The Aramaic- speaking Jews of the Kurdistan Mountains Introduction

The Jews of Kurdistan believe their ancestors had been exiled from northern Israel by the Kings of Assyria, between 733 and 722 BCE, and were settled in "Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (Kings II, 17:6). Their favorite saying is from the prophecy of Isaiah (27:13): "In that day a great horn shall be blown; and those who perished in the land of Assyria shall come…and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem." From that era we are in a complete darkness for 2,000 years, until the great medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (circa 1170) re-discovered the Aramaic speaking Jews.

They speak Eastern Neo-Aramaic, an offspring of the ancient East Aramaic and the Talmudic language. Today, together with the Assyrian Christians, they are the sole native speakers of Aramaic in the whole world. They also spoke the tongues of their neighbors, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi and Kurdish, that belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family.

One could not comprehend their experience without grasping the following themes. The Jews comprised the smallest non-Muslim minority in Kurdistan. They were considered *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the Bible and the New Testament) and were *dhimmī*, people entitled to protection by the *Qur'ān*. The Kurdish society was composed of two main classes, the *‛ashiret*, or the tribal caste, and the non-tribal civilians including the Jews. Most tribesmen were combatants who did not work (work is despicable for them) and therefore exploited their subjects, who considered an asset, indifferent from a herd of sheep. The enormous power of the chieftains (or aghas) enabled them to regulate the course of life of their subjects. Usually, the agha granted patronage to the Jews, who in return, paid dues and performed services, one of which was a communal, un-paid, forced labor (Kur., *zebara*), generally agricultural work in their master’s field. Many rural aghas treated their Jews almost as their personal property. Reports on Jewish slaves must be clarified, since they were not slaves in the familiar sense, but rather slaves in the tribal Kurdish settings. They had rights, families and property, and the selling of one meant the selling of the privileges that comes with him. This slavery was reduced by the British reign in their firm stance against the tribal control.

The Jews were the weakest cast in the society and "gradually became the pariahs and outcast, despised and degraded." It is worthwhile to quote the Jewish traveler David D’Beth Hillel who in 1827 met a governor who questioned their authenticity and avoided eating the food prepared by Jews (therefore presumably *hallal*, or kosher) because they were “not [truly] from the children of Israel.”

The Jews were exploited, robbed and murdered by outlaws. Murder of Jews may have been justified by a socio-religious concept of "*Kafir-Kuşt*," (Kur., killing of infidels). The lack of proper, or any, police response and the leniency of both the tribal and judicial system towards murderers of Jews, further indicate the insignificant value of life of the Jews.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The Jews were generally perceived as un-threatening and reliable, because not even once the thought of disobedience crossed their mind. Their social inferiority facilitated acts of abduction (by force or temptation) of young Jewish women by Kurdish men for whom it was not as complicated and dangerous as the abduction of tribal women. Not only Muslim Kurds could marry, in theory, four wives, they also do not have to pay dowry. Nevertheless the Jewish communities opposed these abductions and applied three mechanisms in an effort to bring back the girls to their families. In retrospect, these abductions may be counted as converts into Islam of Jewish women.

A common pattern of behavior of the Jews reflecting their fragile position was the lack of response to violence and the reluctance to complain on wrong-doings, in order not fuel an atmosphere of hatred. A British traveler witnessed in 1840, in Arbil, an incident in which a young Shiʿite slapped a respectable Jewish store-owner, cursed him and spat at his face. A local companion explained: "he is only a Jew." The Jew was unable to respond. A Jewish emissary reported that seven Jews were murdered in Arbil within two years and it seemed that the governor could not care less, "as if the blood of the Jews is free" and "the Jews are afraid to complain."

Most urban Jews lived in separate neighborhoods (NA, *maḥalıt hozaye*, Kur., *majalah cûleke*), and they had representatives in the municipal administration. Many earned their living from trade and were merchants, peddlers, shop-keepers, loggers, raft-men and muleteers. Others worked as craftsmen, jewelers and farmers. Rural Jews were scattered through hundreds of villages; they labored mostly as weavers or dyers, occupations that were essential for the Kurds. There was hardly a village without one or two Jewish families who had no contact with their fellow Jews. Hence we "understand the original, tragic meaning of exile and dispersion," noted W. J.Fischel. Recently, only one village, Sandur, was solely populated by Jews.

Indeed in recent centuries the Jews leaned on the rabbis in Baghdad, as can be seen in the responsa literature (שו"ת), but the Jewish learning shined in the 17th century, with a Jewish feminine precedent. Asenath Barzani (1590–1670) was a daughter of a noted scholar, Rabbi Samuel Barzani (b.1560) who taught in Mosul, Aqra and Amadiya. She married her father's favorite student, Yaacob Mizrahi, who pledged she would not be bothered with domestic work and would only focus on religious studies. Following his death, she became the head of the yeshiva and the main rabbinic scholar in Kurdistan.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Recently, the education in urban centers was basic, as most children attended classes of rabbis at the synagogue for a few years until they joined the workforce. The writing was not common among them and only individuals knew how to write. The girls knew only to recite the "Shema Yisrael." Their main requirement was the household duties. The tradition was very important for the Jews of Kurdistan. They observed their traditions and no Jew ever worked on *Shabbat*.

An old tradition among them has been pilgrimage to the grave, known as "ziyara" (NA, visit) of the Biblical prophet Nahum which is supposedly in Alkosh near Mosul, "which seems to have the quality of a national sanctuary for the Kurdish Jews." Indeed Alqosh is a Christian village, but Nahum’s tomb was maintained by the Jewish community until 1951. The communal pilgrimage to the grave of the Prophet Nahum had been during the holiday of *Shavuot* (Pentecost), better known as "'ez-ziyara,” (NA, “the holiday of pilgrimage”). While pilgrims would visit the shrine throughout the year, during Shavuot, several thousand people from the surrounding towns and villages would come to stay at the compound of Nahum's grave. Some visitors stayed there for a full two weeks.

Every year, the Jews of Kurdistan used to go out to the countryside at the end of Passover to spend time with the family and celebrate. This was a secular, communal tradition of recreation in nature, known as *"Saharane*,*"* a picnic in the countryside, for a few days on meadows alongside streams, with plenty of food. The entire family would set out in traditional Kurdish dresses and the women would wear their best pieces of jewelry. On arrival at the celebration area, the celebrants would break into dancing with music played by musicians from the community, who played traditional instruments "Dohle" (Kur., Drum) and "Zurne,"(Kur., flute). Beginning in 1975, the annual *Saharane* celebration is celebrated in major parks in Israel, but it takes place during the holiday of *Sukkot*.

Altogether the Jews have resided in at least 200 communities, the overwhelming majority of which were in Iraq, 150 in total, 24 in Turkey, 19 in Persia and one community, al-Qamishli, in Syria.

The 19th century

Kurdistan was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, but the Turks allowed local principalities to rule. During 500 years or so, no major political change occurred until the middle of the 19th century when Turkey crushed the Kurdish principalities in an attempt to restore its central authority. "The Jews were severely affected by the struggle and bloodshed," even more than they were affected by tyranny and caprices of some of the aghas. The 19th century is filled with gloomy accounts on the treatment of the Jews including blood libels, presumably originated by Christians, Greeks, and Armenians, in Persian Kurdistan, in Maraga (whose population was completely dismantled) in 1820 and in Urmia and Salmas in 1820-1821.[[3]](#endnote-3) The famous traveler Israel Joseph Benjamin, known as "Benjamin II" reported in 1848 of heavy taxes, forced labor and extortion of Jews by their aghas who treated them as their own property, at times selling them as slaves. In 1820, J. C. Rich reported that the tribesmen treat the villagers "as if they were created for their use." A chieftain explained: "I am taking from them dues…*zakat* (Ar. alms), or ten percent… and extort from them as much as I can, in all possible means." Benjamin II was astonished that Muslim oppression "did not stop even at the doorstep of the house of God.” Attacks on synagogues, religious processions and ceremonies and against Jewish women in reservoirs used for ritual purification had been reported, some of which ended with fatal results. An ancient Torah scroll was transferred from Nisibin to Mardin and then to Diyarbakir, in order to protect it, due to repeated pillage and lack of sense of security. Another bizarre practice was the removal of corpses of Jews from their graves, at night, cutting the heads and throwing them into the river, because of a belief that this would hasten the rain. Benjamin II was also astonished by the submissive manner in which the Jews accepted their fate: "My heart is burned from sorrow on my people...Our poor brethren think that it is their destiny to suffer, and submit patiently to their fate; the slightest improvement of which they consider an unexpected happiness." Nevertheless, he also provided a brighter picture of "freedom from all oppression" Many were very wealthy, particularly those families engaged in agriculture that owned land and herds." Trying to explain the enduring Jewish presence despite their oppression, he explained that "they can trade throughout the country as much as they like." The fact the Jewish emigration had never stopped, indicates that his explanation was decent but partial.

In 1863 the chief-Rabbi in Istanbul learned of forced conversion, forced labor, removal of bodies from their graves, prohibition to buy estates and to tend the herds. Nevertheless, the picture was not always gloomy. In some towns, the local governors maintained their duties to protect the Jews. In 1880, Mordechai Edelman reported from Diyarbakir that the "local governor is a human lover who behaves well with God and people," and "defends our miserable brothers from any trouble fallen upon them" because of the locals' "eternal hostility."

The Jews and their aghas

Three patterns of patronage had been noted in urban centers. In the first pattern, the Jews enjoyed the patronage of a powerful agha, as in Zakho; in the second pattern, a wealthy Jewish family used its wealth to gain influence and secured the well-being of the community (the Khawaja Khinno household in Aqra); in the third pattern, the Jews had to be resourceful and pay out money to satisfy the greed and capriciousness of urban aghas, as in Dohuk and Amadiya. The position of the Jews was connected to the personality of their agha, as may be seen in the following four accounts. Saʿid Agha was the chief of the Doski tribe after WWI whom the British described as someone who "is usually behind all troubles in Dohuk.” In 1941, a feud between the Kurds of the village Yekmala (Kur., one household) and the Jews of Sandur ended with a lethal attack against Sandur, in which seven Jews were murdered, including the *mukhtar*. Saʿid Agha, with both Sandur and Yekmala under his jurisdiction, apparently approved the attack. The murderers became *fırars* (Kur., escapees) and hid out in the mountains while Saʿid Agha arranged reconciliation with the families of the victims. He gathered all the villagers of Sandur and blamed their dead *mukhtar,* for causing troubles for Yekmala. As strange as it may seem, some Jews justified the murder of their *mukhtar*. Unlike most Jews who were usually reluctant in complaining, the Jewish *mukhtar* insisted on his right to receive justice and kept complaining against his Muslim neighbors. Saʿid Agha offered the victims’ families thirty dinars as compensation for each person who was murdered. He managed to dismiss the charges, and the murderers were able to return to their village. It may be suggested that the very fact that only Jews populated the village facilitated this kind of massacre.

Mulla Mustafa Barzani was a chieftain and the national leader of the Kurdish. The Barzani chieftains have had distinct relations with the Jewish patriarchs of Khawaja Khinno household in Aqra. Occasionally they Jews helped the Barzani aghas in financial matters, during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1943, when Eliyahu Khawaja Khinno died, Mulla Mustafa came in person to Aqra to pay condolences. He said: "We are regarded one family, in spite of our dissimilarity in religion belief. I do not want that any harm would occur to them." Mulla Mustafa (b.1903) and Dawud Khawaja Khinno (b. 1895) had been life time friends and their relationships facilitated the trust that was later created between Barzani and the Israeli government during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[[4]](#endnote-4) A unique character of Mulla Mustafa is discovered through his behavior in the village of Mergasor (Kur., Red Meadow), at the early 1930s. He told the Jews of the village: soon I will launch a war against my tribal enemies and the government, and the roads will be blocked. I will pay you to bring a slaughterer [a butcher] since without a slaughterer, how could you live [without kosher meat]?! The Jews invited an elderly slaughterer “whose hands were barely working.” He not only slaughtered their animals but also taught their children the Hebrew alphabet. Thanks to Mulla Mustafa Barzani’s benevolence, the Jewish children of Mergasor learned Hebrew, quite rare for rural Jewish children.

ʿAbd al-Karim Agha from Zakho, was first cousin of Hajji Agha, the mayor, and Hazim Beg, the most influential person in Zakho. The Jews called him a “righteous gentile,” a title reserved to a protector of Diaspora Jews, during times of tribulation. During the 1940s and up to 1951, the Jews were occasionally subjected to provocation. However, "if someone harassed one of the Jews in the market and ʿAbd al-Karim Agha learned about it, he would come to the market and hit this person, and no one could save him from his hands." During the final migration of the Jewish community in 1951-52, ʿAbd al-Karim Agha supervised in person the trips of the three convoys of Jews who left Zakho via Mosul to Baghdad. He went back and forth riding his own car with each group. The Jews, in retrospect, viewed this gesture of ʿAbd al-Karim Agha as a symbol for his commitment.

Shaikh Muhammad Rabatke the British described as “a character with a few wild followers over whom he has little control,” but his Jewish protégés praised him. Once, during the 1930s, a Turkish official visited Rabatke while Shaikh Muhammad was away. On his way he saw a Jewish woman weaving carpets. "He told his guard, go and bring this carpet." Her son told me years later: "we had no choice. He gave my father a few pennies, to avoid the accusation that he took it without paying. The next morning, when Shaikh Muhammad came back home and learned what happened, he summoned his son, Sayyid al-Jaʿfar, and dictated a letter the Turkish official: 'carry the carpet and return it to the Jews yourself. Nevertheless, if you are ashamed to bring it yourself, you should pay three times the price of a new carpet. The shaikh summoned my father and instructed him to give this letter to the official himself.’ When my father arrived to Sware, his village, the official told his *gendarme*, ‘hold 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 official put in the envelope, three times the price of a new carpet. He was an important official; nevertheless, Shaikh Muhammad treated him, reportedly, just as he treated other thieves.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The last chapter

WWI, commonly known as "saferbalek", or general mobilization, shattered the urban Jewish communities. The Jews suffered from famine, arbitrary measures and forceful conscription campaigns. The Jews, who had never been part of the military before, attempted to evade the draft. They either escaped, seeking shelter in remote villages, far from the hands of the authorities, or paid bribe to postpone recruitment. Many others had been nevertheless drafted, but defected, and the authorities arrested their family members, notably sisters, to put pressure on them to extradite themselves. Still, a considerable number of Jews had been drafted; many were killed or injured and even became prisoners of war.

By the end of WWI, most Jewish communities in southeastern Turkey were devastated by horrors of the war and the massacres of the Christians (Armenians, 1994-96; 1914-18 and Assyrians, 1914-18). The Jews In times of war and uncertainty the Jews tended to immigrate to a safer place. This has been their behavioral pattern. The majority of the Jews of southeastern Turkey immigrated to Palestine either before or after the war. Across the border, in Iraqi Kurdistan, the situation improved after WWI with the British restoring peace and order and extending protection for the minorities. Nevertheless, a growing number of Jews from Iraq immigrated constantly to Palestine, but the effect of the British reign did not last long. In 1941, the pro-Nazi Rashid ʿAli coup inflamed anti-Semitic riots against Jews in Baghdad, known as the *Farhud*. These were echoed in Kurdish towns with intimidation from instigators who wished to take advantage of the state of emergency, especially on Fridays, following the public prayer. However, sensible local leaders and chieftains usually stopped the deterioration of the situation. The position of the Jews further worsened with the intensifying Arab-Jewish warfare in Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel. The presence of Palestinian refugees and exiles in Iraq, notably the mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini and the participation of Iraqi and Kurdish soldiers in the war in Palestine, increased the level of hatred towards local Jews.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The majority of the Jews of Kurdistan lived in Iraq. Prior to their final mass immigration to Israel during 1951-52, about 25,000 Kurdish Jews had been scattered in Iraq. By then, approximately 8,000-10,000 had already been living in Israel. In Persian Kurdistan, out of 10,330 Jews in 1953, about 6,200 had immigrated to Israel. In southeastern Turkey, as noted above, the numbers of Jews dwindled drastically due to WWI and the massacres, which had a negative effect on the minorities. In 1927, only about 2,700 Jews of all ethnic backgrounds remained in this region.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The Jews of Kurdistan immigrated to Palestine as early as the 16th century. Their last chapter in Kurdistan coincided with the establishment of the Jewish State (1948). Their last few years were marked by demonstrations (in which “Death to the Jews!” was a popular slogan) against Israel. The hostility against the Jews in the parliament, in the press and in the streets was echoed in investigations and arrest of Jews in variety of accusations. On 9 March 1950, the Iraqi Parliament passed the law allowing the Jews to emigrate with the proviso that they renounce their Iraqi citizenship. Later, the Parliament passed law no. 5/1951 freezing all of the assets of the Jews. All was set for the imminent emigration en-masse of the Jews to Israel. Dreams and prayers carried in their hearts for centuries were about to be fulfilled.

Bibliography

Barth, Fredrik, Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan. Oslo: Brodene Jorgensen A/S Boktrykkeri, 1953.

Barukh, Yitzhak, Hessne, Jerusalem, 2012 (Heb.)\*

**Ben-Yaacob**, **Abraham,** **The Jewish Communities of Kurdistan, 2nd and rev. ed. Jerusalem, 1981 (Heb.)**

Benjamin II, I. J. (Benjamin the Second), Eight Years in Asia and Africa. Hanover, 1863.

Benjamin of Tudela, The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela. M. N. Adler, ed. and trans. London, 1907.

Blau, Joyce, “Les Juifs au Kurdistan,” in Mélanges linguistiques offerts à Maxime Rodinson, Ch. Robin, ed., Paris (1985): 123-132.

--, “Les relations entre les Juifs et les Musulmans au Kurdistan,” in Islam des Kurdes Les Annales de l'Autre Islam, No. 5., Paris: Inalco-Erism (1998): 199-224.

Braude, B. and Lewis, B. (Eds.), Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the Function of the Plural Society. 2 vols. London and New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982.

**Brauer, Erich, *The Jews of Kurdistan*, Raphael Patai (ed.), Wayne State University Press, 1993.**

**Bruinessen, van Martin, Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization in Kurdistan. Rijswijk, 1978 ; Revised Edition: London: Zed Books, 1992.**

Edmonds, C. J., Kurds Turks and Arabs. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Fischel, Walter J.,“The Jews of Kurdistan: A First-Hand Report on Near Eastern Mountain Community," 1949.

--, Unknown Jews in Unknown Lands: The Travels of Rabbi David D’Beth Hillel (1824-1832), New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973.

Hillel, Shlomo, Operation Babylon, Doubleday Books, 1987.

**Hopkins, Simon, "The Jews of Kurdistan in Eretz Israel and their language," Peʿamim, 56 (1993):50-74 (Heb.)*.***

Israel, Yig'al Moshe, Baldgrin, Yig'al and Suleiman, Zion, Across the river from where our ancestors came: the Jews in Urfa and southeastern Turkey, their immigration to Eretz Israel and their assimilation there, published by the Rishon Lezion Museum, 2013 (Heb).

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, *Tribe and Kinship among the Kurds*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991.

Lambton, Ann K. S., *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Leach, E. R., Social and Economic Organisation of the Rowanduz Kurds. London: The London, School of Economics and Political Science, 1940.

Lewis, Bernard*, The Jews of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Mann, Jacob, “Documents concerning the Jews in Mosul and Kurdistan.” in his Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature. Vol. I: 477-549. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1931; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication of America, 1935. Reprinted, New York: 1972.

Marcus, Shimon, The Jews of Kurdistan, Mahanayim (1964) 93-94 (Heb.).

Marr, Phebe, The Modern History of Iraq. Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1985.

**McDowell, David, “A Modern History of the Kurds,” London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997.**

Meir, E., "The conflict on the land of Israel and Jewish-Muslims relation in Iraq during the 1940s," Peaʿmim 62 (1997):111-131 (Heb.)

Moreh, Sh. and Yehuda, Z., Eds., Hatred of Jews and pogroms in Iraq - corpus of researches and documents, Or-Yehuda, 1992 (Heb.)

Nikitine, Basile, “La féodalité kurde,” *Revue du Monde Musulman*, vol.50, 2nd trimester (1925): 1-26.

Qazzaz N., "The influence of Nazism in Iraq and the anti- Jewish activity, 1933-1941," Peʿamim 29, 1987:48-71 (Heb.)

Sabar, Ariel, My Father's Paradise, A Son's Search for His Jewish Past in Kurdish Iraq, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008

Sabar, Yona, The Folk Literature of the Kurdistani Jews: an Anthology, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982.

Salman, David, I followed you, Jerusalem. (Heb.)\*

Schmidt, Dana Adams, Journey among Brave Men, New York, 1964.

Shwartz-Be’eri, Ora, *The Jews of Kurdistan: Daily Life, Customs, Arts and Crafts*, UPNE, 2000.

The Tells of Sabtuna [nickname for Grandma]: Simha Salha Levi, 1920-2001, Jerusalem, 2014 (Heb)\*

**--, Zaken, Mordechai ,Tribal Chieftains and their Jewish Subjects in Kurdistan: A Comparative Study in Survival, PhD Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2003).**

**--, The Jews of Kurdistan and their Tribal Chieftains: A Study in Survival, Second, Revised Ebook Edition, Jerusalem, 2015.**

**--, Jewish Subjects and their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan A Study in Survival, in Jewish Identities in a Changing World, vol. 9, Brill, 2007.**

Translation of the Book

● Arabic: --, Yahud Kurdistan wa-ru'as'uhum al-qabaliyun: Dirasa fi fan al-baqa'. Transl., Suʿad M. Khader; Reviewers: ʿAbd al-Fatah Ali Yihya and Farast Mirʿi; the Center for Academic Research, Beirut, 2013 (Arabic).

## ● Sorani: D. Moredixai Zakin, Culekekany Kurdistan, published by Mukriyani

## Publishing, Erbil, 2015.

Partial Translation of the Book

**●** Kurmanji:--, "Jews, Kurds and Arabs, between 1941 and 1952", translated by Dr. Amr Taher Ahmed, Metîn no. 148, October 2006, p. 98-123.

**●** French:--, "Juifs, Kurdes et Arabs, entre 1941 et 1952," Etudes kurdes, no. 7, May 2005: 7-45.

--, Central institutions and commerce in the Jewish community of Zakho. Hithadshut, vol. 5 (1985): 11-22 (Heb.)

**--, "The Lost from the Land of Ashur- the Migrations from Kurdistan and Settlement in Eretz-Israel," in ʿEdot-ʿEdut le-Israel, Prof. Avshalom Mizrachi and Rabbi Aharon Ben-David d, eds., Netanya, 2001: The Association for Society and Culture, Documentation and Research: 340-73 (Heb.)**

--, “The Kurdish Jews in Transition: From Kurdistan to Israel,” *Mamostaye Kurd* (Stockholm), Vol.22, 1994: 59–68 [Sorani].

\* These books in Hebrew represent a new genre of books written either by Kurdish Jews or family members and transfer into print the life story of individuals and families in both Kurdistan and Israel.

1. For more details on the subjects mentioned in this article see Zaken (2003, 2007 and 2015). Claude Cahen, “Dhimma,” EI2; G. Vajda, “Ahl al-Kitab.” EI2; C. E.; Bosworth, “The Concept of Dhimma in early Islam,” in Braude and Lewis, vol. I, 1982: 37-5; Van Bruinessen 1978: 117-22; Henry Field, “Jews of Sandur, Iraq,” Asia 37 (1937): 709-10. The word denoting rob or robbery in Neo-Aramaic is "shlakha," i.e., to take off (clothes, shoes), since the raiders would often rob the cloths of the victims as well. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Jews participated in the municipal administration based on the new municipal law of 1929. The Jewish communities had been traditionally recognized as *millet*, a religious community. See Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System, "in Braude and Lewis: 69–90; Meir Benayahu, “Rabbi Samuel Barzani, the exile arch of Kurdistan," Sefunot, 9 (1965): 23-125 (Heb.). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Benjamin II 1859: 92-93, Fischel, First-Hand Report; During the 1930s Mir Muhammad (known also as Mir Kor, the ‘Blind King.’ kor=blind in Kurdish) the leader of the Soran principality, conquered most urban centers in (today's) northern Iraq and minted his own coins, a sign of an official rule. His cruelty towards the Jews and Jewish communities had been reported, the motivations of which is yet to be investigated. In 1837, he was killed by the Turkish authorities in the midst of a Turkish campaign to regain central control over the Kurdish principalities, see David McDowell, A Modern History of the Kurds. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, "Epistles from the communities of Hamadan, Urmia and Barfarush," in Sefunot, the annual book of research of the Jewish communities in the East, Ben-Zvi Institute, 1964: 43-85. (Heb.) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Zaken (2003, 2007, 2015); Shlomo Nakdimon, The Hope that crashed - The Israeli-Kurdish Connection 1963-1975, 1996 (Heb.); consult the following three reports in the Hebrew press: "I met Mustafa Barzani in the eagles' nest in Kurdistan," Yediʿot Ahronot, 12 April, 1991 (Heb.); "The Kurdish people: Simple, proud and experience in suffering," Yediʿot Ahronot, 7 April 1991(Heb.);" Gandi [nickname of General Rehavam Ze'evi] in the land of the Kurds," Maʿariv, 16 May 1991 (Heb.). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In 2014, a great grandchild of Shaikh Muhammad told me that the shaikh and his family had regarded the Jews as subjects of the village, or in fact as complete citizens. They used the Arabic word "aṣḥâb," allies, or friends, an interesting choice of word, because Jews and Christians are condemned in the Qur'an, as can be read in Surat AL-Maʾidah (the table), verse 51: O you who have faith, do not take the Jews and the Christians as friends/allies. They are friends of each other. And he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is one of them. Indeed, Allah guides not a people unjust. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Edwin Black, The *Farhud*: Roots of the Arab-Nazi Alliance in the Holocaust, 2010; Edwin Black, "A *Farhud* legacy of hate," the Jerusalem Post, 16 December, 2010; Abraham H. Miller, "Remembering the Farhud," FrontPageMagazine.com, June 01, 2006; Zvi Elpeleg, The Grand Mufti: Haj Amin al-Hussaini, Founder of the Palestinian National Movement, trans. David Harvey, London: Frank Cass, 1993; Klaus Gensicke, The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years, London: Valentine, 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. According to the population estimates by Andree's "Zur Volkskunde der Juden" (pub Leipzig, 1881), there were 25,000 or so Jews across Kurdistan in the 1940s. The distribution of the Kurdish Jews in Northern Iraq by 1947 is based mainly on the Iraqi statistics: 3,109 in Arbil province, 4,042 in Kirkuk, 10,345 in Mosul, 2,271 in Sulemaniya, and 2,851 in Diyala province, the total of 22,618. The estimates of the Jewish population in southeastern Turkey are more complicated, since they came from different ethnic traditions, Arabic, Spanish, Ladino, Turkish, and Kurdish or Aramaic. Most of the Jews of Urfa immigrated to Palestine already in 1896, following the massacres of the Armenians in 1895. The Jews of Jezira had left by 1924. Similarly, most of the Jews of Diyarbakir, Mardin, Bashqala, Van, Julamerk and Nisibin had left by the early 20th century. See also Amnon Cohen, "Immigration of Jews to Palestine from Persian Kurdistan and East Turkey after the First World War," Peʿamim, 5 (1980): 87-93 (Heb.). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)