man," brother-in-law of Jamīl Agha, the chief agha of the Şindī tribe. His wife, Shahrezadeh, was 'Abd Agha's daughter and Jamīl Agha's sister. The following morning at nine o'clock, the six men who comprised the jury gathered to arbitrate the matter. Naḥum Sabto told them all about the troubles he had gone through, from the guaranty bill he had deposited for Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro to the cooking and hospitality he had provided for him and his companions during the years. Gurgo

<sup>72</sup> Gurgo Naḥum (I#1) used "mutaşarrif" and "*qāimmaqām*" alternately. He must have meant *qāimmaqām*.

Naḥum Sabto remembered the testimony of the woman at whose house the jury convened, Shahzadeh, Ḥājjī Aḥmad's wife:<sup>73</sup>

Although he [Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro] is a guest at my house, I must tell the truth, which I have seen with my own eyes... [In Zakho] everybody can see each other's house and during the hot summer days, we were sitting on the roof [watching] Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro with a company of eight or ten men, sometimes more, sometimes less, visiting [Naḥum Sabto]... They used to prepare food for them. Two [Muslim] neighbors; one of them is Varina, used to cook for them. It is shameful to make such accusations against the Jew. Although he [Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro] is a guest at my house and that he is an agha, I must speak straight. I do not distinguish between a Jew and a Muslim. We were all created [alike, in the shadow of God]. How dare he say that the Jew owes him money? She [Shahzadeh] approached Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro and asked him, 'Did you go to the *Hajj* [pilgrimage]? Why do you wear this *'aqāl* [a type of rope, usually black, shaped as double or triple ring, which sits on top of the *kūfiyya*] over your head?<sup>74</sup> Do you do it in order to deceive the public? Does this poor Jew owe you as much money as you say? His son merely asked you to pay [for items you had purchased]. [He asked you] once, twice, three times. You took goods free. His poor father has been at home for the last two years. He fell, right? So you, instead of helping him in his time of need, demand from him money?'

The verdict, agreed upon by all six men, acquitted the Jew from the accusation that he had owed money to Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro. If anything, the verdict said, Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro was the party owing money, but the Jew had said that he would waive it. Ḥājjī Aḥmad, the host, took the written decision to the *qāmmaqām* who said, "I knew it, but in order not to fuel the hatred, I demanded that the jury would determine the verdict." Despite the verdict, Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro had another request, that Naḥum Sabto and his son should swear an oath in the synagogue, in front of the *Torah* scrolls, with two candles over their shoulders. Gurgo later explained that another Jew, who understood the awesomeness of the site and the sight, advised Ḥājjī Ṣadiq Biro. The *qāmmaqām*, who was eager to put this inquiry behind him, agreed. They were sent to the synagogue, accompanied by two police officers, one of whom was instructed to seize the *khanjār* belonged to Ḥājjī Ṣadiq and protect the Jews from any possible attack by the tribal chief.

<sup>73</sup> It is not clear whether she was the first member of the jury or she just took advantage of the fact that the Jury convened at her house.

<sup>74</sup> *'Aqal* is a headband, a sign for Ḥājjī, a Muslim who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca.

At the synagogue, the *shammash* [Heb., the caretaker, or the maintenance person of the synagogue] opened the *haikhal* [Heb., archway in which the *Torah* scrolls stood] and pointed out the *Torah*, saying to Hājji Şadiq Biro: ‘This is our *Torah*.’ Hājji Şadiq told him, ‘Let him swear an oath that he does not owe me anything.’

Naḥum Sabto swore that he did not owe him any money. If he owed money to Hājji Şadiq Biro, as the later argues, “such-and-such” (terrible things) would occur to him and his family. Nevertheless, if indeed Hājji Şadiq Biro owed him money, then the honorary title of Hājji with which was credited to him because of his pilgrimage to Mecca, “would be credited” to Naḥum instead.<sup>75</sup> According to Gurgo, these painful words pierced Hājji Şadiq Biro like a sharp knife. Hājji Şadiq made a move as if to draw out his *khanjār*, forgetting that the police officer had removed it from him earlier. The police officer, Sa‘īd, said to him:

When the Jew swore an oath [that awful things would occur] to him and his children [if he was lying], it did not upset you that much. Nevertheless, when he made an oath that if you really owe him, your Hājji [title] would be credited to him, then you became angry and it hurt you?

Hājji Şadiq Biro merely said, “God is great” and returned to his village Bahnuna in the Gulli jurisdiction. This complex account proves that attaining justice was possible for urban Jews in Zakho even when the plaintiff was a powerful agha. Nevertheless, the Gulli tribe had less influence in Zakho than the Şindī or Slivani tribes, whose domain lay to the north and south of Zakho. Likewise, Hājji Şadiq Biro quarreled with the government and was not popular amongst the Şindī and Slivani aghas. The conclusion of this jury arbitration might have been different had a Şindī agha or a powerful Zakho agha been involved.

Following his defeat Hājji Şadiq Biro stopped visiting Zakho. Naḥum Sabto’s son, Gurgo, argued that no other Jew would show him respect as his father had done; “nobody would go and buy meat and cook it for him as my father used to do.” Subsequently, Naḥum Sabto sold his house and store. He was planning to immigrate to Palestine, when Hājji Şadiq Biro’s brother, Mīrzah, visited him.

Mīrzah came with a handbag full of money and told my father that Hājji Şadiq Biro sent with him money to open two stores instead of the one he had and that he came instead of him to apologize. He subsequently

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<sup>75</sup> Interestingly this statement encapsulates respect for one of the main pillars in Islam.

told us that Jews from Zakho added fuel to the quarrel, but only God will show mercy to these Jews. My father told Mīrzah that they were leaving for Baghdad. He did not disclose their plan to immigrate to Palestine.

As much as Mīrzah tried to persuade him to stay, it did not help. The following morning, Mīrzah returned to Bahnuna with his money. Six weeks later, Naḥum Sabto left Zakho *en route* to Palestine. Ḥājjī Şadıq Biro's overture, via his brother Mīrzah, came too late. It reflected remorse on behalf of the agha, but Naḥum Sabto had already decided to begin a new life in the Holy Land.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AQRA

Aqra lies about 65 miles to the northeast of Mosul and was the administrative headquarters of the *qadā'*, which bears its name in the Mosul *Livā'*. From the scant material available about the Jews of Aqra during the previous centuries, two accounts shed some light on the position of the community. In the 17th century, the Jewish community considered fleeing the town *en masse*, because of the “king,” probably the governor, who gave them problems.<sup>1</sup> In 1848, Benjamin II reported several attacks by Muslim Kurds against Jewish females who were taking their ritual purification bath near the synagogue, outside the town.<sup>2</sup> During the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, three hundred Jews lived in Aqra.<sup>3</sup> During World War I, only ten Jewish households were reported in Aqra, but in 1929, the number of Jewish and Chaldean families reported to have lived there was 40 and 20 respectively, among 800 households or 4,000 residents.<sup>4</sup> During World War II, one hundred and fifty Jews lived in Aqra,<sup>5</sup> many of whom owned shops and were famous for the manufacture of silver scabbards for Kurdish daggers.<sup>6</sup>

#### A. *Khawaja Khinno's Household*

The leading Jewish family in Aqra during the last three generations was known by the name of Khawaja Khinno.<sup>7</sup> The patriarchs of Khawaja

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<sup>1</sup> S. Assaf, “A Letter from Rabbi in Amadiya to the Community of Ekron,” *Zion* 6 (1934): 106–9 (Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 29–30.

<sup>3</sup> Stern 1854:233; Ben-Yaacob 1981: 83–84.

<sup>4</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 83–84.

<sup>6</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 54.

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew surname of this family is Gabbai (Heb., the treasurer of the synagogue), an appellation linked to members who performed this important duty on behalf of the community. The name or title *Khawaja* was usually given in Arab lands to non-Muslim dignitaries, usually to Jews or Christians.

Khinno managed the affairs of the Jewish community of Aqra and developed relationships with aghas and officials whose benevolence aided the Jews in times of need. The family maintained a tradition of generous hospitality for government officials, police and military officers, and tribal leaders in their *dīwanxane* where the guests would receive food and drinks as well as be entertained with music. The family also provided financial and material assistance for tribal leaders in need. Thanks to their generosity, the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs gained influence with the authorities and aghas. According to Darwīsh Naḥum [I#28] whose father worked as a clerk in Khawaja Khinno's household,

army and police officers used to come and visit [him]. They would sit, drink and eat; they would listen to a singer who would make them happy and then they would go.”

Khawaja Khinno's *dīwanxane* was set up to receive guests every evening except Friday, the eve of the Jewish *Sabbath*. This was hospitality “in all its aspects [as if] it was a free hotel, eating, drinking and sleeping.” The guests would come to Khawaja Khinno's home not only from Aqra but also from all over the country and especially from the northern part of Iraq. The Khawaja Khinno patriarchs seem to have perfected the art of benevolence through the hosting of many guests in their *dīwanxane* and assisting tribal leaders in times of need. Seven servants at Khawaja Khinno's home helped in the management of the house and in hosting the guests; a female servant with her two daughters “used to cook special dishes for the Muslim guests, who did not eat” the food cooked by the family. Darwīsh Naḥum argued that the guests at Khawaja Khinno never would have received comparable hospitality from any Arab or Kurdish citizen. Only the Khawaja Khinno household was able to provide these kinds of services.

The local tradition of hospitality was based on the concept of mutual visits, where Jews and Kurds would extend hospitality to one another; usually the Jews would host the tribal Kurds in their house when they visited the urban center and the Kurds would host and shelter the Jews when they traveled in their tribal jurisdiction. The hospitality of Khawaja Khinno's household, however, was different: “there were far more visits to us,” than the other way around.<sup>8</sup> Another grandson of Khawaja

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<sup>8</sup> Fā'ik Gabbai (I#12); Majid and Hertzal Gabbai (I#9&10); Aryeh Gabbai (I#8); Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28).

Khinno, Shu‘a (derived from Shuwa‘, a nickname for Yehoshua<sup>9</sup>) of Baghdad told Emil Morad, already in 1945, the following account:

My grandfather’s nickname was Khawaja Shu‘a. During the time of the Turks, he served as legal adviser and subsequently he became a member of the court. He was famous and excelled in hosting [Jewish] emissaries. He was wise, intelligent and visionary...he was loved and admired by all. He was influential with the government ever since King Faisal [I, 1885–1933] was crowned [as King of Iraq, August 1921] until his death [of Khawaja Shu‘a] in 1943. He was also influential among the tribal leaders, shaikhs and aghas, with whom he had friendly relations. He also had appropriate associations with Shaikh Muhammad, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī’s father.<sup>9</sup>

These details are consistent with those told by other members of the Khawaja Khinno’s family, the only difference in the above report is the name, possibly because of a typing error. Interviewing several members of this family, I sensed that each son seemed inclined to credit his own father on the expense of other brothers, for being the main or the most important figure in the family.

Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno (d. 1943) was one of the prominent patriarchs of the family who followed the tradition of his ancestors, fortifying relationships with government officials and aghas. He was the head of the Jewish community in Aqra until his death in 1943. During Turkish times, he was a *mustantiq* (Arab., examining magistrate) in the court of Aqra. As a skillful merchant and the head of his community, Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno maintained contacts with the surrounding tribal leaders, notably the Barzānīs, Zībarīs, Herkis, Surchis and the Goran. His strongest links were with the tribes around Aqra, mainly the Barzānīs, whose jurisdiction lay roughly to the northeast of Aqra up to the Great Zab River. Other tribes with whom Khawaja Khinno was associated were the Surchis, whose jurisdiction stretched roughly south of Aqra to the Great Zab River, and with several Zībarī leaders,

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this account was told in 1945 in Baghdad to Emil Murad (1977: 126–27). All the details told by this grandson who resided in Baghdad support the other accounts told by other informants of the Khawaja Khinno family and Aqra (I#8; I#9&10; I#12; I#28). The only difference in this account, is the nickname of the grandfather, Khawaja Shu‘a rather than Khawaja Khinno. Possibly, it was modified to befit the name of the narrator. I noticed the same pattern among other informants of the Khawaja Khinno family when they attributed certain family qualities to their own parents rather than their uncle. For instance, every son stressed his father’s relationship with the Barzānīs.

north of Aqra. He also established connections with the nomadic Herki chieftains and with tribal leaders of the semi-nomadic Goran who migrated annually to the regions around Aqra and whose jurisdiction stretched north and northeast of Aqra. The contacts with the Herkis and the Goran seemed to have developed because the routes plied by the Khawaja Khinno merchants coincided with the migration routes of these tribes. When Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno died, his sons maintained his tradition. David (1887/1893–1977) and Yitzhak (1895/1902–1976) assisted their father during his lifetime in business and in managing the affairs of the Jewish community. He was “a man of unique high quality” in leadership capability. Despite the frequent state of war between the Barzānīs and government officials, Khawaja Khinno maintained good relations with sides, the Barzānī chieftains and the authorities, which accentuates the accomplishments of the family. Indeed, the family patriarchs were known as “Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī persons,” but because of their close contact with the government, officials “were considerate towards us and therefore did not find an excuse to harm us,” said Fā’ik Gabbai (I#12). Iraqi officials did not automatically brand the Jewish protégés of the Barzānīs as anti-government civilians. Government officials understood the need of non-tribal Jews to require the protection of aghas, especially in a tribal society, which was abundant in feuds and characterized by a relative lack of security. Naturally, neither the tribal Kurds nor the government officials considered the Jews integral part of the tribe. Even Jews whose agha was involved in a rebellion against the government, like Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, were not regarded as enemies of the authorities even though they were known as the subjects of a rebellious tribal agha. The authorities would not blame these Jews for the wrongdoing of their agha, unless they were actively involved in assisting him. Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28) argued somewhat exaggeratedly that the local government was “almost in [the] hands” of Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno, whose connections with officials were well established. He remembered a clear example of the influence wielded by the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs. Once, Darwīsh Naḥum’s father became ill, and David Khawaja Khinno went to the military compound in Aqra and called upon the military physician, who was a regular guest of their household. The military physician returned and treated his father. This and other forms of assistance were made possible thanks to the long-term relations forged by the Khawaja Khinno family over the years. Several observers argued, “There was no other

city [in Kurdistan] in which the conditions of the Jews were as good [because of them].”<sup>10</sup>

### 1. *Association with Aghas and Bureaucrats*

Following World War I, the British intelligence reported the main tribal leaders in Aqra district. These were Fāris Babak Agha and Qādir Agha of the Zībarī tribe; Shaikh Aḥmad of Barzān of the Barosh region; Shaikh Badr, Shaikh Ubaidullāh and Shaikh Qayyūm of the Surchi tribe; the Herki tribe (*Köcher*, or nomad); and Ismā‘īl Agha and Ḥājīr Agha of the ‘Ashā‘ir al-Saba’.<sup>11</sup> The household of Khawaja Khinno was known primarily for its good relations with the Barzānī aghas. Nonetheless, the patriarchs of the family also maintained good contacts with other aghas in the region. Members of the Khawaja Khinno family maintained that relationships with the tribal shaikhs and aghas were very good, spanning a long period. Specific details, however, are rather random and not at all comprehensive. Jewish informants from Aqra specified that helping aghas reflected one dimension of these relationships. One must note that wealthy Jews in other urban centers also secured their safety and free passage through dues, gifts and other means of support to aghas. The behavior of the patriarchs of Khawaja Khinno family seems to fit the same pattern, as discussed below.

One guest of Khawaja Khinno’s *dīwanxane* was Ṭāhir al-Yaḥyā, who later became prime minister of Iraq (1964–1968).<sup>12</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#28) related that Muslim guests of Khawaja Khinno’s household, “used to call me *Sofi*, because even as a child I was a devoted believer.” Around 1946 or 1947, Aryeh Gabbai and his brother Fā‘ik went together to Mosul.

I was in *Bāb al-Sahraye*<sup>13</sup> in Mosul where we came across a high officer, who later became prime minister, Ṭāhir Yaḥyā . . . He asked me, ‘*Sofi*, what are you doing here?’ I told him, ‘I am here with my brother Fā‘ik . . .’ He

<sup>10</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3); Me‘allim Levi, (I#23); Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28).

<sup>11</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 478.

<sup>12</sup> Ṭāhir Yaḥyā served as a chief of staff in 1963 under ‘Abd al-Karīm Qāsem’s regime and then served as Prime Minister between 1964 and 1968. Interestingly enough, he was later charged with corruption though these accusations were never proven. See Sluglett 1987: 94, 96, 100, 102, 110–12; Marr 1985: 185, 188, 191–2, 195, 199, 201–2, 204–6, 209, 213, 232 (n. 48).

<sup>13</sup> Most probably he was at or near Sahara hotel in midtown Mosul.

asked me, ‘Where are you going to be in the evening?’ I told him, ‘At the Hotel Ḥamrā.’ He asked me [where was I going to be] ‘around four or five o’clock in the afternoon?’ I told him ‘In Jezira Ḥamrā.’ He told me to wait for him there. He came to my brother Fā’ik... all the company gathered. He came with persons from the most respectable families of Mosul, from the family of Najīb al-Jāber, the family of Sabūnjī,<sup>14</sup> army officers... That night we were in the hotel, they were our hosts... The following night, they invited us to the *Dijlā* [The Tigris] Hotel... This [kind of relationship] was not something that was built up in a single night. This was something that had roots lasting for generations.

This social gathering was well remembered by its Jewish participants, but because of the lack of comparable memories, I could only estimate that the social significance of this event in the eyes of the Muslim participants was not as great.

Family members of Khawaja Khinno confirmed that several tribal leaders who became fugitives, or imprisoned for crimes such as murder or robbery, “had one address: David or Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno [or their father].” The family’s patriarchs would immediately go and visit the person in question in prison, to see if they could help him in any way.<sup>15</sup> At times, the aghas in question found ways to express their gratitude. In one instance, David Khawaja Khinno’s name was placed on the *Tāpū* registration for the village of Karvaso as a gratitude for rescuing ‘Abdallāh Agha Sharafa who had “an important trial in Baghdad.” In another instance, a Surchi Shaikh came to Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno and told him, “Khawaja Khinno, we have gone bankrupt.” Khawaja Khinno who owned a few villages, each containing between seventy and one hundred houses, told him: “Do not worry, go and settle in this village, it is [registered in the *Tāpū*, the bureau of land registration, according to the Ottoman Land Code and Registration Laws of 1858 and 1859] in my name. Go and settle there and get it[s yields].” Another tribal chief whose name was mentioned by the Khawaja Khinno’s sources was Aḥmeh Gorani, whose tribe was “very strong,” that could have enlisted “thousands of armed men” in times of need. “Even Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī could not stand up against them.” Allegedly, one of his brothers violated a woman named Salwa and she registered a complaint against him at the police station. “The authorities could not accept such a sin as a man going to a woman who had no

<sup>14</sup> One of the families of the aristocracy in Mosul.

<sup>15</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#8).

husband. So they captured him and put him in jail.” During the clash between the government and the tribesmen, the government hanged several of the Gorani brothers and tribesmen. Apparently, Aḥmeh Gorani’s family needed the help of Khawaja Khinno in a few instances of complications with the authorities.<sup>16</sup> The Jews helped their aghas not merely in the financial realm but in social requirements and variety of services. In a way, the Jewish subjects have always been on the alert, always ready to fulfill the demands and requests of their aghas, as the following accounts indicate.

The daughter of Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī<sup>17</sup> was married to Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī.<sup>18</sup> This may have strengthened the ties between the two tribal families and Khawaja Khinno’s household. When Zubair, the son of Maḥmūd Agha, got married in the early 1940s, he invited the Khawaja Khinno household to his wedding. Zubair came to Aqra two days before the wedding bringing with him forty mules. According to Fā’ik Gabbai (I#12), “Without prior notice he came and told my father: ‘Khawaja Yitzḥak, I have come to invite you to my wedding.’” Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno immediately enlisted the services of forty young men from the family. They took *dohle* and *zurne*<sup>19</sup> with them as well as a cook and a slaughterer of animals:

We traveled on foot for two days and one night until we reached Zībar . . . When they heard that we were coming . . . Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī and some other [respected] aghas and shaikhs approached to welcome us. They were shooting [bullets] of joy as we responded by shooting bullets in the air from our side to the sounds of *dohle* and *zurne* . . . We met with kisses and hugs and went straight to the *diwan* of Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī.

At this wedding, the youngsters gathered by Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno helped in the arranging and running of the wedding.<sup>20</sup> In this account, Fā’ik Gabbai does not detail the services provided by the Jews to the

<sup>16</sup> Fā’ik and Aryeh Gabbai (I#12; I#8); Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai (I#9&10); Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28) of Aqra.

<sup>17</sup> Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī and his three sons, Titar, Zubair and Umar, used to be tribal enemies of the Barzānīs. See Nauman M. Al-Kanaani, *Limelight on the North of Iraq* (Baghdad: Dar al-Jumhuriya, 1965): 26–30.

<sup>18</sup> McDowall 1996: 292.

<sup>19</sup> *Dohle* (a large drum hung from the drummer’s neck) and *zurne* (an oboe-like reed instrument) are usually played together; most Kurdish folk dance is danced to the sounds of these two instruments.

<sup>20</sup> Fā’ik Gabbai, (I#12). According to a similar account, some of the Jews of Zakho were invited to the wedding of ‘Abdī Agha Şindī, their tribal agha.

Zībarīs, possibly because it was unusual for members of the Khawaja Khinno household to engage in such physical labor. Likewise, the informant who brags about the importance of his family in Aqra may have wished to conceal this specific role played by members of his family at the wedding of a tribal agha.

## 2. *Relationships with Tribal Aghas*

One of the roles played by the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs was that of mediation in conflicts, a role generally reserved in the Kurdish society for highly esteemed shaikhs and aghas. Although the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs were not tribal or spiritual leaders, the elders of the family assumed the role of mediator. At least in two instances during the early 20th century, the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs mediated between the (Turkish and the British) authorities and the Barzānī chieftains. In another instance, the Jewish patriarchs mediated between two families of Kurdish shaikhs, in the 1940s. The mediation among Muslim Kurds further indicates the significant status enjoyed by the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs among the local authorities and tribal leaders. As an expression of the good relationships, mutual visits were conducted during the holidays. During the Muslim holidays, Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno would usually visit the government representatives and then the shaikhs and aghas in the Aqra region, in accordance with their rank and importance, and all his children would accompany him. Among the Shaikhs he would visit were Shaikh Kajaw, Shaikh Mullā Muṣṭafā Jibrāʿīl,<sup>21</sup> ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Agha and Ḥājī Muḥammad from Aqra. Once, in the early 1940s, after visiting the government representatives, instead of proceeding to the higher-ranking notable, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Khawaja Khinno took the other road, to the house of the less important Shaikh, Ḥājī Muḥammad. His children were surprised, but said nothing out of respect for their father. Shaikh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who was told that Khawaja Khinno went first to the house of Ḥājī Muḥammad, was apparently offended. When Khawaja Khinno arrived at the *diwan* of Ḥājī Muḥammad Agha they all stood to honor him, but he refused to take a cigarette or a drink, until ‘Abdallāh, the brother of Ḥājī Muḥammad told him, “Please take this cigarette from me and whatever

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<sup>21</sup> Mullā Muḥammad Jibrāʿīl was one of the wealthiest and most influential men in Aqra. He owned considerable estates in the region. *Personalities* 1923: 72.

you wish, we are at your command.” Khawaja Khinno said, “Fine.” He took a cigarette, tea and some dairy products, which Muslim Kurds would offer to Jewish guests out of respect for the dietary laws. After eating and drinking, he asked them to call all the heads of their clan. He subsequently asked them all to accompany him and slowly led them out. Ḥājji Muḥammad and his brother ‘Abdallāh, and fifty men followed him towards the family of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Agha. These two clans were embroiled in a feud. Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno used the pretext of the Muslim holiday to persuade the lower-ranking clan to visit the higher-ranking clan, in an effort to bring the two parties together. The men of Ḥājji Muḥammad followed Khawaja Khinno to the house of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Agha where they all reconciled.<sup>22</sup>

### B. *The Barzāni Tribal Chiefs and the Jews*

The *Ṣūfi* Shaikhs of the *Naqshbandī tarīqa* from the Barzāni family were among the most respected and influential in Kurdistan.<sup>23</sup> The family was centered in the village of Barzān and became a large and influential tribe that played an important role in the Kurdish national movement. During the early part of the 20th century, Wigram reported that the Shaikh of Barzān was one of the strongest tribal figures in Kurdistan.<sup>24</sup> He told of a visit to Barzān where his company’s guards escorted them to Bira Kapra and

as far as the banks of the river—but when we reached the ferry, their responsibility came to an end. They could not follow us across. It was the Shaikh of Barzān’s country. And the *Hukumet* felt some delicacy about parading their officials in their domain. No doubt, he would receive them graciously—under favour and without prejudice; but there was no earthly use in pretending that *zapitehs* [escorts] could protect us there.<sup>25</sup>

Wigram stressed the modesty of the Shaikh of Barzān: “even less powerful chiefs” live in large castles, but the shaikh of Barzān “dwells among his own people” and his residence is merely an agglomeration of several common houses combined in one. The villages in the region of Barzān were “prosperous looking” and the shaikh was “a merciful

<sup>22</sup> Majīd and Hertzel Gabbai (I#9&10).

<sup>23</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 344–48.

<sup>24</sup> Wigram 1914: 311–13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

over-lord,” noted for his fair treatment of his subjects. When he was quarrelling with the government and became *firar* (an escapee)

in the mountains...he reaped the fruit of his good treatment of his villagers, for not a man, Christian or Moslem, ever dreamt of betraying him to his foes.<sup>26</sup>

Wiġram made a further observation on the Barzānī Shaikh’s compassion and benevolence not only towards their Muslim subjects, but also towards non-Muslims. At the beginning of the 20th century, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām II refused to declare *jihād*, or holy war, against the local Assyrians of Tkhuma, as initiated by some of the Kurdish rivals of the Tkhuma.<sup>27</sup> This report stands in contrast with other reports of oppression of Christians by other Kurdish shaikhs and aghas, such as the Shaikh Ṣadiq of Nehri, who was reportedly “a terrible oppressor of Christians.”<sup>28</sup>

Another report relates to events in the Amadiya district from December 1913. According to a local missionary, the Shaikh of Barzān raided some villages of Nerwa, three Syrian and six Kurdish villages, plundering them, and killing six Jews. The raid on Nerwa was because the Nerwa-Raikan tribesmen refused to help him in a planned attack on Châl and Tkhuma (Assyrians), “but why the poor Jews were specially victimized is not clear,” the missionary asked.<sup>29</sup> This specific report raises doubts regarding the genuine attitudes of the Barzānī leaders towards Kurdish Jews, as it contradicts a variety of reports from different sources on the benevolence of the Barzānīs towards the Jews. This inconsistency may be resolved by two main arguments. First, the Barzānī Shaikh from the recent report was probably ‘Abd al-Salām who was executed in Mosul in 1914, and there is hardly any information regarding his relationships with Kurdish Jews. On the other hand, the later Barzānī leaders, Shaikh Aḥmad and Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, were known to have special relations with Kurdish Jews. The second argument, which may clarify the inconsistency, emerges in the view that the report on the attack has two layers. It contains information about a plan to attack the Tkhuma Assyrian tribesmen, and the killing

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 138–9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 143–4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 164; 177–9; 313–14.

<sup>29</sup> AM, no. 95, April 1914:1259. In April-May 1914, the government operated against Shaikh of Barzān, but he and his followers fled from the troops possibly to Persia or to the Berwari region. AM, no 96, July 1914, 1280–81.

of six Jewish villagers, possibly residents of Nerwa, during a raid on villages of Nerwa-Raikan tribesmen. Nevertheless, one may read the killing of the six Jewish residents of Nerwa-Raikan, according to the tribal rules of conduct in which the killing of Jewish subjects was almost an integral part of the Barzānī attack on their rival tribesmen from Nerwa-Raikan. Although there are reports about anti-Jewish incidents by Barzānī shaikhs and tribesmen, it appears that the leaders of this particular *Naqshbandī* shaikhly family, during the first half of the 20th century, notably Shaikh Aḥmad and Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, had special relationships with Kurdish Jews under their patronage. The following five accounts further substantiate this argument. In addition, Jewish informants of Shino, Mergasor, Serkane and Diana reported on the affirmative attitude of the Barzānīs towards them.<sup>30</sup>

An event that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century demonstrated the good relations of the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs with both the government and the aghas. Reportedly, the authorities asked Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno to mediate between them and Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām Barzānī, an insurgent tribal leader. This account has no other source confirming it and its primary substantiation remained within the Khawaja Khinno family tradition. Several tribes, such as the Shirwan, the Girdi and upper Mizuri, in addition to the Barzānīs, had venerated Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām. In 1914, the *Vali* (Arab., *Wālī*, governor of an administrative unit) of Mosul sent an expedition against him that pursued him into the Mizuri Mountains. ‘Abd al-Salām was captured and executed in Mosul.<sup>31</sup> According to members of the Khawaja Khinno’s family, before he was caught, the Turkish authorities sought to use Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno’s good relations with the Barzānīs in order to convey the government’s good intention towards Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām. It was not the first time that the authorities used the service of religious and community leaders to mediate with their enemies.<sup>32</sup> Aryeh Gabbai described the family history in this matter:

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<sup>30</sup> See below (113–120; 164–166). The benevolence of Barzānī towards the Jews is manifested in the account about Barzānī who paid to bring an animal slaughterer to ensure supply of *kōsher* food for the Jews of Mergasor during the war.

<sup>31</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 479.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, the Chief Rabbi in Turkey acted as intermediary between Great Britain and Turkey before First World War. See Patrick Beesly, *British Naval Intelligence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982): 80.

When my grandfather arrived [at Barzān]...they all came to welcome him, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām [b. ca. 1882], Muḥammad Ṣadīq, Shaikh Aḥmad [b. ca. 1884], Mullā Muṣṭafā [b. 1903], all their children came to welcome my grandfather. He told them that he was coming [as an intermediary] in this matter. ‘No evil is going to happen to you...’<sup>33</sup> They told him: ‘Khawaja Khinno, whatever you are going to cut [i.e., to decree], we are going to wear [to abide by it]. You are a respected man [in our eyes]. If someone else had come, he would not have reached here.’ It was during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It was impossible for him to depart the village of Barzān. They told him: ‘We will build a tabernacle for you.’ They built a big tabernacle for him, and all the Jews [of Barzān] came to eat their meals according to the Jewish tradition [in this tabernacle].

The purpose of the mediation was to create trust between the authorities and the Barzānīs. It is safe to assume that Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno, who had good relations with the Barzānīs, was involved in mediation between the authorities and the Barzānīs. Historically, there were two shaikhs named ‘Abd al-Salām. ‘Abd al-Salām I (the 1st), Ishāq, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī’s grandfather, was eventually hanged by the Turks at Mosul “when he journeyed there to negotiate a settlement after leading a revolt,” in the second half of the 19th century. Although ‘Abd al-Salām the 2nd is the more likely candidate, fitting better into the timeframe, it is possible that the account is an echo of a previous mediation between the authorities and the Barzānīs. ‘Abd al-Salām the 2nd (b. ca. 1882) was the elder brother of Muṣṭafā Barzānī. Like his grandfather and father Muḥammad before him, he led the shaikhly family of the Barzānī tribe. He

resisted some new laws imposed by the Young Turk regime and apparently intrigued with the Russians. He was hung in Mosul in 1914 or, according to another version, 1916.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Into this discussion, Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) inserted details from another clash between the Barzānīs and the government. He said that the authorities told the Barzānīs: “you will have hospitals and schools” and “your houses, which were destroyed during the war, will be built.” Interestingly, these promises were given to Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī in 1943, when the British and Iraqis wanted to quell his rebellion. In March 1945, an amnesty Bill was approved by the Iraqi parliament; it pardoned all Kurdish offenders up to Feb. 1946 (Longrigg 1953: 325–26). It is possible that the information was inserted into this instance because of the similar circumstances in both events, clash between the Barzānīs and the government, when the authorities negotiated a settlement with the Kurds. See below the discussion on schools and hospital for the Kurds: (74–77).

<sup>34</sup> Shmidt 1964: 94–5; Gunter 1992: 5–6; van Bruinessen 1978: 344, 347; Longrigg 1953: 86.

The Turks arrested and hanged him following a mediation attempt that may have restored some trust to the Barzānīs.<sup>35</sup> Apparently, the mediation did not produce the hoped-for result for the Barzānīs, as the authorities eventually hanged their leader. It is not clear how important if at all was the role played by Khawaja Khinno in bringing the two parties together. It is not clear whether his role was central or not, though his family tradition obviously highlighted it. Two other members of the Khawaja Khinno family, Majīd (nephew of David Khawaja Khinno) and Hertzal (son of David), have given another account. According to them, after World War I, the British military representative wished to visit the Barzānī chieftains, but the local police officers were reluctant to join him on the journey to Barzān. According to Majīd Gabbai, the police officers said, “Unless you bring [Eliyahu] Khawaja Khinno, we will not be able to go.” Hertzal Gabbai argued that the “English learned that only my grandfather could help them by mediating with the Barzānīs.” Reportedly, Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno went together with the *Muftī* of Aqra,<sup>36</sup> several police officers and the British representative. His son David joined him in this trip.

These two accounts support the tradition of good relationships between the Barzānīs and the Khawaja Khinno patriarchs. It seems that the officials wanted to use Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno as a mediator with the Barzānī rebels, because reportedly the Barzānīs trusted him. Interestingly enough, members of Khawaja Khinno family argued that Khawaja Khinno managed to make peace between the Turkish Government and the Barzānīs, a statement that is not completely accurate. One of them bragged about it: “He succeeded...and the public was amazed.” Another family member admitted, in retrospect, that the government employed Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno for its own purposes. He had hoped for an honest role in assisting the Barzānīs, and had no idea how the negotiations would end.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> David Khawaja Khinno (b. 1887 or 1894) accompanied his father to Barzān to mediate between the two parties. He reportedly met Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī (b. 1903) and thus began their life-long relationship. When the adults entered the *dīwanxane*, the children and youth played outdoors. There was at least a nine-year age gap between the two boys, making this specific detail more difficult to establish. Susan Meiselas and an interpreter conducted this interview on 10 May 1995, in Tiberius.

<sup>36</sup> The Mufti is an interpreter of Islamic law. He is often consulted on religious matters and has the power to issue a *fatwa* or judgement. The word Mufti is the active form of the arabic *afta*, to judge.

<sup>37</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#8); Fā'ik Gabbai, (I#12); Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai, (I#9&10).

In 1944, Mullā Muṣṭafā concluded a tribal pact with the heads of the Zībarīs, in order to reinforce his leadership among the Kurdish tribes. To seal this pact with a marriage contract, Mullā Muṣṭafā and Shaikh Aḥmad were to marry daughters of the Zībarī tribal leaders.<sup>38</sup> According to members of Khawaja Khinno family,

Once [in 1944], Mullā Muṣṭafā was about to depart from Aqra. Both my uncle and father, David and Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno, accompanied him to say farewell. Before his departure, at the courtyard in front of the police station... he distanced himself from the crowd and consulted with the two brothers... He told David: ‘Ḥājjī Qādir Agha [Zībarī] spoke with me about marrying his sister and Shaikh Maḥmūd Agha [Zībarī] spoke with me about marrying his daughter... What do you think?’<sup>39</sup> David Khawaja Khinno told him: ‘I suggest that the sister of Ḥājjī Qādir Agha be given to Shaikh Aḥmad and you should take the daughter of Maḥmūd Agha.’ Therefore, he [Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī] told him, ‘In that case, prepare gold [jewelry] for her.’<sup>40</sup>

It is difficult to know whether this was a real consultation between Mullā Mustafā Barzānī and Khawaja Khinno or whether it was a polite prelude to the request for gold and jewelry for the fiancées of the Barzānī leaders. Nevertheless, members of Khawaja Khinno household reported, “there was no time to prepare gold for the bride.” Mullā Mustafā wanted the gold immediately, so David Khawaja Khinno sent messengers to bring the personal gold and jewelry of his two daughters, Salīma, Majīd Gabbai’s wife,<sup>41</sup> and Manīra, who has since passed away. Mullā Mustafā Barzānī took their gold and jewelry, put it in a bag, and sent it to the prospective brides. Interestingly, when Barzānī visited the Khawaja Khinno’s household in Tiberius, Israel, thirty years later, in 1973, he brought with him a large golden jewelry for Salīma and handed it to her in an honorable manner.

In 1944, when the patriarch of the family, Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno, died, Mullā Muṣṭafā came in person to Aqra to pay his condolences. This memorable visit demonstrates, in the eyes of the Khawaja Khinno informants, the special bond between the Barzānīs and Khawaja Khinno household. To the amazement of the distinguished Kurds of Aqra,

<sup>38</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 347.

<sup>39</sup> Schmidt 1964: 45.

<sup>40</sup> Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai, (I#9&10).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Barzānī visited them first, before he visited important Shaikhs such as ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʾīl.<sup>42</sup> During this visit, David Khawaja Khinno honored Barzānī with a golden dagger, decorated with three gold buttons, and a pistol.<sup>43</sup> According to Aryeh Gabbai, Barzānī told them: “I am taking the dagger but not the pistol, which you may need. We have [enough] weapons.” On the same occasion, in front of the local tribal chiefs who accompanied him, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī emphasized the bond that existed between him and the Khawaja Khinno family, and the need to continue to protect the family which was dear to him:

You know very well that this family is dear to me... We are regarded one family, in spite of our different religions. I do not want any harm to happen to them.<sup>44</sup>

One sentence of Fāʾik Gabbai seemed to capture the essence of this unique visit. “We felt very unique, we did not [feel] the usual feeling [of inferiority] that Jews would feel towards the Muslims, fearing that some harm may come to us.”<sup>45</sup>

During the years of World War II, there was a continuous shortage of food. As a result, the Iraqi government adopted a centralized policy of monitoring the supply of food and basic goods, known as *tamwīn*

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<sup>42</sup> Aryeh (I#8) and Fāʾik Gabbai (I#12).

<sup>43</sup> Emil Morad (1977: 46) mentioned as well the account of the gold dagger given to Mullā Muṣṭafā by one of the Jews of Aqra. In turn, Barzānī gave the dagger to the son of Khalīl Khoshawī, one of his top men in the 1940s. Khalīl Khoshawī (b. ca. 1890) was the leading agha of Mizuri Bala. His tribal jurisdiction is positioned to the north and northeast of the Barzānī jurisdiction. He aided Barzānī in the attack on Amādiya in 1922 and against Oramar. In return, many of his villages were burnt “by irregulars and by the Raikan who supported the government.” See Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 326. His son, Assad Khoshawī, was commander of the north-western sector and about one-third of the entire Kurdish force in the 1960s (Schmidt 1964: 59). In the 1970s, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī returned this dagger to David Khawaja Khinno, who in turn gave it to Ḥayimke Levakov, an Israeli Mossad agent who was an envoy to Barzānī during the late 1960’s and the early 1970s. On the Israeli involvement in Kurdistan see Tzafir 1999; Sh. Nakdimon, *The hope that collapsed, The Israeli-Kurdish connection 1963–1975*, Tel-Aviv, 1996 (Hebrew); Shmuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle: The Secret relations between Israel-Iran- and the United States*, Tel-Aviv, 1981 (Hebrew); M. Zaken 1991.

<sup>44</sup> Emil Morad (1977: 46–47) mentioned the “meaningful speech” given by Mullā Muṣṭafā on the same occasion. Barzānī ended his speech with the following words: “The Jews are loved by me very much and whoever would hurt them would face misery from me.”

<sup>45</sup> Fāʾik Gabbai, (I#12).

(Arab., appropriation, supply, i.e. the policy of rationing in difficult economic periods). The food was supplied by government agencies to merchants throughout Iraq, and the civilians were able to purchase the goods with coupons provided by the government. The merchants who were authorized to distribute the food and supplies profited from the crisis, and the black market, not surprisingly, flourished. During this time, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī was in exile in Sulaimaniya because the authorities wanted to isolate the most prominent military leader of the Barzānīs from his tribesmen. In 1943, the Kurdish revolt began anew and Mullā Muṣṭafā defied his exile and returned to Barzān to help escalate the revolt. The British who were still at war “were anxious to eliminate” any type of trouble in the Middle East. They advised the Iraqi government to negotiate a settlement with the Kurdish leader. The Minister without portfolio Majīd Muṣṭafā, of Kurdish origin, represented the Iraqi authorities in the talks with Barzānī. He was selected for this assignment mainly because his acquaintance with Barzānī and because he was respected in Kurdish circles.<sup>46</sup> He conceded to the main Kurdish demands, such as official recognition of the Kurdish language. They agreed that the Kurdish region would be “developed and endowed with schools and hospitals.”<sup>47</sup> Muṣṭafā removed unpopular officials and nominated an able Kurdish General and graduate of the British Staff College, Bahā al-Dīn Nūrī, as *mutaṣarrif* of Sulaimaniya. He also arranged for the distribution of barley amongst the Kurdish population. The Prime Minister, Nūrī al-Sa’īd, approved these measures and the accord with the Kurds. Nevertheless, the accord was never implemented, because of the subsequent resignation of the Prime Minister and because the British were anticipating the end of World War II, and had stopped pressing the Iraqis to fulfill the terms of the accord.<sup>48</sup> In July 1944, the cabinet sent up two Kurdish *mutaṣarrifs* to take charge of the *liwā’* of Sulaimaniya and Arbil and sent the Minister of Economics, Tawfīq Wahbī, on a goodwill mission to Kurdistan.<sup>49</sup> Wahbī realized that Barzānī’s power had been increased because of a recent marriage alliance with the tribal chiefs of Zībar. When he left

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<sup>46</sup> McDowall 1996: 290–292.

<sup>47</sup> For the discussion on the mixed information in which the issue of schools and hospital for the Kurds was dealt with (*The Barzānī Tribal Chiefs and the Jews*): 67–72.

<sup>48</sup> Schmidt 1964: 64, 99–103; Longrigg 1953: 325–26.

<sup>49</sup> He became an expert on the Kurds in the Iraqi administration. See Wahbī (1965, 1966).

the region, Barzānī “helped himself to Government grain stores, looted police posts . . . and [demanded] a loan for himself.”<sup>50</sup> Some of these details correspond with details narrated by members of the Khawaja Khinno’s household. Members of the Khawaja Khinno reported that the Iraqi government adopted several measures in order to appease Barzānī. They promised clemency to the Barzānī rebels and promised to build schools and clinics and to employ Kurds in public positions such as construction labor, in order to convey hope and improve the standard of living in the Kurdish region.

At that time, David Khawaja Khinno, who was a prominent merchant in Aqra, was authorized by the government to distribute food rations to the Barzānīs in exchange for coupons. Nevertheless, David Khawaja Khinno reportedly gave the 50,000 food rations to the Barzānī’s and immediately afterwards filed a complaint at the police against Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, claiming that Barzānī armed men demanded 5,000 Iraqi dinars and fifty suits for his men. “If not, we shall kill you now,” they had threatened him. Apparently, David filed the complaint against Barzānī in order to protect himself against future accusations of collaboration with him. According to Majīd Gabbai, he had coordinated and fabricated the complaint with Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī. David Khawaja Khinno had planned that in any future accusations against him of collaborating with Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, he would be able to display this official complaint, claiming that under threat of the gun he had handed over the 50,000 food-rations as well as money and suits of clothes. Indeed, David Khawaja Khinno sold part of the food in the black market and gave the money to Mullā Muṣṭafā. In this manner, David helped the tribal Kurds headed by Barzānī who had been his agha for many years. Nevertheless, there seems to be a piece missing for the completion of the puzzle. Why did David Khawaja Khinno file a complaint against Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī at the police, with the premeditated knowledge of Barzānī?

Several possible reasons may explain the fabrication of the robbery. First, there may have been a provision for transferring the rations to the Barzānīs, such as a final government approval, which the Khawaja Khinno family and the Barzānīs circumvented. An informant from the Khawaja Khinno household has hinted at the possibility of a trap

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<sup>50</sup> Longrigg 1953: 326.

being set for the Barzānīs. According to Majīd Gabbai, his father was asked to mediate between the government and the Barzānīs because of his close relations with the tribal leaders. David Khawaja Khinno's son argued that his father understood his role as a mediator in bringing the Iraqis and Kurds together. He did not understand that "there was a trap being set for the Kurds," as was indicated in the renouncing of the accord and in the resuming the warfare against the Barzānīs.<sup>51</sup>

the government relied upon my father . . . knowing that with his help contact could be established with the Kurds . . . Therefore, they promised to give the Kurds 50,000 units of food, to be delivered through my father.

The government may have planned to push the Kurdish rebels into a deal, or to capture the Barzānī men upon their arrival to collect the promised 50,000 food rations from Aqra. David Khawaja Khinno's collusion with Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī regarding the robbery may have thwarted the government scheme. The most feasible explanation is that David helped Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī against the government policy. Instead of giving the 50,000 food rations in exchange for coupons, he may have sold part of the food products in the black market. He may have therefore fabricated the complaint filed to the police in order to strengthen his claim that the armed Barzānī rebels had robbed him.

Following the cessation of war and Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī's exile to Russia, David Khawaja Khinno was tried in the military court in Aqra.<sup>52</sup> The president of the court was 'Abdallāh Na'sānī, who was an acquaintance of the Khawaja Khinno family. Al-Na'sānī, a military court judge, represents the most vivid example by far of an elite or establishment personality who was a frequent visitor at the Khawaja Khinno's *dīwanxane* during the late 1930s and the early 1940s.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, in later reports, al-Na'sānī was 'tainted' by anti-Jewish verdicts and attitudes in his court.<sup>54</sup> According to members of Khawaja Khinno

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<sup>51</sup> Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai, (I#9&10); Fā'ik Gabbai, (I#12); Aryeh Gabbai, (I#8). These apologetic words correspond with the account discussed in the section entitled "Mediation between the Government and the Barzānīs," in relation to the suggestion that the government may have "used" Khawaja Khinno for its own purposes while he hoped to play an honest role in assisting the Barzānīs.

<sup>52</sup> On the relations between Russia and the Kurds, see Howell 1965.

<sup>53</sup> Na'sānī may have been a judge at civil court of law who chaired trials during the martial law period in which many Jews were accused of a variety of 'Zionist' activities.

<sup>54</sup> Among the many trials in which Na'sānī was the judge, the most famous was the trial in early 1948 of Shafiq Addas, the wealthy Jewish merchant, who was falsely

household, this court had sentenced three men to death sentence. The respect and hospitality afforded the judge may have borne fruit in the aftermath of the Kurdish rebellion, when he became the presiding judge of the court, which in 1947 tried David Khawaja Khinno. The court charged David of collaboration with Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī and of selling on his behalf 50,000 food-rations, which he received within the framework of the *tamwīn* policy, and of helping Barzānī to buy weapons with this money. The prosecution further used Mullā Muṣṭafā's personal visit to Khawaja Khinno's house and the gift of the gold dagger to Barzānī. According to Majīd Gabbai, David argued in court:

First, about [Barzānī's visit to] my house and the gift [of the gold dagger], it occurred when my father died and Mullā Muṣṭafā came to pay his condolences... About the trade: the government gave me these [50,000 notes of food] rations, as it did with other merchants. As a merchant, I gave them their rations [per coupons]. [The prosecutor stated] 'No! You sold them!' [David,] 'No. I did not sell them... [David then explained,] Besides, how could I oppose him? I even filed a complaint against him with the police, that his [Barzānī's] men demanded money and merchandise, to lend it to him, so I filed a police complaint against him, but they [the police] did nothing about it.

Finally, the judge acquitted him, according to members of the family, despite the apparent evidence that Khawaja Khinno helped Mullā Muṣṭafā during the rebellion against the government. The family's good relations with the judge may have helped. They indicate that even shortly before the trial, the judge "came to our house, went to the bar and took some *arāq* (a spirit distilled from raisins) to drink."

The special relations between the Barzānī tribal chiefs and the patriarchs of the family of Khawaja Khinno continued even after the exodus of Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī to Russia (1947) and the mass migration of the Jews to the State of Israel (1951–2). Following the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad at the end of 1946, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī went into exile in Russia.<sup>55</sup> His wife and son Mas'ūd (b. 16 August 1946), who was an infant, returned to Iraq, to the home of her father, Maḥmūd Agha Zībarī, one of the prominent chieftains of the Zībarī tribe. "From time to time my father would receive a letter from Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī," said Aryeh Gabbai (I#8), son of Yitzḥak: These

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charged with betrayal. See Shohet 1981: 205–9; Kazzaz 1991: 275–8; Longrigg 1953: 354; Shina 1955: 138–40; Bar-Moshe 1977: 140–41.

<sup>55</sup> See Koohi-Kamali 1997.

letters would arrive by messengers who would arrive late in the day to avoid contact with the police. In these letters Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī asked Khawaja Khinno “to pay attention to his little child Ma’sūd.” From time to time, Yitzḥak Gabbai had reportedly sent gifts, sweets, and nice clothes to the child Mas’ūd Barzānī.<sup>56</sup> Aryeh Gabbai recalls that Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī’s wife knitted two pairs of socks for his late father, Yitzḥak, which he has kept to this day.

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<sup>56</sup> Mas’ūd Barzānī was born in 16 August 1946 in Mahabad. When Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī marched to the former USSR, in 1947, Mas’ūd with the rest of his family members and Barzānī tribesmen returned to Iraqī Kurdistan. When the Jews of Aqra immigrated to Israel, Mas’ūd Barzānī was about 5 years old. It was therefore logical that the tribal leader Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī had asked his Jewish friend to pay heed to his little child that left behind with his family.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DOHUK

Dohuk is situated about 50 miles north northwest of Mosul. It was the main town in the *qadā'*, which bears its name. In 1820, Rich described it as a small town of 300 houses, which was the principal site of the Doski tribe, together with eighty other villages.<sup>1</sup> The missionary Henry Aaron Stern (1851) commented on Dohuk's mixed population and noted that it included Jewish residents, adding that the *kiahya*, or mayor of the village, was a Chaldean Catholic.<sup>2</sup> In 1859, Rabbi Yeḥiel found there two *minyans* of Jews.<sup>3</sup> The Muslims and Christians formed about a hundred households.<sup>4</sup> In 1929, its settled population was about 3,500 inhabitants, with Kurds forming the majority. Out of the 550 households, 65 were Christian and 30 were Jewish. A sizeable number of Nestorian refugees previously from Tiḡārī and a lesser number of Chaldeans from the Turkish districts of Merga and Bothan migrated into Dohuk in the aftermath of World War I. In 1929, the *qadā'* of Dohuk had a mixed population of 29,858, composed mostly of Muslim Kurds (18,307), Christians 5,784 (19.3%), Muslim Arabs 2,068, Yezīdis 2,870, and Jews 829 (2.7%).<sup>5</sup> In comparison to other Kurdish urban centers, Dohuk has a relatively large Yezīdi population. According to a tradition submitted by Sasson Naḥum (I#31), Dohuk was initially called *Dohuk-e Dasinya*,<sup>6</sup> i.e. Dohuk of the Yezīdis, but following the massacre of the Yezīdis, Dohuk was deserted and Muslims, Christians and Jews began to settle in the town.

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<sup>1</sup> The C. J. Rich Manuscripts, the British Library. MSS.Eur.A.14: 31–2.

<sup>2</sup> Stern 1854: 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Minyan* (Heb.), ten adult Jewish males, the minimum number required for congregational worship. Two *minyans* are therefore twenty Jewish males.

<sup>4</sup> Ya'ari 1942: 45–6.

<sup>5</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 57–58.

<sup>6</sup> Probably a reference to the Daseni tribe in the Dohuk district, reported by Evliya Çelebi in the seventeenth century, regarding a strong and militant Yezīdi tribe, J. S. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezīdis* 1993: 50–51. The Dasinis faced eight Ottoman expeditions against them between 1767 and 1809, the echoes of which may be heard in the above report (McDowall 1996: 42).

A. *Saʿīd Agha Doski, His Sons and the Jews of Dohuk*

The Jews of Dohuk had managed to establish associations with other prominent aghas, notably with the Doski leaders of their region. Immediately after the war, the British listed the main tribe and personalities in Dohuk district: the Doski tribe (Rashīd Agha, Saʿīd Agha and Sharīf Agha); Mizuri-Zair and Berwari-Zair.<sup>7</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31) from Dohuk (b. ca., 1901) remembered Ḥassan Agha, the main agha of Dohuk at the beginning of the 20th century who during World War I sided with Russia against Turkey. Ḥassan Agha fled to Russia with a tribal force. He never returned and Saʿīd Agha his cousin replaced him. Saʿīd Agha was the main tribal ruler of the Doskis (in NA., Dostiknaye) whose jurisdiction stretched from around Dohuk up to the banks of the Khabor River. He was originally from Geramaweh. According to British military reports, Saʿīd Beg (ca. 1890–1947) of Geramaweh near Dohuk was the only one in his tribe “of any influence;” the others were “reduced in power and influence,” being little more than village *mukhtārs*.<sup>8</sup> The British described Saʿīd Agha as “not a particularly strong character, but sensible.” They appreciated his assistance to the government in the operation of 1922 in the Zībar valley and appreciated that he “remained staunch” during “the trouble in the Dohuk district” in 1925, during the visit of the Frontier Commission, when most of the Doski aghas adopted an anti-government stance.<sup>9</sup> After the independence of Iraq, he was elected *mandūb*, or Member of Parliament, in 1938, and twice again in 1944 and 1947.<sup>10</sup> This report mentions three sons of Saʿīd Agha. His son Ismāʿīl committed suicide, allegedly because he had supported the Kurdish national movement led by Barzānī and stood against his father’s pro-British and pro-government policy. Another alleged reason for this suicide was that he was passionately in love with the daughter of Hazim Beg of Zakho, but his father wanted him to marry a daughter of a tribal agha. Another son, Dewali, succeeded Saʿīd Agha. Jewish informants agreed that both Dewali and his father used similar tribal methods of extortion and collection of their traditional dues. The Jewish informants describe Dewali as a tribal agha less tactful and refined than his father, Saʿīd

<sup>7</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 478.

<sup>8</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 167, 232.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>10</sup> Mir Basri, *Aʿlām al-Kurd* (London: Riad Books, 1991): 195.

Agha. Another son of Sa'īd Agha was Rashīd Agha, about whom a telling account is recorded below.

Hakham Shalom Shimon (1884–1977), the *Hakham Bashi* of Dohuk, assumed his father's role until his immigration to Palestine in 1936 “at the height of his career.”<sup>11</sup> Another leader who immigrated to Palestine in 1936 was Daniel b. Ḥakham Naḥum (1890–1960s). Reportedly, Sa'īd Agha Doski, the tribal leader of Dohuk and the surrounding areas, recognized both Daniel and Ḥakham Shalom as “suitable leaders on behalf of the community.”<sup>12</sup> According to Daniel's son, Sa'īd Agha referred affectionately to his father as “Daniko.”<sup>13</sup> His father was the head of large family, a fearless religious man, esteemed by the Muslim neighbors who appreciated devout persons.<sup>14</sup> Ḥakham Shalom and Daniel Naḥum would often visit Sa'īd Agha “for consultation.”<sup>15</sup> Quarrels and feuds were frequent both in tribal surroundings as well as in urban centers in Kurdistan. If the Jews of Dohuk were involved in quarrels, they “would not go to [appeal to] the government, but rather to Sa'īd Agha,” the supreme tribal authority of the region.<sup>16</sup> In violent conflicts, the assailant might consider appealing to Sa'īd Agha to use his influence to prevent his rival from filing an official complaint against him. One would “take a box of tea or sugar, or one or two [Iraqī] dinars, as much as one was able.” In such a case, Sa'īd Agha may have summoned the rival in question and asked him to make peace with his attacker. Eventually, if this person ignored Sa'īd Agha's request to make peace with his rival, he would cause troubles for him. Sa'īd Agha mediated between Jews, Christians and Muslims. He is reported to have played a major role as a tribal and official leader in Dohuk and its environs. He would make peace between rivals, and they would pay him the appropriate amount of money for his services. Yoseph Gamlieli described Sa'īd Agha as being someone capable of having persons released from trial. Reportedly he would sit “with the

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Avidani, “Some of my Memories of Ḥakham Shalom Shimon and the Jewish Community of Dohuk,” *Hithadshut* 2 (1975): 54–5 (Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> Naḥum b. Daniel Dohuki Danieli, “Daniel b. Ḥakham Naḥum Dohuki [Daniel the son of Ḥakham Naḥum Dohuki],” *Hithadshut* 2 (1975): 91–92 (Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> On names and hypocoristic forms, see Yona Sabar, “First names, Nicknames, and Family Names among the Jews of Kurdistan,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New series, vol. 65 (1974): 43–51.

<sup>14</sup> Muslim Kurds expressed respect towards elderly or distinguished Jews. See (“Abd al-Karīm Agha, Patron of the Jews”): 36–43

<sup>15</sup> Naḥum b. Daniel Dohuki Danieli 1975: 91.

<sup>16</sup> Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13).

judge and arrange the release of those accused.” Even if someone had committed murder, “he could turn the guilty into not guilty.” It happened “hundred of times. Not only once,” argued Gamlieli in confidence. This statement relates directly to the murderers of seven Jews in Sandur in 1941.<sup>17</sup> Sa’id Agha rescued them all from imprisonment. According to Yoseph Gamlieli,

They had been put in prison for only ten days. Afterwards, he went and released them all. Nobody could stand against him! He was the government!

1. *Aghatusa or Srixusa—The Agha’s rightful Dues or Corruption?*

The above title—*aghatusa* or *srixusa*<sup>18</sup>—poses a question as to whether the agha’s dues were rightfully his or merely exploitation of the dependent subject by the strong tribal leader. One of the customary privileges of the tribal agha was that of taking a commission or portion from every business transaction in his jurisdiction, or in fact, any amount of money that exchanged hands. The following account reveals that the agha even took a commission from compensation paid by the assailant to his victim. Once, Yoseph Gamlieli was sitting in the teahouse when Yona Kundarchi, a shoemaker originally from Mosul, pulled away his chair as a joke, causing him to fall. Gamlieli took a piece of wood from the fireplace and hit Yona Kundarchi. The police jailed him and he was later released on bail paid by his father. At the trial, the judge sentenced Gamlieli to pay his victim three Iraqi dinars as compensation. Eventually, when Yoseph Gamlieli and Yona Kundarchi (Tur., a shoemaker) were reconciled, Gamlieli began harassing Yona, to force him to return his three dinars, but Yona refused to reimburse him. Three or four days later, Sa’id Agha summoned Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13).

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<sup>17</sup> For more details, see part III, the section entitled “Massacre in Sandur.”

<sup>18</sup> The concept of *aghatusa* (or *aghawusa*, in Neo-Aramaic) relates to the agha’s share, based upon the patronage granted by the chieftain to his subjects, while *srixusa* means (in NA) corruption.

I was heavily drunk. It was Saturday night, after all.<sup>19</sup> I went to his house...we exchanged blessings... Those who were seated were Sa'īd Agha, Hājji Malo, Maḥammadē Melā Ṭāhā and ten of the town dignitaries...Hājji Malo asked Sa'īd Agha: 'Who is this young person who just came?' because I was very well dressed, even Sa'īd Agha and his father were not dressed as well as I was... He told him: 'This is the son of the *Hakham Bashi* of Dohuk...' [Hājji Malo] told him: 'Sa'īd, do not hurt him...he looks like a fine person...' Sa'īd Agha told me 'Isef! I said *Ez xolam*.' He asked me, 'Why you are not you not leaving Yona Kundarchi in peace? Is it not enough that you have hit him badly and cut his ear...? [You should know that] on the day that you hurt him [some persons] asked me to take revenge on you, but for your father's sake, because you are the son of *Hakham Bashi*, I did not want to hurt you. [So] now you [dare] to ask him for the three dinars back... You practically killed him [by hitting him]. You cut his ear! What business do you have asking for those three dinars back?' I told him, 'my house, my vineyards, my store, and my soul are all for you.' I will not take the three dinars from him...'

After several months, Sa'īd Agha summoned Yoseph Gamlieli again. Once again, it was a Saturday night and Gamlieli was heavily drunk once again. Sa'īd Agha asked Gamlieli:

'Isef, what did you do with those three dinars?' I told him: 'I relinquished them as you said. I have no interest in them.' He told me, 'No, no, no. I ask you to take the three dinars from him. Tomorrow morning [my servant] Abo will join you, and you must take back the three dinars from Yona Kundarchi.'

Yoseph Gamlieli reported that Sa'īd Agha had instructed his servant Abo that if Yona Kundarchi refused to return the three dinars, he should hit him with a *gopala* and bring him to Sa'īd Agha. Yoseph Gamlieli informed his father of Sa'īd Agha's request and his father went to Yona Kundarchi's family. He asked them to prepare three dinars. "Otherwise your son is doomed to be killed," he warned. The Kundarchi family went to Sa'īd Agha and settled the matter with him. The next morning, Sa'īd Agha summoned Yoseph Gamlieli. Sa'īd Agha was sitting in the teahouse, playing *tāvla* (Arab., backgammon) with Sayyid b. Melā Ṭāhā. In their presence, Sa'īd Agha told Gamlieli:

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<sup>19</sup> On Saturdays and holidays, many Jewish males in Kurdistan would sit about in groups, either indoors, on the rooftops, or outdoors, drinking alcohol and eating food, singing and rejoicing, indulging in what Brauer (1993: 270) termed 'a drinking party in the company of their friends.'

‘Isef, he [Yona Kundarchi] brought me the three dinars, the son of a dog. Here, take it.’ He threw it on the table... Sayyid Melā Tāhā told me: ‘Take it and put it in your pocket,’ [illustrating with his hand] putting his hand in his pocket... I told him [speaking quietly], *Ez xolam*, I will not take any of these three dinars...’ He told me, ‘No... You must take [at least] some of this money...’ I told him: ‘By God, I will not take [from you] even a cigarette...’ Meanwhile, Sayyid Melā Tāhā was eating himself up [i.e. excitedly], gesticulating to me without attracting the attention of Sa’id Agha, ‘Take it, and put it in your pocket...’

In the end, out of courtesy, Gamlieli took one cigarette from Sa’id Agha and went on his way. In this manner, Sa’id Agha received the three dinars that Gamlieli had paid to Yona Kundarchi as compensation for hitting him.

a) *Shopping at the Expense of a Jewish Merchant*

Ten days after the incident of the three dinars, Sa’id Agha came to the market surrounded by his servants. He sat in Yoseph Gamlieli’s store and drank tea and the following discussion reportedly took place:

Sa’id Agha: “Isef!”

Yoseph Gamlieli: “Ez xolam.”

Sa’id Agha: “I want you to give me six...”

Gamlieli: “Yes, Ez xolam.”

Sa’id Agha: “...six pairs of shoes. I want you to buy them for me.”

Gamlieli: “Yes, Ez xolam.”

Sa’id Agha: “I also want from you six pairs of *shale-shapik*<sup>20</sup> [Kurdish men’s trousers and vest] that you should give to [my servant] Shivan...”

Gamlieli: “Yes, Ez xolam...”

Sa’id Agha: “About the money, I will come to you later and give you the money.”

Gamlieli: “Yes, Ez xolam.”

Sa’id Agha went on his way and Yoseph Gamlieli gave Shivan money to pay for the items requested by Sa’id Agha. He subsequently packed them all in a neat package and sent it with Shivan. The male servant had just stepped out of the store when Sibho, the female servant of Sa’id Agha’s wife, Amīna, came to the store. She asked Gamlieli

to keep the store open in the evening to enable the lady to come and choose linen for two dresses... I tried [to resist], telling her that I was supposed to be traveling to Mosul tonight, but she said, ‘You cannot

<sup>20</sup> The Kurdish spelling is “şal û şapik.”

leave...’ I had no choice... Before she came, four or five servants came to the market and sent everybody away so she would not be disturbed. Amīna came to the market that evening wearing a veil that covered her face so that nobody would recognize [see] her [face].

Inside the store, Amīna lifted her *çadir* (Kur., veil) and exchanged blessings with Gamlieli. The following discussion took place between Amīna and Gamlieli.

[Amīna said:] I heard that you have a beautiful fabric called ‘harawara’ for dresses... Show me all your selection and I shall choose fabric for two dresses... I told her, ‘The store is in front of you... whatever you wish [you may take].’ Amīna remained in my store for an hour until she chose two kinds of fabric. She took fabric in twelve *dar’e* [NA. forearms, length size] instead of the eight needed [for two dresses]. She subsequently said, ‘You know, Isef, I did not bring money. You should come, or send someone. I have an excellent tobacco [at home], there is nothing like it in the whole world. I shall weigh [the equivalent of] whatever you deserve in tobacco...’ I said, ‘Fine, go. May God be with you.’ Amīna went on her way and I thought, ‘Who would go for tobacco? How can I go to her house? I need to close the store and take a companion with me to go to her, and then the tobacco is *qaçax* [Kur., illegal]. Then if I bring this tobacco home and am caught with it, my house will be demolished... If one kilogram were found at someone’s house, he would be put in prison.’

In Iraq, there was a government monopoly on the trade of tobacco. The same applied to *arāq*. It was unlawful to buy or sell unauthorized *arāq*; the person who possessed it would be arrested and the merchandise itself would be confiscated. In conclusion, Sa’id Agha shopped at Gamlieli’s store and in the market at Gamlieli’s expense; his wife Amīna also shopped at his store, taking fabric for dresses, at Gamlieli’s expense. Amīna indeed offered to pay in tobacco, which she had at her house, but Yoseph Gamlieli realized that he could not take the risk of taking illegal tobacco.

#### b) *A Petty Dispute*

Sasson Naḥum (I#31) remembered a petty dispute between Sa’id Agha and a Jew from Dohuk. The serious manner in which Naḥum communicated the following account is in itself a reflection of the relationship between Sa’id Agha and the Jewish inhabitants of Dohuk, as well as an indication of Sa’id Agha’s temperament. One day, Sa’id Agha clashed with a Jew named Moshe, a friend of Sasson Naḥum, a merchant and storeowner in the market. Sa’id Agha bought *shale* (Kurdish

men's trousers) from Moshe, which he wanted to send to one of his shepherds. Sa'īd Agha, however, left the *shale* in one of the stores in the market. It was the month of *Ramaḍān* and during the fast, "no one could [dare] talking to Sa'īd Agha." Later on, Sa'īd Agha encountered Moshe, who was carrying *shale* in his hand. He thought that this was his *shale*. According to Sasson, the following conversation took place [in parenthesis, the informant's comments]:

Sa'īd Agha: "Moshe, this is my *shale*!"

Moshe: "This is not yours." [Sasson Naḥum: "He was not afraid of him; we had a lot of respect in the government."]

Sa'īd Agha [insisted]: "Moshe, I am telling you again, this [*shale*] is mine!"

Moshe [insisted likewise]: "No. This [*shale*] is not yours."

Sa'īd Agha: "I am telling you, this is mine, I know."

Moshe: "Agha [I will bet with you] if this *shale* is yours, I shall give you 200 dinars, but if it is not your *shale*, you must give me 300 dinars."

Sa'īd Agha cursed Moshe and said, "I shall give you 300 dinars and you shall give me 200 dinars? [Based on this ratio] Are you more important than me?"

Sa'īd Agha was about to hit Moshe with his walking stick, but his cousin Rashīd Agha stopped him, according to Sasson Naḥum. Sa'īd Agha left the site of the argument and entered Sasson Naḥum's store with Rashīd Agha and two or three companions. "We calmed him down," said Sasson Naḥum. Moshe was also angry and sat in his store, refusing to come together with Sa'īd Agha, as the attendants tried to reconcile the two. Eventually, the lost *shale* was found in another store in the market and it was proven that Moshe was right and that Sa'īd Agha had been hasty in accusing Moshe of keeping his *shale*.

### c) *Exploitation*

Dewali, Sa'īd Agha's son, was installed in his father's position as the chief agha of the Doskis in 1947. He was the leader of the Doski for a short but decisive period of the last four years in which the Jews of Dohuk and the surrounding lived in Kurdistan, under the Doski jurisdiction, before they immigrated to Israel. The Jews considered Dewali worse than Sa'īd Agha. Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) argued that he was almost beaten to death by Dewali, as the following account indicates. On one occasion, some gold jewelry was stolen from the home of a Jew named Shimon Khate. He blamed another Jew, Gamlieli argued, for stealing his wife's jewels and asked Dewali's help in solving this

matter and restoring the stolen jewelries.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, this Jew was Gamlieli himself. The accusations were sharp and the atmosphere heated, resulting in fights in public places including a Dohuk teahouse. On the evening of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (or *Sukkot*), Dewali summoned Yoseph Gamlieli's father, the *Hakham Bashi* of the community, and some other distinguished Jews.<sup>22</sup>

It later transpired that a local Jew named Hezko b. Ello had incited Dewali against the Jews, telling him that on the Day of Atonement, which had taken place a few days earlier, the Jews had cursed Dewali in the synagogue. It became clear later that Shimon Khate, whose wife's jewelry had been stolen, had given Dewali 50 Iraqi dinars "to hit us and take the money," referring to the proceeds from the stolen jewelry. Dewali asked Gamlieli's father: "I heard that you cursed me on the holy Day of Atonement." The *Hakham Bashi* told him:

We did not curse... [Indeed] we pray on the Day of Atonement that God will soften the hearts of the local leaders... [We pray for God] to put mercy in their hearts... that they will treat the Jews properly... We do not pray that they will become enemies of the Jews... We ask God to put compassion in their hearts, to guard the Jews... If it is deplorable, tell us...

Dewali said, "No, it is not a deplorable, but why did Hezko tell me this?" Hezko must have motivated Dewali against the Jews who supposedly cursed him on the holy Day of Atonement. The *Hakham Bashi* told him "It is not true, let Hezko come [before us]." He also asked that a prayer book be brought and Dewali interrogated the Jewish men in attendance, asking them if they cursed him or not. Dewali then intimated to David Biri, one of the leaders of the Jewish community:

'These jewels of Shimon Khate must have been stolen by Isef b. Yamin' [i.e., Yoseph Gamlieli]. David Biri told him: *Ez xolam*, I have never heard that Yoseph b. Yamin stole these jewels, or ever stole anything in his life. He is a good man, a good person.' Dewali insisted: 'He stole it...'

In this dispute, Dewali tried to find out whether Yoseph Gamlieli was indeed the thief of jewels of another Jew, as suspected by the owner.

<sup>21</sup> The informant did not disclose in his introduction, that he would be one of the suspects, as we shall see below.

<sup>22</sup> Among them Shmuel b. David Salmān, David Biri, Hārūn Jinni, Murdakh Koppo (the father of Yamin), Soso b. Hai, Hezko b. Ello and Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) the informant.

Following this verbal dispute, Dewali stopped talking and began hitting Gamlieli.

He caught me and pulled me by the hand...he took me outdoors [and] using the *gopala* of Murdakh Koppo began hitting me on my back ten times...like this [Yoseph Gamlieli demonstrates]. He caught my hand and told me to return the jewelry...I told him: 'I did not take it. You may do whatever you wish. If I had the jewelry, I would have returned it right away...I have no clue...' Dewali resumed hitting me until he broke the *gopala* on my back...I escaped to a nearby wood where there were large trees...God gave me strength, I took a piece of wood and handed it to him, 'Take it, and kill me.' He looked at me and said to the others [in a tone of blame] 'You put one man into my hands to kill for nothing.'

This event altered the course of the investigation and Dewali then caught Ḥezko b. Ello, who had incited him against the Jews and turned his anger and frustration against him, hitting and cursing him. The identity of the thief was never discovered and neither was the jewelry. The unresolved accusations of the Jews against others reached Dewali. If Dewali had found the stolen jewelry, he most probably would have received a considerable share of it. One of the Jews took advantage of the conflict and spread false accusations against the Chief Rabbi, the father of one of the suspects, saying that the Jews cursed Dewali in the synagogue on the holiest day of the year. The allegations were disputed and the matter was closed, but unpleasant feelings remained within the fragile Jewish community along with disgust at the behavior of Dewali Sa'īd Agha. Gamlieli, who visited Zakho frequently, made a voluntarily comparison between Dewali and Hazim Beg of Zakho. Compared with Dewali and his father, he argued, "Hazim Beg was like an angel."<sup>23</sup>

Dewali was a greedy agha. His pattern of behavior was similar to that of his father, Sa'īd Agha, but his style was different, somewhat harsher and less considerate. Like his father, he made sure to receive commissions of all transactions that took place under his jurisdiction. Every year, the Jews would give him a sum of money to be paid to "his servants" for "guarding the Jews," and on receipt of that the agha would tell his servants "not to rob or murder" the Jews. This concept of *aghatusa* (or *aghawusa*), the agha's share, was linked with the concept of patronage. As soon as Yoseph Gamlieli had sold his assets before

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<sup>23</sup> On Hazim Beg, see *Personalities* 1923: 43.

immigrating to Israel, Dewali demanded his commission. Dewali demanded commissions amounting to one-fifth of the total sum of any financial transaction made in his jurisdiction. When asked whether this tax or commission taken by the agha was *aghawusa*, i.e., taxes related to the agha's patronage, Gamlieli stated emphatically, "No. *Srixusa*," (N.A., corruption). Sitting in his spacious home in a village near Jerusalem, looking back on his life in Kurdistan, Gamlieli, a wealthy merchant whose father was the *mukhtār* and the *Hakham Bashi* of Dohuk Jewish community, expressed his discontent:

The Jews would always bow in honor of their agha when meeting him... Indeed, the agha would not harm the Jews, but would take from them a twenty percent commission on their financial transactions.

Gamlieli expressed annoyance that "the Jews would always say "*Ez xolam, Ez bani*" (Kur. lit., 'I am your servant, at your service') to their aghas. Indeed, this expression was a typical response, used also among tribal Kurds, but when Jews said it to their aghas, in Gamlieli's eyes, it expressed not only politeness or compliance, but also submission of the Jews to their aghas. Looking back upon his life in Kurdistan, Gamlieli argued, "The Jews were always 'broken,'" meaning subservient, submissive, and lowly, reflected in the high dues the agha levied against them.

#### d) *Paying Dewali's Fine*

In some aspects, Dewali was different from his father, Sa'īd Agha, who remained "staunch," or loyal, in the eyes of the British, when elements of the Doski tribe became uncontrollable because of the Turkish intrigue against Great Britain in 1925.<sup>24</sup> Dewali was arrested by the police for inciting tribal feuds and for plotting against the government. According to Jewish informants, there was a fierce feud between Sa'īd Agha of the Doski and Salīmê Mişte. It seemed that Salīm Muştafā (Salīmê Mişte), son of either Mişte (Muştafā Besifke) or Sa'īd Agha of the Mizuri tribe who lived in the village of Basifke two hours' away, murdered Roger

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<sup>24</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 167. In the dividing of the old Ottoman Empire after World War I, the new country of Iraq was formed from the Ottoman *vilayets* of Baghdad, Basra, and also Mosul with its Kurds and its oil fields. The disposition of Mosul was the cause of much skirmishing among the powers involved, but the British who were to administer the new Iraq prevailed, and in 1925 it was finally attached to Iraq.

Cumberland, a missionary resident of Dohuk.<sup>25</sup> Salîmê Mişte became a fugitive. Reportedly, Sa'îd Agha Doski sent his men to Besifke to try to kill Mişte, with no success. In 1947, Salîmê Mişte of Besifke killed Sa'îd Agha Doski on the stairs of the *mutaşarrîfyya* (the *mutaşarrîf*'s seat) in Mosul. Salîmê Mişte was sentenced to death and then Dewali, Sa'îd Agha's son, was arrested for taking revenge on the residents of Besifke.<sup>26</sup> In order to receive clemency, he had to surrender four hundred guns and pay a fine of five hundred dinars to the authorities. This sum of money was collected from Jews, Muslims and Christians in his jurisdiction.<sup>27</sup> Previously, already during the British rule, the government in Iraq was willing to consider providing amnesty to rebellious aghas upon three major conditions: a guarantee to cease hostility, the payment of a considerable fine and the surrender of the number of rifles believed to be in the possession of the agha in question and his men.<sup>28</sup>

e) *Claiming the Cost of a Futile Amulet*

Rashîd Agha was reportedly a younger son of Sa'îd Agha. According to Yoseph Gamlieli, Rashîd Agha used to deal with *kalbusa* [NA, "matters of dogs"] or dirty matters, a description that was based on the following experience:

My brother in-law Me'allim Yitzhak used to make amulets. This is how he made his living. One day, several Kurds caught him. They told him, 'You made us an amulet [in order] to convert this Jewish female [to Islam], but she did not convert, we did not succeed in converting her. Give us back the eight [Iraqi] dinars that we paid you [for the amulet]' One of these Kurds was the son of Hasso Dezarki, a [tribal] agha. They had threatened to kill him if he did not return the eight dinars...

Some Muslim Kurds used to purchase amulets from Jewish makers of talismans. The religious diversity of the society, the traditional society, the relative tolerance of the public and their inclination towards mystical beliefs and practices, facilitated this event about the amulet.

<sup>25</sup> More on Roger Cumberland and the circumstances of his murder see below ("Kafir Kuşt—The Killing of Infidels"): 195–97.

<sup>26</sup> More on this rivalry, see below (95–96; 195–97; 207–212).

<sup>27</sup> Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) and Sasson Naḥum (I#31).

<sup>28</sup> This instance was similar to that of Jamîl Agha Şindî, who collected the money to pay his fine from wealthy Jews and Christians in the Zakho area (see above: 44–51). On the submission of Jamîl agha Şindî, see the Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 167, 289.

There seemed to be a common tradition in urban centers between Jews and Muslims, notably in a realm that borders their religious beliefs, the realm of superstition.<sup>29</sup>

Following the harsh dispute between Gamlieli's brother-in-law and his Muslim complainants, Gamlieli sent his brother-in-law to a Jewish friend in Halabja, in order to protect him. Me'allim Yitzhak became the cantor, slaughterer and circumciser of the Jewish community in Halabja, but his wife, Gamlieli's sister, remained in Dohuk. A group of Kurds would often come to her house to demand the eight dinars, cursing her, threatening to hit her or take her belongings. Eventually, Me'allim Yitzhak sent a letter to Dohuk, asking Gamlieli to bring his wife to Halabja. Gamlieli agreed. He hired a car.

I began to load the car with her belongings, when the son of Ḥasso Dezarki [together] with Rashīd Agha, came to me and said: 'You will not leave and we will not allow this car to leave [unless you pay us the money].' I begged them [telling them], 'This is not the concern of this woman... this is the concern of the Me'allim. [Indeed], she is my sister, but she has no money. I am giving her my own money in order to allow her to leave.' They said: 'No. We shall not let her leave.' He put his hands on the belongings, which were on the car and wanted to take them off the car. I told him to take off his hands [saying]: 'If you do not take your hands off, I will kill you. These are not the belongings of the Me'allim. I am going to him; perhaps I will succeed in getting your money from him. If [you do not allow me to leave], either you kill me, or I shall kill you,' I told Rashīd Agha.

Yoseph Gamlieli tried to convince Rashīd Agha to allow his sister to depart. He threatened to complain to his father, Sa'īd Agha, for trying "to prevent this poor woman from leaving." In the meantime, a crowd gathered around and some of them pleaded with them to let the car go. "In the end, I took her belongings to Halabja," Gamlieli concluded. Rashīd Agha, apparently, did not give up easily. Two months later, Yoseph Gamlieli saw him with another man, "tall like Asmodeus [chief demon], "his feet on the ground and his head reaching the sky" entering the gate of his house.

I was half-naked. My wife was pregnant at the time. As he approached, he shouted from the gate: 'Isef, quickly, I want my eight dinars.' I told

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<sup>29</sup> Nehemiah Hoja (I#21) of Zakho likewise argued that Muslims used to buy amulets made by Jewish rabbis.

him, ‘Wait a minute, I am naked. Let me go inside and bring you the eight dinars.’ I entered the house, dressed in my *shale-shapik*, and took a pistol and ran out to the gate. I told him with my pistol in my hand: ‘Rashīd, do you want my money or not? I [already] told you [that] I have no money and I cannot give you the money. Do you [still] want the money?’ He said, ‘Hasso, open the gate, or else [we are doomed].’ The gate was closed behind these two, ‘Go open the gate,’ Rashīd told the other one, ‘let us leave.’ He ran to the gate and opened it.

Following this incident, Gamlieli finally went to Sa‘īd Agha to complain about Rashīd Agha. “Your son has not left me alone for [the last] three-four months, trying to take the money by force,” he said. Sa‘īd Agha told him, “Isef, go home. I will go home and put out his eyes.” Four aghas were present at the teahouse when Yoseph Gamlieli spoke with Sa‘īd Agha. David Biri, one of the leaders of Dohuk Jewish community, later reprimanded Gamlieli, telling him that he should not have talked with Sa‘īd Agha about this matter in public while in the teahouse.<sup>30</sup> In this instance, David Biri was right. For a Jew to complain in public to a tribal agha about his son’s conduct was not completely proper behavior, according to tribal codes. Apparently, this discussion had an impact on Sa‘īd Agha. Gamlieli heard from Miḥe, “who loved me very much,” that his brother Hasso Dezarki and Sa‘īd Agha had warned Rashīd Agha in the following warning: “if you go once again and trouble Isef, we will give you trouble as well.”

The Kurds who felt cheated appealed for Rashīd Agha’s help, but he was not able to retrieve the money and resorted to the use of threats and force. Because he did not have the authority of a tribal agha, the Jew defeated him. The attitudes of Dewali and Rashīd Agha towards Jews of Dohuk were similar to their father, though different in style. It is clear from the last incident when Sa‘īd Agha, stood behind Yoseph Gamlieli, and prevented his own son Rashīd Agha from extorting money from him.

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<sup>30</sup> Teahouses in the Middle East are a man’s home away from home. They are gathering places where mostly men sit around, drink tea, play backgammon or other games, and discuss social, political, or cultural affairs with their friends. This was not the right place to complain to Sa‘īd Agha about his son’s conduct.

### B. *Shaikh ‘Abdallāh Barifkanī*

Shaikh ‘Abdallāh Barifkanī,<sup>31</sup> one of the religious leaders in the region of Dohuk, had special relations with the Jews and had a special approach to Judaism.<sup>32</sup> Reportedly, he became interested in the *Torah*, part of which was translated for him by the local rabbi during the mid 1920s and early 1930s. Inquisitiveness or openness by Kurdish shaikhs towards other faiths was noted in Kurdistan during the 20th century.<sup>33</sup> Shabbo Shimon, a Jewish servant of ‘Abdallāh Shaikh, reported that one-day, to his surprise,

I met Ḥakham Shalom [Shimoni, the local chief rabbi] in the Shaikh’s neighborhood. I told him, ‘I have never seen you here. What are you doing here?’ Ḥakham Shalom said, ‘My presence here is for the benefit of the Jews....’

When Ḥakham Shalom entered the shaikh’s house, Shabbo realized that he felt comfortable there. The shaikh asked for tea, coffee, and butter to be served to Ḥakham Shalom.<sup>34</sup> Shabbo later learned that Ḥakham Shalom had translated portions of the *Torah* into Arabic and taught shaikh ‘Abdallāh Barifkanī until his immigration to Palestine in 1936. ‘‘The shaikh became a lover of Jews,’’ according to Shabbo Shimon, and he grieved after the emigration of Ḥakham Shalom, since he could no longer continue his studies.<sup>35</sup>

Members of the Jewish community argued that Shaikh ‘Abdallāh cared for the Jews of Dohuk and cited two events to confirm this assertion. During the Assyrian crisis of 1933, a decree was allegedly made ‘‘to eliminate all the Jews,’’ but Shaikh ‘Abdallah appealed to the governor that no evil should occur to the Jews. Likewise, during the crisis of Rashīd Alī in 1941, when the Jews of Dohuk were asked to pay 6,000 gold pounds, Shaikh ‘Abdallāh did not agree that the Jews

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<sup>31</sup> The original spelling in the Hebrew article was ‘‘Abdallāh al-Rafkanī,’’ but since it was edited and printed in *Hithadshut*, which is not known for its careful editing, the correct name should be ‘Abdallāh al-Barifkanī.

<sup>32</sup> Shabbatai Alfiyeh, ‘‘The Lover of Israel Ḥakham Shalom Shimoni,’’ *Hithadshut* 6 (1990): 142 (Hebrew).

<sup>33</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 312–313.

<sup>34</sup> One should note the thoughtfulness of Muslim Kurds towards Jewish guests while taking into consideration the Jewish dietary law.

<sup>35</sup> Shabbo Shimon, 1981: 30.

should pay.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in 1933, during the Assyrian affairs, there was no known threat against the Jews, though members of the Jewish minority express anxiety during this crisis. Shaikh ‘Abdallāh might have appeased the minds of the Jews in 1933 and might have helped them in other ways in 1941. The Jews of Dohuk reportedly paid bribe to Sa‘īd Agha Doski to control the tribesmen and discourage them from taking advantage of the political crisis. Eventually, the Jews of Dohuk survived this crisis because Rashīd Alī’s regime did not endure long.<sup>37</sup>

The following account, told by Shabbo Shimon, reflects a particular relationship between Shaikh ‘Abdallāh and the Jews of Dohuk. Reportedly, Shaikh ‘Abdallāh ailing son wished to be reconciled with his uncles, whom he had been estranged from because a feud. Around the same time, Shaikh ‘Abdallāh asked the Jewish community, through his servant Shabbo Shimon, to pray for his son’s health. Two months later, the reconciliation took place, with the participation of several uncles, Shaikh Nūrī,<sup>38</sup> Shaikh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tūshī and Shaikh Muḥammad Memani and an aunt, Miriam Khātun. The monk Yūsuf and the *imām* of Dohuk also participated. On this occasion, reportedly, Shaikh ‘Abdallāh discussed his quarrel with the *imām* of Dohuk two months earlier because he had “incited” the public against the Jews. In the discussion that followed, Shaikh ‘Abdallāh entered into a polemic discussion with the *imām* about “the pillars of Islam.” Shaikh ‘Abdallāh

promised to pay the *imām* 100 dinars if he would provide answers within one month, but if not, he should stop his incitement against the Jews, and not accuse me if I order his execution.

This must have been a heated discussion. One of the participants asked Shaikh ‘Abdallāh why he asked the *imām* this question about the pillars of Islam and the shaikh asked his Jewish servant, Shabbo Shimon, to bring him the “black pages,” the *Tōrah*, which had been translated into Arabic by Ḥakham Shalom. He then asked his servant to show these pages to Shaikh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tūshī in order that he might understand his roots. Shaikh ‘Abdallāh said that he was proud of his roots. “God gave us power and we need to use this power to protect

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. More on Rashīd Alī and his regime see part IV under the section “Effects of the *Farhud* Pogroms:” pp. 301–310.

<sup>37</sup> On Dohuk during Rashīd Alī’s coup, see pp. 307–309.

<sup>38</sup> Shaikh Nūrī of Barifkan near Dohuk was one of the three important religious personalities of Bahdīnan in the first half of the 20th century.

the Jews, who possess a unique virtue,” he said. He shared with those present two tales attributed to the Jewish rabbis, Ḥakham Shalom and Ḥakham Moshe Manoah, who succeeded in causing rain to fall during a drought and managed to stop two hyenas from eating corpses in the Muslim cemetery.<sup>39</sup> They did it through prayers, purifications and the use of an amulet. For Shaikh ‘Abdallāh, this provided further proof of the superiority of the Jewish people.<sup>40</sup>

### C. *The Feud between Ḥājī Malo and Shaikh Nūrī*

Tribal Kurdish society was characterized by feuds.<sup>41</sup> Although Jews were considered non-tribal subjects and protégés of their masters, on a certain level they were drawn into tribal Kurdish society. This can be seen in the following account, as Jews were involved, usually against their will, in tribal feuds.

One of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community during the first half of the 20th century was David Biri, originally from the village of Biri, whose two sons married the daughters of David Salmān, a wealthy Jewish merchant. Biri gradually became a wealthy merchant in his own right thanks to his lumber business, in which he employed mountain residents to cut down and transport trees.<sup>42</sup> He was appointed treasurer of the synagogue in Dohuk and developed relations with both aghas and the local authorities. Biri was known for his close ties with Alī b. Ḥājī Malo and he maintained his prominence until the day that Ḥājī Malo was killed by Shaikh Nūrī’s son, Sa’īd, beginning a feud between the two tribes. Reportedly, Ḥājī Malo’s rivals wanted to kill Biri as well, but he maintained his guard and “God saved him,” according to the Jews of Dohuk.<sup>43</sup> It was unusual for a Jew to be involved in a

<sup>39</sup> On the practice and prayers during periods of drought, see Ben-Yaacob 1981: 34, 42, 93, 135. Also, see the responsa literature of Rabbi Yoseph Hayim, *Rav-Pe’alim*, Yore-De’a, mark 23.

<sup>40</sup> Shabbo Shimon 1981: 31; Shabbatai Alfiyeh, “The Lover of Israel Ḥakham Shalom Shimoni,” *Hithadshut* 6 (1990): 142 (Hebrew); Daniel Avidani, “Some of my Memories” etc.: 54–5 (Hebrew); Shimon Attar, “The City of Dohuk,” *Hithadshut* 5 (1985): 26–8 (Hebrew).

<sup>41</sup> Fieldhouse 2002:130.

<sup>42</sup> Many Jewish merchants of Zakho used to trade in lumber trees, see below, pp. 220–224.

<sup>43</sup> On murder of Jews by rival tribesmen of their patron aghas, see for instance how the Shaikh of Barzān, according to a local missionary, raided some villages of

feud between two rival aghas, because the Jews were not an integral part of tribal society but rather dependent subjects. Nevertheless, Biri's close relations with Alī b. Ḥājjī Malo made him a target in the eyes of his rival, Shaikh Nūrī.<sup>44</sup> Jewish informants from Dohuk argued that Biri provided information for Ḥājjī Malo about Shaikh Nūrī of Barifkan. Whether true or not, David Biri was viewed as someone who sided completely with his tribal agha against his rival. He also earned his livelihood by way of the tribesmen of Ḥājjī Malo, as they shopped and “spent their earnings” at his Dohuk stores. Reportedly, the feud between the two tribes continued when the Jews immigrated to Israel in 1951.<sup>45</sup>

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Nerwa, because the Nerwa-Raikan tribesmen refused to help him in a planned attack on Châl and Tkhuma (Assyrians). The Barzanis raided 3 Syrian and 6 Kurdish villages, plundering them, and killing 6 Jews. AM, no. 95, April 1914: 1259. See also “Murder of Jews in the tribal setting—the Tribal Response”: 195–213.

<sup>44</sup> Based on Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13); Sasson Nahum (I#31); Ṣāliḥ Raḥamim (I#37). Both Hārūn Judo (I#16) and Daniel Barashi (I#4) have faced problems because of close association with tribal aghas.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, in 2001, eight Kurdish Members of Parliament of the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) have been replaced. Two of them carried the names Selim Ḥājjī Malo and Dr. Qeyis Dewali, probably descendents of the two chieftains discussed in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AMADIYA

#### *A. Amadiya in the Previous Centuries*

Amadiya is situated 65 miles northeast of Mosul. The town is built on an oval rocky plateau, which in its higher area has cliffs fifty to eighty feet high, while the lower area is sharp and strewn by boulder.<sup>1</sup> Amadiya was the capital of the Bahdīnan province, named after the ruling Kurdish family. Significantly, Amadiya was once one of the famed Jewish centers in central Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup> According to Rich (1820) and David D'Beth Hillel (1826), the population of Amadiya was composed of 200 Jewish households and 1000 Muslim households, representing 8,000 Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Before the mid-nineteenth century, Amadiya underwent a change that affected the city and its Jewish community. In 1828, Mīr Muḥammad of Rawanduz also known as Mīrê Kor (Kur., the Blind Mīr) laid siege to the town and conquered it. He plundered Amadiya and mistreated in particular its Jewish inhabitants, an important segment of the population who “were treated with merciless cruelty and oppression.”<sup>4</sup> Many Jews were forced to migrate and the less fortunate were subjected to his tyranny.<sup>5</sup> Until 1838, the Blind Mīr succeeded in subjugating other urban centers with Jewish populations, such as Rania, Koi, Arbil, Aqra and Zakho, penetrating as far as Jezira and Mardin. It is unknown whether Jews were treated as badly in these centers as in Amadiya.

In 1838, the Turkish army captured Mīr Muḥammad and subsequently executed him. This was one of the last accounts of semi-independent

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<sup>1</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 52.

<sup>2</sup> On David al-Ro'i and the various legends and traditions regarding the establishment of the Jewish community of Amadiya, see Ben-Yaacob 1981: 73–5 and Brauer 1993: 57–60.

<sup>3</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 153; Fischel 1939: 227. Bahdīnan is an old province in what is modern day northern Iraq. It included the towns of Dohuk, Zakho and Amadiya. Consult Longrigg 1925: 37, 42, 159.

<sup>4</sup> On the Blind Agha, see van Bruinessen 1978: 71, 157, 221, 291, 442.

<sup>5</sup> Stern 1854: 225.

entities ruled by Kurdish tribal leaders. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Turkish authorities administered this and similar districts more or less directly.<sup>6</sup> Following the removal of the Blind Agha, the Pasha of Mosul ruled Amadiya with an iron fist. The condition of the Jews improved little, but they were obliged to carry water and stones from the plain up to the citadel, and to do every form of degrading work, which impeded their industry. Within a short time, this once flourishing community was reduced to a community of one hundred families.<sup>7</sup> The economic conditions of the Jews deteriorated following the increasing political insecurity.<sup>8</sup> Asahel Grant, who visited Amadiya in 1839, soon after the fall of the Blind Agha, found it almost deserted because of the wars that followed the invasion of the Kurds of Rawanduz. he found that only 250 of the 1,000 houses were inhabited. The rest of the houses and the market were destroyed.<sup>9</sup> In 1850, George Percy Badger had encountered a delegation of Amadiya Jews en route to the Pasha in Mosul, to file a complaint concerning the “money-extortions” by the *muttasalim*, the governor of the town. Jews and Christians alike suffered under the tyranny of the *muttasalims*; they desired to migrate, but were forced to remain in town.<sup>10</sup> Around that time, the missionary Henry Aaron Stern who visited Amadiya accompanied the two local rabbis to the synagogue.<sup>11</sup> He was permitted to speak to the Jews in the synagogue and recorded the following report:

The next day the governor called on me, and, without giving or returning my *salaam*, rudely inquired what business I had [had] with the Jews the preceding evening. I stated to him, in a few words, the object of my intercourse, which immediately removed all suspicion from his gloomy mind and with eyes gleaming with fire, he said, ‘your work is a meritorious one. I hope all the Jews will believe in Christ; for it is better that they acknowledge one great prophet, than deny both.’<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Hay 1921: 191.

<sup>7</sup> Stern 1854: 225.

<sup>8</sup> Eli Binyamin, “The Formation of the Jewish Community in Amadiya,” *Hithadshut* 5 (1985): 25 (Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, London and New York: John Murray. repr., Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1841: 44–46.

<sup>10</sup> J. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals, with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842–1844 and a Late Visit to those Countries in 1850*. 2 vols. London, 1852: 198–99. This kind of prohibition, exercised as well by tribal Kurdish aghas, indicates the lack of autonomy among the Kurdistan Jews.

<sup>11</sup> Stern 1854: 225–6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 227. It is not clear if Stern had informed the rabbis about his missionary labor before his speech in the synagogue. My guess is that the rabbis did not have a

The situation in Amadiya continued to worsen. In 1871, during another war over the city, the Muslims attacked the Jewish community; they robbed the two synagogues and took the *Torah* scroll ornaments.<sup>13</sup> No wonder that in 1881, the number of Jewish families reported to be living in Amadiya had been reduced to only 50.<sup>14</sup> In 1888, the number of Jews reported in the city was 600.<sup>15</sup> According to an official report in 1930, of the 31,746 residents in the district of Amadiya, only 812 were Jewish.<sup>16</sup> A British military report from 1929 listed the population of Amadiya as about 3,000. The report noted the former importance of the town and suspected further deterioration in its status. At that time, there was a shortage of water in Amadiya; the Amadiya district scarcely supplied enough for the needs of the inhabitants. Supplies were supplemented by surplus water from the Dohuk area.<sup>17</sup> In 1945, the number of Jews reported in the city was 400,<sup>18</sup> suggesting a decline of approximately half of the Jewish population within fifteen years, though the official census of 1947 listed 303 Jews in Amadiya.

### B. *Relations with Local Officials and Aghas*

During the first half of the 20th century, Shabbatai Barashi, a wealthy Jewish merchant and a leader of the Jewish community was well connected with the local authorities. He was generous and used to host government officials and tribal aghas, who would eat and drink at his expense. Among his guests were the *mu'āwin*, the head of the police, the *qāmmaqām* and the local judge. The Jews of Amadiya described him as a clever person who had influenced the public “either by way

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clue about his missionary labor, and Jewish origin and knowledge of Hebrew and the Bible may have influenced to allow him to address the congregation. The content of his address may have caused some criticism and it was brought to the attention of the governor.

<sup>13</sup> See the Historical Setting above (mainly pp. 12–13), which narrates instances of robbing the *Torah* Scrolls of Arbil Jewish community. Ben-Yaacob 1981: 79; Ben-Zvi 1951: 9. Following the war, the Jewish community sent two envoys on a fund-raising tour for the refurbishing of the synagogue.

<sup>14</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia: 586.

<sup>15</sup> Morris Cohen, *On the Jews in Persian and Turkish Kurdistan*. Anglo Jewish Association Report (London), 1888–89: 42–45.

<sup>16</sup> Braver 1935: 248; 1944: 269.

<sup>17</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9): 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Yaacob 1981: 81.

of his pocket or by way of drinking,” to quote the popular proverb that described his *modus operandi*. Whatever these officials would ask from him, he would supply. In return, when he needed the help of his associates, they would help him, though no specific accounts were given in this regard.<sup>19</sup> Residents of Amadiya argued that Shabbatai Barashi’s connections with the local officials helped him in the internal, communal conflict with one of the local rabbis, Ḥakham Alwan Avidani.<sup>20</sup> Barashi had supported Avidani’s appointment as *raʿīs tāʾīfā* of the Jewish community, a salaried position paid for by the government. In 1936, a conflict arose within the community, resulting in a division into two congregations. Shabbatai Barashi took charge of the upper synagogue while Ḥakham Alwan Avidani managed the lower synagogue.

The main leaders of Amadiya were the tribal Kurdish aghas. Both Muslims and Jews would seek the help of the agha, because “the agha was better than the government” and “whatever he said, the government would come to terms with it.”<sup>21</sup> Immediately after World War I, the British recognized the main tribes and personalities in the Amadiya district: Rashīd Beg and Mūsā Beg of the Berwari-Bala; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Agha of Nerwa-Raikan and Suto Agha of Qashuri and Oramari.<sup>22</sup> Amadiya had two main aghas in the first half of the 20th century: Ḥājī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf b. Ḥājī ʿAbd al-Azīz and Ḥājī Shaʿbān Agha. Jewish sources provided several accounts of these two aghas and their sons.

### 1. Ḥājī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Agha and His Sons

The British described Ḥājī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf as a successful governor of Amadiya. “Though his rule may be somewhat rough and arbitrary, the country is a rough one,” explained a British report.<sup>23</sup> Ḥājī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf was exiled to Mosul in 1919, after being allegedly plotting against the British regime, ending his appointment as mayor of Amadiya. He was subsequently allowed to return. During the repatriation of the Assyrian refugees formerly from Turkey in Iraq, following World War I, Amadiya was incorporated into the Dohuk district as a *nāhiya* (smaller district) and ʿAbd al-Laṭīf was appointed *mudīr* of the *nāhiya* (governor of a province).

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4); Tzemah Barashi (I#5); Abraham Amadi Manowah, (I#32).

<sup>20</sup> Alwan Avidani 1972.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

<sup>22</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 478.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5: 277.

He was deprived of government authority along with the appointment of *qāmmaqām*, when the status of Amadiya was enhanced to that of a *qadā'*. In December 1920, upon the British evacuation of Amadiya, Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf was appointed *hakem*, or governor, of Amadiya, "a position which he filled with dexterity and success."

The Jews of Amadiya regarded Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf Agha as the patron of all Jews, Christians and Muslims. Jewish sources argued, "Nobody was able to make *ta'adda*" (NA, hostility, harassment) against his Jewish protégés, as he prevented the harassment of Jews by local inhabitants and government officials alike.<sup>24</sup> Once, when Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf was *hakem* of Amadiya (from 1920 onwards) he cooperated with Shaikh Muḥammad Zībarī, his brother-in-law, by enlisting his armed tribesmen to join in the uprising in Amadiya. They dug a tunnel under the wall surrounding Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf's house. On the eve of the Jewish New Year (September 1922), war broke out between the Kurdish rebels and the police force in the *qishle*.<sup>25</sup> The following morning, the Jews of Amadiya did not attend the New Year service in the synagogue, as they feared they would become scapegoats in the war. They gathered in groups inside their homes armed with axes "saying that if they come to kill us, we as well shall kill as many as we can." In the middle of the night, an auxiliary force operated by Levies of the Assyrian Tkhuma tribe broke into Amadiya and aided the government forces in pushing back the Kurdish rebels.<sup>26</sup> In September 1922, Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf almost succeeded in seizing Amadiya in a rebellious act, but he failed and fled to Barzān where he stayed with Shaikh Aḥmad to whom he was related by his sister's marriage to Shaikh 'Abd al-Salām Barzānī. The British military report remarked on 'Abd al-Laṭīf's "mental balance," which "at times, seems doubtful" and his incapability "of abstaining from intrigue."<sup>27</sup>

Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf had four sons: Ṣāliḥê Safyaye, who succeeded his father as Chief agha, Izzāt and Alī, who were officers in the Iraqī army and Aḥmad.<sup>28</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4) was friendly with the aghas of Amadiya. Like Hārūn Judo of Zakho. See above, 49–51. He may have enjoyed some

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

<sup>25</sup> Kurdish rebels in Iraq often attacked police stations in which military equipment and ammunition were stored and which were government symbol.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

<sup>27</sup> Personalities 1923: 3.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

benefits, but he was also exposed to harm by rival tribesmen because of his friendliness with his agha. Barashi acknowledged his relations with Şâlihê Safyaye, the son of Hājji ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Agha and his companion Mişte Tāhir Agha. He explained it with a divine reference, though there was a practical dimension too:

They loved me . . . I used to bring fun and joyfulness [into their celebrations, as a dancer], but also provided them . . . with desired goods free of charge. [For instance], if the agha wanted poultry he would send his servant with money; I would send his servant with the poultry and his money back. So they used to love me.

During World War II, Şâlihê Safyaye and Mişte Tāhir Agha joined the rebels of Mullā Muştafā with the blessings of Hājji ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, whose daughter was married to one of the sons of Shaikh Aḥmad Barzānī.<sup>29</sup> According to Daniel Barashi,

Mullā Muştafā came to Amadiya and Zakho and managed to recruit 500 fighters from Amadiya and the region with the help of Şâlihê Safyaye and Mişte . . . For a while, the fighters waited for the orders in the orchards outside Amadiya. The government sent auxiliary forces from Baghdad. For fifteen days, negotiations took place between the authorities and the rebels by way of the *qāimmaqām* and the *qādī*, but the rebels did not listen to them. Şâlihê Safyaye and Mişte would send their servant Maḥmadê Palaḥ (Fallāḥ?), whose mother was a Christian,<sup>30</sup> with a list of shopping and I would buy it and send them poultry and the like . . . When the rebellion almost broke out . . . they summoned me to join Mullā Muştafā . . . They sent Tāhir Rasho, a servant of Şâlihê Safyaye, who came on Friday evening when I was strolling with my friends after dinner. He took me to the corner and whispered that Şâlihê Safyaye wanted me to join them. I told Tāhir Rasho, I could help you in all aspects, but not in joining the war. I am Jewish, how can I eat during the war, as there is no kosher food there.<sup>31</sup>

It was Friday night. Daniel Barashi (I#4) told Tāhir Rasho that he could not depart on Saturday and that he could not leave his wife behind to go fighting.

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<sup>29</sup> This was the second marriage contract between the families, the first one being the marriage of Hājji ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s sister to Shaikh ‘Abd al-Salām.

<sup>30</sup> Fallāḥ (Arab., farmer, villager) became one of the common names for Christians in the tribal Kurdish society.

<sup>31</sup> The dietary law and the lack of *kosher* meat was a common and quite genuine excuse used by Jews in reference to the compulsory military service, as discussed in part IV under the section “Evading Military Service”: 276–284.

Izzāt, the younger brother of Şâlihê Safyaye, was an officer in the Iraqî army. According to Barashi, Izzāt led three army units, declaring that he was going to teach Barzânî a lesson. When his units neared Barzânî, he sent a messenger to Mullā Muşţafâ, telling him exactly where his units were positioned and what orders they were given. Mullā Muşţafâ prepared his forces “not leaving them a chance to escape.” Izzāt and two other officers deserted their units, joined Mullā Mustafâ, and then crossed the border into Persia. Soon afterwards, a British officer “who had a limp” went to the border region and suggested that Izzāt and the other rebels surrender (in Arab., *dakhala*) to the authorities, promising them clemency. Izzāt, Şalâh, Tâhir, and Aḥmad Ḥājjî ‘Abd al-Laṭîf agreed and were taken to Arbil. They were transferred to the control of the Iraqî army. They asked Izzāt if he knew his fate. He said, “Only one shot, but then take my body to [be buried in] Amadiya.”<sup>32</sup> His brother Alî remained loyal to the government. The other rebels remained in prison, among them Şâlihê Safyaye, Salîmê Mistê and Aḥmad Ḥājjî ‘Abd al-Laṭîf, and the government confiscated their estates and villages.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. *Hājjî Sha‘bān and His Sons*

A British military report in 1929 described Ḥājjî Sha‘bān Agha (b. ca. 1885) as the leader of one of the two factions in Amadiya; the other one being Ḥājjî ‘Abd al-Laṭîf. Ḥājjî Sha‘bān Agha “took a leading part in the Amadiya rising” and was anti-British. Until the end of British rule, he was considered an outlaw who took refuge in communities across the border such as Jezira and in Tkhuma.<sup>34</sup> According to Daniel Barashi (I#4) Ḥājjî Sha‘bān Agha was involved in the murder of at least two [indeed three] British officers.<sup>35</sup> He recalls that Ḥājjî Sha‘bān had sent Tâhirê Ḥamazani to ‘Abd al-Agha Mizuri. They planned to attack the British officers and the Assyrian Levies who had been stationed in the Amadiya *qishle*.<sup>36</sup> Several police officers cooperated with the rebels.

<sup>32</sup> According to Longrigg (1953: 337), four Kurdish officers who had fought with Mullā Muşţafâ and a few ex-ringleaders were sentenced to death.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

<sup>34</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9): 336; *Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932*, vol. 5: 278.

<sup>35</sup> In July 1919, Captain D. Willey, Captain H. MacDonald and Sergeant R. Troup were killed during this uprising. For more details, see Hay 1921: 366.

<sup>36</sup> On the Assyrian Levies see the resourceful web site arranged by Gabriel “Gaby”

After the end of World War I, there was a war between Ḥājji Sha'bān Agha and the British rule... Ḥājji Sha'bān Agha devised a plan together with Ṭāhirê Ḥamzani, from the village of Ḥamza near Bamarne... [Abdal Agha Mizori was also involved]... They planned to kill two British officers... One night they killed them in the *qishle*. They killed them, took the money, and ran away to Res Amadiya. The next day the British army, the Indian units, came to Amadiya. The Jews were fearful and the male adults sent the women and the children to villages to be sheltered there.<sup>37</sup>

Daniel Barashi and his family had stayed for a month in the village Spindare-Maza. Following the end of British rule, Ḥājji Sha'bān remained loyal to the Iraqi and British government and opposed the Kurdish revolt. In return, the authorities granted him villages previously belonging to the rebels Ṣālihê Safyaye the son of Ḥājji 'Abd al-Laṭīf and Miṣṭe Ṭāhir Agha, the aghas of Daniel Barashi. Barashi felt that he would encounter troubles from Ḥājji Sha'bān Agha, because he was loyal to Ṣālihê Ṣafyaye and Salimê Miṣṭe. When Aḥmad Agha and Sa'īd Agha, Ḥājji Sha'bān's sons, summoned Daniel Barashi, he was disheartened that he told his wife Miriam,

I am lost... these aghas have no mercy on their own [persons]... let alone on a Jew... I told my wife goodbye. This is my last day. I kissed her and went to them. I entered the house. They were all sitting. I bent [bowed] from fear. Sit, Daniko [Daniel's nickname], they said, 'Do you know why we summoned you?' I said, 'No.' They said, 'We need you to go with our servants to several villages that belonged to Ṣālihê Safyaye and Salimê Miṣṭe, such as Kurku Banabaye, Dirgini and Barche. They [the sons of Ḥājji Sha'bān Agha] asked me to supervise the collection of all their due crops, store them in storehouses, and seal them... and to give the farmers their rightful yields. They offered me a house to reside in, promising to send a *ḥakham* [meaning a slaughterer] who would provide me with kosher meat in the new residence.'<sup>38</sup>

Apparently, they had interrogated Mahmādê Palah [Falah?] and found out "that Daniko<sup>39</sup> was summoned to join the rebels, but he refused."

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Kiwarkis, <http://www.assyrianlevies.com/index.html>, and see J. Gilbert Browne, *The Iraq Levies 1915–1932*, London: The Royal United Service Institution, 1932.

<sup>37</sup> On the revolt in Amadiya, see for instance Fieldhouse 2002; van Bruinessen 1978; Edmonds 1957 and Othman 'Alī, *British Policy and the Kurdish question in Iraq, 1918–1932*. Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> About the division of the yield between the agha, the landowner, and the cultivators of the land, see part III, on "rural economy" and "the question of dues and the regulation of taxes," pp. 233–240.

<sup>39</sup> Daniko, Daniel's affectionate name.

The sons of Hājji Sha‘bān Agha were encouraged by this information and offered him this job. However, Barashi did not wish to take the task. He said,

Agha, I do not know, I have never done such tasks in my life. This is not my job. A lone Jew cannot sit there [among the Muslims]. I am asking you to release me.

The wives of Aḥmad Agha and Sa‘īd Agha added to Barashi’s weak excuses, telling their husbands, “This is not the job of Daniko, his job is to dance for us with a sword,” as he was a celebrated dancer. Eventually, they let him go.

In difficult times, the Jewish community would appeal for help from Hājji Sha‘bān Agha and his sons, Aḥmad Agha and Sa‘īd Agha. In one instance, around 1939 or 1940, the burden of the *istiḥlāk* (Arab., customs duties), charged by the customs officers was heavy that the Jewish merchants contemplated to stop doing business under these conditions. The community gathered and took their keys to Hājji Sha‘bān, threatening to depart the town. They said, “We cannot stay...there are poor persons, beggars [among us],” Daniel Barashi (I#4) recalled. He explained that it was a cold, difficult winter and the public found it hard to transport enough wood for heating, which was one of the main sources of income for Jews in this area. Hājji Sha‘bān Agha took his *gopala*, and asked his servant to summon Daniel Barashi. When Barashi came to his house near the old *qishle*, a crowd of Jews surrounded Hājji Sha‘bān. According to Barashi, Hājji Sha‘bān said:

If a police officer or a customs officer would come to the Jewish neighborhood, take a stick and give it to him [hit him]. Do not worry. If you will not do it, I will give you a bullet, I will kill you. I told him, *Bale* [‘Yes’], agha. From there, we went to the *qishle*...Hājji *Sha‘bān* went to the door of the *qāmmaqām*, straight to the door, without asking. The *qāmmaqām* stood up...he was old but strong. He told him, I do not want this *māl-mudīr* [‘the head of finance department’] to stay here. [He should leave the town] within three days...The *qāmmaqām* held him and asked him to relax...telling him, whatever you say is holy...Then we returned to the Jewish neighborhood.

According to Barashi, following this event, no custom officer would dare enter the Jewish neighborhood. Before this event, said Barashi, “When we slaughtered a bull or a calf, we would have to pay three-*dinar*.” After this event, the officers took much less than in the past. In this instance, the agha helped the Jewish merchants in the face of the

authorities, having the customs duties reduced and forcing the removal of the official in charge.

Urban aghas were sometimes dragged into petty conflicts within the tribal Kurdish society, as in the following incident. Daniel Barashi (I#4) participated once in a *ḥinnā*<sup>40</sup> celebration. He became drunk and involved in a fight with two Assyrian truck drivers, Marcus and Yoseph. These two have been employees of a wealthy merchant named Khālid Ḥājji Be-Duhi who became angry with Barashi for hitting his drivers. Following this incident, Barashi dared not go to the market where Khālid Ḥājji Be-Duhi and his cousin Sayyid owned stores and a coffeehouse. When Aḥmad Agha and Saʿīd Agha (sons of Ḥājji Shaḥbān) heard about this petty dispute, they planned to settle an old account with Khālid Ḥājji Be-Duhi. One Saturday night, they dispatched their servant to ask Barashi to go to the coffeehouse, promising him protection. Barashi tried to decline this request, but the servant insisted that they were waiting for him there. They had long been in a conflict with Khālid and they wanted to take this opportunity to settle the matter with him. Barashi went to the coffeehouse and sat outside under the shed.

As I approached, they looked at me. I was walking slowly, slowly. I grabbed a chair and sat down and they served me tea. They were sensitive, the bastards. They had brains. They realized [that this was a trap], because I had not come for a long time. [This is why they did nothing] and I returned home.

This account confirms, that even in such a petty conflict, the protection given to the Jews by their urban aghas deterred their enemies from harming them.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ḥinnā* is a reddish cosmetic obtained from the leaves of the henna plant. Traditionally, before the wedding, a *ḥinnā* celebration takes place, during which the women color their hair in this color.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SULAIMANIYA

Sulaimaniya (in Kur., Sulaimani) is located in the northeast of Iraqi Kurdistan, 221 miles from Baghdad. It was founded in 1784 as the capital of the Baban emirate and was named after Sulaimān Pasha who ruled Baghdad at that time.<sup>1</sup> In 1851, as part of the struggle to subdue the (semi) independent principalities in the Ottoman Empire, the Baban emirate was annexed to Mosul. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Sulaimaniya became the Kurdish cultural and intellectual center.<sup>2</sup>

Various reports estimate the number of Jews in Sulaimaniya as being between 100 and 200 families in the 19th century; the number of Muslims was approximately 2,000 households or families.<sup>3</sup> About 1,500 Jews were reported to be living in Sulaimaniya in 1906; a hundred Jewish households were reported in 1917. A decline of approximately fifty percent in the population is in accordance with the pattern of migration of the Jews during wars.<sup>4</sup> Five hundred Jewish families were reported there a few years later. In 1930, only nine hundred Aramaic-speaking Jews lived in the Sulaimaniya district, out of 47,510 inhabitants. The rebellion of Shaikh Maḥmud in the early 1920s caused the emigration of Jews from Sulaimaniya.<sup>5</sup> In 1947, three hundred Jewish families (or 1,517 Jews) were reported to be living there. With the exception of one family, they all immigrated to Israel in 1951–52.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs by Commander James Felix Jones*, in Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government. No. 43, New Series: 207.

<sup>2</sup> On Sulaimaniya, see Edmonds (1957: 79–96, 116–124) and Marjorie Vernon 1928.

<sup>3</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 120.

<sup>4</sup> See the section entitled “Rural Kurdistan as a Safe haven,” pp. 276–280.

<sup>5</sup> Bar-Amon 1981: 103.

<sup>6</sup> For the number of the Jews in Sulaimaniya, see Ben-Yaacob 1981: 111–13 (Hebrew).

A. *The Establishment of Sulaimaniya from the Jews' Perspective*

According to a Jewish tradition, Sulaimān Pasha, who established Sulaimaniya in 1784 said, “a town with no Jews is not considered a proper town,” conveying his ancestors’ belief that God extends his blessings to wherever the Jewish people reside. Accordingly, the founders of the city sent a mission to the town of Qaradagh, that had a thriving Jewish community, and to several of the surrounding villages. The Jews of Qaradagh allegedly dispatched to Sulaimaniya its first group of Jewish inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> This tradition serves to illustrate that the relationships between the chieftains who built the town and the Jewish community were based on beneficial terms offered to the Jews who first settled in Sulaimaniya. However, the migration of the Qaradaghli to the city may have been because of a large fire that burned their town. The Jews recount that their ancestors were granted permission to build their own quarter in the southern part of Sulaimaniya. When they completed the building of the houses and the synagogue, they held an inauguration ceremony.<sup>8</sup> Sixteen years after the establishment of the city, in 1800, a Jewish traveler, Edelman, reported that the Jews in Sulaimaniya “enjoy equal rights” from the authorities and live a “life of comfort and paradise, friendship and brotherhood.”<sup>9</sup> David D’Beth Hillel reported in 1826–27, that the pasha’s treasurer was the president of the Jewish community. According to Reuben Bar-Amon (born 1913), the first president of the Jewish community who came from Qaradagh was Gabriel Bar-Amon, his (great?) great-grandfather.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the time, there have been two main groups of Jews in the city: Sulaimanis, i.e., original or long-time residents of Sulaimaniya and Qaradaghli, i.e., migrants from the neighboring Qaradagh.

B. *Incident against the Jews*

Several 19th centuries accounts describe the Jews of Sulaimaniya as a group that had a good social position in the city. However, in 1895,

<sup>7</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 32–3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–4.

<sup>9</sup> Ben-Yaacob (1981: 111) quotes Hatzfira (Heb. newspaper), 1809, year 16, issue 92.

<sup>10</sup> Bar-Amon 1981: 103. It seems unlikely that his great grandfather was the first president of the community that was established in 1784. Possibly, this president was the person mentioned by David D’Beth Hillel in 1826–7.

an anti-Jewish incident in Sulaimaniya reverberated through Baghdad and Calcutta. Three letters sent from Baghdad to Calcutta, India, reveal a severe assault by “the gentiles of Sulaimaniya” who “hate the Israelites.” A few days before the Jewish holiday of Pentecost in 1895, twenty-one Muslims attacked several Jews who were traveling out of town, and inflicted on them a “cruel pounding.” The perpetrators then entered the town where their numbers swelled to about fifty, and began attacking the Jews who closed their stores and shut themselves up inside their homes. Six Jews, who had been caught in the streets, were badly tortured and their lives endangered. The aggressors broke into Jewish homes, plundered their property and raped their wives; they violated the synagogue and tore the *Torah* scrolls, taking gold and silver instruments. The governor of the town (*mutaşarrif*) dispatched soldiers, but the rioters outnumbered them. On the following day, the army intervened and restored public order by arresting fifty insurgents. The assailants explained that their shaikh had incited them, but the shaikh denied these allegations. He was eventually released. Apparently, several Muslims had joined a group of Jews who were sitting in an orchard near the synagogue, drinking alcohol. The shaikh, who saw them sitting together with a group of Jews drinking (probably) ‘arāq, became infuriated and ordered the attack on the Jews. Some Kurds followed his order and the Jews remained locked up in their homes for seven days until the rioters were caught, and the Jews were relieved. For some time, soldiers patrolled the Jewish neighborhood in order to keep law and order. Shortly afterwards, 20 rioters were sentenced reportedly to between 15 and 18 years in prison. The remaining two rioters were expelled from Sulaimaniya. Following this event,

the residents were warned that if they rioted again against the Jews, the whole city would be set on fire! Cannons were placed around the city and the residents were warned; now they are afraid to say anything to the Jews, either good or bad.<sup>11</sup>

The decisive response of the authorities may have been excessive in its both size and impact on the community. The authorities handed down long sentences on the insurgents, sending a clear message to the community that such acts of communal rioting against the Jews would not

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<sup>11</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 111–12, based on three letters from the Jewish community of Baghdad to the Jewish community in India, printed in the weekly *Magid Yesharim*, Calcutta, sixth year, vol. 34 (1895): 36, 40.

be tolerated. It seemed to be an atypical incident and the authorities dealt with the perpetrators severely.

C. *The Aghas and the Jews: Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzenjī*

As in other Kurdish communities, the Jews had been protected by their aghas to whom they often gave gifts and payoffs in return for patronage, although they were sometimes hurt by their aghas' robbers, greedy tribesmen or *firars*, escapees. In 1909, a traveler reported that the Jewish "clients" had been divided among the aghas; each agha had a certain number of families under his patronage.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, according to Reuben Bar-Amon, each Jewish patriarch "looked for a big tree to seek shelter in its shade." The Jews became protégés of the aghas and shaikhs of the region, and in this manner "they insured their life and existence and felt relatively comfortable," in exchange for payoffs such as offerings and the provision of different types of service.<sup>13</sup> Some time earlier, a Turkish *Beg* sold his estate including the Jews under his patronage. Frequently, armed robbers broke into Jewish homes and took whatever they wished. These robbers were "the companions of the agha and worked for him."<sup>14</sup>

Azīz Daniel Mukhtār (I#53), whose father was the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community of Sulaimaniya, argued that Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzenjī (1880–1956)<sup>15</sup> and his children, Baba Alī (b. 1915) who later became a minister in the Iraqi government, Shaikh Raʿūf and Shaikh Laṭīf were considered protectors of the Jews during the first half of the 20th century. According to a Jewish tradition, when their great-grandfather, Shaikh Kak Aḥmad Berzenjī completed the Ḥajj pilgrimage, he found out upon his return that the person who had supplied the needs of his family during his pilgrimage was a Jewish merchant from the Shmueli family.<sup>16</sup>

Following World War I, the head of the Jewish community of Sulaimaniya was Yom-Tov Bar-Amon, a descendant of the first president,

<sup>12</sup> N. Albalah in O.W. vol. 9 (1909): 579, as quoted Ben-Yaacob 1981: 113.

<sup>13</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 34.

<sup>14</sup> N. Albalah in O.W. vol. 9 (1909): 579, as quoted Ben-Yaacob 1981: 113.

<sup>15</sup> Jewish informants from Sulaimaniya repeated this notion; Moshe Shalom (I#39); Nissim Daniel Gharīb (I#51); Aziz Daniel Mukhtar (I#53). Shaikh Maḥmūd's history is described in many publications. Edmonds (1957) treats him fairly in his book.

<sup>16</sup> The family tree of the Sayyids of the Barzinja family; see Edmonds 1957: 69.

who replaced his father, Obadiyah Bar-Amon, in this position. Bar-Amon had “good relations” with Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzenjī and his brother Shaikh Qādir who “were the most prominent in the city” and “the most powerful” shaikhs in the region.<sup>17</sup> The two distinguished brothers provided protection for the Jews.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, during times of trouble, the Jews would seek shelter from the local tribal authority. According to Moshe Shalom (I#39),

when there was a “fire,” a dangerous situation for the Jews, the Jews would [go to seek help from the Shaikh. On this occasion they would] give him [for example] three or four boxes of tea, three sacks of coffee, and three big packages of sugar.<sup>19</sup> The shaikh would tell them, Go, do not be afraid. He would make sure that their problem would be solved, as he had many supporters and they defended the Jews. No one would dare hurt the Jews.

In other words, the Jews secured their protection from the Kurdish national leader, Shaikh Maḥmūd, in his tribal capacity, just as Jews elsewhere in Kurdistan guaranteed their safety from tribal aghas by way of seeking their patronage and paying dues and giving gifts and assistance in return. The Jews of Sulaimaniya would often send food products, rice, coffee, sugar, “in packages, in sacks, in large quantities...they would send them half a car-load.” Moshe Shalom possibly wished to belittle the scope of material support granted by the Jews to their aghas and its stipulation to ensure the protection and patronage of the aghas. He explained it by saying, “Everything was cheap there: one sack of sugar was worth half a dinar.” In other words, the financial cost to guarantee their safety was not a big burden for the Jews, and it became almost a natural act for rural Jews, in their relations with their tribal aghas.

The patronage of the Jews by the Berzenjī shaikhs is acknowledged, though it is asserted in general terms and not based on detailed accounts. At the same time, in Sulaimaniya, there were reports of acts of murder, harassment, intimidation and expressions of hatred toward Jews, despite the patronage of the Berzenjī shaikhs. In comparison with

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<sup>17</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 34–5. On the family of the Barzinja Shaikhs including Shaikh Maḥmūd and his brother Qādir, see Edmonds 1957, van Bruinessen 1978: 281, 293, 341–43, McDowall 1996: 155–171.

<sup>18</sup> Moshe Shalom (I#39); Nissim Daniel Gharīb (I#52); Aziz Daniel Mukhtar (I#53).

<sup>19</sup> Traditionally, disciples and tribesmen would donate food products for the daily maintenance of the agha or shaikh’s *dīwanxane*, which had many visitors daily.

other urban centers, this information is typical. Indeed, urban aghas rarely ever effected a change in the prevailing anti-Jewish attitudes, or prevented acts of murder or harassment on a personal level.<sup>20</sup> This is why the function of the Berzenjī cannot be evaluated solely on the limited available information. It should be noted, though, that the main expressions of the agha's patronage was in helping the Jews when requested to defuse crises, or mediate in conflicts the Jews had with government agencies or tribesmen.

In May 1919, the first Kurdish rebellion took place under the leadership of Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzenjī of Sulaimaniya. Following this revolt, almost all its residents, fearing British air strike, deserted the city. Part of the population of Sulaimaniya joined the British who had evacuated the town; most of the residents fled to regions far away from the area of conflict. Many Jews from Sulaimaniya went to Baghdad, Kirkuk and other communities. The rebellion lasted only forty days, but even when it ended, some of the Jews were reluctant to return and remained in their adopted communities.<sup>21</sup> The Jews of Sulaimaniya migrated to safer, more secure regions, similar to Jews in communities whose tribal leaders were engaged in tribal feuds.<sup>22</sup> When Shaikh Maḥmūd returned from exile, the Jews of Sulaimaniya visited him frequently in his village. To this day, Shaikh Maḥmūd's reputation and status has not diminished in their eyes or in the eyes of Kurdish society.

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<sup>20</sup> The only exception was 'Abd al-Karīm agha of Zakho who was active in providing safeguard the Jews.

<sup>21</sup> Bar-Amon 1981: 103.

<sup>22</sup> An exception to the rule occurred in Shino following the fall of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. See below: 113–120.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SHINO, MULLĀ MUŞTAFĀ AND THE JEWS

The inclusion of Shino, of Persian Kurdistan, with the five urban centers from Iraqi Kurdistan, may be justified by three main reasons. First, the following accounts provide information on Shino in an important moment in modern Kurdish history. Second, the accounts describe relationships between Mullā Muştafā Barzānī, the greatest Kurdish leader, and the Jews of Shino. Third, the patterns of internal migration in Kurdistan placed aghas and non-tribal Jews from different areas together in a new place, as happened in Shino.<sup>1</sup> Shino became the setting for the encounter between Mullā Muştafā Barzānī who resided there around 1945–1946 and Michael Michaeli, a Jewish weaver originally from Iraqi Kurdistan who became a representative of the Jewish community.

Several Jewish informants from various communities commented on the relations between Barzānī aghas and the Jews under their jurisdiction. The relations between Mullā Muştafā and the Jewish household of Khawaja Khinno in Aqra go back at least three generations to the 19th century if not earlier.<sup>2</sup> Other accounts disclose the relationships between Barzānī aghas, notably Shaikh Aḥmad and Mullā Muştafā, and the rural Jews living in villages under Barzānī control. The family of Moshe Binyamin (I#4) that resided in both Serkane and Mergasor (Kur., Red Meadow) spoke about the positive treatment they received from the Barzānī chieftains and from Mullā Muştafā Barzānī in particular.<sup>3</sup> The following accounts of Michael Michaeli (I#26) discuss the period in 1945/6 when Mullā Muştafā and members of his family and armed units lived temporarily in Shino. Interestingly, when Barzānī

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<sup>1</sup> The various dialects (both Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic) and practices are evidence of internal migration.

<sup>2</sup> Fā'ik Gabbai (I#12); Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai (I#9&10); Aryeh Gabbai (I#8); Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28).

<sup>3</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3); Michael Michaeli (I# 26); Fā'ik Gabbai (I#12); Majīd and Hertzal Gabbai (I#9&10); Aryeh Gabbai (I#8); Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28).

died in March 1979, he was buried in Shino and many Kurds attended his funeral.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. *Barzānī's Jewish Liaison*

Michael Michaeli (I#26) was a Jewish weaver originally from Iraqi Kurdistan. He moved to Shino in pursuit of work, and lived there during 1945–46, when Shino was at war.<sup>5</sup> During 1945–46, for part of which Shino was at war, Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī resided in Shino with his armed units and Michaeli became his weaver. Michaeli met Barzānī “dozens of times,” in his words, and considered him “a great man.” He would make *shale-shapik* for him and would need to measure the threads before commencing weaving. In the following account, Michaeli describes how he became acquainted with Mullā Muṣṭafā and became a liaison of the Jewish community in Shino.

Michael Michaeli had never read any book about the history of the Kurdish national movement, but he lived and witnessed one of its important chapters, serving and helping the Barzānīs, and he was well aware of the importance of this era in Kurdish history. Barzānī arrived in Shino with 3,000 men towards the end of World War II and the Soviets gave Barzānī's men control over Shino, Nakada and Sablax.<sup>6</sup> A year later Barzānī was appointed “a chief of staff” of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. When the Soviets withdrew from the region at the end of 1946, the republic fell apart and a war ensued between the Kurds and the Persians.<sup>7</sup> Some of Barzānī's men were killed and others injured. They retreated and gathered in Shino, bringing with them 180 Persian prisoners of war. According to Michaeli,

during all this period, I was making *shale-shapik* for Mullā Muṣṭafā and his brothers... Babo, Muḥammad Ṣadiq and Shaikh Aḥmad, whom the Barzānīs revered like the prophet Muḥammad.

After the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad, the war between the Persian army and the armed units of Barzānī was waged in the Shino

<sup>4</sup> In 1994, the body of Mullā Muṣṭafā moved from Shino and buried at last in Barzān, where he was born, in a huge ceremony reserved for the Kurdish national leader.

<sup>5</sup> On the Jews of Persian Kurdistan, see Magnarella 1969 and Netzer 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Also known as Sauj Bulaq, or Mahabad.

<sup>7</sup> On the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, see Roosevelt 1947; Eagleton 1963, Gunter (1993, 1994); McDowall 1996: 231–247; Schmidt 1964.

area. Many of the residents escaped from Shino, but the Jews stayed. “We were the Jews of Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī,” Michaeli explained. Indeed, when Barzānī’s men returned from Mahabad they were hungry and “at first they took food and goods from houses of Jews...but they did not take money.” Michaeli appealed to Mullā Muṣṭafā who “gave an order that nobody should disturb the Jews.” The Jews needed security and Barzānī instructed his men to provide guards in their neighborhood. Michaeli explained:

Every night, two of his men would perform *dawriya* [Arab., patrol] in the Jewish neighborhood; one of them would come to the courtyard around which the Jews lived, and the other one would come to my home, because I was the Jew of Mullā Muṣṭafā.

Michaeli, thanks to his craft and unique position in the eyes of Mullā Muṣṭafā had managed to facilitate protection to the Jews of Shino, as can be seen in the following instances.

### 1. *Confiscation of Wheat*

The Jews of Shino stored their wheat and grains in storage spaces. They would dig a pit in which they would place the wheat and cover it with straw and soil, to hide it from view. During one of the stages of the war, hundreds of Barzānī tribesmen suffering from fatigue and hunger came to Shino. It was only a matter of time before they began looking for food and confiscated it from the inhabitants. According to Michaeli,

One day, a Jew named Solomon and his children came running, crying for help, ‘Hawar! Hawara!’ They had stored two to three tons of wheat and Barzānī’s men were stealing it. I tried to help and came to their house accompanied by two Barzānī soldiers, but half of the wheat had already been taken. Every one filled his sack and went away...they were hungry...

Once again, Michaeli accompanied the two Kurdish warriors who were appointed by Mullā Muṣṭafā to protect the Jewish community. They managed to stop the looting, but it was late, as half of the wheat was already looted.

### 2. *Violating the Synagogue*

Another call for help came one cold day in the winter, when someone informed Michaeli that Barzānī warriors had entered the only synagogue

in Shino. There was heavy snow on the ground and Barzānī's men were sheltering in all the mosques in town. The Barzānīs held the Persian prisoners in the largest mosque of the town. They reasoned that the synagogue should not be sitting empty when all the other public buildings were being used. Michaeli appealed to Mullā Muṣṭafā for help, telling him,

We have only one synagogue. Our children study there. We [the adults] pray there;<sup>8</sup> this is our only place and your men have entered it. I ask you to send your men to remove them from there.

Upon Michaeli's request, Mullā Muṣṭafā immediately sent two men with him to remove his men who entered the synagogue without his approval. Barzānī tribesmen were soldiers during a difficult war. Barzānī was the tribal chief and the head commander who was responsible for his armed tribesmen, but at the same time, he was responsible for the welfare of his non-tribal Jewish protégés, as illustrated.

### 3. *Redeeming Jewish POWs of the Persian Army*

During the war with the Persian army, Barzānī's soldiers captured 180 Persian prisoners. They held them in the main mosque at Shino, giving them only some bread and wheat to eat. Michaeli had contemplated the idea that among the Persian prisoners there were Jews. He asked Muḥammad Ṣadiq, Mullā Muṣṭafā's brother, who was in charge of the guards, for permission to speak to them.

He asked me, 'Why do you need to see if there are Jews there?' I explained: I have a lot of work to do for you [weaving *shale-shapik* suits], so if there is any Jew there by any chance, I could take him and teach him [so he could help me].

Muḥammad Ṣadiq agreed to his request. He allowed Michaeli into the mosque where one of the Persian officers asked him "in a language similar to Kurmanji," (i.e., Persian) "What do you want?" Michaeli responded,

Perhaps there are some *kalimim* here, as the Jews in Farsi were called *Kulimim*. The Persian officer said: There is one, Eliezer. He summoned

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<sup>8</sup> In most Jewish communities in the east, the edifice of the synagogue was usually used as the Hebrew school for the children in addition to being a prayer house for the adults of the community.

him: Come here. I asked him, Are you Jewish? He said, yes. I asked, how can I tell that you are Jewish? He said, *be-emet ha-Torah* [Heb. lit. 'In the truth of the Torah,' a typical oath used by Persian Jews], I am a Jew. He took from his pocket a small book of Psalms and began to read it...my heart went out to him, I wanted to cry for him. I asked if there were more Jews. There was another one named Abraham. They said, here, this is an Israelite...and the third one was Zion from Teheran.

Michaeli escorted the three Jews from the mosque to his house. They had fleas, because the prisoners were kept in crowded, unhygienic conditions. They washed themselves and their clothes with boiling water in order to remove the fleas. He asked them: "What was your food?" One of them took out a handkerchief and showed him a few grains of wheat. They remained eighteen days in Michaeli's house. When asked if he really taught them to weave, Michaeli said that he took them "only for the sake of the *mitzvah*," 'a good deed,' related to the redemption of prisoners.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the Persian government and the Barzānīs agreed upon a prisoners swap. They exchanged prisoners on one Saturday, and Michaeli recalled that they left the synagogue without even eating. He gave them food for the road and took them to Mullā Muṣṭafā's soldiers, asking them to take care of them for his sake.

This account indicates the incredible mutual faith between the Barzānī Kurds and the liaison of the Jewish community, Michael Michaeli, thanks to which the Kurds allowed three POWs to join and be in his home while the other POWs were kept under guard in the local mosque of Shino.

#### 4. Tea and Sugar during the Siege

Following the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad at the end of 1946, one of the battle lines moved to the region around Shino. These were difficult days of siege and seclusion and Michaeli recalled a big battle in which four cannons bombarded Shino. One day, Barzānī's envoy came to Michaeli and announced that Mullā Muṣṭafā was summoning him. Michaeli went to his *dīwanxane* and he reported that Mullā Muṣṭafā told him, "*Rūne Me'allim*" (Kur., Sit down, Me'allim),

listen, Me'allim, I have not drunk tea for three days. I did not drink and none of my children and nobody else [drank tea]. [Michaeli explains,]

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<sup>9</sup> The *mitzvah* of the redemption of prisoners is important in Judaism.

Nobody was able to depart Shino; all the residents had escaped, only the Barzānīs and the Jews remained in town; there was no tea or sugar left for them. [Michaeli recalled that Mullā Muṣṭafā told him,] If you are a good Me'allim, find some tea and sugar for me. Take as much money as you wish. Even one kilogram of sugar for a hundred *Tuman*,<sup>10</sup> I do not mind [paying]. I told him: '*Dewlet serê te*' [Kur., it all thanks to you], my money is from you. 'How can I take money from you? Later, if I succeed in finding some, we shall speak and I will tell you how much it cost...' I went and told the Jews [of Shino]: Thanks to this person, who protects us, the Kurds no longer enter your houses, and now this person needs your help... [I asked them:] Do not drink tea and do not use sugar for two days. As much as you can, put aside for him. Each house [there were ten households that were able to give something, the rest were poor] brought a package of tea and sugar. There were 10–15 kilograms of sugar and 4–5 packages of tea. We had collected enough. I did not go back that day... to make it look like a difficult task, so I went the next day. I put it on my back... I saw Mullā Muṣṭafā sitting... They told him, here is the Me'allim coming. He told me, You came. I told him, Yes, Shaikh, I lost half of my soul going to a few villages in order to bring this to you.<sup>11</sup> He asked me, Me'allim, how much did it cost? I told him, '*Qurban* [I am your sacrifice], how could I take money from you? I wish you success and even if my house is burned [during the fight], I would not mind.' He told me: 'Me'allim, you did your duty.'

Michaeli concluded that in this manner, he fortified his bond with Barzānī. "Believe me, until he left Shino, two of his armed men came every night to guard the Jewish neighborhood" and every hour "I would dispatch them to patrol in the street."

This account is deeply rooted in the tribal tradition, as noted by Leach, that sugar, tea and coffee were the expensive items in the upkeep of the *dīwanxane*. From the late 19th century, the Russian style of tea drinking had become fashionable throughout Kurdistan.

The tea is brewed very strong over samovars and served with enormous quantities of lump sugar. The samovar is brought into operation as soon as the guest arrives and tea is served at regular intervals until he goes away again.

Leach noted the high cost of sugar, because of high import duties and the cost of transport, and estimated that the annual cost of sugar alone in an average guesthouse was £27, which "is a very substantial sum

<sup>10</sup> *Tuman* is an Old Persian currency.

<sup>11</sup> During tribal feuds, Kurdish tribesmen were restricted to their habitation while non-tribal Jews and others subjects were able to travel more easily because the tribal feud did not concern them.

indeed.” Leach clarifies that the consumption of sugar, tea and coffee is largely confined to the guesthouse. In addition, sugar, tea and coffee are paid in cash; other kinds of food, such as grains, rice, meat, fruits and the like, are usually within the mutually self-supporting economic framework of most small communities.<sup>12</sup>

##### 5. *Michaeli Jailed for Associations with Barzānī*

When Mullā Muṣṭafā departed Shino, the Persian government took control of the town. Someone informed the authorities that Michael Michaeli was an illegal migrant from Iraq. They said, “He was a Jew of Mullā Muṣṭafā, he was with them,” narrated Michael Michaeli.

One Saturday, the police surrounded my house. Two Persian officers entered and asked me, ‘Is your name Michael?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ [They asked] ‘Were you a Jew of Mullā Muṣṭafā?’ I said no. They told me, ‘Do not lie, you were with them, you had weapons, you used to make clothes for them, you are from Barzān.’ I told them: ‘I came here a year before they did. I did not come from Barzān. I came here just to work to earn my livelihood. It is true that I made clothes for them, but if I had not made them, they would have killed me.’ They told me, ‘there are rumors that you have weapons hidden in your house. If indeed you have weapons, give it to us. If you will not uncover the weapons and hand it over to us, and we would search and find it, we will put you in prison.’ I told them: ‘I have no weapons, believe me. If you do not believe me [you may] search the house.’ They brought spades, hoes, in order to dig... My house was all covered with carpets and woolen blankets... I told the officer... ‘If you find weapons, you may do whatever you wish. Nevertheless, if you would not find anything, I ask that the house be restored to its present condition.’ He realized that I was not afraid and decided not to dig. They took me to prison [jail]... I told Azmī [a *Shī‘ite* Persian who reportedly informed on him] to tell the officer, ‘All the governments are polite, but the Persian government is not polite...’ I told the officer that I had fed and clothed three Jewish [Persian POW’s] soldiers for eighteen days... when they were at my place, one of them asked me to bring their officer as well, to feed him, because they were worried that he might hurt them... In prison I saw many Muslims from Shino. They were under investigation regarding what had happened [when the Barzānīs controlled the town]... I was the only Jew there... Meanwhile, some of the Jews of Shino, Ḥakham Raphael, Ezekiel, Yehoshua, Gabriel, told the Persian officer that I was loyal and helped their prisoners... so after two hours they released me...

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<sup>12</sup> Leach 1940: 30–31.

From that day onwards, Michaeli underwent daily interrogation. Every day, a police officer came to the synagogue and took Michaeli, his brother and cousin to the police station. They were asked why they had left Iraq. The answer given was “for economic reasons.” Michaeli tried to explain that at the time, there had been no Persian authority in the region and any one could cross the border. In the middle of the night, Michaeli would give the police officer one *Tuman* and he would release him. This routine continued every day for a month. “All the money I earned went into the pocket of the police officer,” said Michaeli. Finally, he asked for the personal address of the officer. He asked “What for?” Michaeli said that he wanted to visit him.

I took a fine carpet that I had made, four packs of sugar, and a colorful, beautiful wool blanket. I said, ‘This is for the *dargashtha, dodiya* [NA., cradle] for your baby.’ His wife was very happy. It was beautiful and colorful. He [the police officer] asked me, ‘Why did you bring so many things?’ I told him: ‘Look, it has already been a month...and I cannot work and earn my living. I am not a robber; I just came to make a living. If it is not possible, [you may] deport me. He said he should write a letter to Teheran on behalf of three Jewish families that came from Iraq to Persia, and we will request in their name that they be given Persian passports and identity cards, that they become Persians. If they accept you, very well, if not, I will not be able to do anything.

The police officer received a negative response, but the heavy snow in the area that stopped all transport granted Michaeli and his extended family a three-month extension, which enabled them to travel to Teheran and from there to Israel.<sup>13</sup>

### *Urban Jews and Their Aghas: Concluding Remarks*

The examination of the relationships between aghas and Jews in six urban centers in Kurdistan has revealed three main patterns. In the first, the Jews enjoyed the patronage of a powerful tribal agha(s), as

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<sup>13</sup> Many Iraqi Jews were part of the exodus of Jews at the early 1950s via Iran. See Sanasarian 2002: 47. The Jewish population of Persian Kurdistan in 1950 is estimated around 13,000. In 1951, only 3,500 Jews remained in Persian Kurdistan. The rest moved to Tehran where they found temporary shelter and then headed towards Israel. On the immigration of Jews from Iran, see Amnon Cohen, Immigration of Jews from Persian Kurdistan and Eastern Turkey at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Hithadshut* 5 (1985): 44–45 (Hebrew).

was experienced in Zakho, to a lesser degree in Sulaimaniya and for a short period in Shino and to an extent in Amadiya. By his patronage, a powerful tribal chief, more than any other factor was able to provide a relatively reasonable degree of security and safety for his Jewish subjects. In the second pattern, evidenced in Aqra, a clever and generous Jewish leader(s) safeguarded the Jewish community thanks to his highly placed connections with officials and tribal leaders. In reality, Jewish leaders and merchants in other Kurdish communities also acted generously in their interactions with tribal aghas and government officials, but it seems that the Jewish leaders of Aqra may represent the example par excellence of this pattern of relationship. The Jewish community of Dohuk was different from both Zakho and Aqra. The Jews of Dohuk did not enjoy the patronage of a prominent Kurdish family as in Zakho, nor did they enjoy the benefits of an influential Jewish family as in Aqra. Dohuk and Amadiya represent the third and most common pattern, which was prevalent in all urban Kurdish centers. There, the Jewish leaders had to be resourceful and pay out money to satisfy the greed and capriciousness of urban aghas and deal with other problems. Clearly, the three patterns overlap in most urban centers. The Jewish communities exhibiting the first two patterns had the advantage of having a clear address to which they could turn for help when facing a crisis. This address was either a Kurdish agha or a Jewish leader, who dealt with the concerns of the community. The remainder of the Jews of Kurdistan had no other alternative but to summon their resources and pay to satisfy the greed and caprices of urban aghas.



PART II

RURAL JEWS AND THEIR TRIBAL AGHAS



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EXPERIENCE OF RURAL JEWS

The rural way of life was deeply rooted amongst the Jews of Kurdistan.<sup>1</sup> As reported by early Jewish travelers, Jews lived in hundreds of Kurdish villages, cultivating fields, vineyards and orchards, tending their animals and weaving traditional Kurdish costumes and carpets.<sup>2</sup> David D'Beth Hillel reported (1826–27) that native Jewish farmers lived in four or five villages east of Nisibin, in southeastern Turkey. The existence of synagogues in these villages indicates that these communities must have been relatively established and old.<sup>3</sup> In addition to functioning as a center for prayer, the synagogue would generally house a Hebrew or religious school for children and a center for communal and cultural events. Only rarely did small rural Jewish communities had a specific building designated as a synagogue, and separate buildings for schools and community events. Ben-Yaacob listed approximately 200 villages in which Jews resided throughout the years. In fact, based on the apparent trend of internal migration, rural Jews must have lived in many more villages, because they often migrated from one village to another for various reasons. Many rural Jews lived in two villages, sometimes three, during one generation. Jews in urban centers practiced agriculture as well. Benzion Israeli who visited Kurdish communities in northern Iraq in the mid 1930s reported:

The Jewish agricultural workers in the Kurdish mountains in Mesopotamia acquired a special place within the northern communities. They live mostly in mixed towns and villages. This is a unique layer . . . I visited Dohuk . . . from 108 households, 20 have their own [vegetable] gardens, about 50 work as hired workers of Jews and non-Jewish farmers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ben-Yaacob (1981) lists more than 200 villages in which Jews lived.

<sup>2</sup> A good description of rural life in this region is S. Vila Hoogasian and M. K. Matosian, *Armenian Village Life before 1914*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 142–3.

<sup>4</sup> Benzion Israeli 1934.

In other words, a little less than one fifth of the Jewish families in Dohuk had worked in agricultural occupations and in a little less than half of the Jewish households, someone was employed as a cultivator. The number of Jews who carried out rural activity in Kurdistan must have been larger than the rural Jewish population, because of the pastoral occupations of a considerable number of urban Jews. Indeed most of the modern Jews of Kurdistan were artisans and peddlers, but as Brauer argues, “Their character and religiousness are of a rural nature.”<sup>5</sup>

Before the mass migration of Jews to Israel in 1951–52, about one-fifth of the Jews of Kurdistan made their living from agriculture. Around that time, the number of Kurdistan Jews was around 20,000 with about 8,000 to 10,000 having already settled in the Holy Land.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the number of rural Jews who subsisted from agriculture was around 4,000, but because of the partial agricultural activity on the part of urban dwellers, the number of rural Jews who lived in villages must have been rather smaller than this number. Based on Shiloah (1976), the number of rural Jews throughout Kurdistan before the immigration was between 3,000 and 4,000, i.e., less than one-fifth of the total Jewish population.<sup>7</sup> If one adds the number of rural Jews, who had already migrated to Israel, the accurate number of rural Jews could be larger. Likewise, a British report suggests that the number of agricultural Jews in the Kurdish mountain zone of the Great Zab River did not exceed and may have been half of the number of Jews in the four provinces of northern Iraq, totaling approximately 15,000.<sup>8</sup>

Several scholars have noted rituals of Kurdish Jews during times of dearth. These types of rituals exist mainly in rural societies and Brauer noticed that the origins of these rituals were foreign, but the relation of the Jews to these rituals “is original and natural that one may believe that a large portion of them [the Kurdish Jews] were engaged in

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<sup>5</sup> E. Brauer, “The customs of the Jews of Kurdistan during drought,” in *Magnes Book*, Jerusalem (1938): 50–61 (Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> A. Shiloah et al., 1976: 72, 72–108.

<sup>7</sup> The estimated number of the rural Jewish population was 500 families plus 400 Jewish singles, based on an average of 5–7 people per family. The total number of Jews in rural Kurdistan was therefore between 3,000 and 4,000. Shiloah et al., 1976: 72–108.

<sup>8</sup> Iraq and the Persian Gulf Naval Intelligence Division, *Geographical Handbook Series*, September 1944: 382.

agriculture.”<sup>9</sup> The rural tradition was deeply rooted among Kurdistan Jews that when they immigrated to Israel during the 20th century, many immigrants chose a rural way of life and settled in agricultural communities throughout the Jewish State. Even before the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews from Kurdistan were among the pioneers and settlers of new rural communities. In the beginning of the 20th century, several Jewish families from Kurdistan settled in *Sejera* (from Arab., tree, its Hebrew name is *Ilaniya*), one of the first rural Jewish settlements in modern Palestine, in the Jezreel Valley.<sup>10</sup> In the following years, Jews from Kurdistan established more villages in Palestine. They were among the founders of *Kfar Barukh* in 1926, and they formed the entire population of *El-Ro'i*, established in 1935 in the Jezreel Valley.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1950s, during the mass migration to Israel, more Jews settled in a few dozen rural communities, some of which were populated entirely by Kurdish Jews.<sup>12</sup>

In Kurdistan, rural and urban Jews were ruled by tribal aghas and were subject to tribal codes of conduct. Not only Jews who resided in rural villages but also many urban Jews who traveled frequently through the rural area acquired the patronage of tribal chieftains.<sup>13</sup> It is valuable to describe the rural experience of the Jews in Kurdistan because of the significant number of Jews in rural Kurdistan. Firstly, the number of Jewish families in each Kurdish village was typically small, only one or two families, usually related to one another. Reports from the previous centuries represent this phenomenon. In 1827, David D'Beth Hillel reported that three hours' ride from Faishkhabur, in Sallagha,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> E. Brauer, 1938: 50–61 (Hebrew).

<sup>10</sup> Yoseph Tubbi, *Memories of the Shomer person Yitzhak Nadav* (Tel-Aviv, 1968): 39 (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Habas 1943: 100.

<sup>12</sup> Zaken 2001. Names of some of these villages: Tsuba, Zakkariya, Nes-Harim, Pattish, Mivtahim, Ya'ale, Yakhni, Agur, Kfar Yuval, Alkosh, Avital, Yardena, Metav, Parson, Rehov, Sed-Trumot, Castle (Known also as Maoz Zion), Even-Sapir and more.

<sup>13</sup> “A Survey of the Rural Economic Problems in Kurdistan,” *Tahqiqat be eqtesadi* (Teheran, Iran), 18 July 1970, is a good survey of rural Iranian Kurdistan. On Feudalism in Kurdistan, consult Nikitine 1925. On feudalism in Persia, consult Jacques-Jean De Morgan, “Feudalism in Persia: Its origin, development and present condition,” *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of Smithsonian Institution*, 1914: 579–606. On the feudal society, consult Bloch's *Feudal Society* (1961) and Sjoberg 1952. On tribesmen consult Sahlins 1968; Salzman 1974 and on relations between landlords and peasants in the neighboring Persia, consult Lambton 1953.

<sup>14</sup> Possibly Chala (Chal), whose Turkish name is Cukurca. Ben-Yaacob 1981: 55 supplement: 47.

only one Jew lived in the village of 100 Muslim families. He was the village painter and weaver who was a friend of the head of the village. This was typical of the pattern of Jewish settlement in Kurdish villages.<sup>15</sup> Benjamin II (1859) noted that rural Jews were “scattered here and there” in the Kurdish mountains.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Hay (1921) records only one Jewish family in an area consisting of many Kurdish villages.<sup>17</sup> The Jews lived for centuries as a tiny minority among the Muslim majority. In a small number of villages, the Jews comprised up to ten to fifteen percent of the population. There are reasons to believe that the number of rural Jews decreased gradually over time and that their number and ratio were larger in the past than just before the mass emigration to Israel, in the early 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

The second point worth noting is that most Jews lived isolated and removed from other Jewish communities. In the mid-nineteenth century, Benjamin II commented on the isolation of the rural Jews from their brethren and noted that the Jews, who dwelled in the Kurdish mountains, lived dispersed among the Kurds and “never left the mountains,” and thus were shut off “from the world.”<sup>19</sup> In the 20th century, Moshe Binyamin (I#3) narrated the account about a delegation of rural Jews who visited the *mutaşarrif* in Arbil. When the Jewish leader of Arbil, who accompanied them, asked the *mutaşarrif* to help “these Jews” to migrate to Arbil, the *mutaşarrif* could not believe that they were Jews, because they looked exactly like rural Kurds. This extreme isolation had led to a level of assimilation into Kurdish rural society. In February 1943, Sh. Guttmann wrote about the rural Jews in the Kurdish mountains:

They are scattered throughout [the region] at a great distance from one another. Some places have no Jewish *minyān*. In many places, there is complete ignorance.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Fischel 1939: 223.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 96.

<sup>17</sup> Hay 1921: 86–7.

<sup>18</sup> These reasons are discussed regarding the internal migration of Jews. Here are some examples from rural villages: three Jewish families lived in the village of Serkane, under the tribal jurisdiction of Barzān, in the 1930s. Around the same time, in the village of Rabatke, near Amadiya, five Jewish families lived among sixty Kurdish families. Around 1951, four Jewish families lived in the village of Harn, under the tribal jurisdiction of Zibar, and constituted the only Jews in a vast tribal area of dozens of villages. According to Shalom Pirko (I#34) from Harin, these were the only Jews within “800 villages,” but this is to be considered an exaggeration, or figure of speech.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>20</sup> A report by Shmaryahu Guttmann from 4 February 1943, quoted by Bibi (1998, part I: 178).

Another pattern, which was indeed quite marginal, but deserves noting, is the tenure of complete villages by individual Jewish owners. Benjamin II reported of a village that belonged to a Jewish proprietor. He visited the village of Tselma, which bears the name of its Jewish founder, an hour's journey southeast from Nisibin.<sup>21</sup> The Pasha had granted him a "considerable tract of land" on which he built a number of houses for Arab and Armenian cultivators. Tselma was able to drive away predatory gangs. Benjamin II was a guest in Tselma's house and noted that several other Jews resided in the village.<sup>22</sup> Tselma was not the only Jew who owned an entire village. Jewish sources report that the patriarchs of the family of Khawaja Khinno from Aqra and the family of Moshe Gabbai from Zakho owned villages, though they did not live in them but rather leased out their lands and estates.

The fourth pattern of settlement of Jews refers to a small number of villages, notably Sandur, Sukho and (Be) Tanura,<sup>23</sup> which were populated entirely or almost entirely by Jews, rendering the village homogeneously Jewish. Some of the rural Jewish communities, like Sandur, were old and established. In order to dwell in the rural area in Kurdistan Jews needed the patronage of tribal aghas. Therefore, villages with complete Jewish population were unusual phenomenon, as these communities were lacking the presence of aghas and tribesmen who would protect the Jews in the tribal surrounding. The main reason for the rarity of this kind of settlement was that without the agha's guard, the Jews were too vulnerable and the Jewish community could barely survive, as can be seen in the history of the Jewish community of Sandur.

#### A. *Sandur, a Jewish Village*

The population of the village of Sandur, not far from Dohuk, was entirely or almost entirely Jewish. According to a tradition transmitted by the Jews of Sandur, Christians had lived there in the past and "this is why it was called Sandur, from San-dir."<sup>24</sup> When the Christians left,

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<sup>21</sup> The origin of this name is not clear. It may have been a Kurdish or Arabic version of the Hebrew or Jewish name of the founder of the village.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 63–4.

<sup>23</sup> Betanur or Bezanur in Kurdish pronunciation, and "Betanura" in NA pronunciation.

<sup>24</sup> *Dīr* (pl., *adyār*) in Arabic means a monastery or convent; in names of places, *dir* indicates an existence of Christians in that place.

Muslims and Jews moved into the village.<sup>25</sup> The Christians had built the large building that was later converted to the old synagogue, and when the Muslims left, the Jews destroyed the construction used as mosque (Kur., *mizgeft*). The following account may suggest a process by which Sandur became entirely Jewish.

During the early part of the 20th century, three Muslim Kurdish families still lived in Sandur, but because they worked on Saturday, they disturbed the harmony of the Jewish *Sabbath*. The Jewish *mukhtār* of Sandur, a well-connected person, asked a powerful friend, a judge from Dohuk, to relocate the Muslim Kurds from Sandur. Based on the agreement, the Jews were obliged to buy the houses belonging to the Kurds who moved to the outskirts of Sandur, leaving the core of the village to the Jews.<sup>26</sup> Benzion Israeli, who visited Sandur in 1934, observed four or five Muslim families living in a separate section and several other Kurdish families who engaged in seasonal labor and at the same time protected the village.<sup>27</sup> A Jewish emissary reported in 1942 that no gentiles resided there except one, who was a police officer [guard].<sup>28</sup>

All the lands in Sandur belonged to Jews who labored in their own orchards, vineyards and fields. Vine growing was one of the main industries of the village. In the summer, the vine growers would sell the grapes to a Christian named Bogis in Mosul who had a drinks factory. Some of the grapes would be used to make raisins and some would be exchanged for wheat.<sup>29</sup>

Sandur was so unique in the Kurdish region that the Iraqi Prime Minister would boast about it during his meetings with Jewish delegates abroad.<sup>30</sup> Benzion Israeli, in 1934, was impressed with this homogeneous Jewish village of 800 inhabitants. He said, “Sandur is a state of its own... this is a Jewish village, an autonomous Jewish republic which does not mix with others.” In 1942, Enzo Sereni (1905–1944), a

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<sup>25</sup> Both Benzion Israeli (1934) and Enzo Sereni (1942) reported an ancient cemetery in Sandur, indicating the old settlement of Kurds or Christians in Sandur before the period that it turned into a Jewish village. Benzion Israeli 1957: 41. Bibi (1998, part I: 84–85) quotes a report of Enzo Sereni from April 1942 (available in the central Zionist Archives, file no. 56/4575).

<sup>26</sup> Şalih Rahamim (I#37).

<sup>27</sup> Benzion Israeli 1957: 41; and in a lecture by Benzion delivered on 2 July 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Bibi (1998, part I: 84–85), from a report of Enzo Sereni in April 1942, available in the central Zionist Archives, file no. 56/4575

<sup>29</sup> Eliyahu Shalom (I#38).

<sup>30</sup> Bibi (1988, part I: 228).

Jewish emissary from Palestine to Iraq, visited Sandur and described the village in details. The village was located an hour and a half's drive from Mosul, in a valley between two walls of rock. It was completely green and "full of gardens of fruit, pears, grapes, plums, pomegranates, apples."<sup>31</sup>

Sandur absorbed many Jewish refugees from other places. The family of Ḥakham Mordechai, also known as the Ellah family, migrated to Sandur in the 18th century from the village of Sharanesh. A family tradition relates a conflict between the Ellah family and a gentile, which ended in the death of the gentile. Consequently, the family migrated and settled in Sandur where they became the leading family of the community.<sup>32</sup> In 1934, Benzion Israeli noted ten migrant families that had escaped from mountainous villages out of fear and received shelter in Sandur.<sup>33</sup> In August 1945, one of the Jewish envoys of the underground pioneer Zionist movement, nicknamed Avner b., compiled a report on Sandur. He noted that the Jewish population in Sandur multiplied by way of internal migration of Kurdistani Jews from the surrounding villages. Each year the village expanded by ten to fifteen more houses.

The head of the Jewish community of Sandur was Ḥakham Mordechai b. Moshe (b. Eliezer b. Yehuda b. Yona b. Moshe). Ḥakham Mordechai (b. 1870) was also the *dayyan* (judge for religious and domestic affairs), the leader of wedding ceremonies, the circumciser and the slaughterer of animals of the community. His family was the biggest and the wealthiest of the village. A teacher from the village used the synagogue during weekdays as a *bet-midrash* (Heb., religious school) teaching the *Torah* to 20–25 children, not including girls. Girls were married at a very young age, mostly at the age of fourteen. Avner b. reported,

The boy usually knows the girl well before the wedding. At times, they would sneak together to the orchards for a pleasant and romantic [occasion] for them. The village was not clean [and] had no medical services... In spite of this fact, there are not many diseases among the populations, because of the physical stature of the villagers.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Bibi (1998, part I: 84–85) quotes a report of Enzo Sereni from April 1942.

<sup>32</sup> Mordechai 1978: 22.

<sup>33</sup> Benzion Israeli 1956: 41.

<sup>34</sup> Bibi (1998, part II: 722–23) quotes the newspaper of the pioneer youth movement in Jerusalem [from Iraq], vol.3, dated August 1945. A guide whose pseudo name was Avner b. compiled the report on Sandur.

Avner B. discussed a lower state of health and explained that Sanduris were strong mountain residents who could withstand most diseases. Most Jews lived into old age, from 70 to 100 years, not less.<sup>35</sup>

In 1826–27, David D'Beth Hillel reported that all the inhabitants of Sandur were Jews.<sup>36</sup> However, around twenty years later, Benjamin II reported that 200 Kurdish and only 50 Jewish families resided in Sandur.<sup>37</sup> These discrepancies may reflect inaccuracies in the reporting, but they may also be the result of internal migration. By the first half of the 20th century, the population of Sandur was composed entirely of Jews. In 1942, Benzion Israeli made a lengthy visit to Sandur and reported:

This is indeed a Jewish village of real [Jewish] farmers (four or five Muslim families reside in a separate section of the village) and several more Kurdish families come for seasonal work and incidentally serve to protect them from the gentiles. Their livelihood is from vineyards and orchards, vegetables, some field crops and small herds of sheep. All the inhabitants, young and old, work. The work on the land is truly all their life... There are ten families of migrants. They escaped in recent years from Kurdish villages in the mountains. [They escaped] out of fear of death in this 'Jewish' country. They work mostly in agriculture and their daily wage is about 40–50 Palestinian *Miles*. On the other hand, about ten residents of the village reside temporarily in Baghdad as servants in houses [of wealthy Jews]. They come to Baghdad to earn money in order to be able to pay the dowry for their future wives or in order to help their family and save money for their migration to the Holy Land. Rural life in this village is very hard. Their economic position is probably as bad as other villages. They have one common complaint, their exile. Many times they are abused; they live in constant fear and lack of security of life and property; they beg to immigrate to the Holy Land and ask to be supplied with [immigration] certificates. I saw with my own eyes how a [Muslim] Kurdish youngster who fought with his fellow until bleeding, came back at night into the Jewish village to take revenge on (to kill, as they say) one of the Jewish villagers for daring to separate the fighters. The mere daring of a single youngster to enter into a complete Jewish village 'in a secured place' and hit [a Jewish resident] shows the extent of contempt and humiliation towards the Jews.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Bibi (1998, part II: 723).

<sup>36</sup> Fischel 1939: 227, 229.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 70.

<sup>38</sup> Benzion Israeli 1934: 6.

A Jewish visitor from Palestine who visited Sandur in 1945 commented on its agriculture. The cultivation of wheat and barely in Sandur was not developed and the villagers had to buy flour in the city. The cold fountain water nourished the flowering orchards and vineyards of Sandur. Most families owned orchards and vineyards; ten families owned three to four orchards and vineyards each. Fifteen families earned their living by weaving. The village had a herd of 500 sheep, 50 donkeys and 10 mules, but there were no Jewish shepherds, because Jews could not work on the *Sabbath*, so the Jews of Sandur hired a Muslim shepherd, as did other Jewish communities. The milk collected from the herd was used for daily consumption. Most villagers worked in agriculture and some labored for daily pay for owners of large orchards. In the summer, the residents worked in their orchards and vineyards. They began at dawn, returning home at ten o'clock, to rest during the heat of the day, and continued working from three o'clock p.m. until the evening. The visitor commented about the Sanduris: "the inhabitants are not lazy. They are very swift, and when they plant a new vineyard or during the harvest, they would work hard full days."<sup>39</sup>

### B. *Tribal and Non-Tribal Societies*

Roughly speaking, there were two kinds of inhabitants in rural Kurdistan: those who were part of the tribal system and those who did not belong to it. The latter were "non-tribal," i.e., they "had no tribal organization or, indeed, any organization at all." The non-tribal peasants were practically "under the rule, or rather despotism," of the Turkish and Persian governors or, in some cases, "of the most powerful tribal chiefs."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, not only the rural Kurds, but also some urban Kurds were part of the tribal organization, owing to kinship, marriage contact and migration. Observers noted that the Kurds of Rawanduz, Bitlis, Van, Sulaimaniya, Sinna and other cities still had tribal organization. The term usually used in reference to a tribe, or

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<sup>39</sup> Bibi (1998, part II: 722–23) quotes the newspaper of the pioneer youth movement in Jerusalem [in Iraq], vol. 3, dated August 1945. A guide whose pseudo name was Avner b. compiled the report on Sandur.

<sup>40</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 117–22. See also Henry Field, "Jews of Sandur, Iraq," *Asia* 37 (1937): 709–10.

tribesman, or to their combative nature is *‘ashūra* (from Arab., tribe, in Kur. and NA., *‘ashiret*).

In the early 1820s, Rich gives a noteworthy description of the Bilbas confederation of tribes.<sup>41</sup> The Bilbas

have among them a population of dependents or peasants, who have no voice in their affairs, and are considered a very inferior *caste*... [The Bilbas is composed] of several tribes... Each chief has a certain number of thieves, who rob for him; and his tribe makes him voluntary gifts of provisions... federation of tribes... Their only laws are the custom of the tribe, and the chiefs, assisted by the council of elders, administer the tribe. No crimes are punished with death except for adultery and seduction etc.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, Bishop noted that the tribal nomads had no law but “the right of the strongest.” At the same time, the non-tribal or the sedentary Kurds, especially under Turkey, were “fairly orderly” and peace loving, apart from their relations with the Christians.<sup>43</sup> A. J. Braver, who visited Kurdistan in 1933, noted that Turkish rule in the Kurdish districts was only nominal, and the aghas governed the Jews as they pleased.<sup>44</sup> Van Bruinessen characterized the non-tribal people who lived under the oppressive feudal rule of the tribal Kurdish aghas, as citizens who did not own their own land and had no kinship-based organization with meaningful political significance.<sup>45</sup> There were many non-tribal Kurdish peasants of Muslim origin. Among the Hemewend and Dizeyī tribes, the non-tribal peasants were known as *miskên*, or as *Kurmanj*, in northern Kurdistan. Previously they had been known as *gūran*, which meant “a peasant, a man of non-tribal origin,” a term which was in use in Persian Kurdistan more recently.<sup>46</sup> The non-tribal groups were also known as *reyet* (from Arab. *ra‘yya*, pl. *ra‘yā*, lit, glazing herd, subjects, non-Muslim subjects, parishioners).<sup>47</sup> Van Bruinessen commented that socio-economical changes in the 20th century have narrowed the differences within the Kurdish society.

<sup>41</sup> For more details on its history, see McDowall (1996: 27, 32–33, 354).

<sup>42</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 152.

<sup>43</sup> Isabella Lucy Bird (Mrs. J. F. Bishop), *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (London. Rep. John Murray, 1891), vol. II: 372.

<sup>44</sup> Braver 1944 (vol. I): 217.

<sup>45</sup> For a wider outlook on feudalism, see Bloch 1961.

<sup>46</sup> Minorsky 1943–46: 77–8; Van Bruinessen 1978: 120.

<sup>47</sup> See the discussion of Stillman 1979: 95.

Typically, the tribesmen were nomadic shepherds or semi-nomadic shepherds-cum-cultivators, while economically and politically, they dominated the non-tribal peasants (and artisans). Since most tribesmen have by now fully settled and taken up agriculture and since both within the tribal and non-tribal segments, class contradictions are developing, the distinction is not as clear-cut now as it used to be.<sup>48</sup>

Most Kurds were tribal members or urban residents with a tribal affiliation; some Kurds were non-tribal. Most of the Christians “were politically dominated and economically exploited by Kurdish aghas.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, some of the Christian inhabitants in the Kurdish regions were also organized in tribal structure, notably the Nestorians of upper and lower Tiyārī, Tkhuma, Jilu and Baz, who lived to the south, southwest, and east of Julamerk (Hakkari).<sup>50</sup> The Jewish inhabitants, on the other hand, whether rural or urban, have never been part of the tribal system.

### C. *Tribal Patronage*

All rural Jews and some urban Jews had lived under the tribal jurisdiction of aghas. They were not an integral part of the tribe but rather subject protégés of the agha. Without the patronage of the aghas, there could be no guarantee for their safety and freedom of passage in rural Kurdistan. The customary, sometimes hereditary, tradition to protect the Jews was one of the components in the relations between aghas and their rural Jewish subjects. The protection of non-Muslim subjects, mostly Jews and Christians, became one of the duties of the agha. In return, the non-tribal subjects paid gifts, taxes and portions of their yield and manufacturing. One way to view the relationship between the tribal agha and his Jewish protégés is to view the patronage as the result of the services and dues provided by the Jews. Another is to see the dues and other obligations as the result of the agha’s defense of the Jews. Whatever may be the case, both explanations are too simplistic

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<sup>48</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 117.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> These main Christian groups were neighbors of the Kurdistan Jews and were later compared with them on various aspects. See M. Zaken.

and these relationships were based on several components, discussed in length throughout this book. The rules that formed the bond between the agha and his Jewish subjects created a long-lasting relationship with mutual benefits.

In the tribal setting, the nominal patronage of the tribal chieftain over his Jew was the first layer in the protection of Jews. It was known in the tribal circles that so-and-so is “a Jew” of a certain agha, and the tribesmen knew the consequences of hurting this Jew or offending the tribal rules. These offenders would have to answer to the tribal agha and expect to be charged according to tribal ruling if they violate the rights of a tribal chief. The second layer in the protection of Jews was the physical shelter. It was provided to the Jews in two occasions, while staying overnight in one of the villages under the tribal jurisdiction of their patron agha, or when given escort for the duration of (part of) the trip. A Jewish peddler or merchant who traveled often in the Kurdish mountains would visit many villages during a trip that could last a few days to several weeks. In a number of these villages, he would stay for the night at the home of his tribal host who would take care of his Jewish protégé and at times escort him to his next stop. The Jews called their host *mare-bēsa* (NA, lit., house-owner, host), because while in his house he would provide his Jewish guests with shelter as well as some food.<sup>51</sup> The Jewish peddler would grant his ‘landlord’ some gifts or goods and he would host him, in return, when his ‘landlord’ paid a visit to his community.

However, this patronage did not guarantee completely the safety of the Jewish protégés. When a robbery or an act of theft occurred, it signified that the protection of the Jews was not comprehensive, as they had hoped. At times, the agha knew the identity of the robbers, as they may have been his men, just as they may have been his rivals.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, when tragedy such as a murder of Jew occurred, it usually signified the termination of the pact between the Jews and their agha and led to the migration of the Jewish family involved. The patronage that the tribal agha granted his Jews was nominal. In other words, the tribesmen knew that so-and-so is the Jewish subject and protégé of a

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<sup>51</sup> The Jews observed the dietary laws and while being hosted at a Kurdish house they would limit their diet for drinking tea and eating yogurt or boiled eggs. They would not eat any cooked food, only *kosher*, permissible food and most peddlers would cook for themselves during their trips.

<sup>52</sup> In the early 1820s, in a reference to the Bilbas tribe, Rich claims that each chief has a certain number of thieves, who rob for him. Rich 1836 (vol. I): 152

certain tribal agha, but the agha did not grant his subjects escorts while roaming through the rural area. Most Jews traveled without a physical escort, because they could not allow themselves the cost of escorts. Indeed they adopted several methods of self-defense and hoped that the nominal patronage of their agha and his tribal influence would help them in precarious incidents.

#### D. *The Image of the Jews*

The image of Jews in Kurdistan seemed to stem from a tribal outlook that downgrades non-tribal residents. It appears that only then, if at all, was the image affected by religious and ethnic considerations. One of the famous tribal feuds in modern Kurdistan was relayed to the Western world, thanks to “the tale of Suto and Tato,” published in 1925.<sup>53</sup> In reality, “the tale of Suto and Tato” took place around the turn of the 19th century. Tato, his family and clan were under the control of the powerful aghas of Oramar. The feud begins when Tato can no longer tolerate the humiliation of his brothers by their tribal foes, the aghas of Oramar. He says to his older brothers, Tamo, Hadi, and Resul, “I cannot submit like you, I will not make a Jew of myself in Suto’s hands.” According to the editors’ note, Tato said the following: I cannot continue and “admit myself to be a coward, and resign myself to the status of a slave.”<sup>54</sup> As the story proceeds, Suto Oramari summons all his followers and warns them that if Shaikh Muḥammad Ṣadiq of Barzān co-operates with his enemy, Tato, the lands of the Duskani and Oramari “will be entrapped, and we shall be forced to submit to Tato, or else not live.” As the editors explained the account to European readers, they noted that the sentence “we shall be forced to submit to Tato” means literally, we shall “become Tato’s Jews.”<sup>55</sup>

From the point of view of the tribal Kurds, to submit to one’s enemy means to become a Jew who submits himself to the tribal chiefs. When a tribal agha submits to his foe, he is lowering his position to the level of a Jew. By surrendering to a tribal foe, one becomes a coward and accepts the status of a slave. In the perception of Suto Oramari, a failure in tribal combat leads to one of two options, either to submit

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<sup>53</sup> Nikitine and Soane 1923.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

(and to become Tato's Jew), or to die.

As illustrated in “the Tale of Suto and Tato,” the nominal, perhaps theatrical, reference to “Jews” in Kurdish tribal society had come to be synonymous with admitting defeat, subjugation and enslavement. Even a modern observer of Kurdistan such as Hay portrayed the image of the Jews in rough lines. Hay (1921) reported that if a Kurd wishes to indicate that his tribe is law-abiding, he would say, “Even a Jew could keep us in order.” In other words, even the dominated non-tribal could keep our law-abiding tribe in order. Hay also stated that “if a Kurd wishes to express his contempt for an official,” he would say, “even a Jew would be better than he.”<sup>56</sup> From a tribal point of view, the grave despise to the (Turkish) officials, who represented a political danger to the tribal agha, was even stronger than the contempt to the Jews, who rather represented a moral, religious and social flaw.

The lowly image of the Jews in the eyes of the tribesmen at times helped the Jews, as mentioned by several Jewish sources. Kurds sympathetic to the Jews would come to their rescue and rebuke their abusers, using their already inferior status as a reason why no further exploitation or harassment should be meted out to them. This was one of the rationales used by the Kurdish protectors when persuading their offenders to stop harming the Jews. Moshe Yoseph Mizrahi (I#24) from Rabatke argued that the lowly and precarious position of Jews had indeed helped them. Some Kurds would always come to their rescue and protect the weaker Jews from the wrath of their fellow Kurds. If any Kurd persecuted a Jew, another Kurd would come to his rescue. He would say to the offender, “how do you talk to this poor Jew?” and “why do you give him troubles?”<sup>57</sup> Based on the apparent lowly status of rural Jews and their perception in the eyes of the tribal members, it is not surprising that the Jews were viewed as cowards, as evident in “the Tale of Suto and Tato.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hay 1921: 86–7.

<sup>57</sup> Moshe Yoseph Mizrahi (I#24).

<sup>58</sup> One must note the peculiar sect of the Yezidis, who were despised in Kurdistan because of their religious beliefs and were considered “Devil worshippers.” For some reference on the Yezidis consult Guest 1993; T. Reshid, “Yezidism: historical roots,” *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, January 2005; F. G. Kreyenbroek, “Yezidism—its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition,” *Texts and Studies in Religion* 62 (1995); Henry Field, ed., *The Yazidis: Their Life and Beliefs* (Field Research Projects, 1975).

To comprehend the tribal perception of the Jews, as well as their position, one must note four major differences between tribal Muslim Kurds and rural Jews. First, the Kurds were Muslims; Jews were members of the Jewish religion. Second, together with the Christians the Jews were considered *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the Bible and the New Testament). Both were *dhimmī*, people entitled to protection by the *Qurʾān*. Nevertheless, unlike the Christians, the Jews were a very small non-Muslim community, and were generally submissive and trustworthy. Third, the Jews, especially those in rural areas, were servile and non-combative subjects who relied on the tribal chiefs for protection. Lastly, urban Jews and more particularly rural Jews generally worked in different occupations from those engaged in by their Kurdish neighbors, some of which were considered socially unacceptable to tribal Kurds. Therefore, in the rural area there was virtually no occupational or economic competition between Jews and Kurds. These differences and the tribal Kurdish society's perception of Jews shed light on the relationship between the two groups in rural Kurdistan.

#### E. *The Status of the Jews*

Rich, who in 1820 visited the Sulaimaniya district, referred to the status of the non-tribal inhabitants. A tribesman once confessed to him

that the clans conceived the peasants to be merely created for their use; and wretched indeed is the condition of the Kurdish cultivators.<sup>59</sup> [Rich quoted a tribal agha who told him] I take from them my due, which is the *zakāt*,<sup>60</sup> or a tenth of the whole, and as much more as I can squeeze out of them by any means, and on any pretext.<sup>61</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, Benjamin II referred to the rural Jews who were “in the true sense of the word, surrounded by tribes of savages.”<sup>62</sup> Within their communities, tribal and village aghas governed rural Jews. The aghas protected the Jews and enabled them to work and live with their families according to their tradition, and extracted from them taxes, services and other benefits. Zechariah Barashi (born

<sup>59</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 89.

<sup>60</sup> *Zakāt* (Arab., alms), is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every Muslim must give alms in accordance to his wealth.

<sup>61</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 96.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 96.

1920) who lived in Barashi until his immigration to *Eretz-Yisrael* in 1933, said that the Muslim rulers did with the residents

whatever they liked, treating them as slaves, especially the Jews whom they exploited in all kinds of work, with no payment. Even food for lunch they took from home [working like this] until the end of all seasonal works for the governor. . . . Whoever refused to labor for the agha would receive blows and the punishment of working double time.<sup>63</sup>

Faced with troubles from tribal aghas, Kurdistan Jewish often reiterated the dual system of government. Zechariah Barashi argues that Jewish residents never appealed to the official authorities, because it was “dangerous” for them and “endangered their family.” The reason was that the agha’s hands “reached everywhere in the Kurdish mountains” and he would avenge this complaining Jew, “by means of his Muslim Kurdish servants.” Barashi hedged his testimony, arguing:

The rulers were not all the same. Some rulers were sympathetic to the Jews and some rulers would treat them as slaves . . . . They would work during the day and a few hours during the night. In return, the Jew would receive food for all his family from the types of grains available in that region.<sup>64</sup>

Rural Jews had to submit to the authority of the agha under almost all circumstances with only one way out. If a Jew could no longer tolerate the difficulties, “he would escape with his wife and household, seeking shelter with another agha or migrating to a large town such as Mosul or Baghdad.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Benjamin II, Jewish mountain dwellers lived in isolation amongst the Kurds and “never left the mountains.”<sup>66</sup> The following three accounts shed light on the status of rural Jews in the previous centuries. In Nerwa, a Jewish man kidnapped an eight-year-old Jewish girl with the permission of the Kurdish tribal chief. Her father was unable to bring her back for “fear of the gentiles, the lords of the country.” The *dayyan* of Nerwa, warned the rabbis in the region not to perform a Jewish wedding for the ‘couple’ in question.<sup>67</sup> The second report occurred in Sandur, around the 18th century: a father

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<sup>63</sup> Z. Barashi, “The Town of Barashi and My Wanderings in the Kurdish Mountains,” *Hithadshut* 5 (1985): 29–30.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 70.

<sup>67</sup> Mann 1931–1935, vol. I, letter no. 9: 486, 525.

attempted to cancel the betrothal of his daughter, under the pretext that it was signed when she was a minor.<sup>68</sup> In the third account from the village of Sakho,<sup>69</sup> a man took a wife for his son, a minor, with the understanding that she would perform the housework until he grew up. Eventually, the woman fled the house and the community expressed great fear that she would leave her religion in order to rescue herself. The community declared the marriage invalid, because her husband was a ‘minor,’ and an investigation was carried out to see whether he had “pubic hair,” in an attempt to prove whether he was indeed a little boy.<sup>70</sup> These reports reveal several aspects concerning the Jews in the tribal Kurdish society: the great power of the agha over the Jews and great fear from the agha among the Jews; the inferior status of women, marriage of minors and general ignorance regarding the relations between the genders.<sup>71</sup>

The following account sheds more light on both the status of rural Jews and their own perception of their status. Some Jews, predominantly those in rural areas, seemed to internalize the values and perception of their own status as perceived by the tribal society. They seemed to undergo a process similar to introjection in psychology through which individuals internalize and accept their status from the standpoint of the tribal Kurdish society. They may have adopted the tribal standpoint to such a degree that they often viewed with criticism fellow Jews who acted against tribal aghas or against tribal interests. The Jewish subjects who assumed the tribal viewpoint could criticize fellow Jews who acted improperly, judging them from the point of view of the Kurdish tribesmen.<sup>72</sup> Paradoxical as it may seem, some Jews understood and even justified acts of punishment against Jews by tribal Kurds. Two Jews from Sandur justified the murder of their Jewish *mukhtār* in 1941 because he confronted Kurdish tribesmen, accusing them of stealing animals belonging to the Jews of Sandur. In the opinion of these two Sanduri Jews, their *mukhtār* confronted the Kurds in an offensive manner.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 88, 538–541.

<sup>69</sup> According to Ben-Yaacob (1981): 85, this is Sukho (or Soka, or Sukhi), a village between Shosh and ‘Aqar, a day and a half distance from Amadiya.

<sup>70</sup> Mann 1931–1935, vol. I: 488–489, 542–543.

<sup>71</sup> Consult the article of Bedr-Khan on the Kurdish women, Kamuran BEDIR-KHAN, “La femma Kurde,” *Hawar* (no. 19) 1938; and Hansen 1961.

<sup>72</sup> Introversion in psychology is the unconscious internalization of aspects of the world (especially aspects of persons) within the self in such a way that the internalized representation takes over the psychological functions of the external objects.

He adopted a more daring behavior than was to be expected from a Jewish subject in his relations with the tribal masters. Şālih Raḥamim (I#37) from Sandur, referring to the murder of the seven Jews, in a punitive action of Kurdish tribesmen, explained:

The truth of the matter is that they [the murderers] regretted... but our *mukhtār* was very powerful. He had connections in the government; he had connections with the *qānmaqām* and with *ma'mūr al-markaz* [the head of the police station] and with the judge in Dohuk. He would put persons in prison. He was very strong...

The Jews of Sandur were under the patronage of Sa'īd Agha Doski who usually protected them, but not in this instance. According to Şālih Raḥamim, "The truth is that they were right [the murderers], they had asked permission from Sa'īd Agha."<sup>73</sup> If Sa'īd Agha had prohibited it, they would have been unable to commit the murders. In Şālih Raḥamim's opinion, the Jewish *mukhtār* almost deserved his death, since he left the murderers no other choice by acting against the tribesmen who were persecuting the Jews. The Jewish *mukhtār* had resorted to seeking government interference. His complaints and appeals for government interference against the tribal Kurds irritated the tribesmen and lead eventually to the murder of seven Sanduris. From their lowly position in Kurdish society, the two Jewish observers viewed the behavior of the Jewish *mukhtār* as too provocative for a non-tribal Jew within the tribal society. They had internalized and accepted the tribal codes of Kurdistan, and accordingly believed that the Jewish *mukhtār* of Sandur had exceeded the boundaries of acceptable behavior and acting too harshly against the tribesmen. The pattern of behavior of the Jewish *mukhtār* of Sandur did not correspond to the image or position of rural Jew, as seen by his two Jewish criticizers. The justification of the murder stems from the poor self-image and position of the Jews in the tribal region Kurdish society; it may be closely related to the question of slavery among rural Jews in Kurdistan, as discussed henceforth.

### 1. *Jewish Slaves*

According to Benjamin II, in the middle of the 19th century, rural

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<sup>73</sup> Reportedly, the Kurds went to Salimê Mişte, Sa'īd Agha's rival, and asked permission to kill Sasson and Moshe, the two Jews. According to Şālih Raḥamim, Salimê Mişte granted his permission to kill the Jews, and Sa'īd Agha's permission was requested as well.

Jews were scattered throughout the Kurdish mountains. Their mobility was restricted, as they were “compelled to stay in the places assigned to them.”

One often finds five, ten, or even twenty Jewish families [as] the property of one Kurd, by whom they are laden with taxes, and subjected to ill treatment. Heavy taxes are imposed upon them...they are compelled at different periods of the year to perform serf-service, to cultivate the master’s field, without receiving or being able to demand the smallest compensation for their labor.<sup>74</sup>

He reported that in the remote villages, Jews still suffered bad treatment although they were no longer “sold as slaves” as in the past.<sup>75</sup> In addition, they had to pay heavy taxes and work as serfs, mainly in agriculture, for the benefit of their master at different periods of the year. The Jews received no payment or other compensation for their work.<sup>76</sup>

It must be noted that around that time, the central Turkish government was in the midst of an unprecedented attempt to quell the semi-independent Kurdish principalities.<sup>77</sup> In this context, one may view the following report. In October 1851, *en route* from Sandur to Zakho, A. H. Stern passed several secluded villages where “oppression and tyranny had driven the inhabitants [from their friendly regions,] to seek shelter in the more inaccessible mountain districts.”<sup>78</sup>

Several patterns emerge from the descriptions of relationships between rural Jews and their aghas, among which were the patronage granted by the aghas, the dues of the Jews, the compulsory labor (*Kur., zebara*) and other obligations forced on rural Jews.<sup>79</sup>

An important question that needs clarification is whether the Jews were actually ‘slaves’ in Kurdish society. J. C. Rich, who visited Sulaimaniya in 1820, saw little difference between the plight of the non-tribal Kurds and that of the black slaves in the West Indies.<sup>80</sup> Benjamin II, in the mid-nineteenth century, discussed the plight of rural Jews who lived in the Kurdish mountains. According to Benjamin, the master had absolute power over “the life and death of his slaves.” Accordingly, he

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<sup>74</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 96.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 220–221, 288; Nieuwenhuis 1982: 106.

<sup>78</sup> Stern 1854: 220.

<sup>79</sup> Edmonds 1957: 224–25.

<sup>80</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 96.

could sell his slaves to another master, as individuals or whole families.<sup>81</sup> In the 1860s, Taylor noted that the reference to Christian peasants of the Botan district was *zêrkirî*, “bought with gold.” Their aghas sold them together with the land that they cultivated.<sup>82</sup> It is reasonable to assume that this procedure also applied to non-tribal Jewish subjects. Other witnesses made similar observations. Harry Charles Luke observed in 1907–1908 that the “Kurdish tribal chiefs still have ownership of their Jews” just as they have or had “ownership of their Nestorians.”<sup>83</sup> In 1933, A. J. Braver noted that the “aghas governed the Jews as they pleased.” Many of the aghas subjugated the *fallāhîn* (lit. cultivators, pl. of *fallāh*, used in Kurdish society with reference to Christian farmers,) and the Jews too as slaves, just as in previous centuries in Poland and Russia.<sup>84</sup> Braver argued that Jews were still subjugated to Kurdish aghas. A British official informed him that until recently the Jews of the mountains were slaves of their masters. These aghas had a tradition of sending each other, a Jewish family who specialized in handcraft, such as weavers or dyers as a gift for the holidays. Hakhham Shmuel of Rawanduz informed Braver that slavery existed wherever the hands of the Iraqi police did not reach.<sup>85</sup> Braver reported that he met

a 35-year-old Jew who was bought at the time by his master for 200 *qaran*<sup>86</sup> and his master still demands that he work for him. In Rawanduz, the Jew is not worried by the firm demand of a Kurdish master, but at a distance of 12 kilometers [7.5 miles] from the police station, a slave would not dare to stand against his master.<sup>87</sup>

In 1942, Enzo Sereni, a Jewish emissary from Palestine noted that the Jewish village Sandur had “two types in a racial sense,” the first type of wealthy villagers called ‘Kollacks,’ [*Cossacks*, in old Russia, were wealthy villagers who ruled their workers by force] “a very healthy type, very strong, very handsome.” The second type seemed to him as little backward or primitive (Sereni used the word “degenerate”). This backward type originated “from the Jews who resided [until

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 96.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor 1865: 51; Van Bruinessen 1978: 118.

<sup>83</sup> Luke 1925: 14.

<sup>84</sup> Braver 1944 (vol. I): 217.

<sup>85</sup> This statement reaffirms the principle of dual system of government, as discussed above (“the Dual System of Government”): 23–24.

<sup>86</sup> *Qaran* (*qeran*) is an Old Persian currency. *Qerane* is the plural form in NA.

<sup>87</sup> Braver 1935: 247. See also Imanuel Bar-Hayim, “on the slavery among the Jews of Kurdistan,” *Davar*, 2nd of [the Hebrew month of] Adar, 1948 (Hebrew).

recently] in Kurdish villages and were slaves of Kurdish shaikhs.” For the voyage of Enzo Sereni, see Bibi (1998, part I: 84–85) who quotes a report of Sereni from April 1942. In some places, even as recently as the early 20th century, Kurdish aghas may have sold their rights and ‘ownership’ over their Jewish subjects to other aghas. Based on the testimony by Yehoshua Reuben (I#44) from Chāl, “Jews were sold like slaves.” For instance, Agha Ubaido sold Reuben’s uncle Gedalyah to another agha, Isefko, for 200 *qarane*.<sup>88</sup> Reuben suggested a financial explanation for the sale of Jews by their agha; it was much easier for the agha to sell a Jew in his possession than other assets such as land. It is not entirely clear whether this was a purely economic ‘transaction,’ because both aghas, the buyer and the seller, were from the same family. Indeed, the agha sold his benefits or customary rights that came with the ‘ownership’ of the Jew. According to Reuben, these rights included the receiving of gifts from the Jewish subject on the Muslim holidays. Rural Jews would give their agha once a year one liter of oil, and a pair of traditional Kurdish wool pants, *shale-shapik*. These and other privileges passed down from father to son and were transferable. Interestingly, around the same time Wigram met the old agha of Chāl who served as the government *mudīr* or governor of his district and was a Sūfī by religious belief. Wigram noted him as the craftiest “murderer in the country-side” and shed some light on the question of slavery of Jews.

He is the only man of the writer’s acquaintance who keeps a really large herd of domestic Jews. The village of Chal is largely populated by men of that race; and they are to all intents and purposes the serfs of the agha—his tame money—spinners. The writer was even offered full rights in one of them for the sum of five pound; and if the bargain had held in more civilized districts (and the vendor, to do him justice, did not realize that it would not), it might have been as profitable an investment as is ever likely to come his way! A Jew of one’s very own, bound to put all his financial skill at your disposal, and to use it solely for your benefit, would be a most valuable property.<sup>89</sup>

Wigram is most probably relating to Sa‘dī Agha b. Mīrzah Agha, who ruled over Chāl and the surrounding region.<sup>90</sup> Wigram seems to have

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<sup>88</sup> Twenty *qarane* were worth one *Majidi*.

<sup>89</sup> Wigram 1914: 317.

<sup>90</sup> Sa‘dī Agha b. Mīrzah Agha, the old agha of Chala, served at the same time as government *mudīr*. More details on Sa‘dī Agha b. Mīrzah Agha. See below: 199–201.

believed that the full rights in a Jew means that the Jew would harness all his time and energy to the economic benefit of his master. Possibly, he may have conveyed his preconception of the economic value of a full-time working Jew.

According to Yehoshua Reuben (I#44) from Chāl and several other rural informants, the Jews of the aghas worked for their living and supported their families. In addition, they were at the disposal of their agha. They granted him gifts in holidays and other occasions, dues, and portions of their yields or production. Likewise, the Jews worked for the agha according to the practice of *zebara*, a form of an obligatory communal work, a day or two in a year. However, *zebara* was required from all non-tribal subjects, not just from rural Jews.<sup>91</sup> Urban Jews were also required at times to perform *zebara*, on behalf of their agha. Many Jews from Zakho remember vividly how they were mobilized to dig irrigation channels around Zakho on behalf of their urban agha, Hazim Beg.

In 1933, Braver explained that slavery was a common reality and both Jews and Christians suffered it. He nevertheless found a beneficial aspect to the subjugation of Jews:

In a country with no security, the subjugation of the Jew included the patronage of the master, and without the patronage of a strong tribe, no one could survive in the mountains.<sup>92</sup>

According to E. Brauer, in earlier times the trading of Jews by the aghas was a more common practice. The agha could receive between 300 to 400 *qerane* (15–20 British pounds) for the sale of his Jew; whenever the agha was in need of money, he would sell one of his Jews. The agha could also sell a part of a Jew. He first would sell a foot saying, “Piyekî Cûhî dê firoşim,” (Kur., I will sell a foot of the Jew). For one foot he obtained about 10 British pounds.<sup>93</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, the German Saad reported that the mayor of Zakho had told him

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<sup>91</sup> This assessment is valid concerning the first half of the 20th century. It is based, besides the written documents, on interviews with the following informants: Moshe Binyamin (I#3), Daniel Barashi (I#4), Haim Barzānī (I#6), Moshe Yoseph Mizrahi (I#24), Michael Michaeli (I#26), Levi Mordechai (I#27), Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (I#33), Shalom Pirko (I#34), Eliyahu Shalom (I#38), Levi Mordechai (I#45).

<sup>92</sup> Braver 1935: 247.

<sup>93</sup> Brauer 1993: 225.

Lately one of the Kurdish *begs*, who owes me an amount of money, wrote to me that at the moment he had no cash. He will, however, sell in the near future his Christian, that is, he will transfer him to another *beg*,<sup>94</sup> and then he will pay.<sup>95</sup>

Other reports indicate that tribal aghas may have received part of the dowry as compensation for the loss expected when their Jewish subjects married Jews outside their jurisdiction. Likewise, the agha would expect some compensation for his future loss when the Jews migrated voluntarily, because of a murder in the family or lack of livelihood, both of which fell under the responsibility of the tribal agha.

In order to understand the pattern of slavery observed in Kurdistan in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is necessary to understand slavery within the context of the Arab, and especially the Muslim world, even though Kurdish aghas did not follow the Islamic definitions of slavery.<sup>96</sup> Islamic law recognizes two prescribed methods of enslaving people. The first is through *jihād*, holy war, and the second is the enslaving of children born to slave parents. "Through these two methods, it was possible to go a long way in ensuring that only non-Muslims would be enslaved."<sup>97</sup> The Muslim armies enslaved thousands of prisoners of war, but both Christians and Jews who were *ahl al-kitāb* and *ahl al-dhimma* were spared this fate by paying tax instead. The mass slavery in the Arab and Islamic world was generally the result of large transfers of blacks from Africa from the 12th century until the end of the 19th century.<sup>98</sup> In Muslim societies, slaves performed different roles than in the West. They were "not used on large plantations for the production of commercial products" such as cotton and sugar, but rather performed household chores and served in harems, in the army and in administration.<sup>99</sup> According to Gordon,

Slaves, because of the interactive nature of Islam, whose tenets made it easy for slaves to enter the fold, did not feel like strangers in Muslim society.

<sup>94</sup> *Beg* is a feudal lord; a chieftain invested with an office as a governor.

<sup>95</sup> L. Lamec Saad, *Sehshszebje Jahre als Quarantänarzt in der Türkei* (Berlin, 1913): 255, n. 11. The mayor of Zakho at the early 20th century was Muḥammad Agha, whose son Hājjī Agha became mayor after him.

<sup>96</sup> Laffin 1982: 1.

<sup>97</sup> Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York, New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 24.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

Furthermore, slaves could seek higher positions and many were gradually absorbed into Muslim society.<sup>100</sup> Several reports from eyewitnesses in Kurdistan from the 19th and early 20th centuries, describe rural Jews as slaves, subjugated to tribal chieftains in isolated places, far from the public eye. These reports discuss mal-treatment, abuse and exploitation of rural Jews by their tribal aghas and some reports discuss the sale of Jewish slaves, which seemed limited mainly because tribal aghas did not hasten to relinquish such an asset. Indeed, these Jews were not slaves in the western or even the Islamic sense of the word, but rather ‘slaves’ of tribal Kurdish chieftains in remote areas who had many obligations and only few rights. Based on the available information, it is clear that the kind of Jewish slavery recorded by western travelers does not correspond to the definitions of slavery according to the Islamic tradition. This slavery had been practiced in the isolated mountainous regions by powerful chieftains, who at times bought the right to possess Jewish subjects and at times received them as birthright. They granted them patronage in the wild and insecure tribal region and in return received gifts, dues, labor and various other benefits.

Yehoshua Reuben (I#44) came from Chāl, a town under the rule of Sa’dī Agha b. Mīrzah Agha, who ruled over “more than three hundred villages in the surrounding region.”<sup>101</sup> He reported another arrangement involving rural Jews: approximately thirty Jewish families lived in Chāl and each family had its own *istāda* (NA., master, lord, and owner), who granted protection to his Jews. This is an Aramaic expression for a master at the village level. The *istāda* received payments from his subjects during the Muslim holidays. They would grant him a pair of *barguze* (Kur., pants) and one liter of oil at each of these holidays. The protection meant that nobody was allowed to hurt the Jew. Reuben’s grandfather had four sons: Solomon, Eli, Gedaliah and Reuben, Yehoshua’s father. The Kurdish agha who was the master of Yehoshua bequeathed the four Jewish brothers to his sons, Aḥmad, Ubaydo, Omar, and Muḥammad. Shlomo and Eli belonged to the oldest son, Aḥmad. Reuben and Gedaliah belonged to the second and third brothers respectively, Ubaydo and Omar. When Omar died, Gedaliah became the possession of Ubaydo, for Omar died childless.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1. See Lewis (1970 and 1990).

<sup>101</sup> In the above discussion about the old agha of Chāl, who served as government *mudīr*, Wigram probably relates to Sa’dī Agha b. Mīrzah Agha.

Interestingly, the four Jewish brothers were bequeathed to their Kurdish masters according to the Islamic law of inheritance, with the eldest son receiving twice as much as his younger brothers.<sup>102</sup>

Subjugation was part of rural Jewish life in Kurdistan and during the Ottoman Empire, following World War I, in parts of Iraq, Turkey and modern Persia. The Muslims, whether Arabs, Turks, Persians, or Kurds were always several rungs higher on the social ladder than Christians and Jews. The division between tribal Kurds, who were mostly Muslims, and non-tribal inhabitants, most of whom were Christians and Jews, was one of the defining rules shaping the social subdivision in Kurdistan. The Jews have always belonged to the non-tribal section of Kurdish society and their subordinate status is discussed below.

In spite of the reports of Western and Jewish travelers who attached the label 'slave' to rural Jews in Kurdistan, one cannot consider all rural Jews to be slaves in the complete meaning of the word, either by Western or Islamic standards. Rural Jews, especially towards the mid-twentieth century, were non-tribal protégés and subjects of the tribal agha; they were not completely autonomous but rather under the rule of the agha. They needed his permission in important personal or familial decisions such as the marriage of a son or a daughter to someone outside his jurisdiction and the migration to another tribal jurisdiction. They also gave the agha gifts on the Muslim holidays and other occasions, and worked once or twice a year in his fields, orchards or vineyards for no payment, a duty known as *zebara*.<sup>103</sup>

By 1943, when Jewish slavery in Kurdistan had been confined to remote rural areas, Shmaryahu Guttman discussed their isolation and ignorance in northern Iraq. He argued that the Jews became slaves to Kurdish aghas to whom they were sold for reasons of security.<sup>104</sup> The editors of the book in which this document appeared noted that Jewish emissaries from the Holy Land such as Guttman interpreted tenancy as slavery, and that "in Iraq slavery of Jews was not known. Even if

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<sup>102</sup> The law of primogeniture that exists in some Muslim societies entitles only the eldest son to inherit the whole of the father's property or at least to get the lion's share. The Qur'an (for instance, sura 4, *al-nissa*) and many Islamic jurists and modern scholars discuss the rules of inheritance in Islam. Consult J. J. Nasir, *The Islamic Law of Personal Status*, 3rd rev. ed., 2002.

<sup>103</sup> See Salmazadeh (1980: 114–115), about the economical benefits of the landlord, such as unpaid labor.

<sup>104</sup> Bibi (1998, part I: 178) from a report sent by Shmaryahu Guttman in February 1943.

there were a few instances, the language used by Guttman is general and comprehensive for all Kurds."<sup>105</sup>

## 2. *The Authority of the Agha*

The influence of the tribal agha over the life of his Jewish subjects cannot be underestimated. Benjamin II noted the humiliation of Nestorians and Jews alike in the Kurdish mountains, as is apparent from the following custom. If a Kurdish master meets his non-Kurdish slaves on the road, they are forced to run in front of him all the way to the stable door "without even once being allowed to stop to take breath. This barbarous custom is practiced almost daily."<sup>106</sup> The master had absolute power over "the life and death of his slaves." Accordingly, he could sell his slaves to another master, individually or in whole families.<sup>107</sup> Another old practice that highlighted the power of the agha took place before the marriage of Jewish or Nestorian young persons. It was necessary for a young man to purchase his bride from her master if she was leaving his jurisdiction for another agha's domain, thus causing her master material loss of annual taxes. According to an extreme practice, related by Benjamin II, whose reports are at times based on unfounded information, the new bride "must place herself at the disposal of her master," though "only within the last few years had this odious abuse" been abolished and replaced by a payment of money to the master.<sup>108</sup> No other source supports the existence of such a practice. It ought to be stressed that this practice did not exist during Benjamin II's visit and that he had only heard of it. Allegedly, one young bride had desperately resisted her master and killed him. Now, the old form of abuse had been exchanged for another, as the master's claim had to be redeemed with money and young men must purchase their bride from her agha.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., n. 16.

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 96–97.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. Based on the lack of other sources supporting this bizarre account and due to the fact it was not in practice during Benjamin's visit and based on the nature of relationships between Jews and their tribal chieftains, one tends to reject this account. It may have been a local attempt or a sporadic phenomenon that was violently rejected and voided as reported by Benjamin II. The practice of paying compensation to the agha, which is dealt with in this book, seems to stem mostly from the loss of income for

Of special interest is the instance described by Benjamin II, highlighting the power of the chieftain. The agha had appointed an unqualified Jew to be the slaughterer of animals for the Jewish community in exchange for an annual payment. The chieftain thus superseded the rabbis, who had authority in matters of *halakha*.<sup>110</sup> When Benjamin II realized the essence of the bargain between the chieftain and the unqualified slaughterer, he succeeded in having the unqualified slaughterer removed from his position. The interference of the Jewish traveler had infuriated the Kurdish chief who threatened to have Benjamin's head, but the Jewish traveler managed to escape unharmed.<sup>111</sup>

In the Kurdish regions, the central authorities held the local agha responsible for the unlawful activity that occurred in the area of his jurisdiction. In practice, this arrangement helped the Ottoman rulers to control their remote and frontier provinces by means of local rulers and agents. In the early 1920s, Wallace Lyon met

‘Abd al-Qādir Beg the agha of the Miran who was the over-lord of his Chaldean serfs. These Kurdish chiefs, known as Beg Zada, intermarried among themselves and like squires, they squatted [lounged] around in most of the villages. As intermediaries they dealt with government officials, and entertained all visitors. [They] paid all fines, reimbursed themselves liberally by private and personal levies on their people, led them in battle and defended them against aggressors.<sup>112</sup>

The following account, reported by a local missionary, is characteristic of this policy. In April 1914, Kurds robbed several Assyrian boys who were returning home from the missionary school in Amadiya, accompanied by two servants of the mission, not far from the Assyrian village of Hayis.

The boys had little to lose, but the others [the servants] were taking with them supplies for their houses, chiefly materials for clothing, and the value of the total loss was rated by them at £23. This sum was paid over to us by the Amadia authorities pending the return of the goods, which, together with the robbers, they have demanded from Rashīd Beg, the Mira of Berwar. Meanwhile they have recouped themselves by apportioning the amount among the five villages situated near the scene

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the agha because of the marriage of one of his protégés. This is similar to the father's loss of income that was compensated by the groom, in the form of dowry.

<sup>110</sup> Benayahu 1965: 39–40.

<sup>111</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 83–85.

<sup>112</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 134.

of the robbery (3 Kurdish, 1 Syrian, and 1 Jewish). This appears to the western mind a strange way of dealing out justice, but we are assured that it is the law of the State.<sup>113</sup>

Van Bruinessen noted that the tribesmen refer to the distinction between tribal and non-tribal inhabitants as follows:

Masters and servants, rulers and ruled... Tribesmen are warriors [and] do not toil; non-tribal [inhabitants] are thought unfit to fight and it is only natural that their lords exploit their labor. They are a productive asset, not unlike a flock of sheep.<sup>114</sup>

According to Rush and Rand, although the agha had “the theoretical power to buy and sell a Jew, to grant him life, or to execute him at will, on very few occasions was this right exercised.”<sup>115</sup> A Kurdistani Jew from Barashi told Rush and Rand that

the agha had great power over our lives: We had to ask the agha’s permission to migrate from the village, to marry off a daughter, to obtain a divorce. The agha was the arbitrator in local quarrels and disputes that were brought to him... His judgment... could bring death at any time... The agha could even sell us to another agha, if he chose!<sup>116</sup>

In various tribal areas, non-tribal inhabitants could not easily abandon one agha for another. According to van Bruinessen, the freedom of movement of some non-tribal inhabitants was restricted even as recently as the second half of the 20th century in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>117</sup> A Jew from Barashi summarized the agha’s authority in this way:

If a villager needed workers to harvest his field, he had to ask permission from the agha, as his need for workers in his fields took precedence. In such an event, the men of the village were obliged to work for him first, without receiving any payment.

Jewish sources argued, “Only the crippled and the sick men could be excused” from such labor.<sup>118</sup> The agha would levy a tax on the dowry that was paid to the father of the bride. He would summon the father of a Jewish girl who was about to marry an outsider, and expect to

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<sup>113</sup> AM, no. 96, July 1914: 1280.

<sup>114</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 117.

<sup>115</sup> Rand and Rush 1979: 9.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*: 8.

<sup>117</sup> Van Bruinessen 1978: 118.

<sup>118</sup> Rand and Rush 1979: 8.

receive his share of the sum the father received for his daughter: “one-fourth of the money,” or “one-tenth” according to another version.<sup>119</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4) from Amadiya wished to marry a Jewish woman from the village of Nerwa. Barashi’s uncle, Shabbatai, invited the two aghas of Nerwa, Qaḥiro and Sa‘do, to Amadiya. He hosted them and bought *kabab* from Sayyid Muṣṭafā Kababchi<sup>120</sup> in the market and prepared for them a special meal because they did not eat Jewish dishes. Daniel Barashi reported:

My uncle told them, ‘There is a girl in Nerwa, if you will agree, we shall come and take her...’ [Daniel explains,] ‘Any one who wanted something regarding the Jews of Nerwa had to ask the agha’s permission.<sup>121</sup> They bought [= owned] the Jews of Nerwa. The Jews could not have migrated without their permission.’ [Regarding the girl from Nerwa,] The aghas said, ‘We are ready, if the boy is willing.’

Daniel Barashi went to Nerwa and paid sixty dinars as a dowry to his future father-in-law, but the latter did not give the aghas of Nerwa their share and kept all the money. When the aghas learned of the amount, they demanded one-tenth for themselves, just as with any other transaction. “At first, they did not ask for it directly. Sa‘do Agha told me that the other agha would create problems if we did not receive his share of the dowry.” According to Barashi, the agha would have caused troubles for his father-in-law. Eventually, Barashi himself gave the agha six dinars as a gift.

In summation, the tribal agha had immense power over the lives of his Jewish villagers. The Jewish villagers had to ask permission to migrate from his village before they could migrate; they had to ask permission from the tribal agha to settle in a certain village under his jurisdiction. Rural Jews had to seek permission before divorcing their wives or marrying their daughters to someone from another tribal jurisdiction. The power of the agha over his Jews was very comprehensive that, in theory, in some isolated places and recently much less than in previous centuries, he could even sell them to another agha. Discussing the power and authority of the agha, which may seem exaggerated in foreign eyes, A Jew from Barashi asked his interviewers,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 11.

<sup>120</sup> *Kababchi*, in Tur., the *kabab*’s maker.

<sup>121</sup> Salmanzadeh describes how the landlord of the village expects gifts for ‘permission to marry’ (1980: 114–115).

Does it seem strange to you that we Jews lived under such rule? Does it sound like a fairy tale or a chapter from history of a time long ago? Nevertheless, it is true... This is how... we lived there in the rugged mountains of Kurdistan!<sup>122</sup>

The power of the agha over his Jews was sufficiently pervasive for them to retract testimony or complaints made in court or at the police station if they ran counter to the agha's interests. The following account shows once again, the agha's supremacy over the authorities. Daniel Barashi (I#4) once worked in Nerwa with his father-in-law in weaving *shale-shapik*. One night, thieves stole some items from their house. Barashi reported that Gedaliah and Raḥamim were two Jewish rivals of his father in-law in Nerwa. They "wanted to hurt him" and persuaded some Kurds to steal from him. He knew that Jews accompanied the thieves, as the dogs would have barked and caught them if the Kurds had come alone. Barashi filed a complaint at the *makhfar* (Arab., guarding station, or police station). They authorized him to search each house in which he suspected he might find the stolen goods. Barashi searched some Kurdish homes but found nothing. After a short while, he asked the police officer to conduct another search, this time in the village of Dasga, the residence of Şâlihê Xane, the agha of the two Jewish suspects, Gedaliah and Raḥamim. Two police officers from Amadiya accompanied Barashi to Dasga.<sup>123</sup> They searched one house, in which some stolen belongings were found in a hole near some trees. In another house, a woman approached them saying, "go away, there is nothing here." Barashi knew there must be something hidden there. Apparently, the thieves split the stolen items among them. He returned to Nerwa, but the residents of Dasga reported Barashi's visit with the police officers to their agha, Şâlihê Xane. He visited Agha Qaḥiro and Agha Sa'do of Nerwa and requested their intervention in the matter. He explained and they understood that he could not allow this dishonor to be inflicted upon him. At night, Qaḥiro and Sa'do came to Daniel Barashi and said, "We are brothers-in-law, we gave you our daughter," referring to the Jewish girl from Nerwa whom they allowed him to marry. They prevailed upon him to cancel the complaint. The next day they all went to Bebuwa where Barashi once again met the police officer. This officer had previously slapped the face of the Kurd in whose house

<sup>122</sup> Rand and Rush 1978: 8.

<sup>123</sup> Barashi (I#4) remembered that one of these officers was of Christian origin.

stolen items were found, asking him, “How dare you steal these things from the Jew?” Eventually, Qahiro and Sa‘do went to the *mudur* in an attempt to cancel the complaint. According to Barashi,

the police officer could not cancel the complaint, because of the new supervising officer [who would not allow such conduct]. ‘If the Jew changes his testimony, however, saying that (the stolen things were lost... then something can be done). I said, ‘I cannot say something like this. Everybody knows that these things were stolen, how I can change [my testimony?].’... They said, ‘Do not worry; there is a new supervising officer.’

Eventually, the aghas convinced Daniel Barashi to give, in his words “as in a joke,” a corrected testimony. The new supervising officer was amazed when Barashi expressed his new version while giggling. They went into the *mudur*. Barashi was fined three dinars. He returned to Nerwa and then to Amadiya and later received twenty-five dinars as compensation for his cooperation.<sup>124</sup>

Jewish informants and observers of Kurdistan often mentioned that tribal chiefs had their own men, stealing and robbing on their behalf. According to Rush and Rand, some greedy and corrupt aghas had “robbers” who worked for them, “and only after receiving the payment of much money would the agha keep the robbers away.”<sup>125</sup> An example is provided in the following account, narrated by Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (I#33), concerning Rashīd Agha b. Şālāḥ, from the village of Betanur (Betanura, by the Jews), also known as Rasho Betanor who was the agha of Whela. Reportedly, Aḥmad Beg b. Ḥājī Rashīd Beg, the head of the Berwari tribesmen, coveted his mule. When Shabbatai did not comply with the agha’s demand to hand over the mule, the agha resorted to another method. “I did not give him, so Rashīd the son of Şālāḥ) came and stole it and gave it to him,” to Aḥmad Beg.<sup>126</sup> A missionary who resided in the region and was in contact with the

<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Naḥum Sharabi (I#40) of Zakho was asked by ‘Abd al-Karim Agha to withdraw a complaint that he had submitted against one of his protégés. See above, 41–42.

<sup>125</sup> Rand and Rush 1978: 7–8. See also Rich 1836 (vol. I): 152, who claims in the early 1820s, that each chief of the Bilbas has a certain number of thieves, who rob for him.

<sup>126</sup> The stealing or coveting of a mule was a common theft in Kurdistan, as noted, for example in AM (no. 97, October 1914: 1291): In 1924, an Assyrian from Jilu put his mule for the night in the stable of Shaikh Nūrī Muḥammad in the village of Hatu-ish, but in the morning, it was gone.

brigand chiefs in the region, in 1914 made the following report concerning Ḥājī Rashīd Beg of Berwari, the father of the above mentioned Ahmad Beg:

This gentleman, like a good many [other] brigand chiefs, both Kurdish and Syrian, has from time immemorial taken toll from all who pass through his country [territory], and nobody hitherto has dared to resist. But recently, a company of Baz [tribal Assyrians], who were treated in this way, lodged a complaint, and the Mira, to his astonishment, found himself compelled by the kaimmakam to return to the complainant what he no doubt regards as his legitimate dues, amounting to the sum of £12.<sup>127</sup>

Ḥājī Rashīd Beg of Berwari-Bala had fought against the British during World War I, but he fought fair and sent back his Indian prisoners “unharméd,” a behavior that granted him the appreciation of the British commanders in Iraq. While in Turkey, Ḥājī Rashīd Beg did not join the anti-British activity. Later the British allowed him to return to his tribe and appointed him as the chief of the Berwari-Bala.<sup>128</sup> The personal experience of Hārūn Judo provides a rare glimpse into the phenomenon of robbers and assassins in the service of the aghas. There is a wide discussion of this phenomenon among non-tribal subjects, but rarely in such detail or from personal experience, as with Judo.<sup>129</sup>

#### F. *The Jewish Subjects as Assets*

The most common occupations of rural Jews were those of weavers and dyers as well as farmers and occasional peddlers that rendered them valuable assets to the Kurdish tribe. The reputation of rural Jews as submissive, loyal and trustworthy further strengthened their standing in the feudal, tribal community.

Tribal Kurdish aghas valued their rural and urban Jews as assets and treated their Jewish and Christian subjects almost as their personal property. The Kurdish language expresses this perception clearly. When a chieftain speaks of his Christian and Jewish subjects, his protégés, he calls them, *Filehê min* (Kur., “my Christians”) or *Cihûyê min* (Kur., “my

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 1292–93.

<sup>128</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 5: 227.

<sup>129</sup> See pp. 49–51 above.

Jews.”), suggesting an affiliation of great nearness between the two if not mastership or ownership of the agha over his subjects. On the other hand, the Jews and Christians would bestow great esteem on their agha referring to him obediently and calling him “my agha.” In any case, the tribal agha who granted Jews his patronage would receive great esteem, besides gifts, dues and commissions of various kinds.

During tribal feuds, aghas attacked rural Jews of rival aghas, robbing them or killing them. Indeed rural Jews were considered tribal assets, but at the same time, they were fragile targets for tribal foes.<sup>130</sup> The killing or harming of a Jewish subject of one agha was intended to cause damage to the tribal agha’s assets and reputation. Incidentally, aghas whose Jewish subjects were harmed by rival aghas may have looked, more theoretically than practically, for similar mode of revenge, robbing or killing Jewish subjects of their rival agha. From a Jewish point of view, this was one of the paradoxical consequences of their tribal experience. It is a well-known observation that tribal Kurdish society was riddled with feuds. Here is the opinion of Lyon, who served as PO in Kurdistan between 1918 and 1944:

the greatest curse of Kurdistan is the blood feud or vendetta, and strange to say, it is often the women who keep it going from one generation to the next. A young bride may say to her husband, ‘How can I sleep with you in peace when the blood of my brother/father/uncle etc. is still crying for revenge and that so-and-so who killed him is still strutting around like a cock on a dunghill.’ From that moment, there is no peace for the bridegroom until he levels the score. Even then, his relaxation cannot last long because he immediately becomes the target for the victim’s relations. If they are children, he may hope for a few years’ grace; but when they grow up their mother will drive them to take revenge.<sup>131</sup>

Internal migration was a familiar pattern in the experience of rural Jews who often migrated from one rural community to another, or to urban centers. The four main reasons for migration were economic necessity, the lack of personal security, fatalities such as the murder of a family member, and abduction (by force or temptation) of young Jewesses by tribal Kurdish males. These events occurred mainly in regions affected and oppressed by tribal feuds. The murder of rural Jews by rival aghas as part of a tribal feud highlights the value placed

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<sup>130</sup> On tribal feuds in Kurdistan, see Leach 1940: 55–57; van Bruinessen 1978: 59–67.

<sup>131</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 130.

on the Jews within the society. The role of Jews in the tribe may have motivated the rival tribe to murder one of them. Such a murder would often lead to the migration of the victim's family. The migration of Jews represented a blow to the tribal reputation, because it highlighted the tribe's failure to protect its Jewish subjects. Likewise, the tribesmen who benefited from the economic activity of the Jews were hurt as well. It represented a loss to the assets of the tribe, because usually after the murder of a Jew, the whole family and at times the entire Jewish community would migrate to a safer place. Several Jews became victims in tribal feuds, when they were killed during rival tribes' raids. At the end of 1913, the following main event occurred in the Amadiya district, according to a report of a local missionary.

In the beginning of December, the Shaikh of Barzān made a raid on some villages of Nerwa, three Syrian and six Kurdish [villages], plundered them, and killed six Jews. The reason of this raid is said to have been that the Nerwa [Raikan] people refused to help him in an attack on Chal and Tkhuma, which he was preparing for the spring. But why the poor Jews were specially victimized is not clear.<sup>132</sup>

During periods of warfare and tribal feuds, the role of rural Jews received special attention. Jewish peddlers and merchants were valuable particularly during tribal feuds, when the passage of the tribesmen through their rivals' region was limited. For instance, the inhabitants of Serkane were members of the Barzānī tribe, which was notorious for its feuds with neighboring tribes.<sup>133</sup> During times of warfare and tribal feuds, the Jewish inhabitants of Sarkane helped supply necessary provisions to the tribesmen. The movement of the Jews was not as restricted, because they were not an integral part of the tribe and therefore not considered involved in the tribal feud. During the tribal war of the 1920s, they were able to travel back and forth relatively and were able to help the Barzānī tribal Kurds of Serkane, whose movement was limited. In 1932, during the Barzānī revolt against the Iraqi government, the family of Moshe Binyamin (I#3) had already migrated to Mergasor.<sup>134</sup> The Barzānīs were unable to travel to Rawanduz

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<sup>132</sup> AM, no. 95, April 1914: 1259. In April-May 1914, the government operated against the Shaikh of Barzān, but the shaikh and his followers fled from the troops possibly to Persia or to the Berwari region. AM, no 96, July 1914, 1280–81.

<sup>133</sup> On the tribal feuds of the Barzānīs, see Gunter (1993; 1994); Schmidt 1964 and Tzafir 1999.

<sup>134</sup> See Schmidt 1964: 97–8.

or Aqra, while the Jews could travel to these and other towns for commercial and other purposes. The Jews were thus able to help the Barzānī tribesmen, by providing them with elementary products that were difficult to obtain, such as tea and sugar. Just as in Serkane in the 1920s, the Jews of Mergasor operated as purchasers of goods on behalf of the Barzānī Kurds.

Rural Jews had important role also in peaceful times. The Jews of Serkane were weavers who made *shale-shapik*, the traditional Kurdish outfit that was a popular and important part of the tribal wardrobe.<sup>135</sup> Thanks to their craft, the Kurdish aghas protected the Jewish weavers and took care of their needs.<sup>136</sup> Four Jewish families of weavers lived in the village of Harin, in the heart of the tribal jurisdiction of Zībar, under the jurisdiction of Fāris Agha. The Jewish weavers provided the tribal and rural Kurds of Harin and the surrounding areas with traditional Kurdish suits and in return, the Kurdish villagers took care of all the needs of the Jews. The motto of the agha, according to Shalom Pirko (I#34) was,

‘in order to keep the Jews and enable them to live among us we have to take care of them.’ The Kurdish neighbors would take turns in bringing the Jews firewood, wheat and all kinds of grains, fruits and vegetables [in order to enable the Jews to maintain their labor and live in the region in comfort]. The villagers allowed the Jews to pick produce from the fields of the Kurds, or to request milk, yogurt, butter, oil and the like. If the Jews needed certain items, they would ask the Kurdish *mukhtār*. Once every two or three months, the *mukhtār* would ask the owner of the flocks to give the Jews four or eight big sheep. The shepherd would bring the sheep to the *mukhtār* and he would send them to the four houses of the Jews.

### G. Loyalty of the Jews

Rush and Rand, based on dozens of interviews with Kurdistan Jews, characterized them as “being clever, helpful, and loyal” as long as “their basic religious demands” were not denied.<sup>137</sup> Jewish informants support the claim that the rural Jews had the reputation, among the Kurdish tribesmen, of being loyal and trustworthy, as the following

<sup>135</sup> See Kraków (1982) for the attention to personal appearance amongst Kurds.

<sup>136</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

<sup>137</sup> Rand and Rush 1979: 9.

accounts indicate. Levi Mordechai H̄inno (I#45) from Jujjar was once on a caravan from Jujjar to Aqra, when Suri (NA. ‘Surisnaye’) tribal brigands robbed the passengers near Robye.<sup>138</sup> The aghas of the Suri (possibly Surchi), Shaikh ‘Abdullah and Shaikh Badī, happened to be rivals of Smā’īl Agha of Jujjar. When the brigands recognized that one of the Jews in the caravan was a Jew of Smā’īl Agha, “one of the thieves tried to point a gun at him, while this Jew hid behind other persons.”<sup>139</sup> When they returned to Jujjar, H̄inno met Smā’īl Agha.

He asked me ‘Where is your hat? Is it too hot for you to wear your hat?’ I told him: ‘No, we were robbed.’ He asked me ‘By whom?’ I told him that the Surisnaye<sup>140</sup> robbed us in Asi M̄iri. He summoned his men, but we did not let him go [to fight with them]. We were afraid that when they arrived there [to the battlefield, to the Surisnaye] it would be dark. We did not wish many persons to be killed because of us... We were [also] afraid that they would take revenge against us. We were thirteen Jews [from Jujjar] together [in this caravan] and we prevented him [Smā’īl Agha] from going. We told him that it would be dark [therefore late, and dangerous] when he reached there.<sup>141</sup>

A British report from 1923 relates to the rivalry between H̄ājī ‘Abdallāh b. Raḥmān of Jujjar in the Aqra district who disliked his neighbor, Ismā’īl Agha. The report described him as head of the Bizaini section of ‘Ashā’ir al-Saba, very pro British, who suffered considerably in 1920 because of the proximity of the Assyrian refugee camp at Mindan.<sup>142</sup>

Michael Michaeli (I#26) related that Shaikh Tawfiq of Sisnawa regarded the Jews as loyal and trustworthy.

He had a *koçke* in which there was a big *samovar*... A *çayçi* [tea maker and server] named Baba Bakir would hand round tea and food twenty-four hours a day. The Muslim Kurds were not allowed into the private home of the shaikh, only to his *koçke*, which was separated from the house,

<sup>138</sup> Today, Jujjar is about 15 kilometer northeast of Bardarash subdistrict at the district of Akre (Aqra).

<sup>139</sup> It is not clear whether the purpose was to kill, to intimidate the Jews of their rival, or just to provide amusement.

<sup>140</sup> This is either the Neo-Aramaic form of the name of a clan of which I was not able to find out its Kurdish equivalent, or a reference to its.

<sup>141</sup> Benzion Israeli who visited Jewish communities in Kurdistan during the 1930s argued: the state of these communities is bad and there is no hope for betterment. One cannot report the abusers to the authorities as “they would kill us” [and] “it would not help us,” say those in the Mosul community. For the complete session see below, 297–98.

<sup>142</sup> Personalities 1923: 7–8.

and only when invited...<sup>143</sup> The *çayçi* would often go to the house of the shaikh to bring food and other products, but even he was not allowed into the house of the shaikh. He would wait at the front door while female servants would bring him food to take to the *koçke*. The Jews of Sisnawa, on the other hand, were allowed into the residence of the shaikh, because the agha had confidence in them.

Michaeli often went to the private section of the house of Shaikh Tawfîq, with his permission, to tell stories and sing songs to his household, mainly to the women, girls and children who were not allowed into the male-oriented *koçke*. Likewise, the daughters of Shaikh Tawfîq often came to Michaeli's house to play with his sisters, but they would never pay a social visit to any of the houses of the Muslim Kurds.

We were 'their Jews.' The shaikh [Tawfîq], would respect my father. He used to tell my father 'come and sit, Moshe.' In the *koçke*, his seat was opposite the shaikh. The shaikh loved to listen to his stories of days past. My father was previously the Jew of Shaikh Ubaidullâh [of Baijîl], his father. His father had told him, 'Protect him.' My father was very old and he remembered the events of the earlier times, so he used to tell him. Once a week he would sit with him, drinking tea or coffee, and would tell him stories, not fake, but real, historical events.

Reports from urban Jews reinforce this notion. Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) from Aqra explained the good relations between Muslim Kurds and Jews in Aqra because "the Jews were loyal."

When outdoor festivities took place, it would not bother the Muslim Kurds if Jews were in close proximity to the Muslim women because Jews were loyal, they were trustworthy. If they had been Muslims, they would not have let them near their women. Men and women would be kept apart.

In summation, tribal aghas trusted and respected their rural Jews both because of their useful occupations and because they were submissive and loyal subjects. The Jews did not pose a threat to Muslim Kurds. In the economic realm, Kurds and Jews rarely labored in the same professions and were therefore rarely in competition. The lower status of the Jews and their long history of obedience provided the Kurds with a sense of confidence in their relations with their Jewish subjects and neighbors.

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<sup>143</sup> A guest of the chieftain would stand at the entrance to the guesthouse and unless asked specifically to enter and sit down, he would not enter into the guesthouse.

On occasion, tribal aghas competed for the allegiance of Jewish subjects, creating a tense situation that could lead to feuding between them. The following is record of such an incidence. Two prominent aghas lived in Sharnakh in the early 20th century, Ḥājji Isef (Yūsuf) Agha from Malā Balka and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Agha from Ḥasen Agha, perhaps Ḥasseina, a small broken tribe of nomads and villages near Mosul.<sup>144</sup> Yaacob Chirmero<sup>145</sup> of Zakho was under the patronage of Ḥājji Isef Agha who visited Zakho occasionally and liked to stay as a guest at Yaacob’s home. According to Ḥayyo Chirmero (I#35), Ḥājji Isef Agha asked his uncle Yaacob to build a large and spacious house for his comfort. Nevertheless, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Agha, his rival, wanted Yaacob to become his protégé. He warned Yaacob to cut off his relations with Ḥājji Isef Agha. Ḥayyo Chirmero said,

My uncle insisted, ‘I would not replace him.’ He was not ready to replace Ḥājji Isef Agha. Consequently, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān kidnapped him and locked him up alone in a room, where he remained for ten days. Ḥājji Isef Agha had no knowledge of this incident. Ten days later, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān released him, warning him not to come to Sharnakh [any longer]. He had sent messengers ordering them to kill Yaacob and his brother, my father (Yona), and to bring him their heads.

When Yaacob returned to Zakho, his brother Yona (Ḥayyo Chirmero’s father), heard that two of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s tribesmen, Qaplar and Jahwar, “were coming to kill them.” Yaacob summoned several strong Jewish men.<sup>146</sup> They planned to attack the thugs *en masse* and subdue them as soon as they entered the front door. These ‘robbers’ barely entered the house when the Chirmero brothers and some other Jewish men captured them. They tied them up and placed them in the basement, while all the Jews sat around together upstairs eating and drinking. The Chirmero brothers summoned a Jew named Binyo from Sharnakh, who was a subject of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. They wished to resolve the situation, but Binyo was shocked that they had captured the Kurdish tribesmen sent by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Agha and expressed fear

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<sup>144</sup> Ḥājji Isef [Yūsuf] Agha is mentioned below (p. 279) regarding the shelter given to the Jews during WWI; Sykes 1915: 458–59

<sup>145</sup> Chirmero, in Kurdish, means 400 men. This family has a tradition that men in their family were strong and capable to stand against 400 men.

<sup>146</sup> Among them were Mīro Zaken, Mamo Yona Gabbai and one of the heads of the Be-Chuna family.

that they would all be killed. Yaacob was angered and disgusted by his cowardice and told him, "Go from here, the hell with you." Finally,

Yaacob led the 'robbers' to the riverbank, where he returned their rifles. He told them, 'Now you may kill me.' They said, 'How come we can kill you now?' They returned to 'Abd al-Raḥmān Agha and told him the whole story. Ḥājjī Isef Agha had no knowledge of the threats against his Jew, Yaacob, and his subsequent kidnapping. After hearing nothing from Yaacob for a while, his son Khurshīd asked him, 'Why has Yaacob not come?' Ḥājjī Isef Agha said, 'I do not know. Send him a letter telling him to come.' They sent a letter and asked Yaacob to come within a few days.

Ḥayyo's father, Yona, and his uncle, Yaacob, went to visit Ḥājjī Isef Agha as requested, but they divulged no details. Ḥājjī Isef Agha, nevertheless, must have heard something, because he took them with him to visit 'Abd al-Raḥmān. In the presence of Ḥājjī Isef Agha, 'Abd al-Raḥmān asked them, "Did those robbers come to you?" Ḥayyo's uncle said: "They did not come and I have never seen them." He persisted in his story and revealed nothing of the incident. Ḥayyo explained that if Ḥājjī Isef Agha had learned of the incident, a major clash would have resulted between the two rival aghas. In such an event, they would blame the Jews for the clash and for any casualties inflicted. This emerged repeatedly in accounts about confrontations between Jews and Kurds. The Jews were willing to give up seeking justice, in order to maintain the status quo. Chirmero concealed information that he knew could lead to a fight between the two rival aghas, Ḥājjī Isef Agha and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Agha. Chirmero knew that it would be his own Jewish community that would suffer in the end, for he comprehend the disadvantage of Jews in the tribal Kurdish society as well in the judicial and court system and in other domains of confrontations with Muslim Kurds.

#### H. *Helping the Agha*

The Jewish subjects were often helpful to their aghas and were regarded as assets. The following are two accounts about Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, the tribal chief and the national leader of the Iraqi Kurds in the 20th century and Qādir Agha, the chief agha of the Zībarīs.

1. *Providing Ammunition to Barzānī*

Moshe Binyamin (I#3), whose family lived for generations under the jurisdiction of the Barzānīs,<sup>147</sup> narrated the following story. It occurred after Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī had ended his exile in Sulaimaniya in November 1943 and had begun his military campaign against the Iraqi regime.<sup>148</sup> Several tribal chiefs helped him to destroy police stations in the north of the country. He was staying with his men in the mountains and one day he dispatched an envoy to the home of Moshe Binyamin, his Jew in Diana asking him to go to the *raʿīs* (from Arab., leader, head of the village) of the Christians and request that he provide Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī with three belts of bullets for guns.<sup>149</sup> Incidentally, Wigram reported a similar story regarding the Barzānī leaders. When Shaikh ʿAbd al-Salām of Barzān was quarreling with the government at the early 20th century and became escapee in the mountains, “he reaped the fruits” of his good treatment of his villagers, “for not a man, a Christian or Moslem, ever dreamt of betraying him to his foes.”<sup>150</sup>

Back in 1943, Moshe Binyamin responded promptly to the request of the envoy of Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī. He went to the house of the *raʿīs al-tāʿīfā* of the Christians in Diana, Raʿīs Tūma, and passed on Mullā Muṣṭafā’s request.

Raʿīs Tūma said, ‘Wait another hour. I will prepare it.’ The three Christian leaders, Raʿīs Tūma, Raʿīs Oḥana, Raʿīs Isho; each prepared a belt of twelve on twelve.<sup>151</sup> They also sent three used suits, because Barzānī had also requested some used clothing, as he was sleeping outdoors on bare soil with his head resting on wood.’ I handed the requested items to the envoy of Mullā Muṣṭafā. I never saw or heard from him again.

Moshe Binyamin noted that it was “very dangerous. God forbid if one was caught by the police,” but he felt he had to help Barzānī, who used to help and love his Jews. When asked why he took the risk, he said:

He [Mullā Muṣṭafā] used to love us. We loved him. He was our ruler for many years. I told you, if it were not for him, I would not have been able to learn the [Hebrew] alphabet.

<sup>147</sup> The family of Moshe Binyamin lived in Serkane and Mergasor under the jurisdiction of the Barzānīs for at least three or four generations.

<sup>148</sup> See Schmidt 1964: 99–101.

<sup>149</sup> *Diana* is situated 7.5 miles north of Rawanduz.

<sup>150</sup> Wigram 1914: 138–9.

<sup>151</sup> Possibly an “x,” crossed shaped, two belts of bullets, put on a warrior’s chest.

When Moshe Binyamin's family lived in Mergasor, between 1931 and 1934, a war ensued between Mullā Muṣṭafā and his tribal enemies and government troops.<sup>152</sup> Mullā Muṣṭafā informed the Jewish males of Mergasor that he was about to launch a war. During the war, they would not be able to bring a slaughterer of animals from Aqra or Rawanduz, as they used to do during peaceful days. He suggested that they should bring a Jewish slaughterer to reside with them so they would be able to eat kosher meat:

Barzānī told us: I will pay you to bring a slaughterer, because [soon], when a war ensues, the roads will be closed and you will have no slaughterer, nor a circumciser, nothing. How could you, Jews, live like this [with no kosher meat]?<sup>153</sup>

The Jews of Mergasor acted upon Barzānī's advice and invited an elderly slaughterer of animals named Shevane "whose hands were barely working." In addition to slaughtering their animals, he also taught the children the Hebrew alphabet and elementary religious studies. Thanks to Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī's benevolence, the Jewish children of Mergasor learned the Hebrew alphabet and the community had kosher meat and a circumciser during the war. Usually, Jewish and Hebrew education was not available in rural communities, and often, Jewish children in small rural areas did not receive a proper, systematic education. Mergasor was no exception until the appearance of the slaughterer and teacher, sponsored by Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī.

## 2. *Helping Qādir Agha Zībarī's Wife*

Aghas and tribesmen often assisted rural Kurds, and the Jews in turn assisted their aghas and tribesmen. An accidental encounter between a young Jewish pupil and the wife of Qādir Agha Zībarī reveals an interesting account. The pupil, Yehoshua Reuben (I#44) was sent by his father, Reuben, from his village Chāl to the village of Suriye to study under Ḥakham Yoḥannan. There was lack of Jewish education in rural communities and not every village had a teacher for the children. Suriye was under the jurisdiction of Qādir Agha Zībarī. Yehoshua was not treated well by his teacher in whose home he lived and was often

<sup>152</sup> See Schmidt (1964: 97–99).

<sup>153</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

hungry because they were poor. One day, he went to the palace of Qādir Agha Zībarī to beg for some bread to relieve his hunger. He recalled:

When I went up to the fortress, I did not see a soul. I immediately entered the kitchen. Gullname, the wife of Qādir Agha, was there. She asked me, ‘Jew, what do you want?’ I said, ‘I am hungry.’ She told me, ‘Sit down, boy.’ We call it *lakhma raqiqa* [NA., thin and crispy bread that turns soft with moisture]... she fed me with it. I ate until I was content. This food revived me. This woman, I learned afterwards, came from Zakho. She said, ‘Your appearance is not like the family of Ḥakham Yoḥannan. Where do you come from?’ I replied, ‘I am not a close relative of them. I came from Chāla to learn *Torah*.’ She asked me, ‘Which family in Chāla do you belong to?’ I replied, ‘Khātun Agha, if I told you where I came from, would you know them?’ She insisted: ‘Tell me.’ So I told her, ‘I am the son of Reuben; I am a grandchild of Warde.’ When I said it, she embraced me and cried. I was afraid and confused. She told me: ‘You are just like my son, whose name is Ibo.’ She explained, ‘A *firḡmān* [a command] was given by Shaikh Barzānī and we had to migrate [from our village]... the Turkish government burned everything... My son Ibo is now twenty years old. When we had to depart and came to Chāla, I was pregnant with Ibo. Your grandmother,’ she said, ‘sent me all the necessary equipment for a nursery, *dudiya* [NA., baby swing], and she used to send a bag full of rice, lentils, and all kinds of stuff. We were hiding in the basement of Amatko, a gentile Kurd.’

An accidental meeting between a young Jewish boy, Yehoshua, and Qādir Agha Zībarī’s wife, Gullname, led to the revelation of a tribal episode twenty years earlier. Gullname had remembered that when her husband had fled to Chāl, Yehoshua’s grandmother had helped her with nursery equipment and food for her infant. This account reaffirms the tradition of mutual help between aghas and their Jewish subjects.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GUARDIANSHIP AND JUSTICE BY THE AGHAS

Urban and rural Jews were helpful to their tribal aghas in many other ways. The vital assistance that Jews extended to their aghas, mainly in times of need, was only one dimension of the relations between the aghas and the Jews. The Jews helped rescue aghas by providing urgently needed money for ransom or for a personal guarantee on behalf of the agha to ensure his release on probation. In this manner, Jamīl Agha Şindī, Dewali Sa'īd Agha, Ḥājjī Şadiq Biro, as well as unnamed Gūranī and Herki shaikhs, were reportedly given help by wealthy Kurdistanī Jews. These relationships between the Jews and their aghas were mutually beneficial, with aghas also often helping the Jews both in daily life and in times of emergency. The aghas' guardianship manifested itself in practical ways too. Sometimes, when Jews under their protection were harmed their aghas reacted in severe retribution, against the attackers whom they felt were challenging their power. Nevertheless, the patron agha would not retaliate every time a rival chief hurt his Jews. The reaction depended upon various matters such as the balance of power between the tribes. At times, conflicting tribal interests would temper a severe response. Once, the aghas of Nerwa acted severely against the abusers of their Jews, in an instance when a Kurd from the village of Dotaza robbed and hit a Jew from Nerwa named Mordechai. The robber took his belt that was made of ten meters of linen. Upon his return to Nerwa, when the agha asked for his share or commission of the transaction, Mordechai told him about the robbery and beating. The agha of Nerwa took some armed tribesmen to retaliate against his attackers, and consequently, the robber who stole the belt was killed and two others were wounded.<sup>1</sup> However, there are also reports of tribal chiefs who did not justly punish the abusers and murderers of Jews. At times, this was because of the Jewish victims themselves, who feared blame if the two tribes would feud.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

<sup>2</sup> Sāliḥ Raḥamin (I#37). See also above (pp. 157–164) for several similar instances.

The aghas would generally take care of the interests of their Jewish subjects in their relations with the authorities. From the testimony of several rural Jews, we learn that at times their agha managed to have taxes waived or canceled. In one instance, the influential Jewish *mukhtār* of Sandur, Moshe Me'allim, managed to arrange an exemption from taxes for the Jewish villagers, one on estate tax (in Arab., *darībat al-mulūk*) and another one on flocks and herds.

#### A. *Physical Escort*

Rural and urban Jews adopted various measures of protection when traveling through the desolate tracts of the Kurdish plains and mountains. Some merchants would carry a pistol; others would travel in groups. At times, though not often, they would have a tribal escort on certain unsafe sections of the roads. When carrying considerable amounts of money, expensive goods and traveling on dangerous roads, a physical escort was imperative. In these events, the Jews' inferior and vulnerable status forced them to have an escort on their business travels. A personal escort was quite rare and even an escort appointed by the agha did not guarantee that the journey would be safe and uninterrupted.<sup>3</sup> However, Moshe Binyamin (I#3) related two instances in which a tribal escort saved both his life and that of his father. During the 1940s, when the Moshe Binyamin's family lived in Diana, his father Binyamin once traveled to buy supplies for the approaching Feast of Passover. His young cousin joined him in carrying the purchases and they went to Sidaka, a *mudīriyya* (Arab., jurisdiction of *mudir*, district directorate) in which there was a *mudīr* and a police station.<sup>4</sup> Sidaka was the home of an important tribal chief from Rawanduz, named Maḥmūd Beg, the son-in-law of Shaikh Rashīd of Lolan, a famous Naqshbandi leader.<sup>5</sup> In order to have money to purchase supplies, Binyamin carried three or four *shale-shapik* suits to sell, and when he sold the suits, he carried a fair amount of money in his pockets. When Binyamin went to the

<sup>3</sup> See the section entitled "Methods of Precaution," below (pp. 225–29), discussing the methods of self-defense by Jewish merchants and peddlers.

<sup>4</sup> *Mudīr*, governor; *mudīriyya*, a jurisdiction of the *mudīr*.

<sup>5</sup> Shaikh Rashīd of Lolan was in rivalry with the Barzānīs. From his exile in Russia (1947–58), Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī vowed revenge on those he accused of betraying the Kurdish cause, among them Shaikh Rashīd of Lolan. McDowall 1996: 293.

house of Maḥmūd Beg, his patron agha in the region, Maḥmūd Beg warned him about the robbers on the roads and sent a reliable person to escort him to Diana, asking him to telephone him upon their safe arrival in the town. Just before reaching the village of Shaikhan three robbers confronted them and said, “Hands up!” The escort, Zamshid Beg, said:

One, two, three, *ṭalāq!* Unless you kill me [first], you will not touch this Jew... One of the robbers said, ‘He has money, he has a lot of money, we came to kill him.’ The escort said, ‘[even if] he has money, silver, everything, you are not going to touch him.’

The robbers left Binyamin alone, and when he arrived home, Zamshid Beg phoned Maḥmūd Beg from the house of the police officer, telling him all about the trip and the robbers. While Zamshid Beg was making his phone call to Maḥmūd Beg, Binyamin asked his son, Moshe, what he had done in his week’s absence and Moshe told him that he had made a pair of *shale-shapik*. “He told me bring this suit and give it to the escort as a gift,” concluded Moshe, “for he had saved us.”

The following account relates as well to the hazards of traveling in the wild rural areas. Reportedly, the ability of Jews to collect debts from Kurdish and Arab business associates became more difficult during the period before the mass emigration of Jews from Iraq and Kurdistan to Israel in the early 1950s.<sup>6</sup> With the approach of immigration to Israel, many Jewish businesspersons were faced with a position in which many Kurds owed them money from previous business trips. Because of the impending migration to Israel, many Kurdish and Arab debtors evaded re-payment to Jewish merchants by postponing settlement with various excuses. As the emigration came nearer, urban Jews concluded that not much good would emerge from their attempts to have their debts paid, and considering the unsafe roads they slowly gave up of their debts. During this tense period, Moshe Binyamin (I#3) decided to collect his debts.

I traveled for two or three days on foot to Sivek and then to Lolan... I had relations, in these villages, with Muslims who would kill themselves before allowing someone to kill me... I stayed in the home of one of the Kurds, who had twelve sons... At night, the Kurdish host said to one of his sons, ‘Tomorrow you should escort him, that no one should hurt him.’ In the morning, three men confronted us... shouting, ‘Do not move [or]

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<sup>6</sup> See (“Economic Pressure before the Immigration to Israel”): 333–36.

we will kill you!’ I had a watch in my pocket. He [one of the bandits] removed the [chain of the] watch off my neck and said, ‘If I kill you, I should not miss it [the watch].’ Eventually, the gentile who escorted me told him, ‘You will not kill him.’ I thought that my soul was about to depart my body... These two [the bandit and the escort] were talking [back and forth] until [my escort] said, ‘One, two, three, *talāq!* Unless you kill me [first] you cannot hurt him... We are twelve brothers, if you kill me, you will not be able to move in this region’ [because of the revenge threat of my brothers]. The man, his name was ‘Abdul Agha said, ‘There is no color after black. I am black from Turkey, Iraq and Persia. My work is only with a gun. Just yesterday, I killed two Muslims in this valley. This is my work. I am going to kill him.’ He [my escort] said, ‘You will not kill him.’ They continued [arguing] until he said, ‘All right, today I will not do anything with your Jew.’ [Nevertheless, my escort] said, ‘I will not move from this stone, until you return his watch.’ I said, ‘Leave it.’ He said, ‘No. I took an oath concerning the *talāq*. Until he returns the watch, I will not move from here.’

Indeed, ‘Abdul Agha returned his watch. On the way back, they stayed overnight at the same village where they once again encountered the robbers, who were owners of sheep, heading towards Chustar for their flocks. His escort told the owner of the home in which they stayed, that these robbers “wanted to kill the son of Binyamin,” i.e., Moshe Binyamin. The landlord became upset, took his gun from under the blankets, and said, “I will kill you now and cut you into pieces! We have one Jewish [visitor] a month here, and you dare to do something like this to us?” Moshe Binyamin tried to pacify him, saying that they had already made peace, but his landlord said, “Now this has become a matter for me, it concerns my Jew.” Moshe Binyamin had some products that he planned to sell: sugar, tea and cigarettes.

I wrapped it in a piece of cloth, tied it, and gave it to the robbers. I told them, ‘Take it for the road.’ I gave it to ‘Abdul Agha... He said, ‘This is enough for me.’ This is called faith. It is enough for me. To tell you the truth, until I returned home, I thought that this was my last day. After this event, I never went wandering in the [tribal, rural] villages again.

This tense situation was resolved thanks to the perseverance of the Kurdish guardian and escort of the Jewish traveler, who opposed any attempt to hurt or exploit him. Moshe Binyamin still felt obliged, or perhaps slightly more confident, to appease the robber with material benefits, which satisfied the robber.

### B. *The Justice of Tribal Aghas*

The tribal chieftain was the arbitrator in local quarrels and disputes that were brought before him. His judgment “could bring death at any time.”<sup>7</sup> Several testimonies of rural Jews portray the Kurdish agha as an honest and righteous judge who bestowed justice on the Jews. Ten accounts follow, relating how five tribal aghas acted justly on behalf of their Jews. Indeed, most of these aghas did not make their imprint on Kurdish history, perhaps because such historical writing was scarce. Nevertheless, based on the records of Kurdish Jews regarding their character, prestige and conduct, some of these aghas deserve more attention and acknowledgment than they did.

#### 1. *Hājji ‘Abdallāh and Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*

Hājji ‘Abdallāh was the *mukhtār* of Jujjar and Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was the tribal authority in the region. Hājji ‘Abdallāh had three daughters but no sons. He was an old man who was good towards the Jews. Reportedly, he had instructed the Kurdish inhabitants of Jujjar, “Do not raise your hands against the Jews,” because they are “*faqīr*” [Arab. lit., poor], “quiet and inoffensive,” in the translation of Levi Mordechai Hīnno (I#45).<sup>8</sup> Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz instructed the Muslim neighbors not to violate their *Sabbath* and if they had a lit cigarette in their hand, they were to throw it away out of respect for the religious observance of the Jews.<sup>9</sup> Levi Mordechai Hīnno narrated the following incident:

One day someone complained about me . . . [that I stole from him two gold earrings.] . . . I used to travel to a person named Sofi Gurgor in the village of ‘Asingiran, a distance of one hour on foot from my village. [Once, when] his mother passed away [I visited him to pay my condolences]. He asked me to give him my *shala* [traditional Kurdish pants] . . . I asked, Shall I go home in my white [long] underpants?<sup>9</sup> He asked me how much I wanted for them. I told him, ‘Two gold *liras*.’<sup>10</sup> He told me, ‘Here are two earrings of my wife, which are worth gold.’

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed by Rand and Rush (1978, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> One of the reported reasons for the protection of Jews stemmed from their inferior, despised status. See above, 9–17; 137–143.

<sup>9</sup> Jews of Zakho reported of a similar phenomenon that Muslim Kurds would extinguish their cigarettes on *Sabbath* when encountering Jews.

<sup>10</sup> Gold Turkish *lira* was in use mainly in Kurdish tribal regions after the end of the Turkish rule.

After some time, they approached Levi Mordechai Ḥinno and asked where he obtained these earrings. Ḥinno said, “From Sofi Gurgo.” The person whose earrings had been stolen went to Ḥājīr ‘Abdallāh asking that Ḥinno should give him his earrings back. Ḥājīr ‘Abdallāh told him:

The Jew bought these earrings. Give him money for them in order to retrieve them. He said, ‘This is my property [and you expect me] to pay for it?’ [Ḥājīr ‘Abdallāh] told him: ‘This is my Jew. I do not wish to see him suffer’ [any economic loss].

Eventually, the matter reached the ears of Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz who summoned Sofi Gurgo, who had traded the earrings.

He asked him, ‘Do you know this Jew?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The Shaikh demanded, ‘What did you give him and what did he give you in return?’ Sofi Gurgo said, ‘I gave him my wife’s earrings and I received *shale* from him.’ The Shaikh retorted ‘But these earrings are stolen!’ He returned the earrings to their real owner... He then told Sofi Gurgo to pay the Jew money instead. Sofi Gurgo replied, ‘I do not have money.’ The Shaikh told him: ‘I will pay him and I will take it out of your wages.’

Apparently, Sofi Gurgo used to work for him. Ḥinno concluded: “I went to the *koçke* of Ḥājīr ‘Abdallāh and told him that I was given the money. He warned me that I should never buy anything from these [kinds of] persons.”

## 2. *Qādir Agha Zībarī of Suriye*

The family of Ḥaim Barzānī (I#6) lived in Awqawa (or Awquwa, Kur., “a lot of water”) under the jurisdiction of Qādir Agha Zībarī. In Awquwa, his family had a Muslim neighbor who used to tie his cow at night with a rope. One night, the neighbor’s cow fell or slipped from a mound and was strangled by the rope with which it was tied up.

In the morning, our neighbor came to my father and said, ‘It is worthwhile for you to take some of the hide... We took some of the hide... for making shoes called *Kalake*. A year later, this neighbor came to my father and asked four *majidi* for the cowhide. My father told him: ‘Even for the whole cow you would not receive such a price.’ The neighbor took all our tools (kitchenware, pots, wooden spoons and some work tools) and tried to leave the house. My late father told my big brother ‘Shut the door’ and he began hitting our neighbor. He subsequently went out and began yelling ‘*Hawara!* [Kur., help! saying that] this Arab [Kurd] hit us and took our tools.’ The *mukhtār* asked our neighbor ‘Why did you do

so?’ The neighbor said: ‘I want my money.’ Rasho Agha, the *mukhtār*, hit him too. He told us that on Thursday Qādir Agha Zībarī would come to the village and would conduct several trials.

Qādir Agha, the chieftain of the Zībarīs at the time, lived in Suriye. One Thursday, Qādir Agha visited Awquwa and conducted public trials. Ḥaim Barzānī elaborated on the first case of a woman who wanted to divorce her husband. The ‘trial’ took place in the center of the neighborhood. There was a house with a low roof. The whole village was invited to attend the trial. When Qādir Agha completed the first trial,<sup>11</sup> Rasho told him: “We have another trial.” He informed him of the dispute over the cow’s hide. Qādir Agha said, “This is an easy case for me.” He heard the two sides. Ḥaim recalls:

My father told him that the neighbor asked him to take all the cowhide, but he was unable to take it all. Qādir Agha then took a match in his hand and said that he would conduct ‘a trial of wolves.’ He put the match inside his clenched fist and told the owner of the cow to try to take the match using only his tongue. The owner of the cow tried to extricate the match with his tongue while the agha kept his hand closed tight until our neighbor stretched out his whole tongue, out, and then Qādir Agha inserted a needle [the match?] into his tongue. His wife and five children wept and begged him to stop. Qādir Agha said, ‘only if you bring (four or) five gold *majidi* will I release him.’ He released him only after they had given him the money.

Ḥaim Barzānī who was around ten or eleven years old at the time of the incident, asserted that this was a ‘trial of wolves.’ From the accounts of Ḥaim Barzānī, one receives the impression that Qādir Agha was equally concerned with matters large and small, and always strove to execute justice, as the following account indicates. Once there was a tribal war between Qādir Agha and Shaikh Nūrī. Qādir Agha took many prisoners and much booty, taking their clothing and everything they owned. Qādir Agha turned to the two Jewish households in Suriye and asked them to help him carry the items and store them. Those carrying the loot opened one of the sacks and found many pairs of shoes.

Everybody took shoes... My brother Yitzhak took a pair of shoes for himself [as well]... We used to go to the *koçke* of the agha. [Once] the

<sup>11</sup> This trial deserves a separate treatment. In short, the wife complained about the masculinity of her husband and Qādir Agha reportedly asked the husband to show his performance, in public, to see if his wife was right or wrong. The informant reported that the husband performed his duty and did it well.

agha asked my brother, ‘Tell me the truth; do not lie, where did those shoes come from?’ He told him. That night, someone came and stole his shoes. My brother went to Qādir Agha and told him. Qādir Agha said, ‘Come back tomorrow at 12:00 noon and take the shoes back.’ The agha summoned all his assistants and warned them: ‘If whoever took these shoes would not return them, his destiny will be bad and bitter. If the shoes are not returned, I will give the Jew shoes of my own, but I will burn down the house of the thief.’<sup>12</sup>

Eventually someone gave back the shoes, placing them in front of the door of their house. These two accounts indicate the power and the authority of the agha over his tribe; at the same time, they show the concern of the agha for his Jews and the importance he placed on executing justice.

### 3. *Shaikh Muḥammad Rabatke*

A British military report did not have a high opinion of a certain Shaikh Muḥammad, resident of Rabatke. He was a relative of Shaikh Nūrī Barifkani and was described as “a poor character with a few wild followers over whom he has little control.” He resisted arrest in June 1919 and later came in for *dakhalh*. According to the report, he also harbored “wanted persons.”<sup>13</sup> If this report did not confuse two different shaikhs of Rabatke, the testimonies of the Jews of Rabatke describe Shaikh Muḥammad of Rabatke quite differently. In fact, the Jewish residents from Rabatke highly appreciated Shaikh Muḥammad. Based on accounts of his Jewish protégés, it appears that although Shaikh Muḥammad may not have been an important agha nationally, he was nevertheless a strong, influential tribal chieftain in his region. He did not receive much attention or high regard by the (British) army intelligence, but as far as his Jewish subjects were concerned, he was strong and supportive ruler. Indeed, Shaikh Muḥammad did insist on justice for his Jewish protégés at almost any cost, and protected them from the evils of both officialdom and tribesmen. Shaikh Muḥammad was a shining example of the patronage and guardianship of the local aghas that enabled the Jews to live for many generations in rural Kurdistan. Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24) argued:

<sup>12</sup> Haim Barzānī (I#6).

<sup>13</sup> Personalities 1923: 67.

In our city [village], it was something special. Our shaikh was an honest judge. [Indeed] he did not know how to write his name, but he was an honest judge.

Naturally, Shaikh Muḥammad was the local tribal arbitrator who would arbitrate in disputes brought before him and then deliver judgment. In 1931, following the emigration of their relatives from Barashi, to Palestine, members of the Mizraḥi family in Rabatke also wished to emigrate. Several family members of Moshe Mizraḥi, residents of Rabatke, decided to sell their property in the neighboring villages. They traveled to the village of Spindare.

We walked in the street [of Spindare.] There were no Jews [residing] there; only Arabs [Kurds] lived there. One person was sitting on a chair [in front of his house]. He asked us, ‘You must be Jews?’ We said, ‘Yes.’ He asked, ‘What do you want [to do here]?’ We said, ‘To sell our goods...’ He suggested, ‘Come and stay in my house...’ [for the night]. His name was Ḥājjī ‘Abd al-Qādir...

The Jews of Rabatke and Ḥājjī ‘Abd al-Qādir had a long discussion. The Jews told him of their intention to immigrate to Palestine and their host told them that he had made pilgrimages to both Mecca and Jerusalem. He described Jerusalem quite accurately, as “a poor town, with no work [for its inhabitants], no land and no agriculture.” He suggested Haifa, as “a city with a harbor,” where they could find jobs and earn their living. The Jewish men stayed in his house overnight and the following morning they prepared to leave to sell their goods. They had tied up a mule and two donkeys near his house, but in the morning, they discovered that one of the donkeys was missing along with its load. Its rope had been cut. Their host had already left and gone out to work in his field. Mizraḥi recounted:

I told my uncles, ‘Let us go to the *mukhtār*,’ to the agha of the village. His name was Amīn... We told him the whole story. We asked him to help us find our donkey that was lost.’ The *mukhtār* told us, ‘What can I do? I know nothing and I cannot help you. I am not the keeper of your donkey. There are travelers who come here from Syria, Lebanon and many other countries. This is a public domain. How can I find your donkey now?’

The Jewish men returned to Rabatke without the donkey. They went to Shaikh Muḥammad Rabatke and told him the whole story. He asked them, “Why didn’t you go to the *mukhtār*?” They told him what the *mukhtār* had said. The event was settled swiftly, as described by Mizraḥi:

Shaikh Muḥammad called his son Sayyid Ja‘far and told him, ‘Write a letter to the *mukhtār* Amīn. Write to him, ‘Your name will be obliterated [If you would not act promptly]. The donkey belonging to our Jews was stolen. Even if it was stolen by travelers from Lebanon, from Egypt or Syria, I want it [back] from you, even if the donkey has risen to heaven...’ The walking distance between Spindare and Rabatke was four hours... Shaikh Muḥammad summoned Mordechai, the son of Yoseph, the Jew whose donkey had been stolen... He told him, ‘Take this letter and give it to the *mukhtār* [of Spindare].’ The shaikh warned him, ‘Do not drink and do not eat anything at his house’ [not because of fear of poison, but in order not to receive anything from him and in order to teach him a lesson, explains Mizraḥi]. Mordechai walked to Spindare, he delivered Shaikh Muḥammad’s letter to the *mukhtār* Amīn, and returned immediately to Rabatke without even resting, eating or drinking, after four hours on the road. He returned and told Shaikh Muḥammad: ‘I did what you told me.’ The shaikh told him: ‘I hope that the donkey will not be returned. Do not worry; I will give you four mules in its stead...’ Well, we returned [from Spindare] on Thursday. He [Mordechai] took the letter to [the agha of] Spindare on Friday. On Saturday, we discovered the donkey walking alone to his home. Someone had brought it to the outskirts of the village and let it loose to return alone. The donkey was returned with the merchandise on it.

Shaikh Muḥammad was well aware of his power, and the *mukhtār* of Spindare recognized his ability as well, as indicated both in the determination of Shaikh Muḥammad and in the quick response of the villagers from Spindare.

The following account occurred before World War I, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24) recalled a confrontation between Shaikh Muḥammad of Rabatke and a Turkish official who exploited local Jews. The Turkish official, related to as *mudīr al-‘āmm* (Arab., director general) by Mizraḥi, lived in the city of Sware, near Barashi, and was in charge of the region. He once visited Rabatke when Shaikh Muḥammad was away from home. The Turkish official stayed only for a short time as a guest in the house of the shaikh. Mizraḥi recalls:

Our house was in the same neighborhood as the house of the shaikh. My mother used to weave carpets. The *mudīr*, from the house of the shaikh, saw that she was weaving a carpet. He told his *gendarme* [French, police officer] to take the carpet. He came and said, ‘Sa‘īd al-Rash,’ this was the name of the *mudīr*, ‘wants this carpet.’ He told my father, ‘Pick up this carpet and come with me.’ There was no choice. We cried, but there was no choice. We had to give it up. He gave my father a few pennies that were worth ‘nothing,’ in order to avoid the accusation that he took it

by force. The next morning, he returned [to Sware] and in the evening, Shaikh Muḥammad came home and saw that his wife was upset. [He asked her] ‘What happened?’ She told him what the *mudīr* had done to the Jew. He told her, ‘Do not be upset.’ He summoned his son, Sayyid al-Ja‘far, and told him to write a letter to *mudīr al-‘āmm*. ‘Write to him, “You should carry the carpet yourself and return it to the Jews. [Nevertheless] if you are ashamed to bring it yourself, pay them three times the price of a new carpet.”’ The shaikh summoned my father and told him, ‘Go and give this to the *mudīr* himself, not to a servant, and come back right away.’ My father went to the *mudīr*. The *mudīr* told the *gendarme*, ‘Keep the Jew here.’ He read the letter and told my father, ‘Take the carpet.’ My father refused. He told him: ‘If I take it, the shaikh will kill me.’ The *mudīr* took an envelope and put in it the amount of money indicated by the shaikh, three times the price of a new carpet. My father brought back the envelope and this matter was settled.

The *mudīr* was surely an important official, as he was always accompanied by a *gendarme*, in his travels and at home. Nevertheless, Shaikh Muḥammad treated him, reportedly, similar to the way he treated other thieves, with contempt and humiliation. The following incident occurred during the late Ottoman period. It involved the theft of a sheep belonging to a Jew and the decisive handling of the matter by Shaikh Muḥammad. Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24) was only about six years old at the time, but his father and brother, Ḥakham Raḥamim, told him the story in detail. Yoseph, Moshe’s father, bought a sheep and was planning to buy two more sheep. He would slaughter the sheep to prepare meat and store it for the whole year. He placed the sheep in the care of the village shepherd.

One evening, the sheep did not return home. My father asked the shepherd, ‘What happened?’ He replied, ‘Jew, there were no wolves, no thieves, why did it not return home?’ [Moshe explained that] the shepherd used to bring the herd back to the village and each sheep would return to its owner. My father asked the neighbors, but they had not seen the sheep. Three days later, he went to Shaikh Muḥammad. The Shaikh asked him ‘What is the matter with you?’ He told him, ‘My sheep was lost; from all the two thousand village sheep [it was my sheep which was lost].’ The shaikh told him, ‘Go and ask around.’ My father replied, ‘I have already asked and I waited three days before coming to see you.’ The Shaikh told him, ‘Do not tell any one that you have lost a sheep. Do not worry. Leave this matter to me. Go home and say nothing about it.’

This occurred close to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, around October. Nothing happened until the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, or (Heb., *Shavuot*) around May the following year. Mizraḥi argued that indeed

Shaikh Muḥammad had many informers, but he did not find out any information. Eventually, because of an argument that erupted between the wives of the two thieves, the details about the theft and the identity of the thieves became clear. The thieves were two Kurdish neighbors, Slaimān and Ḥussain. They caught the sheep in the forest and slaughtered it. Between them lived a woman named ‘Ayshe. Mizrahi described how they discovered the identity of the thieves:

One day the two wives of these two thieves quarreled. The one told the other, ‘You know, if the shaikh finds out that we stole the sheep of the Jew, he will kill us.’ ‘Ayshe heard them. Our house was on the way to the fountain. On her way to the fountain, she stopped by our door and said to the door, ‘Oh door, these [so-and-so] persons stole your sheep.’ The following day, My mother went to the fountain and met the Shaikh’s wife, Ḥalime Khātun. My mother told her, ‘We heard who stole our sheep, but we are afraid to talk about it. The shaikh did not allow us to talk about it.’ Ḥalime Khātun asked her, ‘Who told you?’ My mother said, ‘An angel told us.’ Ḥalime Khātun returned home upset. Her husband, the shaikh, asked her, ‘What is the matter with you?’ She told him: ‘How can you expect the Jew to stay with you when he and his property are not safe?’ She told him that Ḥussain and Slaimān stole the Jew’s sheep. The shaikh sent his servants to summon Slaimān. He told his servant, ‘Bring him in any condition, even if he is naked.’ The servant went and told him: ‘Slaimān, the shaikh loves you and wants to speak to you.’ It was in the evening. He arose and went to the shaikh, who invited him to sit down. Slaimān asked the shaikh, ‘What do you want from me?’ He said, ‘I have one question. If you wish to tell me the truth, say so.’ He said, ‘Yes, agha.’ The shaikh asked him, ‘Did you steal the Jew’s sheep from the herd?’ He admitted, ‘Yes sir, I stole it.’ The shaikh responded, ‘Bless you. You may go home.’ The following day he summoned Ḥussain; he asked him the same question and received the same answer. Then he dismissed him. The shaikh had patience; he was clever [commented Moshe]. He waited eight days and then sent a message to My father telling him not to forgive Slaimān and Ḥussain when they appealed for his forgiveness. At the same time, the shaikh sent the two thieves the following message, ‘Tomorrow morning, I want you to provide one sheep for each leg of the stolen sheep. Each one should bring four sheep, both of you [together] eight sheep. You should go and tie them near the house of the Jew. In addition, you have three days in which to leave my village with your wives and families. If you do not leave within three days, I will burn you inside your houses.’

The Shaikh’s punishment was severe, for the two villagers could not feed their families if they were forced to leave their lands and village. “Without cultivating their land their children were doomed to die from hunger,” said Mizrahi. The following morning, when the family of

Mizraḥi woke up they found eight sheep tied up near their house on Slaimān and Ḥussain's plots of land. Slaimān and Ḥussain

went to the *mukhtār* of the village, 'Alī b. Khaḍīr, and told him the whole story: 'We have sinned, we have committed a crime, but the shaikh wants to burn us to death in our houses if we do not leave within three days.'

The *mukhtār* and the two thieves came to Mizraḥi's uncle, Yitzḥak b. Darwīsh, who was the fabric dyer. He was an older, respected man with a white beard. They asked him to accompany them to the shaikh. Mizraḥi recalls:

Slaimān and Ḥussain tied a rope around their necks and climbed up to the house of the Shaikh. Near the room of the shaikh, they got down on all fours [as if they were dogs]. They lay down on the floor and went into his room near the *dodiya* [NA., cradle]. The Shaikh told his guards: 'Take these dogs out,' as if they contaminated the room, because there [in Kurdistan] it was not permitted to touch dogs. The *mukhtār* told the shaikh: 'Indeed they have made a mistake, but have mercy on their children.' The shaikh said. 'If the residents from my village behave like this towards the Jew, how will other persons, from the outside, behave?'

Shaikh Muḥammad finally allowed them to remain in the village. His responsible stance in protecting the Jews of his village, however, made a strong statement. According to Mizraḥi, the two thieves regretted their act and until their immigration to Israel, they continued to ask forgiveness from his father. Mizraḥi argued that Slaimān and Ḥussain "became like brothers to us" following this incident.

The following incident, reported by Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24) took place in Rabatke around 1927–28. One Friday afternoon, a Jew from Aqra, named Ḥammo, came to Shaikh Muḥammad in connection with a debt incurred by Osmane, a Kurdish resident of Rabatke. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, Mizraḥi left his house and saw a bearded man sitting on Shaikh Muḥammad's balcony whom he identified as Jew; "Only one out of a thousand Muslims would have a beard," explains Mizraḥi. He thought to himself,

Oh, God, what is this Jew doing on a Friday [afternoon] at the house of the Shaikh? I told my father: 'I think there is a Jewish guest at the shaikh's.' My father told me 'Go and invite him.' I went and said, 'Hallo, sir.' He replied, 'Hallo.' I asked him, 'Why are you not coming to the Jews?' He said, "I have an issue to discuss with the shaikh.' I told him, 'Come to us for the Sabbath and on Saturday night you can speak to the shaikh.' He replied, 'The shaikh will not agree.' I insisted, 'Come!'

We went to pray. My father told him, ‘Today [on Saturday] we do not speak [about business, what brought you here].’ On Saturday, the shaikh sent his servant to ask why we took his guest. My father explained to him: ‘Muslim guests for you, Jewish [ones] for us.’ He said, ‘This is right. You did well.’

On Saturday night, Mizraḥi’s father and the guest went to Shaikh Muḥammad and he followed them. They sat on a *taxt* (Kur., wooden bed).

The Shaikh asked him, ‘Jew, what do you want?’ He told him about the Kurd named Osman from Rabatke who was a *solçeker* (Kur., shoemaker). He went to Aqra and took forty rupees’ worth of merchandise from Ḥammo, and then escaped without paying. Ḥammo said to Shaikh Muḥammad, ‘So now I have come to the agha, the shaikh, maybe he will do something.’ The shaikh called his servant, Pino, and told him to go and bring Osman right away. Osman lived in Rabatke, but because of his work, he used to wander from one place to another. When he approached the shaikh’s house, he saw Ḥammo and began to be afraid. The shaikh asked him, ‘Do you owe Ḥammo forty rupees?’ He replied, ‘Yes.’ He asked him, ‘So why did you not give him [the money]?’ He said, ‘I had no [money], so I ran away.’ The shaikh told him, ‘I want you to pay him back now the forty rupees worth of merchandise that you took from him.’ Osmane told him: ‘agha, I have no money.’ With forty rupees [at that time, explains Mizraḥi], one was able to buy two houses. Osmane told him: ‘[Even if you] kill me, I have no money.’ The shaikh took forty rupees [out of his pocket] and gave it to Ḥammo. He told him, ‘You may go back to your home tomorrow.’ He said to Osmane, ‘Tomorrow, when I return from the prayer at the mosque, I want the money.’

Ḥammo left the following morning, with Mizraḥi accompanying him for part of the road. In the meantime, Osmane had no money, so he needed to pay the shaikh gradually. He sold his cow in order to cover part of the debt. Moshe thinks that Osmane had not finished repaying the shaikh even by the time his family immigrated to Palestine. Mizraḥi concluded the account with a rhetorical question:

Where have you seen such behavior, as Shaikh [Muḥammad] who takes money from his own pocket and gives it, just like this, to a [foreign] person?

Eliyahu Shalom (I#38) described Shaikh Muḥammad’s relations with his Jewish subjects. His father, Ḥakham Raḥamim Shalom, was a slaughterer of animals, circumciser and traditional, natural herbalist originally from the village of Barashi. Over a thirty-year period, his family had resided in three villages: Hasinke, Rabatke and Sandur.

In 1931, his father settled in Rabatke at the request of Shaikh Muḥammad, “because my father helped the gentiles a great deal... he performed circumcisions and used to heal persons.” Eliyahu Shalom contributes another view of Shaikh Muḥammad.

He ruled over the whole region. When he laid his hand on something, no government or external power was able to intervene and change the matter. Of course, if you murdered someone the government would come, but over local conflicts and quarrels, no one would interfere.

Eliyahu Shalom recalled a conflict between two female neighbors, one of them being his mother. Aḥmo, the neighbor’s husband, came and hit Eliyahu’s mother. His father complained to the shaikh, who went to Aḥmo’s vineyard. Shaikh Muḥammad caught Aḥmo and hit him hard that he fell to the ground. According to Shalom, when Shaikh Muḥammad hit someone with his wooden walking stick, nobody dared intervene or resist him. One had to absorb the punishment and wait for it to end. Shaikh Muḥammad usually acted shrewdly with officials and aghas who hurt or misused his Jews, but he acted differently in this instance. When a Kurdish man hit the wife of the Jewish Ḥakham, the shaikh hit him hard with a stick in public until he fell to the ground, in order to instill fear in his fellow villagers. These accounts indicate that Shaikh Muḥammad was a powerful agha in his region and his influence reached officials and fellow tribal aghas. He was genuinely respected by his Jewish protégés from Rabatke for his concern and protection.

#### 4. *Shaikh Tawfīq of Sisnawa*

Shaikh Tawfīq of Sisnawa was born into a powerful family of Surchi shaikhs in rural Kurdistan. He was the son of Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh of Baijil, one of the famous tribal Kurdish rebels through the 1920s. His grandfather was Shaikh Muḥammad of Baijil.<sup>14</sup> Shaikh Tawfīq was a prominent shaikh in his own rights and reportedly acted justly towards the Jews under his jurisdiction in Sisnawa.

Residents of Sisnawa had gardens near their houses, but the watering was done on a rotation basis, as there was insufficient water to

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<sup>14</sup> On Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh of Baijil and the Surchi Shaikhs, see Military Report on Iraq (Area 9): 300–308. See also the genealogical table of the Surchi shaikhs of Baijil in *Personalities* 1923.

irrigate all the gardens at the same time. One day, according to Michael Michaeli (I#26),

Sayyid Haba Bakir, the servant of Shaikh Tawfiq, transferred the water from my garden to his garden. I asked him, 'Why did you do that?' He said, 'This is not your turn.' He threw a small stone at me, which struck me. Nothing [really] happened. I went to Shaikh Tawfiq and told him what had happened. He summoned this Sayyid. He responded [to my complaint] and said that I cursed him. [Shaikh Tawfiq] ordered his two servants, 'Go into his garden and turn it upside down, from the roots, and destroy his fence.'

This infringement of the right of the Jew to water his garden when it was his turn seems like a minor offence, but apparently, aghas such as Shaikh Muḥammad Rabatke and Shaikh Tawfiq of Sisnawa would sometimes use severe punishments against abusers of local Jews. In this manner, tribal aghas would send a clear message of warning against the abuse of Jews and against the violation of their rights, as well as expressing and legitimizing their own power.

Michael Michaeli (I#26) gave another example of the ample support given by Shaikh Tawfiq to the Jews of Sisnawa when confronted with injustice inflicted by their Kurdish neighbors. In Sisnawa,

There was a Jewish woman who was mentally unbalanced... [Among other things] she would curse persons... Once she cursed a gentile Kurd and he hit her... Shaikh Tawfiq, as a punishment, expelled this Kurd from the village.

Shaikh Tawfiq acted severely against his servant who violated Michaeli's right to water his garden. He acted much more severely in this instance, by expelling the aggressor from Sisnawa. Indeed Michaeli provided no further details regarding this incident and the aggressor. In any case, expulsion was an extreme punishment in the tribal society. The very suggestion by the agha of this punishment in response to violence against a Jewish woman is strong evidence of the message the agha wished to convey regarding his guardianship of his Jews, as well as his own authority.

### *C. Rural Jews and Their Agha: Concluding Remarks*

The status of rural Jews in Kurdistan varied from one tribal jurisdiction to another and from one period to another. The existence of Jews in

hundreds of villages for generations, maintaining an agricultural way of life, suggests the following general view. The Jews lived in rural Kurdistan with relative ease and security and were able to provide for their families and to observe certain religious and spiritual practices. Nevertheless, the social position of non-tribal rural Jews was inferior to that of the tribesmen who occasionally took advantage of their inferior status and inflicted on them contempt, abuse, cruelty and various kinds of hardship. The Kurdish society was divided between tribesmen and non-tribal residents, placing most Christians and practically all Jews as non-tribal protégés of the tribal agha. Several reports from the 19th and early 20th centuries describe rural Jews as slaves, who were subjugated to tribal aghas in isolated places. The reports discuss mal-treatment, abuse and exploitation of these Jews by their aghas and even the sale of Jewish slaves. The sale of Jewish slaves seemed limited mainly because the aghas did not hasten to relinquish such an asset. Indeed, these Jews were not slaves in the western or even Islamic sense of the word, but rather 'slaves' who had many obligations and only few rights in the remote rural area of Kurdistan under tribal chieftains.

During the 20th century, the apparent form of relationships between tribal aghas and their Jewish subjects depict rural Jews who were non-tribal protégés of the tribal agha, who extended them his patronage and physical shelter. In return, the Jews provided the agha with services, gifts, taxes, and worked for him occasionally (*zebara*). Traditionally, Jews were accorded a lower status and vulnerable, but in everyday life, they were considered loyal and trustworthy and were helpful to their aghas in financial affairs and in times of need. The Jews were not autonomous but under the rule of the agha who had considerable power over them. Jewish villagers had to seek the agha's permission in matters such as migration or settling in a new village under his jurisdiction. Rural Jews had considerable value in the eyes of their aghas, who protected them as one would protect his tribal assets. Among the rural occupations of Jews were those of weavers and peddlers. The aghas took care of the needs of the Jewish weavers who made Kurdish clothing for the tribesmen, and Jewish peddlers helped the tribesmen during tribal feuds by providing them with necessary goods. In addition to the rural Jews, some urban Jews traveled extensively in the rural area. Like rural Jews, they were given the patronage of tribal aghas. In return, they helped their aghas in times of need and frequently provided them with material goods. Their social status was superior to that of the rural Jews.

Based on the apparent patterns of internal migrations of rural Jews which will be discussed in details henceforth, it seems that rural Jews were not completely secure in rural Kurdistan. The most traumatic event affecting rural Jews was a murder in the family. There were no Jewish massacres in Kurdistan, apart from one incident in which Kurdish tribesmen murdered seven male Jews in Sandur in 1941. Accounts of Kurdish tribesmen and aghas that inflicted hardship on Jews exist alongside accounts of aghas who were benevolent towards them. Indeed, written reports, mainly from the 19th century or from the early 20th century, convey events of financial exploitation, abuse and arbitrary murder of Jews, which necessitated at times the migration of the entire family to a safer region.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, oral interviews with fifty-six Jewish informants suggest that despite these sometimes-fatal incidents, there seemed to be more reports, or rather more significant reports about tribal aghas acting favorably towards Jews than reports about those who mistreated or misused them, during the first half of the 20th century.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the agha and his rural Jews was mutually beneficial, with aghas often helping the Jews both in their daily lives and in times of need. They protected the Jews in their place of habitation; at times, they stood behind them in conflicts with other tribesmen and would mediate their troubles with the authorities. Several rural Jews described their Kurdish aghas as honest and righteous judges who executed justice on behalf of their Jews. The justice, patronage and guardianship by some of these aghas made it possible for Jews to reside for hundreds of years in rural Kurdistan.

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, Salīm Gabbai (I#11) narrated that his family migrated to Zakho from another village, when a Muslim Kurd wanted to marry a daughter of the family. Other Jewish families migrated whenever a murder or an other tragedy happened to them.

<sup>16</sup> Two sources that provide numerous examples for the mistreatment of the Jews by their Kurdish masters and by the authorities, especially in the previous centuries, are the Ben-Yaacob and the five vols. of Avidani (1972) who shares his personal reminiscences in Kurdistan during the beginning of the 20th century.

PART III

SOME ASPECTS OF DAILY AND PERSONAL LIFE



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SAFETY OF JEWS IN KURDISTAN

The Jews in Kurdistan were concerned about their personal security. To some extent, their concerns reflect the relative lack of security and the lesser standing of Jews in the tribal setting. The recurrent acts of abduction of young women by Kurdish tribesmen, the robbery and even murder of merchants and peddlers on the roads and other kinds of financial exploitation of Jews by tribal Kurds that are dealt with throughout this book, reflect the lack of personal security of both rural and urban Jews. The noticeable trends of migrations of Jews, especially from the tribal region to the relatively safer urban centers, demonstrate the lack of personal security of rural Jews.

#### *A. Motives for Migration*

It is valuable to quote B. Dickson who argued, in the early 20th century, that most of the rural inhabitants in Kurdistan had never been out of their own villages and “a man who has been to the next village is looked upon as an adventurous traveler.”<sup>1</sup> In view of this observation, concerning the rarity of travel by rural dwellers, the regularity of migration of Jews of rural and urban Jews from one community to another deserves analysis. The non-tribal protégé of a certain agha, who wished to migrate and settle in a new village, had to seek the permission of both the agha whose jurisdiction he wished to leave and the agha under whose jurisdiction he wished to reside. It was not an easy task for a Jewish protégé to face his powerful chieftain and ask permission to leave. One must have good excuses to facilitate such a shift in loyalty. Oral testimonies suggest three main motivations behind the migration of rural Jews. First, the national revival of the Jewish people in the Holy Land or Israel during the first half of the 20th century; second, economic hardship and lack of work or providers; and third, lack of

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<sup>1</sup> B. Dickson, “Journey in Kurdistan.” *The Geographic Journal* 35 (1910): 366.

personal security, which is reflected either by tribal warfare or feuds or by murder of Jews and the leniency shown towards the murderers. The last categories were often considered justified reasons for migration and were often approved by the aghas. The following accounts elaborate the various motives for migration and illustrate the position of rural Jews in the tribal region.

Kurdish Jews migrated to the Holy Land as early as the 16th century. From the end of the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century, immigration from Kurdistan to the Holy Land took place. By 1952, practically all the Jews of Kurdistan had immigrated to Israel. In fact, the reasons for the individual migration of Jews to the Holy Land prior to the mass migration of 1951–52, usually combined spiritual and national motivations, at times in addition to economic hardship and lack of security. On the other hand, the migration *en masse* to Israel during the early 1950s occurred for all the above reasons, as well as because of the deterioration in the security of the Jews, the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel. This massive migration was made possible thanks to the organized, communal efforts of the Jewish leadership in both Israel and Iraq. The following four accounts highlight the conditions that led to the migration of Jews.

In the time leading up to the mass migration to Israel, a delegation of Jews from Diana traveled to Arbil to seek help from the head of the Jewish community, Şāliḥ Yoseph Nūrī, who was the organizer of the emigration.<sup>2</sup> Around that time, the position of Jews became more precarious. In order to register and apply for a visa,

they had to go to Rawanduz, seven kilometers [4.3 miles] on foot, but they were afraid of being killed in the roads... because the Muslims were saying, these Jews are going to Palestine; we should not let them go, we should kill them.<sup>3</sup>

A delegation of Diana Jews visited Şāliḥ Yoseph Nūrī, the prominent head of the Jewish community of Arbil and asked for his help, expressing the primal fear that the Kurds “would take our daughters, if he does

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<sup>2</sup> On Şāliḥ Nūrī see “The late Şāliḥ Nuriel: Leader in the Diaspora,” *Hithadshut* 1: 52–53 (Hebrew). See also (1988, part I: 127). Şāliḥ Nūrī (or Nuriel, in Hebrew) is described as an able and charismatic leader. Following his immigration to Israel in the early 1950’s, he was killed in a traffic accident in Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

not help us” and they would remain in Diana. Nūrī tried to convince them to stay in Diana four more months, because “no one has yet left Arbil,” but the Jews from Diana wanted to migrate right away, even if it meant staying in the synagogue in Arbil.<sup>4</sup> In the end, he took them to the *mutaşarrif* and told him:

‘I would like you to give an order that these Jews should be brought to Arbil.’ The *mutaşarrif* asked him, who [are you talking about]? He said [pointing to us] here, this person, Moshe Binyamin. He said, ‘He cannot be a Jew,’ because we were dressed just like Kurds. He asked again, ‘how could it be that he is a Jew?’<sup>5</sup> Judging us on our clothes and our language, because we did not know any Arabic or Hebrew, we only knew to speak Kurdish.<sup>6</sup>

The persistence of the Jews of Diana finally paid off as the *mutaşarrif* approved of their migration to Arbil. Moshe Binyamin returned to Diana and informed his family about the meeting, asking them to prepare to move to Arbil, where they would reside until the immigration to Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Darwîsh Naḥum (I#28) from Aqra described a gradual wave of migration of rural Jews who lived under the jurisdiction of the Surchis. Rural Jews were not able to maintain daily life without an organized, supportive community. They needed at least a slaughterer of animals for the provision of kosher food, but this service was not available in the villages. Some of these villages were located several hours walking-distance from Aqra and rural Jews had lived in these villages for generations, but they finally decided to migrate to Aqra in the years preceding the migration *en masse* to Israel. In 1950, the treasurer of Garzanzgel,

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<sup>4</sup> During the preparation for the emigration to Israel, many Jews came from villages to the Kurdish towns and then to Baghdad, where they were placed in synagogues, until the time of their turn arrive to take off and fly to Israel.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, A. J. Braver (1935: 247) who visited Kurdistan in 1933 noted that only an experienced eye could distinguish between the Jews of the mountains and their Kurdish neighbors.

<sup>6</sup> Prof. Yona Sabar wrote me that his late father had mentioned seeing a person who said a Jewish prayer in Kurmanji. He recited “*birkat ha-omer*,” a unique Jewish prayer designating the counting of every day from the 2nd day of *Pesah* or Passover, until *Shavuot*, or Pentecost (the festival of wheat harvest), 49 days altogether. According to Sabar’s late father, this person did not know any Hebrew and looked very much like a gentile Kurd. From a personal letter to the writer of this book dated December 20 December 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

Levi Yitzhak, traveled to Baghdad and met the *Hakham Bashi* to discuss the immigration of his community to Israel. Upon his return, he instructed the 110 Jewish members of the community to prepare for the immigration. The Jews began to sell their property, but the tribal leader of the region, ‘Abdallāh Agha, sent his men to relieve the Jews of their weapons. They had forbidden the Jews to sell their goods and leave the village. The leaders of the community discussed the state of “severe danger” and appealed to ‘Abdallāh Agha to set an appointment for them, but he refused. On the tenth of the Jewish month of *Iyyar*, (6th of April 1950) and within 6 weeks the operation of “Ezra and Nehemiah” was about to begin. This operation carried 120,000 Jews from Iraq into Israel during one year. They sent a letter through a “loyal gentile” to the *Hakham Bashi* of Mosul, Hakham Solomon, saying,

We, the Jewish community of Garzanzgel, are in danger now, because the governor of the region ‘Abdallāh Agha has confiscated our weapons. He forbidden us to sell our goods, houses and fields, and forbidden us to leave the village...passers-by are not allowed to visit us...and he [‘Abdallāh Agha] is not willing to meet with us. We would appreciate it if you would intervene in the matter.

Hakham Solomon filed a complaint with the head of the police. The Police officer questioned both the petitioner and ‘Abdallāh Agha in Mosul. Consequently, they reached an arrangement with seven clauses that illuminate both the standing of rural Jews in the Kurdish society and the question of their migration, as follows.

1. ‘Abdallāh Agha will guard the Jews until their final departure to Mosul;
2. The Jews are allowed to sell their goods;
3. The agha will receive ten percent commission from the money of these sales;
4. The government will confiscate all the houses of the Jews;
5. The agha will confiscate all the fields of the Jews;
6. The Jews will pay their debts by way of the agha;
7. The agha will collect the debts of Muslims to Jews and pay the Jews.

The agreement was signed with ‘Abdallāh Agha who was held accountable to the Jews, until their departure to Mosul. Two months later, the Jews of Garzanzgel were ready to move to Mosul. One of the leaders of the community hired five big trucks and the police accompanied them until their arrival in Mosul. During the following months, all the

Jewish families of Garzangel flew from Baghdad to Lod Airport in Israel.<sup>8</sup> This account is significant, as it relates how a rural community needed the support of both the Jewish leadership and the head of the police in Mosul and the required cooperation of the tribal authority in order to leave their community.

Rural Jews had been dependent on their aghas and they had to seek permission to migrate to another location. In other words, the Jews had to receive the agha's consent for the final act of emigration to Israel. That is why many rural Jews migrated in stages, moving first to the nearest urban center that had an established Jewish community. In the larger Jewish communities, leaders or activists who took care of all the necessary procedures and preparations for emigration.

Economic reasons constituted one of the main motives for migration of rural Jews. Michael Michaeli (I#26) migrated twice because of economic hardship. He was born in Aqra and when he was a young boy, around 1920, his family migrated to the village of Sisnawa, a few hours' ride from Aqra. Sisnawa was under the jurisdiction of Shaikh Tawfiq Surchi the son of Shaikh 'Ubaidullāh of Baijil. The economic hardships that necessitated the migration of Michaeli's family were probably related to the effects of World War I. Michaeli's family migrated once again before World War II, because of economic hardship. The locust "destroyed all the grains," explained Michaeli.<sup>9</sup> He paid a visit to Shaikh Tawfiq and told him:

'My children are hungry. I have no food for them.' I had to ask his permission [to migrate]. I was his Jew and I needed his permission. I asked Shaikh Tawfiq, either to support my livelihood, or to let me go on my way. He said 'listen, I have 60–70 families, and if I support your livelihood, I have to support the Muslim families as well.'

Without the agha's permission or his blessing, his Jewish subject could not migrate. Around 1938–39, Michael Michaeli led twenty-three members of his family from Sisnawa, near Aqra, to Zinwe on the Iraqi-Persian border. From Zinwe he continued alone and crossed the border into Persian Kurdistan. In Sofian, he appealed in person to Mam Ḥussain, the agha and the religious authority of the region. Michaeli had a Kurdish friend, named Ketzil, who escaped from Iraq to Persia, because of a tribal feud and was residing in Sofian. Ketzil led Michael

<sup>8</sup> Menaḥem 1980: 57.

<sup>9</sup> Locust, in Kurdish, *kūlî*; in Neo Aramaic, *kamsa*.

to the *dīwanxane* of the local agha, Mam Ḥussain. Michael had prepared in advance a suit of *shale-shapik* as a gift for Mam Ḥussain. According to the local custom, when a new guest arrived at the *dīwan* of the agha, he was not allowed to sit until the agha gave him permission.

Ketzil was invited by the agha to sit down. Mam Ḥussain asked him, 'Who is this person?' Ketzil told him: 'This Jew wishes to settle here.' He gave him a suit of *shale-shapik* and said, 'This is a gift for Bapir Agha,' his oldest son. I [Michael Michaeli] was then invited into the *dīwanxane*. The agha asked me, 'What is your occupation?' I told him '*shale-shapik*.' He was very happy and said, 'If this is your occupation, you will profit very well here.' Ketzil told the agha, 'If you want him to reside here; you have to bring his belongings, his household, from Zinwe.' The agha asked me, 'What else can you do?' I told him that I am a farmer and I know how to grow tobacco, rice. Ketzil had guided me, telling me how what to say, in order for the agha to accept me.

Michaeli visited Mam Ḥussain around November, just before the heavy snow of the Kurdish winter would cover much of the land. From December onwards, it is practically impossible to travel on the roads. The road from Zinwe, near Rawanduz, to Sofian, was eight hours' distance. Mam Ḥussain had to find a way to bring the family of Michaeli to Sofian before the winter began. Mam Ḥussain learned that eighteen members of Michael Michaeli's family were waiting for him behind the border. He explained that it would be difficult to provide Michaeli with [good] housing, because the winter was approaching and all the apartments were taken. The settlement of Michael in Sofian required that Mam Ḥussain order the preparation of a special apartment for him. Mam Ḥussain summoned Aḥmad, a rich merchant, who traveled for business purposes between Persia and Iraq.

He came and stood at the door. Even this wealthy person had no permission to enter unless he was allowed to do so. The agha told him, 'I need you to go tomorrow and bring the household [and belongings] of this Jew over here.' Aḥmad told him, 'If you had only told me this in the morning, I could have prepared five camels with wheat to go to Zinwe, to sell it there and bring the household of the Jew on the way back.' The agha told him: 'I do not care.'

Mam Ḥussain instructed Aḥmad to travel to Zinwe, Iraqi Kurdistan, and bring the family of Michaeli to Sofian, Persian Kurdistan. The merchant and his assistants prepared a load of wheat and left early the next morning with Michaeli. They walked all day long and stayed one night in Zargatan, near Shino and Nakada, they arrived in Zinwe

the next morning. After they had sold the wheat, they took Michael's wife and children and placed them on the camels with their belongings. Michael and his son walked alongside from ten o'clock in the morning until the following morning, without stop, until they reached Sofian.

For a few years, Michael Michaeli (I#26) lived in Sofian, but the death of both his mother and sister-in-law within a short time apart drove him to migrate to Shino, a town with a Jewish community providing religious and community services, of which Michaeli was in need. In Shino, Michaeli found himself in the frontline of the struggle between Barzānī and the Persian army. It is interesting to note that local Jews did not migrate as soon as the war began. It is possible that they felt safer in this kind of war than in a tribal feud. In the war that erupted in Shino, the Jews enjoyed the protection of the Barzānī fighters and were not the target of the army. In Shino, Michaeli maintained ties with the Kurdish leader Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, for whom he weaved *shale-shapik* and provided other services.

Many migrations in the rural area were motivated by tribal feuds. Documents from the early 17th century reveal that Rabbi Shmuel Barzānī fled from Barzān after it was set on fire, probably because of a dispute among the local shaikhs.<sup>10</sup> The security of rural Jews was entrusted to the tribesmen, and therefore, tribal feuds would threaten the security of the Jewish protégés.<sup>11</sup> In fact, not only rural Jews, but also urban Jews were compelled to migrate in times of warfare. During World War I, at least fifteen Jewish families from southeastern Turkey settled in Zakho alone, because of the Armenian massacre and the Assyrian-Turkish clashes both of which took a heavy toll. One of them was Moshe Mehager who came from the Bashqala area and whose surname 'Mehager,' or 'migrant,' has been attached to his offspring ever since. Following World War I, the Jewish community of Amadiya sent all the women and children to the village of Spindare Maje for about a month, because of rebellious activity and tension between tribal Kurds of Amadiya and the British rule.<sup>12</sup> Several Jewish families had lived in the village of Rabatke, under the protection of Shaikh Muḥammad Rabatke. The local Jews lived safely and praised Shaikh Muḥammad for his guardianship and moral sense, but

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<sup>10</sup> Benayahu 1965: 26.

<sup>11</sup> Salmazadeh 1980: 115.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4).

after his death around 1945 it turned very bad... Shaikh Muḥammad was no longer there to protect the Jews. His son became *fīrar* because of a murder he had committed in the tribal War... We were not able to suffer anymore. Raids and investigations of the army occurred daily... until we had had enough and decided to migrate.<sup>13</sup>

Rabatke, which had been safe for Jews, thanks to Shaikh Muḥammad, became an area of tribal warfare and became dangerous. The tribal conflict became bloodier and the personal security of the Jews deteriorated. A Jewish family that lived there from 1931 was forced to move to Sandur.<sup>14</sup>

The village of Khalka, in Raikan, near Nerwa, under the jurisdiction of Kalḥê Raikani was a notorious area for tribal feuds.<sup>15</sup> According to a British military report, Kalḥê Raikani was

the leading agha of Raikan, first cousin of Wahnāb (Hobi) Agha, who was murdered by Sutu Agha of Oramar in October 1919. [He then quarreled with the chief agha of Mizuri-Bala.] Having promised a girl to Khalīl Khoshawī, who had sheltered him, he married her to a Raikan Agha, which led to fighting between Raikan and Mizuri-Bala. [He later] produced a tribal force to assist the *qāmmaqām* of Amadia in the 1922 revolt, and destroyed several Mizuri-Bala villages.<sup>16</sup>

When Kalḥê Raikani was murdered, his son Ḥaviyo Raikan took his place.<sup>17</sup> Ḥaim Barzānī (I#6) was born around the end of the 19th century in the village of Khalka. When he was a child his family moved to Awqawa in Zībar, under the jurisdiction of Qādir Agha Zībarī. Seven years later, because of a tribal war in Zībar, his family moved back to Raikan. They later migrated to Bamarne, under the jurisdiction of the famous Shaikh Bahā al-din of Bamarne. From Bamarne, they emigrated to *Eretz-Yisrael* in 1927. In summation, within 30 years his family migrated four times between villages in rural Kurdistan. Likewise, all the Jews of Shandokh moved from the village because of tribal feuds. Reportedly, Jews from Sandur and Be-Tanure had settled in Shandokh and lived there uninterrupted until the time when Shafar Agha “who was a terrorist,” pushed the head of the village, Aban Agha, out of Shandokh. Shafar Agha came into Shandokh and ruined it while

<sup>13</sup> Eliyahu Shalom (I#38).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The previous tribal rulers in this region were the notorious Tato and Tamo, two brothers who were killed by Suto Agha. See Nikitine and Soane 1923–25: 70.

<sup>16</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 326.

<sup>17</sup> See also Ben-Yaacob 1981: 62.

Abano (a nickname for Aban *Agha*) escaped to Dohuk. The village was devastated and the Jews migrated from Shandokh because of the fierce tribal war that ensued. One of the Jews of Shandokh remained there for two more years because he owned a vineyard, which he did not want to surrender, although his mother kept urging him to leave. Eventually they migrated to Dohuk, leaving their vineyard behind without having sold it.<sup>18</sup>

### B. *Murder of Jews in the Tribal Setting—The Tribal Response*

A murder of a family member was the most serious tragedy that could befall on rural Jews. If a murder of a Jewish villager occurred, it usually involved the migration of the victim's family to a safer place. Four aspects should be noted in reference to the tribal setting regarding this question: (1) the particular circumstances surrounding the murder; (2) the lack of proper or any police response; (3) the leniency of the tribal and local judicial authorities towards the murderers; (4) the migration of Jews because of the murder of a family member.

#### 1. *Kafir Kuşt—The Killing of Infidels*

Killing a Jewish protégé of a tribal chieftain was an insult to the agha, but it did not create an irresolvable dispute. As one informant said bluntly, "it is just like killing the agha's cattle," i.e. it involved mainly material damage and harm to the agha's reputation. This may indeed be too harsh a statement; nonetheless, it shows that the killing of an agha's Jew was a resolvable issue. In the tribal Kurdish society, murder of a Jew was regarded as a lesser crime than a murder of a Kurdish tribesman. Wallace Lyon, a British political officer who in the early 1920s met 'Abd al-Qādir Beg Mirani, the over-lord of the Chaldeans of Shaqlawa, reported that he "was fond of his serfs and reckoned that one of his Christians was as valuable as a good mule."<sup>19</sup>

In discussing murders of Jews and Christians by Muslims, it is important to present the following account. Roger Cumberland (b. 1894) was a U.S. citizen from Chicago, who was assigned to a mission

<sup>18</sup> Levi Mordechai Yaacob (I#27).

<sup>19</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 134.

in Kurdistan. He arrived in Mosul in 1923 and then traveled and explored Kurdistan. He learned Kurdish and became acquainted with the Kurds “north of Mosul as far as Zakhu and Amadiya.” He eventually settled in Dohuk, where he became famous among the inhabitants of the surrounding area.<sup>20</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31) knew him personally and often visited his home. He spoke of “Mr. Cumber” [Cumberland] who resided in Dohuk following World War I. He built a house that was open to the public. In 1930, he bought a spring of water and laid a pipeline to provide water for the residents of Dohuk.<sup>21</sup> The curiosity of the neighbors, as well as some benefits, turned his house into a meeting place, mostly for Muslims. The public often asked the *Sahib* for loans.<sup>22</sup> Mr. Cumberland would say to those who borrowed from him, according to Sasson Naḥum, “ne je te bistînim, ne bidim te,” (Kur., I will neither take it from you, nor you will give it to me).<sup>23</sup> When the public gathered in his house at night, he used to read for the audience, in Kurmanji, from a Christian prayer book, which contained “no evil,” according to Sasson Naḥum who visited Cumberland occasionally. Mr. Cumberland used to ask that mutual love thrive between all religions. “Then he used to bow, and everybody bowed after him,” giggled Sasson Naḥum.

Nūrī Ḥaddad was the *mu‘āwin* of Dohuk; his brother was the principal of the boys’ school, and his wife was the principal of the girls’ school. Reportedly, they were among the new disciples of Mr. Cumberland. According to a book that contains biographies of missionaries, the name of the person baptized by Cumberland was Abbūd Abbūd. The Muslims ordered his wife to divorce him because “he was no longer a Muslim.”<sup>24</sup> The pupils must have said that the principal taught them about Jesus, who was the Son of God and who raised the dead and worked miracles. The parents learned about it and began to hate Mr. Cumberland, according to Sasson Naḥum. Cumberland’s biography states that “success brought danger” and his work attracted opposition and hatred.<sup>25</sup> According to Sasson Naḥum, Sa‘īd Agha of the Mizuri

<sup>20</sup> Blincoe 2001: 160–64.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Sahib*, from Arabic, originally friend, companion. During the colonial period, *Sahib* was used for lord, sir or master, usually of a European or western origin.

<sup>23</sup> The attitude is in accordance with one of the guidelines in the Bible and the New Testament such as in Matthew 10:8, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

<sup>24</sup> Blincoe 2001: 165.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 164–65.

tribe sent Salîmê Mişte his son to kill Cumberland. According to Cumberland family members, he knew one of his murderers personally, Salîmê Mişte, son of Sa'îd Agha of the Mizuri tribe who lived in a village two hours' distant. Salîm went with his servant to visit Mr. Cumberland who honored them greatly; then Salîm shot him and injured him severely. His servant asked "*Agha, why?*" and was shot as well. Cumberland's servant died on the British plane that carried them to Mosul and Cumberland died in the hospital. Salîmê Mişte became a fugitive. According to Sasson Naḥum, in the end, Sa'îd Agha Mizuri managed to bring him to his village. Two reasons helped Sa'îd Agha solve this problem. First, "he was influential in the government." Second, explained Sasson Naḥum, because "it was a killing of an infidel or non-Muslim, known in the Kurdish society as *kāfir kuşt*. Salîmê Mişte soon regained his status, to the anger of Sa'îd Agha Doski, the chief agha of Dohuk and the surroundings. Sa'îd Agha Doski sent his men to Besifke to try to kill him, with no success.

## 2. *Leniency towards the Murderers of Jews*

Rural Jews did not belong to the tribe, i.e., they did not have blood ties with the tribesmen. Therefore, they were not obliged to mutually protect and defend each other, as was required from tribesmen. It was only natural for the tribesmen to react vengefully when a fellow tribesman was murdered, and to act more leniently when a Jewish protégé was murdered. Generally, the agha and the tribesmen were less inclined to escalate matters by entering into a blood feud with a tribe whose members were responsible for the murder of their Jewish subject. Only rarely would tribal chiefs retaliate for the murder of a Jewish subject.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of *kāfir kuşt* facilitated leniency towards murderers of Jews. Following the murder of Jews, three possible patterns of action were reported. They further indicate the comparative leniency with which the murder of Jews was viewed in tribal Kurdish society. The first pattern was the lack of retribution, as in many instances, when the bodies of the victims were never found. It was therefore difficult, if not impossible, to discover the identity of the murderers, which was concealed owing to mutual tribal assistance. It was relatively rare that the identity of murderers was discovered. The second pattern employed

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<sup>26</sup> See Brauer 1947: 188–89; Brauer 1993: 226–27

in many of these instances was the payment of ransom for the victim's blood in order to redeem the tribal murderers.

The third pattern that may have occurred following the murder of Jews by known tribesmen was the flight of the murderers to the mountains in order to escape punishment. They managed to survive in the mountains thanks to the assistance of fellow tribesmen until the time in which an arrangement was made enabling them to return to their homes without fear of punishment.

The central government did not manage to execute law and order in the regions controlled by the tribal Kurdish society, in which chieftains often gave refuge to fugitives. For instance, in 1923, a British report related to Sayyid Khalil Agha of the Berzinja family in Kirkuk district, who "is wealthy, perhaps in part from sheltering criminal fugitives from justice." Likewise, it is said that Shaikh Muḥammad of Rabatke harbors "wanted persons."<sup>27</sup>

The family of Daniel Barashi (I#4) came from the village of Barashi following the murder of his uncle by tribesmen. The murderers escaped unpunished and became *firars*. According to Barashi, his late uncle was a handsome man and a talented singer who performed at Kurdish and Christian weddings.

At times, their women would [fall in] love [with] him, but they could not have taken him. As a result, the [male] Muslims, from their hatred, became jealous. Some of them planned an ambush. He was on the roof when he was killed and his friend was injured. This happened ninety years ago approximately [around the turn of the 19th century].

Reportedly, several aghas were responsible for the murder.<sup>28</sup> "If the aghas had not cooperated [in this matter] it would not have been possible," said Daniel Barashi who was named after his late uncle. Regarding the punishment, nothing happened to the murderer, who escaped to the mountains. Occasionally at night, he would return home. Following the murder the victim's brothers decided to migrate from Barashi to Amadiya. The authorities did not pursue the murderers to bring them to justice and there was no retribution against them.

When Jewish subjects of the tribe were murdered and the identity of the murderers was known, the agha would prefer to reach a settlement

<sup>27</sup> Personalities 1923: 54, 67.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4) blamed on one, Ḥussain Agha, the father of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Agha and Muḥammad Agha.

of ransom money or compensation for the blood of the victim from the tribesmen who had committed the murder. On the other hand, following a murder of a tribal Kurd, the victim's family and clan members are obliged to seek revenge for the murder of their blood relative, and the tribal *agha* is forced to abide by the tribal codes. Unlike the unarmed Jews, the tribesmen had both weapons and the support of the tribe in their desire for vengeance. A small and fragile rural Jewish group could not mobilize tribal support to engage in a tribal feud over the murder of a Jewish protégé. The Jews might have received sympathy and condolences, but since sympathy was not enough, the family of the victim would generally migrate to another safer village, both because of disillusionment resulting from the lack of tribal support and for fear of the recurrence of such murder.

At the first decade of the 20th century, Yehoshua Reuben (I#44)'s grandfather, Yehoshua, was murdered on the road between Chāl and Amadiya. Reuben's account refers not only to the violent details of the murder, but also to the position of Jews within tribal society.

My grandfather used to travel to the *qadā'* of Amadiya to buy wool in big quantities. He would bring it to Chāla for weaving... He had a gentile friend, Melā Tamar from Sargale, who would collect all the quantity [of wool] there... Melā Tamar would collect all the merchandise and my grandfather would come and take it [once in a while] and pay him. Once he went... there was [a passage] of water [where the travelers would meet]... two Kurds also rode the *kalak* [raft] with him over the water and then went to their way. These gentiles asked him where [are you going], he told them to Melā Tamar, this money is for him; I am just taking merchandise from him and returning. They told him, we are going together. Which route [there were two ways] are you taking? He said, Seri [which was a short cut]. They reached Dirgini, a Christian village, and told my grandfather, we are going to kill you. He told them, do you want money? Here is the money. They told him, we are going to kill you and take your money as well... On their way back in the *kalak*, the *kalakvan* [raftsman] asked them, why did you return? They said, we went to Seri [and completed our business there] and now we are heading back.

When Reuben's grandfather had been missing for five days, a team of fourteen Jews from Chāl went in search of him. They reached the *kalakvan* who gave them the names of the two men who had traveled with their father, Sayyido and 'Abdallāh. Indeed, they said that they were going on a journey, "but they returned two hours later, although your father did not return," he said. About one hundred Kurdish villagers from Halane, Sikan and Zewan, helped the search group. When

the body of Yehoshua's grandfather was finally discovered, they realized that his murderers had killed him "not with a pistol, nor with a knife, but with stones." They gave the names of the murderers to Sa'dī Agha, the tribal chief of the region. He told them, "Go and cut down all the fruit trees of the village of Bezanur,"<sup>29</sup> the village of the murderers. This was the sign of a tribal blood feud. Then they took two bullets and put them in the house of the *mukhtār* of the town, Şālīḥ. The two bullets represented the desired punishment for the murderers, according to the tribal law. A feud was declared between Sa'dī Agha and the rival agha of Nerwa, Qahidi (Qaḥiro?). In the negotiations between both aghas, Sa'dī Agha, the chief agha of Chal told Qahidi Agha, the agha in charge of Nerwa and Bezanur: "I want the two persons who killed the Jew, I want their heads." Yehoshua Reuben asserted, "Both murderers were wealthy." The tribesmen claimed, "We do not submit persons. According to our law, as much as you charge us [compensation] we shall pay." Reuben recalls:

Sa'dī Agha took the 'blood' of my grandfather and summoned my uncles, his sons. He told them: 'I took the 'blood' of your father.'<sup>30</sup> They said, 'We do not want it...'. They had planned, my father later told me, to kill the two men from Bezanur village. Nevertheless, Sa'dī Agha warned them and said, 'If you are going to kill the two gentiles, a big war will ensue and many persons will be killed.'

If tribal Kurds were killed, a tribal feud would ensue, but the murderers of Reuben's grandfather were not punished. Instead, they paid compensation to Sa'dī Agha, the patron of the Jews. The agha indeed offered the 'blood' money to the sons of the victim, but as Reuben explained, they did not consider it appropriate to take the money, because by doing so it would have appeared that they had forgiven the murderers. Indeed, they wished to kill the murderers, but could not do so given the reality of their social position. Likewise, it did not seem appropriate to take the money from Sa'dī Agha, their protector and benefactor. The agha was compensated for future loss of income incurred by the murder of a Jewish subject who otherwise would have paid taxes and granted gifts and other benefits. Sa'dī Agha and Qahidi

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<sup>29</sup> Several Jewish families lived in this village throughout the years. Reportedly, they suffered from the hands of the tribal Kurdish aghas.

<sup>30</sup> 'Blood' in Arabic, *damn*, pl. *dammat*, *dmun*, means a killing, a death, a life, and is used commonly to denote killing and revenge. In Neo-Aramaic, blood (*dima*) is used in phrases to denote blood, money, heavy emotion, toughness, and bloodshed.

Agha extinguished the blaze that could have erupted into a tribal feud through payment of ransom by the tribe of the murderers to the patron agha of the Jewish victim. The behavior of the two tribal chiefs seems to have been based on the common conviction that the shedding of blood of a Jew from Chal was not sufficient reason to engage in a tribal war, which may have resulted in much bloodshed. When the murderers of the Jewish victim remained at large, the only recourse for the Jews of Chal was to migrate from the region. Interestingly, Yoseph Amrani (b. 1898) from Chal who came to Palestine in 1928, reported that he had migrated from Chal when he was 13 years old, in 1912. He spoke of the departure from Chal following “the murder of a Jew at night with a rock,” that corresponds to the details of the murder of Reuben’s grandfather. The Jews of Chal had no choice but to leave the village. Everybody left his home and escaped to another place and Yoseph Amrani moved to Garzangel.<sup>31</sup>

This account suggests that the value of the life of Jews in rural Kurdistan was much smaller than the lives of tribal Kurds. Furthermore, it was the leniency shown towards the murderers, which illustrates the differences in status between Kurdish tribesmen and non-tribal Jewish protégés.

### 3. *Murder of Jews in Rural Areas*

The major problem Jews faced in rural Kurdistan was their physical security and the danger to life when traveling alone far away from the safer urban centers. When a Jew was murdered in spite of the tribal patronage, this trust was irrevocably fractured. Overall, the number of Jews murdered in the tribal region was relatively small. The Jewish communities, however, were also small and the murder of a Jew prompted a drastic response, usually the migration of the family or the whole community.

The family of Moshe Binyamin (I#3) had lived in the region of Barzān for generations. This family migrated four times within thirty years and resided in Serkane, Mergasor, Havdi(ya) and Diana. Two out of these three migrations were necessitated by the murder of a family member by tribal Kurds.

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<sup>31</sup> Yoseph Amrani, OHD, 6 (40).

We were only three Jewish families in Serkane. My grandfather was Yitzhak. During the feast of Passover, he was killed. He traveled to bring eggs for the wedding of my younger uncle, but he was killed. My late father decided that we would not stay there [in Serkane]. How can we depart? My father said that we must turn to Shaikh Aḥmad Barzān [the supreme tribal chieftain of this region]. My father and three other men went to Barzān. They told him: ‘Ya shaikh...we do not wish to stay in this village any longer, transfer us to another place.’ The shaikh said, ‘If I cannot keep you [safe] in this place, I could not keep you [safe] in another place.’ My father told him, ‘I will not move from here unless you give us an answer.’ Shaikh Aḥmad was not a simple man. [He was a] great man, so he said, ‘Alright, I will give you an answer, my Jews.’ They returned after a week...he sent his servants...and said, ‘Take their households and transfer them to Mergasor.’

The first murder occurred when Binyamin’s grandfather, Yitzhak, was caught in a tribal feud between the Barzānīs and their enemies from the Marakerchi tribe of Serokan. In the eyes of the Jews, the murder was a personal catastrophe. At the same time, it represented a tribal failure on the part of the Barzānīs to protect them. As a result, they wished to move from Serkane and appealed to Shaikh Aḥmad Barzān, under whose jurisdiction they had lived for many years, to relocate them to a safer community. Eventually, Shaikh Aḥmad transferred them to Mergasor, also under his jurisdiction, under the headship of Aḥmad Agha. Moshe Binyamin tried to explain his grandfather’s murder from a tribal point of view of the murderers. His reasoning underlines the unique position of the rural Jews. The tribal enemies of Serkane murdered Binyamin’s grandfather because he continued to travel to the neighboring towns, such as Aqra and Rawanduz, in the midst of the tribal feud. He used to buy goods and sell them to the Kurdish villagers and tribesmen, whose movement was limited, either because of tribal feuds or because of clashes with the government. In times of war, Binyamin’s grandfather was a valuable purchaser on behalf of the tribesmen who were confined to their villages because of the restrictions of war. Unlike the tribal Kurds who were engaged in the tribal feud, the Jews were less restricted in their travels through the rural area, because they were not part of the tribe. Nevertheless, in this and other events, Jews were able to circumvent the restrictions imposed on the tribes under whose jurisdiction they lived. In addition, tribal chiefs may have asked their Jews to execute missions on their behalf. Binyamin attributed the following notion to the enemies of Serkane, “If we kill this Jew, then the village will cease to exist.” Eventually, the murder of

his grandfather caused the migration of his family. After seven years in Mergasor,<sup>32</sup> a war broke out between the Barzānīs and the Iraqi army and the seven Jewish families residing in Mergasor migrated to Rawanduz because of the deteriorating situation. Nevertheless, after about six months, Moshe Binyamin's father asked the *qāimmaqām* to allow him to return into the Kurdish region. He explained that since they were making clothes to the tribal Kurds "we were able to make a living." The *qāimmaqām* was not willing to listen, but Binyamin's father insisted and eventually the official allowed them to migrate to Havdi (called by the Jews Havdiya).

We lived with them [the Barzānīs]. We would go to their villages; we would sleep in their own houses. They would give us...oil, sheep, goats, rice... everything, they would bring [these products] to our houses. After seven years, they killed my uncle, my mother's brother...After they killed him, we did not have a life anymore, we had to migrate [from this place]... Our tribal leader, the agha, was Mullā Oswara...but he could not raise his hand [to protect us, to retaliate] because the tribesmen who killed [my uncle] had the upper hand.

Once again, the tribal agha of the Jews of Havdi was incapable of protecting them from his tribal enemies, so they migrated to Diana.<sup>33</sup>

During the early 1930s, the men of the family of Moshe Binyamin (I#3) used to roam the villages surrounding Havdi, buying sheep's wool. The Kurdish villagers would shear the sheep in the spring and store the wool for the Jewish weavers who would use it to make traditional Kurdish suits known as *shale-shapik*, the main craft of the Jews. One night, after the Feast of *Shavuot* [Pentecost], thieves broke into the house of Binyamin's paternal uncle, Brindar, in Havdi, and stole four or five bags of wool. Around that time, Moshe Binyamin's grandmother was on her deathbed. The family was preparing for the expected Jewish guests from Diana, Baltas and Rawanduz, who would be visiting to pay their condolences. A short while after the robbery, Moshe Binyamin's maternal uncle, Shevane, traveled out into the surrounding villages to

<sup>32</sup> For this period in the biography of Barzānī, see Schmidt 1964.

<sup>33</sup> Diana, a village near Rawanduz. According to Ben-Yaacob 1981: 98, n. 1, in 1947, about 200 Jews lived there, most of them engaged in agriculture. The information is based on an epistle submitted by the Rabbis of Zefat to the Jewish emissary, Rabbi Moshe b. Rabbi Yoseph Matliya', published by M. D. Gaon in "Mignaze Yerusahlayim" of Pinhas Grayevski, issue 104, Jerusalem, 1933 (Hebrew) and also A. Ya'ari, Shluḥe Eretz Yisrael: 664 (Hebrew).

purchase food. During his journey, Shevane, who according to Moshe Binyamin, “had a sharp tongue,” went to Ashad Agha from Shetna, and blamed him for the robbery of the wool from the Jews. He told him bluntly

We are your Jews. You should be ashamed of this [robbery], sending your robbers to steal our source of income... He warned him... that he would file a complaint with the Iraqi police authorities, to come and fetch him, so a fear entered their heart and on his way [back,] they killed my uncle.<sup>34</sup>

This murder represents a marginal pattern in the relations between the aghas and the Jews, which can be traced in the written material as well.<sup>35</sup> At times, as in the above instance, aghas abused their patronage over the Jews and the same tribesmen who were supposed to protect the Jews of Havdi were actually behind the theft of the wool. The reasoning of Moshe Binyamin was as follows: the rural Jews of Havdi were supposed to keep quiet and restrain themselves, even when robbers belonging to their aghas committed such acts of theft. When one of the Jews, who was reportedly outspoken, dared to accuse Ashad Agha of personally being behind this robbery, he was subsequently murdered. According to Moshe Binyamin, “the evil instinct entered into them and they did it [murdered him].”<sup>36</sup>

The majority of murder instances of urban Jews occurred not in the towns but rather on the rural roads. Murders of Jews from urban center, such as Zakho, in the tribal area had a tremendous impact on the Jewish community, that about half of whose males made their living from various commercial occupations. Yehoshua Mīro (I#25) and Khadhuri Raphael from Zakho gave a harrowing account of a robbery by a gang who planned to kill them. They begged for their lives and the robbers argued with one another whether they should kill the Jews

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<sup>34</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

<sup>35</sup> Edmonds (1957: 427) relates to the status of Jews and Christians in Zakho in early 1925. He argues that their “suffrages” were “of course not in doubt for a moment.” See the following sources for the subject: Assaf 1943; Benjamin II 1859; Benzion Israeli (1934, 1956); Ben-Zvi (1957, 1967); Braver 1944; Brauer (1947, 1993) and Fischel 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Compare this account with the one on the murder of the *mukhtār* of Sandur by the neighboring tribesmen whom he accused of stealing sheep owned by Jews. See the “Massacre in Sandur,” pp. 207–212.

or let them go free. They vacillated back and forth several times, before the two Jews were released.

Even in the 20th and 21st centuries, living in comfort in Jerusalem, members of the Jewish community of Zakho continue to discuss and reminisce the triple murder of three Jewish merchants in 1928 that shocked the Jewish community. Strangers robbed three cousins, Asher, Yoseph and Jum'ā, and murdered them, smashing their faces beyond recognition. Several families who made their living from trading stopped traveling in the rural area because of this tragic event; some decided to emigrate to *Eretz-Yisrael*. One of these was the family of Tzidkiyahu that collected its debts from the inhabitants of Zakho and the surrounding area, a process that lasted one year. The family succeeded in selling only one of their houses, because the other Jews did not wish to see them leave. They postponed their departure for three more months out of deference to the requests by many Jews. Eventually, they left Zakho by way of Mosul and Damascus and the thirty members of the family were smuggled into Palestine through an illegal channel.<sup>37</sup>

On 18 October 1944, a letter was sent to Jerusalem by relatives of a Jew from Zakho, Shlomo Atiya, asking for immigration certificate for him to rescue him from the dangerous state in which he was involved. The following excerpts from this letter shed light on into the relations between Jews and Muslims in Zakho and the surroundings during the last decade of the Jewish experience in Kurdistan. The details convey that in times of feud or insecurity, Jews in Kurdistan would seek shelter by migration.

It is with great sorrow that we respectfully bring to your notice some details about Shlomo Eliyahu Salmān [also known as Shlomo Atiya who helped in smuggling Jews during the 1940s] from our [Jewish] Kurdish community in Zakho, Iraq... The above mentioned is in a terrible situation... because of the murder of two Jews, father and son, Naḥum b. Yiḥyā Cohen and his son Abraham, who were killed by Arabs [= Kurds] in the villages surrounding Zakho. They robbed them and threw their bodies into one of the potholes in the mountains. After a short while, rumors spread that these two Jews were murdered and robbed and their bodies were hidden. A group from the city, together with the police, searched and looked in all these places [that the rumors said] but did not manage to find their bodies and bring them to burial. Since this Shlomo

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<sup>37</sup> Tzidkiyahu 1981: 26.

Salmān used to hide in these Arab [= Kurdish] villages and had some acquaintances there, he bribed them with money until they discovered that so-and-so killed the father and his son and threw them in a certain pothole in the valley. He returned immediately to Zakho and took police officers with him upon the government order and they came to the place, discovered the corpses of the two Jews in the hole, went immediately to the house of the murderers, caught them, tied them, brought them to the city, and imprisoned them. This is why the Arabs [= Kurds] of these surroundings began to hate the afore-mentioned Shlomo. From that day onwards, he could not leave his home to go outdoors, because they were looking for him and if they found him, they would kill him right away. Therefore, he is now staying miserable and unemployed within his house, and his family members are starving. This event was notified to his brother here in Jerusalem and we, the committee of the community [of Zakho immigrants in Jerusalem] translated the enclosed letter from Arabic to Hebrew, and he is looking for a way to escape and save his soul from the danger that he [and his family] is facing. We request your honor to obtain for this family an immigration certificate in order to save them from this danger and we would thank your honor greatly.<sup>38</sup>

This letter reveals several facts about the experience of Jews in urban and rural Kurdistan. First, the person in question, Shlomo Atiya, was a famous smuggler of Jewish individuals and groups from Kurdistan to Palestine via northern Iraq and Syria. Second, Atiya acted in a manner too daring for Jews in Kurdistan and caused the arrest of two tribesmen charged with murder. Consequently, Atiya became the target of enmity of the tribesmen and his life was in endangered. It was impossible for him to leave his house [i.e., to travel out of town] and he was not able to work.

Another Jew, from Sandur, was murdered because of criminal activity in which he was involved. The relative tolerance expressed by Şālih Raḥamim of Sandur when relating this murder is striking. A Jewish villager named Piro acted against his fellow Jews by cooperating with Kurdish thieves and leading them at night to the homes of Jews. When problems occurred between the Kurdish thieves and their Jewish partner, the two Kurds killed him. Around 1946 or 1947, “in the summer nights, we would sleep on the roofs. They came and beat him to death,” said Şālih Raḥamim (I#37). Piro took a huge risk dealing with tribal criminals. Interestingly, Şālih Raḥamim expressed understanding, if not

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<sup>38</sup> Bibi (1998, part I: 349). Relatives of Shlomo Salmān in Jerusalem told this account, in the 1980s and 1990s to Gavish (1999: 227–230).

justification, for the murder of Piro, because he viewed his behavior as a betrayal of the community.

#### 4. *Massacre in Sandur*

In Kurdistan, there were no massacres of Jews, as far as we know, apart from one instance of mass-murder that occurred in Sandur. In contrast to the dangers that existed in the rural areas, the Jews were usually safe within their villages and urban centers, unless they were targeted by local tribesmen. One noted exception occurred in Sandur, not far from Dohuk, which was the last exclusively Jewish village in Kurdistan. In 1941, Kurdish tribesmen from the neighboring village of Yekmala (Kur., one household) massacred seven Jews in Sandur.

A report by a Jewish emissary written in 1945 discusses the reason of the attack, “an old quarrel between Moshe the Ḥakham’s son and the residents of the neighboring village.” The Jewish sources described Moshe as a “brave man” who did not tolerate stealing from his co-villagers by the neighbors, and if they managed to steal, would sometimes bring it back by force. Therefore, the neighbors hated him and caused this great disaster. During the attack, the villagers had five guns, but the Jews could not defend themselves because it was a surprise. After the attack, the government took all the weapons from the village and up until now, the village is without weapons, which is very bad. Now the Ḥakham’s family wants to buy weapons, but legally.<sup>39</sup> A British report expands on the circumstances leading up to this event. In 1930, Kurdish thieves from the neighboring village of Yekmala tried to steal sheep, goats and cows but the Jewish guards spotted them and fired at them. One person was killed, the brother of the village agha of Yekmala. For eleven years, the Kurds of Yekmala attempted unsuccessfully to take revenge on the Jews of Sandur by killing Moshe, the *mukhtār*, and his brothers Sasson and Yehuda, who were leaders of the Jewish community. These circumstances were probably the background to the scene described by Benzion Israeli who in 1934 reported “many instances of humiliation, constant fear, lack of security for life and

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<sup>39</sup> Bibi (1998, part II: 722–23) quotes the newspaper of the pioneer youth movement in Jerusalem [in Iraq], vol. 3, dated August 1945. A guide whose pseudo name was Avner b. compiled the report on Sandur.

property,” of the Jews who begged him to arrange their immigration to the Holy Land.<sup>40</sup>

During the period of tension with the Jews prevailing throughout Iraq in 1940, the Kurds of Yekmala may have considered it the appropriate time to take their revenge. On the night of Saturday, 13 December 1941, they entered the village and opened fire on the houses of the *mukhtār* and his brother.<sup>41</sup> Seven men were killed and three others were seriously injured. According to a British Foreign Office report, the attack occurred on either (Wednesday) 12 February 1941 or (Friday) 10 January 1941.<sup>42</sup> The attack was related to a blood feud with the neighboring village of Yekmala, which ensued following the murder of a Jewish villager from Sandur by a resident of Yekmala.<sup>43</sup> Despite the ransom payment and the arrest of the murderer, the bad relations remained and resulted in the final incident that had begun with the theft of several animals.<sup>44</sup> Šālīḥ Raḥamīm (I#37), an eyewitness, communicated the details of the massacre. On Saturday night, two tribesmen of Yekmala came to Sandur with five additional tribesmen.

They entered into the house of Sasson, the brother of Moshe Me‘allim [the *mukhtār*]. Actually, they did not enter...but from the window, they shot and injured [two children] a child named Farīq and the second child was Šadīq... They then left and went to the house of the *mukhtār*, Moshe. He invited them to enter...they told him ‘No, we came to kill you.’ They began shooting whoever was there...killing not only the family, but also guests. Those who were killed were Moshe Me‘allim, Moshe from [the village of] Mezi, Chicho, Yoseph, Shabbatai and Jum‘ā...

After perpetrating the massacre, the murderers warned the villagers that if they followed them, they would be killed, and then they left Sandur. Another report from 1942 was compiled following a visit of twenty-five Jewish soldiers serving in the British army.<sup>45</sup> This report discusses the murder of ten Jewish residents one night in the previous year, during

<sup>40</sup> Benzion Israeli 1956: 41.

<sup>41</sup> Actually, this date occurred on Thursday.

<sup>42</sup> Three different dates were given for this event.

<sup>43</sup> This information has no backing among the Jews of Sandur.

<sup>44</sup> FO 371 27099 (The Public Record Office, London).

<sup>45</sup> The 25 soldiers came from Palestine. They belonged to *Solel-Bone* (Heb., Name of a large construction company) and were part of the Special Construction unit-Palestinians. In Kirkuk and Mosul, memorandum by Sh. R. [Shalom Rashba] 15 August 1942 (Hebrew).

the revolt of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī, and argues that the village was still affected by the murder.

The most important Jewish family in Sandur was that of the *hakham*, who traditionally held the title of *mukhtār* of the village. Hakham Mordechai (1870–1941) and his son Moshe (1890–1941) were among the seven Jews murdered on 13 December 1941, in an attack by Kurdish tribesmen on the house of the Jewish *mukhtār*.<sup>46</sup> Hakham Mordechai was the rabbi of the community and his son Moshe was the *mukhtār*, who established close connections with the authorities. He aided both Jews and gentiles whenever they needed help from the Iraqi authorities.<sup>47</sup> Šālīḥ Raḥamim (I#37), not a relative of the *mukhtār*, presents a critical view of events leading to the murders.

The Jews were powerful and the *mukhtār* [Moshe Me‘allim] was disturbing them [the Kurdish neighbors]. We were farmers there. If someone stole a goat, a sheep, a cow... he used to go and blame the villagers of Yekmala. The *mukhtār* had a friend, a judge in Dohuk. He would do whatever he told him. Once they stole a cow from the village and the *mukhtār* went to two men from the village of Yekmala and had them swear in the *ṭalāq*<sup>48</sup> that they did not steal the cow. In this instance, they had stolen it. They went to their homes and had problems with their wives, because they had stolen the cow, but had sworn in the *ṭalāq* and lied, that they did not steal it.

If they were to take a false oath in the *ṭalāq*, they are obliged to divorce their wives. The Jewish *mukhtār* of Sandur challenged them and the two Kurds took a false oath, saying that they did not steal the domestic animals of the Sanduri Jews. When the accused Kurds' wives found out about the matter, they decided to kill the person who forced them to take the oath, thereby making it invalid.

Another question is whether the population of Sandur was entirely Jewish had any bearing on the fact that seven Jews were massacred in this village. It may be suggested that the very fact that only Jews populated the village facilitated the massacre. It is difficult to imagine such a massacre occurring in a village with mixed population where the small Jewish community is the protégé of the local agha. The tribal protector of the inhabitants of Sandur lived far away, making such a

<sup>46</sup> Mordechai 1978: 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ṭalāq* in Arabic means divorce; taking an oath in the *ṭalāq* means that this is the condition attached to the vow. If it is shown to be untrue, one must divorce his wife.

crime possible. In this event, it appears that the tribal agha may have given his approval for retaliation. An additional piece of information appears in the British report, referring to Sa'īd Agha Doski, "the local agha who is usually behind all troubles in Dohuk." Sa'īd Agha, with both Sandur as well as the tribesmen of Yekmala under his jurisdiction, did not welcome interference by the authorities in his backyard. It is not surprising that he complained about the inspector. This suggests that the latter was doing his work faithfully.<sup>49</sup> The murderers became *firars*, to avoid being captured by the authorities. They hid out in the mountains and only occasionally would return to their homes. Şālih Raḥamim (I#37) once met the escaped murderers accidentally when he and his father were working in the vineyard. His father asked them,

Why did you kill innocent persons? These two were Rashīd and Tehli, the two who committed the murder. They explained to my father that they came early in the evening and did not expect to find many persons... They asked my father not to disclose that they were in the region. During the day, they would roam in the mountains and at night they would go back to their homes... My father said, fine, we would not disclose it.

During all this time, Sa'īd Agha tried to arrange a solution that would allow the murderers to return home. Jewish sources shed more light on his role. They believed that the murder of the Jews could not have been possible without his consent. Likewise, Sa'īd Agha played a vital role in the reconciliation between the murderers and the families of the Jewish victims of Sandur. He came to the village of Sandur, which was under his jurisdiction, and gathered all the Jewish residents. Reportedly, Sa'īd Agha told them, "They [the murderers] did what they did; whatever happened, happened. Your *mukhtār* gave them trouble," placing the blame on the Jewish *mukhtār* who was among the seven murdered.<sup>50</sup> Şālih Raḥamim, who rationalized, if not justified, the murder of their *mukhtār*, echoed Sa'īd Agha's words. Sa'īd Agha offered the victims' families thirty dinars as compensation for each person who was murdered. The injured villagers did not receive any compensation. The persuasion of the powerful Sa'īd Agha with the compensation payments closed the affair. It is not clear how Sa'īd Agha managed to dismiss charges, but

<sup>49</sup> FO 371 27099 (The Public Record Office, London).

<sup>50</sup> Şālih Raḥamim (I#37).

the murderers were able to leave their mountain hideout and return to their village without fear of punishment.

These two [murderers] would come to visit us and we would visit them, as if nothing had happened... they even visited the son of Moshe Me'allim [the *mukhtār*] who was murdered.<sup>51</sup>

Apparently, this agreement restored the relations between the murderers and the Jews of Sandur. Israel Mordechai, the son of Yehuda and the grandson of Ḥakham Mordechai, who was murdered, described the delicate situation from a Jewish point of view, following the possible capture and indictment of the murderers.

If they had been brought to trial, their punishment would have been hanging... but then we would have been forced to leave [the place which has been] our village for the last few hundred years, and we did not want to leave. We therefore decided to make reconciliation and they paid heavy compensations for their crime.<sup>52</sup>

Following the reconciliation, the Kurds of Yekmala became “good friends with the Jews,” according to the Jews of Sandur, as strange as it may seem. Israel Mordechai wrote that during Rashīd ‘Alī’s regime, the agha of Yekmala and other Kurds helped and protected them. Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup, however, only lasted from April 1941 until June that year. The murder of the seven Jews must have occurred earlier, on 12 February 1941 (or 10 January 1941), as noted in the British reports, rather than on 13 December 1941, as dated by Jews of Sandur. The Jews of Sandur argue that during the troubled time of Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup in the middle of 1941, the Kurds extended support to them.<sup>53</sup> The agha of Yekmala and his men came to protect the Jews of Sandur from the impending troubles, but fear of the tribal Kurds was not diminished. Yehuda b. Ḥakham Mordechai (b. 1902), who became *mukhtār* after his brother’s death, sent two messengers to Sa‘īd Agha, the supreme leader of the Doski, asking him to send his tribesmen to guard the Jews of Sandur. Sa‘īd Agha came in person, “with a police force and many of his men.” He repelled the Kurdish tribesmen who attacked Sandur and left his men in the village. Sa‘īd Agha made the following promise to Ḥakham Mordechai, the village’s rabbi:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mordechai 1978: 23.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

No one would ever hurt the Jews of Sandur, even if there were an edict from the authorities against the Jews. He would personally guarantee that the Jews would not be harmed.<sup>54</sup>

The state of security improved. In 1945, it was reported that six Arab police officers guarded the village. The police force was established in 1941.

It may be suggested that the very fact that Sandur was entirely populated by Jews facilitated the massacre of seven in 1941. No other similar event occurred in recent generations in any of the villages where Jews lived as a small, protected community within the tribal Kurdish population. Indeed another massacre of seven Jews occurred in Zakho in 1891 or 1892, but it was in urban center and under different and not as clear circumstances.<sup>55</sup> Although not unheard of, entirely Jewish villages were rare. Such a small minority group needed protection and were generally more secure living in villages with mixed populations.

As far as is known, Jewish persons were generally murdered outside their village or town. At times, the pretext for such murder was robbery, or because the Jewish subjects were confrontational, or too daring in their relations with their tribal Muslim neighbors. In other instances, innocent Jews were murdered when they became victims of tribal feuds. The massacre in Sandur occurred openly. They came to the village and announced brazenly to the *mukhtār* of the village, who invited them into his home, that they had come to kill him. They murdered the Jews inside their homes and did not attempt to conceal their identities, warning the villagers not to dare to follow them. The Jews were the protégés of the tribal agha, Sa'īd Agha Doski, who reportedly either ignored the murders or gave them his approval.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ben-Yaacob (1981: 209–211). See the ‘the Position of the Jews in the Previous Centuries, pp. 9–10.’

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE JEWS

#### A. *Before the 20th Century*

The Jews of Kurdistan participated in the local economy. Both urban and rural Jews paid taxes and dues to the authorities and to the tribal chieftains under whose patronage they lived. Several earlier records relate to the economic position of Jews in Kurdistan during the last few centuries. Rabbi Shmuel Barzānī (d. ca. 1630) urged the community of Amadiya to help in raising funds to build a *bet-midrash* or religious school,<sup>1</sup> despite the community's poor economic position.<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Barzānī also warned the Jews in his epistles not to inform the authorities about the capital of fellow Jews in order to prevent damage or plots against well-to-do Jewish residents.<sup>3</sup> This request indicates disagreements between the authorities and the Jewish civilians over their tax assessment. Another issue that relates to the economic position of Jews is the question of taxes paid by Jewish communities. Several records from the 19th century indicate the problematic nature of tax payment in Kurdistan.<sup>4</sup> In one instance, in Arbil, the “minister [*mutasarrif*] had committed evil” against the Jewish community and doubled their *tarbiya* tax. *Tarbiya* in Arabic means education, increase, growth. Conventionally, it means the development and training of people in various aspects. Commonly it describes children upbringing. It is not completely clear what kind of tax was applied in this instance, since the Jewish education was managed and financed by the Jewish community. The community contested the decision and appealed to a higher authority in Kirkuk.<sup>5</sup> In another instance, recurrent floods in Mosul forced the Jews who

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<sup>1</sup> In Yiddish, amongst the Jews of Eastern Europe, the synagogue was also called *schul*, from school.

<sup>2</sup> Benayahu 1965: 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 44–45.

<sup>4</sup> Consult A. Ben-Shemesh, ed., *Taxation in Islam*, vol. I. (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 2nd rev., 1967.

<sup>5</sup> See also Benjamin II 1859: 35–36.

survived to abandon the city and look for a safer area. When the situation improved, the poor were the first to return to Mosul, but they were faced with the burden of new, unaccustomed taxes.<sup>6</sup>

During the 19th century, two Jewish travelers have shed light on the economic position of Jewish communities in Kurdistan. In 1826–1827, David D’Beth Hillel ranked the communities he visited with a plain yardstick. He reported on “poor Jewish families” in Mardin,<sup>7</sup> Dohuk and Zardawa (or Sardava, Sardova). In Arbil, most members of the community were “poor.” Some of the Jews in Amadiya and most of the Jews in Bashqala were “wealthy merchants.”<sup>8</sup> Some of the Jews of Zakho were “very wealthy, with a large [number of] cattle.” Most of the Jews of Sulaimaniya were merchants.<sup>9</sup> David also visited two agricultural communities, Sandur and Sukho. The Jewish communities in both villages owned “a lot of cattle.” Most of the Sanduris were “very wealthy” and all the Jews of Sukho were wealthy villagers.

The second traveler who discussed the economic position of the Kurdistan Jews was Rabbi Yehiel Fischel, who visited thirteen Jewish communities during a fund-raising tour in 1859. Among other things, he recorded the cost of renting a mule from one place to another and the funds he managed to raise in each community. In addition to the written report of Rabbi Fischel, the following calculation has been made in an attempt to assess the economic position of the community. The calculation is based on the total funds collected by Rabbi Fischel in a certain community, divided by the reported number of Jewish householders or inhabitants, in order to estimate the average donation per inhabitant. The assumption is that such a figure may indicate the average wealth of the community, though it relates as well to the level of generosity in each community. For a better assessment of the position of the Jewish communities visited by Rabbi Fischel, they were divided into three groups according to size: (1) up to 30 households; (2) up to

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<sup>6</sup> Originally from *Gabelle* (Latin/French), tax on salt. This was a common term in the middle ages in reference to tax on food products. *Gabila* was a tax on the *kosher* meat in the slaughterhouse. This tax was used as a main source of the income of the Jewish community, from which the wages of the Chief-Rabbi, the judges and the slaughterer of animals were paid. See the Responsa Literature of Rabbi Yom-Tov Tzahalon (vol. I, mark 50) concerning *gabala* tax that was imposed in one city.

<sup>7</sup> Fischel 1939: 222.

<sup>8</sup> Bashqala is today within Turkish Kurdistan.

<sup>9</sup> The author probably means that these merchants in Sulaimaniya are wealthy, though he did not write it explicitly.

60 households; and (3) between 150 and 200 houses. Most communities visited by Rabbi Fischel fall into the first category of small communities, up to thirty households. These were Severeke (44/10=) 4.4 (i.e. the amount raised in Severeke was 44 *qirsh*<sup>10</sup> and the number of Jewish households was 10, the result was therefore 4.4); Diyarbakir (90/30=) 3; Jermuk (80 *qirsh*/40=) 2; Kufri (50 *qirsh*/30=) 1.7; Tuz Khurmatu<sup>11</sup> (17 *qirsh*/12 up to 15=) between 1.41 and 1.13; Jezira (10 *qirsh*/10=) 1, Dohuk (15 *qirsh*/20=) 0.75.<sup>12</sup>

Only two communities fit into the medium-size communities, up to sixty households: Sandur (60 *qirsh*/60=) 1 and Urfa (40 *qirsh*/50=) 0.8. Four other communities are larger communities, between 150 and 200 houses: Kirkuk (100 *qirsh*/150=) 0.66;<sup>13</sup> Mosul (100 *qirsh*/200=) 0.5; Arbil (90 *qirsh*/200=) 0.45 and Zakho (56 *qirsh*/200=) 0.28. Oddly, the best fund-raising results were achieved in communities that Rabbi Fischel described as “poor.” These were Severeke (4.4) Diyarbakir (3), Kufri (1.7) and Jermuk (2).<sup>14</sup> In other words, there is no correlation between the verbal description of the resources of the community and the funds raised in the particular community. The results for small communities make no sense, although the comparison of the results within the other groups—medium and large communities—may shed light on the comparative economic position of the community.

Based on the report of Rabbi Fischel and the above calculations, one may note three main groups of communities: The first group includes six communities not visited by the traveler: Bai,<sup>15</sup> Amadiya, Aqra, Shosh, Mardin and Nisibin. Rabbi Fischel skipped these communities because of either “the small profits expected” or “the dangers of the road.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Qirsh* (in colloq. Arabic also *qursh*, pl. *qrūsh*) is a piaster. During the late Ottoman period, qirsh was a silver coin worth of 40 *paras* or 80 aspers (*aḳçe*), the usual Ottoman coin used in financial reports. Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptum Arabicum Palaestinae* (CIAP), vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 60.

<sup>11</sup> Tuz Khurmatu is located south of Kirkuk.

<sup>12</sup> In Jezira, the Jewish population is described as “very poor,” and the traveler actually lost money, paying more for travel expenses than the amount of money he managed to raise. Jezira receives here a relatively good grade, because it was a small community and may have made an effort to contribute money for an important cause.

<sup>13</sup> In Kirkuk which was described as “not wealthy,” he received the best grade in the group of the large communities. We could assume safely that the rest of the large communities are equally “not wealthy.”

<sup>14</sup> In Diyarbakir, For example, he raised 90 *qirsh*, divided by the number of householders, 30, gives us the grade of 3.0.

<sup>15</sup> “Bai” may be either a printing error or an error in the transliteration.

<sup>16</sup> Ya‘ari 1942: 33, 47.

The second group consisted of six poor communities that had been visited by the traveler: Jezira, Tuz Khurmatu, Dohuk, Severeke, Diyarbakir and Kirkuk. In Jezira, the price for renting the mule (30 *qirsh*) was three times the money raised from the Jews (10 *qirsh*). In Tuz Khurmatu, the rent of the mule (12 *qirsh*) was only a little less than the money donated by the community (17 *qirsh*). In Dohuk, the rent of the mule (3 *qirsh*) was one fifth of the sum donated by the Jewish community (15 *qirsh*). Rabbi Fischel mentioned Jezira and Dohuk explicitly as poor communities.<sup>17</sup> He ranked three other Jewish communities as poor or not wealthy. The Jews of Severeke were poor,<sup>18</sup> as were most of the Jews of Diyarbakir,<sup>19</sup> and the Jews of Kirkuk were not wealthy.<sup>20</sup> The third group consisted of five average communities: Sandur, Mosul, Arbil, Urfa and Zakho.

Jewish emissaries in Kurdistan planned their fund-raising trips carefully, being aware of the poverty of some Jewish communities.<sup>21</sup> Several documents published by Mann and in the Hebrew *Responsa* literature, demonstrate the economic hardship of individual Jews in earlier centuries. In one instance, a father from Zakho who was in great economic stress, sold his daughter as a servant when she was six or seven years old. The buyer still owed him one *jerk*.<sup>22</sup> On one occasion, in front of a witness, the buyer gave him the money on one condition, of an engagement between the girl and his son. Her father agreed, but after some time the buyer died and one of his sons returned the girl to her parents.<sup>23</sup>

Another phenomenon that demonstrates the poor state of the Jews existed right up to the middle of the 20th century. Young un-married, or widowed women, or even married women, moved from their hometowns to Baghdad in pursuit of a livelihood.<sup>24</sup> In one instance, Raḥel b. David who was a married woman from Dohuk migrated to

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 42, 45–46.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>21</sup> Mann 1931–1935, vol. I: 482, 502.

<sup>22</sup> *Jerk* was worth a quarter of a *majidi* or English shilling before World War I. Possibly it is *charik* or *charkhi* (Kur., *cerxi*), a Turkish coin from the Ottoman period, worth 5 piasters.

<sup>23</sup> Responsa Literature, Rabbi Tzedaka Ḥotzin, *Tzedaka u-Mishpat*, Even ha-Ezer, mark 25.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Cohen, *How the Jews obtain their livelihood at Baghdad*. Anglo Jewish Association Report (London), 1883–84: 48–53.

Baghdad in order to work. When her husband died, she returned to Dohuk where her husband's brother, Moshe b. Eliyya, married her in a levirate marriage, according to Jewish custom. In 1892, they were divorced and Raḥel moved back to Baghdad.<sup>25</sup>

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Jews of Kurdistan suffered at times from a shortage of food, because of famine, locusts, floods or epidemics. Recently, it was reported that in the years 1880 and 1888, food was so scarce that many Jews were forced to move to Baghdad.<sup>26</sup> According to a Jew from Zakho whose family migrated from Zakho to Baghdad in search of a livelihood in the early 1920s,

twenty percent of the Jews of Zakho would eat their bread while resting. The rest of them would eat their bread in tiredness. Some had something to eat in the morning, but in the afternoon, they had no food.<sup>27</sup>

Many Kurdistani Jews from Zakho, Dohuk, Amadiya, Sandur, migrated to Baghdad because of lack of livelihood. In Baghdad, they worked as servants in the homes of wealthy Jewish merchants and businesspersons. In 1910, Aaron David Shohet, who was a translator (*Dragoman*) in the British Consulate in Baghdad, submitted a report on the economic position of the Jewish community. He argued that five percent of the community was poor and they were mostly those who had come to Baghdad from the north, i.e. from the Kurdish region.<sup>28</sup> The number of Kurdistani Jews in Baghdad was considerable. In February 1943, Shmaryahu Guttmann reported:

In most of the houses of Jews, there was a servant. In the common house, there was a Kurdish Jewish servant. One does not walk to drink water, without calling the servant and asking for water. In the houses of Jews, there were Jewish servants from Kurdistan. One could not imagine a Baghdadi Jew doing a physical work.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Responsa literature, Rabbi Yoseph Haim, *Rav-Pe'alim*, Even ha-Ezer, mark 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ratzahbi 1958: 371–77; *Magid Yesharim*, 5th year, vol. 26, 25th of Adar (1884); 6th year, vol. 14, 6th of Shebat (1885).

<sup>27</sup> Sha'ya Zaken (I#20).

<sup>28</sup> Eli Kedurie, "The Jews in Baghdad in 1910," *IJMES*, October 1971: 355–361. In 1904, the French vice-consul in Baghdad gave the number of Jews in Baghdad vilayet as 40,000, out of a total population of 160,000. In 1910, the number of the Jews of Baghdad was estimated to be between 45,000 to 50,000. The number of the Kurdistani Jews in Baghdad, most of whom came from the northern, Kurdish districts, could be estimated around 2,000.

<sup>29</sup> Bibi (1988, part I: 175) quotes a report by Shmaryahu Guttmann from 4 February 1943.

According to Sabar who was born in Zakho, “most of the Jews, like the other Kurds,” were poor “and suffered from the local authorities’ neglect of proper schools, vocational training, modern utilities and other facilities and services necessary for modern economic life.”<sup>30</sup>

Another socio-economic feature worth noting was that little if any social and economic mobility was possible within the traditional Kurdish centers throughout the early part of the 20th century. The chances of any one born into an unfortunate family changing his economic status were slim, as one’s ability was based on the family profession, its property and financial strength.<sup>31</sup>

### B. *The Main Occupations of Jews*

In Islamic countries, Jews were not subject to “occupational restrictions” as in Europe, but they favored some occupations for a variety of reasons.<sup>32</sup> Kurdish Jews were employed mainly in three types of occupations: agriculture—mostly but not only in rural villages; handicraft—in both village and urban centers; and commerce—mostly in urban centers. David D’Beth Hillel (1826–7) argued that commerce was the most common trade amongst the Jews in Amadiya, Sulaimaniya and Zakho.<sup>33</sup> During the mid 1930s, Aqra consisted of about 150 families most of whom were merchants. The rest of the Jews were artisans or goldsmiths, weavers, dyers and agricultural farmers, cattle owners and owners of cedar forests.<sup>34</sup> The dominance of Jews in the local market of Aqra was so significant, that it was closed on the Sabbath and Jew-

<sup>30</sup> Sabar 1968: 21.

<sup>31</sup> Zaken 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis 1984: 90–92. Longrigg noticed during the end of the first half of the 20th century, “immense increase in mobility and travel for all but the poorest,” (1953: 387).

<sup>33</sup> David did not mention any Jewish merchants in Zakho, but in the middle of the 20th century, half of the Jewish families in Zakho earned their living through trade and commercial occupations. Some of them were very wealthy because of large herds of cattle. They were merchants, who traded, among other things, in livestock, as did their offspring in the 20th century. Zaken 1985: 19.

<sup>34</sup> Fischel, who edited David D’Beth Hillel records, had been himself to Kurdistan in 1936 and testified to inscriptions, in both Arabic and Hebrew, on the wall of the synagogue. The inscriptions were written in the *Hijra* year 1206 (1792/3). One can deduct safely that the synagogue is indeed more ancient than the inscriptions inscribed on its wall, because David D’Beth Hillel already in 1826/7 reported that the synagogue was “very ancient.” Fischel 1939: 224, n. 11.

ish holidays.<sup>35</sup> In the early 19th century, J. C. Rich described Penjwin as a village, although its main income came from commerce. A few Jewish families lived in the village, which belonged to an agha from Sulaimaniya.<sup>36</sup> The merchants traded in gallnuts and hides (skins and leather of animals),<sup>37</sup> which, in the following century, were still common items in the trade of Jewish merchants. Benjamin II described Rawanduz, today a city, as a place “engaged in agriculture.”<sup>38</sup> In the early 20th century, according to a British report,

the Kurd is dependent upon the Christians and Jews for all handicrafts, particularly for the clothes they wear, [as] handicraft being apparently considered beneath their dignity.<sup>39</sup>

A British report from 1944 mentions Jewish merchants and peddlers “scattered in isolation in small groups throughout the villages of the whole country.”<sup>40</sup> Jews labored in a variety of occupations other than commerce. Hay (1921) stated that the Jews of Arbil had the monopoly of making *‘arāq*, for this drink is unlawful to Muslims, though “a certain number drink it when it is made.”<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Rich, in her diary, mentioned meeting some Jewish clerks.<sup>42</sup> The Jews of Kara were mainly *hamāle* (NA., porters) who transported salt, the main industry of the town.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, a Jew from Zakho explained that the average young, unmarried Jewish male would engage in hard work such as portage. When married, he would become a logger and then a peddler or merchant. These last two crafts were much less physically demanding than logging, rafting, or muleteering. This reference was made concerning the common, non-wealthy Jewish men of Zakho.<sup>44</sup> In wealthy families, the occupation and business would pass from father to son. The Jews of Sulaimaniya were merchants, goldsmiths, tailors, excellent weavers,

<sup>35</sup> Michael Michaeli (I#26) and Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28).

<sup>36</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. II): 181–182. One must note that some of the current Kurdish cities were no more than villages or large village in the recent past.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 93.

<sup>39</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932, vol. 4: 479.

<sup>40</sup> Iraq and the Persian Gulf. London: Naval Intelligence Division, Geographical handbook Series, September 1944; Benjamin II 1859: 66.

<sup>41</sup> Hay 1921: 86–87.

<sup>42</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. II): 368.

<sup>43</sup> Yehoshua Reuben (I#44).

<sup>44</sup> Mordechai Sa‘do (I#46).

expert wool dyers.<sup>45</sup> Some urban Jews were artisans whose professional skills were passed down in the family, from father to son. Some parents wanted their children to learn an occupation through training with a professional artisan, as the following account demonstrates. It is about a father who wanted his son to be a carpenter, and so had him apprenticed to a Muslim master.

My father wanted my brother to learn carpentry, but the Kurdish carpenter, Ramaḍān, did not want to take a Jew as apprentice. He told my father: ‘A Jew would abandon his master as soon as he learns how to make a chair, because he loves money.’ It was around 1938 or 1939. My father took advantage of his contacts with Hazim Beg, a minister without portfolio and entrepreneur of Zakho and the region... Nevertheless, Ramaḍān who was then doing the carpentry for the new house of Hazim Beg rejected even his appeal, telling him, ‘I do not take a Jew into my business.’

Nevertheless, Hazim Beg insisted and Ḥabīb Katna began working as an apprentice of Ramaḍān. He worked for him for a few years, then became independent, and began to work with his brother Raʿūf, especially in the surrounding Christian villages. The Katna brothers became carpenters both in Kurdistan and in Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Observance of the *Sabbath* by Jews prevented many of them from working as government employees. Hamilton argued in 1928, that the authorities designated holidays for the satisfaction of the Muslims, certain days “for Jews only,” others “for Christians only,” and all the rest of the religions. The Jews were the strictest in observing the holidays; no Jew could work on Saturday, which may be the reason why only a few Jews came to work in Hamilton’s camp of road construction and in government agencies in general.<sup>47</sup>

### 1. *Urban Economy*

Most Jewish families in Kurdish urban centers earned their living as merchants. In Zakho alone, approximately half of the Jewish population earned their living by means of trade. In 1945, a Jewish emissary who visited Zakho reported that the Jews there worked in agriculture, crafts, smuggling, and the transfer of lumber on rafts.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 34.

<sup>46</sup> Raʿūf Katna (I#36).

<sup>47</sup> Hamilton 1937: 146.

<sup>48</sup> Bibi (1998, part I: 449) quotes a report by Yitzhak Shvaiki dated 30 January 1945.

Like the Jews of Zakho, many Jews in urban centers such as Dohuk, Aqra, Amadiya, Arbil, Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya dealt in commerce. Jewish merchants maintained regular commercial contacts with associates in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Arbil and Mosul. Several enterprising merchants traveled as far as Moscow, Tiflis, Tabriz, Esterkhan, Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>49</sup> In Kurdish, the general term for merchant is *bazirgan*<sup>50</sup> but the Jewish sources discuss two main categories of this profession, as follows.<sup>51</sup>

*Tijāre* (NA., merchants): usually wholesale merchants who owned stores and/or warehouses in the market. They dealt with goods such as linen, clothes, sheep, wool, and all kinds of agricultural products and Wood for fuel, which was an important commodity. It provided substantial work, since it was in unlimited supply in the surrounding hills and it was floated down the rivers and streams. To Zakho, for instance, it was floated on rafts from the Gulli district.<sup>52</sup> The merchants did not hurry to get rid of the goods immediately after purchasing them, but they preferred to wait patiently. The profits of the big merchants were due to the long waiting period until the market price increased. The following accounts indicate that Jewish merchants occupied part of the economy of the country and the region as a whole. The family of Me'allim Abraham (I#15) of Zakho, after World War I, supplied trees "to the British government in Iraq." They would hew poplar trees and sell them to the British who used them as electricity poles, in the match industry, and as lumber. His family had Jewish partners in Baghdad and trading agents in Mosul. In the regions surrounding Zakho and near the forests they had "groups of woodcutters and muleteers who would cut the trees and transport them on mules and on boats from the mountains to Zakho and then to Mosul."

Sasson Kitāne was a Jewish merchant from Zakho who traveled once to Turkey, leading a flock of sheep with two assistants, a Jew named Hārūn Chasuro, and a Muslim named Hājjo Aleki.<sup>53</sup> His Muslim partner was Najib Jader. They led six thousand sheep from Turkey, some of which were meant to be sold in Syria, but because of tension along the Iraqi-Syrian border, possibly the results of the Assyrian crisis of 1933,

<sup>49</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 34.

<sup>50</sup> *Bazirgan* (Kur.), *bazaar*=market and *gan*=suffix forming nouns and adjectives. *Bazirgan* means merchant but also a prosper person. See also Leach 1940: 42-44.

<sup>51</sup> An detailed version of this topic is available in M. Zaken 1985: 11-22.

<sup>52</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929.

<sup>53</sup> On Sasson Kitāne, see *Minhat Ashur* 9, October 1997: 42-43.

they could not transfer the sheep across the border as originally planned. Eventually, they were forced to sell the sheep in the local market at lower prices. As a result, they lost a great deal of money and credibility. From that day onwards, following this major financial setback, Sasson Kitāne stopped dealing in large quantities of sheep.<sup>54</sup>

Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) of Dohuk was a merchant and storeowner. In 1938–1940, in accordance with the *tamwīn* policy, the government distributed elementary products such as sugar and linen to certified merchants throughout the country. These authorized merchants would then distribute them to the public on coupons. Gamlieli, who was one of many authorized merchants, attempted to boost his profits through distribution in the black market, but the police discovered three sacks of sugar in his house. Gamlieli recalls:

They caught me and took me to prison. I remained in prison six months... I was supposed to distribute this sugar on rations, but because they found sugar in my house rather than in my store, as it should have been, they confiscated it and cancelled my authorization to distribute merchandise according to the *tamwīn*... We used to take it home, because many persons wanted to buy it... buyers would wait in line for an hour... and the store was small, so I took sugar home many times... This was known to all... and the authorities imprisoned me and after six months I was released and began to trade again.

The second category of merchants was the *dikāndare* (N.A., storeowners or storekeepers) who attended their stores in the market.<sup>55</sup> They worked on a smaller scale than the *tijāre*, attending mostly in *bazar* (Kur., market), purchasing and providing merchandise merely for their own store and own customers. Leach reported that most of these merchants in the region of Rawanduz in 1938 were Jews or Armenians.<sup>56</sup>

According to a British report from 1911, the authorities thought that they received only half of the dues from

the total amounts of imports and exports to and from Turkey... [because] during the summer months... [When the Kurdish tribes cross the border to their summer pasture] all control at the frontier becomes impossible.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ra'ūf Katna (I#36).

<sup>55</sup> In Zakho, there was a unique Jewish market known (in N.A.) as *shuqt hozaya* (the Jews' market).

<sup>56</sup> Leach 1940: 42. Leach, however, refers to *dikandar* as a peddler or *'etar* who managed to establish himself as a shopkeeper.

<sup>57</sup> Rabino 1911: 21.

The smuggling of goods was a widespread phenomenon in the provincial Kurdish districts, which were situated usually around the and frontier. Two basic facts made Zakho, for instance, an important trading and smuggling center. First, it was a district town, *nāhiyah*, surrounded by hundreds of villages. Second, Zakho, in Iraqi Kurdistan, was situated 9 miles from the northern border with Turkey and 10 miles from the eastern border with Syria. The close proximity to the triple border and the numerous economic opportunities encouraged smuggling between Turkey and Syria to Iraqi-Kurdistan. The smugglers would cross the border passing through a small stream of the *Khabur* River known as *Khezla* (or *Hezil*). The Kurdish residents on the Turkish side of the river were expected to wear an identifying Turkish hat or 'casket,' when grazing their herds near the border. The smugglers used to remove their hats when crossing the border to Iraq. On the other side of the border, they would wrap a headscarf, *yashmax*, around their head in a manner called *laffa* [Arab., to roll up, to wrap up]. In this way, they assimilated into the local Kurdish population. They would cross the *Hezil* stream at night and if the police or border guards on one side or the other caught them, it did not pose an unbearable obstacle for the experienced smugglers. If, in spite of all, a smuggler was caught, the matter could be settled through bribery (Arab., *rashwa*; Tur., *balcha*). Many smugglers came to Zakho, which was the only commercial center in this region. They could sell their goods and obtain various types of merchandise, either by cash or by barter. Some of these smugglers crossed the border quite routinely and over the years, special relationships developed between Jews of Zakho and Kurdish smugglers from Turkey. It should be noted that smuggling, *qaçax*, was not viewed as criminal activity among the Kurds. In a way, the border between Iraq and Turkey divided Kurds who lived for centuries without boundaries. Smuggling goods from Syria to North Iraq was less frequent than from Turkey. According to one method, merchants from Zakho traveled to Syria, usually to Qamishle. Following World War I, the French administration built the town that had a considerable Jewish population, part of which had relatives in Zakho. They would buy goods, which were in demand in Zakho, and would later cross the border with the goods.

Jewish peddlers would roam the villages in the plains and mountains and became an important part of the rural economy, providing goods to Kurdish villagers and tribesmen, many of whom would rarely leave their surroundings. For instance, Jewish Peddlers of Sulaimaniya would

roam throughout the villages of Shahrizur during the week and would come back home for the *Sabbath*.<sup>58</sup> The itinerant peddler (Kur., *cerci*, or *etar*, from Arabic)<sup>59</sup> was formerly a common occupation among urban Jews. The peddler was described by Leach as a traveling peddler who “fulfills the functions of the general village store” and his terms are “partly barter and partly cash.”<sup>60</sup> The Jewish peddler was not wealthy enough to be a storeowner and could only deal in small quantities of basic products needed by villagers who only seldom left their rural residence. The peddlers used to buy products in the local market, usually on credit, or with borrowed money, and travel with one or two loaded mules or donkeys to the surrounding satellite villages. After selling their goods, they would return to their hometown with money or goods that they had traded for. They would then repay the credit or sell the goods, rest a few days, and then embark on another trip. This was an unsafe occupation; over the years dozens of Jewish peddlers were murdered or robbed in the course of their travels.

There was a slightly different type of occasional peddler, known as *çerkçî* or *çerkchi* (Kur., a small peddler). Some Jews acted as occasional peddlers, taking advantage of a profitable opportunity when it appeared. Transactions usually took place in the countryside where the *çerkchi* approached Kurdish villagers or farmers carrying products. Some Kurdish villagers preferred selling their products in a proper price rather than traveling around offering their goods for sale. These villagers were the targets of the local *çerkchi*. When a Kurdish villager, loaded with goods was passing by, the *çerkchi* would approach him and bargain over the value of a certain product. The *çerkchi* had an advantage because he was aware of the market price. Some of the villagers were naive and some were not aware of the market price and the ratio of supply and demand. These products were not weighed in a proper scale but rather would be evaluated approximately by both sides. Therefore, the *çerkchi* would frequently buy products at a good price. When the

<sup>58</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 34.

<sup>59</sup> *Etar* (from Arabic, *attār*, perfumer, perfume vendor) means in Kurdish perfume seller. Chyet also notes the synonyms *dikāndar* (shopkeeper, keeper of a general store) and *çerçî* (peddler). Obviously, there seem to be interchanging of the terms according to the different places and speakers of the local languages. The peddlers or wandering traders, were also known as *bazāze* (plural of *bazāz*, from Arab., draper or cloth merchant), or *khazāre* (NA., plural form denoting those who wander in and around the villages; the occupation is called *khzāra*).

<sup>60</sup> Leach 1940: 42.

transaction was completed, the villager would return to his village, pleased that he had saved himself one lost day of work, if he had not sold his goods to the *cherkchi*. The *cherkchi*, on the other hand, would return to his hometown and sell the goods to one of the merchants at a profit. A *cherkchi* who wanted to make the most of the commercial opportunities had to be energetic and sly. Some of the *cherkchis* did not even have any cash and sometimes they had to borrow money for such transactions. In Zakho, for instance, most *cherkchis* belonged to the lower class of the society, and their main asset was merely commercial sense and aptitude for business.

a) *Methods of Precaution*

Jews were rarely harmed by strangers within their village or within the inhabited jurisdiction of their patron tribe. Within the tribe, the agha would usually protect the Jews from the local tribesmen and villagers. Around 1913, Sykes met three Jews from the Hakkari region “traveling unarmed with various goods.” Sykes argued that these Jewish “are practically immune from robbery and can travel in their own districts without fear.”<sup>61</sup> This was doubtless thanks to the patronage granted to the Jews by their local aghas. In the early 20th century, Dickson noted the constant danger of murder and robbery on the roads and the isolation of most small communities.<sup>62</sup> Jewish merchants and peddlers had to adapt precautions to protect themselves. The main concern for the safety of the Jews was on the rural roads and outside the jurisdiction of the tribe. Jewish travelers rarely traveled outside the jurisdiction of their patron tribal agha, so they usually traveled through the dangerous rural roads without a physical escort. Nevertheless, the non-tribal status of rural Jews made them an easier target for *firars* or tribal enemies of their patron tribe. Jewish travelers resorted to various means to defend themselves. They would travel in groups of two to three men, or with a tribal escort along part of the road, or they would join caravans or tribesmen en route to their destination. Some Jewish merchants, when traveling in pairs or groups, positioned themselves a few hundred meters apart from each other, so that if one of them was robbed, the other could run for help to the neighboring village. Indeed, Jewish peddlers who traveled extensively throughout the Kurdish mountains were

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<sup>61</sup> Sykes 1915: 431–32.

<sup>62</sup> Sabar 1990: 53. On robbers and brigands in Kurdistan, see Soubrier 1947.

experienced; they knew the roads, the villages and their inhabitants, and acquired tribal associates. They conducted themselves cautiously and respectfully in order to minimize friction and troubles. The nominal protection of the aghas and the self-defense measures taken by Jews who roamed the rural roads were generally sufficient. Nevertheless, a few dozen Jewish travelers were murdered during the first half of the 20th century, usually resulting in the migration of the victim's family to another village or region. When the family of Moshe Binyamin (I#3) migrated from Mergasor to Diana, they sought the patronage of new aghas and acquired the patronage of Maḥmūd Beg, the chief of Pirseniya, Aḥmad Agha, the chief of Mergasor and Ḥājjī Aḥmad 'Ali Agha. In the previous years, two members of the family were murdered, one in Serkane, the other in Mergasor, turning protection on the roads into a matter of great concern for this family.

Eventually, when we came to know them [the chieftains], they gave us respect. They would send their servants [as escorts] to protect us while traveling on the roads, to prevent us from being killed. In this manner, we lived [there] for eleven more years.<sup>63</sup>

Most Jewish peddlers came from urban centers; only a small number of rural Jews worked occasionally as peddlers. In any case, most if not all their routes passed through rural and tribal regions. The city best known for its Jewish peddlers was Zakho, which was surrounded by hundreds of satellite villages. Peddlers would tour the mountainous villages, back and forth, usually in the spring and fall. To ensure their physical safety and the safety of their goods, peddlers needed the protection of the aghas under whose jurisdiction they traveled. The peddler developed unique relationships with tribal Kurds who used to host him during his stopover in their village. These hosts were called *mare-bēsa* (NA, house-owner, host) for they hosted the Jewish peddler in their home during their trips. The peddler would receive hospitality, some food, usually bread and tea and shelter at the house of his host. He would cook his own kosher food and use his own pan and plate, according to Jewish dietary law. From time to time, he would give his host and his wife gifts or other desired goods. Edmonds described the role of the local agha and the practice of hospitality in the Kurdish village.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Based on his testimonies they lived there for a maximum of six years.

<sup>64</sup> On the hospitality and potential shelter in the Kurdish villages, see below ("Rural Kurdistan as a safe haven"): 276–280.

...A village of any size generally has a resident squire in the person of the principal (or the most sophisticated) landowner, or a tribal agha who has established himself there by force. The squire is required by custom and by considerations of prestige to maintain a guest-house... where even the humblest traveler can claim entertainment and bedding; the host expects no payment, direct or indirect, for a short stay... He is not necessarily identical with the mukhtar... the official village headman... Where there is no squire the mukhtar makes himself responsible for the entertainment of travelers in the mosque, there being no prejudice against the admission of persons not of the Muslim faith. The guesthouse or the guest-room... becomes a kind of club where relations, guests, travelers and neighbors drop in to exchange news or transact business; those present dispose themselves in a single line along the walls according to a rough order of precedence, the place of honor being farthest from the door.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to material goods, the peddlers circulated reports, tales and entertainment throughout the isolated rural villages. Many peddlers and merchants became storytellers, some more talented than others. The Jewish storyteller would sit in the *dīwanxane* of the local agha and tell news of tribal feuds and folk-tales. According to Rand and Rush it seemed as if he “had saved his tales” from the entire year and “they burst forth like a fountain of water.”<sup>66</sup> Throughout the time, Jewish peddlers developed the requisite skills of storytelling and some became notorious storytellers. This quality helped them in their relations with the Muslim villagers, and smoothed their trade routes into the villages. Bois stressed that among the Kurds, *çirokbêj*, storytelling, is “highly esteemed.”<sup>67</sup>

The *dīwanxane* was an important social institution in the tribal setting. Every agha who respected himself maintained a *dīwanxane* where he entertained his tribesmen and visitors. The following description by the British political officer, Wallace Lyon, in the early 1920s, relates to the summer *dīwan* of Mirani ‘Abd al-Qādir Beg, the chief agha of the Khoshnaw tribe.

His summer *dīwan* was in the woods just below the village [Shaqława] and consisted of a pool of water about 3 feet deep and 20 feet square, surrounded by masonry benches covered with quilts and carpets and shaded by a scaffolding of poplar poles supporting grape vines, and close at hand was a pleasant guest house for winter use. A servant was always present

<sup>65</sup> Edmonds 1957: 100–101.

<sup>66</sup> Rand and Rush 1978: 9.

<sup>67</sup> Bois 1966: 63.

dispensing endless locally grown cigarettes and glasses of sweet tea from a Russian samovar. Even in the absence of the host or other guests with whom to engage in polite conversation, one could lounge and doze on the hottest days to the tinkle and rush of the water in and out of the pool and the twittering of the various birds, which abounded in the vicinity.

Lyon then describes in details the ceremony of serving several courses of food and fruits, coffee and cigarettes.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, not all chieftains had such a luxurious pool of water and a rich kitchen, but most chieftains and village aghas maintained a *dîwanxane*, in which tea and at times refreshment were served.

Based on both informants and written documents, “a Jew would be able to carry out his travels only with proper protection from a tribal chieftain.” Without protection from the agha “who exercised some control over the bands of robbers active” in his area of jurisdiction, the fate of the Jewish peddlers was uncertain.<sup>69</sup> The following took place when a Jewish peddler approached a village: He would lead his donkey first “to the house of the agha to ask for permission to sell goods in the village” and to offer him first choice of his fine cloth.<sup>70</sup> Aghas allowed the Jewish peddlers to roam in villages under their jurisdiction, making it known in tribal circles that they were granted protection from bands of robbers who attacked those who roamed alone. Some greedy aghas had robbers working for them, and only after receiving some money would these aghas restrain their robbers.<sup>71</sup>

Overall, urban Jews made a name for themselves as diligent and clever merchants. Nevertheless, the 1948 war between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, the defeat of the Arabs and the establishment of the State of Israel, affected the life of Jews in Kurdistan. Jews reduced business trips throughout the tribal regions, reduced their sales on credit and made an effort to recover the money owed them for transactions on credit, in preparation for immigrating to Israel.

#### b) *Adventures of a Jewish Peddler*

At least half of the Jewish population of Zakho earned their living from various trades and commercial occupations. The popularity of this

<sup>68</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 133–34.

<sup>69</sup> Rand and Rush 1978: 9.

<sup>70</sup> Invented name in a folktale, which is rooted in authentic social and economic circumstances, Rand and Rush 1978.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

trade among the Jews of Zakho has made possible a thorough investigation of this subject. Jewish peddlers were always concerned about their protection on their trips. For many, these business trips were the main source of income, but at the same time, were always worrisome, as bandits robbed many Jewish peddlers and murdered a few dozens of them during the first half of the 20th century.<sup>72</sup> When Yona Gabbai (ca. 1880–1970),<sup>73</sup> a Jewish peddler and well-known storyteller from Zakho, was preparing for a trip, he would try to secure escort. Gabbai would go to the merchant's *khān* of Zakho, looking for tribesmen who were on the point of leaving the town whom he could join for at least part of his journey. On one occasion, as he went into the market, he was thinking to himself:

The world is frightening. The roads are frightening. There are brigands in the valleys... I should go and look for travel companions from the Slivani [tribe], I shall go with them, I shall join them.

Yona Gabbai spoke about the risks of the peddlers in rural Kurdistan. Once, in the village of Mālsine, he and his cousin were preparing to continue their peddling trip.

My host, Alī, asked me, 'Where are you going, Yonanko?'<sup>74</sup> I told him: 'we are loading [to depart], may I be your sacrifice.' He said, 'Sit down and stay in your place. It is already afternoon. If you depart now, you will be robbed. Brigands will kill you. Tonight you shall sleep here [and] tomorrow morning I shall take my pistol and walk with you part of the road, and then you can go on your way.' 'You spoke well,' I said.

Jewish informants discussed the abuse and exploitation of Jewish peddlers by tribal Kurds who robbed their money and goods. This was another risk, in addition to the worries of personal safety. Once, in one of his peddling trips Gabbai arrived to the vicinity of Mālsine and considered visiting this village, while his elder brother's words of warning were ringing in his ears: "Do not approach Mālsine... Avoid it, because 'Abdī Ghāzāla will exploit you, he will take fabric without payment." 'Abdī Ghāzāla was a tribal resident of Mālsine who was notorious for his extortion and exploitation of Jewish peddlers of

<sup>72</sup> See as well "Exploitation of the non-tribal Jews:" 242–46.

<sup>73</sup> Yona Gabbai (I#7) was one of the main storytellers discussed by Sabar (1982), who kindly provided me with a text in which Yona Gabbai narrated an account about his life.

<sup>74</sup> Yonanko is the Kurdish affectionate name of Yona.

Zakho. When Gabbai came near Mālsine, a Kurdish by passer told him that ‘Abdī Ghāzāla was out of the village. He was tempted to take advantage of Ghāzāla’s absence and decided to go to Mālsine, but as soon as he entered the village, he came across none other than ‘Abdī Ghāzāla himself. The latter did not waste time and immediately sent his servant towards Gabbai.

His servant came. Who is his servant? He and my brother are soul mates. When he realized who the Jewish peddler was, he said, ‘Ashes on my head’ [an expression for terrible grief], ‘Abdī has told me to bring him about ten items. He will rob you off. Give me a couple of items and escape from here as soon as possible. I will tell him that you did not have any more items.’ He broke my back [expression]. I gave him a shirt, pants, *kāfiya*<sup>75</sup> [or *kūfiya*, Arab., a square of white cloth] and a cloth belt. They were worth six *charikhūye* less [minus] 60 *pāre*.<sup>76</sup> He took them and went away. I began weeping, saying to myself ‘my brother will kill me, he will slaughter me.’

Yona Gabbai traveled extensively in rural Kurdistan and experienced several other incidents of abuse and exploitation.

One day, in the year when the Armenians were massacred [in 1915], I traveled to Jezira to sell white fabric. I sold products for eighty *majidi*. [Then] some bastard asked for twenty pieces of this cloth. Ḥayyo, My [Kurdish] landlord [or host] told me: Give it to him, he is cruel, do not dare act against his will. He asked me, ‘How much?’ I told him, I bought it [myself] for twenty *majidi*; I am not going to make any profit on you. He said, ‘Tomorrow, I shall pay you your dues, do not be bothered . . .’ The following day I went to him, saying, ‘My esteemed man, give me my twenty *majidi*.’ He yelled at me, ‘Go away, pig! I do not have [money] today. I will give it to you tomorrow.’<sup>77</sup> I said [in my heart], these twenty *majidi* are lost. I went away. As I left him, I saw two *dohle* [drum] and two *zurne* [flute] playing in the main square of Jezira, and some two hundred Jezīris dancing around in a circles. Two others were dancing with swords in the center. At that time, I loved to have a good time. I had been three or four times previously, in Jezira, and each time I would earn twenty-thirty liras. I was in a good mood . . . I began dancing opposite these two dancers with the swords, while the father of the bride-groom and twenty other aghas were sitting on a bench watching me . . . He [the father] sent his servant, saying,

<sup>75</sup> *Kafiya* or *kūfiya*, Arab., a square of white cloth.

<sup>76</sup> *Charkhi* or *Charik* (Kur., *Cerxi*) is a Turkish coin from the Ottoman period, worth 5 piasters. *Pāre*, in Kurmanji, is money. In this context, it is used in reference to money notes smaller than the *Charkhi*.

<sup>77</sup> When Yona Gabbai went to the house of the Kurd, it was in itself, a daring act in the social reality of Kurdistan. In Islamic eyes, the reference to a Jew as a pig is a reference to a despised and dirty animal.

'Take the sword from the dancer and hand it to the Jew.' He really gave me the sword. [As you may know...] the most professional dancers have never managed to hit me in dancing... We began dancing... my competitor tried to hit me... I turned and twisted... until I struck him with my sword on his face and held the sword over his head [as a sign that] I hit him... As I was watching, two or three guys were coming to hit me [but] the father of the bride-groom yelled at them, 'Guys, do not touch the Jew!' He called me and said, 'My Jew, come here, do not be worried, you are not leaving my wedding until it is over. If someone will hurt you, I will take out his eyes.' He was powerful; he was the leader of Jezira.

The next day, the Jeziris continued dancing in circles, but Gabbai sat in the corner. The bridegroom's father sent his servant to find out why the Jew had stopped dancing. Gabbai told him, "I am not in the mood, because so-and-so cheated me, taking several products worth twenty *chanikhiye*, and not paying me the money." The agha asked his servant, Ahmad, to accompany him to this person's house once again. If he would not pay the money, the agha promised to pay it instead, pledging:<sup>78</sup>

'This son-of-a dog will be indebted to me, and I would like to see how he dared not give it back.' We went to him... I told him, *Ez xolam* [I am your servant], give me the twenty *majidi* you owe me.' He said, 'I still do not have the whole sum, come back tomorrow.' The servant was standing at the door. He stepped inside saying, 'The agha has said that if you did not give him his money, he would give it to him instead, and then he would like to see how you eat his money.' When he heard this, like everybody, he was afraid of the agha, he said, 'I am your servant, sixteen *majidi* are prepared, I will have the four remaining *majidis* tomorrow morning.' I told him, 'Give me now the sixteen *majidi* and until tomorrow morning God is great [phrase, meaning we shall live and see].' I took the sixteen *majidi* and was very pleased. We came back to the agha. The agha gave me four *majidi* and said, 'Go, dance and enjoy.' We had fun.

The next morning, the agha of Jezira sent his servant to Yona Gabbai with a gun as a gift, for his enjoyable participation in his son's wedding. Gabbai figured that he could sell the gun for thirty *majidi* and gave thirty *majidi* to the groom, as a gift for his wedding. "At first he refused, but then he took it and I returned," said Gabbai. In this instance, unlike other instances, Gabbai was rescued from the hands of a tribal Kurd who exploited him. He managed to make the most

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<sup>78</sup> Several examples have been noted by Jewish sources of tribal chieftains who were willing to pay a debt for a Jewish (subject or another) instead his Muslim, tribal debtor. See a similar account regarding Shaikh Muhammad of Rabatke above ("The Justice of Tribal Aghas"): 174-181.

of the kindness of a powerful Jezira agha, whose son's wedding he attended, adding much delight to it. Eventually, the agha managed to recover Gabbai's debt.

c) *The Slaughterer of Animals*

Each urban Jewish community had a few professionals who helped fulfill the religious needs of the community: the *hakham* (Heb., rabbi), the *hazzan* (Heb., cantor), the *Me'allim* (Arab., teacher of the children), the *mohel* (Heb., circumciser) and the *shohet* (Heb., slaughterer of animals). Often it was one person who performed most or all these functions. The most important of these functions was that of the *shohet*, an occupation with both economic and dietary aspects, without which proper Jewish life was impossible. Rural communities, on the other hand, were usually small and hardly ever had any of these professionals residing among them. They could survive without a teacher for the children, and indeed many rural Jews were illiterate, but they could not conduct proper Jewish life without following Jewish dietary laws. The Jewish communities strictly observed the rules of kosher slaughtering and the occupation of *shohet* was in demand.<sup>79</sup> The kosher meat was supplied only by the *shohet*, who would come from one of the urban centers once or twice a year and slaughter a few animals for the rural community. Four documents published by Mann deal with the position of the *shohet* in the Jewish community in earlier centuries. The *shohet* was one of the few religious roles, which could sustain a livelihood and therefore, many individuals wished to become a qualified *shohet*. Many students sought approval to become *shohet*. In one instance, a certain Rabbi sent an envoy to a smaller town to inspect several of his students whom he considered not entirely qualified in slaughtering. The Rabbi's envoy asked them to practice *shehita*, slaughtering, in couples, in order to avoid mistakes. A slaughterer without an authorization could lose his source of income and slaughterers who were asked to practice in couples could lose half of their potential income. This request caused disagreement, because it touched upon a delicate issue of the slaughterers' source of income, but eventually, the strict envoy was forced to depart the town in an embarrassing situation.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Benayahu 1965: 39–40.

<sup>80</sup> Mann 1931–1935, vol. I: 490, 545–47 (letter no. 21). The other documents, which

## 2. *Rural Economy*

The two most important obligations of the Jews concerning their tribal chieftains were the dues paid to the agha and the occasional *zebara*, the customary communal labor committed by the villagers on behalf of their agha, in his estates or fields.<sup>81</sup> Following is a brief review of the most important occupations, as well as the main duties of Jews, as reflected in relations between the Jews and their aghas.

Jews lived in hundreds of villages throughout Kurdistan. Layard, around the middle of the 19th century, came across a large camp of nomadic Jews and visited their tents. It was on the road between Bashqala and Van, but according to Layard, there were many flock-keepers like them, spread throughout the mountains.<sup>82</sup> Hay concluded (1921) that the country between the two Zab Rivers was predominantly agricultural, and commerce was of secondary importance. Large numbers of Jewish villagers labored in agriculture, as farmers, owners of livestock, vine growers and field workers, either on their own land, leased land or as day workers.<sup>83</sup> A native of Shandokh near Dohuk reported that he and some other Jews in the village labored as agriculturists, either on their own land, or on lands belonging to others.

### a) *The Social Role of the Weaver*

Weaving was one of the main occupations of Jews in Kurdistan for generations. The first modern travelers and observers of Kurdistan, such as J. C. Rich (1820), noted that Jewish villagers in Kurdistan were dyers of cotton and linen.<sup>84</sup> Around 1827, David D'Beth Hillel reported, that the only Jew in the village of Sallagha was the village painter, who was a friend of the head of the village.<sup>85</sup> The good relationship that this

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deal with the question of the *shohet*, are the following: letter no. 8 (486, 524), letter no. 14 (487, 532-3) and letter no. 15 (488, 533-4).

<sup>81</sup> *Zebara* was forced labor, though generally for short period and specific seasonal tasks. *Zebara* became customary in the tribal surroundings and some non-tribal subjects considered it rather 'voluntarily' labor than forced labor.

<sup>82</sup> Layard 1853: 383-384.

<sup>83</sup> Hay 1921: 86-87.

<sup>84</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. II): 184.

<sup>85</sup> Fischel 1939: 223; Fischel 1944. According to the itinerary, it is possible that this village was Chala.

Jewish painter enjoyed with the village agha was most likely the result of his providing the chief and villagers with traditional Kurdish attire. Layard, before the middle of the 19th century, reported the village of Nera, 35 miles northeast of Amadiya, where many Jewish families made their living by weaving the colorful wool and linen worn by the Kurds.<sup>86</sup> In 1859, Rabbi Yeḥiel argued that all the Jews in Kurdistan were usually weavers, even the rabbis.<sup>87</sup> Bishop (1890) argued that Jewish weavers made the jackets from golden lace for the leader of the Tiyārī.<sup>88</sup> A British report from 1911 on Sinna, in Persian Kurdistan, asserts, “The chief industry is carpet-making, and as wool in Kurdistan is of superior quality, the carpets (known as *kaliche* and *sajadeh*) made at Sinna are considered among the best of their kind.”<sup>89</sup> The Jews and Christians of Sinna made up less than ten percent of the total population, but their involvement in the trade was disproportionate to their numbers. Hay (1921) noted that the majority of the Jewish males in Arbil were dyers or weavers.<sup>90</sup> The weavers would hang the threads of the wool from the ceilings to prevent worms from eating it. They would make *khuba*, also spelled *gūba* (NA., loom, literally means pit, pl. *gube*), a blue color for the dresses, which was stored in large jars. They would weave pants of wool called *barguze* and make cover for shoes prepared from calf leather. An excellent kind of goat’s wool, called *mar’es*, “smooth just like silk,” was used for making *shale-shapik*, rugs, and other cloths for the Kurds.<sup>91</sup>

A significant number of urban Jews also earned their living as weavers. Reportedly, during the first half of the 20th century, thirty Jewish families in Aqra earned their living from weaving, knitting or sewing; three families were dyers of fabric.<sup>92</sup> Some Jews of Amadiya were weavers of Kurdish suits, blankets and carpets.<sup>93</sup> The migration of Jews from the village to the city is one reason that explains the occupation of weavers in urban centers. Another reason is that until the

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<sup>86</sup> Layard 1853: 376.

<sup>87</sup> Ya’ari 1942: 49.

<sup>88</sup> Bishop 1891(vol. II): 314.

<sup>89</sup> Rabino 1911: 12.

<sup>90</sup> Hay 1921: 86–87.

<sup>91</sup> Yehoshua Reuben (I#44), Eliyahu Shalom (I#38) and Haim Barzānī (I#6).

<sup>92</sup> Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28). Michael Michaeli (I#26) reported that his whole family used to work in weaving, making *shale-shapik* as well as blankets of wool, known as *jajame*.

<sup>93</sup> Abraham Amadi Manoah (I#32).

early 20th century, urban centers were actually large villages in which rural occupations were practiced to a certain extent. The occupation of weavers combined economic, social and cultural roles within the tribal setting. The role of the weaver was particularly significant in the Kurdish community, as the Jewish weaver was able to sustain his living in the Kurdish village while providing the Kurdish tribesmen with their favored traditional clothing.

After the mass migration of the Jews to Israel, did Christians and Muslims gradually take over the function of weaving in rural Kurdistan. The testimonies of Jewish weavers help us understand the experience of rural Jews in the Kurdish villages.<sup>94</sup> Michael Michaeli's family was welcomed enthusiastically in the village of Sofian, in Persian Kurdistan, merely because they were excellent weavers. His tale demonstrates the value of the Jewish weaver in the eyes of the tribal agha and stress the efforts made by Mam Ḥussain of Sofian in bringing his extended family with their belongings all the way from the Iraqi-Persian border into Persia.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, four Jewish weavers lived in the village of Harin under the tribal jurisdiction of Zībar and supplied *shale-shapik* for the tribal Kurds in the surrounding villages. This was the very reason why they were summoned by the agha who asked them to come and settle in Harin. The chief agha of the Zībarīs, Fāris Agha, instructed his tribesmen and villagers to take care of all the needs of the Jews under his responsibility. This was the motto of the agha: "In order to keep the Jews and enable them to live among us, we have to take care of them." Their Kurdish neighbors would provide the Jews in turn with firewood, wheat and all kinds of grains, fruits and vegetables in order to enable the Jews to keep up with their labor and live in comfort.<sup>96</sup> Jewish weavers were permitted to glean grain growing in the cultivated fields of the Kurds, and to obtain milk, yogurt, butter, oil and the like. If the Jews needed something, they would ask the Kurdish *mukhtār*. Once in every two or three months, the head of the village would ask the owners of the herds and flocks to give the Jews four or eight big sheep for the supply of meat. The shepherd would bring the sheep to

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<sup>94</sup> Eliyahu Shalom (I#38).

<sup>95</sup> Michael Michaeli (I#26).

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin II 1859: 93. One must note that grain was one of the main commodities of commerce.

the *mukhtār* and he would divide them among the four houses of the Jews.<sup>97</sup>

A Jewish weaver whose family lived both in rural and urban centers, emphasized the protection and the supply given by the agha and his tribesmen to the Jews: “in the village, we did not have to buy anything.” The Kurdish villagers and tribesmen would give the Jews products in exchange-trade, or barter, “with money, or without money.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, the weavers would receive food products and other necessities in exchange for the dresses, even if the clothes were still on order. Rural Jews who migrated to the city had to adapt to an urban economy that was different from the village barter economy. When this particular family of weavers migrated from the rural area to the town of Diana, they realized that it was more difficult to make a living in town. They continued to weave Kurdish clothes, but they were required to roam through the surrounding villages in order to sell their costumes and with the money received, they bought food and other products for their daily needs. As strange as it may seem, in the village, they were not accustomed to do the sales of their weaving products and the need to purchase basic food products. In Diana, they needed to sell and buy, to roam around and bargain, and to purchase goods and products, that in the village they would receive from their fellow villagers, without leaving their homes. These were drastic changes in their habits. It is not surprising therefore, that part of the rural Jews felt comfortable in village where the Kurds would take care of all their other needs and protect them.

b) *The Question of Dues and the Regulation of Taxes*

The *jizya* paid by non-Muslims in Muslim lands, was not only a poll tax but also a symbol of their obedience and low status. In 1855, the Turkish *majlis* abolished the *Jizya*, or the poll tax imposed on *ahl al-kitāb* (the “People of the Book”) during the Ottoman period.<sup>99</sup> Instead of the *Jizya*, Jews and Christians had to serve compulsory military

<sup>97</sup> Shalom Pirko (I#34).

<sup>98</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3).

<sup>99</sup> Consult the reference lists of Lewis (1984), Stillman (1979) and Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmis: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Granbury, New Jersey: Farleigh University Press, 1985), and Claude Cahen, *Dhimma and Djizya* in EI<sup>2</sup>.

service.<sup>100</sup> However, the *jizya* was replaced with a new tax, the *badal 'askarī*, which non-Muslims paid instead of military service.<sup>101</sup> Several Jewish informants argued that the Jews paid *zerset*, (Kur. a golden-head, gold per head), i.e. poll tax, or *Jizya*. Rural Jews paid *zerset* to the agha "who owned them." Yehoshua Reuben (I#44) explained that each Jewish house would pay one *majidi* as *zerset*. In return, the agha would protect and guard them.<sup>102</sup>

In rural Kurdistan, the cultivator and the owner of the land divided the products of the land using several methods. One of them was known as *nisf-i kuri* (Per., half of the work's yield), in which the cultivator and proprietor divide the produce equally. The cultivator supplies the seed and necessary labor and the landlord pays the expense of reaping. According to another arrangement, known as *dah-du* (Kur. lit., ten-two ratio) "which is the most common in Kurdistan, the produce is divided into twelve parts of which the proprietor takes two, and the cultivator ten, the latter paying all expenses."<sup>103</sup> The local practice set up the measures of taxation for generations. In October 1895, a missionary who visited the village of Ula, in the surroundings of Urmiya, reported to have

found a considerable state of excitement prevalent, as the agha... a very wealthy and powerful *Mollah*, was trying by every means to exact a third of the wheat produced as his tax, instead of an eighth, as has been the established custom in his district from time immemorial.<sup>104</sup>

The most common percentage of tax given to the local agha by the villagers was one-tenth of the yield. In several villages near Aqra, such as Shosh, Nerim, Kharbez, Siyan and Baijil, the villagers gave one tenth of the yield, such as wheat, barley and the like, to the local agha.<sup>105</sup> Out of the villages mentioned above, Jews resided only in Baijil, under the jurisdiction of Shaikh 'Ubaidullāh. A Jew named Levi was the miller of all three windmills belonging to Shaikh 'Ubaidullāh. On Fridays, he would receive one-tenth of the yield that would be brought to the windmill. Michael Michaeli (I#26) from Sisnawa lived under the jurisdiction of Shaikh 'Ubaidullāh's son, Shaikh Tawfiq of Baijil, who

<sup>100</sup> Soane 1926: 148–149.

<sup>101</sup> For a lengthy discussion of this subject, see below, mainly 271–284.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel Barashi (I#4) and Yehoshua Reuben (I#44).

<sup>103</sup> Rabino 1911: 1.

<sup>104</sup> AM, no. 24, July 1896: 167.

<sup>105</sup> Darwīsh Nahum (I#28).

ruled as well over Nerwa, Malmas, Khala, Biue, Mandia and Galuk. Out of all these places, Jews lived only in Sisnawa. Shaikh Tawfiq levied taxes from the cultivators of the land, one tenth of each *ulba* (pl. *ulbe*, measure of weight equal to 14 kg) of wheat. A man named Shanna, representative of Shaikh Tawfiq, would weigh the wheat and collect one-tenth. Shaikh Muḥammad of Rabatke would levy one-tenth from all the yields of the villagers, because all the lands of the village belonged to him.<sup>106</sup> In Shandokh, the land cultivated by the farmers, belonged to a Christian from Mosul, Brāhīm b. Patros. One of the local Jews received a piece of land from Patros and the terms were one tenth of the yield to the owner of the land.<sup>107</sup> In short, these were common terms in the relations between landlord and tenant, and not specifically imposed on the Jews.

Tribal aghas levied two thirds of the yield from villagers working for them in vineyards owned by the aghas.<sup>108</sup> The aghas of Shandokh owned land, vineyards, and the villagers who worked in their vineyards received one-third of the yield, while the landlord received two-thirds. The portion of the tax was based on the kind of product or growth and on the ownership of the land. On raisins, Shaikh Muḥammad of Rabatke would take one-tenth, although on tobacco he would take one-half, because this cultivation requires a lot of watering. Another ratio was applied to animals. Some of the wealthiest rural Jews owned herds of sheep. The owners of the livestock would give the shaikh one out of fifty animals every year.<sup>109</sup> The agha had a portion in business transactions as well. In the salt industry of Kara, the proprietor of the mine would take four-fifths of the profits, and Ḥājīr Rashīd Beg, the chief of the Berwaris, would take one-fifth.

In addition to or instead of taxes, some rural Jews would give their aghas gifts on Muslim holidays. The Jewish weavers paid their dues in the form of a suit of traditional Kurdish clothes, *shale-shapik*, the main product of his labor, on the Muslim holidays, *Ramaḍān* and *Hajjiye* (*ʿīd al-adḥa*, “the feast of the sacrifice,” also known as *ʿīd al-kabīr*, “the big holiday,” that indicates the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca). Ḥaim Barzānī (I#6) who lived in three villages in Kurdistan noted that

<sup>106</sup> Eliyahu Shalom (I#38).

<sup>107</sup> Levi Mordechai Yaacob (I#27).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Michaeli (I#26).

Jewish weavers “would give the agha and his assistants clothing” and “he would protect” them in return.<sup>110</sup> Occasionally, the Jews would give the agha and some of his family members, usually his favored wife and eldest son, personal gifts, usually clothing. At times, gifts would be given to the household or to the maintenance of the *dīwanxane*, where the agha would host and feed many guests. A gift such as four or five packages of sugar, occasionally, would be a small token to express the gratitude and loyalty to the agha. Paying taxes by the Jews, or percentage of their yield, as well as personal gifts or products of their own manufacture, once or twice a year was an act representing the loyalty of the Jewish subjects to the tribal chief. It may have signified the *bay‘a*, the traditional vow of allegiance to the ruler.<sup>111</sup>

The payment of taxes, the gifts and other services rendered by Jewish subjects constitute one dimension of the relationship between the agha and his Jewish subject. Other dimensions had been the patronage, the protection, the occasional help and the act of fulfillment of justice by the aghas on behalf of the Jewish subjects. According to Rand and Rush, rural Jews were granted protection, not by virtue of belonging to a Kurdish tribe but in return for “paying heavy taxes and bribes” to the aghas.<sup>112</sup> Indeed one testimony asserts that rural Jews did not pay any taxes at all,<sup>113</sup> but it is possible that this sole testimony leans on the experience of villagers who did not labor in agriculture and therefore did not have to pay taxes.<sup>114</sup> However, the equation of dues equaling protection is not nuanced enough and needs some qualification. It is

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Daniel Barashi (I#4) and Ḥaim Barzānī (I#6).

<sup>111</sup> *Bay‘a* in Arabic represents the traditional Islamic oath of loyalty. According to traditional Muslim law, the head of the state, the caliph, is chosen and appointed through a procedure that known as the *bay‘a*. This word comes from the root b-y-‘, meaning to buy and sell. In other words, it is a deal or a contract agreed between the ruler and those who appointed him ruler, which imposes duties on both. Islam and the West: A Conversation with Bernard Lewis, 27 April 2006, Washington, D.C.; *Bay‘a*, EI<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>112</sup> Rand and Rush 1979: 9.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Michaeli (I#26), Eliyahu Shalom (I#38) and Ḥaim Barzānī (I#6).

<sup>114</sup> Eliyahu Shalom (I#38) argued that Jews who owned vineyards or orchards did not have to pay a portion of their yield as a tax to their agha. He possibly relates to Sandur, in which his family lived for a while, and was a village populated only by Jewish villagers. In addition, his family did not own vineyards or orchards, and he possibly did not know the facts. He based on the experience of his family in Hasinke and Rabatke, two small villages in which the Jews did not labor in agriculture. Only later and due to a tribal feud did his family migrate to Sandur, a village of Jewish farmers. In another argument, Eliyahu Shalom said that Jews usually did not labor in agriculture, and if they did, “the agha would give them a discount.”

true that the Jews were an asset to the agha and the dues, gifts, services, labor and miscellaneous help provided by them comprised an important condition for the patronage granted by the agha. Nevertheless, as we know, some chieftains abused and misused their human assets, and were not content with the benefits provided by their subjects, and became greedy. On the other hand, values such as the tribal tradition, the will of a tribal chief to his son (to keep and protect his Jewish subjects), the tribal honor and the prestige of the chief who has Jewish subjects, as well as the special crafts and skills of the Jews, contribute additional puzzles of the whole picture. Together with other factors mentioned through this book, of which some are more visible than others, they make up the complete equation.

c) *Communal Labor on behalf of the Agha—Forced or Voluntarily?*

The Jews described *zebara* as communal labor on behalf of the local agha for a specific period annually or seasonally. Forced labor originated in the ancient world, but its practice survived into modern times as well.<sup>115</sup> Salmanzadeh names this practice “unpaid labor” and classifies it as part of the economic benefit expected by the landlord from the villagers.<sup>116</sup> Michael Chyet defined *zebara*, as a “communal work situation” and *zebare* as “the social institution whereby a group of villagers pool their efforts to complete a task for one member of the group.”<sup>117</sup> Apparently, this “one member” must have been powerful enough, such as the agha of the village, to compel all villagers to help in a certain task important to him. Jewish sources defined *zebara* in various ways. One Jewish villager defined *zebara* as “voluntary labor,” the only commitment of the Jewish villagers to the local agha. They would usually dig irrigation routes, cultivate, or tend the agha’s vineyards.<sup>118</sup> Another Jew from Whela argued that the only duty towards their agha was

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<sup>115</sup> See Mitra K. P., “Begar and forced labour in Historical Records,” in Proceedings of Indian historical Records Commission, Jaipur (Vol. XXIV) 1948: 26–27; V. S. Kadam, “Forced Labour in Mahārā-ra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. XXXIV (February 1991): 55–87.

<sup>116</sup> Salmanzadeh 1980: 114–15.

<sup>117</sup> M. L. Chyet, *Kurdish-English Dictionary*. New Haven: Yale, 2003. This is the most comprehensive and informative Kurmanji-English dictionary, summing up two centuries of scholarship on Kurmanji.

<sup>118</sup> Şalih Raḥamim (I#37).

*zebara*, one day a year, in which the villagers help the agha and work for him in picking the leaves of grapes.<sup>119</sup> He called it “annual voluntary work.”<sup>120</sup> A third villager viewed “the only tax to the agha,” as *zebara*, or “voluntary communal work for the agha, once a year.”<sup>121</sup> Michael Michaeli (I#26) described how Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh had exploited a few Jewish families under his jurisdiction in Baijil. One of these families was the family of Bibe that had three sons, Yoseph, Peretz and Ezra. Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh treated them well and no tribal Kurd was able to harm them. Nevertheless, he himself used to send them to places such as Aqra and he would make them work for him in a variety of tasks such as cleaning out the manure of his stables and burning trees.<sup>122</sup> When it came to providing them with food to eat during work, Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh was allegedly stingy. He would allow the villagers working for him to eat a loaf of bread, but only after drinking a load of water from a bowl made out from an emptied pumpkin.

Indeed some of the rural Jews defined *zebara* as ‘voluntary labor,’ but it had the characteristics of ‘forced labor,’ though only for a short duration, one or two days annually. It had been a tradition in rural Kurdistan, and the Jewish subjects were committed to it with no ability to resist, as they were hardly able to stand against the tribal agha. In some instances, appeared to be extreme ones, such as with the Shaikh ‘Ubaidullāh of Baijil, the agha took advantage of his Jews, as they were available and almost without charge. A Jewish source reported that when he was in need of workers to harvest his rice, he would have to ask permission of the agha.

If the agha needed workers at that time of the year for his own fields, all the men of our village were forced to work first for him—and for no money at all. Only the crippled and the sick could be excused from such labor.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Leaves of grapes (NA., *tarpe*) are very popular in the Kurdish cuisine. The leaves are rolled to stuff rice, vegetables and small pieces of meat.

<sup>120</sup> Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (I#33).

<sup>121</sup> Haim Barzānī (I#6).

<sup>122</sup> Imposing despised jobs or tasks on Jews is recorded in Islamic tradition. Consult L. D. Loeb, “Dhimmi Status and Jewish Roles in Iranian Society,” *Ethnic Groups* (1976) 1: 89–105; B. Lewis 1984: 27–30 and Haim Zafrani, *Deux mille ans de vie juive*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983.

<sup>123</sup> Rand and Rush 1978: 8.

### 3. *Exploitation of the Non-Tribal Jews*

The economic exploitation of the Jews demonstrates another aspect of the relationship between Jews and their aghas. This exploitation was possible in a tribal setting in which the tribesmen had social, political and martial dominance over non-tribal Jews. The following accounts demonstrate the tribal dominance and its influence on the economic experience of Jews in Kurdistan. A villager from Shandokh argued that the villagers, Jews included, worked for the agha, “for money and by force,” referring to that the aghas had generally been the sole owners of most if not all the land around the village. Tenants therefore had no other alternative but to work for them.<sup>124</sup> At times, wealthy Jews had to cope with greedy aghas, as in the following examples.

#### a) *Deception*

Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) discussed an event that happened to him personally, when two brothers of the Doski tribe, Rashīd and Khurshīd, tried to cheat him while trading with him. These two knew that Gamlieli was a merchant who was looking for trade opportunities and offered to sell him truckloads of coal. Gamlieli learned that the coal trade had the potential for a fine profit and paid in advance for fifty truckloads, two liras for each. He took the two brothers to a court to sign a promissory note. Nonetheless, they never supplied him with the coal. After a few months of waiting, Gamlieli realized that he had been deceived. He traveled alone to Stukurke, the village of Rashīd and Khurshīd.

I stayed at their house one night. I told them, ‘My dear ones, you did not bring me the coal.’ They told me, ‘Tonight you are [staying] here, but tomorrow we shall bring you fifty truckloads in Kore Gavane,’ because there, in the mountains, the trucks cannot drive. I said fine... At night, Rashīd came... and said to me ‘Tonight, my brother will kill you.’ [I asked] ‘Why would he kill me, what did I do to him?’ He said, [because of] ‘your money... he will kill you and throw your body in a valley and no one will be able to claim that Khurshīd killed you.’ I asked him... to hide me... He said, ‘I will take you to the house of my [female] servant, and I will hide you there.’

Yoseph Gamlieli had an extra five or six hundred dinar in his pockets, which Khurshīd knew about and coveted. Khurshīd had planned to kill him in Rashīd’s home and throw his body in a valley. “Rashīd’s con-

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<sup>124</sup> Levi Mordechai Yaacob (I#27).

science was cleaner,” Gamlieli thinks. Rashīd told his brother, “Do not kill him when he is in my home; kill him [only] upon his departure from my home.” Rashīd eventually helped Gamlieli to escape. He dressed him in woman’s dress and took him to the house of his female servant at the edge of the village. Rashīd warned her, “Isef is here in faith, if I do not find him here tomorrow morning, I will kill you.” She vowed “on my eyes.” Just as Rashīd had left, Yoseph threw off the woman’s dress and with his sandals, pistol and dagger in his hands, ran for his life. “I ran the whole night” up the mountains and down the valleys, and “the road did not end for me.” At the end, “God brought me to Jaldit Amadiya,” from where buses depart to Dohuk. “I recited ‘*shema*’ *Israel*’ (Heb. lit., “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” the single most important prayer recited by Jews daily and in times of distress).<sup>125</sup> Gamlieli was happy. He followed the lights and finally reached the village of Kore-Gavane where his family used to have a Christian friend, a sergeant in the police, named Jajjo [Giwergis] b. Kako. Gamlieli went to his house.

‘He asked me, Isef, where have you come from?’ I told him the story... While we were still talking, we heard someone knocking on the door. We were afraid that it was Rashīd, who was running after me... He told me, ‘Yoseph, let me hide you in the toilet, maybe this is him. I am afraid that he will kill both of us together. Let me hide you...’

The police officer was afraid of Rashīd for he was “an angel of death with one eye” [a phrase], “even Dewali [the chieftain of the Doski tribe at the time] was afraid of him.” Jajjo hid Gamlieli in the toilets. He went to open the door; it was Rashīd with four or five men with him. Rashīd asked him:

You must swear that you did not see Isef, the son of the *Hakham Bashi* of Dohuk! Jajjo told him ‘no, no, he did not come and I did not see him. What happened? Was he killed or what? Rashīd told him: ‘no, no, Jajjo, do not worry. He was not killed. I am looking for him. He was lost in my village and we do not know where he is.’ Jajjo told him: ‘He is in the village [He must be still in the village]. Rashīd asked him, ‘How do you know?’ Jajjo said: [is it possible that] ‘a Jew will come at night from your village [all the way] to here?’ Rashīd told him: ‘No, I also do not believe

<sup>125</sup> According to Simon Greenberg, this is the most important single sentence in the Jewish literature. It is “the basis for all our ethics and morals. It is the foundation upon which rest our hopes for a mankind living in brotherhood and peace.” Cohen 1965: 32.

it.' He said, 'Good, please sit, I will make you tea.' He sat; Jajjo made him tea and sent him away.

All this time Gamlieli was shivering in fear in the toilet. When Rashīd finally left, Jajjo managed to send Gamlieli on a ride to Dohuk. While talking about Jajjo, the Assyrian police officer, Gamlieli blessed him saying, "God will give him health." Jajjo stopped a truck full of wood with two men sitting in the front and they took Gamlieli. That night, Gamlieli finally reached Dohuk, he went home saying the "*shema Israel*" blessing. Yoseph Gamlieli was not discouraged by this experience. He was determined to recover the money taken from him dishonestly. He did not appeal to Sa'īd Agha, because Khurshīd was a powerful member of his Doski tribe. The tribal relations between the two were such that "Sa'īd Agha was not capable" of recovering the money from Khurshīd. He "would not have given him a penny." Gamlieli appealed to a Muslim judge, Ḥussain Beg Tuhala, who was a friend of his family.

The judge summoned Khurshīd and told him: 'I am not concerned about the Jew, but rather about the money that belongs to my uncle [who lent it to him] and I want to return it to him.'

The high status of the judge and the fact that his uncle was a warden in a prison seemed to be convincing enough factors for the two Doski brothers to return the money. This was not an official trial conducted in a courthouse, but rather a manipulation by a Muslim judge within the traditional and tribal setting of the Kurdish society. This manipulation employed the intimidating power of an official against two tribal criminals who took property belonging to Gamlieli.

#### b) *A Vineyard Changing Hands*

Powerful tribal figures were capable at times to manipulate and control the local Jews to an extent that they were able to 'purchase' and transfer into their hands desired assets and goods of the Jews. Moshe Gabbai was the head of Zakho's Jewish community and the wealthiest Jewish man in town who owned shops in the market, estates, lands and even villages, one named Sarlike, another one named Afirmaye. The family owned land in the nearby village of Kestaye. In Zakho, they owned two *khāns*, one containing stores and the other for merchants and their mules to sleep there overnight. The Gabbai family used to have a nice vineyard named later "Muḥammad Agha's Vineyard," opposite the Jewish neighborhood. Muḥammad Agha

was the mayor of Zakho.<sup>126</sup> During World War I, tribal and political dominance combined with manipulation, forced the wealthiest Jew of Zakho to give up his vineyard to the mayor of Zakho, Muḥammad Agha. This vineyard was beautiful and full of fruit trees. Muḥammad Agha coveted this vineyard and told Salīm Gabbai's (I#11 grandfather, Yitzḥak Gabbai,

I want this vineyard. He [Yitzḥak Gabbai] said, 'I will not give it to you...' Muḥammad Agha said: 'if you do not give me this vineyard, I will have them take your son, Moshe, to the army...' 'He informed on him and my father [Moshe Gabbai, later the head of the Jewish community of Zakho] was taken to the army... My grandfather [had] told him, 'I will not give it to you. Take my son to the army.' [At first] Muḥammad Agha took our mules for *sukhra* [Arab. forced labor], he used to come and confiscate our wheat granaries... He used to take it by force. At the end he said, 'I will take your son to the army.' He was sent to the army... [During the war] one of the Turkish army commanders... resided in our *khāns*... He said to my grandfather Yitzḥak, 'I will pay you the rental money...' When the army came to Zakho, my grandfather emptied his *khāns* and the army units were placed there...<sup>127</sup> He told them that he did not demand rental money, but he wanted his son to be returned and released from the army... A telegram was sent and Moshe Gabbai was released immediately... Later on, Muḥammad Agha told my grandfather, 'your son returned, it is true, but I will burn your house if you do not give me this vineyard...' In the end, he gave him the vineyard; we did not have any choice.

Wallace Lyon, who served as a British political officer in Kurdistan between 1918 and 1944, described the corruption of the Turkish judicial system in a similar instance:

If a man had a pleasant orchard, which he refused to sell to some covetous Pasha, it was a simple matter for the Pasha to trump up some charge, have him arrested, and perhaps detained until he agreed to sell. There were many such cases...<sup>128</sup>

### c) *The First Gas Station in Zakho*

Good relations with the new British rulers could be profitable, as the patriarchs of the Gabbai family had learned. The British leased land from the Gabbai family, the village of Afirmaye a few miles from Zakho,

<sup>126</sup> Vineyard, *karma* in NA.

<sup>127</sup> Yona Gabbai (I#7) from Zakho, reported that the army took possession of many apartments in Zakho, including his mother's apartment.

<sup>128</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 63.

and used it as an airport. In 1923, the British authorities wanted to open the first gas station in Zakho. They offered the franchise to Moshe Gabbai, who was a reliable man in their eyes. He built a gas station that belonged to the “Rafidain Oil Company.” When tension increased between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine, a fact that influenced Muslim-Jewish relations in Iraq as well, the British suggested that he should take a Muslim partner, naming Hazim Beg of the Shamdin Agha.<sup>129</sup> Moshe Gabbai was the second richest person in Zakho after Hazim Beg. He had villages and estates around the town, which Shamdin Agha “coveted,” according to his son Salīm Gabbai. Hazim Beg was named as a potential buyer and partner of these estates, but Moshe Gabbai managed to keep most of his estates until the immigration of Jews to Israel, in 1951. Salīm Gabbai (I#11) reported:

One day a big manager came from London [his name] Eshevy [Ashley?] Glanzel . . . He said, ‘Gabbai, there is a war between the Jews and the Arabs. If the Arabs win, it will not be good for you. Likewise, if the Jews win, it will not be good for you. Here they will give you troubles like enemies. I would like to make Hazim Beg a partner of yours in the oil company, in the gas station . . . It was Friday. My father, in his [sharp] brain said ‘But I already have a partner . . .’ My father told him, ‘Today is Friday, tomorrow is Saturday, but on Sunday, I will send you a copy of the partnership contract . . .’ He went to one named Hājji Muḥammad, a humble and God-fearing . . . good Muslim . . . He told him, ‘Hājji, I will make you a nominal partner, whatever you need, gas, gasoline, other things; I will give you, whatever you need.’ He signed over this partnership contract in court. They made a contract. He sent a copy of it to London. . . . The war began and then was over. This Muslim did not cheat us. He did not claim, ‘I am your partner, I want [my share].’ We were just sending him gas and gasoline; whatever he needed, he was a good person, who lived near the Jewish neighbor . . . His son was Ṣa‘o. They were good and humble persons.

Hājji Muḥammad did misuse the fictitious contract with Moshe Gabbai. Gabbai, who built the gas station in 1923, kept it until 1951. That year, the government confiscated the gas station and all its underground stores, upon the renouncing of their Iraqi citizenships by the Jews, before immigrating to Israel.

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<sup>129</sup> On the influence of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine over the life of Jews in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan see below, pp. 330–337.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONVERSION OF JEWS TO ISLAM IN THE KURDISH SOCIETY

#### A. *Conversion of Jews to Islam*

Bernard Lewis discusses three inferior groups in Islam, slaves, women and unbelievers, citing the three essential inequalities related to the dominant and inferior groups: master and slave, man and woman, believer and unbeliever. The Jews in Kurdistan have been inferior in the social and religious ranks. Theoretically, they could befit two of the essential inequalities discussed by Lewis: they were non-tribal subject protégés of the tribal Kurdish aghas and they were ‘unbelievers,’ in the eyes of the Muslim society. Indeed, in earlier periods some of the rural Jews were slaves, according to the tribal Kurdish concept of the word, as discussed in details above.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed in recent centuries, conversion to Islam has not occurred on such a massive scale as witnessed at the birth of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Few if any Jews converted to Islam out of religious motives.<sup>3</sup> Conversion of Jews to Islam was typically motivated by social factors such as the degree of assimilation within the society or the isolation of rural Jews. The main

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis 1984: 8–10. Indeed the position of Jews was not equivalent to that of slaves, but being subject protégés of the chieftain, entails some qualifications resemble to that of slaves, especially in the earlier centuries and in the remote rural region.

<sup>2</sup> On Conversion in early and medieval Islam, consult Tritton (1970), Lapidus (1972: 248–262), Joseph Cuoq, *Islamisation de la Nubie Chrétienne VII<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècles*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1986; Daniel C. Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Vryonis (1973), R. W. Bulliet, *Conversion in Islam in Medieval period: An Essay in Quantitative History*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1979, and F. Thomas Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979). Also, consult Humphreys’ (1991) concise introduction on this subject and Lewis (1984: 9–10, 71–72, 92–101, 146–47), Levtzion (1979) and Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d’Islam* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Assaf 1943: 119–120; Responsa literature (שׂו״ת, Hebrew, acronym for “Questions and Answers”) of Rabbi Ephraim Lanyado, *Degel Mahane Ephraim*, Even ha-Ezer, mark b. The testimony about the murder of a Jew, who refused to convert and opposed the demand of the local shaikh, was received in Baghdad in 1785.

reasons for conversion of Jews and the mechanisms adopted by the Jewish community to combat conversion of Jews, as discussed below, convey several aspects of these relations.

Four preliminary points should be made at the outset of this discussion. First, the number of Jewish women who converted to Islam was significantly larger than the number of men.<sup>4</sup> The religion of Islam permits Muslim males to marry Jewish or Christian women, “when you give them your due dowries, and desire chastity and not lewdness nor secret intrigues.”<sup>5</sup> However, Islam does not allow Muslim women, under any circumstances, to marry non-Muslim men. Second, in Islam, marriage is a simple contract, which requires only two witnesses. To maintain the marriage, the wife must be obedient to her husband, and the husband must pay his wife a dowry and provide her with proper maintenance. Third, in marrying Jewish women, Muslim males had two main advantages. Since they could marry four women, the Jewish woman could be the second, the third or even the fourth wife. In addition, when marrying Jewish woman whose family opposed the marriage, the man saved the high cost of a dowry payment.<sup>6</sup>

In the Jewish community, a Jew who married a Muslim person had to be detached from his or her family and the community as a whole. A Jew who wished to marry a Muslim had to convert to Islam and the conversion under these circumstances was not religiously motivated. The conversion to Islam affected not only the personal life of the converted but also raised the social status of converted Jews. Rural Jews who married tribal Kurds became members of the tribal society; urban Jews who married urban Kurds elevated their status by the mere affiliation with a higher religious and social group. Almost all Jewish informants interviewed knew of Jewish females, and at times males, who converted to Islam during the first half of the 20th century. Some informants were reluctant to talk about this delicate issue if it was their relative who was involved, but eventually all informants agreed and discussed this subject in details.

Jews intermarried with other neighboring religions and therefore converted to other religions as well. In Dohuk, two Jewish men converted

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<sup>4</sup> Responsa Literature of Rabbi Tzedaka Hutzin, *Tzedaka u-Mishpat*, Even Ha-Ezer, mark 9; Benjamin II 1859: 81–82. Rabbi Tzedaka Hutzin (1699–1773) originally of Aleppo, became the Chief Rabbi in Baghdad between 1743 and 1773.

<sup>5</sup> Kazzaz 1990: 157–165.

<sup>6</sup> Edmonds 1957: 224–25; Leach 1940: 19–4; 44–46.

to Christianity and married Christian women.<sup>7</sup> Then, two of their nieces became Christians as well. The Church and the Synagogue in Dohuk were near one another and Jews and Christians often met one another. Interestingly, Jews and Christians in Dohuk maintained good relations.<sup>8</sup> Following a visit to Dohuk in the early 1990s, Yona Sabar published a Neo-Aramaic text in which a Christian from Dohuk spoke favorably about the Jews and the good relations between both groups.<sup>9</sup> In Nisibin, there was a Jewish woman who became Christian and married a Christian man, but after her death, her children immigrated to Israel and returned to Judaism.<sup>10</sup>

The discussion about intermarriage of Jews with Muslim Kurds may not be completed without two supplementary remarks. The question of the origin of the Kurds has been an enigma, and Arab opponents of the Muslim Kurds have charged them at times with having a Jewish origin. Recently, Prof. Joyce Blau noted, that “in order to defame the Kurds in the eyes of the Islamic milieu,” a thesis is now circulating in Turkey, which “proves the Jewish origin of the Barzānī family.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed the Jewish origin of the Kurds has not been substantiated, but the unique bonds between the two groups may have supported this notion. In his reports on Sulaimaniya at the early 20th century, E. B. Soane mentioned the blood relations between Jews and Muslim Kurds. He argued, quite cynically, that “the keepers of the old habits and those who despise innovation” in Sulaimaniya, “they would be the killers of Jews amongst them,” while ignoring the blood relations that tie ninety percent of the Muslims to the Jewish race.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in Atrush, Abraham Mordechai Mizraḥi (b. 1900) argued that from 1,500 households in Atrush, more than one forth had Jewish origin, and their name, Ben Cuhî (or Ben Cihû,<sup>13</sup> lit., the son of a Jew) testifies to

<sup>7</sup> One of these women was called Chiche.

<sup>8</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31).

<sup>9</sup> Yona Sabar 1995: 33–51; 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Eliyahu Khodeda, OHD, 7 (40); Na‘ma Avrahami Iven, OHD, 66 (11).

<sup>11</sup> Joyce Blau, Report on M. Zaken thesis submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 19 June 2004; Cevat Eroglu, 2004, *Israil’in beka stratejisi ve Kürtler* (Israel everlasting strategy and the Kurds) Safya: Istanbul: 244.

<sup>12</sup> Soane (1912: 197–198, 200) relates to conservative Muslim Kurds who view innovation or *bid’a* in Arabic, with disapproval and mistrust, as *bid’a* is a term that has been tainted with negative colors by Muslim jurists and clerics. See *Bid’a* in the EI<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Jihî*, *jihu* and *ju* in the Latin spelling or Cuhî, Cihû, *Cû* in the Kurmanji spelling are common pronunciations for a Jew.

it. He argued that Kurds took some Jewish women by force, but other women converted willingly.<sup>14</sup>

Shame and sorrow befell Jewish families whose members converted to Islam. When Na'ima, Moshe Shalom's sister (I#39), married a Muslim Kurd in Sulaimaniya, their sister, Raḥma, was troubled.

She did not want Na'ima to become Muslim, it was a shame for us. [Even] if a person smoked a cigarette on *Sabbath*, it would be enough for the Jews to refer to him as non-Jew... [let alone if someone converted to Islam]. Raḥma threw herself from the roof. Luckily she did not die. She still limps from this event.<sup>15</sup>

The disgrace of the conversion of a Jewish female was reflected as well in the statement of Levi Mordechai H̄inno (I#45) whose sister converted to Islam.

Someone who wanted to marry my sister took her to Ismā'īl Agha, the head of the [Muslim] *millet* [and married her under his jurisdiction and blessing]. She gave birth and her son name was Maḥammad. Later on, my sister's husband passed away and her son too. My mother wanted her to come back home, but I did not agree.

Levi Mordechai H̄inno's unforgiving attitude towards his sister ultimately prevented her from returning home, though his mother wished her to return and was willing to accept her into the family. Possibly, the fact that they had a small family, a widow and her son, facilitated the discussion of the returning of the daughter into the family. Likewise, the fact that H̄inno's converted sister lost both her husband and a child, may have facilitated such option of her returning to her the Jewish family.

### B. *Main Causes for Conversion*

V. B. Moreen cited three main reasons for conversion of Jews: (1) a conviction of the truth of the other faith; (2) the material [and other] benefits that result from conversion and (3) a fear of concrete or threatened persecution. The history of Jews in Christian lands provides many instances that fit the third class, but the experience of the Jews in Sunni

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<sup>14</sup> Abraham Mordechai Mizraḥi, OHD, 76 (11).

<sup>15</sup> Moshe Shalom (I#39).

Muslim lands provides relatively few such instances.<sup>16</sup> Kazzaz argues that conversion among the Jews of Iraq in modern times was rare and generally related to personal grievances and mostly because of lower economic and social position. In the 20th century, there were incidents of conversion of the first reason reported above, i.e., “a conviction of the truth of the other faith.”<sup>17</sup> The experience of Jews in Kurdistan provides instances merely for the second reason, i.e., “a material [and other] benefits.” It is useful to note the main five causes of conversion among the Jews of Kurdistan, as recorded both in the written literature and in oral records.

### 1. *Abduction of Jewish Women*

Abduction of women in the tribal setting is known in Kurdish and other chronicles. In the early 1820s, Rich noted that the “carrying off [of] a girl by the lover is common.”<sup>18</sup> In Azerbaijan, most of the Christians lived in villages administered by feudal landlords, or aghas, the majority of whom were Muslims. The villagers worked practically for no profit and occasionally the aghas carried off their attractive women to a *harem*. Likewise, C. J. Edmonds and R. E. Leach who discussed the Kurdish society in the first half of the 20th century noted the practice of abduction of Kurdish women.<sup>19</sup> Oral testimonies also record the abduction of young Jewish women by tribal Kurds who wished to marry them. In Kurdish tribes, tribesmen would sometimes overcome opposition against a particular marriage by abducting the desired bride. Many times, the so-called abduction was carried out with the secret cooperation of the woman who was ‘abducted.’ Subsequently, negotiations would take place between the tribal leaders whose members were involved, in an attempt to reach an agreement, which usually included considerable financial compensation. If negotiations failed, a feud generally ensued. From the point of view of Kurdish tribesmen, kidnapping Jewish women was less complicated than the abduction of Muslim tribal women. Tribal Kurds faced no opposition or potential

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<sup>16</sup> Vera B. Moreen, “The problems of conversion among Iranian Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” *Iranian Studies* 19, nos. 3–4 (1986): 215–228.

<sup>17</sup> Kazzaz 1990: 157.

<sup>18</sup> Rich 1836 (vol. I): 152.

<sup>19</sup> On marriage practices and bride price, see Edmonds 1957: 224–25; Leach 1940: 19–4; 44–46.

feuds, which would have resulted if Kurdish women had been abducted. The Jewish families whose daughters were abducted had no power by force of arms to overcome the kidnappers. They attempted to oppose the conversion of family members by way of petition to the local rulers, or by other peaceful methods discussed below.

In 1931, the *Hakam Bashi* of Zakho sent a letter to the head of the *National Jewish Committee* in Palestine, describing among other distressing phenomenon, instances of the abduction of Jewish women.<sup>20</sup> In Nisibin, a tribal Kurd fell in love with a Jewish woman whom he met at a wedding where he was performing as a member of a band of musicians. Later on, he returned and “took her by force.” Her parents and the Jewish community were willing to pay money in order to redeem her, but the Kurd was too powerful and they could not bring her back. The woman remained with him and her family mourned for her bitterly.<sup>21</sup> Moshe Shalom (I#39) from Sulaimaniya reported that his sister converted “for romantic reasons.” He added that the Kurdish male “fell in love with her and abducted her.” For Moshe Shalom, it was inconceivable that his sister would forsake her family for a Muslim. I asked him again whether his sister was indeed abducted and was married “against her will.” He answered, “I do not know, perhaps she wanted him too, I was not there.” His younger brother, Şadîq, argued on the other hand, that the “marriage of Jewish females to Muslim Kurds did not occur by force.”<sup>22</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) from Aqra argued that no Jews ever wished to convert, but in fact, “they were taken by force.” The patriarchs of his family managed to liberate several Jewish females who considered conversion. Justice Yaacob Tzemaḥ (I#54) whose father was an Iraqi Parliament member from Mosul argued, that his father was faced with the special challenge of saving

young Jewish females in Kurdistan from the hands of the tribal chiefs... who controlled the region of northern Iraq... In a country where polygamy is allowed... the mighty tribal chiefs coveted Jewish females, mostly minors... They kidnapped them by force of arms, forced them to become Muslims and married them by force.

In his account, Yaacob Tzemaḥ stressed the element of force. He indeed did not recall specific instances, but he referred to the perception of his

<sup>20</sup> Gavish (1999: 144–45; 2004: 164–66).

<sup>21</sup> Eliyahu Khodeda, *OHD*, 7 (40).

<sup>22</sup> See below (“Romance”): 255–56.

father regarding the mighty power of Kurdish aghas who would take attractive Jewish women under their patronage by force. At times, their parents did not dare complain since they lived under the patronage of the agha in question, but this information, at times, may have leaked out of the Kurdish region into Mosul. In these instances, the Jewish Parliament Member would act firmly to return the daughter to her family. In Yaacob Tzemah's view, returning the abducted daughters to their families and the young age of these women, at times from nine to twelve, was further support for the claim that some of these acts were real abduction rather than pseudo abduction. Significantly, Jewish informants used the term 'abduction' in describing the kidnapping of Jewish women. However, they also used this term also when Jewish women escaped and joined their abductors willingly.

It ought to be noted that the lives of young Jewish women were centered around the house. Generally, they were not formally educated, as they did not attend any religious or government school. Incidentally, in towns and more so in villages, they came across tribesmen who would at times tempt them into running away with them. Even when the details about the abduction of Jewish women were more comprehensive, the reality depicted seems to be somewhat different from outright abduction. Jewish informants who were unable to admit that Jewish females joined Kurdish males willingly, may have used the term 'abduction' even when the reality did not support it, because of the shame and sorrow that was linked to the departure of their daughter under these circumstances. The clarification of this question lies in Middle Eastern tribal practice. Marriage was the exclusive business of the parents or guardians; the personal desire of the couple in question had no say in Kurdish society.<sup>23</sup> In the Jewish community, and in practically all traditional Middle Eastern societies, women were not allowed to choose their spouse. The marriage contract and its terms were matters for the parents. In other words, marriage without the consent of the family was a violation of an elementary rule according to which parents of the groom pay a visit and request the woman's hand from her parents.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For a concise discussion of this subject and other references, consult Eickelman 1989: 170–175.

<sup>24</sup> In December 2003, the Supreme Court in Lahore, Pakistan, validated the right of women to marry, without the approval of their father or brother. This verdict revoked the previous verdict that marriage without the consent of the woman's father or brother is not valid. In other words, according to the common practice in traditional Islamic and Middle Eastern countries, even at the beginning of the third millennium, marriage

Because of this tradition, Jews whose daughters were married without their consent regarded this act as abduction, even if the woman involved may have cooperated with the abductor. At all events, we seem to have here instances of abduction of minor (or helpless) Jewish women, as well as instances of semi or pseudo abduction of minor (or adult) women who were either seduced or became fascinated with the idea of running away with a tribesman. Instances of both types have long existed in tribal Kurdish society. In spite of the differences between the two types of conversion and abduction discussed above, members of the Jewish community considered both types as abduction.

## 2. *Economic Status*

Isabella L. Bird, who was an observer of Kurdish life in the late 19th century, reported the conversion to Islam of non-Muslims who were then able to “take away the whole property” of their family. In Nisibin, a Jew named Gurjī who converted to Islam was consequently entitled to the property of his family.<sup>25</sup> Another Jewish man from Nisibin, Abraham Maishen, converted to Islam “because of a threat” or a fear that the authorities would confiscate the money of the Jews.<sup>26</sup> In Diana, a Jewish woman married a Muslim Kurd. The two brothers who discussed this instance differ on the reasons, one argued that she converted because “they did not have anything to eat,” and his brother argued that she indeed was poor, but she was also “attracted” to a Kurdish man, who happened to be the owner of a coffeehouse. Economic hardship was also a reported motive for the dissolution of a marriage in Amadiya. Tova, the daughter of Me‘allim Shimon from Amadiya was married to her cousin. “She loved him, but her husband did not have work and he did not have money for maintaining the house.” She left him and married a Muslim. She later wanted to come back to her family, but her uncle argued, “As she already had become a gentile, she should stay there.”<sup>27</sup>

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without the consent of the parents or the guardians is still viewed as a violation of an important social rule.

<sup>25</sup> Yoseph b. Binyamin (I#2).

<sup>26</sup> Eliyahu Khodeda, OHD, 7 (40).

<sup>27</sup> Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5).

### 3. *Romance*

Western observers of Kurdish regions noted, somewhat in amazement, examples of love in marriage in Kurdish society, as reported in the *Kurdistan Missionary* in 1921:

Many and many a marriage is one of mutual attraction...Genuine affection between husband and wife (so rare among the Islamic nations) is by no means unknown among the less savage tribes, and there is no finer feature of the race than its open intercourse and good understanding between the sexes.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the instances of conversion of Jews were motivated by romance.<sup>29</sup> Na'īma Shalom from Sulaimaniya married a Muslim Kurd around 1935–1937. She was Moshe Shalom's sister (I#39). Na'īma worked as a house cleaner at the house of the wealthy Jewish family of Abraham Shalom.

We used to live in the Jewish neighborhood, and the other family resided in a more respected neighborhood, near the *serai*... This [Jewish] man had asked my father to allow Na'īma to work as a maid for his wife and help her. She did not have any children. She worked there for six months or a year. They would send her to the market to buy things, she probably met a [Muslim] man there who fell in love with her... abducted her... and eventually married her...

Moshe Shalom linked romance and abduction almost in the same breath, although apparently this instance was motivated primarily by romance, which further supports the above interpretation of the question of abduction. In a village near Dohuk, a Muslim Kurd took a beautiful married Jewish woman from her home. Her husband appealed to Ḥakham Shimoni, the *Ḥakham Bashi* of Dohuk during the early 20th century, for help. The Ḥakham visited the *qāimmaqām* about this matter and eventually, the *qāimmaqām* sent his men to release the Jewish woman. In a similar incident, a young woman fell in love with a young Muslim man and went with him to his house for one week. Ḥakham Shimoni came to the parents of the young Muslim and convinced them to send the woman to his house. At first, the woman refused to leave their home. Ḥakham Shimoni eventually convinced her to come to his house only

<sup>28</sup> KM 13, no. 3, March 1921: 36–37.

<sup>29</sup> Romance or love were not discussed in the open by the families concerned. They were concerned with their shame and sorrow and the tragic circumstances of losing a daughter or a sister, but at times, romance or love were implied or reasoned.

for one week, promising to let her go at the end of the week, if that was what she still wanted, but at the end of that week, the young woman vowed that she would never again see the Muslim man.

#### 4. *Conversion to Escape Punishment*

Conversion of Jews to Islam was also motivated by the desire to escape severe punishment. Medieval religious authorities like the Maimonides recorded this motive.<sup>30</sup> In Kurdistan, only men were motivated to convert in order to escape punishment, primarily because there were hardly any Jewish female criminals. In Zakho, two Jewish brothers responsible for killing another Jew in a fight were worried about the imminent trial and the punishment, that they converted to Islam to escape severe retribution.<sup>31</sup> These acts were motivated by the notion that the trial and verdict of Muslims were much more lenient than the trial and verdict of non-Muslims.<sup>32</sup>

#### 5. *“Anchored” Women and Domestic Problems*

A unique report relates to Jewish women from Nisibin who were unable to remarry within the Jewish community because of religious restrictions and therefore married gentile men. The husbands of these women were missing during World War I. There is a Jewish legal term that denotes a woman whose husband is missing, but whose death is not definitely established. In Hebrew, a woman in this situation is called *‘agunah* (lit., anchored) or bound woman, and she is not permitted to remarry. Reportedly, some of these women in Nisibin, whose husbands were missing, were still young and beautiful. They asked the Jewish community to release them from their marriage obligations, but several years passed and the religious court did not release them. According to the Jewish *halakhic* law, in their unresolved status as “anchored” women, they were unable to marry Jewish men, unless the religious court un-tied their marriage bond. The court failed to provide them with a proper

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<sup>30</sup> Maimonides in his Yemenite Epistle (ca. 1287) and in other essays discussed the conversion to Islam in order to escape death.

<sup>31</sup> Gurgo Nahum Sabto (I#1). Yona Sabar, a native of Zakho, reported of two Jewish brothers who converted to Islam, in a letter to the writer of this book from December 2003.

<sup>32</sup> See also (“*Kafir Kūst*—the Killing of Infidels”): 195–97.

solution, because it did not have specific evidence of their husbands' death and it could not release them to remarry. Finally, after a long wait, at least two of these women converted and married gentile men, one became Muslim, to marry a Muslim, and another one became Christian, to marry a Christian.<sup>33</sup>

In Kirkuk, a Jewish man whose wife was reportedly "a bad woman," decided to divorce her and demanded her *ketubbah* (Heb., marriage contract). The husband did not have money to pay the amount specified in the marriage contract, so he could not pay off and redeem her *ketubbah*. Rather than financially compensating her, he gave her custody of their two daughters and only then was able to issue a divorce decree, according to Jewish *halakha*. Later on, the woman sold her small daughter to a Jewish man and then converted to Islam, marrying a Muslim Kurd. Her daughter, who was six or seven years old by that time, remained with the person who bought her, but the local rabbi suggested that the man who bought her should

contract an engagement with her, to prevent her mother from coming and saying, 'I want my daughter,' and take her into the religion of the gentiles, and turn her into a gentile . . . so he made an engagement with her, and wrote her *ketubbah* and married her, and then brought the daughter and gave her to her father.<sup>34</sup>

In Diana, a Jewish man named Amram was married to a woman named Kitāne, from Battas. Reportedly, she did not like him any longer, but rather than obtaining a proper divorce, she simply left him and married a Muslim. Kitāne had two sons; the older, Bablo, stayed with his father Amram and lives now in Ashdod, Israel, but the younger, Brāhīm, joined his mother who married a gentile. After the Gulf war of 1991, a woman from his family and about thirty children and grandchildren, immigrated to Israel in accordance with the Law of Return.<sup>35</sup>

In another instance in the village of Arādan near Bamarne, reportedly, four Jewish brothers sexually abused their sister, Khātun. Tzemah Barashi's wife (I#5) reported, "Every day they would cause her troubles"

<sup>33</sup> Eliyahu Khodeda, OHD, 7 (40).

<sup>34</sup> Responsa Literature, Rabbi Tzedaka Ḥofzin, *Tzedaka u-Mishpat*, Even ha-Ezer, mark 22.

<sup>35</sup> "But I think they are not [real] Jews," argued Moshe Binyamin (I#3) who reported this account. The Law of Return enacted in Israel allows Jews and their descendants to immigrate to the State of Israel. Some immigrants were blamed for doing it from economic reasons rather than the reason of returning to the ancestors' holy land of Zion.

and “they would sleep with her, the poor girl.” Therefore, she escaped into the hands of Muslims. Her family went after her and asked her to return, but she said she would not return. They lived in the village of Arādan, neighbors of Bamarne. According to Tzemaḥ Barashi’s wife,

the village of Arādan was just like a place of terrorists, bandits; no one was able to go there. There were only two Jewish homes there and she [Khātun] was the only daughter among four brothers. She was not able to stay. She went away.<sup>36</sup>

### *C. Mechanisms Applied by the Jews to Overturn Conversion*

In the Jewish community, conversion was seen as an act of great loss, almost irreversible, akin to the death of a family member. The leaders of the community generally attempted to halt the process of conversion or reverse it at an early stage. Sasson Tzemaḥ, the Jewish parliament member from Mosul, was familiar with forced conversion in Kurdistan. According to his son Yaacob Tzemaḥ (I#54), the salvation of abducted girls was “a complicated and delicate task,” involving three main problems. The first difficulty was to find the whereabouts of these girls in the remote Kurdish villages. The second problem was to convince the authorities to mobilize the police forces in order to rescue these girls from the hands of their abductors and return them to their families. The third issue was the possible danger of revenge by the tribal agha against the girl’s family. Sasson Tzemaḥ viewed the abduction of Jewish girls with extreme gravity and used to appeal to the highest-ranking government officials: the prime minister, ministers or the *mutaşarrif*. The MP’s involvement in attempts to return ‘abducted’ Jewish women back to their families at times motivated tribal chiefs to send armed envoys to threaten Tzemaḥ in order to reduce his influence. On the other hand, the fact that government official took a serious view of the abduction of Jewish women by tribal chiefs seriously, and viewed it as a provocation against the central authority actually helped Tzemaḥ and the Jews. These kinds of incidents enabled both the Turkish (Ottoman) and the Iraqi governments to squash un-controlled chieftains, as it

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Tzemaḥ Barashi was present during the interview with her husband Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5).

provided them with an opportunity to fight the chieftains for legitimate reasons on behalf of the public.<sup>37</sup> Yaacob Tzemaḥ recalled that in all the instances of abduction brought to his knowledge, the young Jewish girls were finally located. His father would involve in this matter either a Muslim *qādī*, or the Mosul city council in which he was a member, before his role as an MP.<sup>38</sup> The marriages of the girls were made null and void and they were placed in the hands of Sasson Tzemaḥ. He granted them shelter in his home and hosted them until they were able to go back to their families or until a marriage with a Jewish male was arranged for them. At times, he arranged their transfer from Mosul to *Eretz-Yisrael* where they married, as it may have been too dangerous for them to remain in Kurdistan.<sup>39</sup> Yaacob Tzemaḥ stressed that it was thanks to his father's influence in the government that he was able to rescue these women in rural areas of Kurdistan.<sup>40</sup>

Records show that three main courses of action were taken in order to nullify Jewish females' conversion to Islam. At times, more than one course of actions was taken in order to return the girl to her community.

### 1. *Appealing to the Local Authority*

The first method Jews employed to nullify conversion, was to appeal to the local, tribal or religious leader under whose jurisdiction the conversion or the wedding took place. The community leaders and family members of the converted woman would appeal to the local leader to allow them to bring her back to her family. At times, this appeal was effective, as the authority of the local leader could produce better results than other methods, as illustrated below.

A Jewish man named Sasson, with his two wives, Raḥel and Sara, migrated from the village of Shirwana Maza to Diana, because of a

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<sup>37</sup> On the power struggle between the authorities and the tribes, see van Bruinessen 1978: 161–248.

<sup>38</sup> At first, he was a council member of Mosul, and then he became a Member of Parliament, representing the Jewish communities of Mosul district.

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Yaacob Tzemaḥ, "Sasson Tzemaḥ—a delegate in the Iraqi Parliament: chapters in the representation of the Mosul Jewry," *Minḥat Ashur* 6 (1994): 8–9.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Yaacob Tzemaḥ was recently the president of the court district in Jerusalem. On his father, Sasson Tzemaḥ and his activity with the Kurdish tribal chiefs, see Meir 1993: 56.

tribal war. In Diana, they rented a room in a house of a gentile Kurd because of a lack of rental space and economic difficulties. Eventually, the owner of the house, Ḥassan, fell in love with one of the Jewish wives and they ran off together. He took Sara with him to the house of La'le Khan,<sup>41</sup> where he worked as a servant. Reportedly, he had told La'le Khan that Sara wanted to convert to Islam. Meanwhile, members of the small Jewish community were searching for Sara. Her relatives could not believe that she would go with a gentile man willingly, saying, "She was not that type of person and she had a child." During the search, a person of Jewish origin who had become Muslim, met Moshe Binyamin (I#3) at the local coffeehouse and told him that Ḥassan took Sara to the house of La'le Khan, intending to convert her to Islam. Moshe told his uncle and the local Ḥakham, Me'allim Shmuel, who then informed her husband, Sasson. They formed a delegation that included Sara's child and Sasson's second wife, Raḥel. They all went to the house of La'le Khan, in Rawanduz.

They knocked on the door and said that they came in the matter of this woman. Sasson told La'le Khan, 'This person brought her by force. She has been married and has a child [they brought the son as well] ... she is my wife; she is a married woman ... she is not a girl ...'

Ḥassan apparently had introduced her to La'le Khan as an unmarried woman. La'le Khan called upon Ḥassan and the Jewish woman. She questioned Sara, who insisted:

I am not going back. I want [to stay with] him. La'le Khan asked her, 'Is this your son?' She said, 'Yes.' La'le Khan told her: 'go back to your home, if not, God forbid, I will cut all your hair' [a sign for a disgraced woman].

Moshe Binyamin stressed that it was done without police, without force. La'le Khan simply told Sara, "Go back home." To the Jews she said, "God forbid that he will touch her." Eventually, Sara was taken back to Diana. Later, she immigrated to Israel and lives now in a rural community (a *moshav*) near Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> La'le Khan, reportedly, was a widow of a tribal leader, whose wealth and prominence was acquired by her own merit as well. In Kurdish tribes, names of ladies of prominent families are accompanied by the title 'Khan.' When her name is not mentioned, the reference to her is as '*Khanim*,' or lady. See Edmonds 1957: 83n, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3) from Diana.

## 2. *Communal Panel of Deliberation*

Another method applied by Jewish communities to counter conversion of Jewish women was the panel of deliberation, which enabled Jewish leaders, in spite of their non-Muslim and non-tribal status, to challenge the tribal Kurds involved in the conversion. The Jewish community would appeal in an attempt to bring the women in question home through this un-official, but important mechanism. In Diana, two Jewish women converted to Islam and the Jewish community appealed to form a panel of deliberation in Rawanduz, under the auspices of the *qāmmaqām*, to investigate whether the two women wished to convert willingly, or had been forced to do so. In the panel that convened, a woman named Simḥa said that she wished to remain Jewish and consequently, the Muslim man who took her by force was imprisoned. The other woman, Kitāne, said that she wanted to become Muslim.

Another instance that occurred in Diana sheds light on this mechanism. A woman named Batyah converted to Islam, but later returned to visit her mother in Diana. The Jews in town who misinterpreted her visit, quickly arranged to form a communal panel in order to inquire whether she wished to return to her family or not. The panel was composed of representatives of the two faiths concerned and an official, but the woman surprised the members of the Jewish community when she argued that she returned merely to visit her mother. The Jews in the community asked her to leave, telling her, “Why did you come, to cause trouble for the Jews?”<sup>43</sup>

Six months before the mass migration to Israel (1950), a family member of a local shaikh in or around Koi-Sanjaq, abducted a Jewish woman. At first, when he fell in love with her, her parents sent her to reside with relatives away from Koi-Sanjaq, but the Kurds discovered her whereabouts and took her by force.

Her father went to the police and they told him that they would call her to court and ask her whether she wanted to remain Jewish or to become Muslim. They summoned the girl, but in the meantime, they [the Muslims] replaced her by someone else. Because of their anxiety [her family] did not notice, as women there would cover their face with a veil. Her father did not realize that [it was someone else and] not his daughter had testified. They brought a Muslim woman and she said that she wanted to become Muslim.

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<sup>43</sup> Moshe Binyamin (I#3) and his brother Shaul who provided the last episode.

The Judge told them that their daughter wanted to become Muslim. Only later, did they hear that she had been replaced, but it was too late.<sup>44</sup>

In some instances, as in the following account, the Jewish communities employed more than one mechanism, in an attempt to bring a Jewish woman back to her family. In Amadiya, there was a Jewish couple, Qamare and Ḥakham Raḥamim.<sup>45</sup> The husband married Qamare when she was young and reportedly treated her roughly.

He would never smile or laugh with her. If he had spoken to her like a human being, this would not have happened... Whenever he used to sharpen his knife, which he used for slaughtering animals, he would threaten her, 'With this knife I shall kill you.'<sup>46</sup>

Ḥakham Raḥamim was a neighbor of Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5). For a variety of reasons—her husband's roughness and intimidation of her, the age gap between the two, and a gentile who fell in love with her—she escaped to convert to Islam. One day, when her husband was away, she came to the house of Tzemaḥ Barashi and his wife and told them:

I am going to the agha to become a gentile... I have had enough. Every day when he sharpens his knife, he tells me that he is going to slaughter me with this knife. This is no life. Instead of living I am dying. I do not want this.

She left on Friday afternoon and went to Ḥājji Sha'bān of Amadiya. When her husband realized that she was gone, he became enraged. That same day, at the evening prayer, the congregation decided to send a delegation to the agha, to try to bring her back. The delegation visited the agha in the evening. To the servant who opened the door they said:

We need to talk with the agha. If he accepts us, we shall tell him why we have come. If he does not accept us, we shall go back home.' The agha allowed them in. Inside, one of the delegates, whom the agha knew very well, explained that they came 'because of a Jewish woman who came to you to become a gentile and we wish to bring her back to her husband.' The agha said: 'here she is, at home.' He raised his voice and continued: 'if she wants [she may leave], if she says yes, you may take her back. If she says I do not want to go, you may not take her.'

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<sup>44</sup> Israel Shomer, OHD, 57 (11).

<sup>45</sup> When Ḥakham Raḥamim immigrated to Israel during the large immigration in the early 1950s, he resided in the Moshav of Nes-Harim, in the Judean Mountains, south of Jerusalem.

<sup>46</sup> Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5).

Qamare did not wish to go saying that she was willing to return to Judaism if he granted her a legal divorce.

Her husband, the Ḥakham, the slaughterer [the informant Tzemaḥ Barashi speaking cynically] went to the Muslim *mufti* pretending to convert to Islam. He thought to himself, that if he too became a Muslim, his wife would not be able to leave him and he would be able to gain her back. Ḥakham Raḥamim told us that he was not going to be ‘a real Muslim.’ After a week or two, he returned. Realizing that it was a hoax, the Muslims looked for him and wanted to kill him. He remained in hiding for fifteen or twenty days until one Thursday evening, after dinner, he showed up in Amadiya. He asked me [as his neighbor] to give him the key of Be-Hazane [one of the two synagogues in Amadiya]. ‘I opened the synagogue for him and hid him there.’

He stayed there until Sunday and Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5) arranged a car to take him to Mosul. Reportedly, the Jewish community conducted a panel of deliberation, in which Qamare said:

My sin will be upon your shoulders if you force me to return to him. I would rather marry a Jewish dog than return to him. If he will not divorce me properly, I will become a gentile.

When the Ḥakham heard these words he took a pistol and shot Qamare in the back, but she was not seriously injured. Consequently, the police imprisoned Ḥakham Raḥamim and he was tried, but Qamare remained gentile and did not return to the Jewish community.

### 3. *A Period of Seclusion*

Another method used by Jewish communities to counter the conversion of Jewish women was to detach the woman in question from her new Muslim, Kurdish, associates. The intention was to place her in seclusion for a period, to allow her to contemplate her decision while separated from her Muslim associate, under the supervision and the pressure of a respected Jewish person or family. The purpose was to test the woman’s conviction and try to compel her to return to her religion. At the end of the period, the woman would either maintain her new faith or return to her family. Several respected Jewish individuals were able to bring back converted Jewish females from their new residence to their home for a period of seclusion, until they changed their minds. In addition to the Jewish Member of Parliament, Sasson Tzemaḥ, the patriarchs of Khawaja Khinno’s family from Aqra managed to reverse the conversion process of several Jewish and Christian women. Some of

these women were brought to the house of Khawaja Khinno, at times for up to a month, to find out whether they really wished to convert. Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) argued:

Our house was open, if a Christian wanted to convert, they would not send her to the house of the priest, but rather to our house. She would stay at our house for up to a month. If we convinced her, she would return to her religion. If we did not succeed... but there were hardly any instances, in which we did not succeed [especially] when [the converted person] was a Jew.

Aryeh Gabbai recollected several instances of Jews and Christians who converted to Islam. They managed to bring them to stay in the house of Khawaja Khinno.

I remember two Jewish women who were taken by force in the surrounding villages... in the jurisdiction of Aqra. We brought them to our house; we convinced them and returned them to their families.

Fā'iq Gabbai (I#12) recalled another instance of a complete Jewish family that converted to Islam, the father's name was Nissim and the daughter's name was Miriam. In Baghdad, she was known as Mary.

My late father took this matter upon himself. We brought them to our house and sent them to Baghdad and this matter was resolved. Today she is here [in Israel] where she is known as Marie Kongaha [she was] a famous Baghdadi dancer.<sup>47</sup>

The Jewish communities took strong measure trying to return Jewish women to their community. Often more than one method was used and often the Jews had to rely on the authorities to intervene on their behalves, as influence with the civil authority or the local rulers was indispensable.

#### D. *The Role of Aghas and Shaikhs*

Assaf recollected a few instances of forced conversion, where "Jewish inhabitants had been severely tortured by tyrants in order to force convert them [to Islam]." Other documents concerning the Jews of Persia and Kurdistan in previous centuries reveal a brutal and fatal destiny for

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<sup>47</sup> The informant testified that he invited her and she participated in his wedding in 1956, at the Lido club in the city of Ramleh, Israel.

Jews who refused to convert. During the first half of the 20th century, the only instances of forced conversion occurred when young Jewish females were concerned. Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) stressed the power of the shaikhs in the region of Aqra that enabled them to take attractive Jewish women by force. If a Jewish female were abducted in one of the surrounding villages, the patriarchs of Khawaja Khinno's family would inform the police of the kidnapping. They would ask the police to bring the woman to their home. According to Aryeh Gabbai,

She would be in our home, until we resolved this matter, either by sending her back to her village, or by marrying her to someone [Jewish] from the town or some other village.

Nevertheless, appealing to local religious leaders or shaikhs could lead to severe repercussions, as in the following account. Shaikh Bahā' al-Dīn (also known as Bawadin) was a famous *Naqshbandī* Shaikh in Kurdistan.<sup>48</sup> After World War I Shaikh Bahā' al-Dīn was about 70 years old. In August 1919, the British destroyed his house and *takiyya* (an abode where disciples of *Ṣūfī* order perform their rituals), as they did with some of their main opponents, and he was sent to Baghdad. He was later allowed to return to Bamarne.<sup>49</sup> According to Tzemaḥ Barashi (I#5),

In Bamarne, there were six or seven houses of Jews amongst the Kurds. Shaikh Bawadin [Bahā' al-Dīn] was very old [exaggerating] about 130 years old [but] he looked like a boy. His *dīwan* would host 200–300 men... All [the Muslims] in Iraq and Iran respected him and knelt and bowed towards him... No one would dare approach him or talk to him [out of both fear and respect]... He was worse than the government... He was hot-tempered; in the heat of the moment he could kill persons.

Once, a Jewish woman named Nergez converted to Islam in Bamarne, the seat of Shaikh Bahā' al-Dīn.<sup>50</sup> In accordance with the local practice and in response to the petition of the Jews, the authorities placed Nergez in the hands of the Jewish community for three days, to determine

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<sup>48</sup> He was one of the three religious personalities of Bahdīnan in the first half of the 20th century. The others were Shaikh Nūrī of Barifkan near Dohuk and Shaikh Aḥmad of Barzān, together with Shaikh Ṭāhā of Nehri. *Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932* 4: 479. It seemed that the British did not evaluate Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzinjī as a religious leader but rather as a tribal leader.

<sup>49</sup> Personalities 1923: 27.

<sup>50</sup> Nergez's family was originally from Dohuk and, reportedly, she had been married twice, but both her husbands died.

whether she was willing to return to her family or not. During this time, the Jews attempted to persuade her to come back home. Especially active and possibly blunt in his statements against the Muslims and against Islam, was her father's brother-in-law, Hakham Shimon, who was a *shohet* from Amadiya visiting Bamarne. Eventually, Nergez decided to return to the Muslim Kurds and informed them that the Jews cursed Islam. "After a few days, four or five tribesmen went out and slaughtered the Jewish *shohet*, Me'allim Shimon, his brother-in-law, Naftali and a small child, Binyamin [be-Albiye]." Tzemaḥ Barashi recalls:

It was a long time ago, before I was married. Nergez's father Abdal<sup>51</sup> tried to convince me to marry her. He told me, 'Give me 15 dinar and we would bring her back from Mosul for you [to marry].' I told him that I did not want it. [Tzemaḥ explains:] if I married her, I would be killed, I would cause harm to myself . . . I was afraid.

#### E. *Conversion of Jewish Men*

The number of Kurdish Jewish men who converted to Islam during the first half of the 20th century was significantly smaller than the number of Jewish women. There are three main reasons behind these figures. First, it was a patriarchal and male-dominated society; second, if a Kurdish man coveted a Jewish woman, he was able to fulfill his wish if the desired woman would cooperate with him. The other way around, a Jewish man and a Kurdish woman, was not very likely in the social and tribal setting of Kurdistan. Third, the almost complete control of tribal *aghas* over the lives of Jewish families who lived in the rural region, contributed as well to the large number of Jewish women who converted and married Muslim Kurds. The Jewish community did not seem to protest as strongly against conversion of males as they did against the conversion of females to Islam. The community was disturbed by the phenomenon of married men who converted to Islam and left their Jewish wives in a state of "abandonment." Of such occurrences, one learns from a revolutionary innovation of the Jewish community of Sinna, Persian Kurdistan, in 1807. This Jewish

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<sup>51</sup> In one instance, he refers to Nergez's father as Menaḥem and in another instance as Abdal. It is possible that the Hebrew and the Kurdish names were replaced, or the first name and surname were used alternately, or that the two names were mistakenly mixed.

community amended the marriage contracts, appending a new condition to the contract according to which the contract would be invalid if the man converted to another religion. This amendment indicates that there were incidents of Jewish men who converted to Islam without divorcing their Jewish wives properly, and contrary to the demands of the Jewish *halakhic* rules. The *Responsa* literature deals as well with several instances in the previous centuries of Jewish males who had converted to Islam in Kurdistan. In one instance, a rabbi concluded that the *get* given by a man who converted to Islam was not lawful. The rabbi asked the community of Maragha to try to obtain a proper *get* [Heb., A divorce decree]. His wife threatened, that she would convert to Islam and takes her son with her if she was not allowed to re-marry.

In the first half of the 20th century, several Jewish men converted to Islam. In Koi-Sanjaq, a Jewish man who had converted to Islam, came from his village just prior to the mass migration of the Jews to Israel, to ask Israel Shomer to register him for immigration. "I fixed a visa for him and sent him to Baghdad. He left his Muslim wife and two children behind. Now he lives at Alkosh [in northern Israel]," said Israel Shomer.<sup>52</sup> There are many reports of Jews who converted to Islam, but this is the only known report of a converted Jew who abandoned his family in Kurdistan and joined the Jewish community en route to Israel. Darwīsh Naḥum (I#28) from Aqra knew one person named Binno [Binyamin] who used to play the Zurne (a flute) and the public used to love his music.

A Kurdish female fell in love with him and did not let him go... He married her. He divorced his Jewish wife, with whom he had a son. His son's name is Amram and he lives in *moshav* Menuḥa.<sup>53</sup> From the Kurdish woman he had four sons and four girls. A while ago [in the early 1990's] I was in Kurdistan for a visit and I asked about his children. Recently I received a telephone call from his son. He wanted to contact his half [Jewish] brother.

In another instance, a Jew from Zakho fell in love with a Muslim woman. Recently, on a visit of Hārūn Naḥum (I#30) to Kurdistan, following the 1991 Gulf War,

<sup>52</sup> Israel Shomer, OHD, 57 (11).

<sup>53</sup> A *moshav* is a village settlement under the auspices of and within the framework of the settlement authorities in Israel. These types of settlement along with the *kibbutz* cooperatives were very common during the first half of the 20th century and during the early stages of the State of Israel.

his children asked me to tell their half brother in Israel that they want him to visit his father before he passes away, and that they may want to immigrate eventually to Israel.

Hārūn Naḥum also discussed the conversion of two brothers from Zakho, Muḥammad Ben Cuhî (or Ben Cihû) and Aḥmad Ben Cuhî. Sasson Naḥum (I#31) from Dohuk, reported on Jewish men who had converted to Islam. One of them, named Murdakh, fell in love with a Muslim female. He was already married, but he left his Jewish wife and married a Muslim woman. Afterwards, his brother, Pinḥas (later ‘Abdallāh), whose wife was his cousin from Zakho, divorced his wife and married a Muslim woman. They remained in Dohuk. The Muslim children of Murdakh used to love to come to the Jews and called them *pismam* (Kur., cousin, relative).

The above accounts indicate that the conversion of Jews to Islam was tragic and painful, especially when Jewish females converted. The Jewish community, especially the leadership, fought the conversion process. The conversion of Jews to Islam was part of Jewish experience in Kurdistan. In the early 1990s, after the Gulf War, an autonomous Kurdish regional government was established in northern Iraq. Jewish females who converted before 1950–51, were able to contact family members living in Israel. As a result, several dozen Jewish women who had married Muslim males, wished to immigrate to Israel based on the Law of Return that enables Jews and their offspring to become citizens in Israel. These Jewish women immigrated with their families, numbering in the hundreds, provoking a controversy in Israel over their real motives. Unlike many Jews who immigrated to Israel inspired either by Zionist ideology, or to fulfill the biblical, Judaic, vision of the return to Zion, most immigrants who came from Kurdistan in the early 1990’s came primarily because of the instability caused by the war and the prospects of financial incentives. The controversy increased when it was reported that some of these immigrants paid a visit to the local mosques and when many of them later emigrated from Israel into European or western countries or returned to Kurdistan.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For more details on this question, see Zaken 2001; Löwy 1994; Netty C. Gross, “Israel’s Kurdish Fiasco.” *The Jerusalem Report*, 5 March 1988.

PART IV

THE LAST GENERATION IN KURDISTAN: BETWEEN WWI  
AND THE IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL



## CHAPTER ONE

### JEWISH EXPERIENCE DURING WORLD WAR I: CONSCRIPTION AND EVASION<sup>1</sup>

In 1914, several weeks after the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and announced war on Great Britain, Russia and France. In the streets of Baghdad, the authorities announced the *nafar-āmm* (Tur., general conscription) to the beating of drums in the main streets of the city. Many Baghdadi Jews were drafted to the Sixth Army that was dispatched to the snowy Caucasus Mountains to confront the Russian army. Two-thirds of the Turkish force, among them hundreds of Jews, did not return home from the battlefield. The news of the horrors encouraged many Jews to evade conscription to the army. Some deserted their units and sought shelter with Bedouin tribes, while others escaped to Basra, which fell to the British in November 1914.<sup>2</sup> The news from the battlefield reached the Kurdish towns and the remote provinces. This war was known as *nasusit-seferbalik*,<sup>3</sup> signifying misfortune, chaos, and ill-fated travel from which one did not return. During the war, the civil population in the Ottoman territories faced harsh measures, conscription campaigns, and confiscation of goods, shortage of food and even famine, which drove many urban Jews to seek refuge in rural communities under the jurisdiction of tribal aghas. As a result, many urban Jews were scattered in the rural area during the years of the war.

The Jews of Kurdistan had hardly ever served in the Turkish army before World War I. A few exceptions have been recorded: before

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<sup>1</sup> This part (IV) deals with the political, economic and martial experience of the Kurdistan Jews of Iraq from the beginning of World War I up until the mass immigration of the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan to Israel during 1951 and 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Shohet 1981: 121. For more details about the war in Kurdistan, see Kamal M. Ahmad, *Kurdistan during World War I*, trans. by A. M. Ibrahim, Forwarded by Akram Jaf (London: saki Books, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> *Nasusit* (in NA., fight, war); *seferbalik* (in Turk., general alert). This name derives from the fact that the Turkish authorities mobilized almost 3 million soldiers into the army and millions of civilians throughout the war.

World War I, the authorities sent two diligent young Jewish students from Sulaimaniya to a military training school in Istanbul. Following the war, these two trainees, Shimon Shaul and Haim Ezra, returned to Sulaimaniya and served in the Iraqi army and the police force.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Yoseph Ben Binyamin (I#2) from Nisibin reported that his father served in the Turkish army even before the war, in 1912–13. These examples represent an exception to the rule of the pre-war era. During the war, most adult men were drafted into the army. Rev. Allen of Urmiya who toured Kurdistan during August 1917 reported from Sablax (also known as Saujbulagh or Mahabad, in Persian Kurdistan),

that 75 per cent of the population were old women and some young women, but all widows, and a multitude of orphans. The other 25 per cent were old men and young cripples.<sup>5</sup>

A Jew from Zakho argued, that besides a few elderly men, “the army did not leave [even] one man in Zakho.” The conscription officers left no man at home who was “between the ages of seventeen and seventy.”<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the war, the authorities “took one hundred and one Jews from Zakho on foot to Mosul.”<sup>7</sup> A similar account of the situation in Dohuk is related:

After the outbreak of the war, no one was left [in the city]... They [the authorities] seized them all... even men between the ages of fifty and sixty... and there was no school, nothing [no religious education] in the synagogue as well.<sup>8</sup>

This description is not unique to Kurdistan. A Jew from Baghdad reported, “The Turkish gendarmerie hunted us like wild animals” and when we were caught they sent us to the *qishle* and “treated us like prisoners of war.”<sup>9</sup>

The following account by Naḥum Sharabi (I#40) from Zakho is more reminiscent of prisoners of war rather than new recruits. During recruitment,

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<sup>4</sup> Shimon Shaul became *muqaddam* (Lieutenant Colonel) in the supply corps of the Iraqi army, reportedly the highest-ranking position that a Jew reached in modern Iraq. Haim Ezra became a police inspector in the district of Diwaniya, populated mostly by Shīʿite Muslims, but he was murdered at an early age.

<sup>5</sup> KM 12, no. 12, December 1917: 5.

<sup>6</sup> The reference “fifty or sixty or sixty-five” years old relates not to a specific age but rather to the fact that the authorities drafted the elders of the community as well.

<sup>7</sup> Meʿallim Levi (I#23); Hārūn Judo (I#16).

<sup>8</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31).

<sup>9</sup> Barshan 1997: 14.

the army officers would ride on horses while the recruits would walk... Chaos and neglect prevailed everywhere. [At the height of the war] the army did not supply the soldiers with uniforms or shoes nor did it replace them when they were worn out. If someone became sick, there was no medical treatment and he would be left to die.

At the beginning of the war, the Turks enlisted only one-sixth of the total number of soldiers who were drafted during the whole war. Throughout the war, the authorities initiated strict conscription campaigns that mobilized more civilians to the army to fulfill the growing military needs. Me'allim Levi (I#23) maintained that the Turks came to Zakho repeatedly during the height of the war, searching for men eligible for army service. The following account suggests that only a few Jewish men remained in Zakho during the war. "Once, during the war, the Turkish authorities even raided the synagogue, on a Saturday." On a Jewish *Sabbath*, the Turks raided the Jewish synagogue of Zakho and captured two rabbis and thirteen other eligible men, including Me'allim Levi's father.

Two rabbis and the brother of one of them were sent to military service in Istanbul and Mosul. The one was sent to Mosul [because he] paid half the ransom [to redeem himself]; the other did not have money and was taken to Istanbul.<sup>10</sup>

The Turkish army was in such great need of soldiers that the conscription officers violated not only the Jewish house of prayer, but also disregarded the freedom of worship and sanctity of the Jewish *Sabbath*. Based on this occurrence, it seems that only 15 men eligible for military service remained in Zakho at the height of the war, since it may be assumed that most if not all the adult males in the town participated in the Saturday services at the synagogue.

The recurring campaigns to conscript males succeeded in recruiting many Jews from urban areas. Only few oral and written records of Jews who served in the war have survived, although the available records suggest that the Turks utilized Kurdistan Jewish recruits in non-combative positions because of their age and lack of experience. Naḥum Ḥannah from Dohuk served in the confiscation administration, in charge of the storage of food and provisions. During a period of two or three years, he and a Muslim named Khaidar Agha were in charge of the *amber* (Arab., *anbar*, lit., granary), where the army stored

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<sup>10</sup> The two rabbis were Rabbi Moshe and Rabbi 'Alwan, Me'allim Levi (I#23).

wheat, barley and other grains as well as other products confiscated from civilians.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Yoseph Ben-Binyamin's father from Nisibin supervised several shepherds who tended thousands of animals that the army had confiscated. Reportedly, he was stationed as far as Izmir and did not return home for a period of two years, but he reaped some benefits from his posting.

Sometimes they had nothing to eat... they would go to Arab [= Kurdish] villages in order to sell some animals. In this manner, they made their living and even managed to send some money home.<sup>12</sup>

Another Zakho Jew, Yoseph Shaul Levi (1888–1984), was an officer in the supply division of the Turkish army.<sup>13</sup> Sha'ya Zaken from Zakho also served in a non-combat position. For three years, "he was stationed on the banks of a river near Persia," ferrying soldiers to the other side. He was in charge of a boat that ferried soldiers and took on board civilians for a fee.<sup>14</sup>

During the war the Turks mobilized 2.85 million men out of which 325,000 were killed, 400,000 were wounded and 250,000 were missing or POWs. More than third of the men mobilized were among the casualties.<sup>15</sup> The accounts of Jews in non-combat positions may be misleading, as many Jews in combative units did not return from the war to relay their experiences, while more of the non-combat soldiers survived.

The account of Yaacob Abraham Chavero (hence, Shavro) is unique because this is one of the few accounts by a Jew who served in a combat unit during the war. He narrated his experience to his son, 'Aziz Shavro (I#55), who recorded it. When the war broke out, Yaacob Abraham Shavro was drafted into the Turkish army. Conditions for the soldiers were difficult; there was practically no food and they usually ate bread and drank tea. When they entered villages, they would seize cows or sheep, slaughter them and eat the meat. During the war, the troops

<sup>11</sup> Sasson Naḥum Ḥannah (I#31).

<sup>12</sup> Yoaeph Ben Binyamin (I#2). Apparently, the soldiers would divide the money among themselves.

<sup>13</sup> Gavish (1999: 89–90) interviewed his son, Zakī Levi, who bragged that his father had been in charge of "all the supply of the Ottoman army in the Middle East," a clear exaggeration, because an officer aged 26, let alone a Jew, could not have possibly been in such a position, but rather a lower ranking military supply officer.

<sup>14</sup> Sha'ya Zaken (I#21).

<sup>15</sup> Susan Everett, *The Two World Wars*, vol. 1, *World War I* (Bison Books, 1980).

discovered an act of betrayal by the division commander who ordered the troops to halt their fire.

The soldiers, who were exhausted, took off their clothes. They fell asleep like dead men... I was the runner-courier for my company commander. He [sensing something] told me to notify all the 250 company soldiers not to take off their shoes and clothes, [suspecting] that there was treachery. We waited to see what the night would bring. At night, the commander told me, 'Order the [250] soldiers of our company to leave the camp quietly.' The commander left first and we followed him. We distanced ourselves 300 meters from the camp. The commander and I warned the soldiers not to fall asleep. Suddenly, at two o'clock in the morning, we saw the division commander leaving the camp with a flashlight. Without prior notice, we heard the sound of airplanes. My commander told me, 'Yaacob, look to see what happens to the soldiers of the division who fell asleep.' The airplanes flew low and bombed the camp... they wiped out the whole division, more than four thousand soldiers. After they finished, they flew low; we saw the division commander blinking his lamp towards the airplanes, and they dropped four boxes by parachute and departed. My company commander ordered the arrest of the division commander. We caught him and told him, 'Traitor, look at what you have done! You killed all your soldiers.' Ninety-five percent of them were dead while five percent were wounded. In the morning, the company commander contacted the Chief of the Staff and told him of the events. The Chief of Staff asked him, 'How many soldiers survived?' He told him, '250.' The Chief of Staff gave the order, 'Each soldier should fire five bullets at him.' We stood him up, called him a traitor and each soldier fired five bullets at him. We took the four boxes of gold, loaded them on the mules, and retreated with the British on our tails.

Shortly afterwards, the British advanced and captured Yaacob Abraham Shavro. He was very sick and feared that the British would kill him, but they kept him in hospital. When he had recovered, the British sent him to a prisoner-of-war camp in Bombay, India, where he remained with more than 15,000 captured soldiers of the Turkish army. The British paid the prisoners a salary, and two months later Shavro opened a snack bar, where he sold tea, coffee and sandwiches. "I made a lot of money," he told his son. He remained for three years in the British prison camp. When he was finally released after the war, he went to the market in Bombay and bought items "such as clothes, shoes, and put it with the money in a bag and put the bag in a suitcase and took the train. En route, the money was stolen," Shavro told his son. When he returned to Zakho after seven years of army and imprisonment, he found no one at home. "I asked the neighbors, 'Where are my wife and two children?' They told me, 'Your wife and children are dead.'"

‘Azīz Shavro concluded: “Consequently my father married my mother, Raḥel b. Warde ‘Ado. They had my brother Abraham, and seven years later I was born.”<sup>16</sup>

### A. *Evading Military Service*

Faced with harsh recruitment campaigns, urban Jews used all their skills and resources to evade the draft. Many Jews managed to find shelter in the rural and tribal Kurdish region; other Jews found different methods to evade the draft, as indicated hereafter.

#### 1. *Rural Kurdistan as a Safe Haven*

As suggested by its Turkish name, *seferbalik*, the war prompted migration of urban Jews to the outlying regions. Most eligible Jewish men were either conscribed to the army or fled to the rural area to evade enlistment to the army. Many of those enlisted to the army escaped their units in the first chance they had. The workforce of urban communities was therefore reduced, leaving many Jewish families with no providers. The rural area was safer than the urban centers during the war. Jewish and Muslim villagers who lived in the rural area, in a certain tribal jurisdiction, and under the patronage of tribal chieftains, were out of reach of the conscription officers. In addition, starvation, one of the harsh consequences of the war, affected them less. In rural villages, unlike in the city, one was able to obtain basic needs such as food, grain and fuel. Many urban Jews, who escaped to the mountains, managed gradually to transfer their families to join them and remained in the rural area throughout the years of the war. During the war, the most important virtue of the rural area was the ability to avoid military service. A Jew from Rabatke affirmed:

In Rabatke, neither Jews nor Kurds served in the army. The village of Shaikh Muḥammad [Rabatke] was a shelter. My brothers did not go to the army; my father did not go...our shaikh was a powerful man who would not allow [his subjects] to be conscripted to the army.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ‘Azīz Shavro (I#55) narrated and wrote down the records of his father Yaacob Abraham Chavero. His father was previously married to Ḥesne Babelo and had two children.

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24).

A Jew from Chal stated that the residents of Chal did not serve in the army, neither in his father's time nor in his generation. The aghas of Chal would not allow their subjects, Kurds, Jews and Christians alike, "to be killed like dogs in the army," he explained, suggesting an alienation if not abhorrence of the tribal society towards military (or any) service by the central government.<sup>18</sup> Like the Shaikh of Rabatke and the agha of Chal, many aghas opposed the recruitment of their villagers and tribesmen primarily as this would inflict on them loss of income, thereby weakening their status. Similarly, the Jews of Whela, near Nerwa, were not drafted to the army because "the Jews did not give them soldiers." The residents of Whela did not see the war but only heard about it.<sup>19</sup> A Jew from Shandokh (called by Jews, Shandokha) near Dohuk recalls that the state of affairs during the war was pitiable, "but we, in Shandokha, did not feel the war," he argued.

During the war, the authorities would 'capture' men and take them into the army. Nevertheless, in Shandokha, out of forty or fifty [some of whom were Jewish] males, our agha did not agree that even one person would go... It was his village and he did not allow any of the Jews to go to the army during that war... [Once every while] he would go to the *qishle* and when he returns in the afternoon, he would tell his servant: 'Go and tell all the residents [Muslims and Jews] to gather [for a meeting]... They would gather and ask him, 'What do you want, agha?' He explained that the *qāmmaqām* and the governor had asked him, 'Why he does not allow any of his 50–60 villagers to join the army?' The agha insisted that he would not allow his men to go to the army, because 'they are my servants [attending] all my vineyards [and] working for me. If they were drafted into the army, the village would cease to function and we would die from hunger...' In the *qishle*, they would all stand in his honor and show him respect... Thereupon he told us, 'Collect some money; tomorrow I shall give it to them. Maybe they will leave us alone.' This occurred daily [routinely], and every one gave [him] as much as he could, a rupee or *majidi*.<sup>20</sup> They would put it in a *kafiya* and give it to them...<sup>21</sup>

The agha of Shandokh was powerful enough to discourage the local authorities from drafting his villagers, though the bribe money given to local officials must have amplified his sway. Abbano, the agha of Shandokh, was very powerful. He managed to manipulate the draft

<sup>18</sup> Yoseph Armani (b. 1898), OHD, 6 (40).

<sup>19</sup> Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (I#33).

<sup>20</sup> *Rupee*, an Indian currency; *majidi*, an old Ottoman currency.

<sup>21</sup> Levi Mordechai Yaacob (I#27).

to suit his interests. Reportedly, the authorities enlisted into the army only one civilian from Shandokh. A personal conflict with that Jewish person led the agha to allow the authorities to draft him.

His name was Ḥammo from the family of Jum‘ā...Ḥammo owned a vineyard, and when the agha asked him to fulfill a certain task for him, he refrained from doing it, saying, ‘Leave me alone.’ The agha warned him that his fate would be bad and bitter...and then gave his name to the government. They eventually took him to the army, and he never returned. No one ever heard from him again.

In other words, in urban centers, the authorities were able to enlist the draftees more easily rather than in the rural communities, where tribal aghas were very protective of their subjects, particularly the Jews, who often functioned as the weavers of the traditional Kurdish clothes or as the agha’s land tenants.<sup>22</sup> Many Jews in the conscription age fled to the tribal region. For urban Jews, this was both natural and practical method to evade military service, as many were merchants and peddlers well acquainted with the surrounding tribesmen. Throughout the generations, they developed patron-subject relations as well as social and personal relations with tribal and village aghas who granted them patronage and allowed them to roam in their jurisdiction.<sup>23</sup> During the war, the population of the rural communities burgeoned, as many urban dwellers with their families, settled in the rural area. The Jews of urban Kurdistan enjoyed an option not shared by other urban Jews. The Jews in Baghdad, for instance, complained that during the war, “the Muslims fled to the villages and we, the Jews, had nowhere to go to seek shelter from the Turkish conqueror.”<sup>24</sup> The Jews of Zakho have been for centuries under the patronage of the surrounding tribes such as the Ṣindī, the Slēvānīs, the Gullis and the Gugis.<sup>25</sup> Some urban Jews looked for rescue during the runaway, through patronage of a tribal chief. Abraham Mordechai Mizraḥi (b. 1900) from Atrush, who reached conscription age during the height of the war “escaped from one place to another in order to hide in the mountains, to avoid being caught by

<sup>22</sup> See Dzięgiel Leszesk Kraków, “Hygiene and Attention to Personal Appearance among the Iraqi Kurds,” *Archiv Orientali* (Prasha, Poland), 50 (1082): 43–50.

<sup>23</sup> Me‘allim Levi (I#23); Me‘allim Abraham (I#15); Gurgo Naḥum Sabto (I#1); Ra‘ūf Katna (I#36).

<sup>24</sup> Barshan 1977: 14.

<sup>25</sup> The Ṣindī (in NA., Sindaye), the Gullis (NA., Gullaye), the Gugis (NA., Gugaye) and the Slēvānīs (NA., Slevanaye).

the authorities.”<sup>26</sup> David Yaer, a native of Qaradagh described how his brother deserted the army during the war.

He was afraid and decided to run away in order not to be killed [in the battlefield]. He managed to escape and came to a certain Arab [Kurdish] shaikh whom the government could not control [He told him:] ‘I am a Jew. I am a runaway]. I would prefer to be killed by you, rather than by the government. [If you allow me to stay], I am willing to be your servant.’ The shaikh agreed and my brother stayed there two-and-a-half years until the war was over and he returned home.<sup>27</sup>

During the war, “my family went to the village of Bōşal, where they had much fruit,” said Me‘allim Abraham (I#15). Likewise, Hārūn Judo’s (I#16) brother, David, found shelter in the village of Bōşal, when he escaped from the army. The family of Gurgo Naḥum Sabto (I#1) from Zakho found shelter at first in the village of Baijo in Turkey (33 miles north of Zakho). One or two years later, they moved to Bahnuna, the village of Ḥājjī Şadiq Biro, the chief agha of the Gulli district. The population of Bahnuna was strictly Muslim, but during the war, four or five Jewish families found shelter there, as in other Kurdish villages. Another Jew from Zakho, Sasson Kitāne, led two young men to Sharnakh that was distant from government centers, police stations and army camps. He placed them under the patronage of Ḥājjī Yūsuf Agha,<sup>28</sup> one of the aghas of Sharnakh.<sup>29</sup>

This pattern of crisis-type migration was in a complete opposition to the prevalent pattern of Jewish migration from rural villages to urban centers. Gurgo Naḥum Sabto (I#1) explained that urban Jews migrated because

the alternative was to die in the town...every one fled to his agha or to the [Kurdish] patron whom he knew, where he could seek shelter and protection [from the hand of the authorities]... [In the villages] they usually worked for their patron, for all they wanted was simply to earn their living.

Shabbatai Piro’s father from Zakho found shelter in a Kurdish village while escaping from the authorities. At that time, there was famine in Zakho as in this region. Because of the starvation in Zakho, he would

<sup>26</sup> Abraham Mordechai Mizrahi, OHD, 76 (11).

<sup>27</sup> David Yaer, OHD, 71 (11).

<sup>28</sup> On Ḥājjī Yūsuf [Isef] Agha, see above: 162.

<sup>29</sup> Ra’ūf Katna (I#36). The two young Jews were Zvi Haioka and Şāliḥ Dāwūd.

send a box of food from time to time to his mother. Gradually, all the members of his family joined him in the village.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, many families migrated to rural villages to join a family member who was an army deserter.

## 2. *Tax Substitute, Exemption and Desertion*

The Jews and Christians, who were *dhimmi*s, paid various taxes other than those paid by Muslim civilians, the most prominent of which was the *jizya*, or poll tax, that the Ottoman Empire abolished in 1855.<sup>31</sup> In that year, the Ottomans enacted a new compulsory draft law that excluded Christians and Jews, who instead paid *badal-‘askariyya* (Arab., military substitution tax), a tax exempting them from military service. The *jizya* was replaced with a new tax, which the non-Muslims paid in lieu of military service, called *badal ‘askari* or plainly *badel*. At the same time, the Turks abolished the official prohibition against carrying arms. A person who paid *badal ‘askari* to be redeemed from military service was known as *badalchi*.<sup>32</sup> From 1885 onward, this law was enforced more strictly,<sup>33</sup> although it exempted clerics, cripples and the chronically ill from the payment. In 1909, the Ottomans introduced a new law of compulsory service for every Ottoman citizen from the age of 19. A short time before the beginning of war, the draft age was lowered to 18 although non-Muslim citizens could be exempt from military service by paying a fee.<sup>34</sup> John Joseph, who studied the history of the Assyrian and Jacobite Christians in the Kurdish regions, regarded the additional tax paid by Christian and Jewish males above the age of sixteen as an advantage. He argued that “while the Muslims fought the battles of their shah and sultan, the non-Muslims stayed at home and attended to their fields and peddling.”<sup>35</sup> Following the gradual implementation of this decree, it appeared that the majority of the Jews in Kurdistan preferred to pay the *badal* tax in order to redeem themselves. Only those incapable of paying the tax were drafted into the army. It should be

<sup>30</sup> Shabbatai Piro, OHD, 56 (11).

<sup>31</sup> See Lewis (1984: 14–16, 65–66, 195 n. 9, 197 n. 24) and Stillman 1979: 95.

<sup>32</sup> *Ci* (pronounced *chi*) is a suffix used in Turkish to form other nouns indicating the occupation, association or belief of a person.

<sup>33</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999): 40.

<sup>34</sup> Meir 1989: 401.

<sup>35</sup> Maclean and Browne 1892: 122; Joseph 1961: 69.

noted that paying the *badal* was possible to an extent even during the war. Me'allim Levi (I#23) from Zakho argued, "Jews who had money redeemed themselves" by paying 50 gold liras every year. Apparently, in spite of the forceful conscription campaigns, some of the Jews were able to buy their exemption from conscription duty. Yona Tzidkiyahu from Zakho noted that at the height of war, in 1916,

my father, Sasson, was drafted into the army like the rest of the public, but he was released after three months following the ransom of 50 pounds of gold payment by my grandfather Morderchai to the officials... as was [the practice] maintained by the corrupt Ottoman ruler.<sup>36</sup>

Naḥum Ḥannah from Dohuk "bought his freedom three times," once every year, paying 50 gold liras each time.<sup>37</sup> Shabbatai Piro's father who was recruited to the army sent a letter from Haifa asking his family to pay the *badal* ransom on his behalf. His family was forced to sell property and only with the money collected in this transaction, they were capable of redeeming him.

Two months later, my father returned home. He stayed at home a couple of months, but the Turks came once again and wanted to take him [to the army]. Nevertheless, [this time] he fled to the mountains.<sup>38</sup>

Esther Mizraḥi (b. 1903) from Dohuk recalls that the authorities captured her father.

I cried and said to him that I would like to join him... Later on, my father bought [redeemed] himself from the Turks with twenty gold pounds... He came back home, but they caught him once again. Nevertheless, the second time he did not pay for his freedom but rather escaped from the war [into the mountains].<sup>39</sup>

Based on the testimonies of several informants it appears that the payment of the *badal* 'askarī by Jewish civilians during the war was a form of bribe, and that in fact the payment bought them only a brief relief from the military service.<sup>40</sup> The information suggests that it may have been a deferment of the military service for a one-year period or shorter.

<sup>36</sup> Tzidkiyahu 1981: 26–29.

<sup>37</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31). *Lira* is a Turkish coin of gold used especially in tribal regions, in which the Indian *rupee* introduced by the British never replaced it.

<sup>38</sup> Shabbatai Piro, OHD, 56 (11).

<sup>39</sup> Esther Mizraḥi, OHD, 60 (11).

<sup>40</sup> Sasson Naḥum (#31) from Dohuk; Y. Tzidkiyahu (1981: 26–9) from Zakho.

The Jews of Kurdistan viewed the war that befell them in November 1914 like a volcanic eruption. They did not consider it their own war, nor did they have any desire to be involved in it. The compulsory draft and the aggressive conscription campaign troubled the Jewish inhabitants. Most Jews had no tradition of military service. They had never been a part of the tribal Kurdish society, which had a combative nature. Naturally, they did not view themselves as ideal recruits for military service. The devastating effects of the war further deterred Jewish males from joining the army as it encouraged those serving in the army to desert. As the war stretched on, the Turks underwent increasing military difficulties and needed a constant flow of fresh soldiers. The Turkish army, faced with constant desertion of soldiers, imposed harsh punishments including the detainment of family members of deserters and the issuing of a death-sentence for repeated desertion. Family members of Jewish males, who fled from the conscription officers to Kurdish villages, were arrested in attempts to squeeze information out of them regarding the whereabouts of the deserters.<sup>41</sup> Jewish informants discuss the ongoing, harsh struggle between the authorities and the residents qualified for military service.

Yoseph Ben Binyamin from Nisibin (I#2) relates that some of those drafted to the army, “stole themselves,” or deserted, after a year or two in the army.

They simply ran away; and no one seemed to notice, there was such chaos [in the war] . . . No one was able to keep track of who attended and who was missing. There was complete disorder . . . My uncle, Menashe, deserted the army and escaped to a rural area, but the authorities caught his brother [Binyamin, the informant's father] and detained him twice. They said, ‘We want you to bring your brother to us.’ He replied, ‘Am I my brother's keeper?’

At last, his family bribed someone in order to have Binyamin released from jail. The Turks often employed this method against family members of deserters. They arrested not only male but also female relatives in order to force the deserters to surrender. Hārūn Judo (I#16) from Zakho recalled that both his brother David and his uncle Baruch deserted the army. His uncle deserted three times, once from Diyarbakir, once from Mosul and once from Sinjār:

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<sup>41</sup> Shabbatai Piro, OHD, 56 (11).

My aunt, Asno, was the only sister among seven brothers and the authorities took her to Diyarbakir. Later on, she was returned to Dohuk. She was not alone. They took thirty or forty women whose sons, brothers or husbands were deserters, but the Sultan [finally] allowed releasing them. This matter lasted a month... Rabbi Shalom Shimoni, the local Jewish *mukhtār* [head of a village or community] was a very influential man in Dohuk at the time. He gave the authorities guarantees for my aunt and promised that upon seeing her brother she would notify them... Subsequently, my aunt came back to Zakho.<sup>42</sup>

It is apparent that deserters exposed their family members to punitive action. For this reason, many of them, including some would-be draftees, migrated with their families to the rural area, which was safer.

The authorities employed harsh measures in dealing with repeated desertions. Deserters who were caught for the third time were liable for a hasty execution based on the *ʿurfī* [Arab., martial law] without a trial or the right of appeal.<sup>43</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31) from Dohuk was an eyewitness to an execution of army deserters. One of them was the husband of his maternal aunt:<sup>44</sup>

We were [pupils] at school [when the execution took place]. They took four or five men [who were all deserters]. Two of them were Jews. He [my aunt's husband, named Moshe Ave] was one of them, [and] another Jew called Shilo, and I think there were another Jew, two Christians and one Muslim. They [the guards] led them to *Nosht Qyshlo* [the police station<sup>45</sup>]. We were watching from the windows of the school, [a building of] two floors. They brought six [men] and blindfolded them. I was eleven or twelve years old. Twelve police officers stood against them, a ratio of two to one. There was also a Christian from Dohuk [among them]. What a man he was! Each pair of [police officers] shot one and killed them all. They fell to the ground. The Christian fell, but he did not die immediately. There was a [police officer] called Ḥamma Çhai, the bastard; with his army boots, he crushed his head [the informant demonstrates this act with his foot].

Esther Mizraḥi (b. 1903) also from Dohuk reported that her uncle was hung in Dohuk during the war.<sup>46</sup> Most likely, he was a third-time

<sup>42</sup> Hārūn Judo (I#16).

<sup>43</sup> Three-time deserters from the army during the war were subjected to death sentence. See also an essay on the subject in *Minḥat Ashur* 4 (1992): 82 (Hebrew).

<sup>44</sup> He was uncle of one named Jardo.

<sup>45</sup> *Nosht qyshlo*, originally a Turkish word for soldiers' winter quarters (*qış*, in Turk., means winter).

<sup>46</sup> Esther Mizraḥi, OHD, 60 (11).

deserter. Reportedly, two other Jewish deserters were pardoned, thanks to the petition of the local rabbi, Ḥakham Shalom Shimoni who convinced the *qāmmaqām* that

their execution would not help the authorities, because hey had already tasted death after hearing the terrible verdict while sitting in solitary confinement, dressed in the clothes of those condemned to death.<sup>47</sup>

The Ottoman authorities communicated decrees to the public through the heads of the *millets*, or the religious communities. Accordingly, the *mukhtārs* of the Jewish communities would post lists with the names of the draftees and announce other government decrees such as the confiscation of goods. They would gather the congregation at the synagogue or would announce the decrees during the public prayers. The *mukhtār* would also accompany the draftees to the drafting officers. The *mukhtārs* of *millets* were exempted from military service by special decree of the Ottoman Empire, known as “*Cemaat Başları*” (Tur., heads of communities). Naḥum Ḥannah, the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community in Dohuk, was therefore exempt from military service. Interestingly, the Turks did not observe even this exemption because of the growing demand for soldiers and the general disintegration of the empire during the war. According to his son, Sasson Naḥum (I#31), when Turkey’s position deteriorated,

the authorities ignored neither the “dry ones” [the elders] nor the “fresh ones” [the youngsters]. When the state of affairs became desperate, they took [even] my father [the *mukhtār* of Dohuk Jewish community] to the army.

### B. *Migration because of Scarcity of Food*

Another harsh outcome of the war was the severe food shortage that affected the population of the Empire, civilians and soldiers alike. The power of the army to confiscate the remaining goods and animals from the civil population, made the situation even worse. A Jew from Whela recalls that

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<sup>47</sup> Shabbatai Alfiyeh 1990: 140–141.

when the Turkish soldiers returned from the battlefield, they passed through Whela...they would come and go...asking for food, bread. They were dying of hunger.<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi (I#24) from Rabatke stressed the hunger and food shortage during the war: “Even if persons had money, there was nothing to purchase.”<sup>49</sup> He recalls the flow of refugees from Turkey in the middle of the war, the food shortage and the death of many from hunger. The hardships of this war were immense. In August 1917, the Christian missionary Rev. Allen reported from Kurdistan the

misery and distress of the Kurds...Thousands are in rags and begging in the streets...all kinds of diseases are raging...and if no help reaches them, they will all die of hunger. There is a great famine in Kurdistan.<sup>50</sup>

Hārūn Judo (I#16) from Zakho recalls that all the Jews who remained in Zakho had hardly anything to eat. Judo’s father, Yoseph, traveled as far as Egypt for seven years leaving his wife and children behind:

At that time, when my brother Sabto was drafted to the army, two years after the beginning of the war [1916], I remember that it was impossible to find a loaf of bread even for a dinar of gold.<sup>51</sup> We would go to the fields and cut *karange* [NA., wild artichoke] that could be fried and eaten.<sup>52</sup>

Several testimonies referred to the hardships of war during which many persons almost died from hunger.<sup>53</sup> Me‘allim Levi (I#23) stressed the fatal famine in Zakho:

During [a period of] six months, one hundred and seventy of the Jews of Zakho died from starvation and disease, [when] sick refugees came to Zakho and we became sick too.

Sasson Naḥum (I#31) from Dohuk also stressed the extreme difficulties experienced during the war and attributed it to the flow of Armenian refugees, who escaped from southeastern Turkey following the massacre

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<sup>48</sup> Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (I#33).

<sup>49</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981, Supplement: 48.

<sup>50</sup> KM 12, no. 12, December 1917: 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Dīnār*, from Late Greek *dēānarion*, from Latin *dēnārius* was formerly used in several units of gold and silver currency in the Middle East.

<sup>52</sup> *Kereng* (Kur.) or *Karange* (NA), whose botanical name is *Cynara Cardunculus*, is wild artichoke, cardoon.

<sup>53</sup> Gurgo Naḥum Sabto (I#1).

of Armenians in Turkey from mid 1915 onwards. “Many died in the famine” and “persons ate [parts of] the dead bodies,” he said, having seen with his own eyes the refugees who overflowed the town taking a dead cat from the garbage to eat it.<sup>54</sup>

The scarcity of food touches upon one of the forceful measures employed by the Turkish authorities throughout the war, the confiscation of food storages, which has often been mentioned in the testimonies of Jewish informants. The difficulties on the battlefield as well as the food shortage forced the authorities to exploit all the national resources as well as the private, civilian recourses. During the war, the authorities passed three confiscation decrees according to which the army could confiscate one-tenth to one-twentieth of an individual’s store. They confiscated animals, butter, oil, grains, cereals and more. According to Sasson Naḥum (I#31) of Dohuk, they “took whatever the public had at home” for the sake of the war effort. The confiscation procedure was called *mubāyaʿa* (Arab. lit., homage, pledge of allegiance). Abraham Mordechai Mizraḥi (b. 1900) from Atrush recalls:

With the increasing difficulties on the battlefield, the Turks did not give food to their soldiers. I know because my brother was drafted into the army. The army confiscated whatever was in the storage [of the villagers and merchants] while the population suffered from hunger.<sup>55</sup>

Meʿallim Abraham (I#15) from Zakho recalls that the army confiscated a white thoroughbred owned by his family. Naḥum Ḥannah was a merchant and the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community in Dohuk. His family managed to survive during the war thanks to the wheat they had in storage. As the war continued, the Turks confiscated a large portion of this store.<sup>56</sup>

### C. *Forced Labor*

The forced labor on behalf of the Empire was among the vigorous measures imposed on civilians by the Turks during the war. The personal

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<sup>54</sup> The Armenian massacre resulted in between 600,000 and 1.5 million deaths according to Armenian and other sources while the Turkish government continues to deny that genocide occurred and argues that a much smaller number of deaths occurred. See for instance, Hidirash 1997.

<sup>55</sup> Abraham Mordechai Mizraḥi, OHD, 76 (11)

<sup>56</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31).

experience of Hārūn Judo (I#16) from Zakho is worthy of mention. The police enlisted him for *sukhra* (Arab., ‘forced labor’) when he was a thirteen-year-old boy, with two elderly Jewish males overseen by a police officer, to lead twenty-four donkeys, each loaded with four cans of kerosene, all the way from Zakho to Jezira. Judo related his story with a touch of humor that belied the true nature of forced labor:

This journey lasted eight days instead of one day... The authorities gave us no drink or food... neither to us nor to the donkeys. On the first day, after departing from Zakho, we arrived at a Christian village, Bıdaro. I was in charge of three donkeys. The police officer went to a Christian home and told them, ‘this boy and the donkeys will stay with you until tomorrow. Take care of them.’ Of the three donkeys, two belonged to me and to my brother David. At night, I entered the stable and the barn looking for food... There was no food and no straw. As I was searching, I realized that there was an echo from the wall... I climbed on the donkey and threw myself upwards... I entered and found a hidden stash of wheat. I took some 20 kg of wheat. I fed the donkeys some 5 kg and some 15 kg I hid under the containers of kerosene... On the second day we reached Qasrıke, about 15 kilometer [9 miles] from Zakho. On the third day, [we arrived] at Tel-Kobi... The *mukhtār* of the village gave us a plate of food and a loaf of bread each. They were rich. It was a Muslim village. From there, we went to Waḥsıt. Tel-Kobi was a *muduriyye* [a town where the *mudır* or district officer is stationed]. They told us, ‘Go to get bread.’ They supplied bread to the army there. ‘You are considered army as well.’ We waited from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. They gave us a dry piece of bread that we could not eat it. We soaked it in water until morning. It was spring. There was already grass growing for the sheep, but the donkeys ate it with earth [so they remained unsatisfied]... In Tel-Kobi I met someone with a gun on his shoulder. He asked me, ‘Are you Jewish?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He asked me, ‘What are you doing here?’ I replied, ‘I am going to the *qāmmaqām* of Jezira’... He cursed the *qāmmaqām* and said, ‘Sell me the donkey with the kerosene.’ I answered, ‘I cannot.’ He threatened, ‘Give it to me and it will be good for you, but if you do not, it will be bad for you.’ I had no choice. He gave me *majıdı*... The police officer who accompanied us asked me, ‘What happened?’ I told him, ‘The donkey died.’ He wrote down, ‘The donkey died.’ We came to Chamzıra where there was a watermill. The owner... asked me, ‘What are you carrying?’ I told him, ‘Kerosene.’ He said, ‘Sell it to me.’ I said, ‘I cannot sell it. It is not mine.’ He, too, cursed the *qāmmaqām*. I told him, ‘If you bring us bread... we will sell it to you,’ because we were hungry... He brought me bread and I ate it. I went to the police officer and told him that the donkey with its load of kerosene drowned in the water. He wrote it down... I went to the two elders... Moshe Zakho and Abraham b. Ḥabo ‘Ate. I gave them half the bread. I felt compassion for them... We continued to another village that had tall wheat growing. They did not feed us, but

the donkeys were allowed to eat the wheat and barley. We continued and one donkey fell to the ground. The police officer said, ‘Stay here until the donkey dies.’ I sold that donkey for one *majidi* as well... On the eighth day, we took a boat headed for Jezira, 2 kilometers [1.2 miles] distant from Jezira... The rivers was wide; all the animals were on board. I sold the fourth donkey on board... twenty donkeys were left. We reached the *qāimmaqām* and gave him the kerosene. He said, ‘Come tomorrow and receive your payment.’ We did not believe that he would pay us. We would kiss his feet [if it were true]... The next day, Saturday, he gave us 20 *majidis*. Each one took six *majidi* and with the remaining two *majidi*, we bought watermelon seeds. Jezira had Jews in it. I went to a woman, Naze, an aunt of Amram Ellah.<sup>57</sup> I told her we had arrived on *sukhra* and had no food. ‘I would like to bring you some wheat.’ She was glad. She knew me. I gave her half of the wheat in my possession. She made us 12 *pitās* [round flat bread]. It was good. With my money, I bought four *patire* [packs of cigarette paper]. Each package contained 100 boxes of [cigarette] papers. With these four *patire*, we would be able to survive a long time in Zakho, by selling each package for four or five *majidi*...

Hārūn Judo and the two elders returned to Zakho. Following the war, he became a successful merchant in Zakho.<sup>58</sup>

#### D. Casualties of Jewish Soldiers

The hardship and anguish of wartime was engraved upon the memories of the Jewish informants. Despite all the attempts to evade army service, many Jews could not avoid being drafted into the army. Me‘allim Levi (I#23) from Zakho argued, “Not many Jews were killed in the war,” because the Jews gradually redeemed themselves. The Jews remembered well those who did not returned.<sup>59</sup> David Yaeer and Yaacob Abraham Raphael of Sulaimaniya reported that one hundred and seventy male Jews were drafted into the army during the war and only five of them returned alive.<sup>60</sup> These accounts suggest that although Kurdistani Jews attempted to avoid army service during the war, many of those who

<sup>57</sup> Amram Ellah, a patriarch of a Jewish family from Zakho, whose children became very successful businessmen in the construction and hotel industry in Israel.

<sup>58</sup> More on Hārūn Judo (I#16) see part I, the section on Zakho.

<sup>59</sup> Naḥum Sharabi (I#40) from Zakho recalls that Naḥum, the father of Hannah, his sister in law, never returned from the war. Likewise, Yaacob Yitzḥak from Karasor, near Dohuk, recollected that some of the Jews who served in the army during the war returned while others were killed, OHD, 78 (11).

<sup>60</sup> David Yaeer and Yaacob Abraham Raphael, OHD, 71 (11).

were drafted lost their lives. Yoseph Ben Binyamin (I#2) from Nisibin argued that between a quarter and one-third of the Jews of Nisibin who served in the army died in the war, similar to the general ratio of the casualties of the war in the Turkish army. He calculated that about five or six men were killed in the war out of approximately twenty Jewish families in Nisibin.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Eliyahu Khodeda (b. 1903) from Nisibin argued that soldiers who were drafted into the army “did not return,” his uncle included.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE END OF THE WAR AND THE YEARS FOLLOWING

Rev. B. Allen who toured Kurdistan towards the end of the war narrated the following:

The war laid the Kurdish cities, towns and homes waste, already in 1915. The people fled into the mountains where multitudes fell in battles or were massacred. After the armies had swayed back and forth eight times over our field, we also had to leave the field. Now the remnants of the Kurds are returning. But everything is ruined, and crops have failed. And worst of all, there is none to help them.<sup>1</sup>

The war devastated the urban population of Kurdistan. By the end of November 1919, Turkish officials had left all the towns in the Mosul area, and the Turkish flags had been removed.<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman Empire lost the war and the British reign began mainly in Iraqi Kurdistan. The British (who conquered the area during the war) reorganized the country and did away with the three former provinces (*vilayet*) of the Ottoman Empire: Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. Iraq consisted of new 14 provinces (*liwā's*) headed by a *mutaşarrif* (governor of a province) and the Kurds dwelled mainly in five provinces: Kirkuk, Arbil, Sulaimaniya, Diyala and Mosul.<sup>3</sup> The end of the war signaled the gradual return to the urban centers of Jewish soldiers who survived the war and of Jews who sought shelter in the rural area.<sup>4</sup> The years following the war constituted a difficult period for both the Jewish population as well as the Kurdish and Christian population as waves of migrants and refugees fled into Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Among them were the Assyrians refugees of southeastern Turkey who had been settled in Iraq where they were given land in and around Zakho, Amadiya and Dohuk.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KM 12, no. 12, December 1917: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Iraq Administration Reports 1914–1932 4: 467.

<sup>3</sup> Harris 1958: 28.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Shabbatai Piro, who escaped to a rural village during the war, returned to Zakho three years after the end of the war, in 1921, OHD, 56 (11).

<sup>5</sup> See Kamal M. Ahmad, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> See K. Attar, *The minorities of Iraq during the Period of the Mandate, 1920–1932* (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1977). On the relations between the Church of England and the Assyrians' church of the East, see Coakley 1992.

The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire caused a decline in the economic standing of the urban population. Zakho, for instance, suffered from a narrowing of opportunities and a change of borders as it was situated, after the war, a short distance from the new three-way border between Turkey, Iraq and Syria.<sup>7</sup> These new borders impeded trade possibilities for the Jewish merchants who used to travel as far as Bashqala, Van and Damascus during the Ottoman period. The narrowing borders signaled an end to the previous commercial possibilities for the Jews of Zakho. Following the war, local Jews migrated in waves both to Baghdad and to the Holy Land, or Palestine, the results of which were a gradual decline of urban Jewish communities in Kurdistan. At the end of the war the majority of the Christians and the Jews in Kurdistan, who had previously been under Ottoman and Persian jurisdiction, found themselves under British rule. The establishment of the British mandate in both Palestine and Iraq made it easier for Jews in Iraq, who yearned for the return to Zion,<sup>8</sup> to ‘travel’ to Palestine. Immigrants who had already established themselves in the Holy Land invited their relatives to join them. The horrors of the war and the state of decay in Kurdistan encouraged many young persons to immigrate. Consequently, in the years following the war, a growing number of Jewish immigrants moved to Palestine from Kurdistan. This wave of immigration ended only when the British sealed the gates of Palestine to Jewish immigrants.

The arrival of the British in Kurdistan signaled hope. The economy improved slowly but gradually as the British took over the administration of Iraq and built up its infrastructure. The Jews of Kurdistan recalled, “Only after the British came, things began to improve.”<sup>9</sup> Hārūn Judo (I#16) from Zakho affirmed similarly:

At the end of the Hebrew month of *Ellul* [the 12th month of the Jewish calendar, November 1918], the British entered Zakho in four cars. We were astonished, ‘What kind of object is this, walking iron, flying iron [i.e., airplanes]?’ Persons began to work for the British paving roads [in the Public Works Department]. Small boys, from the age of ten to twelve, would receive half a rupee. Older boys would receive one rupee

<sup>7</sup> See Feroz Aḥmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> The yearnings for the return to Zion, or the Holy Land, are deeply rooted in the Jewish heritage, and are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and in the daily prayers.

<sup>9</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31).

per day. There were Indians in the British army, so we learned to speak with them. They used to sing and teach us songs.<sup>10</sup>

Hārūn Judo worked like many young Jews for the British administration, paving new roads from Zakho to Mosul, to Amadiya and alongside the big bridge in Zakho.<sup>11</sup> The introduction of new jobs and infrastructure initiatives offered new prospects for the inhabitants of Iraqi Kurdistan, and many Kurdistan Jews managed to benefit from the arrival of the British. The British army had leased the village of Afirme, near Zakho, which was an estate that belonged to Moshe Gabbai, the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community of Zakho. In return, the British granted him a license to open a *Shell* franchise, the first gas station in Zakho. The British also needed lumber in huge quantities for both their infrastructure initiatives in Iraq and their industry back home. Many Jewish merchants who worked in the lumber business prospered as they met the British demand for lumber. At the same time, money flowed into northern Iraq in the form of compensation granted by the British to Assyrian refugees previously from the Hakkari region in Turkey who had settled in Iraq following the war.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the arrival of the British in Iraqi Kurdistan offered new hope for its anguished inhabitants, but the revolt of the Kurdish tribes and the subsequent unrest affected economy and stability of the country.

Despite the optimism following the end of the war, the economic and political state of the Jews was still unstable, especially during wartime, and then again in the periods of crisis occurred frequently in Iraq during the 1920s, 1930s and the 1940s.<sup>13</sup> The following testimony by Rabbi Alwan Avidani of Amadiya sheds light on the troubles experienced by Jews during the exodus of Assyrian refugees. Hakham Avidani would travel at times to the neighboring Jewish villages to slaughter animals and provide kosher meat for Jewish villagers. Once, before the high holidays (September-October 1919), he traveled to three neighboring

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<sup>10</sup> There were several Indian divisions of the British army in Iraq after World War I. See Edmonds 1957: 28, 31, 34, 37.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on the construction of roads and infrastructure in Iraq by the British after the war, see Hamilton 1937 and Gavish 1999: 90.

<sup>12</sup> Based on the interviews with Hārūn Judo (I#16), Salīm Gabbai (I#11) and Ra'ūf Katna (I#36). Menashe Eliyahu b. Mordechai, OHD, 70 (11), reported as well on this village that belonged to Moshe Gabbai and non-tribal Muslim Kurds cultivated it.

<sup>13</sup> Consult Meir (1989, 1995, 2002), Zakkai 1996 (Hebrew), Shohet 1998, and Kazzaz (1991, 2002).

Jewish villages, ‘Ardin, Ainskhakh and Aqdish, many of whose residents had migrated from Amadiya.

I remember that once when I traveled to slaughter animals... the Christian *Atwis* [Assyrians or *Tiyārīs*] murdered a Jew named Ḥayyo Mardana under a tree near ‘Ain Kadḥat, called ‘Ain Shasa, and he was buried there and they looted all his property. Because of this event, I stayed during *Yom Kippur* [the Day of Atonement] in the village of Bamarne with all the congregations of these villages... At that time there was great fear in these towns of the Assyrian Christians who would kill and loot. This is why we prayed and cried wholeheartedly on *Yom Kippur* and on the following day, there was relief—it was a miracle—and we traveled up to Amadiya, my hometown.<sup>14</sup>

The plight of the Jews of Zakho is reflected in two letters sent from Zakho within 13 years after the war. The first letter was sent to the Zionist Organization in London in 1922, and was signed by the *Ḥakham Bashi*<sup>15</sup> and twenty-three residents of Zakho. The war and the subsequent border modifications hurt the economic state of Zakho, which was located on the commercial crossroads between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. The wealthy merchants of the Jewish community lost their income, and the community became poor and needy. The letter mentions that members of the community worked as lumberjacks or loggers, porters and carriers of goods, artisans and peddlers. These professions did not provide enough income for the laborers. The peddling profession was extremely dangerous. More than thirty Jewish peddlers who roamed in the surrounding mountain villages to sell their wares were killed. The economic hardships forced some members of the community to borrow money from loan sharks; others were subjugated to rigid gentile masters in the town. After years of Turkish rule, the Jewish leadership was perplexed by the new British administration. They complained that they did not have able English speakers or persons skilled in lobbying on behalf of the community. “We have no one to rely on,” the letter states, “aside from God our father and your distinguished organization” (referred to the Zionist organization in London). At the end of the letter, the writers appealed for help and for immigration

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<sup>14</sup> Alwan Avidani 1972, vol. 5: 546. Several other sources, some Christian, indicate that groups of Assyrians refugees raided and looted Kurdish villages. See Wigram (1929: 227), Stafford (1935: 43) and Joseph (1961: 161).

<sup>15</sup> On the origin of this office in the Ottoman Empire in 1835, see Lewis 1984: 174–75.

certificates to the Holy Land.<sup>16</sup> This letter reveals that the Jews lacked the sophisticated leadership necessary to deal with the new English administration. The Jewish leadership of Zakho was capable of dealing with the tribal leadership of the surrounding region and with the local government officials. The coming of the new, English speaking, European administration put the Jewish leadership in an unfamiliar and perplexing position, to the point that they decided to write a letter to the Zionist organization of London.

Nine years later, the *Hakam Bashi* of Zakho sent another letter to Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the head of the National Jewish Committee in Palestine.<sup>17</sup> The letter describes the ongoing distress of the Jews of Zakho, Amadiya and Dohuk, in the period following the war through 1931. In particular, it notes cases of robberies and murders of peddlers and the abduction of Jewish women. Before the war, the Jewish merchants would travel as far as Turkey and Syria. In these days, however, the letter states, “whoever travels to Turkey is either robbed or murdered and we cannot travel even one-hour’s journey from our town to procure supplies for our families.” This letter raised the concerns of the Jews regarding emigration:

About fifty households wish to emigrate, but many of them do not have the necessary expenses for the travel and the certificates. Some of the Jews have some money but they are not competent in the administrative procedures to implement their desire. Some other Jews own houses, the sale of which will provide the travel expenses, but there are no buyers. Some of them have jewelry whose sale will not provide enough for the travel expenses.

The letter ends with the request for immigration certificates and financial help.<sup>18</sup> This letter was written in response to Ben-Zvi’s desire to verify the information on the murders and robberies of Jews from Zakho. The British compiled another report on the plight of the Jews in July 1931, possibly in response to the appeal of Ben-Zvi, after he had expressed concern about the security of the Jews. This British report attempted to downplay the poor state of security of the Jews. In August 1931, Ben-Zvi transferred all the above-mentioned documents to Haim

<sup>16</sup> Zvi Yehuda, A letter from the Jews of Zakho to the Zionist organization in London 1922, *Neharde’a*, 8 (1990): 34–35 (Hebrew); Gavish (1999: 142–44; 2004: 162–66).

<sup>17</sup> Hebrew, *ha-va’ad ha-le’umi* (הוועד הלאומי).

<sup>18</sup> Gavish (1999: 144–45; 2004: 164–66).

Arlozorov, in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Ben-Zvi recommended no further investigation into past events such as

...how many murders occurred and what did the government do to punish the murderers...But I suggest taking the necessary measures to guarantee permits and certificates for those Jews from Zakho, Amadiya, and elsewhere in Kurdistan who wish to immigrate to the Holy Land.<sup>19</sup>

This correspondence confirms that emigration to the Holy Land was one of the main concerns of the Jewish community in Kurdistan after the war. The main motivations for emigration were security and economy.

#### A. *New Political Developments*

World War I ended with the British occupation of the three Ottoman provinces that composed modern Iraq: Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. This British rule encompassed most of the Kurdistan Jews under the British mandate in Iraq and improved the security for minorities. It was not accidental that the massacre of Assyrians in 1933 occurred less than a year after the termination of the British mandate, although the British remained influential in Iraq until 1944.<sup>20</sup> The general position of the Jews improved with the entrance of the British to Iraq, as demonstrated in the following examples. A Jew, Sir Sasson Yehezkel, known as Sasson Effendi, was the first Iraqi Finance Minister and served in five out of the first six Iraqi governments.<sup>21</sup> The Jews of Iraq were given four seats in the Iraqi parliament, two delegates from Baghdad, and one each from Basra and Mosul.<sup>22</sup> The contact with the Jewish community in

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> On the massacres of Assyrians in Iraq, consult Wigram (1929: 227); Stafford (1935: 43); Joseph (1961: 161); and Annon., *The Assyrian Tragedy* (Annemasse, 1934), which discusses the national struggle of the Assyrians. Assyrians believe the author was Mar Eshai Mār Shimʿon XXIII, a Cambridge University graduate and Patriarch of the Church of the East. The book was reprinted in January 1988 by Mr. Sargis Michael and is now made available online in its entirety by “Assyrian Information Management” (AIM), the organization that manages Atour. See also Genocides against the Assyrian Nation, compiled by the staff of the Ashurbanipal Library, 400 Mclewin Ave. #705, Scarborough, ONT Canada M1B5G4.

<sup>21</sup> Longrigg 1953: 130–142; Saṭīʿ al-Ḥaṣārī, *muzakarāti fi al-ʿIraq*, vol. I, Beirut 1921–27: 152; Shina 1955: 119–122; Shoheit 1981: 129–132.

<sup>22</sup> Sasson Tzemaḥ of Mosul was a member of the Iraqi parliament representing the Jews in this (Kurdish) district. He served four terms, between 1929 and 1951.

Palestine also improved thanks to better communication between the two countries. Teachers and emissaries from the Jewish community in Palestine promoted interest in the prospective emigration to Palestine.<sup>23</sup> Arnold T. Wilson, a highly ranked British army officer in Iraq and an opponent of the Zionist movement, stressed in his book that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was received with indifference in Iraq. N. Kazzaz argues on the other hand that nationalist circles protested against the declaration immediately after its announcement.<sup>24</sup> In any case, the escalating events in Palestine especially from 1929 onwards prompted incitement against the Jews in Iraq. Business strikes and demonstrations instilled fear into the Jewish residents of Baghdad, causing many of them to close their stores for two weeks.<sup>25</sup>

During the period preceding World War II, relations between Muslims and Jews in Kurdistan were not marked by hostility, friction and violence.<sup>26</sup> Jewish informants characterized their relations with Muslim Kurds as “generally good.” The status of the Jews and their relations with their neighbors were notably better in the towns of Aqra and Zakho than in other Kurdish enters. The Jews of Zakho fondly stressed their reminiscences of Saturday encounters with urban Muslim Kurds. They voluntarily described how on their way back from the *Sabbath* service at the synagogue Muslim Kurds, out of respect for them, would extinguish their cigarettes. This recollection represents the by-gone days when relations between Jews and Muslims in Kurdistan were good. On the other hand, helpless individuals such as elders of the community and pupils on their way to and from the school reported incidents of harassment by Muslim Kurds.

The emergence of the Zionist movement and Arab nationalism in the 20th century changed the position of Jews in Arab countries. Elsewhere, a Jew could embrace or support Zionism without being seen as a traitor by his fellow citizens. In Iraq, the authorities viewed the Zionist movement as anti-Arab, and a Zionist Jew was considered a traitor in the mind of Arab nationalists.<sup>27</sup> The establishment of the State of

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<sup>23</sup> For more details about Jewish travelers and emissaries in Kurdistan, consult A. Ben-Yaacob, “Emissaries from Eretz Israel in Baghdad, Kurdistan, India and China,” *Mehqare erez yisrael*, Jerusalem, 5 (1955): 257–86 (Hebrew).

<sup>24</sup> Kazzaz 1981: 189, n. 113.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–91.

<sup>26</sup> Gavish (1999: 40–42) reached the same conclusion concerning the Jews of Zakho.

<sup>27</sup> Meir 1989: 455.

Israel affected the relations between Jews and Muslims throughout the Arab world and in Iraq as well. Polak comments on the changes in headgear worn by Iraqi Jews. During this period of transition, Iraqi Jews shifted from wearing the Turkish *fez* or *tarbush*, which was popular in the late Ottoman period, to the *sidāra* (pl. *sidāyir*), a common boat-shaped Iraqi headgear usually of black velvet that was worn by modern Iraqi nationalists. This subtle gesture attests to the attempt to assimilate as well as the decreasing self-confidence of the Jews.<sup>28</sup>

From the mid-1930s, the Arab nationalist movement and anti-British sentiments set the tone in Iraqi politics and in the streets of Iraqi and Kurdish urban centers. With it came increased anti-Jewish feelings. In 1934, Benzion Israeli who came from Palestine in search of Iraqi palm trees visited several Jewish communities in northern Iraq, Kirkuk, Arbil, Mosul, Dohuk and Sandur. He was given some information on other communities that he could not visit in person, such as Sulaimaniya, Aqra, Koi-Sanjaq, Rawanduz and Amadiya. He noted the scattering and isolation of the Jewish communities and came to several conclusions on the relations between the Jews of Kurdistan and their Muslim neighbors.

The exile here is bitter and cruel sevenfold. The Jews here are trampled underfoot. They are constantly humiliated and insulted everywhere. They are treated with contempt and are often hit, rather individually, when assaulted, and more than anything else suffer the constant fear of being uprooted from all that ties these communities to this land of exile. I came across Jewish communities that are awaiting a miracle that will redeem them from this terrible exile—the Arabian exile—and take them to *Eretz-Yisrael*. There is no [community] organization and persons do not speak with one another [about this sensitive subject]. Some of them would only speak with me in private and begged me to help them to immigrate... The state of these communities is bad and there is no hope for betterment. One cannot report the abusers to the authorities as ‘they would kill us’ [and] ‘it would not help us,’ say those in the Mosul community. ‘If there were no rain and a famine ensued, they would exterminate us, say persons in Kirkuk. Many are traders, in stores, and peddlers, and their incomes are unrealized in the form of bills unpaid by the Muslim residents of the country. There is no hope of recovering the debts or even part of them. Many would settle for receiving just the amount of money needed for immigration. There are many whose capital is in the form of debts unpaid by the gentiles and at the same time they have no money that would suffice for their immigration... There is a question, how to realize

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<sup>28</sup> Polak 1960: 42; Sohet 1981: 150–51.

their property- houses and other estates. They fear that if their wish to emigrate were revealed, it would provide another pretext to oppress [and exploit] them. Their highest priority is finding a way to emigrate.<sup>29</sup>

Following the end of the British Mandate in 1932, the new Iraqi regime experienced five military *coups d'état* between 1933 and April 1939, and five different persons served as prime ministers. The Iraqi body politic was unstable.<sup>30</sup> The fragile reign of King Ghāzī enabled the emergence of Arab nationalist forces and the activity of nationalist groups whose leaders were Palestinian and Syrian refugees who received shelter in Iraq. The German Ambassador to Iraq during the Nazi regime, Dr. Fritz Grobba, initiated pro-German Nazi propaganda, which eventually influenced several ministers, general managers and high-ranking officials.<sup>31</sup> On top of all this, there was a strong German presence in Iraq. Since the late Ottoman period, German army officers had trained the Turkish officers, including the Arab (Iraqi) officers, and Germany was highly respected among these circles. When Hitler rose to power and began to re-establish Germany's status as a military superpower, Iraqi admiration for Nazi Germany blossomed. Likewise, Nazi propaganda against the Jews increased, together with that of the Palestinian mufti, Ḥajj Amīn al-Ḥussainī.<sup>32</sup>

The deterioration of the state of security in Palestine as well as the outbreak there of the uprising in 1936 increased the hostility between Jews and Arabs in Iraq. The escalation revealed a growing Iraqi involvement in the war in Palestine,<sup>33</sup> the Iraqis provided not only material and moral support the Palestinians, but also sent between 100 and 500 fighters to assist in their war against the Jews.<sup>34</sup> Following the collapse of the revolt in British Palestine in 1939, Ḥajj Amīn al-Ḥussainī (1897–1974), the mufti of Jerusalem, fled to Iraq. There he became “the most important and influential man in Iraq, both in religious and political circles,” according to an American delegate.<sup>35</sup> In

<sup>29</sup> Benzion Israeli 1934.

<sup>30</sup> Consult Ireland 1937; Kalidar 1979; Kazzaz (1991; 2002); Khadduri 1951; Longrigg 1953 and Marr 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen 1972: 32–3; Khadduri 1960: 243–69.

<sup>32</sup> Ireland 1937: 436.

<sup>33</sup> Consult Sylvia Ḥaim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (University of California: 1962) and Y. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel*, Misha Louvish, trans. (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1972). Both books have a large bibliography on the subject.

<sup>34</sup> Kazzaz 1981: 191.

<sup>35</sup> L. Hirshowitz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (Tel Aviv, 1965): 86 (Hebrew).

January 1941, he sent a letter of support to Hitler.<sup>36</sup> Iraq became the land of exile for many Palestinian figures and refugees, and from their position there, they continually whipped up hatred against the Jews.<sup>37</sup> They slandered the Zionists in both Palestine and Iraq and branded the Jews in Iraq as traitors and supporters of the Zionists.<sup>38</sup> The growing Palestinian presence in Iraq and the burgeoning Iraqi involvement in the struggle in Palestine increased anti-Jewish sentiment in Iraq. This conflict blurred the differentiation between Zionism and Judaism.<sup>39</sup> These developments served as the background for the deterioration in the status of the Jews in Iraq. From 1936 onwards, Jews in Iraq reported an increase in oppression and in the number of incidents of incitement against them.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Khadduri 1960, appendix IV: 378–380.

<sup>37</sup> On Ḥājī Amīn al-Ḥussainī see Kazzaz 1991: 204–9; Zvi Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti*, Tel-Aviv, 1989 (Hebrew). Amongst the companions of the Mufti were Jamāl al-Ḥussainī, Dr. Dāwūd al-Ḥussainī, ‘Abd al-Qāder al-Ḥussainī, Ḥassan Salāma, Amīl Jūrī, Mūsa al-‘Alāmī, Akrām Zu‘aitar, Amīn Rwaiḥa, Darwīsh al-Mqadādī, Fawzī al-Kawkajī, Dr. Amīn al-Tamimī, Shaikh Ḥasan Abu Sa‘ūd, Ishāq Darwīsh, Maṣṣūr Dāwūd, Salīm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. See Eliyahu Agasi, *20 years for the pogroms in the Jews of Baghdad*, Tel-Aviv, 1961: 9 (Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> Meir 1995: 113–14; Luks 1977: 30–39; Appel 1983: 56.

<sup>39</sup> Kazzaz 1981: 195.

<sup>40</sup> See Bar-Moshe 1977. There is an earlier Arabic version of this book, entitled *Al-khurīj min al-Iraq* (The exodus from Iraq), Jerusalem, 1975. See also Kazzaz 1991; Gavish (1999, 2004), Haim Saadon, “The Palestinian Element’ in violent Eruptions between Jews and Muslims in Muslim countries,” *Pe’amim*, 63 (1995): 86–131 (Hebrew).

## CHAPTER THREE

### JEW, KURDS AND ARABS, 1941–1952

The lack of documentation on the Jews of Kurdistan allows merely a limited discussion of the Jewish experience. The information on the Jews of Iraq, however, is superior, and as Longrigg articulates in discussing these years, “the art of living in Iraq, and surviving bad times, was no new” to the Iraqi Jews.<sup>1</sup> The eleven years between 1941 and 1952 composed the final chapter of the Jewish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. Two major events that occurred during this period reverberated throughout the Kurdish regions. The first event that rocked the Jews in Iraq was the coup of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī in mid-1941 and the consequent pogroms against Jews in Baghdad known as “Farhud.” The second event or in fact, a chain of events started roughly with the partition plan of Palestine between an Arab state and the Jewish state that was ratified by the UN on 29 November 1947. Britain announced its intention to terminate its mandate over Palestine on 15 May 1948, but hostilities broke out before the British departure. While the Arab countries opposed the partition plan, the Jews accepted it and proclaimed the Jewish state on 14 May 1948. The following day, five Arab armies, from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq invaded Israel, but were repelled. Of these five states, only Iraq had no common border with the Jewish state. Therefore, its participation in the war was another indication for the acute hostility against the Zionists and the Jews that was propagated within its population during these years. The establishment of the State of Israel eventually led to the mass migration of Jews from Iraq in 1951–1952, finalizing this chain of events and ending the last chapter of the Jewish experience in Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Longrigg 1953: 192.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (1984:188–91) discusses the influence of the conflict in Palestine on the rise of Arab anti-Semitism.

A. *Effects of the Farhud Pogroms*

In March 1941, at the height of World War II, Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī (1882–1965)<sup>3</sup> led a coup and took control of Iraq, forming a nationalistic and pro-German government. From the beginning of May, the new regime began to fight against the British. In the following months, anti-Jewish propaganda increased, although the Jews were not harmed physically. During April and May 1941, demonstrations took place in several Iraqi and Kurdish urban centers, such as Mosul, Kirkuk, Arbil and Amara in northern Iraq. The pogroms against the Jews of Baghdad took place immediately after the collapse of the regime and the flight of its leaders, Rashīd ‘Alī and the mufti of Jerusalem, and before the new regime under British sponsorship had managed to establish itself. The weekend of 31 May through 2 June 1941, coincided with the Jewish holiday of Pentecost in which the Jews of Baghdad commemorated the disintegration of this regime. These unprecedented riots and massacres of the Jews in Baghdad, known as the *Farhud*,<sup>4</sup> during the early days of June 1941, “electrified the atmosphere in Iraq” and in Kurdish towns.<sup>5</sup> These pogroms shocked the Jews of Iraq and inaugurated a new state of intimidation regarding their presence in Iraq. Among the perpetrators of the pogroms were members of nationalist organizations, supporters of the old regime and members of the defeated Iraqi forces.<sup>6</sup> For the Jews and observers of Iraq, the most disturbing phenomenon was the participation of the masses in the pogroms.<sup>7</sup>

During the *Farhud*, between 150 and 180 Jews were killed, hundreds more were injured and Jewish property was looted by mobs.<sup>8</sup> A report based on data supplied by the president of the Jewish community in

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<sup>3</sup> Rashīd ‘Alī was a member of a noble family (al-Gilānī) in Baghdad and a prominent Iraqi politician. He was overthrown from his post as prime minister in February 1941 by the crown prince ‘Abd al-Ilah, but in April, when Great Britain suffered many blows in the war, he reinstated himself through a coup organized by pro-Nazi Iraqi officers. In May 1941, The British forces defeated the coup and overtook Baghdad once again.

<sup>4</sup> Yūnis al-Sab‘āwī was known for his hatred of the Jews. His underground name, “Farhud,” was attached to the pogrom of Jews in June 1941. He was one of the four persons behind the coup, also known as the “golden square.” Kazzaz 1991: 206–207.

<sup>5</sup> Bar-Amon 1985: 35.

<sup>6</sup> For more on this regime see Mohammad Tarbush, *The Role of Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941* (London: Kegan Paul International). See also Hamdi 1987; Khadduri 1951 and Marr 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Polak 1960: 53–4.

<sup>8</sup> Kazzaz 1991: 206–210; 238–24; Tripp 2000: 105–6.

Baghdad placed “the real blame” for the riots on the police who were “in a position to stop the rioting.” Many police officers “sided with the looters after having pretended to try and stop the rioting by ostensibly shooting over the heads of the crowd.” The head of the community stated that 600 persons were wounded and many of the dead were taken to the Muslim cemetery, “without their relatives being informed, and buried in mass-graves.” The number of houses looted was 896; the number of families rendered homeless was 2,373 (or 13,000 persons); the number of Jewish shops looted was 583. Likewise, offenders desecrated and wrecked three synagogues and raped and kidnapped girls and women, but it was impossible to know their number “as their families refused to report the cases. If something like this happened to a Baghdad family, it constituted a most serious stain on their reputation.” It is interesting to note that around midday a Kurdish regiment was rushed to Baghdad with orders to stop the looting.<sup>9</sup> A report from Baghdad in early April 1942, by a female envoy of the Youth Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency concluded:

I found the Jews in great fear and concern, and living as if they were in a blockade camp. They have lost all trust in their Iraqi friends and their British friends too. The Jews are very bitter that none of the distinguished Iraqis showed concern or apologized to their Jewish friends for the events that occurred during the days of the pogrom, and none expressed their sorrow.<sup>10</sup>

The short life of the regime of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī did not allow its leaders time to orchestrate official action against the Jews in the northern, Kurdish parts of the country. Nonetheless, its “evil thoughts were well conceived,” according to Dr. Yaacob Tzemaḥ (I#54), whose father, Sasson Tzemaḥ, was a member of the Iraqi parliament (between 1929 and 1951), and who had earlier served as a member of *al-majlis al-idārī*, (Arab, the administration council) of the *mutaṣarrif* in

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<sup>9</sup> Report on the Anti-Jewish riots in Baghdad, June 1st and 2nd, based on data supplied by the president of the Jewish community in Baghdad, prepared by the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, 3 January 1942. See also H. J. Cohen, “The anti-Jewish Farhud in Baghdad,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, October 1966: 2–18; Honig 1989 and David Brinn, “Operation Baghdad: The story of David Raziel.” *The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, week ending March 23, 1991: 9.

<sup>10</sup> A report by Metilda Mazzal Musairi (Bibi 1988, part I: 59), available also in the Central Zionist Archives S6/4575.

Mosul.<sup>11</sup> During this period, the horrors struck the Jews of Mosul and northern Iraq mainly because of three reasons. First, Baghdad was the capital and the events that transpired in this large city reverberated throughout the country. Second, a few thousands Kurdish Jews who had migrated from Kurdish towns and settled in Baghdad kept in touch with family and members of the community back home and the horrors and effects of the “Farhud” reached the Jewish communities in the northern of the country. Third, even in the northern part of the country and in Kurdish towns, Muslims “looked for every opportunity to hurt the Jews” and those who had never raised a hand against the Jews prior to 1941, “publicly threatened the security of Jews all over Iraq.” The intensified incitement against Jews in mosques, combined with the anti-Jewish propaganda of the new government, struck fear into the hearts of the Jews of northern Iraq, in Mosul and other Kurdish towns. Out of fear, the Jews did not leave their homes, especially at night. Consequently, the Jews limited their daily contact with the authorities, with the Muslims and with the tribal population, and especially with those individuals who were known for their hatred of the Jews.

Nevertheless, fear and anxiety penetrated the Jewish communities in Kurdish towns, mainly because of the role of General Qāsem Maqṣūd who was the military governor of the Mosul district during Rashīd ‘Alī’s regime. Jewish sources argued that Maqṣūd expressed hatred towards the Jews and conducted a “regime of fear,” intimidation and extortion against the Jews of his district. The same pattern of intimidation occurred throughout the northern districts. A short time after his arrival, Maqṣūd summoned representatives of the Jewish community threatened them, claiming that they “remained loyal to the British, undermining the rule of Rashīd ‘Alī.” Maqṣūd demanded that the Jewish community pay 3,000 gold Turkish liras to be delivered to him in person within three days as a “guarantee for [their] good behavior.” “He behaved as someone who was in a hurry,” and the impression was “that Maqṣūd wanted to take the money for himself,” noted Yaacob Tzemaḥ. The Jewish community of Mosul was helpless and a distinguished Muslim whom they consulted advised them “to buy time,” as the days of Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup were numbered. A few days later, the British removed him from power and restored the legal regime.<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Lanyado from

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Yaacob Tzemaḥ 1994: 8–9.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Yaacob Tzemaḥ 1997: 171–172. Another report about Qāsem Maqṣūd relates to his relations with Rabbi Solomon (1895–1968) of Mosul. Reportedly, Maqṣūd’s wife

Mosul, who was a teacher in several towns in northern Iraq between 1939 and 1946, argued that in May 1941, General Qāsem Maqsūd demanded two gold liras from every Jew in the northern communities such as Mosul, Zakho, Dohuk and Aqra. Five accounts follow of events that occurred in different urban centers in Iraqi Kurdistan during Rashīd ‘Alī’s brief rule.

### 1. *Kirkuk*

Moshe Dabas from Kirkuk<sup>13</sup> argued that the governor of the district was a law-abiding man who did not hate the Jews, as also were the head of police and the magistrate. Their position may have helped the Jews during the second half of May 1941, when an unfortunate event occurred:

The daughter of Yaacob Levy, the Ford agent, was hanging clean wash in the courtyard of their home. Several hooligans who wanted to imitate the events in Baghdad began yelling that she was signaling to the British airplanes.<sup>14</sup> The police quickly arrested her and took her to their center [of the police] in order to save the household from the crowd. The community acted swiftly... They jointly marched to the *mutaşarrif* [provincial governor]. The governor released her within two hours and possibly punished the hooligans or warned them not to repeat this action. The mostly Kurdish population was not hostile to the Jews and they were en guard... The news about the pogrom in Baghdad worried us and we were anxious about the safety of the Jews there. When we heard that Jamīl al-Midfāī had formed the new government, we knew that the troubles had ended.<sup>15</sup>

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had lost three babies shortly after birth. On a condolence visit to his home, Rabbi Sasson blessed Maqsūd that in his next born son, he would perform the circumcision in the synagogue and blessed him that the good fortune of the boy would prevail. When Maqsūd’s son was born, the rabbi performed the circumcision of the newborn in the presence of the city’s notables. Reportedly, Maqsūd felt indebted to the rabbi. In May 1941, Maqsūd became military governor and acted as the sole ruler. Gabriel Lanyado, “Working as a [Jewish] teacher in government schools outside Mosul,” *Minhat Ashur* 5 (1993): 76 (Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> Kirkuk (also spelled Karkuk; in Kur., Kerkūk) is located 155 miles north of the Baghdad.

<sup>14</sup> According to Barshan (1977: 103–4), in 1941, he met a Muslim classmate who was watching the Jewish neighborhood in Baghdad at night. When he pressed him what he was doing there he stumbled and then said, *wallāh yah akhū dazẓūnī hunā u-qālūtī, akū yahūd yantūn ishārāt dāw’ya lil-ṭayārāt al-‘inglīziya* [in God, my brother, they sent me here and said that there are Jews who are signaling light signals to the British airplanes].

<sup>15</sup> A. Twaina, *Golim u-ge’ulim* [Exiled and rescued]. Tel-Aviv 1977: 85–86. On al-Midfāī, see Marr 1985: 77.

A Jewish soldier who served in the British army in Kirkuk relates that during the coup of Rashīd ‘Alī the Jews shut themselves up in the Jewish quarter for fear of leaving the neighborhood. He goes on to add,

I knew a young Jew (I was a friend of his elder brother; they both worked in the R.O.C., “Rafidain Oil Company”) who was the only one who dared to walk outside the quarter following the occurrences. His brother served at the time in the Iraqi army in Baghdad, and when he felt that the atmosphere had become unbearable (his officer accused him of signaling to the British airplanes), he became a *fīrar*. After the suppression of the revolt, he arranged his release from the army by bribing persons with money... The two brothers told me secretly that during the revolt of Rashīd ‘Alī, all the British personnel of the I.P.C. and the R.O.C.<sup>16</sup> in Kirkuk were imprisoned. When German pilots roamed the city, (they stayed there about three weeks) and the Jews faced a great danger, the *Hakham Bashi* of the city managed to contact the *mutaṣarrif* of the city and the district (a Kurd and a friend of the British). After receiving [a bribe] in his hands (approximately 3,000 Iraqi dinars), the *mutaṣarrif* gave orders to the local police to prevent any attack against the Jews. After the suppression of this revolt, this *mutaṣarrif* was promoted to an office in Baghdad.<sup>17</sup>

Benzion Israeli noted that during the rule of Rashīd ‘Alī, many of the Jews of Kirkuk hinted that they had bought pistols. They were not willing to be taken like sheep to the slaughter. Israeli also noted that small groups of rural Jews began to migrate to urban centers following the rule of Rashīd ‘Alī.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *Sulaimaniya*

Shalom Shalom, an emissary of the Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine, who was stationed in Sulaimaniya during May 1941, noted that this month passed peacefully and no one disturbed the lives of the Jews in the city. He described the events following the rumors of the pogroms in Baghdad, on the second day of the Jewish festival of Pentecost:

When we were in the synagogue, we heard a big noise. Several hooligans were standing near the street of the Jews. They wanted to break into

<sup>16</sup> I.P.C., Iraq Petroleum Company; R.O.C., Rafidain Oil Company, an Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

<sup>17</sup> In Kirkuk and Mosul, memorandum by Sh. R. [Shalom Rashba] 15 August 1942 (Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

our apartments. The *imām* of the city, Muḥammad Golānī, heard that several hooligans wanted to attack the Jews. He came running and asked them to approach him. He conducted the following dialogue with them: 'I would like one of you to answer my questions.' One of the hooligans approached him and said, 'Yes, Sir; I am willing to answer you.' 'What do you intend to do?' asked the *imām*. 'We heard that in Baghdad Jews were assaulted, their property looted and their women taken as booty. We want to do the same,' replied the youth. 'Who had decreed the above, Moses, Jesus or Muḥammad?' [The answer of the youngsters was] 'None. The Jews are infidels and we wish to take revenge.' The *imām* demanded, 'Who told you they are infidels?' 'So we heard.' 'Now listen, those who told you that the Jews are infidels are themselves infidels. The persons who looted in Baghdad are criminals. They do not believe in God and in his messenger. The Jews are under our auspices and protected by us. Whoever causes harm to an ally will be punished in hell. Now, what do you intend to do?' They all responded: 'We will execute your order, our *imām*.' The *imām* said, 'Now, you all go home and begin to fast until the evening, that God may forgive you the great sin that you intended in harming Jews. What would you have done if others were to hurt them? Would you not rush to defend them? Therefore, rush home and repent of your sins.' The group lowered their heads, kissed the hands of the *imām* and departed to their homes.<sup>19</sup>

A Jewish soldier in the British army reported on Shaikh Muḥammad's behavior during the Rashīd 'Alī revolt. This must have been a typo error. According to the following account he must have referred to Shaikh Maḥmūd Berzinjī, a native of Sulaimaniya, rather than any one else.

When Shaikh Maḥmūd was in Baghdad, Rashīd 'Alī and Yūnis Sab'āwī<sup>20</sup> demanded that he call the people of Kurdistan to take part in the revolt. The Shaikh, who had been a supporter of British rule, suggested a seemingly more efficient measure than sending a message. He would go in person to the Sulaimaniya area, he suggested, and quickly organize armed Kurdish units that would actively support the revolt. Rashīd 'Alī agreed with this plan. Shaikh Muḥammad [Maḥmūd?] took to the road. When he left Baghdad, he contacted Major Lions [correct spelling: Lyon; the British Political Officer in the Kirkuk district] and together they traveled through several communities in the area of Sulaimaniya, and he demanded that the Kurds, most of whom were under his influence, not support this revolt in any way. It was noted that this was an important service to the British.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Twaina 1977: 85.

<sup>20</sup> Rashīd 'Alī was the leader of the revolt; al-Sab'āwī was the commander of the pro-Nazi youth groups who was later tried and hanged. See Marr 1985: 80.

<sup>21</sup> In Kirkuk and Mosul, memorandum by Sh. R. [Shalom Rashba].

Longrigg likewise argued that none of the tribal leaders placed themselves behind Rashīd ‘Alī. Shaikh Maḥmūd escaped from Baghdad, reached Sulaimaniya and “essayed to raise forces to ‘support the British.’”<sup>22</sup> The recent biography of Lyon from Kurdistan fails to relate this account although it mentions Shaikh Maḥmūd.<sup>23</sup> Reuben Bar-Amon from Sulaimaniya noted that until those days, “there was no connection with *Eretz-Yisrael*,” meaning that this event was powerful that it stimulated immigration to *Eretz-Yisrael* amongst the Jews. Following these events of the early 1940s, the head of the community of Sulaimaniya, Rabbi Yom-Tov Bar-Amon, immigrated to *Eretz-Yisrael*, inspiring many to immigrate and prepare themselves for a change in their circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Dohuk

During the Rashīd ‘Alī crisis, the *qāmmaqām* of Dohuk, Nadī Hurmozi, summoned a delegation of the Jewish community. Sasson Naḥum (I#31) was one of the delegates, together with David Salmān and Ḥakham Shemtov. The *qāmmaqām* told them that the central government in Baghdad had given an order that every Jew in the country must pay a certain amount of money in gold coins. Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13), the son of the *mukhtār* of the Jewish community recalled, “In that day of Hitler,<sup>25</sup> the Jews in Kurdistan were left to the mercy of a hostile government and the tribes,” who were eager to take advantage of the power vacuum. The Jewish community of Dohuk was asked

to pay a hundred gold liras... The Jews did not have [the money]... They were poor... some [of them] had the ability [to pay the ransom], but most of them, 90 percent, were unable to pay... We each had to give 100 lira [fearing that] if not, the Jews would be killed. That night, the tribes came and wanted to attack and rob the houses of the Jews...

The *qāmmaqām* gave them an extension of three or four days to collect the gold coins. They notified the whole community and the congregation began praying and fasting for the abolition of the decree. Indeed, Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup collapsed two or three days later.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Longrigg 1953: 295.

<sup>23</sup> Fieldhouse 2002: 164–9.

<sup>24</sup> Reuben Bar-Amon 1985: 35.

<sup>25</sup> Referring to the Pro-Nazi coup of Rashīd ‘Alī.

<sup>26</sup> Sasson Naḥum Hannah (I#31). He was also interviewed in 1973 through the OHD, 56 (11).

The Jewish community feared a possible massacre. Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) noted that parts of the Doski tribe of Sa'īd Agha, and other tribal chiefs such as Farhān Agha, Rashīd Agha and Muṣṭafā Besifke (Salīmê Miṣṭe's father) allegedly wished to attack the Jewish communities of Dohuk and Sandur. These tribesmen desired to exploit the disorder of the central government, and during Rashīd 'Alī's regime rumors spread in the streets that they aimed "to kill and loot the Jews." The *Hakham Bashi* (Gamlieli's father) went to Sa'īd Agha, the chief of the Doski tribe "taking with him a lot of money as a bribe." Eventually, Sa'īd Agha "did not permit anything [bad] to happen" to the Jews that night. The *hakham Bashi* went as well to the *qāimmaqām*. It was the evening of the festival of Pentecost. That night nothing happened.

Nevertheless, the next day the *qāimmaqām* called upon my father to tell him that Rashīd 'Alī al-Gilānī had been killed [he actually escaped] and the English regime had been restored [saying] 'You should not be afraid.' This was a relief for the Jews... My father came with a handkerchief in his elevated hand, yelling, 'Oh Jews, do not be afraid.' He came to the synagogue where the whole congregation was praying and fasting on the day of the [Jewish] festival [of Pentecost], and the festival truly became a day of joy, relief and happiness.

#### 4. *Zakho*

During the regime of Rashīd 'Alī al-Gilānī, the government demanded from the Jews of Zakho a "large amount of gold." Salīm Gabbai (I#11) reported:

Sixty days after Passover, there was a *coup d'état*. They summoned the Jews... My father was one of the delegates of the Jews... They were told to give one thousand *mithqāl* of gold [each *mithqāl* equals 1/7 oz. or about 4.05 gram]... The Jews had 15 days to obtain the gold.

The Jewish delegates discussed the matter, but could not decide how to divide this unexpected burden. Before the Jewish holiday of Pentecost approached, the *qāimmaqām* summoned the delegates of the Jewish community once again, and he learned of their failure to obtain the money.<sup>27</sup> Salīm Gabbai stressed that the *qāimmaqām* was on good terms with his father, Moshe Gabbai, the *mukhtār* of Zakho's Jewish community, and that he was willing to grant him a one-week extension to obtain

<sup>27</sup> Me'allim Abraham (I#15).

the money “believing that eventually the coup would fail.”<sup>28</sup> The Jews seriously discussed cashing in their wives’ gold and jewelry and declared a three-day communal fast at the end of which they found out that Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup had failed and the decree was canceled.

### 5. *Koi-Sanjāq*

Koi-Sanjāq reportedly housed 600 Jews in 1947 and 50 Jewish families in 1950. The Jews constituted less than one-fifth of the population. During the coup of Rashīd ‘Alī, about 3,000 Muslims surrounded the Jewish neighborhood. The Jews locked their stores and gathered inside their homes. Sasson Hai reported that the *mu‘āwin* of the police wanted to help the Jews but he could not deliver assistance. The two local leaders who helped the Jews during this crisis were religious leaders, Kaka Ziad and Shaikh Melā Khwez (Kkwezī/Xwezī). The Kurds sent men to the Jewish neighborhood and some of them sat at the entrance of the homes of the Jews and warned the crowds against harming them.<sup>29</sup> Israel Shomer argued that the police did not wish to help the Jews, but a Muslim friend of his rushed to Shaikh Melā Khwez to inform him of the troubles of his Jewish friend. Consequently, he sent his men to protect the home of Israel Shomer from the mob who gathered in the streets. About 18 men came to his house and positioned themselves in and around the house. They cocked their guns and warned the crowd that whoever threw stones would be shot. The mob said that a Jew from the second floor threw stones on them. Israel Shomer confirmed the story; a Jew had indeed been the first to throw stones.<sup>30</sup> Sasson Hai’s report on the experiences of the Jews in Koi-Sanjāq mentioned four instances where Jews were murdered, but his details of the events following Rashīd ‘Alī’s coup were similar to the above account.

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<sup>28</sup> Mordechai Sa‘do (I#47) remembered that the Jews had quarreled among themselves when faced with the demand to supply a large amount of gold (“either 2 kg or 10 kg”). Gavish (1999: 204–209) relates four accounts of Jews about this event: Haya Gabbai argued that the demand was to supply “approximately 6 kg of gold within three days, otherwise the Jews would be killed.” Šālīḥ Qōlo argued that the demand was “about 1,000 grams of gold,” but in the meantime, “they put the leaders of the community in jail,” until the money would be supplied. Salīm Gabbai, the son of the *mukhtār*, who was also detained, remembered that the demand was “about 2,000 gr.”

<sup>29</sup> Sasson Hai, OHD, 59 (11).

<sup>30</sup> Israel Shomer (b. Yitzḥak) OHD, 57 (11).

B. *Effects of the Establishment of the State of Israel*

The events that occurred during the regime of Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī were the first major alarm that signaled a significant deterioration in the relationships between the Jews and the Muslims, Kurds and Arabs as well as tribal segments. These events shook the sense of security of the Jews. Their social and internal fabric, maintained for generations, “was fractured, for the first time in many years.”<sup>31</sup> One of the main characteristics of this period was the loss of confidence of the Jews and the fear that the pogroms of 1941 or worse would be repeated.<sup>32</sup>

Kurdish Jews generally described the relations with their Muslim neighbors as being good, approximately until World War II during which the coup of Rashīd (1941) ‘Alī and the *Farhud* occurred, or until the establishment of the State of Israel (1948).<sup>33</sup> The impression of Kurdish Jews as to when things changed 40 or 50 years ago is a matter of some importance, although through the clouds of the years the reality must have been blurred. It seems that most Jews pointed to the establishment of the State of Israel as a point in time when relations with their neighbors changed drastically. More importantly, the events that occurred during the fifth decade of the 20th century, and the elaborated memoirs of Kurdish Jews suggest that the change in relations between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors was gradual. The change occurred during a period of great political transition, which included the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, the British takeover of Iraq and Kurdistan (1918), the formal rule of the Iraqi regime (1932), and the coup of Rashīd ‘Alī (1941). The position of the Jews in Iraqi Kurdistan further deteriorated following the war of 1948 between Arab countries and the Jews and after the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>34</sup> The tension between Muslims and Jews increased as Iraq and several other Arab countries joined in the fighting against the new Jewish State and were subsequently defeated. In July 1948, the Iraqi Parliament added “Zionism” to clause 51 of the penal law, where it appeared along with communism on the

<sup>31</sup> Gavish 1999: 205–206.

<sup>32</sup> Meir 1995: 127–130.

<sup>33</sup> Gavish (1999: 40–2) interviewed dozens of Zakho Jews who reported that relations between with the Muslim Kurds were good until World War II.

<sup>34</sup> In Israel, the Arab-Israeli War is known as the “War of Independence” (Heb., מלחמת העצמאות) or the “War of Liberation” (Heb., מלחמת השחרור). The Palestinians call the war “The Catastrophe” (Arab., *al-Nakba*).

list of movements or ideologies that endangered the security of Iraq. The maximum punishment for infringement of this clause was death. The Iraqi army underwent changes that reflected these special times; Jewish soldiers were separated from the rest of the army and then they were asked to turn in their weapons. The authorities dismissed military and police officers of Jewish origin. In the public arena, a fund was announced on behalf of the Arabs in Palestine and fund raising was mobilized. Among the contributors were some Jews who possibly wished to clean their names from common suspicions against Jews.<sup>35</sup> Longrigg articulated the public atmosphere against the Jews in 1949:

An increase of hostile pressure on the Jews of Baghdad, and the connection between Zionism and Communism was taken for granted by popular outcry; Jews and Zionists were identified; and the sight of the terrified community, declared to be selling Iraqi military secrets to Palestine, aroused in some the worst instincts of spite and bullying.<sup>36</sup>

### 1. *The Position of the Jews Worsened*

During the late 1940s, the tension between the Muslim population and the Jews escalated. One of the reasons was the role played by the Arab press and the radio; another one was the Palestinian propagandists who visited Iraq to speak out against the Jews in Palestine and enlist the help of the Iraqis in their cause.<sup>37</sup> Jewish informants noted several explanations behind the changing attitude of Muslim Kurds and Arabs towards the Jews. The first explanation notes the Nazi German presence in Iraq before and during World War II. The second explanation relates to the presence of Palestinian refugees and exiles who arrived in Iraq and Kurdistan through the 1930s and 1940s and incited the public against the Jews both in Palestine and in Iraq. The following account gives an example for the widespread presence of Palestinian refugees throughout Iraq. Around 1940, three or four exiled Palestinian activists came to the small town of Zakho and rented rooms from Jewish property owners. One of them rented a room from

<sup>35</sup> Shohet 1981: 202; Meir 1995:123–28; Longrigg 1953: 353–4; Luks 34–37.

<sup>36</sup> Longrigg 1953: 353.

<sup>37</sup> Kazzaz 1991: 195; Meir 1995: 113–14; Luks 1977: 30–39; Appel 1983: 56; Zvi Elpeleg, the Grand Mufti, 1989; Cohen 1972: 32–3; Khadduri 1960: 243–69. Also, consult Haim Saadon, “The Palestinian Element” etc., and Sh. Moreh and Zvi Yehuda 1992.

Naḥum Naḥum's father (I#29). Based on their agreement with the authorities, they would report to the police station daily, but one day they disappeared, leaving behind their belongings. As a child, Naḥum sneaked into the Palestinian's room and 'took' a brand new camera, but his father who was displeased by his behavior instructed him to return it. The police questioned the Jewish property owners as to the whereabouts of the Palestinians exiles. The next account demonstrates how dangerous was the role of some preachers who disseminated the Palestinian case, speaking against the Jews throughout Iraq. It occurred in the late 1940s in Zakho:

Once, a Palestinian Ḥājjī<sup>38</sup> came to the marketplace of Zakho and began an incitement campaign against the Jews saying, 'The Jews killed us and committed other evil acts.' Someone reported him to 'Abd al-Karīm Agha who hurried into the market, caught this Ḥājjī and told him, 'There is no place for you here. Leave this town right away. If you do not leave, I will kill you. Palestine is there, not here. This is Iraq. Our Jews have been [living] with us for two thousands years.'<sup>39</sup>

'Abd al-Karīm Agha banished him. He would not allow a person engaging in public incitement against the Jews to stay in Zakho.

The third explanation behind the changing status of the Jews relates to changes that occurred following the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>40</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31) from Dohuk listed specific instances of harassment, accusations, investigations and expressions of hatred toward Jewish civilians. Many testimonies were given about the fear and anxiety that increased among the Jews, and about the ability of the Muslims to hurt them that increased as well. According to Naḥum and Hārūn Naḥum (I#29&30) from Zakho who migrated to Baghdad, the tension with Muslims increased when the problems started in Palestine. Likewise, Mordechai Sa'do (I#46) from Zakho said:

Relations with the Kurds were very good; we were like brothers until the establishment of the State of Israel. Afterwards, there was a rift between

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<sup>38</sup> Ḥājjī, an honorary religious title for a Muslim who performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>39</sup> Me'allim Abraham (I#15). This report is supported by two other interviews [Raḥel Hammo, OHD, 68 (11) and Menashe Eliyahu b. Mordechai, OHD, 70 (11)]. A Muslim from Palestine incited against the Jews ("who killed our wives and children") in the Zakho mosque in 1949–1950.

<sup>40</sup> On the deterioration of the position of the Jews in northern Iraq following the establishment of Israel, see throughout the Hebrew publication of the Jews from Mosul, *Minḥat Ashur* 5 (1993): 73; 8 (1996): 108; 9 (1997): 38.

us. From 1948 to 1950, there were problems. None of us was able to speak about the State of Israel or they would accuse us of being Zionists.<sup>41</sup>

The last few years of the Jewish sojourn in Iraq were marked by demonstrations against the Jewish State as well as by intimidations against the local Jews. One of the slogans shouted in these demonstrations was “Death to the Jews!” On the eve of the declaration of the State of Israel, on May 14, 1948, the Iraqi government imposed martial law throughout the country, forbidding the gathering of crowds and the carrying of weapons. This was a tense period, though according to Cohen, the tension prevailed throughout Iraq “apart from the region of Kurdistan, in which the Kurds expressed sympathy for the Jews.”<sup>42</sup> Cohen seems to be correct in his general statement, though the details discussed in this chapter convey a completely different scene. The Jews in Zakho reportedly had good relations with their neighbors and the Kurds respected them, but as the conflict in Palestine between Jews and Arabs intensified, the Jews in Kurdish towns became more anxious. According to Gabriel Lanyado,

After the establishment of the State of Israel, life was made more difficult and the Jews began leaving their homes and escaping to Baghdad. In Baghdad, they found illegal ways to escape through Persia to [the Land of] Israel.

Being a teacher in several Kurdish towns, Lanyado noted that the situation “was difficult” for Jewish pupils. They escaped from “fanatic Muslim pupils” who harassed them. Lanyado testified that in Zakho he collected several Jewish pupils who had run away from school and some new pupils who knew that he would be their “helper and savior” from the Muslim harassers.<sup>43</sup>

The fourth reason for the change in the attitude between Jews and their Muslim neighbors was the participation of the Iraqi army in the Arab-Jewish war in Palestine in 1948. Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) from Dohuk explained that Iraqi participation in the 1948 war over Palestine and the ensuing Iraqi casualties increased the tension and pressure on the Jews of Iraq.

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<sup>41</sup> He is referring to the trial of eleven Jewish raftsmen from Zakho; see below, (“Imprisonment for Hailing Israel”): 327–333.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen 1972: 34–39.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Lanyado 1993: 76.

Following the war of 1948, in which Iraqis participated and were killed, we came under pressure and fear of death. Indeed, we were [always] under pressure, but [prior to the war] we were freer [as we were] able to talk more, to sit in the teahouse at night. Nevertheless [after the war], as soon as it got dark, around eight or nine o'clock in the evening, we would hurry to our homes in groups of two or three, and every one would go to his own home. One would not walk alone. The situation became bad. After 1948, they would curse the Jews in the markets and throw watermelon skins at the elderly Jews.

Yāzī, Me'allim Abraham's [#16] wife, who was present during the interview with her spouse, recalls one person from Zakho who participated in the war in Palestine.

Hājī Mado was a neighbor of my uncle Murdakh. He was an officer [in the Iraqi army]. He told his mother, '[Israeli] women fought in the war [against us], so our resistance weakened.' My uncle's wife told him: 'You should have brought two of them over here for us [for our Jewish youth].'

The Arab armies suffered heavy losses in the 1948 war. The Iraqi army dispatched about 15,000 to 18,000 Iraqi soldiers to the battlefields in Palestine. The number of casualties reported was 5,000 to 15,000 out of approximately 40,000 Arab soldiers that participated in the war.<sup>44</sup>

The fifth explanation cited for the changing position concerning the Jews was the registration for immigration of Jews that was the first major step on the way to their final migration to Israel. Levi Mordechai Yaacob (#27) from Shandokh who migrated to Dohuk in 1947–48, points out that relations with Muslim Kurds in Dohuk were good “until the registration for immigration” to Israel and the renouncing of Iraqi citizenship began. Subsequently, “they began to hate us.”

The following accounts demonstrate the difficulties experienced by local Jews during this period in which the Jewish presence in Iraq and Kurdistan was in its final chapter. In Baghdad, the authorities evacuated houses and clubs owned by Jews and settled Arab refugees in them. The authorities dismissed Jews from their posts in government ministries. Public announcements called on the public to do their shopping on Saturdays in order to hurt the Jewish merchants and businesses. Principals of government schools notified their Jewish students that

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Eligar Sadeh, *Militarization and State Power in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Case Study of Israel, 1948–1982* (Universal Publishers, 1997).

they could not guarantee their safety and advised them to transfer to Jewish schools.<sup>45</sup>

Yona Sabar, a native of Zakho, points out an instance of harassment that demonstrates how the enemies of the Jews rose up against them following the establishment of the State of Israel:

Hakham Murdakh [Mordechai] Zabariko was walking once in the market with a basket of eggs, and a Kurd jumped in front of him to frighten him, [the results of which] he dropped all the eggs on the floor in a big mess.

Yona Sabar also remembers that during those years, occasionally, at Jewish funerals Kurdish youth would sing “Cuhî ne, darên şkestî ne, cehennemî ne,” (they are Jews, like a broken tree, they go to hell).<sup>46</sup> Although the Jews formed a sizeable part of the community of Zakho and the Kurdish establishment respected their leaders, Jewish youths were occasionally subjected to provocation on their way to and from school and in the marketplace.

The following account reflects the suspicion against Jews in Iraqi Kurdistan during this tense period.<sup>47</sup> In Dohuk, the police arrested one day someone who was making amulets that were inscribed partly in Hebrew and partly in Arabic with a symbol resembling a Star of David in the middle. The police suspected the person carrying the amulets of being a spy. Under interrogation, he said that he had once lived in Dohuk and said that he knew the family of Sasson Naḥum (I#31). On Saturday night, the police summoned Sasson Naḥum for questioning, to verify whether he knew the man suspected as a spy. His original name had been Menahem before his family converted to Islam. His new name was Aḥmad.

He looked like a shaikh, dressed in green clothes and a green hat. He had only one eye. He was handcuffed. I did not recognize him. He was ten or twelve years old when his family left Dohuk. His father was Yoseph the *shammash* [caretaker of the synagogue] while my father was the *gabbai* [treasurer] . . . When he left, he was ten or twelve years old and he had two eyes . . . The *mu'awin* kept me through the night, while making phone calls to the *mutaṣarrif* in Mosul . . . The police seized a sack full of amulets . . . He asked me if I knew the symbol that they suspected . . . to be the flag of

<sup>45</sup> Shohet 1981: 202–5.

<sup>46</sup> Yona Sabar, in a personal letter to the writer of this book, dated 27 December 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Bar-Moshe 1977.

the State of Israel... We had never seen the flag and did not recognize it... I went with the police officer, named Aḥmad Muṣṭafā, to the house of Abraham Meʿallim... We brought him to the *muʿāwīn* around 4 a.m., and he said that these were amulets and we were free to go home...<sup>48</sup>

Most Jewish informants pinpointed the establishment of the State of Israel as being the catalyst of the major shift in relations with the Kurdish neighbors. Another event that symbolized the breach in the relationship between the state, its Muslim majority, and the small Jewish minority was the trial and execution of Shafīq Addas. On 15 August 1948, Shafīq Addas (born 1900), a wealthy Jewish merchant from Basra, was hanged in the town following a rigged trial. This was a dark day in the history of the Jews of Iraq.<sup>49</sup> The day after the hanging, the famous Iraqi lawyer Muḥammad Zakī al-Khatīb told the Jewish reporter, Menashe Zaʿrūr: “The day will come when the Iraqi people will exonerate Addas, just like the French people exonerated Dreyfus.”<sup>50</sup> The Jewish Iraqi writer, Yitzḥak Bar-Moshe, dedicated a large section of his book to the trial of Shafīq Addas,<sup>51</sup> stating that the death sentence shocked every one. The Jews felt “as if they had lost their way in the desert again. The earth was trembling under their feet once again.”<sup>52</sup> Jews throughout Iraq were affected by the crisis. Jewish informants from Kurdistan reported that Muslim and Christian neighbors taunted them about the Shafīq Addas affair. A Jewish carpenter from Zakho reported that in September 1948, shortly after the hanging of Shafīq Addas, he and his brother traveled to the home of ʿAzīz Yaqū, the *raʿīs* of the Christian community in Faishkhabur. He remembered that ʿAzīz Yaqū taunted him about the hanging of Shafīq Addas while showing him photographs of Addas in a magazine.

In the following year, the pressure of the Jews of Iraq continued. In September 1949, the police arrested a Jewish youth from Baghdad who gave the names of four members of the *He-ḥalutz ha-tzaʿir* (Heb., “the young pioneer”) movement who provided in turn the names of leaders and members of the movement. Consequently, the police arrested about 700 members of the Zionist movement in Iraq. This event reverberated

<sup>48</sup> Sasson Naḥum (I#31) and OHD, 69 (11).

<sup>49</sup> His judge was ʿAbdallāh al-Naʿsānī, a famous judge who later chaired many trials in which Jews were accused by the authorities. See Shohet 1981: 205–9; Kazzaz 1991: 275–8; Longrigg 1953: 354; Shina 1955: 138–40; Bar-Moshe 1977: 140–41.

<sup>50</sup> M. Zaʿrūr, *Al-Yawm* (Tel-Aviv), 4 March 1962, quoted by Shohet (1981: 208–9).

<sup>51</sup> Bar-Moshe 1977: 76; 148–151; 164–76.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 164–176.

throughout Iraq. The Jews in Kurdish urban centers lived during this era under stress and fear of the authorities; occasionally the police carried out unannounced, nightly searches in their homes.<sup>53</sup>

Written and oral sources alike convey the fear of the Kurdistan Jews of the catastrophe that might befall them, because of the rumors regarding their fate. The following report conveys the impression of fear of the government and of the Muslim neighbors. Victor Baruch from Arbil gave Otto Jastrow the following account of a fearful moment experienced by the Jewish communities of northern Iraq.

On the day that we decided to immigrate to Israel, when the State of Israel was declared, those Arabs, the gentiles, changed their approach to us. ‘Why are you going to Israel?’ They told us, ‘In that case, we will kill you.’ One day they surrounded the houses and there was a curfew. They said, ‘Whoever leaves his home will be killed.’ We were at home and we cried. They said, ‘Within an hour or two they will come and kill us all.’ We cried and refused to eat. We fasted. What could we do? Father and mother were worried for the small children, aged between two and four... We had a *sāxōb* [possibly container for bread] upstairs, a large *sāxōb* for bread. Our father put my brother and me into it. He hid us inside the *sāxōb* and covered us with bread. He told us, ‘If they kill us... when they have left, you must climb out of the *sāxōb* and run away to wherever you can. If we die, you must remain alive. We are afraid for you.’ We cried; we did not understand what was happening. They hid us there and told us, ‘Do not breathe a word. When they come to kill us, do not cry, do not do anything. Be silent, so they will not find you here.’ They said, ‘You will remain alive and perhaps some of our relatives will remain alive. You (should go to them) and tell them that you survived.’ Nevertheless, this did not happen, God had mercy on us. They did not come to kill us. So, they took us out (of the *sāxōb*) and they were happy. We were all glad and we sat together. They said, ‘Today they did not kill you, did not kill the Jews, they postponed it. We do not know for how long.’ We were glad and thanked God that he had saved us from death.<sup>54</sup>

The above reports and anecdotes emanating from several urban centers demonstrate the growing difficulties experienced by Kurdish Jews and the Jewish fear of the government and their neighbors. The following accounts illustrate that the fear of the Jews was immense in the rural Jewish communities as well.

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<sup>53</sup> David Ben Baruch, *Khanaqin and the Jewish community*, 4 vols. (Petah-Tikva: 2002), vol. 1: 67–69 (Hebrew).

<sup>54</sup> Otto Jastrow, “New Arabic texts from Aqra and Arbil,” *Massorot* 9–10–11 (Jerusalem, 1997): 451–52 (Hebrew).

## 2. *Tribal Intimidation and Raids against the Jews*

Kurdish tribesmen generally took advantage of any state of political insecurity. The hostility against the Jews in parliament, in the press and in the streets served as a platform for these tribal segments to try to gain some material benefit from the Jews. Even though many tribal leaders granted protection to their Jewish subjects, it appeared that in these months of civil disintegration some tribal elements could not stand the temptation to take advantage of the insecure Jews. Jewish informants reported several examples of this phenomenon, often in general terms.

During Passover in 1948, on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, the atmosphere in Iraq was tense. In the streets, hooligans cursed Jews and threw stones and vegetable seeds at them.<sup>55</sup> Public demonstrations against the Jews and the State of Israel represented a shift in public opinion. There were rumors of an imminent pogrom against Jewish communities. The Jews, who feared the impending events, were nevertheless prepared to stand up for themselves.<sup>56</sup> The Jews prepared their defense and collected stones and oil on the roofs and prepared weapons, such as knives, daggers, guns, pistols, Molotov and sulfur cocktails. In all the urban centers of Kurdistan, the Jews prepared themselves to defend against this growing hostility. The following accounts reveal the feeling of insecurity among the Jews in the late 1940s.

### a) *Aqra*

In Aqra, after the establishment of the State of Israel, rumors spread that the tribesmen were planning to kill the Jews. The Jews had organized protective measures against threats from their neighbors. The younger members of the community organized themselves into parties of two or three and tried to stick together. Every Jew prepared a weapon, a knife or whatever he could lay his hands on, although “a Jew [as much as he tried] was never armed like a Muslim.” The community designated Jewish guards to different sections of the Jewish neighborhood; the guards were responsible for streets, paths and houses. “We

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<sup>55</sup> Bernard Lewis (1984:166) quotes the British vice consul in Mosul, in 1909, who describes a Muslim boy throwing stones at two middle-aged Jews “just as a small boy elsewhere might aim at a dog or bird.”

<sup>56</sup> Zakkai 1996: 108–109.

organized ourselves to the best of our ability, to guarantee that whoever attacks us would not leave alive.” One day, the servants of Shaikh Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʿīl came to Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno, the head of the Jewish community, and told him: “all the shaikhs have convened at the Shaikh’s home and he is asking your presence.” Khawaja Khinno went there with a company of five young men. “The shaikh had my father sit near him and his escorts stood behind him.<sup>57</sup> The shaikh asked Majīd, one of the youngsters of the Khawaja Khinno’s household:

‘You came to protect your uncle, as if he is in a place where someone could hurt him. If we had wanted to hurt him, could you have done anything against so many persons?’ Majīd told him, ‘Shaikh, we did not come to fight. You have asked us to come, so we respected you. Nevertheless, if you kill five, we shall kill a hundred.’<sup>58</sup>

The purpose of this meeting became clear when the Shaikh told Khawaja Khinno that “Shaikh Kajaw<sup>59</sup> from Baijil, with his brothers and uncle, Shaikh Qayyūm, were coming to kill the Jews.” Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno told him, “We are not sheep, if Shaikh Kajaw from Baijil will attack us, he will encounter fierce opposition.” Around the same time Shaikh Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʿīl suggested that the Jews join his men in an attack against the police station where there was a large arsenal of weapons and ammunition dump, in order to supply themselves with more weapons and then jointly guard the Jews. Yitzḥak Khawaja Khinno rejected this suggestion.<sup>60</sup> Later on, Shaikh Kajaw denied that he had ever planned to harm the Jews. The elders of the Khawaja Khinno family faced Shaikh Kajaw and his brothers with Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʿīl’s allegations. He said, “On the contrary! I heard that you,” referring to Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʿīl “were going to harm the Jews.” Apparently, Shaikh Muṣṭafā Mullā Jibrāʿīl wished to trigger troubles between the Jews and the authorities. His rationale was that if the Jews of Aqra got into trouble with tribal shaikhs, they were free to defend themselves, but if they got into trouble with the police or the authorities, there would be no justification for them to fight against the

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<sup>57</sup> The escorts were young men of the Khawaja Khinno family, among them Majīd, Raḥamim, Mikho and Ezra.”

<sup>58</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#8) and Fāʿik Gabbai (I#12).

<sup>59</sup> Also pronounced Kajjow.

<sup>60</sup> Aryeh Gabbai (I#8). Attacking police stations in which ammunition and weapons were stored, and which symbolized the central government, was a typical pattern of insurgent tribal elements in Kurdistan.

authorities.<sup>61</sup> The following excerpt from a 1929 British military report on Mullā Jibrāʿīl corresponds with the above account, noting his enmity for the Surchi shaikhs and his liking for intrigues:

A wealthy and important landowner . . . has taken no part in any of the hostile acts perpetrated in the Aqra district after the war. [He] is on bad terms with the Shaikh ʿUbaidullāh (Surchi). Professedly pro-government, but requires watching owing to his penchant for intrigues.<sup>62</sup>

b) *Zakho and Dohuk*

Two incidents that are worth noting occurred in Zakho, both related to the gathering of tribesmen around Zakho, causing anxiety amongst the local Jews. The first incident occurred during World War II, when the deteriorating economic situation in Iraq enabled the Communist party to gain support among the lower classes.<sup>63</sup> In Zakho, the Communist activity included the circulation of newspapers and leaflets with an anti-government message. The most vocal Communists were members of the Be-ʿIsako<sup>64</sup> (ʿIsako, Kur., fond of ʿIsā) family who participated in anti-government demonstrations,<sup>65</sup> and who targeted capitalist entrepreneurs and large landowners of the Shamdin Agha family, who were the patrons of the Jews.<sup>66</sup> The conflict escalated during the period of wheat and grain shortages. In the postwar economy, grain prices rose from an index of 100 in 1939 to 773 in the peak year of 1943. Grain producers and dealers such as Hazim Beg profited from these circumstances.<sup>67</sup> In the mid-summer 1946, the Communist party arranged a serious strike against the government.<sup>68</sup> In the incident in question, the demonstrations against Be-Shamdin Agha motivated Ḥājji Agha, a member of the family and the mayor of the town, to contact the tribal chieftains with whom he had blood relations, mainly the Sindis and

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) 1929: 329.

<sup>63</sup> Marr 1985: 90–91.

<sup>64</sup> ʿIsako is the Kurdish affectionate name for ʿIsā. The main activists of Be-ʿIsako were two brothers, Ḥusnī and ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥājji Rājji.

<sup>65</sup> On urban unrest, see G. Denooux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> For more details on the family of Shamdin Agha, see above: 33–43. Be-Shamdin Agha (“Be,” short of “Beth,” house or family in NA) is the form used by Jews and Christians to denote the family or the household of Shamdin Agha.

<sup>67</sup> Marr 1985: 90–91.

<sup>68</sup> Longrigg 1953: 338.

the Slevanis, with a request for help. As tribesmen approached Zakho, there was almost a siege around Zakho and their asses and mules filled the streets.<sup>69</sup> The *qāmmaqām* of the town, a Christian named El‘azar Beg, rushed to Hazim Beg and Hājī Agha—the two important men of Zakho—and asked them to prevent the tribesmen from entering Zakho and turning it into a battlefield. According to one informant, this conflict turned into a political struggle between Be-‘Isako and Hazim Beg. The Muslim inhabitants and the Jews of Zakho feared that they had come against the Jews, but “Hājī Agha’s intention was to crush Be-‘Isako.” This conflict lasted three days. On the fourth day, the situation calmed down because of an order issued in Baghdad, and the tribesmen began to leave Zakho. Raphael b. Moshe Zaken, who was leaving Zakho on his peddling circuit, described the siege as a “human chain around Zakho.” On his way out of Zakho, he came across Bishār Agha, the son of Šalāh Agha Šindī, who gave him a reassuring message for the concerned Jews:

My Jew, do not worry. We are not aiming at you, return [to Zakho] and tell your cousins...gather all your family members and tell them: do not be afraid. We are not aiming at the Jews.<sup>70</sup>

He immediately returned to Zakho to report this to his family members. Before long, the tribesman left Zakho and the surrounding area, relieving the fears of the Jews, but not the tension between Be-Shamdin Agha and Be-‘Isako.<sup>71</sup>

The first incident occurred probably around mid-1946 and the second incident happened two or three years later, following the establishment of the State of Israel, when approximately one hundred supporters of

<sup>69</sup> Me‘allim Abraham (I#15).

<sup>70</sup> Gurjī Zaken (I#17). Hazim Beg had been an entrepreneur, a member of parliament and for a while a minister without portfolio. For more details, see Part I, the section on Zakho.

<sup>71</sup> According to Gurjī Zaken (I#17), Hazim Beg sent a secret message to ‘Abdallāh b. Hājī Mirro to leave Zakho or his fate would be bitter. ‘Abdallāh, who had a fine store in Zakho handed it, as well as his house, over to his cousin, Muḥammad, and migrated to Kirkuk. ‘Abdallāh’s wife and three children joined him. His wife, Sabro, of Jewish origin, would return to Zakho three times a year to visit her mother. During her visits, a love affair ensued between her and ‘Abdallāh’s cousin, Muḥammad. Once, when ‘Abdallāh visited Zakho, they planned to kill him, and so they did. They were arrested by the police and were sentenced to death. The news of the death sentence motivated friends of ‘Abdallāh b. Hājī Mirro to commence a demonstration aimed at Hazim Beg, with slogans hailing justice and insinuating that he was behind the murder. Hazim Beg nevertheless ordered an immediate appeal and everything was reversed. “They were acquitted, all thanks to Hazim Beg.”

a certain Shaikh Qāsem gathered in the Jewish neighborhood of Zakho threatening the Jews and their property. When the Jews of Zakho were discussing these affairs forty years or so later, some details of the tribal intimidation by Shaikh Qāsem may have been confused with those surrounding the political and economic conflict between Be-Isako and Be-Shamdin Agha. In reference to both affairs, Zakho Jews noted that tribesmen from all around Zakho surrounded the city “wanting to kill the Jews and take their property,” and that the Jews hid inside their homes in fear for their lives. The memories of both events stirred similar fears among the local Jews.

The following event relates to the tense period following the establishment of the State of Israel. At that time in Zakho, there was a speculation, that the tribesmen who participate in the Friday prayer “would kill the Jews” following the inciting sermon of the *imām*. On Thursday night, the anxiety of the Jews because of the rumors was at its peak, and the Kurdish tribesmen had to carry out patrols in the town to calm down the situation. Apparently, during the ceremony on Friday, the cleric did not incite against the Jews but rather warned, “Whoever hurts the Jews will be hit by both the tribesmen and the government. And the matter ended.”<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, another account from Dohuk relates to rumors and threats that on a certain Friday “they [the tribesmen] would be coming to slaughter the Jews.” Sasson Naḥum (I#31) reported that one Friday the Jews were warned that they had only two more hours to remain in Dohuk. Sasson explained:

On Fridays, the villagers would come to pray at the mosque in Dohuk, so they said that following the prayers, they would kill us. We were very afraid. We closed our stores and shut ourselves up inside our homes.

Reportedly, several members of the Jewish community of Dohuk, Sasson Naḥum, Shlomo David Salmān and David Biri sought the help of Saʿīd Agha Doski who was sitting in a coffeehouse. Sasson Naḥum recalled that they told him the following:

‘Agha, we are afraid, we have heard all kinds of rumors.’ He told us, ‘What do you want from me. Go away, I do not care.’ We became even more afraid [because] previously he would [usually] calm us down [in similar situations] and now he spoke differently.

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<sup>72</sup> Menashe Eliyahu b. Mordechai, OHD, 70 (11).

The Jewish deputation left Sa'īd Agha, the chieftain who would usually help the local Jews, and especially if he saw an opportunity to collect fees for his help. They went to seek help from a Jewish physician originally from Baghdad, Dr. Yeḥezkel, who resided in Dohuk. He phoned the *qāimmaqām* of Dohuk who was at the time in Arbil and he rapidly returned to Dohuk. Upon his arrival, he drove in his car together with Sa'īd Agha, whose attitude was changed in the presence of the official and Dr. Yeḥezkel through the streets of the town. In addition, Sa'īd Agha's tribesmen began searching for those who had come to Dohuk from the villages and drove them away, and these scenes reassured the local Jews. Interestingly, the events in Zakho and Dohuk were of the same nature: in both, there were rumors that the Jews would be killed, and both concerned tribesmen who came to participate in the Friday public prayer that included a sermon in the main mosque.

c) *Sandur*

The deteriorating relations between Muslims and Jews affected also Sandur, the unique village of solely Jewish farmers, which was under the tribal patronage of Sa'īd Agha Doski of Dohuk. According to Şāliḥ Raḥamim (I#37) from Sandur,

When the war broke out [in Israel, between the Jews and the Arabs], they [the Muslim Kurds] said, 'If in Palestine Jews kill Arabs, we have to kill the Jews here [in Iraq].' One Friday afternoon, many armed men gathered on a mountain near Sandur. It was around three or four in the afternoon. We went to an elder [the *mukhtār*] named Sasson and told him: 'Sasson, many Kurds are gathering against us,' [asking] 'What do you think [we should do]?' He said, 'Why are you standing still? Go and tell Sa'īd Agha and he will know what to do.' Two young men immediately left for Dohuk, a distance of an hour and a half; they went to Sa'īd Agha and told him of our plight.

Sa'īd Agha gathered one hundred armed men and told them, "You must kill at least twenty or thirty of them," referring to rival tribesmen led by Ḥājjī Mālo, who "are coming against our Jews." Sa'īd Agha and his men converged in Sandur on Friday night. This may have been enough to deter the rival tribesmen from pursuing an attack against the Jews of Sandur. Some twenty Doski tribesmen remained in Sandur to guard the Jewish villagers at night. There were not enough beds for all the tribesmen who came to Sandur. Following that night, they returned to their homes. According to Şāliḥ Raḥamim,

Sa'īd Agha sent a letter [or a message] to Ḥājji Mālo in which he told him, 'Are you not ashamed of yourself, coming [here to Sandur] to kill my Jews, to loot them? If there were a *firmān* [governmental decree, to kill the Jews], I am the one who would [execute it and] kill them, for they are my Jews. Why did you send your men over to them?'

Sa'īd Agha reportedly stipulated that the Jews were his Jews for better or for worse, thereby epitomizing his patronage over the Jews. His behavior in Sandur seemed different than his initial attitude in Dohuk, as discussed above, either because the timing was different, or because the Jews of Sandur were almost entirely at his mercy and under his complete responsibility.<sup>73</sup> The different attitude of Sa'īd Agha in Dohuk and Sandur may have been caused by the fact that the attack on Dohuk was carried out by members close to his Doski tribe, whereas the attack on Sandur came from his sworn tribal enemies.

d) *Garzangel*

The following event may suggest what the tribesmen had in mind when contemplating an attack on the Jews in this tense period. The family of Yitzḥak Menaḥem migrated to the village of Garzangel, in the Mosul area,<sup>74</sup> where most of the Jews were employed in agriculture, weaving and trade. Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a group of Gorani tribesmen encircled the village, shot some warning bullets, and raided the Jews of Garzangel. They stole 200 sheep, 10 horses and mules, 30 head of cattle and 15 calves. The fifteen Jewish families who lived in the village had some weapons, five guns and ten pistols, but they were not capable of withstanding one hundred armed tribesmen. Reportedly, a Jewish youth named Naḥum resisted the raid. He used his weapon against the assailants, but he was killed. Two other Jews and one Muslim were injured. Eventually, the police managed to capture the robbers and charged them in court; the Goranis returned a small part of the stolen goods.<sup>75</sup> Another testimony on this event came from Mordechai Saydo from Shosh, near Aqra, who often visited his uncle and father-in-law in Garzangel.<sup>76</sup> In one of his visits,

<sup>73</sup> See the section entitled "Sandur, a Jewish village," pp. 130–134.

<sup>74</sup> Ben-Yaacob 1981: 56.

<sup>75</sup> Menaḥem 1980: 57.

<sup>76</sup> His father-in-law was also his uncle, as cousins marriage was a very popular pattern of marriage. See Leach 1940: 21–22; Patai 1973: 35, 93; van Bruinessen 1978: 68–69.

he reported that armed Kurds attacked the village at 2 A.M. from all sides and took everything they could. “They left nothing, not a sheep, not a cow, not a horse. Then, at 4 or 5 A.M. they left.” Later on, the Shaikh who owned the village and the police came, but they could not provide any help. Reportedly, this event awakened the desire among the Jewish citizens of Garzangel to immigrate to Israel.<sup>77</sup>

### C. *Accusations and Imprisonment of Jews*

The harassment of Jews in Kurdistan was perpetrated not merely by tribesmen and other outlaws, but was also instigated by the authorities. In 1947, the Iraqi foreign minister told the UN Committee on Palestine: “The fate of the Jews in Muslim countries depends on developments in Palestine.” Even Nūr al-Sa’id, the prime minister, uncharacteristically declared that the Jews were “hostages.”<sup>78</sup> As elsewhere in Iraq, Jews in Kurdistan were subjected to searches, questioning, and detention as indicated in the following accounts.

Until 14 May 1948, there were normal mail deliveries between Iraq and British Palestine. Iraqi and Kurdish Jews, whose relatives or friends had already settled in Palestine, part of which became Israel, used to keep up a mail correspondence with them. With the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the declaration of the State of Israel, on 15 May 1948, the Iraqi authorities confiscated all letters sent from Palestine to Iraq and transferred them to the secret police, *al-mukhabarāt*. The government issued no regulation forbidding mail deliveries from Palestinian citizens; yet, many Jews who received letters from Palestine were taken by surprise when the police detained them. The secret police seized these letters and filed them for later use, regardless of their content. In order to victimize the Jews, the authorities seized nine sacks of mail that were sent from Palestine to Iraq.<sup>79</sup> The police arrested and tried those who received letters from Palestine, even though these letters were dispatched at the time it was legal and the border between the two countries was open. The Iraqi authorities used

<sup>77</sup> Mordechai Saydo and Moshe Saydo, OHD, 67 (11).

<sup>78</sup> Rejwan 1985: 236. Nūr al-Sa’id (1888–1958) was a prominent Iraqi politician in the 20th century. He served as a chief of staff of the Iraqi army and then minister and prime minister.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 233–234.

letters sent from Palestine to Iraqi citizens of Jewish origin as a pretext to charge Jews with disloyalty and Zionist activity.<sup>80</sup> In this manner, the Iraqis arrested Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) from Dohuk because of a letter received from the former rabbi of Dohuk, Ḥakham Shalom Shimoni, who was already in Jerusalem. The letter said:

The British are about to leave Jerusalem and the Muslims will leave as well. It will be ruled by Jews, and if it is God's will you should come here.

Gamlieli had never received this letter; the authorities kept it for six months, at the end of which

they came and took me from my store to the *qishle*. In the *qishle*, they hit me with *khayzarān* [Arab., whip made of reed, rattan or bamboo]. They asked me to read this letter. I had no knowledge of this letter. I read the letter... that was written by Ḥakham Shimoni... They put me in handcuffs and took me to Mosul... They were going to crucify me. I was given a sentence of [death by] crucifixion.

Yoseph Gamlieli later learned that his father traveled to Baghdad to try to release him. According to Gamlieli,

My late father took with him six hundred dinars... He reached Nūrī al-Sa'īd and gave him the money at night... The next morning, they were supposed to execute me, but my *'afū* [Arab., lit. amnesty, pardon] arrived. He reached Nūrī al-Sa'īd and put the money in his hands, 500 or 600 dinars... He [Nūrī al-Sa'īd] told him, 'I do not want it, but [you may] give it to my servants.' He gave it to his servant. He [Nūrī al-Sa'īd] said, [considering that] 'you are very old and you came in person all the way [from Dohuk] to see me... For your sake, I will save your son.' That night, Nūrī al-Sa'īd sent a telegram and that same night I was supposed to be executed. They let me off the hook... that same night.<sup>81</sup>

The alleged bribe of 500 or 600 dinars and possibly the compassion of Nūrī al-Sa'īd rescued Yoseph Gamlieli.

Following the establishment of Israel the Jews of Zakho felt more tightly controlled by the authorities, experienced harassment, and troubles similar to other Kurdish towns. The Jewish community pleaded for help from influential persons in the authority. A Jew from Zakho reflects this atmosphere in the following account:

<sup>80</sup> Meir 1989: 463.

<sup>81</sup> Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13).

There was a Christian person in Zakho, called Nimrūd, who had two brothers who served as officers in the Iraqi Army. One of them was killed in the war with Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī and the second one was alive. Ḥamīd, the son of Nimrūd, had met Shmuel Gabbai, the son of the head of the Jewish community in Zakho, and warned him about the intention of the army ‘to come and capture Jewish suspects in Zakho.’<sup>82</sup>

At that time, the martial law was still intact. On one Friday in August 1948, the authorities detained seven Jews from Zakho and questioned them about their contacts with the State of Israel and Zionism.<sup>83</sup> Moshe Gabbai, the head of the Jewish community, was one of the seven arrested.<sup>84</sup> The Jews were detained for allegedly donating money to the Jewish National Fund. Two of them, Dāwūd ‘Ijjo<sup>85</sup> and Šālīḥ Dāwūd had family members in Israel. Eventually, the authorities released the seven Jews in return for a payment of fifty dinars each, “as a bribe,” but two of them did not have the money.<sup>86</sup> The authorities kept them in detention in a separate room. One of the interrogators even slapped Dāwūd ‘Ijjo, a hunchback, on his face. Dāwūd ‘Ijjo told him: “You should be ashamed of hitting someone [crippled] like me! You are the government, so you go and search out my brother [in Israel].” They recorded the testimonies, but only upon receiving the money, were they released. Nevertheless, bribery was not always successful, as the following account indicates.

### 1. *Imprisonment for Hailing Israel*

Several dozen young Jewish males earned their living by transporting goods, notably logs. They were loggers (NA., *tarāḥe*), who guided their loaded rafts along the Khabur River that surrounded the Island of Zakho, to the Hezil Stream, north of Zakho and all the way to Mosul by way of the Tigris River. Usually, Kurdish villagers would cut the trees and prepare the logs and sell them to the Jewish loggers who would transport the logs for Jewish merchants. At times, the loggers would double as muleteers while traveling the mountainous roads.

<sup>82</sup> Ra’uf Katna (I#36).

<sup>83</sup> The Jewish informants did not know the exact date only that it occurred during the month of August.

<sup>84</sup> Those detained were Šālīḥ Dāwūd, Moshe Mehager, Dāwūd ‘Ijjo, Me‘allim Abraham and Baruch Nissim.

<sup>85</sup> Dāwūd ‘Ijjo was known as “the hunchback.”

<sup>86</sup> The two were Dāwūd ‘Ijjo and Šālīḥ Dāwūd.

The following account occurred at the end of 1948 or in the early part of 1949, when the war raging between the Jews and Arabs was at its peak or had just finished. A group of twenty-five Jewish loggers was en route to the village of Doavmiske, 43.5 miles from Zakho, to collect logs loaded on rafts and take them down the Tigris River to Zakho. The following account is based on the testimonies of two members of the group, ‘Azīz Shavro (I#55) and Ḥayyo Cohen (I#22). While making their way from Zakho to Doavmiske, the heavy snow forced the group to remain in the Kurdish village of Batufe for three days and nights. When the sun finally shone and the weather improved, they went outdoors and in an attempt to warm themselves up danced in a circle, chanting “Ti-ti-ti, Israel!” a chant they used to chant in religious or social celebrations, when dancing with the *Torah* Scroll, or at Jewish weddings when accompanying the bridegroom from and into the synagogue.<sup>87</sup> Although this chant contained the name of Israel, it did not have any specific Zionist implications. Interestingly, ‘Azīz Shavro (#55) added a Zionist flavor to the account. “We said, we shall take the flag of Israel and dance and sing songs of *Eretz-Yisrael* in order to warm up.” This was a romanticized version of the event. In another interview with him, he admitted that they praised the State of Israel for triumphing over the Arab countries, and that a group of fifty Muslim Kurds joined them in their dance. Eleven of these Jews were later charged with involvement in Zionist activity. They consequently spent three to three and a half years in jail. Their only crime was dancing Kurdish dances outdoors “in order to warm up,” chanting the words “Ti-ti-ti Israel” in celebration of the victory of the State of Israel over its Arab opponents. Local Kurds from Batufe complained that they had been singing Zionist songs, although some local villagers joined them in their dancing. The police arrested them and found a hand grenade in their possession that was intended for use in underwater fishing. Ḥayyo Cohen (I#22) recalls:

We were supposed to bring trees from Batufe, a place with a governor, an army unit and army officer who guarded the whole area. It was January 1949. There was heavy snow, perhaps one meter an half high. We could not leave the house. We lit a fire and played backgammon indoors. Suddenly, on Saturday, the snow stopped and the sun came out. The Kurds

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<sup>87</sup> In Israel, the Kurdish community would sing this chant in celebrations. The celebrants would sing this chant followed with the mantra “Ti-ti-ti, Israel!” such as “Big Ones, Israel!” “Strong ones, Israel!” and so on.

played when the sun came out. They rolled snowballs down from the peak of the mountain. We joined them in this. Suddenly, one of us [one of the Jewish loggers] Ḥabīb [Tamar] or Yiḥyā Kalakavan, took out a *kifīyya* [Arab., male headscarf], tied it to a stick and began dancing in a circle while chanting “Ti-ti-ti Yisrael!” Then, the whole village joined us and started singing “Ti-ti-ti Yisrael.” Suddenly the police came...they asked if we came to spoil the Kurds here...They searched in our tools and found hand-grenades, which were kept for underwater fishing. The governor put us in prison until the next morning and we emerged feeling very cold. He phoned Zakho and said that he had caught a group with a flag and hand-grenades who intended to bomb the bridges between Iraq and Persia...He wanted to glorify himself...Our hand-grenades were TNT in which we used to place a long fuse. We would light the fuse and throw it into the river to fish. In short, the Kurds with whom we danced came and testified against us.

Something in this account was unclear. Why would the Kurds of Batufe, who reportedly danced with the Jews from Zakho, inform the police? I asked ‘Azīz Shavro [I#55] this question. He explained:

[We had a problem with] an Arab police officer whose wife was a prostitute.<sup>88</sup> She came to dance with us for fun. This police officer came to us [because his wife was dancing with us] saying, ‘Are you not ashamed to raise the Israeli flag and sing Israeli songs?’ He went to his officer and reported that he had heard the group that was already in Batufe singing songs celebrating Israel’s victory over seven [Arab] states.

When asked about the motives of this police officer, ‘Azīz Shavro revealed another puzzle of the event.<sup>89</sup>

There was one person [in the group] named Raḥamim [b. Usaka] Sa‘do. He told us to file a complaint against that police officer who harassed us...The truth of the matter is that the police officer did not [complain], he merely came to disband us...but we complained that he harassed us. He then came and begged us not to file a complaint, saying that he would be fired. We had a mutual agreement that we would not complain and he would report to his supervisor that the matter was resolved. Nonetheless, after our departure, the police officer wrote down the whole story anew...The truth of the matter is that Raḥamim [b. Usaka] Sa‘do failed us...

<sup>88</sup> A prostitute, either in the nominal sense of the word, or in its derogatory sense, as for a ‘cheap’ woman.

<sup>89</sup> Gavish (1999:1) admits that she could not figure out the right version regarding this event.

Reportedly, the Jews wanted to dance to warm themselves up and the song chanted was “ti-ti-ti-Israel” with slogans about the victory of the Jews over seven Arab states. The Israeli flag that was allegedly raised had been merely a colored *kūfīya*. The Jews reported that Muslim Kurds from Batufe joined the group of Jews who were dancing.<sup>90</sup> According to ‘Azīz Shavro, upon being arrested, the group was marched to Zakho with their hands chained. In Zakho, their families pleaded for their release, but the local police officers argued that since this matter fell under the jurisdiction of Mosul they could not interfere. After fifteen days in Zakho, the police transferred the arrested Jews by truck to a jail in Mosul. ‘Azīz Shavro recalls:

As soon as we arrived, the police officers told us, ‘You are Zionists, you will not survive here.’ They kicked us, hit us, and shaved our heads. They gave us cans with holes in the bottom and told us to fill them with water from the faucet in order to wash the yard. How exactly could we fill up cans with holes in them? At the same time, police officers hit our heads with sticks until our blood flowed and we cried out with pain... The police officers told us, ‘Did you want to go to Israel to kill Arabs? You will see stars during the daytime!’ It continued for six hours until the night... The next morning... military officers came to interrogate us... They told us, ‘If you inform on your friends in the Zionist movement we won’t hit you, but if you refuse to do so we will break your bones.’ We tried to explain to the interrogators that we were merely raftsmen who transfer merchandise from the mountains to Zakho along the Tigris River... The interrogators told us, ‘It was testified that you raised an Israeli flag and sang songs about Israel in a demonstration.’ We told the interrogators, ‘We left Zakho with mules on a seventy-kilometer [44 miles] journey to Batufe and we were unable to continue until the snow stopped. It was very cold, so in order to warm up we danced, jumped, and sang and more than fifty [local Kurdish] villagers joined us. We did not say one word against Iraq.’ The interrogators told us, ‘You are Zionists, [you are] lying.’ They ordered the police officers to hit us all over our bodies until we agreed to tell them who the leader of the Zionist movement was. We cried and yelled, the police officers hit us mercilessly with kicks and punches all over our bodies, and we were bleeding. They threatened us saying ‘You will die if you do not inform on them. [... The next morning] they told me, ‘Azīz, we would free you if you tell us who your partners are. Perhaps it is true that you work as raftsmen, but you must be

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<sup>90</sup> None of the informants remembered the name of the police officer, but some remembered peculiar details. He was an Arab from Mosul. Later that year he won 500 *dinars* through a lottery ticket. He bought a house, land, and a bus, and began to gamble and play cards. He lost everything and eventually he killed himself, reportedly in 1949.

transferring weapons and ammunitions to Israel in order to kill Arabs.’ I told them, ‘We transfer logs and nothing else. We and our ancestors have always been loyal to Iraq.’ They said again, ‘You are lying,’ and hit me with deadly blows. I cried and yelled until I fainted, because they broke my nose and all my face was bleeding. For three months, we did not say a word to our interrogators; we did not wash ourselves or change our clothes and we ate no meat, but only three bread rolls and twelve dates. We did not know what was going on with our parents and they did not know what was happening to us.

After three months, the authorities released four of the fifteen Jews. The rest were transferred to Baghdad where they met the two famous Jewish prisoners, Shalom Sāliḥ Shalom and Yoseph Baṣrī, who were to be hanged finally in January 1952.<sup>91</sup> The remaining eleven Jews went on trial and the judge, Lieutenant Colonel ‘Abdallāh Na‘ṣānī, sent them all to prison, generally for term periods around three years.<sup>92</sup> ‘Azīz Shavro said:

We had given the names of fifty Kurds from Batufe, who were willing to testify that we had done nothing, but the police officers threatened them and the cowardly Kurds changed their testimony.

In the Baghdad prison, the prisoners experienced humiliation and hardship. The prison housed four hundred Barzānī Kurds of whom reportedly the Arab prisoners were afraid, “but we mixed with them” because we “were Kurds from Zakho.”<sup>93</sup>

In prison, the inmate in charge of cleaning the cells was a *Shī‘ite* Muslim named Maḥmūd Qardash who in collaboration with the warden officer would allegedly plant *ḥashīsh* in the beds of wealthy Jewish prisoners, in an attempt to extort them. The warden officer would then send wardens to search their cells.<sup>94</sup> If *ḥashīsh* were found in a prisoner’s cell, he would be transferred to another prison, *Nukrāt Salmān*, on the

<sup>91</sup> See Meir 2002. Other Iraqi and Kurdish Jews were jailed for their association with Israel. See, for instance, Yehuda Atlas, *Through the poll of Hanging*, Tel-Aviv, 1969 (Hebrew).

<sup>92</sup> Many Iraqi Jews who were accused because of ‘Zionist’ related activity in the 1940s reported that ‘Abdallāh al-Na‘ṣānī was the military court judge. See Joseph Meir 2002. The main trial he chaired was the trial of Shafīq Addas whose verdict shocked the Jewish community. This trial evoked much emotion among the Jews. See, for instance, Bar-Moshe 1977: 164–176.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Azīz Shavro (I#55).

<sup>94</sup> In the book *Going with no return*: 118–120 (Hebrew), Yeḥezkel Ḥava reports of similar incidents in reference to Qardash, but without giving his name.

Iraqi-Jordanian border “where it was very hot.”<sup>95</sup> The warden would fine the prisoner 10 dinars, and if he did not pay, he would be thrown into solitary confinement. Out of the 200 Jewish inmates, only fifty-one remained in the prison in Baghdad. The authorities transferred the rest of the Jews to other prisons. According to ‘Azīz Shavro, one year he became the cleaner and guardian of the cell in which twenty Jewish inmates were incarcerated, receiving a quarter of a dinar from every inmate per month. The Jewish inmate in charge of this cell was Ezra Abu Shamma. After a year or so in prison, the wardens transferred all the Jewish inmates to a two-storied bakery structure built by the British. They built a 5-meter long fence with a locked door, and Maḥmūd Qardash kept the keys. Finally, all the Jewish inmates decided to overthrow Maḥmūd Qardash who had been causing many troubles, aggravating and extorting Jewish prisoners. They prepared themselves “for war,” though oddly enough, it occurred 18 days before the end of their term.

In the morning, we all stood near the fence, and as Maḥmūd Qardash opened the door of the yard, we fell upon him and hit him. He shouted, ‘Help, help, Zionists are killing me.’ Dozens of wardens and prisoners came to his aid but we fought like lions. The head warden telephoned the minister of police, Ṣāliḥ Ḥammām, telling him that Zionists were trying to escape, and asked for auxiliary forces. Dozens of police officers arrived and we ascended to the second floor of the bakery threatening to throw [building] blocks at every police officer who tried to enter. A police officer named Abu Omar was injured after we threw stones at him. They attempted to rescue him, but we would not allow it. They tried to enter through the roof in order to take him, but we did not let them... It continued from six in the morning until six in the evening and then the head warden came to speak with us.

This rioting ended with the understanding that no harm would be inflicted on the Jewish rioters and the warden took an oath on the *Qurʾān* and the King of Iraq. Maḥmūd Qardash was ousted from his position in charge of the Jewish inmates, but the warden transferred ten Jewish inmates to other prisons, in Kūt and ‘Amāra, despite his promise. When asked why the riot occurred 18 days before the end of their term, ‘Azīz Shavro (I#55) disclosed the reason, which was not mentioned in

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<sup>95</sup> Nukrāt Salmān was a desert police station, 150 km west of Samawa, which is on the southern Euphrates in the Diwaniya district. At the time, Zionists and Communists were imprisoned there and were subjected to difficult conditions. On 12 July 1951, the prisoners announced hunger strike for ten days. Shohet 1981: 213, n. 186.

any of the accounts of the Jewish prisoners: “a Jewish boy went to the toilets and Maḥmūd Qardash tried to rape him” and the boy called for help. This event prompted the riot.<sup>96</sup> After 18 more days in prison, “we thought that we would be released,” said ‘Azīz Shavro, “but they declared us to be a danger to the state.” As a result, the authorities transferred them to another jail for four more months.

Eleven men in a [small] room just eight meters [square] where all of us could not sit down or sleep [at the same time]... The smell of the toilets made us very sick that we went on strike, and [two Jewish prisoners] became ill from the situation there.<sup>97</sup>

In the end, the authorities released the Jewish prisoners and flew them straight to Israel. ‘Azīz Shavro (I#55) and Ḥayyo Cohen (I#22) arrived in February 1952 after three years or so in prison. Cohen considered this event the cause of great fear among the Jews of Zakho. The situation was not as it had been in the past, he reported.

#### D. *Economic Pressure before the Emigration to Israel*

On 17 December 1949, the Iraqi government canceled the emergency laws, and illegal emigration began immediately. On 9 March 1950, the Iraqi Parliament passed the law proposed by the Minister of Interior, Ṣālīḥ Jaber, allowing the Jews to emigrate with the provision that they renounce their Iraqi citizenship at the same time. Finally, on 10 March 1951 the Iraqi Parliament passed law no. 5/1951 freezing all of the estates and assets of the Jews who left Iraq.<sup>98</sup> These legal developments accompanied the mass emigration of Jews from Iraq. Before the emigration, the Jews of Kurdistan came under growing disturbing pressure from their Muslim neighbors and from government agencies. The Jews prepared to leave behind their homes and properties and to immigrate to a country that they hardly knew anything about. The following accounts relate to the imminent immigration to Israel and

<sup>96</sup> Meir 2002.

<sup>97</sup> Eliyahu Ḥakham and Yoseph Ḥammo b. Naze were among the 11 Jewish raftsmen who were arrested.

<sup>98</sup> Shohet 1981: 222–24. By the end of the year, 90,000 Jews registered for immigration and 20,000 had already left, Longrigg 1953: 362.

represent some of the Jewish concerns regarding their relations with their Kurdish neighbors and associates.<sup>99</sup>

One evening Sasson Naḥum (I#31) and his friend Moshe Ave visited the *koçke* of Sa'îd Agha, the chief of the Doski tribe in Dohuk, where a heated discussion ensued on the upcoming migration "of Jews to Palestine." Sa'îd Agha asked Moshe Ave, "Are you planning to migrate to Palestine?" Moshe Ave said, "Agha, we are not the type of Jews [who emigrate]. We are different." Sasson Naḥum spoke in a low, appeasing tone of voice, imitating how Moshe Ave (or any other person) would speak to the agha. Sa'îd Agha said to Moshe, "You are lying." He then said in a provoking manner, "Go on, you may leave for Palestine." Sa'îd Agha then turned to Sasson Naḥum with the same question. "I told him that we were unable to go and we did not dare to leave." Sa'îd Agha told him, "You are telling the truth, but Moshe is lying." A Mullā from Beshinke [Basifke?], who was a guest in the *koçke*, was discontented by the conversation with the Jews, and thought that it would likely encourage their emigration.

The Jews of Kurdistan also experienced economic pressure, which in itself provided a sufficient motive for migration. The state of affairs became difficult for Jews. Sasson Naḥum of Dohuk (I#31) differentiated between the original Kurdish population of Dohuk, who "loved us," and "strangers" or newcomers who came to Dohuk from villages and other places in recent years, as well as Arabs who had "hatred in their hearts; they did not like Jews after the conflict broke out in Palestine." The Muslim associates stopped selling gold to the Jews. They knew that the situation of the Jews was difficult and that finally they would leave to Israel.<sup>100</sup> In other words, the volume of business shrank. Mutual trust, which was necessary for business transactions, evaporated as the Muslims realized that the Jews were going to immigrate. The imminent migration of Kurdistani Jews intensified the attempts by Jewish merchants to redeem their debts from business associates. For obvious reasons, not many debtors of Kurdish or Arab origin were willing to pay their debts to Jewish creditors just a short while before the emigration of Jews after which the debt would be invalid. This method of selling on credit was rooted in the Kurdish tribal setting and was one

<sup>99</sup> See Sh. Doga, "Preparation for the immigration to the land of Israel and difficulties of absorption in the land of Israel," *Hithadshut* 6 (1990): 82–83 (Hebrew).

<sup>100</sup> Yoseph Gamlieli (#13) and Sasson Naḥum (#31).

component of the complex relationship between Jewish traders and Kurdish tribesmen. This approach was partly related to the need of the Jewish peddlers to sell all their goods while roaming in the villages, and was partly based on the lack of money in the tribal society. This method was also part of the economic dominance and exploitation of Jewish subjects within the tribal Kurdish society. The Muslim population was well aware of the pending emigration of the Jews, and as a result, many Jews were not able to sell their assets at all, or sold them at a very low price. Kurdish buyers exploited the situation and bought estates from Jews at a considerable reduction. Yoseph Gamlieli (I#13) sold his vineyards for 200 Iraqi dinars, instead of a reported value of one thousand dinars.

Before I received [the] 100 dinars, Dewali [the tribal agha under whose patronage the Jews of Dohuk lived]<sup>101</sup> summoned me, demanding twenty dinars as his share. I begged him, telling him ‘We have no money... how I can give you twenty dinars?’

Gamlieli’s begging did not help. Dewali exploited the Jews of Dohuk up until the last moment before their departure. Even in the midst of the difficulties experienced by the Jews, Dewali demanded his share of the disadvantageous transactions made by the Jews. Reportedly, other Jews in Dohuk were exploited in a similar manner. Already in 1934, Benzion Israeli commented on Jewish traders in Kirkuk whose “incomes are unrealized” because of bills not settled by Muslims and that “there is no hope of recovering the debts or even part of them.”<sup>102</sup> Many Jewish merchants attempted to collect their debts. Just before emigration, Me‘allim Abraham (I#15) attempted to collect some debts from local merchants in Mosul with whom he had had business transactions. Among them were Muḥammad Shākir, Sayyid Kudo, and Ṭāhā Qsabashi. “They tried to avoid paying me,” but “I managed to obtain some money from some of them, and the rest of the debt remained unpaid.” A majority of the Jews of Kurdistan lost their estates and property when the Baghdad government declared a freeze on the assets of those emigrating from Iraq. Nevertheless, a small number of Jews were able to bypass the decree. In March 1951, before the start of the emigration, the Iraqi government decreed a ‘*tajmīdi*,’ (Arab., freezing) of the assets, estates, and property of the Jews emigrating from Iraq.

<sup>101</sup> More on Dewali see above, pp. 186–190.

<sup>102</sup> Benzion Israeli 1934.

This decree turned many wealthy Jews, who had been registered for emigration, penniless. Me'allim Abraham (I#15) of Zakho managed to outsmart the new law:

We had eight truckloads of poplar trees and various other quantities of merchandise... that we planned to transport to Mosul... I phoned my *wakīl* [Arab., representative] in Mosul, Maḥmūd [Muḥammad? Aḥmad?] Shākir, and asked him to come to Zakho urgently. Eventually, I heard that the merchandise belonging to my brother Ḥammo had been impounded in Batufe... [At that time] Maḥmūd Shākir, our *wakīl*, also served as a council member in Mosul... He came to Zakho, because I told him this was not a matter for the telephone... When he arrived, he told me, 'you know there is a new decree, freezing Jewish assets. Any Muslim who safeguards Jewish property faces five years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 dinars...' I instructed him how [to circumvent it]. I told him to write a promissory note in my name for the sum of 700 dinars. 'I will keep it, and you will complain to the *qāimmaqām*.' He sought the advice of some friends and agreed... He wrote a letter saying that he, Aḥmad Shākir, gave me 700 dinars for the purchase of trees that will be shipped to Mosul on a certain date. The contract was dated eight months earlier, before the freezing of assets law. He asked the *qāimmaqām* what could be done. The *qāimmaqām* asked him, 'Is this true?' He said, 'It is true,' and showed him the contract. The *qāimmaqām* told him, 'I will check it out and let you know.' He then telephoned Batufe and made some enquiries. He then ordered the release of the Jewish merchandise that had been held up there... We managed to send trucks to transport the merchandise from Batufe and then sent them... In this manner, we managed to salvage something from the government. I took the money but I sent 100 dinars to the *qāimmaqām* and 50 dinars to Ḥājji Khaḍer, both of whom had been involved.

The authorities made it hard for the Jews to leave Iraq with their money and possessions. Na'ima Shomer argued that just before the departure from Koi-Sanjaq towards Baghdad en route to Israel, the authorities warned the Jewish immigrants that women would be allowed to take only a single outfit and one pound with them. The Iraqi administration made sure that women inspectors searched the Jewish women and men inspectors searched Jewish men. A Muslim Kurd accompanied the Jews of Sulaimaniya all the way to Baghdad. His name was 'Abd al-Majīd b. Ḥājji Amīn of Mekader. "He carried everybody's money and came with us to Baghdad... In Baghdad he gave us all the money back. He did not keep even a nickel for himself."<sup>103</sup> The same practice recurs in Koi-Sanjaq where the Jews were afraid to take the money to Baghdad.

<sup>103</sup> Sasson Ḥai and his wife Na'ima Shomer, OHD (11) 59.

Throughout the journey, there would be searches and inspections by police officers, either on behalf of the government, or on behalf of personal initiatives of local officers, who wished to feather their own pockets. A certain Abu-Baker, a Muslim Kurd from Koi-Sanjaq reportedly took more than 1,500 Iraqi dinars from Jewish families for safekeeping. Each family gave him fifty or a hundred dinars and some pieces of gold. When they reached Baghdad, his cousin arrived with half the sum. Sasson Hai narrated:

I handed it back to the [Jewish] residents of Sulaimaniya, and two days later, he sent the rest. He did not take a penny from us, though we gave him gifts [that we could not take with us], such as silverware, or nice buckets, or a fine blanket. We would always give him gifts; he did us favors.<sup>104</sup>

Practically all the Jews of Kurdistan immigrated to Israel during 1951 and 1952.<sup>105</sup> The Jews remember that the Kurds conveyed grief because of the abrupt end of a relationship that had lasted hundreds of years. Most Jews related that the Kurds expressed sorrow at the departure of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>106</sup> They remembered their Kurdish neighbors accompanying them to their buses as they headed for Baghdad. Israel Shomer of Koi-Sanjaq described what happened in his town. The *qāimmaqām*, a Sulaimani Kurd named Rashīd Shakir, planned to conduct a physical inspection of the Jews leaving the town. He wished to verify the names and gender of the emigrants with those appearing on his list. Israel Shomer recollected, “Everybody closed their stores that day and gathered in a big yard to watch the women take off their clothes,” during the planned inspection. According to Israel Shomer, the shaikhs and the public in town “stood up against him.” They told him “to let the Jews go their way.” Apparently, “the shaikh of the city,” Melā Khwez Agha, warned the *qāimmaqām* that he would not remain alive if he executed his plan. Eventually, he scrapped the idea and the Jews were permitted to leave the city without further delay.<sup>107</sup> By 1952, practically all the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan emigrated to the State of Israel, thus ending the long chapter of history of Jews in the Kurdish lands.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. Two years before the immigration, Sasson Hai moved to Sulaimaniya to work there while his wife Na’ima Shomer remained in Koi-Sanjaq.

<sup>105</sup> About the operation behind the immigration of the Jews of Iraq, see Hillel 1987.

<sup>106</sup> See Zaken 2000 and Gavish 1999: 266–68.

<sup>107</sup> Israel Shomer, OHD, 57 (11).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This manuscript focuses on the Kurdish Jewish communities, mainly in the region of Iraqi Kurdistan during the first half of the 20th century, examining the relationship between the non-tribal Jewish subjects and protégés and their tribal aghas. To comprehend the perception of the Jews in the eyes of the Kurdish tribesmen and the position of the Jews in the Kurdish society, five significant differences between the tribal Muslim Kurds and the Jews ought to be noted. Firstly, the Kurds were Muslims; Jews were members of the Mosaic Jewish religion. Second, along with the Christians, the Jews were considered in Islam, *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the Bible and the New Testament). Both Jews and Christians were *dhimmī*, people entitled to protection by the *Qur'ān*. Third, the main social distinction in the Kurdish society is between the *'ashiret*, the tribal caste, and the non-tribal members. Most Kurds were tribesmen linked with real or adopted blood relation with other tribesmen within their lineage or tribe. They were considered an integral part of the tribal society. At the same time, all the Jews were non-tribal civilians who lived outside the margins of the tribe and the tribal Kurds viewed them as the lowest, poorest and most contemptible group in the Kurdish society.<sup>1</sup> Fourth, most Jews, especially in rural areas, were servile and non-combative subjects who relied on their tribal chiefs for protection. Nevertheless, unlike the Christians, the Jews were a very small non-Muslim community, and were generally submissive and trustworthy in the eyes of the tribesmen, while some of the Christians were *'ashiret*, i.e. tribal and combative in nature. Lastly, urban Jews and more particularly rural Jews generally worked in different occupations than their Kurdish neighbors, some of which were considered socially unacceptable to tribal Kurds. Therefore, in the rural area there was virtually no occupational or economic competition between Jews and Kurds.

In the tribal Kurdish society, Jews generally performed specific economic roles. In many aspects, both politically and economically, they

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance, B. Nikitine and E. B. Soane, "The Tale of Suto and Tato." BSOAS 3 (1923-5): 71-75.

were subjects of their aghas. The Kurdish aghas treated them almost as their personal property and the Kurdish language clearly expresses this perception: when an agha speaks of his Christian or Jewish protégés, he calls them, “Filehê min” (Kur., “my Christians”) or “Cihûyê min” (Kur., “my Jews”), suggesting an affiliation of great nearness between the two if not mastership or ownership of the agha over his subjects. On the other hand, the Jews and Christians would bestow great esteem on their agha referring to him obediently and calling him “my agha.”

In both rural and urban Kurdistan there were two forms of government: the official government and the tribal chieftains. The Jews thus faced two separate systems of authority, the most important of which was the tribal system. In daily life, the role of tribal chieftains was much more decisive than the role of the central government. At times, the tribal chieftains were stronger than the local government, which was often under their influence. At times, loyal forces to the tribal chiefs were incorporated within the system of local government. With the focus the dual authority, this manuscript deals concisely with the social history of the Kurdistan Jews during the first half of the 20th century, up to 1951, the time of the mass immigration of Jews to Israel. This manuscript examines the sets of relationships between aghas and the local authorities and the Jews in six urban centers, Zakho, Aqra, Dohuk, Amadiya, Sulaimaniya (in Iraqi Kurdistan) and Shino (in Persian Kurdistan) and discusses various accounts from more than two-dozen Kurdish villages. In urban centers, three main patterns of relationships between Jews and Muslim Kurds appeared. In the first pattern, the Jews enjoyed the patronage of a powerful tribal Kurdish agha(s). In the second pattern, a wealthy and generous Jewish family mobilized the protection for the Jewish community. In the third pattern, the Jews would use their best ability and pay-off money to endure the caprices or the greed of urban or tribal aghas and to confront other problems. At times, these patterns overlapped.

This manuscript described several prominent Kurdish chieftains and their attitude towards the Jews; two of them were discussed in detail. The first one is ‘Abd al-Karīm Agha of the ruling family in Zakho, Shamdin Agha. The Jews of Zakho honored him as a “righteous gentile,” a title given to a major protector of Diaspora Jews, during times of tribulation. The second Kurdish leader described is Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī, the most important Kurdish leader of the 20th century. Barzānī was a descendant of an established family of Sūfī Shaikhs of the Naqsh-bandī tarīqa that was known for its considerate attitude towards the

Jews. Accounts about Mullā Muṣṭafā Barzānī and his brother Shaikh Aḥmad, suggest that Barzānī was not only a champion of Kurdish nationalism, but also a righteous and obliging tribal chieftain.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the manuscript an attempt was made to compare between the urban and rural experience of the Jews and their relationships with the aghas under whose patronage they lived. Most of the Jews were urban dwellers, but a significant number of Jews resided in villages in Kurdistan, generally a small number of Jewish families in each village. Throughout the generations, rural Jews maintained an agricultural lifestyle and resided in hundreds of Kurdish villages. This may suggest that Jews lived in rural Kurdistan with relative ease and security that enabled them to provide for their families and maintain elementary spiritual needs. When their regular lives were disturbed by a tragedy, caused by local tribesmen, the Jews would usually migrate to a safer jurisdiction. This explains one of the trends of migrations amongst rural Jews and the large number of villages that had a Jewish population in one time or another.

Jewish weavers, who lived both in rural villages, highlight the protection and attention given by the agha to the Jews. In the village, Jewish weavers practically did not have to buy anything. The aghas would instruct the Kurdish villagers to protect the Jewish weavers and provide them with food products and other necessities. Theoretically the villagers supplied these products in exchange for the desired outfits or carpets, but they would supply the products even if the clothes or the carpets were not ready or submitted yet. At times, the Kurdish *mukhtār* would ask the owners of the herds and flocks to give the Jews sheep for the supply of meat.

An important question that needs clarification is whether the Jews were actually 'slaves' in Kurdish society. Several reports from eyewitnesses from the 19th and early 20th centuries, describe rural Jews as slaves, who were subjugated to tribal chieftains in isolated places. These reports discuss mal-treatment, abuse and exploitation of rural Jews by their aghas and even the sale of Jewish slaves. In practice, certainly during the 20th century, the agha could sell not the person described at times as 'slave,' but rather the privileges that come with him. At the same time, this 'slavery' had an advantage since in a country

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<sup>2</sup> On Kurdish nationalism, see W. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement; Its origin and Development* (PhD Thesis, Syracuse University, 1960).

with no security, the subjugation of the Jew included the patronage of the master, without which no one could survive in the rural areas. In conclusion, one cannot consider all rural Jews to be slaves in the complete sense of the word, either by Western or Islamic standards. This slavery had been practiced in the isolated mountainous regions by powerful chieftains, who at times bought the right to possess Jewish subjects and at times received them as birthright. The aghas granted the Jews patronage and in return received gifts, dues and various other benefits. The Jews labored once, twice or even more times a year in the agha's fields, orchards or vineyards for no payment, a duty known as *zebara*. In reality, rural Jews were non-tribal protégés and subjects of the tribal agha; they were not completely autonomous but rather under the rule of the agha. The agha had an immense power over the life of his Jewish subjects who needed his permission in important decisions such as the marriage of a son or a daughter to someone outside his jurisdiction or the migration to another tribal jurisdiction.

Tribal chieftains protected not only rural dwellers, but also urban Jews who traveled extensively through the rural and tribal areas. In order to survive, traveling Jews sought the patronage of local tribal chiefs. In return, the Jews provided the agha with services and gifts and paid the agha's fees or commissions for significant business transactions under his jurisdiction. Finally, as reported extensively, both urban and rural Jews assisted their aghas in various ways. Tribal chieftains valued their rural Jews as an asset both because of their advantageous occupations and because of their submissive attitude, as rural Jews never posed a threat to aghas. Although the image of Jews were seen as poor, and at times cowardly, their loyal and trustworthy reputation further confirmed their status as an asset. Many acts of exploitation and abuse of rural Jews and less so of urban Jews were reported. These acts occurred because of the almost complete political dominance of the tribal chiefs in Kurdistan and because of the greed and abuse of power by some aghas. However, in spite of their disadvantage, thanks to creativity and shrewdness, in some instances the Jews were able to claim their rights and prevail against their abusers.

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their abusers. Rural Jews described a number of Kurdish aghas as powerful and honest rulers who bestowed justice on the Jews in their trials and rulings. Interestingly, some of these aghas were hardly recorded in the Kurdish annals. The favorite position of these aghas justifies and explains the long and relatively safe residence of Jews in rural Kurdistan throughout the generations. The available records suggest that in spite of occasional exploitation, abuse and even murder of Jews in the tribal setting, many aghas acted favorably towards their Jews alongside with aghas who inflicted hardship on them.

This manuscript discusses the relative lack of security of Jews in the tribal setting as demonstrated by acts of abduction of young women, by robbery and even murder of Jewish merchants and peddlers, and by other kinds of financial exploitation of Jews. The migrations of Jews, especially from the rural area to the relatively safer urban centers, were motivated by economic hardship, tribal feuds and the general lack of personal security. In discussing the murder of Jews in the tribal setting, two aspects ought to be noted, the lack of proper or any police response and the leniency of the tribal and local judicial authorities towards the murderers. It is suggested that this response is related to the concept of *Kafir Kuşt*—the Killing of Infidels. In the tribal society, the value of the life of Jews was much smaller than the lives of tribal Kurds. The leniency shown towards Kurdish murderers illustrates the differences in status between Kurdish tribesmen and non-tribal Jewish protégés.

Another facet of the relationship between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors and chieftains was that of conversion and Islamization of Jews. Conversion to Islam was part of the experience of Kurdistan Jews. The Jewish community regarded conversion almost as death in the family and the main reported reason for conversion of Jews was “abduction” of women. Apparently, Jews used the term “abduction” in describing not only the kidnapping of Jewish women but also when Jewish women joined Muslim men willingly. Jewish communities applied three methods to combat conversion to Islam. At times, more than one course of actions was taken in order to return the girl to her community. The first method was the appeal to the local authority; the second one was the establishment of a communal panel of deliberation, through which the Jews would challenge the tribal Kurds involved in the conversion; and the third method was the guarantee of a period of seclusion for the woman in question, to allow her to contemplate her decision while separated from her Muslim associate, under the supervision and the pressure of a respected Jewish person or family. Several events were

reported in which influential Jews managed to rescue Jewish women on the verge of conversion.

The last section of this manuscript deals with the political and social history of the Jews between World War I and the emigration en masse of the Jews to Israel in 1951–52. During World War I, the anguish of urban Jews was far greater than that of rural Jews in Kurdistan. The intense conscription campaigns were one of the characteristics of the war that burdened the population in the Ottoman Empire. The Kurdistanis Jews had no tradition of military service, and they had never been part of the tribal society, which was combative in nature. This is why most eligible Jewish men attempted to evade service in the army. Many urban Jews sought shelter under the patronage of tribal chieftains in rural areas where they were safe from Turkish conscription officers. Following the war, Jews from Kurdistan began migrating to the Holy Land. Those who remained in Kurdistan described their relationships with Muslim Kurds as “generally good,” until approximately the late 1930s and during the 1940s. Two events signify the change in the relations between Muslim and Jews: firstly, the pro-German coup led by Rashīd ‘Alī al-Gilānī in mid 1941. The riots in Baghdad against the Jews, known as the *Farhud*, in early June 1941, reverberated throughout Mosul and northern Iraq. From this shaky moment onwards, Jews faced tribal and local hostile elements who wished to take advantage of the disorder in Iraq and the anti-Jewish propaganda that was spread throughout the country during the height of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Secondly, the position of the Jews in Iraq further deteriorated after the establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948. The growing presence of Palestinian refugees in Iraq, from the mid 1930s onwards and the participation of Iraqi units in the war against the Jews in Palestine during 1948, further fueled hatred towards Jews. During the last eleven years of the Jewish presence in Kurdistan, Jews faced raids and instances of tribal intimidation as well as detention and jailing on various ‘Zionist’ charges.



## GLOSSARY

- agha [Kur.]: honorary title for a tribal or village chieftain; also a master or patron.
- aghawusa, aghatusa [NA]: the privilege of the agha for commissions and dues and other services performed by his non-tribal subjects.
- ‘ashiret, ‘ashirate [Arab., Kur., NA]: tribal, belonging to a tribe (i.e., belonging to a warrior and combative group).
- badal, or badal askarī [Arab.]: tax paid in substitute for military service.
- badalchi [Tur., badalci]: someone who redeems himself from military service through the payment of badal.
- cihû [Kur.]: Jew.
- çayçi [Tur.]: tea maker or server.
- dîwanxane [Kur.]: reception room, guestroom, of an agha or a dignitary.
- Eretz-Yisrael [Heb.]: The land of Israel.
- fallāḥ [Arab., Kur.]: agriculturalist, farmer; in Kurdish, Christian.
- firar [Kur.]: deserter, fugitive, escapee.
- firmān [Tur., Arab.]: governmental or imperial decree,
- gopal, gopāla [Kur., NA]: a walking stick of wood.
- hawar! hawāra! [Kur., NA]: a call for help.
- ḥajj [Arab.]: pilgrimage to Mecca.
- ḥājji [Arab., Kur.]: a title assumed by one who performed the pilgrimage.
- ḥakham [Heb.]: a learned man, a rabbi, who teaches the children and also practices as slaughterer and circumciser (see also me‘allim).
- imām: the male worshiper who leads the recitation of prayer in a mosque.
- jizya [Arab.]: poll tax paid by non-Muslim subjects in Muslim countries.
- kāfir kuşt [Kur.]: killing of an infidel.
- koçke [Kur.]: a guesthouse, sitting place of a Kurdish tribal chief.
- khān [Kur.]: coaching inn, caravanserai, commercial building in the market, used for storage of merchandise, residence of merchants and keeping of the animals.
- liwā’ [Arab., pl., ‘awliya]: district, province, Iraq is divided into 14 such units.
- minyān [Heb.]: ten adult men, the minimum necessary quorum for communal prayer in Judaism.
- majlis [Kur., meclis]: tribal council, guest room of Kurdish chieftain (see also under koçke or dîwanxane).

- mitzvah [Heb.]: a good deed performed by individual Jews, physically [for example, purification of the body] or spiritually [prayer, giving donations to the poor]. A mitzvah has a great moral value in the Jewish law.
- me‘allem [Arab., Kurd.]: a teacher; a polite title used by Muslim Kurds towards Jewish religious men in general.
- mîr [Kur., contraction of Amîr]: leader or ruler of semi-independent principality (emirate), or the paramount chief.
- mukhtâr [Arab.]: head of a village or community.
- mullâh [Kur., mela]: village preacher, the Kurdish equivalent for ‘âlim, Muslim cleric or religious scholar.
- mutaşarrif [Arab.]: governor of a province.
- nosht qyshlo [Tur.]: police station (see also qishle).
- qaçax [Kur.]: illegal, fugitive, robber, runaway, brigand, smuggled.
- qađā [Arab.]: district.
- qāđî [Arab.]: judge.
- qāimmaqām [Tur., Arab.]: district officer.
- qishle [Arab.]: jail.
- qurban [Arab.]: [I am your] sacrifice, said to show love, respect, obedience.
- Ramađān [Arab.]: month of fasting; a personal name.
- Sayyid [Arab.]: a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad; in modern usage, Mr.
- şūfî (Kur., sofi): Muslim mystic, usually referred to a member of the Naqshbandi mystical order (ṭarīqa), or an old pious man.
- shaikh [Arab.]: lit., an elder, a leader of a mystical order, or a tribal chief.
- shale-shapik [Kur.]: traditional Kurdish men’s trousers and vest.
- Shī‘a [Arab.]: major subdivision from the Muslim orthodoxy or *Sunna*, originated by ‘Alī, the fourth caliph and his followers.
- shoḥet [Heb.]: authorized slaughterer of animals according to the Jewish jurisprudence.
- tamwīn [Arab.]: supply, in reference to the period in which supply was appropriated by the government per coupons.
- ṭāṭfa [Arab. Kur., taīfe]: tribe, clan, ethnic or religious community.
- yishuv [Heb.]: the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel.
- zebara [Kur.]: communal work required from non-tribal subjects, on behalf of their tribal chieftain.
- zerser [Kur.]: literally, golden-head, i.e. poll tax, jizya.

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- Rabbi Abraham b. Yitzḥak 'Antebi, *Mor ve-Ohalot* (מור ואהל)

*Notes*

1. Incidental references are cited fully in the footnotes rather than in the bibliography.
2. Hebrew references are generally translated.

*Abbreviations of Publications often quoted*

AM	Assyrian Missionary Quarterly Paper (London)
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EI <sup>1</sup> , EI <sup>2</sup>	Encyclopedia of Islam, first and second editions
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
JJS	Jewish Journal of Sociology
JRCAS	Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society
KM	The Kurdistan Missionary (Minneapolis, Minnesota)
MEJ	Middle East Journal
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

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*Unpublished Interviews Conducted by the Writer<sup>1</sup> of This Book*

- A. Note that the following list includes the ordinal number; abbreviation of the name in brackets; name of informant, his age or date of birth, and place(s) of origin and residence in Kurdistan, as well as number and dated of the interviews conducted:
1. Gurgo b. Naḥum Sabto (Hebrew name Zeev Arieli), born in Zakho (1914–2004). In Israel he lived in El-Roi and Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Two interviews: 21 March 1987; 24 May 1987.
  2. Yoseph b. Binyamin (1915–2001). He lived in Nisibin and Qamishle. Interviewed on 14 June 1987. In other occasions throughout the 1990s, he was asked other questions and clarifications.
  3. Moshe Yitzḥak Binyamin (1913–1999?). He lived in Serkane, Mergasor, Havdi, Diana. His bother Shaul was present and contributed twice to the discussion. Interviewed in September 1995.
  4. Daniel Barashi (1913–2007). He lived in Amadiya and Nerwa. Five interviews: 15 June 1987; 16 June 1987; 18 June 1987; 17 July 1987; 19 July 1987.
  5. Tzemaḥ Barashi Amadi (ca. 1915–2007). He lived in Amadiya. Interviewed on 22 September 1994.
  6. Haim Barzānī (1896/7–199?). He lived in Khalka-Raikan, Suriye and Awqawa. Two interviews: 7 June 1987; 21 June 1987.
  7. Yona Gabbai, Zakho (1880–1970). Interviewed by Yona Sabar in the mid 1960s.
  8. Aryeh Gabbai (b.) Lived in Aqra. Interviewed on 22 August 1994.
  - 9&10. Majīd Gabbai & Hertzal Gabbai. They lived in Aqra. Interviewed by Susan Meiselas, 10 May 1995.
  11. Salīm Gabbai (1920–2003?). He lived in Zakho, Arbīl, Atash Ḥarir, and Shaqlawa. He was a nurse in both Kurdistan and Israel. Interviewed on 3 August 1987.
  12. Fā'ik Gabbai (born 1928), Lived in Aqra, where he was a merchant. Interviewed on 22 August 1984.
  13. Yoseph Gamlieli (1910/15–1999?). He lived in Dohuk where he was a merchant, the son of the *mukhtār*. Interviewed on 5 August 1987.
  14. Yigal Haini (b.1917). He lived in Arbīl where he was a teacher. Interviewed on 30 July 1999.
  15. Me'allim Abraham (1911–2005). He was a Ḥakham and a slaughterer in Zakho, from a family of merchants. In Israel served as a local Ḥakham in Jerusalem. Interviewed on 5 August 1997.

<sup>1</sup> All the informants have been interviewed by the writer of this book except informant # 7 (I#7) who was interviewed by Yona Sabar and informant #9 and 10 (I#9&10) who were interviewed by Susan Meiselas and an interpreter. Many thanks for both of them for letting me use the tapes made by them.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the informants lived in Jerusalem, and I would indicate only those who did not live in Jerusalem.

16. Aaron [Hārūn] "Judo" (1905–1998?), Zakho. He was a merchant in Zakho. Two interviews: 21 June 1987; 7 July 1987.
17. Gurjī Raphael Moshe Zaken, Zakho (1937–1999). Seven interviews: 25 March 1987; 8 April 1987; 23 April 1987; 29 April 1987; 25 May 1987; 22 June 1987; 25 June 1987.
18. Yitzḥak Murdakh Miro Zaken, Zakho (1910–1998). Three interviews: April 1985; 2 April 1985; summer 1986.
19. Zvi Zaken (1908–2002). He was a merchant in Zakho and a storekeeper in Jerusalem. Interviewed on 26 August 1987.
20. Sha'ya Zaken (1918–2000). He lived in Zakho and Baghdad. Interviewed on 4 August 1987.
21. Neḥemiah Hoja (b. 1927). Lived in Zakho. He was blind from early childhood. Two interviews: 31 October 1986; 29 November 1986.
22. Hayyo Cohen, Zakho (b. 1930). He lived in Zakho. He was a rafts man who was imprisoned with ten other Jews from Zakho. They were sentenced for 3 years in prison for Zionist related activity. Interviewed 8 February 1999.
23. Me'alim Levi (1900–199?). He lived in Zakho. He was a Ḥakham and teacher of children. Five interviews: 13 May 1987; 24 June 1987; 1 August 1988, 12 August 1988; 7 September 1988.
24. Moshe Yoseph Mizraḥi, Rabatke (1920–199?). He was a farmer. Three interviews: 15 June 1987; 17 June 1987; 25 June 1987.
25. Yehoshua Miro, (b.1920). He lived in Zakho. He was a merchant in Zakho and a police officer in Israel. Interviewed on 31 May 1987
26. Michael Michaeli (1915–199?). He lived in Aqra, Sisnawa, Sofian and Shino. He was a weaver in Kurdistan. Eight interviews: 16 June 1987; 17 June 1987; 18 June 1987, 22 June 1987; 1 July 1987; 8 July 1987; 26 July 1987; 7 August 1988.
27. Levi Mordechai Ya (1920–199?). He lived in Shandokh. Interviewed in July 1987.
28. Darwīsh Naḥum (b.1926). He lived in Aqra. Interviewed on 23 August 1994.
- 29&30. Naḥum Naḥum (b. 1926) & Hārūn Naḥum (b. 1930), two brothers who lived in Zakho and Baghdad. Interviewed on 10 September 1994.
31. Sasson Naḥum Ḥanna (1901–199?). He lived in Dohuk where he was a merchant. Interviewed on 26 August 1987.
32. Abraham Amadi Manoah, (1907–199?). He lived in Betanure and Amadiya. Two interviews: 17 June 1987; 21 June 1987.
33. Shabbatai Amram Yoseph (1897–199?). He lived in Whela near Nerwa. Two interviews: 15 June 1987; 2 August 1988.
34. Shalom Pirko (b. 1925). Lived in Harin. Interviewed on 22 September 1994.
35. Hayyo Chirmero (1906–199?). He lived in Zakho. Interviewed in 6 July 1987.
36. Ra'uf Katna (Kitāne) (b.1930). He lived in Zakho. He was a carpenter. Interviewed on 14 January 1990.
37. Sāli Raḥamim (1920–199?). He lived in Sandur. Two interviews: 10 May 1987; 1 July 1987.
38. Eliyahu Shalom (1921–199?). He lived in Hasinke, Rabatke and Sandur. Two interviews: 10 May 1987; 19 July 1987.
39. Moshe Shalom (b. 1925). He Lived in Sulaimaniya and Baghdad. Interviewed in May 1994. His brother Ṣadiq contributed slightly to the interview.
40. Naḥum Sharabi (b. 1917). He lived in Zakho. Five interviews: 16 October 1986; 30 October 1986; 1 June 1987; 4 June 1987; 14 June 1987.

41. Esther b. Binyamin (1920–199?), born in Tiberius. Interviewed on 4 January 1991.
42. Shoshanna Binyaminoff, (b. 1915?), of Urmiya. Interviewed in summer 1999.
43. Rivka Yisha'yahu, (b. 1915?). She lived in Be-Tanura and Chal. Interviewed in October 2002.
44. Yehoshua Reuben (1903–2000?). He lived in Chala and Kara. Six interviews: 22 June 1987; 28 June 1987; 1 July 1987; 6 July 1987; 14 July 1987; 8 August 1988.
45. Levi Mordechai (b. Pinhas) nickname “Hinno”, (1910–199?). He lived in Jujjar, Garzangal and Hozarchod. Interviewed in 1987.
46. Mordechai Sa'do Yoseph (1907–2003). Lived in Zakho. Interviewed 6 July 1987.
47. Bogis Kirma, “Pisho,” (1900–199). Native of Sandur. Interviewed 1999.
48. Meir Zaken, Zakho (b. 1925). Interviewed 1985.
49. Babakir Pizhdar. Interviewed in summer 1992 in London.
50. Ephraim b. Binno (1910–199?). Native of Zakho. He was a merchant, trading mainly with lumber woods. Interviewed on 6 July 1987.
51. Saleḥ Zaken, Zakho (b. 1932). Interviewed several times during the 1980s and 1990s.
52. Nissim David Nissim “Gharib” (b. 1926). Native of Sulaimaniya. Interviewed in 2001.
53. 'Azīz Daniel Mukhtār (b. 1920) lived in both Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya. Interviewed in 2001.
54. Justice Dr. Tzemaḥ (d. 2006). Native of Mosul, a son of a Member of the Iraqi Parliament. Interviewed on 17 September 2002.
55. 'Azīz Shavro (Chavero) (b. 1931). Native of Zakho. Interviewed on 19 April 2003.
56. Shamuel Baruch (1898–199?), Zakho. Interviewed in 1887.

*Notes on the Informants*

1. The number of informants is actually bigger than 56 (61), because there are three couples of brothers interviewed together (I#9&10; I# 29&30 & I#39) and two couple of spouses (I#5; I#29). At times, a remark or a note of the other attendant was recorded, but it was not justified to consider it an independent interview.
2. The following surnames, Gabbai (referring to the treasurer or caretaker of the synagogue), Zaken (old man, similar to Altman, Alterman, or Alter in Jewish communities in Eastern Europe), and Naḥum (the name of the Biblical Prophet, Naḥum the Alqoshite, believed to be buried in Alqosh) are common in Jewish communities in Kurdistan. Holders are not necessarily belonging to the same family. Other common surnames indicate the origin of the person (such as Amadi or Barashi, denoting someone whose origin is from Amadiya or Barashi).
3. Most informants were identified by the first name and the surname, or their father's name and sometimes a third name, the grandfather name. At times, a nickname was added.
4. The following number of interviewees relate to each Kurdish community specified.
  - a. Zakho: 22
  - b. Aqra: 6
  - c. Sulaimaniya: 4
  - d. Amadia: 3
  - e. Dohuk: 2
  - f. Sandur: 4

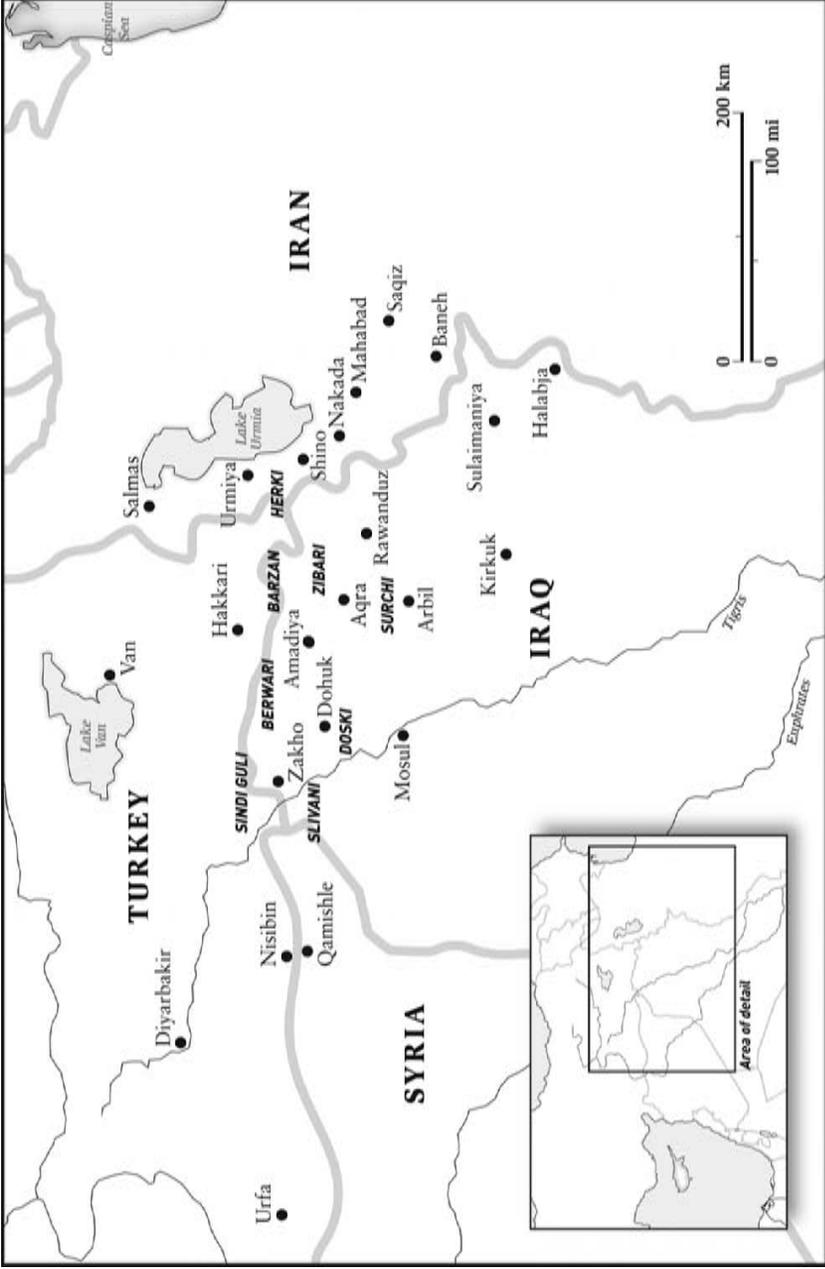
- g. Rabatke: 2  
 h. Betanure: 2  
 i. Nerwa: 2.  
 j. Chal (Chala): 2.  
 k. Arbil, Mosul, Kirkuk, Jujjar, Chala, Kara, Urmiya, Hasinke, Harin, Whela, Shandokh, Sisnawa, Sofian, Shino, Khlaka-Raikan, Pizhdar, Serkane, Mergasor, Havdi, Diana, Nisibin, Garzangel, Hozarchod, Suriye, Awqawa: one (1) interviewee.  
 6. At times, one informant resided in more than one community and was able to share his experience from more than one place of residence.

*Records and Transcripts of Unpublished Interviews of Kurdistanî Jews available  
 at the Oral History Division, The Institute of Contemporary Jewry,  
 The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus Campus*

File # in OHD and Name of Interviewee	Origin (Birthplace)	Date of Interview
7 (40) Eliyahu Hudedā	Nisibin	(18 January 1973)
6 (40) Yoesph 'Amrani	Chal	(21 January 1973)
5 (40) Abraham Hayyeg	Kanyarash	(22 January 1973)
74 (11) David Brinder	Mergasor	(22 January 1973)
76 (11) Abraham Mordechai Mizrahi	Atrosh	(19, 21 January 1973)
60 (11) Esther Mizrahi	Dohuk	(17 January 1973)
56 (11) Sasson Ben-Naḥum Hannah	Dohuk	(16 January 1973)
78 (11) Yaacob Itzhak	Karasor	(16 January 1973)
57 (11) Israel Shomer	Koi Sanjaq	(17 January 1973)
59 (11) Sasson Hai & wife Na'ima Shomer	Koi Sanjaq	(18 January 1973)
71 (11) David Ya'eer and Yaacob Rephael & wife Salima Rephael of Mandali	Qaradagh; Sulaimaniya	(19 January 1973)
66 (11) Na'ima Ayun and Esther Yamin	Dohuk	(17 January 1973)
67 (11) Mordechai Sayudo	Shosh	(18, 19 January 1973)
75 (11) Nehemia Hoja	Zakho	(17 January 1973)
69 (11) Batya Zaken	Zakho	(22 January 1973)
72 (11) Moshe Ben 'Amram	Arbil	(21 January 1973)
70 (11) Menashe Eliyahu	Zakho	(23 January 1973)
68 (11) Rachel Hamu	Zakho	(20 January 1973)

Note: The following number of interviewees interviewed through the *Oral History Division* relate to each Kurdish community specified:

- a. Zakho: 4  
 b. Dohuk: 3  
 c. Koi Sanjaq: 2  
 d. Nisibin, Chal (Chala), Kanyarash, Mergasor, Karasor, Atrosh, Arbil, Shosh, Qaradagh; Sulaimaniya: one (1) interviewee.





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Note: for convenience, three sub-categories within this index (“Kurdish localities,” “Kurdish tribes” and “Kurdish villages”) were arranged in accordance with related subjects and names of persons (first names first) within each category. The rest of the index with both subjects and names was arranged alphabetically.

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