

—THE JEWS OF IRAN—
—IN THE—
NINETEENTH CENTURY

Aspects of History, Community, and Culture

—by—
DAVID YEROSUSHALMI

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BRILL
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The Jews of Iran in the Nineteenth Century

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Aspects of History, Community,
and Culture

by

David Yeroushalmi



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To Mattan and Judy with Love

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAIU	Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris
AJA	<i>Anglo-Jewish Association Annual Report</i>
Ar.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramic
BAIU	<i>Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle</i>
BMAIU	<i>Bulletin Mensuel de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle</i>
BZI	Library of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem
EI	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> (new ed.), 1960–
EIr	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
FO	British Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London
Heb.	Hebrew
JI	<i>Jewish Intelligence and Monthly Account of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews</i>
JMI	<i>Jewish Missionary Intelligence</i>
JNUL	The Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem
JQR	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSS	<i>Jewish Social Studies</i>
LSPCJ	Annual Report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews
Ms.	Manuscript
Per.	Persian
Q	<i>Qamari</i> (= lunar <i>Hijri</i> calendar)
Sh.	<i>Shamsi</i> (= solar <i>Hijri</i> calendar)
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND STYLE

The transliteration system used for both Arabic and Persian is that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* but with some differences. Diacritical marks are omitted. The silent *h* in Arabic is represented by *a* while in Persian it is ordinarily represented by *a* and sometimes by *ah*. In the Hebrew translation, too, preference has been given to simplicity. As such, diacritical marks have also been omitted.

For famous places, proper names and terms, the common English forms are used, while less familiar ones are transliterated. Dates in Islamic lunar (*Qamari*) calendar are indicated by *Q*. Those with no lunar signifier are in the Persian solar (*Shamsi*) calendar. All Islamic and Hebrew dates, however, are given with their Christian (Gregorian) equivalents. *Iran* and *Iranian* are used instead of *Persia* and *Persian*.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the brackets and parentheses as well as the words and explanations that appear inside them have been added by the author.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. *Sources and Issues Related to the Study of Iranian Jews in the Nineteenth Century*

Both on a symbolic level as well as in practical terms, the launching of the first Alliance school in the Jewish quarter of Tehran on February 22, 1898 marks a major turning point in the history of Iranian Jews in recent generations. In light of the considerable importance and high hopes that the Chief Rabbi and the heads of the community in the capital city attached to the establishment of this first new school under European Jewish protection, the occasion was set and celebrated deliberately on the first day of the Jewish festive month of Adar (the month of the Purim festivities and merrymaking) in the Hebrew year of 5658.¹ The latter school, initially for boys and later on also for girls, was soon followed by the establishment of similar modern-oriented and primarily secular schools under the directorship and patronage of the Alliance Israélite Universelle Organization of France. Thus, Alliance schools were soon founded in Iran's other larger Jewish communities, among them those in the cities of Hamadan (in 1900), Isfahan (in 1901), Shiraz (in 1903), Sanandaj (in 1903), and Kermanshah (in 1904). In the course of the following years, prior to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, additional schools were founded, with the active financial and administrative support and supervision of the Alliance, also in the smaller communities in the towns and cities of Tuyserkan and Nahavand (in 1906), Kashan (in 1911) and Gulpaygan (in 1914).²

¹ For an eyewitness description of this occasion, see the report of the Persian Jew turned-Christian missionary Mirza Nurullah Hakim, who during this time conducted welfare and evangelistic activities in the Jewish quarter of Tehran, in JMI, July 1898, pp. 107–108. Additional and more detailed and informative reports on the official inauguration of this first Alliance school on April 15, 1898 in Tehran, as well as reports on the activity of the Alliance emissaries in Tehran and in some of the other Jewish communities of Iran during this year are found in BAIU, Deuxième Serie, No. 23, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres 1898, pp. 63–71, and in BMAIU, No. 11, Novembre 1898, pp. 194–195.

² Cf. Avraham Cohen, "Iranian Jewry and the Educational Endeavors of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," JSS, XLVIII, number 1(1986), pp. 15–44.

Hand in hand with several other socio-political, administrative and broad cultural developments and processes that took place inside Iran before and in the course of the Constitutional Movement and Revolution of 1905–6, and particularly following the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, the establishment of the Alliance schools contributed significantly to the processes of socio-cultural transformation and civil integration that embraced and affected the diverse areas of individual and communal lives of Iran's centuries-old Jewish minority. The increasingly rapid pace of the legal, social, economic and religio-cultural reforms and changes under the Pahlavi regime (1925–1979) were particularly felt in Iran's larger cities and towns where the large majority of Iran's Jewish citizens lived. The latter forces and developments during more than five decades of a secular, Western-oriented and nationalistic Iranian monarchy transformed beyond recognition most (if not all) aspects and patterns of individual and collective lives that had formed over centuries and characterized the lives of Iranian Jews ever since Iran's Arab-Islamic conquest (in the mid-7th century) and particularly ever since the establishment of the Safavid state in 1501.

Among the observers and students of Iranian Jewish history in the 19th–20th centuries there is a common tendency to regard the establishment of the Alliance schools at the turn of the 19th century and onward as the beginning of the “new” or “modern” era in the lives of Iran's Jewish minority³. Unfortunately, however, no attempt has so far been made to examine and clarify critically the validity and suitability of terms and notions such as “modern,” and “modern era,” as well as “new,” “Western,” “traditional,” “Oriental,” etc., as tools of research and means of historical periodization and analysis required for a better understanding of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements in the course of the last two centuries. Moreover, in the available body of studies and publications that deal with the history and heritage of

³ See, e.g., Ezra Sion Melammed “Ha-Yehudim be-Faras lifney Shishim Shanah,” [The Jews in Persia Sixty Years Ago], *Sinai*, year 14, vol. 29, issue 7–8, Jerusalem, 1951, pp. 364–365; Hanina Mizrahi, “Minhagim u-Masorot,” [Customs and Traditions], in *Edoth*, 3 (1947–8), numbers 1–2, pp. 88–89; Habib Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, 3 vols., Tehran, 1334–1339/1956–1960, vol. 3, pp. 776–782, and more recently, A. Cohen, “Yehudey Iran ve-ha-Mif'al ha-Hinukhi shel 'Kol Yisrael Haverim',” [The Jews of Iran and the Educational Endeavor of the Alliance Israélite Universelle], *Pe'amim*, 22 (1985), pp. 93–95, and Faryar Nikbakht, “As With Moses in Egypt: Alliance Israélite Universelle Schools in Iran,” in *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 203–212.

Iranian Jews under the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties (1795–1921 and 1925–1979, respectively), little systematic and scholarly attention has so far been devoted to the historical conditions and processes that preceded the establishment of the Alliance schools. The latter historical conditions and developments, chief among them the increasing exposure of Qajar Iran to the agents and forces of Western and European influence and penetration on the one hand and the growing contacts and relations between the Jews of Iran and their coreligionists in Western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century on the other hand, led, albeit gradually, to the infusion of Western-oriented notions and ideas into the social, religious and cultural outlook of community heads, rabbis and the wealthier strata of the Jewish population who lived in Iran's larger urban communities. Reinforced by the growing political, economic and cultural contacts between Iran and the diverse agents and channels of European and Western influence in Iran, the latter forces and ideas in Iran's larger Jewish communities during the 1820s–1890s led, among other results, to the early educational, social and occupational reform in Iran's larger communities during the 1900s–1910s and onward.⁴ Moreover, while the increasing exposure and weakness of the Qajar state vis-à-vis the strategic, military, and technological threats and challenges of the European (chiefly British and Russian) powers contained within them the seeds of diverse pressures, dislocations and upheavals for Iran's general population, the growing political, diplomatic and economic presence of Western and European states in 19th century Iran provided the Jews of Iran with opportunities to seek foreign-European and particularly Jewish-European support and protection. For the Jewish communities and settlements of 19th century Iran, which due to a variety of historical and local conditions (among them vast geographical distances, scarcity of paved and secure roads, and the nature of pre-modern means of communication and transportation) were highly scattered and maintained little connections with each other and with the outside world, the formation and subsequent growth of contacts with European

⁴ For a preliminary discussion of some of the better known agents and channels of Western influence among the heads of the larger Jewish communities in 19th century Iran, see my article “Al ‘Amadot u-Teguvot shel Rabbanim ve-Rashey Qahal be-Iran kelapey ha-Hashpa’ah ha-Ma’aravit ba-Me’ah ha-19,” [On Positions and Responses of Rabbis and Communal Leaders in Iran toward the Western Influence in the 19th Century], forthcoming in the collection *The Jews of Iran*, eds. A. Netzer and Sh. Regev, Bar-Ilan University.

and particularly with Jewish-European and Jewish-Ottoman subjects and institutions constituted a remedy to a centuries-long physical and cultural isolation. Furthermore, all the available sources of information reveal that the goal and motivation of Iranian Jews to seek foreign support and protection in the course of the 19th century derived first and foremost from their profound sense of helplessness and with a view to confront or mitigate a host of existential hardships, physical insecurities and entrenched legal, social and occupational discriminations and disabilities. The latter plights and hazards were for the most part rooted in the long-established status of Jews as an unequal, inferior and widely despised religious minority within Iran's Shi'ite-dominated state, society and general culture.

Despite the considerable importance of the 19th century as an interim period of continuity as well as a century of gradual and continuous change in the lives of Iranian Jews, however, most areas of the general history, culture and communal lives of Iranian Jews in the 19th century still await systematic research, data collection and balanced and unbiased examination. Yet, the study of Iranian Jews in the 19th century in the broader context of Iranian history on the one hand and in the context of their emerging relations with the foreign powers and with the Jews outside Iran on the other hand confronts the researcher with many objective limitations as well as subjective tests and challenges. While the choice of specific areas and topics that have to do with the lives of Iranian Jews during this period results ultimately from the researcher's own choice and deliberation, there exist numerous objective and serious difficulties that are independent of the researcher's individual approach, method or level of scholarship. Broadly speaking, the objective difficulties and obstacles that stand on the way towards a well-informed and balanced study of Iranian Jews in the 19th century (and earlier) belong to three separate, though closely related, areas. The first, and by far the most serious and consequential among these, lies in the relative scantiness of primary sources in the various relevant languages. In this regard, the observation made some four decades ago by the late Itzhak Ben-Zvi, the scholar of Jewish communities in the East, is still valid. In his words, which were written in connection with the comparative state of research and source materials relevant to the recent history of the Jewish communities in the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa:

Our scanty knowledge about the lives of the Jews in Iran requires us to dig deeply into the sources and rely on the kind of information which had they been from other communities it is doubtful whether we would attach to them importance. The scarcity of the material turns every piece of information and every detail about the Jews of Iran into something valuable to their history, and thus we are commanded to consider most carefully any such information, of which even a tiny bit can teach us a lot about this Jewry.⁵

Second, and hand in hand with the limited body of available primary and authentic sources, the student of the 18th and 19th century Iranian Jewry is faced with a very limited body of scholarly and solid research and publications related to the various aspects of Jewish life and history in Iran during this period. Although the studies and publications that have been conducted over the last six or seven decades (in European languages, in Persian and mainly in Hebrew) have added much to our knowledge and understanding with regard to various aspects of social, communal, material as well as cultural and religious lives in Iran's highly scattered Jewish communities, nevertheless many fundamental and in some cases the most elementary aspects and patterns of Jewish life in 19th century Iran have received no comprehensive treatment whatsoever.⁶ These areas and disciplines, which in the case of the Jewish communities of North Africa, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq and the Ottoman Empire have formed the subjects of far more extensive and systematic studies, include the areas of demography (including emigration and migration), economic and material lives, social institutions and communal organization, education, relations with Iran's

⁵ I. Ben-Zvi, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot* [Researches and Sources], Jerusalem 1966, p. 292.

⁶ Among the scholars and researchers of Iranian Jewry who have contributed to the documentation and investigation of the history of Iranian Jews in the 19th century, mention should be made particularly (according to the chronological order in which their work appeared) of the late Professor Walter J. Fischel, Itzhak (Isaac) Ben-Zvi, Professor Ezra Sion Melammed, Mr. Hanina Mizrahi, Dr. Habib Levi, and Professor Amnon Netzer, and may they long live, Mr. Azaria Levy, Dr. Avraham Cohen, Dr. Giora Fuzailov, Ms. Haideh Sahim and Dr. Daniel Tsadik. For a partial list of their publications dealing with the history, culture and community of Iranian Jews in the 19th century, see the list of bibliographical references in our book, below, and particularly A. Netzer, *Osar Kitvey ha-Yad shel Yehudey Paras be-Makhon Ben-Zvi*, [Manuscripts of the Jews of Persia in the Ben Zvi Institute] Jerusalem 1985, pp. 59–69; H. Sarshar, ed., *Esther's Children*, op. cit., pp. 437–450; D. Tsadik, *Foreign Intervention, Majority, and Minority: The Status of the Jews during the Latter Part of Nineteenth Century Iran* (1848–1896), Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2002, pp. 349–372, and Haim Saadoun, ed., *Iran: Qehilot Yisrael ba-Mizrah ba-Me'ot ha-Tesha' Esreh ve-ha-Esrim* [Iran: Jewish Communities in the East in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries], Jerusalem 2005, pp. 259–262.

Muslim and non-Muslim populations, processes and dimensions of forced and voluntary conversion to Shi'ite Islam, to the Baha'i faith and Christianity, communal and individual responses to Western influence, history of the emerging relations between the Jews of Iran and the Jewish Diaspora in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, biographies of rabbis and heads of communities, accounts of prominent personalities and families, histories of individual communities (including those of the four larger urban communities of Tehran, Hamadan, Isfahan, and Shiraz), and many more areas and topics. The absence of solid and systematic groundwork in these and other closely related areas and topics severely impedes the knowledge and the perspective required for a balanced understanding of Iranian Jews and the conditions and forces that shaped their lives in the course of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.

The third major obstacle that still restricts our ability to form a clear and coherent picture of Iranian Jewry in the course of the 19th century lies in the disjointed and highly scattered nature of the available sources of information. The latter sources of information and data are highly fragmented and found in small, incomplete and out of context fashion in hundreds if not thousands of diverse and mostly unrelated primary and secondary sources and documents. Broadly speaking, these sources and scattered references consist of:

1. Reports and writings of European (mainly British and French) consuls, agents and diplomatic officials.
2. Accounts and reports of Christian missionaries who conducted missionary and related welfare activities among the Jews of Iran during the 1820s–1910s.
3. Travel-books, memoirs and accounts of European (and some Middle Eastern) travelers, professionals and scholars, who traveled or lived and worked in Iran.
4. Reports and articles on the Jews of Iran in the growing body of 19th century Jewish press of Europe, North America and the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the publications of Jewish communal and cultural associations, mostly those based in Europe, and published in Hebrew and in the main languages of Europe.
5. Accounts and testimonies of Jewish religious emissaries (in Hebrew *shadarim*, literally, emissaries on behalf of rabbis), who were sent by rabbis and institutions of charity and religious learning in Ottoman Palestine in order to collect donations and provide religious

services in the Jewish communities scattered in Iran and in the region.

6. Historical sources, documents and writings produced by the Qajar state and administration as well as by some educated members of the Iranian state and society, including the writings of some of the members of the Shi'ite clerical establishment.
7. Last but not least, sources, writings and records (both private as well as family and community related) in Judeo-Persian, Hebrew and Persian, left to us by the Iranian Jews who lived in the different communities across Iran.

Two broad observations should be made with respect to this rather large and for the most part dispersed and incongruous body of 19th century historical sources of information. First, they can be divided into those that were produced by the Iranian Jews themselves (in Judeo-Persian, Hebrew and Persian), and those that were produced, recorded or transmitted by other individuals, among them non-Jewish Iranians, Middle Eastern and Ottoman subjects and officials, and particularly European and Western (both Jewish and non-Jewish) individuals, professionals and officials. The second observation that emerges from an overview of this diverse and variegated historical material is that both the quantity and the informative value and accuracy of the material grow steadily and increasingly during the second half of the 19th century and onward. The bulk of the European sources related to the Jews and the Jewish communities of Iran in the 19th century (particularly those belonging to the British Foreign Office and to the Jewish organizations and publications of Britain, France and Germany) reflect and document in detail the formation and the continuous growth of contacts and relations between the Iranian Jews and diverse European subjects, officials and organizations during the last four decades of the 19th century. More importantly, the examination of the available material, including the large body of Judeo-Persian manuscripts that were produced and mostly copied in the course of the 19th century, reveals that both because of centuries-old practices as well as by consequence of stagnation and gradual decline in the general condition of Iran's Jewish communities in the course of the 17th–19th centuries, most of the day-to-day and customary religious and communal activities and functions in the various communities were not recorded. The regrettable absence of this kind of religious, communal, legal and personal records, chief among them community registers and records, deliberations and decisions of

rabbinic courts, as well as works and writings of rabbis, judges, communal functionaries and educated individuals in the various communities, deprives us of a most valuable body of firsthand and authentic source material for the study of Iran's Jewish communities in the course of the 18th–19th centuries and earlier.

The rather poor and limited character of the historical sources and documents left to us by Iranian Jews is further aggravated by the lack of any known chronicles or semi-historical writings relating to any given community or geographical area. So far, the students, researchers and bibliographers in the field have not come across any works (including personal diaries or periodic recordings) which provide a descriptive and chronological account of daily lives and events in any of Iran's larger and smaller communities in the course of the 19th century. The absence of such sources and documents is far more evident and consequential in the case of the medium-sized and smaller communities and settlements, most of which were situated in the north-west, center and southern regions and provinces of Iran. Thus, for example, in the communities of Salmas and Mianduab, both in Western Azarbaijan; Garrus and Saqqez, in Iranian Kurdistan; Nahvand, in the province of Hamadan; Gulpaygan, Khunsar and Borujerd, in 'Eraq-e 'Ajam, or central Iran, and Zarqan, Jahrom, and Firuzabad, in Fars, and in a dozen of other similar communities, there lived an average of 200 to 300 souls during the 3rd quarter of the 19th century. According to all the available evidence, the communal organization and the number of communal bodies and functions in these and in many other similar Jewish settlements across Iran were very meager. Moreover, the vast majority of the routine religious, communal and interpersonal activities and transactions in these and in many of the larger urban communities were conducted only in an oral fashion. As a result of the latter conditions and practices, the amount of documents and written records produced by the heads and literate members of those communities was accordingly very limited. It is worth noting that of Iran's estimated Jewish population of some 20 to 25 thousand souls in the mid 19th century and some 40–45 thousand during the turn of that century, an estimated 30 to 35% lived in the latter category of medium-sized and smaller communities in towns and provincial districts.⁷

⁷ For the estimated make-up of Iran's Jewish population during the second half of the 19th century and the relative share of those who lived in the country's larger cities,

The communal and socio-cultural factors and shortcomings that account for the limited volume of source material in the medium-sized communities seem to have affected much more the situation in the smaller settlements in the remote provincial and rural districts, and particularly those that were situated in Western Azarbaijan, Iranian Kurdistan and in the southern province of Fars. In many of the latter settlements we learn of 15–20 Jewish families, and at times as few as 5–10 individuals, living in the midst or by side of the local Muslim population throughout the 19th century. The amount of historical sources and documents produced in the latter small settlements throughout the 19th century and earlier appear to have been minimal and thus whatever information and knowledge we possess about the lots and living conditions of the Jews in them is extremely limited and relies mostly on hearsay or on partial and incidental testimonies provided by outside visitors and travelers.

Finally, because of a variety of events, upheavals and hardships that affected or disrupted the lives of the various communities, among them attacks and pogroms perpetrated against some of the communities, partial or total destruction and disappearance of some other communities and settlements, periods of famine, epidemics and other natural disasters, and particularly because of the continuous occurrences and conditions of internal migration as well as emigration to other countries and territories throughout the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, (as a result of the latter occurrences and conditions) whatever written records and documents were in the possession of those communities and their members suffered from various degrees of damage, neglect or loss. According to all indications, a significant, though unknown, portion of these Judeo-Persian, Hebrew and some Persian historical sources and documents have either perished, or else kept as memorable sentimental items by community and family members. Some others are known (or assumed) to be in the possession of private collectors, brokers and antique dealers. These facts further deprive us of some of the firsthand body of evidence which would otherwise increase our knowledge and understanding with respect to diverse aspects of history, society, religion and culture in those little known communities and settlements.

towns and provincial and rural settlements, see in our book, below, sources no. 10, 11, and 12.

2. *General Background*

Within the broader context of Jewish history in Iran ever since Iran's Arab-Muslim conquest in the mid-seventh century C.E., the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century represent a particularly bleak and trouble-ridden period. Indeed, contrary to the observation made by some scholars of Iranian history,⁸ the available body of evidence and the research conducted so far demonstrate that some broad processes of marginalization, isolation and demographic decline had shaped and determined the lives of Iranian Jews ever since the 16th and 17th centuries. Hand in hand with other historical forces and conditions, which were related to Iran's internal bloody wars and chaotic affairs and to its external relations and increasingly diminished regional position in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the latter processes and forces of isolation and repression reached their peak and exercised their full negative effect on Iran's Jewish communities and settlements during the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries. Furthermore, the processes and forces of social and occupational marginalization and religio-cultural decline, which had been set in motion particularly with the advent of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 (see below), did not reach their final and clear end in the course of the 19th century. Neither did most years and decades of the 19th century constitute a consistent and uninterrupted course of improvement and strengthening in the overall position, security and welfare of Iran's Jewish minority. Different forms and varying degrees of individual and communal plights and distresses, among them entrenched civil and legal inequalities and discriminations and a host of religious, social, occupational and cultural restrictions and disabilities in the course of the 18th and most years of the following century were among the everyday conditions under which the vast

⁸ See, e.g., Professor Hamid Algar's assertion in his "Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VII, ed. P. Avery et al., Cambridge 1991, p. 731: "Jews and Zoroastrians also benefited from an outside interest in their welfare. The Alliance Israélite Universelle constructed schools for the Jews in Tehran, Hamadān and elsewhere, and despite losses to both Baha'ism and Christianity, the Jewish community of Iran strengthened its position throughout the 19th century." On the establishment of Alliance schools, the first of which was founded only in the spring of 1898, see in our book, above. For other observations similar to Professor Algar's, see C. Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914*, Chicago 1971, pp. 22–23.

majority of Iran's highly dispersed and by and large poorly protected Jewish communities lived and struggled.

Forming an era of transition in the history of the Middle East at large and in the internal and external affairs of Iran, however, the decades of the 19th century also served as a bridge between the old and the new. These were indeed years in which long-established institutions, traditions and practices which had evolved over centuries and had shaped and governed the lives of Iran's Jewish minority were coming into increasing contact with new and hitherto unknown sources of influence. These new forces, whose main origins derived from Iran's growing exposure to the physical presence as well as the economic and cultural penetration and dominance of European and Western Powers and their affiliated agencies in Iran and the region, were bound to affect and in the long run erode, reshape or completely eliminate many of the old traditions, institutions and practices which had characterized the lives of the Iranian Jews over many centuries. As a meeting ground for diverse historical, socio-cultural and material forces and developments in the history of Iranian Jews, the course of the 19th century provides the researcher and the interested reader with a unique and stimulating area of research and investigation. The study of diverse, though closely related aspects of life and activity among the Jews of Iran in the course of the 19th century does not merely clarify the circumstances and the historical dynamics that ultimately transformed them from a fundamentally oppressed, marginalized and threatened minority (particularly in the course of the 17th–19th centuries) into an increasingly active, enterprising and resourceful segment of the Iranian state, economy and society (particularly as of the beginning of the 20th century and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6). The study of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements in the organic context of Iran's local conditions and developments in the course of the 19th century and in the broader context of their growing contacts and relations with the Western Powers and with their coreligionists abroad, equally shed light on some of the dominant characteristics and patterns of individual and communal lives among the Iranian Jews prior to their rapid modernization in the course of the 20th century.

Within the longer continuum of Jewish life in Iran ever since the advent of Islam, however, the period that proves to have been by far more important and historically consequential with regard to the overall condition of Iranian Jews in the course of the 18th–19th centuries was

the Safavid period (1501–1736).⁹ The latter dynastic era introduced and consolidated a lasting revolution in the lives of Iran's vast population, divided along numerous ethnic, linguistic, religious and factional lines. It also laid the foundations for a new socio-religious order that had direct and for the most part detrimental effect on the legal position as well as the general condition of Iran's religious minorities in the course of the 16th–19th centuries.¹⁰ The kings and the leading figures of the Safavid monarchy, chief among them the founder of the dynasty Shah Isma'il (r. 1501. 1524) and the competent and powerful monarch Shah 'Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629), brought about the establishment and consolidation of a strong and proud Persian-Islamic monarchy for the first time ever since the downfall of Iran's pre-Islamic Sasanian Empire (222–632) and the subsequent annexation of its vast territories and populations to the Arab-Islamic Caliphate in the mid-7th century. As a central component of their dynastic identity and ideology, however, the Safavid monarchs introduced and energetically enforced the Shi'ite Twelver (Ar. *Ithna 'Ashari*) or Imami Creed as the state religion of Iran. The introduction and progressive spread and consolidation of the Imami Shi'ite dogma and traditions, which upheld the spiritual authority and infallibility of the fourth Islamic Caliph 'Ali¹¹ and his eleven descendants (or Imams) as the sole rightful successors of the Prophet Muhammad, provided Iran's majority Shi'ite population with

⁹ For a general discussion of the Safavid dynasty and its role in Iranian history, see, among other sources and publications, R. Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, Cambridge 1980; idem, *The History of Shah Abbas the Great*, being a translation of Iskandar Munshi's *Tarikh-i 'Alam Aray-i 'Abbasi*, 2 vols., Colorado 1978; V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Muluk, A Manuel of Safavid Administration*, London 1943; M.M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids*, Wiesbaden 1972; C. Melville, ed., *Safavid Persia, The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, London and New York 1996.

¹⁰ On the position of Iran's religious minorities during the Safavid period and the effects of Safavid policies and institutions on their condition, see V.B. Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorities in Safavid Iran, 1617–61," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 40 (January–October 1981), pp. 119–134. Cf. *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols., London 1939, vol. 1, pp. 155–158, 364–367, 405–408. As regards the Jews and the harsh effects of the Safavid policies on their lives, see, e.g., W.J. Fischel, "The Jews in Mediaeval Iran from the 16th to the 18th Centuries: Political, Economic and Communal Aspects," *Irano-Judaica*, ed. Sh.Shaked, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 265–291, and V.B. Moreen, "The Persecution of Iranian Jews during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II (1642–1666)," in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. LII (1981), pp. 275–309.

¹¹ 'Ali, son of Abu Talib, was the cousin as well as the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. He was killed in the year 40 Q/661 C.E., at the age of 59. Regarding his exalted position in Shi'ite tradition in Iran, see below in our book, source no. 33 note 8.

a considerable degree of religious cohesion as well as shared cultural bonds and marked political and territorial borders. The same features of the Safavid state and institutions, however, contained within them the seeds of what were to become (particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries) growing exclusion, segregation and ill-treatment of non-Shi'ites (including Sunni Muslims) within the diverse spheres and institutions of the Iranian state, society, economy and general culture.¹² The latter discriminatory and increasingly negative and hostile attitudes towards non-Shi'ites (i.e. attitudes and notions that were embraced and promoted by the Safavid theocratic state and its affiliated clerical, administrative, military and public arms) struck roots in the course of the 16th–17th centuries and became internalized and widespread among broad sections and institutions of the Iranian state and society in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.¹³ The fundamentally negative and discriminatory notions, laws, and practices concerning the non-Shi'ites were to have harsh and debilitating effects on the overall standing and welfare of most of the religious minorities in Iran already in the course of the 16th–17th centuries and particularly ever since the demise of the Safavid monarchy following Iran's invasion by Afghan tribes in 1722.¹⁴ Indeed, ever since the establishment of the Safavid state, and much through the end of the 19th century, the overall condition, security and welfare of Iran's religious minorities depended largely on the relative ability and resources of each of them to withstand or invariably repel, mitigate or manipulate the lasting effects of the profound socio-religious and institutional revolution that had been introduced by the founders of the Safavid state. This was particularly so in the case of Iran's Jews and Zoroastrians (i.e. the followers of Iran's

¹² For a discussion of some of the common, and mostly negative, attitudes of Imami Shi'ite law and tradition towards non-Imami Muslims, see, e.g., Etan Kohlberg, "Non-Imāmī Muslims in Imāmī Fiqh," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 6 (1985), pp. 99–105. Idem, "Some Imāmī Views on the Ṣaḥāba," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), pp. 143–175. On some of the more characteristic tenets of Imami law and dogma concerning the followers of the other monotheistic religions (i.e. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians), see in our book, below, sources no. 1 and 7.

¹³ On the growing strength and development of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran following the fall of the Safavids, see H. Algar, "Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran," op.cit., and pages 705–715 in particular. Cf. S.A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago and London 1984, pp. 215–220, and Y. Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahya*, 4 vols., Tehran 1361/1982, vol. 1 pp. 23–28, 37–38.

¹⁴ For further discussion of this matter, see below in this introduction.

pre-Islamic state religion) throughout the 16th–19th centuries. Out of Iran's three major groups of recognized religious minorities during the period under discussion, i.e. Christians of various denominations, and mainly Armenians and Nestorians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, it was the Christians, and particularly the Armenians, who due to a variety of political, regional and commercial factors enjoyed the protection and support of various powerful Christian states and their commercial and religious establishments both inside Iran and outside its borders.¹⁵ Lacking any tangible political, economic and military leverage inside Iran, and deprived of any significant foreign connections and relations with European and regional states and governments through the first decades of the 19th century, Iran's Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities were as a rule less protected and considerably weaker.¹⁶ As such, they were subjected to a host of physical pressures and insecurities as well as numerous legal and socio-economic restrictions and disabilities which were imposed on them within the dominant Iranian-Shi'ite state and society in the course of the 16th–19th centuries. As far as Iran's non-Shi'ite population in general and its religious minorities ever since the rise of the Safavid dynasty are concerned, by far the most debilitating element in the general approach of the Imami Shi'ite law consisted of the notion that non-Shi'ites (including the followers of the monotheistic religions) were inherently and ritually impure. By extension, any

¹⁵ Regarding the background and causes of the protection enjoyed by the Armenians in Iran in the course of the 16th–18th centuries, see particularly Vartan Gregorian, "Minorities of Isfahan: The Armenian Community of Isfahan, 1587–1722," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 7 (1974), part 2, numbers 3–4, pp. 652–680, and Cosroe Chaqueri, ed., *The Armenians of Iran*, Cambridge Mass., 1996, pp. 3–7 in particular. As to the protection granted by Iranian monarchs to Iran's Armenian minority in the course of the 16th–19th centuries, see Isma'il Ra'in, *Iranian-i Armani*, Tehran 1349/1970, pp. 113–136. On the extensive commercial and political ties of Armenians with some of the leading trade companies of Europe in the course of the 17th–18th centuries, see, e.g., N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, 2 vols., Calcutta 1956, vol. 1, pp. 230–237; R.W. Ferrier, "The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *The Economic History Review*, second series, vol. XXVI, no. 1, 1973, pp. 38–62; idem, "The Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation," *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, nouvelle série, tome VII, 1970, pp. 427–441. On the protection granted by the American Protestant Mission to the Nestorians of Azarbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan as of the 1830s, see, e.g., Rev. Justin Perkins, D.D., *Missionary Life in Persia, glimpses at a quarter of a century of labors among the Nestorian Christians*, Boston 1861, pp. 3–5, 48–49, 55–63.

¹⁶ Regarding the fundamentally unprotected and downtrodden position and living conditions of Iran's Zoroastrians during the 16th–17th centuries, see, e.g., D.F. Karaka, *History of the Parsis*, 2 vols., London 1884, vol. 1, pp. 54–66.

physical contact with non-Shi'ites or with objects (particularly wet and moist ones) which had touched them would result in the physical and ritual defilement (Ar.-Per. *najāsāt*) of Shi'ite believers. In the words of the eminent scholar of Jewish communities of the East, the late Professor Walter J. Fischel, who among his many studies devoted to the Jews of Iran also investigated the general position of Iranian Jews following the establishment of the Safavid state:

The Safavid rulers introduced into Persia Shi'a Islam as a state religion and allowed a hierarchy of clergy to rule with almost unlimited power and influence over every sphere of public life. The cornerstone of the inter-confessional relationship towards the non-Muslims was based on the concept of the ritual uncleanness of Jews, Christians and others alike.¹⁷

Furthermore, in Professor Fischel's historical assessment, which was written some seven decades ago and which is largely supported by the various sources and studies that are available to us now:

Even though the promulgation of the Shi'ite religion by the Safavid monarch Shah Isma'il was first and foremost a political act that was directed at the Ottoman Empire, which adhered to the Sunni branch of Islam, it changed the attitude of the state towards its religious minorities, and in the course of time it led to a special Shi'ite concept in the arrangement of the inter-religious relations. This concept, which regarded the unbelievers as ritually impure, determined the fate of the Jews of Iran until this day. Just as the declaration of Islam as the state religion [of Iran] following the fall of the Sasanian dynasty in the 7th century C.E. determined the fate of the Jewish population in the land, so did the declaration of the Shi'ite Islam as [Iran's] state religion in the 16th century inaugurated a new era in the history of the Jewish diaspora in Iran.¹⁸

The introduction and gradual consolidation of the Imami Shi'ite tenets, which emphasized the categorical inferiority of the non-Shi'ites and the potential physical and spiritual threat and harm that they presented to the community of Shi'ite believers, constituted a significant departure from the old-established and generally more tolerant theological, legal and societal principles and concepts that had shaped the common

¹⁷ W.J. Fischel, "The Jews in Mediaeval Iran from the 16th to the 18th Centuries," *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁸ Idem, "History of the Jews of Persia under the Safavid Dynasty in the 17th Century," (in Hebrew), *Sion*, 2 (1936-7), pp. 273-274.

position of most Islamic states and societies toward their recognized and protected (*dhimmi*) religious minorities since the advent of Islam.¹⁹

As far as the long term and predominantly adverse effects of the Imami Shi'ite law and tradition on the position of Iran's Jewish minority in the course of the 16th–19th centuries are concerned, we know that despite the important political and dynastic changes which took place in Iran during the 18th century (see below), the fundamental legal definitions and customary practices that had stricken roots during the Safavid period persisted without any significant change much through the 1870s and even further. During the interim period that came between the Afghan invasion of 1722 and the rise of the Qajar dynasty in 1794, we know of two failed attempts by Iran's contemporary rulers to change and ameliorate the lower position of Iran's Jewish minority. The first of the two initiatives, both of which were a by-product and integral part of the internal power struggles in Iran following the fall of the Safavids, was initiated by the Sunni Afghan invader and ruler Ashraf (r. 1725–1730). A cousin and successor to the Afghan tribal leader Mahmud (r. 1722–1725), who invaded Iran in 1722 and spurred the fall of the Safavid dynasty, Ashraf was resolved to suppress and to downgrade Iran's majority Shi'ite population and thus indirectly promote the country's Sunni and non-Shi'ite population, and Jews among them. Thus, upon his succession to the throne in 1725, he issued a royal edict in which he ranked Iran's various religious and ethnic groups. According to the latter decree, the first rank was assigned to the Afghans, the conquerors of Iran; the second to the Armenians; the third to a Sunni tribal ally of the Afghan invaders known as Dergesins; the fourth rank went to the Hindu Banians; the

¹⁹ The legal position and general standing of *dhimmi* or protected religious minorities in early Islamic history and in the Sunni-dominated states and societies in pre-modern times have been extensively treated. For selective sources and bibliographical references pertaining to the subject, see, especially, C. Cahen, "Dhimma," in *EI*, vol. II, pp. 227–231; A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar*, reprint edition, London 1930; A. Fattal, *Le statut légal de non-musulmans en pays d'Islam*, Beirut 1958. For further treatments of the subject with particular attention to the legal position and actual condition of Jews in Sunni-dominated countries in the course of the centuries, see: S.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, New York 1955; E. Ashtor, *Qorot ha-Yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-Muslimit* (History of the Jews in Muslim Spain), 2 vols. 2nd reprint, Jerusalem 1966; N.A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, Philadelphia 1979; idem, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, Philadelphia 1991; M.R. Cohen, *Under the Crescent and Cross*, Princeton 1994; idem, "What Was the Pact of 'Umar? A Literary-Historical Study," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 23 (1999), pp. 100–157.

fifth rank was assigned to the Zoroastrians; the sixth, and just one level above the lowest rank, went to the Jews, while the seventh and the most degraded standing was assigned to the “Persians,” i.e. the land’s Shi‘ite majority population who, in the words of the decree, “are treated like slaves by the six other nations.”²⁰ The declared intentions of the Afghan occupiers to redefine the position of Iran’s religious minorities did not materialize, as they were ultimately defeated and expelled from the country in 1736.²¹

The second attempt following the fall of the Safavid dynasty to revise and restructure the foundations of the Iranian state and society by altering the Shi‘ite-dominated character of the state and its institutions took place during the reign of the powerful ruler and conqueror Nadir Shah of the Turkoman Afshar tribe (r. 1734–1747).²² With a view to forge a new Islamic identity for the Iranian state, i.e. one which would have common traits and affinity with Iran’s Sunni neighbors in Afghanistan, Turkistan and the Ottoman Empire, Nadir Shah invested considerable efforts in curbing and suppressing the Shi‘ite traditions and practices which had long been identified with the Safavid Shi‘ite state.²³ Through a fusion of the Shi‘ite and Sunni brands of Islam, and by proclaiming a new rite, (known as Ja‘fari), as the fifth school or *Madhhab* of Sunni Islam, Nadir hoped to reach a rapprochement with the Sunni Ottoman Empire and thus perhaps prepare the ground for making himself the head of a united Muslim world. Nadir Shah’s attitude towards the various religious groups of the empire, especially towards Christians and Jews, was as remarkable.²⁴ Among his other actions in support of Iran’s Christians and Jews he went as far as settling a considerable number of Jews and Christians in the city of Mashhad, the holiest

²⁰ See Judasz Tadeusz Krusinski, *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia: Taken from the Memoirs of Father Krusinski*, trans. into English by Father Du Cerceau, 2 vols., 2nd ed., London 1740, vol. 2, pp. 196–198. Cf. L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, Cambridge 1958, pp. 298–299.

²¹ For further discussion and bibliographical references concerning the Afghan invasion and its implications for Iran’s religious minorities and Jews in particular, see especially V.B. Moreen, *Iranian Jewry During the Afghan Invasion: The Kitāb-i Sar Guzāsh-i Kashan of Babai b. Farhad*, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 1–18 in particular.

²² Cf. H. Algar, “Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran,” op. cit., pp. 706–707.

²³ See ‘Abbas Iqbal Ashtiani, “Wathīqa-yi Ittihad-i Nadiri,” in *Yadgar*, year 4, No. 2, September–October 1945, pp. 31–43.

²⁴ W.J. Fischel, “The Bible in Persian Translation,” *Harvard Theological Review*, XIV (1952), pp. 30–31. Cf. L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah, A Critical Study Based Mainly Upon Contemporary Sources*, London 1938, pp. 278–281.

Shi'ite city inside Iran and his place of residence in the northeastern province of Khorasan.²⁵ Independent in his views concerning Muslim tradition and religion, and differing from his Safavid predecessors in his attitude towards religious minorities, Nadir Shah fostered the idea of a universal religion embracing Islam, Christianity and Judaism. It was in this context that, shortly after his successful invasion of India in 1740, he commanded to translate into Persian the Hebrew Biblical books of the Pentateuch (*Tawrat*) and the Psalms (*Ẓabur*), as well as the Christian Gospels (*Ingil*) and the holy Qur'an.²⁶ This interfaith project, which was carried out in Isfahan in close collaboration between Muslim, Jewish and Christian religious scholars and translators, began in May 1740 and was completed in June 1741.²⁷

Nadir Shah's religious positions at large and his generally more tolerant and supportive actions concerning Iran's Jewish minority aroused high hopes among the Jews. Among other responses of Iranian Jews during this period we learn of messianic yearnings which Nadir Shah's personal attention to rabbis and Jewish scholars of Isfahan, Kashan, Yazd and Qazvin had aroused. The extant Judeo-Persian manuscripts dating from this period, which contain the translated texts of the Biblical Psalms ordered by Nadir Shah as well as historical and biographical information related to rabbis who took part in this project, provide revealing evidence about the psychological condition of Iranian Jews during this period and the extent of hope and expectations that they attached to Nadir Shah's supportive attitudes towards his Jewish subjects. In one of these manuscripts, which according to the information contained in it was copied in 1760 by one of the rabbis who was closely involved in the translation project, we read:

Upon the completion of the translation, Nadir Shah presented the sages of Israel with robes of honor and gifts and, thereafter, he dismissed them.

²⁵ W.J. Fischel, "The Jews of Central Asia (Khorasan) in Medieval Hebrew and Islamic Literature," in *Historia Judaica*, 7 (1945), pp. 49–50; idem, "Secret Jews of Persia: A Century-Old Marrano Community in Asia," *Commentary*, vol. VII (January 1949–June 1949), pp. 28–29.

²⁶ See J. Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, 2 vols., London 1815, vol. 2, p. 104, and particularly *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, op. cit., pp. 637–638. Cf. L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, op. cit., pp. 280–281, and E.S. Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, Gainesville 2006, pp. 76–77.

²⁷ W.J. Fischel, "The Bible in Persian Translation," op. cit., p. 31, and A. Netzer, *Osar Kitvey ha-Yad Shel Yehudey Paras be-Makhon Ben-Ẓvi*, p. 17.

At nights, in the royal assembly, the Chief Mulla of the kingdom [Mulla-bashi]²⁸ would read and interpret for the king, sometimes from the Torah and sometimes from the Psalms, and the king enjoyed this greatly. He had sworn saying: 'I will take Russia, I will rebuild Jerusalem, and I will gather all the Children of Israel together.' However, death overtook him and did not allow him to do so."²⁹

With Nadir Shah's assassination on June 20, 1747, his kingdom disintegrated. As far as the position and general state of Iran's Jewish minority is concerned, neither the attempts of the Afghan invaders nor the ambitions of Nadir Shah at introducing a new socio-religious order in Iran met with any success. The implementation of such a profound revision in the political and socio-religious institutions of the post-Safavid state would possibly have affected or to some degree improved the official and actual position of Iran's Jewish minority. However, the force and considerable tenacity of the Shi'ite institutions, beliefs and practices, which had been promoted and strengthened by the Safavids, outweighed the constellation of personal ambitions and political interests of the Afghan invaders and particularly those of Nadir Shah to establish a new and more inclusive order. Shi'ism had become firmly established as the religion of the majority in most of the provinces of Iran under the Safavids and thus the innovations of the Afghan invaders and the rite which Nadir Shah attempted to introduce had no widespread appeal and did not take root.³⁰ This historical reality had major ramifications for diverse areas and aspects of life in Iran during the 18th century and onward. With its broader implications for Iran's Shi'ite majority population, it largely determined the position and lot of Iran's religious minorities and Jews among them. Despite significant developments and changes which took place in Iran's internal affairs and institutions in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the fact remains that following the reign of Nadir Shah, and much through the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6, the primary political traditions, religious institutions and social norms that constituted the foundations of the Iranian state, society and general culture in the course of the 18th–19th centuries,

²⁸ Regarding this important clerical office among the other institutions of the Safavid state, see V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*, op. cit., pp. 41–42.

²⁹ See in the introduction to the Judeo-Persian translation of the Hebrew Psalms, attributed to Baba'i Ben Nuri'el of Isfahan, in Ms. Heb. 8° 3068, in the possession of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, f. 4a–4b.

³⁰ Z. Safa, *Tarikh-i Siyasi va Ijtima'i va Farhangi-yi Iran, az Aghaz ta Payan-i Ahd-i Safavi*, 4th reprint, Tehran 1376/1997, pp. 310–318.

were either identical with or else evolved from those which had been instituted and nurtured during the long years of the Safavid dynasty. Despite significant differences discerned in the religious views and policies of dynasties and individual rulers that controlled Iran ever since the fall of Nadir Shah until the emergence of the Constitutional Movement towards the end of the 19th century, Iran's rulers during the period accepted and endorsed the Shi'ite religion and tradition as Iran's state religion and as the principle source of the country's collective identity and cohesion. This reality had major repercussions on Iran's religious minorities at large and on the country's extensively diffused and poorly-protected Jewish minority in particular. First, the legal and civil position of the Jews as well as the definition of their rights and obligations (which directly regulated and affected their daily lives within the Shi'ite-Iranian state and society) derived predominantly from the codes and precedents of Imami Shi'ite law and jurisprudence. The latter body of law, as well as the theological and doctrinal concepts that stood at its basis, had profound biases to the detriment of Iran's non-Shi'ite denominations.³¹ Second, as a result of the considerable weakness of the central government and administration during the second half of the 18th century and during most years and decades of the 19th century, the Iranian state was constrained in its ability and resources to provide physical and legal protection to Jews as well as to many other weak and disadvantaged segments of the general population. This state of affairs had harsh effects particularly on Jewish communities and settlements which were situated far away from the capital and from the administrative and military headquarters in the various provinces and districts. Not least, the combination of inadequate state protection and the growing spread and strength of popular Shi'ite beliefs and practices concerning the non-Shi'ites ever since the end of the 17th century³² exposed the

³¹ See D. Tsadik, "The Legal Status of Religious Minorities: Imami Shi'i Law and Iran's Constitutional Revolution," *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 10, No. 3 (2003), pp. 376–408. Regarding the fundamental approach of Imami creed towards non-Shi'ites, as expressed in early Shi'ite sources, see E. Kohlberg, "Non-Imāmī Muslims in Imāmī Fiqh," op. cit. Idem, "Some Imāmī Views on the Ṣaḥāba," op. cit., and M. Bar-Asher, "On Judaism and the Jews in Early Shi'i Religious Literature," (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim*, 61 (1994), pp. 16–36.

³² See S.A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, op. cit., pp. 151–159.

Jews as well as many other members of Iran's religious minorities to routine acts of discrimination, degradation and abuse.³³

The Safavid political, socio-religious and cultural revolution, which largely contributed to the low and vulnerable position of Iranian Jews in the course of 18th–19th centuries, led to state-wide persecution of Jews designed to convert them to Islam already during the reign of the Safavid Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642–1666).³⁴ Following the expulsion of the Afghan invaders and the meteoric rise and fall of Nadir Shah, which were accompanied by ravaging wars and massive bloodshed and suffering in most regions of Iran, a new tribal leader by the name of Muhammad Karim Khan, of the Zand clan of the Lur tribe, succeeded in imposing his authority on parts of the defunct Safavid empire. Having defeated the other contestants for power in 1176 Q./1762, Karim Khan (r. 1750–1779) pacified most of western Iran, from the Caspian littoral and Azarbaijan in the north and northwest to Kirman and Lar to the south and southeast. He took up residence in Shiraz (in July 21, 1765) until his death on March 1, 1779.³⁵ Karim Khan, the founder of the new Zand dynasty, refused to adopt the title of Shah and called himself “wakil al-ra'aya,” or “representative of the people.”³⁶ He did not attempt to recover the northeastern and eastern provinces of Iran, but devoted his efforts to providing security, reviving trade, agriculture and handicraft in the province of Fars and in western Iran.

³³ For detailed description of such acts of discrimination and persecution perpetrated against the Zoroastrians in the city of Kirman as late as 1888, see J. Surushian, “Zardushtian-i Kirman dar Hashtad Sal Pish,” in *Farhang-i Iran Zamin*, ed. I. Afshar, vol. 21, Tehran 1385/2006, pp. 73–78. For other similar acts of religious persecution committed by segments of the Shi'ite population of Yazd against local Jews and Zoroastrians in 1889, see I. Afshar, ed., “Safarnama-yi Tiligrafchi-yi Farangi,” in *Farhang-i Iran Zamin*, op. cit., vol. 19, pp. 196–197.

³⁴ See particularly V.B. Moreen, *Iranian Jewry's Hour of Peril and Heroism, A Study of Bābā Ibn Lutf's Chronicle (1617–1662)*, New York/Jerusalem 1987. For a contemporary Armenian account of the Safavid attempts to convert the Jews in the capital city of Isfahan and in other parts of the country in the years 1657–1658, see the testimony of the Armenian historian Arakel of Tabriz, translated into French, in A. Galante, *Histoire de Juifs de Turquie*, 9 vols., Istanbul, Editions Isis, n.d., vol. 9, pp. 123–132. For additional discussion of this period, see A. Netzer, “Persecutions and Forced Conversions in the History of the Jews of Iran in the 17th Century,” (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim*, 6 (1981), pp. 33–56.

³⁵ See J.R. Perry, “The Zand Dynasty,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, ed. P. Avery et al., Cambridge 1991, pp. 63–101; idem, “Zand,” in *EI*, vol. XI, pp. 443–444; idem, *Karim Khan Zand, A History of Iran, 1747–1779*, Chicago 1979. Cf. A.H. Zarinkoob, “Karim Khan Zand,” *EI*, vol. IV, pp. 639–640.

³⁶ J.R. Perry, “The Zand Dynasty,” op. cit., p. 97.

He further invested extensive efforts in developing and rebuilding the city of Shiraz,³⁷ which during his days had the largest Jewish community across Iran.³⁸ The Persian historical sources of the period contain numerous accounts and anecdotes that point to Karim Khan's liberal views and fundamentally tolerant, egalitarian and humane attitude to diverse groups and classes of subjects in his realm.³⁹ Furthermore, in matters of religious observance and in his personal attitude toward Shi'ite dogma and tradition he is said to have been free-minded and rather non-committed.⁴⁰ Neither did he seek the support of the Shi'ite doctors and clerics in promoting his goals and policies. However, as regards the state religion of Iran, upon which the broad legal, civil and societal definitions and attitudes concerning Iran's religious minorities were based, Karim Khan endorsed the Twelver (*Ithna 'Ashari*) Shi'a and thus established anew the unrevised Shi'ism as Iran's state religion. Each of the twelve districts of Shiraz, his seat of government, was held to be under the patronage of one of the Twelve Imams. Coins were struck in the names of the Imams and the Friday sermon (*khutba*) began with the invocations of blessings upon them.⁴¹

With the death of Karim Khan, in 1779, the Zand ruling family became torn by fierce and ruthless internal divisions and rivalries. Within a period of fifteen years, which ended with the ascent to power of a new tribal leader in 1794, the territories and provinces of the Zand state were ruled by no less than six different members of the Zand ruling clan.⁴² The relentless power struggles among the members of the dynasty, which involved repeated killings and other atrocities perpetrated against each other, were further accompanied by anarchy and ongoing battles between the rulers of the Zand dynasty and their tribal and factional allies on the one hand and the members of the ascending Qajar tribe

³⁷ K. Afsar, *Tarikh-i Baft-i Qadimi-yi Shiraz*, Tehran 1374/1995, pp. 182–218.

³⁸ J.R. Perry, "The Zand Dynasty," op. cit., p. 100.

³⁹ See, e.g., Riza Quli Khan Hidayat, *Tarikh-i Rawzat al-Safa-yi Nasiri* (forming part of the *Tarikh-i Rawzat al-Safa*), 10 vols., Tehran 1339/1960, vol. 8, pp. 71–73, 122–127; Muhammad Hashim Asaf (Rustam al-Hukama), *Rustam al-Tawarikh*, ed. M. Mushiri, Tehran 1352/1973, pp. 11–12, 16, 58.

⁴⁰ J.R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, op. cit., pp. 220–222. Cf. S.A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, op. cit., 217.

⁴¹ H. Algar, "Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran," op. cit., p. 710.

⁴² For the identity of these rulers and the short periods of their reign in the west and south of Iran, see J. Perry, "Zand," in *EI*, op. cit., and Sir Harford Jones Brydges, *The Dynasty of the Kijars*, 1833 ed., reprint, New York 1973, pp. cii–cxci.

and their supporters on the other. These wars and regional conflicts, similar to those which had preceded them during the Afghan invasion and the reign of Nadir Shah in the first half of the 18th century, had devastating effects on the lives of Iran's settled population in many of the cities and rural areas across the country. The capital city of Shiraz as well as numerous towns and settlements in the north center and south of Iran (among them the larger cities of Hamadan, Qazvin, Isfahan, Yazd, Kirman and the smaller towns of Kazerun, Zarqan and others in the south), in which Jews and other religious minorities had continuously lived ever since the Safavid period and earlier, suffered from anarchy and lawlessness, periods of siege, hunger, massacre, looting and extensive damage to public and private property.⁴³

As far as the overall condition of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements during the reign of Karim Khan and his successors is concerned, lack of information and documentation as well as absence of research on the subject limit our ability to form a clear and balanced picture. Nevertheless, the partial and disjointed pieces of information and evidence point to diverse hardships, insecurities and persecutions to which the Jews in various locations in western and southern Iran were subjected. These hardships resulted in part from the general conditions of political instability, breakdown of public order and diverse material distresses and dislocations which equally affected the lives of Iran's general population before and after the death of Karim Khan. However, according to the available information (i.e. mostly oral testimonies provided by Iranian Jews and recorded during the first and second halves of the 19th century), the additional plights and distresses of Iranian Jews during the period were to a large extent a consequence of the generally low and degraded status of Jews as well as a result of their poorly protected physical and communal position in several localities across Iran.⁴⁴

⁴³ Regarding the dislocations and sufferings of the population in these and other cities, towns and settlements of central and southern Iran following the death of Karim Khan, see Hasan-i Fasa'i's *Farsnama-yi Nasiri*, trans. into English by H. Busse and published as *History of Persia Under Qajar Rule*, New York and London 1972, pp. 5–69.

⁴⁴ For oral accounts provided by the heads of the community of Hamadan to Christian missionaries in the 1840s (i.e. testimonies that throw light on the plights and demographic decline of the community ever since the 1740s), see in *Jl*, December 1845, pp. 412–415. For similar information provided by the Jews of southern Iran in the 1890s regarding the gradual decline of their communities ever since the 1760s, see in the report on the communities of Kazerun and Burazjan, in *Jl*, August 1893, pp. 116–118.

Some of the scholars of the Jewish communities of Iran and Iraq, who have touched on the history and general condition of the Jews in Iran and Ottoman Iraq during the reign of the Zand dynasty, have pointed to the generally harsh and heavy-handed attitude of Karim Khan and the other members of the Zand ruling family towards the Jews.⁴⁵ Among the other historical sources of the period, which according to the latter mentioned scholars contain information attesting to the particularly harsh and brutal treatment of the Jews during the reign of Karim Khan, reference is made to a Hebrew chronicle of the events connected to the siege and occupation of the strategically important port city of Basra (in southern Iraq) by the armies of Karim Khan during the months of April 1775– March 1779.⁴⁶ The author of this valuable historical work, by the name of Rabbi Ya‘acov Elyashar,⁴⁷ was an emissary who was sent on behalf of the rabbinic authorities of the Jewish community of Hebron (Ar. Al-Khalil) in Ottoman Palestine to the Jewish communities of Baghdad and Basra in 1773. Arriving in Basra in the fall of that year, he was unable to leave the city during the next four turbulent years and served as an eyewitness to the 13 months-long siege of Basra by 30,000 soldiers of Karim Khan and the hardships and sufferings of the city’s population during the siege and the occupation that followed it. Entitled *Megillat Paras* (literally “The Scroll of Persia”), and written in rhymed verse, Rabbi Elyashar’s chronicle documented in detail the brutal treatment of Basra’s well-established and prosperous Jewish community of merchants at the hand of the Iranian soldiers and commanders of Karim Khan, led by his brother Sadiq Khan.⁴⁸ Among other information related to the fate of the community under the Zand control, the chronicle documents the looting of Jewish property, rape of Jewish women, imprisonment, torture and deportation of the wealthy members of the community (chief among them the influential head

⁴⁵ See, e.g., A. Ben-Ya‘acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequfat ha-Ge’onim ‘ad Yameynnu*, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 334–335, and particularly H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 482–489.

⁴⁶ For a detailed description and discussion of the siege and the subsequent occupation of Basra, see J.R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, op. cit., pp. 167–198.

⁴⁷ Regarding him see particularly A. Ya‘ari, *Sheluhey Eres Yisrael*, 2nd reprint, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 591–592.

⁴⁸ For the complete text of the chronicle see David S. Sassoon, “The History of the Jews of Basra,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* [New Series], 17 (1926–1927), pp. 438–440. For a discussion of the chronicle and its diverse historical, religious and intra-communal aspects, see M. Benayahu, *Rabbi Ya‘acov Elyashar ve-Hiburo Megillat Paras*, Jerusalem 1960.

of the community the opulent merchant and banker Ya'acov son of Aharon Gabbay) to Shiraz, as well as extortion of large sums of money from those who were not deported, and more.

While this chronicle and other Jewish sources related to it⁴⁹ provide valuable information on the condition of the Jewish community of Basra under the occupation of the Zand rulers, one cannot derive from them any conclusive evidence pointing to the particular approach and attitude of the Zand dynasty toward Jews. The harsh treatment of Basra's general population and Jews among them have to be viewed and understood in the context of the contemporary practices and norms which characterized the attitude of invaders and occupiers toward occupied settlements and populations. As far as the overall condition of Iranian Jews during the reign of the Zand dynasty is concerned, however, the importance of the chronicle lies in the manner in which it juxtaposes the protected status of Jews under Ottoman control with the fundamentally weak and precarious condition of Iran's scattered Jews. The considerable economic power, political connections and inter-communal relations of the Jewish elite in Basra, Baghdad and other Ottoman provinces, as evidenced in great detail in the chronicle and in other Jewish sources of the period, stand in sharp contrast to the generally oppressed and highly isolated condition of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements under the rule of the Zand dynasty and much during the last decade of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. Indeed, the overall impression that emerges with regard to the generally poor, downtrodden and insecure condition of Iran's scattered Jews during the reign of Karim Khan and his successors is strengthened by contemporary accounts and testimonies left to us by foreign travelers and visitors. Even in the capital city of Shiraz, where Jews were comparatively more protected, we are told of diverse disabilities, plights and degradations to which the Jews in the city were subjected. Thus, for example, the Dutch traveler and explorer Carsten Niebuhr, who visited the towns and settlements of southern Iran during the reign of Karim Khan, recorded his impressions of the region and the current condition of its population and institutions. Visiting the capital city of Shiraz in the spring of 1765, and commenting on the

⁴⁹ Regarding these sources, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Teqfat ha-Ge'onim*, op. cit., p. 334, notes 7–12, and A. Ya'ari, *Sheluhey Eres Yisrael*, op. cit., p. 591, note 77.

general condition of the Jews in the seat of the Zand Dynasty, he noted: "Like [in] most of the cities of the East, the Jews of Shiraz dwell in a separate quarter of their own, and they live, at least outwardly, in great poverty."⁵⁰ Similarly, the British official William Francklin, who was in the service of the East India Company's Bengal establishment and visited Shiraz in the winter of 1787 (i.e. about eight years after the death of Karim Khan), found the Jews in the city as being visibly oppressed and abused in the midst of the city's population and organized life. In his words:

The Jews of Shirauz [sic] have a quarter of the city allotted to themselves, for which they pay a considerable tax to government, and are obliged to make frequent presents: These people are more odious to the Persians than those of any other faith; and every opportunity is taken to oppress and extort money from them; the very boys in the street being accustomed to beat and insult them, of which treatment they dare not complain.⁵¹

Testimonies provided by native Jews of Shiraz and other towns and settlements of southern Iran in the 1820s point to numerous hardships and pressures to which Jews in those localities had been subjected during the last quarter of the 18th century. Physical violence, high taxes and diverse forms of extortion committed by local Muslim residents and officials in these localities had led to the flight and emigration of Iranian Jews to the more protected towns and cities of Bushihr (in the Persian Gulf), Basra and Baghdad during the last decade of the 18th century and the first years of the 19th century. In the city of Shiraz itself, evidently under the weight of the pressures and inducements to which the Jews during these years were exposed, a substantial portion of the Jewish community in the city (i.e. about 100 families out of the community's total of 300 families) had converted to Shi'ite Islam. Rev. Joseph Wolff of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who conducted missionary work among the Jews of Bushihr, Kazerun and Shiraz in the winter of 1824–5, recorded the testimony of the heads of the community of Shiraz regarding these converts. In his words, which were written down in December 1824 in Shiraz:

⁵⁰ C. Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie et en d'autres pays circonvoisins*, 2 vols., Amsterdam 1776–1780, vol. 2, p. 139.

⁵¹ W. Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786–7*, London 1790, p. 60.

They [i.e. the Chief Rabbi and the head of the community of Shiraz] told me that hundred families of Jews who turned Mussulmans at Shiraz keep secretly the Jewish law, and never eat with Mussulmans, and therefore they continued to live in the Jewish quarter, in order that they might remain unnoticed by the Mussulmans.⁵²

Although we lack information and documentation about the living conditions and the specific events that affected their lives in the different provinces of Iran during the reign of the Zand dynasty, the partial and disjointed evidence seems to point to general trends of demographic decline and material, communal and cultural stagnation and deterioration in many of the larger and smaller communities and settlements in the various parts of Iran.⁵³ While the continuation of demographic decline during this period and in the course of the first decades of the 19th century resulted among other local factors and upheavals from conversions to Islam and emigration to countries and territories outside Iran's borders, the decline and deterioration in the overall condition of Iranian Jews during this period stemmed to a great extent from the continuation of their lower legal, social and occupational status and from the diverse discriminations and disabilities to which they were subjected.

The defeat of the last Zand ruler Lutf 'Ali Khan at the hand of Iran's next monarch Aqa Muhammad Khan of the Qajar tribe in October 1794 marks the beginning of a new and comparatively more stable period in the history of post-Safavid Iran. With the fall of the southeastern city of Kirman, which had been among the last pockets of the Zand resistance to the ascending power of Iran's next ruling dynasty, Lutf 'Ali Khan was brought before the country's new ruler Aqa Muhammad Khan. The latter had him deprived of his sight and sent him to Tehran, where, upon arrival, he was put to death according to Aqa Muhammad Khan's order.⁵⁴

Like many other Turkic and Turkoman tribes, the Qajars, who also consisted of several clans, had migrated from Central Asia into the Middle East during the 14th century. However, they did not make their appearance in the political and military arena of Iran until the 16th

⁵² See the detailed account of Rev. Joseph Wolff in the *Nineteenth Report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews*, London 1827, pp. 195–196.

⁵³ Cf. A. Netzer, "Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Faras," in *Yehudey Iran*, ed. A. Netzer, Tel Aviv 1988, pp. 6–7.

⁵⁴ H. Fasa'i, *Farsnama-yi Nasiri*, op. cit., p. 62.

century. They were among the nine Turkoman tribes who assisted the founder of the Safavid kingdom Shah Isma'īl (r. 1501–1524) in his rise to power,⁵⁵ and allying with other Turkic and Shi'ite tribes, known as the Qizilbash (or Red Heads), they had assisted the Safavids in establishing their authority across Iran and in effecting their far-reaching transformation of the land and its religion and institutions. Yet, despite the fact that the Safavid rulers regarded the Qajars as their political allies and invited their leading chiefs into the royal court, they took precautionary measures by dispersing their tribes.⁵⁶ Under Shah 'Abbas the Great, in 1587, some of the Qajars were transferred from the northwestern provinces of Ganja (in Azarbaijan) and Erivan (in Armenia) to the Caspian provinces of Mazandaran and Gurgan for the purpose of defending those territories from the raids of local Turkoman tribes.⁵⁷ Some others were sent to Georgia to protect the kingdom's northwestern border, while others were stationed in Khurasan (in the northeast) to fight the Tartars. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the Qajar tribal chiefs held important offices and assignments, particularly as military chieftains, commanders and governors of several provinces, districts and cities.⁵⁸ They were particularly active and prominent in military campaigns along Iran's northwestern frontiers in Caucasia (mainly Georgia, Armenia and Azarbaijan) and in the Caspian provinces of Mazandaran and Gurgan, and Khurasan.⁵⁹

By the end of the 17th century and on the eve of the Afghan invasion in 1722, however, the main concentration of the Qajars appears to have been in Astarabad (i.e. Gurgan), where they played an important part in the struggles for power in northern Iran following the fall of the Safavid kingdom. The protracted period of anarchy, destruction and bloodshed following the collapse of the Safavids, which together with other negative factors contributed considerably to the hardship and demographic decline of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements, continued well into the last decade of the 18th century, when Aqa Muhammad Khan,

⁵⁵ V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ A.K.S. Lambton, "Kadjar," in *EI*, vol. IV, pp. 387–389.

⁵⁷ Mirza Muhammad Taqi Sipihri [Lisan al-Mulk], *Nasikh al-Tawarikh: Tarikh-i Qajariya*, ed. J. Kiyanfar, 2 vols., Tehran 1377/1998, vol. 1, pp. 9–8.

⁵⁸ Regarding the names and precise positions and assignments of these Qajar officials as well as the regions in which they served and fought through the end of reign of Shah 'Abbas the Great in 1629, see Iskandar Bayg Turkaman, *Tarikh-i Alam Aray-i 'Abbasi*, 2 vols., Tehran, Amir Kabir Publishers, 1350/1971, vol. 2, p. 1085.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 75–80, 90, 134, 264 and 270.

the chief of the powerful Quyunlu clan of the Qajar tribe, made his successful bid for the throne. Escaping from the Zand court in Shiraz, Aqa Muhammad Khan eliminated his family rivals in Mazandaran, ironed out differences with other leading Qajar clans and forged alliances not only with neighboring Turkomans and Kurds in the north, but also with tribes of central Iran as well as some powerful notables of southern Iran who had been in the service of the Zand dynasty in Shiraz.⁶⁰ With the help of the latter allies, Aqa Muhammad Khan captured Shiraz (in 1793), defeated the Zands, and, bringing much of southern Iran under his control, he turned his attention to the north. In a series of military campaigns he succeeded in establishing his hold over extensive territories stretching from Azarbaijan and Georgia in the northwest (in 1794–1795) to the Province of Khurasan in the northeast (in 1796).⁶¹ Having moved the capital city to Tehran, at the time an obscure and insignificant town near the main concentration of Qajar troops in the Caspian province of Astarabad, Aqa Muhammad Khan was finally coronated in Tehran in the spring of 1796.⁶² While he was about to invade Bukhara (in the present-day Republic of Uzbekistan) and Balkh (in northern Afghanistan) in November 1796, his attention was diverted to Georgia, where some 80,000 Russian troops and heavy artillery units, instructed by the Russian Empress Catherine II, were on their way to recapture Georgia and invade Azarbaijan.⁶³ Aqa Muhammad Khan mustered a large expeditionary force to repel the Russian threat. However, while leading his army into Georgia he was assassinated, on June 17th, 1797, by two of his servants.⁶⁴

The assassination of Aqa Muhammad Khan did not put an end to the rule of the newly-founded dynasty. Over the entire course of the 19th century, and until the official abdication of the last Qajar monarch Ahmad Shah in October 1925, the Qajar kings and the members of their extensive family managed to ensure the continuation of their dynastic, though highly tenuous rule over Iran. Due to their tribal history and outlook as a major ally of the Shi'ite-Safavid state, and as a result of their limited and shaky hold over Iran's extensive territories and varied demographic groups, the Qajars did not challenge but largely

⁶⁰ E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton 1982, pp. 36–37.

⁶¹ H. Fasa'i, *Farsnama-yi Nasiri*, op. cit., pp. 72–86.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 67–68.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

adopted and preserved the socio-religious institutions and the common civil norms and popular traditions and practices that had formed and stricken roots in the course of the Safavid era and earlier. Aqa Muhammad Khan's nephew and successor Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) was in turn followed by the latter king's grandson Muhammad Shah (r. 1834–1848), who was succeeded by his son Nasir al-Din Shah. The latter resourceful monarch, whose long but fundamentally embattled and controversial reign spanned nearly the entire second half of the 19th century (1848–1896), was assassinated in May 1896, and upon his death he was succeeded by his physically frail and poorly-suited son Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907). However, while the Qajar dynasty was preserved, the style of their rule changed considerably during the course of the 19th century. While Aqa Muhammad Khan, the founder of the dynasty, had been first and foremost a tribal leader who obtained and consolidated his power through tribal networks and tribal conquests and alliances, his nineteenth-century successors discarded the tribal style in favor of courtly and increasingly extravagant and costly ceremonial conduct and rituals. Moreover, throughout the 19th century, the Qajar monarchs tried to routinize and enhance their power and leverage vis-à-vis Iran's diverse social and demographic groups by creating statewide bureaucracy and by establishing an effective standing army. They further invested efforts in legitimizing their dynasty by presenting themselves as the "Shadows of the Almighty" and the devoted defenders of Shi'ite Islam in Iran and among the Shi'ite communities beyond Iran's borders.⁶⁵

As far as the general standing and the living conditions of Iran's highly dispersed Jewish communities and settlements under the rule of Aqa Muhammad Khan and his successors in the course of the 19th century are concerned, the widespread and chronic weaknesses and problems that beset the Qajar state and its institutions throughout this period as well as the despotic norms and inefficient methods and practices that characterized it had negative effects on the general welfare and security of Iranian Jews during most years of the 19th century. To begin with, the attempts of the Qajars to create an efficient statewide administration largely met with failure. Faced with multiple

⁶⁵ 'Ali Agshar Shamim, *Iran dar Dawra-yi Saltanat-i Qajar*, new reprint, Tehran 1375/1996, pp. 199–200. Cf. E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, op. cit., pp. 38–39.

and progressively more acute needs and challenges in the areas of security, administration, finances, public services and more, the Qajar rulers and their political and administrative elites both during the first and second half of the 19th century invested efforts to introduce Western-modeled reforms and institutions. While the initial drive for modernization, mainly in the area of military organization, occurred during the 1810's–1820's, and it was led by the heir apparent Prince 'Abbas Mirza (1789–1833),⁶⁶ the more significant among the initiatives to reform and modernize the institutions of the Qajar state took place during the first years of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign. Associated first and foremost with the leadership and vision of Nasir al-Din Shah's capable and innovative chief minister Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani (1807–1852), better known as Amir(e) Kabir, the latter wide-ranging reforms took place during the years 1848–1852.⁶⁷ The following stage in the history of administrative and institutional reforms and modernization took place mainly during the years 1871–1886, and they were, among their other main motives, driven by Nasir al-Din Shah's desire to increase and expand his personal authoritarian control over the country's far-laying provinces and districts and their respective economic resources and revenues.⁶⁸ While some among the latter 19th-century reforms, and particularly several of those that were implemented by Amir Kabir, left their imprint in the history of Iran in the course of the 19th–20th centuries,⁶⁹ by and large the initiatives and attempts of Nasir al-Din Shah and his predecessors fell short of providing solutions for the mounting weaknesses, pressures and ailments that plagued the Qajar state and the lives of its variegated populations.⁷⁰

The failure to create a centralized and effective administration both during the first and second halves of the 19th century meant that local communities and demographic groups (both urban and provincial as

⁶⁶ See H. Busse, “‘Abbas Mirza,” in *EIr*, vol. I (1985) pp. 79–84. Cf. Mirza Quli Khan Hidayat, *Tarikh-i Rawzat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*, op. cit., vol. 10, pp. 61–70.

⁶⁷ See H. Algar, “Amir(e) Kabir,” in *EIr*, vol. II (1987) pp. 959–963. Cf. F. Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran*, 3rd reprint, Tehran 1348/1969, and 'Abbas Iqbal Ashtiani, *Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir*, 3rd reprint, ed. I. Afshar, Tehran 1363/1984.

⁶⁸ See S. Bakhash, “Administration: The Qajars (1209–1344/1794–1925),” *EIr*, vol. I (1985), pp. 464–466; idem, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars, 1858–1896*, London 1978, pp. 261–304. Cf. A.K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, Oxford 1953, pp. 151–152.

⁶⁹ 'A. Iqbal Ashtiani, *Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir*, pp. 480–488.

⁷⁰ S. Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars*, op. cit., pp. 265–266.

well as rural and tribal) largely preserved their autonomy and their traditional and old-established organizational structures. Within the latter local and communal systems in Iran's cities, small towns and provincial settlements, in which the vast majority of Iran's Jewish communities were situated, Jews occupied a particularly low, marginal and in many respects excluded and physically-vulnerable position. It is true that the regions, provinces and districts in which the highly diffused Jews of nineteenth-century Iran lived differed from one another in many important respects. Indeed, these vastly different geographical areas and their respective physical landscapes and human environments throughout the 18th–19th centuries and earlier were marked by distinct local histories as well as by numerous religious, linguistic, socio-cultural, economic and other closely-linked characteristics that distinguished them from one another and which formed the foundations of the daily life and the annual cycle in each of them. These important local and regional variables equally shaped the nature of the relations between the various social groups and determined their position opposite the institutions and representatives of the state. However, as far as the power and leverage of the Qajar state vis-à-vis these highly autonomous and semi-independent communal and demographic units is concerned, the absence of statewide effective central administration in the course of the 19th century deprived the Jews as well as numerous other marginal and underprivileged segments of the general population of badly-needed state protection. This situation, which continued well until the 1870's,⁷¹ made the Jews as well as some of the other religious minorities largely dependent upon these semi-autonomous and old-established frameworks of human activity in the various parts of the Qajar state. By reason of their internal structures and distinct local histories, which were rooted in centuries-old traditions, customs and practices, the latter demographic and communal entities of nineteenth-century Iran were ordinarily resistant to change.⁷² Among their other characteristics, particularly in Iran's older cities, towns and provincial centers, where Jews were found in disproportionately large percentages, the latter semi-independent

⁷¹ On the widespread hardships and insecurities of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements through the year 1872 (i.e. the end of the Great Famine and the growing lobbying of European Jews on their behalf), see particularly in sources no. 33, 35, 36, 38 and 39 in our book.

⁷² See J. Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500-to the Revolution*, trans. into Persian by A. Tadayyon, Tehran 1377/1998, pp. 238–239.

units preserved and perpetuated the entrenched position of Jews as a particularly low-ranking and disadvantaged religious minority. In the words of the scholar of Qajar Iran, the late Professor 'Ali Asghar Shamim, who characterized the position and general condition of Iranian Jews in relation to other social, demographic and ethno-religious groups of nineteenth-century Iran: "In every town Jews constituted the lowest and the most wretched social group."⁷³

In addition to their failure to create a statewide administrative machinery, the Qajars were rather unsuccessful in their attempts to build strong military and security forces. Because of numerous factors and realities which were symptomatic of the general condition of the Qajar state in the 19th century (chief among them forces of disunity and inertia, continuous and increasing economic, financial and budgetary difficulties of the court and the government, vested interests, intrigues, political and personal rivalries, jealousies and ambitions, etc.), the Qajar monarchs did not manage to build a standing army to withstand foreign military pressures and aggressions. Neither did they succeed in setting up trained and well-organized security forces to carry out the decrees of the royal court and ensure security and safety of movement and traffic across the kingdom's vast and poorly-connected regions, provinces and districts.⁷⁴ The sources of information and evidence related to the condition of the military and security forces during the first and second halves of the 19th century contain detailed descriptions pointing to the poorly maintained, outdated and inefficient character of the military and security forces in the various parts of the Qajar state. The British official Robert Binning, for example, who traveled in Iran in the course of the year 1850–1, observed that many of Iran's tribal people, among them Turkish, Kurdish, Arab and other clans, were normally engaged in raiding and robbing the country's settled population. He also noted that the same tribal men also made up a large portion of the Shah's army. In his words: "They [i.e. the tribes of 19th-century Iran] are by no means particular in their religious observances; and are not ruled and influenced by the moolahs [i.e. Shi'ite clergymen] as townsmen are.

⁷³ 'A.A. Shamim, *Iran dar Dawra-yi Saltanat-i Qajar*, pp. 377–378. For similar characterization of Jews in Iran's main towns and cities, see 'A. Mustawfi, *Sharh-i Zindagani-yi Man: Tarikh-i Ijtima'i va Idari-yi Dawra-yi Qajariya*, 4th reprint, 3 vols, Tehran 1377/1998, vol. 1, pp. 164–165.

⁷⁴ A.K.S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, London 1987, pp. 97–98. Cf. J. Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, op. cit., pp. 216–217.

They are all, in a greater or less degree, professional robbers—some tribes living solely by rapine and plunder; and others resorting, only occasionally, to such means. The villagers hold them in great dread on account of this...; and many of them serve in the Shah's army, where they are accounted the best soldiers possible."⁷⁵ Similarly, the traveler Arthur Arnold, who toured the provinces in the south, center and north of Iran as late as 1875, noted that "Anywhere in [the southern Province of] Fars the talk of the road is of robbers."⁷⁶ Commenting on the general condition and qualifications of soldiers in remote provincial and rural areas who were assigned to protect the local populace, he further noted: "In every village, there is a certain number of men accustomed to carry arms; tofanghees [sic], gun-carriers they are called. More or less these men are under the orders of the Governor. He can acquire their attendance in any part of the district, either as an escort for travelers, or merchandise, or for the destruction of robber bands. But no one seems to place much confidence in a tofanghee. Generally he is 'a man with a gun,' and nothing more."⁷⁷ Similarly, recording his impressions of the soldiery and security forces in southern Iran in 1881, the British official Edward Stack, of the Bengal Civil Service, noted: "Here [in the southeastern city of Kirman] there were no tufangchis, but rather regular soldiers in shabby blue tunics and trousers, with old muzzle-loading muskets and rifles, rusty bayonets and most imperfect notions of drill...; they get indifferent pay at long intervals, and have to subsist mainly as artisans and hangers-on [sic] of the bazaar."⁷⁸ While in the capital city of Tehran, where he had an opportunity to observe the Shah's efforts to improve and modernize his army with the help of European (chiefly Austrian and Russian) military officers and advisers,⁷⁹

⁷⁵ R.B.M. Binning, *A Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon, Etc.*, 2 vols., London 1857, vol. 1, pp. 189–190. On Kurdish tribes who plundered large caravans of pilgrims returning from the Shi'ite holy sites in Ottoman Iraq to western Iran (Qasr-i Shirin), in the summer of 1852, see *JH*, July 1852, p. 262.

⁷⁶ A. Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, 2 vols., London 1877, vols. 2, p. 155. Regarding the total absence of security on the main roads connecting Iran's larger cities and towns during the time, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 58–59 and 156.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 80–81.

⁷⁸ E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, 2 vols., New York 1882, vol. 1, p. 217.

⁷⁹ Regarding the composition and the general strength of the Iranian military during the 1870's–1890's and the activity of the European officers and advisers who were involved in assisting and training some of the units of this army during the second half of the 19th century, see G.N. Curzon, *Persian and the Persian Question*, 2 vols., London 1892, vol. 1, pp. 586–599. On the elite cavalry unit of Nasir al-Din Shah's army, commonly known as the Cossack Brigade and established in 1879 on the model

Stack further commented: "A few words may be added concerning the Shah's army. The regiments drilled by Austrian officers are said to be creditable. I had not an opportunity of seeing these, for they had gone to fight the Kurds (the Azarbaijan regiments had put down the Kurds before they arrived);⁸⁰ but I did see many hundreds of infantry soldiers of sorts. Teheran [sic] is full of them...; but let me say this much, that the untidiness, the carelessness, the technical ignorance, the general fecklessness of the Persian soldier exist in as great a degree as any imagination, military or civil, can conceive. There is nothing soldier-like in the men; they are hangers on of the bazaars, where they spend their time in buying and selling, eating and smoking."⁸¹ G.N. Curzon, whose detailed work on Iran is an important source of information and insight concerning nineteenth-century Iran and its institutions, observed in 1890 that the Qajar army was composed of irregular tribal cavalry and artillery, equipped, drilled and clothed more or less on European lines. The latter units were supplemented by some irregular cavalry and semi-regular cavalry and regular infantry supplied on a territorial basis by quota.⁸² As a rule however, through the end of the 19th century, the problem of the regular payment of the military forces and the provisioning and equipment of the army was never satisfactorily overcome. Pay was often, if not usually, in arrears, and the lack of adequate military administration prevented the army becoming an effective fighting force.⁸³

Hand in hand with an absence of effective central government (particularly during the 1790's–1860's), the lack of statewide, reliable and mobile military and security forces further undermined the authority of the Qajar government and among its other broader repercussions deprived the Jews and their scattered communities of badly-needed state protection. Despite the fundamentally sympathetic and growingly supportive attitude of the Qajar monarchs toward their Jewish subjects (beginning with Muhammad Shah and progressively during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah and Muzaffar al-Din Shah), by and large, and much through the last decade of the 19th century, the weakness of the

of Cossack units in the Russian army, see M. Atkin, "Cossack Brigade," *EIr*, vol. VI (1993), pp. 329–333.

⁸⁰ The parentheses appear in the original text.

⁸¹ E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 165–166.

⁸² G.N. Curzon, *Persian and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, pp. 576–577.

⁸³ A.K.S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, op. cit., pp. 98–99.

Qajar state and its judicial and executive arms had a negative effect on the Jews of Iran and their scattered communities. Among their other major implications for Iran's unequal and mostly disadvantaged and impoverished Jews, the latter structural weaknesses of the Qajar state, administration and army left the Jews and their communities at the mercy of local and often-times arbitrary and hostile forces and incidents.⁸⁴ More importantly, the absence of effective state protection, particularly until the 1860's, and the limitations and checks on the power of Nasir al-Din Shah and his officials to translate their good intentions and declarations into substantial reform on behalf of the Jews, much through the end of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign, accounted for the continuation of many of the old discriminations, abuses and indignities to which the Jews in the various parts of the country were subjected. Even in provinces, districts and towns where Jews did enjoy the official and actual patronage of the Shah and his personally appointed governors,⁸⁵ as well as in numerous localities in which they enjoyed the occasional support and protection of local officials, notables and some Shi'ite clerics, the fundamentally precarious position of the Jews in nineteenth-century Iran was aggravated by reason of their being a diluted, poorly-organized and lowly-regarded ethno-religious minority caught in the midst of Iran's increasingly fragmented, conflicted and crisis-ridden population.⁸⁶

Last, but not least, despite the efforts of the Qajar monarchs to gain religious legitimacy for their rule, they failed to secure the moral and religiously-sanctioned authority required to rule over the Iranian-Shi'ite

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the vulnerabilities stemming from the weakness of the Qajar state and administration in the various communities during the first and second halves of the 19th century, see the following sources and explanations in our book. Source no. 36 (on the Jewish community of Mashad and its forced conversion in March 1839); source no. 35 (on the community of Barfurush, in Mazandaran, and the consequences of the pogrom in that community in May 1866); source no. 33 (on the violence directed at the Jews of Hamadan in 1866); source no. 34 (on the poorly protected Jews of Urumia and Western Azarbaijan during the years 1888–1893); and, source no. 40 (on the precarious condition of the Jews of Hamadan in 1892–3).

⁸⁵ See, e.g., the personal attention and protection accorded to Jews of Isfahan by Nasir al-Din Shah's powerful son and Governor of Isfahan and several other provinces, Mas'ud Mirza Zil al-Zultan (1850–1918), in source no. 29 in our book.

⁸⁶ A.K.S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, op. cit., pp. x–xi, 104–105; J. Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, op. cit., pp. 217–221; E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, op. cit., pp. 33–36.

state.⁸⁷ Although some members of the Shi'ite clerical establishment, particularly the state-paid religious officials and functionaries, were willing to identify with royal authority, most prominent Shi'ite clergymen (*mujtahids*) distanced themselves from the Qajar court. Claiming that the last Shi'ite Imam (i.e. the Hidden Imam) had delegated the responsibility of guiding and protecting the public not to temporal authorities but to the Shi'ite religious establishment, most influential and increasingly popular Shi'ite clerics of nineteenth-century Iran claimed that the Qajar state was at worst inherently illegitimate and at best a necessary evil to prevent social anarchy.⁸⁸ Given the growing material, social and psychological distresses and dislocations of the general population (particularly during the second half of the 19th century), and in light of the incompetence and failure of the Qajar state to provide solutions for the country's widespread problems, many of the high ranking Shi'ite clergymen called openly to disobey the Qajar administration and some even claimed the authority to unseat the Shahs, princes and governors.⁸⁹ Thus, while the Qajar monarchs sought to project the image of the Shadows of the Almighty, their decisions and decrees often did not extend beyond the capital city. Viewed by the main religious authorities of Shi'ite Islam as usurpers of God's authority, and lacking the necessary political, administrative and technical instruments for enforcing their decrees and decisions, the Qajars were largely dependent upon the interests and shifting alliances of Iran's traditional sources of power. Chief among the latter were the tribal chiefs and landlords, local notables, military officers and bureaucrats, big merchants, and the leaders and functionaries of the Shi'ite clerical establishment. Thus, in the absence of military power, internal security, administrative stability and ideological legitimacy, the Qajars remained in power largely by either retreating whenever confronted by dangerous opposition, or by manipulating the many communal, factional and societal tensions and conflicts that beset their kingdom. Succinctly summarized by Professor E. Abrahamian, scholar of Iranian society and politics in the 19th–20th centuries: "The Qajar dynasty ruled nineteenth-century Iran with neither the instruments of

⁸⁷ A.K.S. Lambton, "Concept of Authority in Persia: Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries A.D.," *Iran*, 26 (1988), pp. 101–102.

⁸⁸ H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906*, op. cit., p. 5, cited in E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 41.

⁸⁹ S. Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, Boston 1887, p. 441.

coercion nor the science of administration, but with the practice of prudent retreats and the art of manipulating all the possible variations in the complex web of communal rivalries.⁹⁰

In the eyes of the Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe, who had become the main advocates of Iranian Jews and their communities as of the early 1840's, the weakness of Qajar state and its respective institutions stood at the basis of the multiple inequalities and insecurities that affected the lives of Iran's Jewish subjects through the last decade of the 19th century. Reflecting the broadly-shared perceptions and views of the main Jewish leaders of European Jewry with regard to the generally precarious and downtrodden condition of Iranian Jews on the eve of the second journey of the Qajar monarch, Nasir al-Din Shah, to Europe in the summer of 1878, the Jewish Chronicle, the major publication of British Jewry, observed in a long editorial article:

The ruler of Persia will soon be amongst us. It is quite true [that] not much has come of the demonstration made five years ago when he visited our metropolis.⁹¹ We have not heard of any perceptible improvement in the condition of the Jews of Persia. Things are pretty much as they were. But we have no right to ascribe the disappointment to any want of good will on the part of the Shah. Persia, unfortunately, is large, and the Shah far off. There is little intercommunication between the provinces and the capital. The fanaticism of the people, moreover, is a great as their greed. All these circumstances operate to the detriment of the unfortunate Jews. The Shah's orders at a distance from the court maybe regarded with impunity, his authority set aside by the provincial governors. Misrepresentations are not easily discovered, and the Shah is at all times liable to be deceived by bigoted or rapacious servants. Nevertheless, there is something in it that we have not heard anything during the last five years of fierce persecutions which at one time were chronic in Persia; nor of individual flagrant acts of almost daily occurrence. Some good has therefore been done by the solicitations on behalf of his Jewish subjects addressed to him at his former visit to Europe.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, op. cit., p. 41. Idem, "Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5 (1974), pp. 3-31. For similar characterization of the Qajar socio-political system in the 19th century, see, e.g., A. Seyf, "Despotism and the Peasantry in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview," *Iran*, 31 (1993), pp. 137-147.

⁹¹ This is a reference to Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to the main capitals and cities of Europe during the spring and summer of 1873. Regarding this royal journey and its implications for the Jews of Iran, see below in our book, source no. 39.

⁹² For the full text of this editorial, entitled "The Shah again in Europe," see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 486, July 19, 1878, p. 3.

SECTION I
LEGAL POSITION AND GENERAL CONDITION

SOURCE 1

REGARDING THE LEGAL POSITION OF JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND ZOROASTRIANS (*AHL-I KITAB*) WITHIN THE SHI'ITE STATE, ACCORDING TO *JAMI'I-*ABBASI**

Introduction

Authored by the eminent Shi'ite scholar Shaikh Muhammad Baha' al-Din 'Amili (Feb. 18, 1547–August 30, 1621, or August 20, 1622), the work known as *Jami'-i 'Abbasi*, i.e., “Comprehensive Collection Dedicated to (Shah) 'Abbas,” is a Persian manual of Shi'ite law and dogma. The work, which soon after its completion became an authoritative and popular textbook, was in use amongst Shi'ite jurists, students and laymen through the twentieth century. Although in its final edition the work consisted of twenty long and detailed chapters, its author, commonly known as Shaikh Baha'i, sufficed only to write its first five chapters. Following the death of Shaikh Baha'i, who was considered both at the Safavid court and amongst the Shi'ite Imami circles as one of the leading lights of his time, his disciple, named Shaikh Muhammad Nizam al-Din Sawaji, was ordered by the Safavid Shah 'Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629) to complete his teacher's work. Shaikh Nizam al-Din succeeded in completing the work and dedicating it to Shah 'Abbas some time before he died (ca. 1630) at the age of forty.

The passages from the *Jami'* translated and presented below concern some of the main aspects and definitions of the *dhimmi* (protected) position of non-Muslim subjects within the Shi'ite Imami state, society and law. As such, the selected passages before us deal with three areas of Shi'ite theology and law that had direct, and largely detrimental, effect on the legal definition and the actual socio-economic and living conditions of Iranian Jews through the early years of the twentieth century. The first, and by far the most central and debilitating element in the Shi'ite Imami approach to non-believers, as formulated in *Jami'-i 'Abbasi* as well as in numerous similar works authored by Shi'ite Imami jurists through the twentieth century, pertained to the ritual impurity (*najasat*) of unbelievers, including Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and others. The second passage from the *Jami'* presented below discusses

the rights, duties and disabilities of the Jews and other recognized religious minorities, as defined and agreed upon by virtue of a contract between the sovereign Shi'ite state and the protected, though explicitly unequal and inferior religious minorities. The third passage from the same work contains some further laws and regulations that both on a symbolic level as well as in actual terms were designed to preserve and illustrate the marginalized position of the unbelievers. The underlying theological justification behind these and other closely related discriminatory laws and concepts was that non-believers were in essence misguided and sinful humans who deserved to be discouraged and even punished. These restrictions and disabilities, which inevitably resulted in multiple existential and psychological plights for the non-believers, were further perceived as a proof and evidence that the non-believers were rejected and forsaken by God owing to their false beliefs and practices. The discriminatory and humiliating laws cited below were equally designed to induce the religious minorities to embrace Islam and thus achieve improved lives in this world and eternal salvation in the world to come.

As far as the actual implementation of the latter laws in the course of the nineteenth century is concerned, however, all the sources of information at our disposal suggest that not all of the stipulations spelled out in *Jami'i Abbasi* were put into practice. Time, location, custom and numerous other human and historical factors played roles in the degree and intensity to which the above cited laws and stipulations were actually carried out. Thus, the prohibition against building houses of worship, the obligation to wear identifying clothes (both for men and women), the requirement to build houses lower than those of Muslims, as well as the restrictions concerning the manners of riding animals and strolling and resting on the roads, were either not implemented or only partially enforced in some locations in the course of the nineteenth century. However, the cardinal definitions and stipulations spelled out in the *Jami'i Abbasi* with regard to the legal and general status of Jews were implemented and enforced in most parts of Iran roughly through the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6. Among the more important legal definitions and provisions of *Jami'i Abbasi* contained in the passages above, and honored and implemented throughout the nineteenth century, mention should be made of the following: 1. The ritual impurity of Jews. 2. The payment of poll-tax. 3 Subjection to commands issued by the Muslim state and its religious authorities. 4. The obligation to demonstrate due respect toward the Islamic religion

and its sanctified traditions and symbols. 5. The obligation to comply with laws and regulations pertaining to the supremacy and security needs of the Islamic state, society and population. 6. The inadequacy of Jews as witnesses before the Islamic court. 7. The unequal and comparatively negligible entitlement of Jews to blood-money in cases involving murder or killing of Jews by Muslims. 8. Denial of inheritance rights from Jewish heirs, i.e., a Jewish heir who converts to Islam becomes entitled to the entire inheritance. 9. The prohibition against bearing arms. 10. The prohibition against riding horses. 11. The prohibition against marrying Muslim women.

The passages presented below are based on *Jami‘-i ‘Abbasi, Shaikh Baha’ al-Din ‘Amili*, being a lithograph edition of the work published in Bombay in 1319 Q./1901–2 C.E., and reprinted in Tehran (n.d.) by the Farahani Publishers. For further information and discussion regarding this work and its main author, see E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. IV, pp. 266, 407; E. Kohlberg, s.v. “Baha’ al-Din ‘Ameli,” in *EIr*, vol. III, pp. 429–430, and M.‘A. Mudarris, *Rayhanat al-Adab*, vol. 2, pp. 382–396. Regarding this manual’s co-author, i.e., Shaikh Nizam al-Din Sawaji, see M.‘A. Mudarris, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 213, and S.M. al-Amin, *A‘yan al-Shi‘a*, vol. 9, pp. 252–253.

Jami‘-i ‘Abbasi

A. *The Ritual Impurity of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Other Unbelievers*

The unbeliever (*kafir*), whether he/she is or is not a protected (*dhimmi*) subject under Islam, or an enemy at war with Islam (*harbi*), or one of the People of the Book (*ahl-i kitab*), is impure (*najis*). Notwithstanding, a few amongst the jurisconsults (*mujtahidin*) are of the opinion that Jews and Christians are pure, although this opinion is weak (*za‘if*).

Being impure, the unbeliever is included among a category of eleven substances and bodies that any contact with them on the part of the believer results in his/her ritual impurity. These substances and bodies are: 1. Urine. 2. Excrement, on condition that both of these two latter mentioned substances are secreted from an animal whose meat is unlawful (for eating) and whose blood is surging (*jahandah*). 3. Blood flowing from any animal that has surging blood, regardless of whether its meat is lawful or unlawful (for eating). 4. Semen discharged from

an animal which has surging blood, regardless of whether its meat is lawful or unlawful (for eating). 5. Dogs. 6. Pigs. 7. Unbelievers, whether protected (*dhimmi*) subjects, enemies at war with Islam (*harbi*), or the People of the Book (*ahl-i kitab*). 8. Anything that causes drunkenness, on condition that it is fluid in its origin. 9. Wine. 10. Beer, even of a kind that does not cause drunkenness. 11. A dead animal, on condition that it had surging blood when it was alive, and regardless of whether its meat was lawful or unlawful (for eating). All body parts of a dead animal are impure, with the exception of those parts that lack sensation, such as hair, bones, horns and hoofs.¹

B. *The Legal Position and Disabilities of Jews in Shi'ite State, Society, and Law*²

As regards the People of the Book, they consist of two groups. The first group consists of the community of people (*jama'at*) that possess a divine book and have had a God-sent messenger, such as the Jews (*jahudan*) that the Torah is their book, and Moses, God's interlocutor,³ may God's peace and blessing be upon him, is their messenger, and the Christians (*nasara*), that the Gospel (*injl*) is their book, and Jesus, peace be upon him, is their prophet. The second group (of the People of the Book) are those who have neither had a (divine) book, nor a God-sent messenger, yet they have regard for what resembles a book and messenger, such as the Zoroastrians (*majusan*) who say that they possess a book named *Žand* and *Pazand*,⁴ and that they have had a messenger by the name of Zarathustra (Zardusht). As regards both of these two religious denominations (*firqa*), however, it is incumbent to engage in holy war (*jihad*) also with them⁵ until they become Muslims, or else they accept the payment of poll-tax (*jizya*) and its respective conditions. As to the conditions and prerequisites for poll-tax, they are twelve:

¹ Cf. *Ŷami'ī Abbasi*, op. cit., pp. 29–30.

² For the text of the following section, see *ibid.*, pp. 153–154.

³ The term “Kalim-Ullah,” i.e. “The conversant of God,” is the title of Moses in Islamic sources. Its origin is found in the Qur'an 4:164, “and to Moses did God speak, conversing”

⁴ Spelled in the text as “*Žhand*” and “*Pazhand*.” *Žand*, i.e., “exposition and explanation,” is the name for the commentary on the ancient Zoroastrian sacred scriptures, known as Avesta. It was written in the Pahlavi language in the course of the Sasanian period (ca. 220–640 C.E.). *Pazand* is a commentary on the *Žand*.

⁵ I.e., in addition to other categories of nations and religions considered to be at war with Islam.

The first condition is the acceptance of poll-tax, that is the amount which the Imam,⁶ or the Imam's deputy (*na'ib*),⁷ each year, at the end of the year, assign upon the heads of all the sane and adult men of these two groups, even if they are elderly, lame or paralyzed, including the amount to be paid by them on account of their lands. As to the question whether the poll-tax consists of a fixed amount or whether it varies, there exists a difference of opinion amongst the jurisconsults (*mujtahidin*), with some maintaining that it is not fixed and that the task of determining its amount belongs to the Imam. The more correct opinion, however, is this latter one, as it is compatible with the abjectness (*mazallat*) and degradation (*khwari*) of those (who are obliged to pay the poll-tax).

The second condition is for them to adhere to the commands of Muslims.

The third condition is that they shall not commit what is in violation of security, such as resolving to embark upon war with Muslims, or providing assistance or aid to polytheists (*mushrikan*), for if they damage any of these three said conditions they turn into enemies considered at war (*harbi*) with Islam.

The fourth condition is that they shall not commit adultery with Muslim women (*zanan-i musalmanan*),⁸ and that they shall not marry them.

The fifth condition is that they shall refrain from acts of incitement, and that they shall not seduce Muslims and lead them astray.

The sixth condition is that they shall refrain from robbing Muslims on the roads.

The seventh condition is that they shall not allow into their houses those who spy for infidels (*kuffar*), and that they shall not let infidels know the secrets of Muslims, and that they shall not convey to them in writing any information and intelligence whatsoever concerning Muslims.

⁶ I.e., one of the twelve leaders of the Ithna 'Ashari (or Twelver) Imami tradition, the last of whom went into occultation in 873/4 C.E., and whose return to earth will herald the Day of Judgement.

⁷ With the establishment of the Safavid state in Iran in 1501 C.E., which introduced the Shi'ite Imami faith as the state religion of Iran, the head of the Shi'ite state was considered to be the deputy or the representative on earth of the last Imam. Cf. R. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, pp. 2-3.

⁸ These last two words, which literally mean "women of Muslims," can be understood and translated as "Muslim women," as well as "Muslim wives."

The eighth condition is that they shall not kill Muslim men and women. As regards the last five aforementioned conditions, provided that the Imam has stipulated them in his poll-tax contract with them while they do not act in accordance with them, they will turn into enemies at war (*harbi*) with Islam.

The ninth condition is that they shall not blaspheme (*sabb*) the Almighty, glory be to Him the Most Exalted, and His Messenger, may the Lord bless him and his house; furthermore, they shall not scorn (*istikhfaf*) the faith of the Muslims and their Book, for, Heaven forbid, if blasphemy occurs on their part, they will become death-deserving (*wajib al-qatl*). Also, in case the condition concerning the duty to refrain from scorning the Muslim faith is stipulated in the poll-tax contract, and they act in contradiction to it, they will turn into enemies at war with Islam.

The tenth condition is that they shall not commit publicly in Muslim towns reprehensible acts (*munkarat*), such as drinking wine, eating the meat of pig or marrying one's mother or sister,⁹ and other acts such as these.

The eleventh condition is that they shall not build houses of worship within the Land of Islam; that they shall not raise their voices when they read in their prayer books, and that they shall not ring (church) bells; they shall not build their houses higher than or as high as the houses of Muslims, but they shall build them low. If they damage these conditions, provided that it has been stipulated in the poll-tax contract that they should not do so, they will turn into enemies at war with Islam.

The twelfth condition is that they shall walk and appear in public in such a way that they become distinguishable (*mutamayyiz*) from Muslims, meaning that their clothes shall be different from the clothes worn by Muslims; that their riding animals shall be different from those of Muslims; that they shall ride on one side of the animal, so that they hang both of their feet on one side of the animal; that they shall not ride horses; that they shall not gird themselves with swords and (other) weapons; that the Christians shall not wear belts (*ẓunnar*); that their women, too, shall go around in such a manner that they become distinguishable from Muslim women; that they shall not walk on a paved road (*jaddah*)

⁹ Elsewhere in the book (*Ḥami'i Abbasi*, op. cit., p. 415) the practice of marrying one's mother or sister is attributed specifically to the Zoroastrians.

but rather turn aside from the road; and that they shall not give their (male) offspring titles of honor (*laqab*) and nicknames (*kunya*).

C. *Jews as Witnesses, Their Blood-Money, and Rights of Inheritance versus Muslims*¹⁰

As regards the duty of and the conditions for testifying, you shall know that by consensus (*ijma'*) of juriconsults, testifying is an obligatory precept (*wajib-i kifa'i*) of the Islamic faith, regardless of whether one has or has not been summoned to serve as a witness. The first condition for serving as a witness is that one shall be an adult. The second condition is that one shall be sane. The third condition is that one shall be a Muslim, inasmuch as the testimony of an unbeliever is not sound (*sahih*), even if he/she testifies with respect to another unbeliever. Yet, some juriconsults are of the opinion that testimony given by Jews with respect to Jews is acceptable, and some (juriconsults) have permitted the protected subjects of Islam (*ahl-i dhimma*) to testify on behalf of each other, even if they differ in their religions, such as Jews testifying with respect to Christians. However, it is not permissible for Jews to testify with respect to Muslims.

As regards the payment of blood-money for a Muslim male individual, even if he were a child, you shall know that in case he is killed by another (Muslim) person wrongfully and intentionally, and both parties agree to the payment of blood-money, the amount to be paid is the equivalent value of one hundred camels, each worth one hundred and twenty dirhams,¹¹ that is the total of twelve thousand dirhams, or its equal value, to be paid either in gold or in cattle, sheep or new clothes. The blood-money to be paid for a Muslim woman is (about) half the amount of the blood-money paid for a Muslim man, that is the amount of five thousand dirhams. The blood-money for Jewish

¹⁰ For the original text of the translated passages in this section, see the following: For the passage entitled "Jews as witnesses," see *Jami'-i 'Abbasi*, op. cit., pp. 366-367; for the passage on "their blood-money," see *ibid.*, pp. 448-449; and for "rights of inheritance versus Muslims," see *ibid.*, pp. 392-393.

¹¹ Derived from the Greek dragma, dirham was a coin, ordinarily made of silver. It was also the name of various measures of weight in Iran and other Muslim countries. Cf. M. Mu'in, *Farhang-i Farsi*, vol. 2, pp. 1518-1519.

men is eight hundred dirhams.¹² The blood-money for Jewish women is four hundred dirhams.¹³

As to that which prevents an heir altogether from receiving inheritance (*mirath burdan*), the first is being a slave, for a slave does not receive inheritance, regardless of whether the deceased is a free person or a slave.

The second is being an unbeliever (*kafir*), for an unbeliever does not receive inheritance from a Muslim, even if he is next-of-kin (*nazdik*) to the deceased, whereas a Muslim does receive inheritance from an unbeliever. Furthermore, being unbeliever heirs to a (deceased) Muslim prevents them from receiving inheritance, even if they are next-of-kin to the deceased. However, if the (deceased) Muslim does not have any Muslim heirs, his unbeliever heirs may receive inheritance from him, and, in such a case, there is no difference between the various categories of unbelievers. Moreover, in the case of unbeliever heirs (*waratha-yi kafir*), if they become Muslims before the inheritance is divided (*qismat-i taraka*), they all share the inheritance, provided that they are equals in their inheritance rights. In case some among them enjoy preferential (*awla*) rights, they take with them the entire property.

¹² Compared to twelve thousand dirhams to be paid for Muslim men.

¹³ Compared to five thousand dirhams to be paid for Muslim women.

SOURCE 2

THE CONDITION AND DISABILITIES OF THE JEWS IN IRAN IN THE 1850s, ACCORDING TO THE JEWISH EXPLORER I.J. BENJAMIN, KNOWN AS BENJAMIN II

Introduction

Rumanian explorer and writer Israel Joseph Benjamin (b. in Folticheni, Moldavia, in 1818; d. in London on May 3, 1864). He first engaged in the lumber trade, but, after some initial success, he lost his modest fortune and gave up commerce. Influenced by his failure, and being of an adventurous and inquisitive disposition, he decided to emulate Benjamin of Tudela, the famous Jewish traveler of the twelfth century. He adopted the name Benjamin II, and took to the road in search of the remnants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. He first went to Vienna, and in January 1845 started for Constantinople, visiting several cities on the Mediterranean. He landed in Alexandria in June 1845 and proceeded via Cairo to Palestine and from there to Syria, Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran and India. He returned from India by way of Afghanistan, arriving in Constantinople in June 1851, and from there to Vienna. After a short stay in the latter city Benjamin went to Italy, embarking from there for Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Upon arriving in France after having traveled for eight years, he prepared in Hebrew his impressions of the travel, and had the book translated into French and published in 1856 under the title *Cinq Années en Orient*. The same work, revised and enlarged, was subsequently published in German, under the title *Acht Jahre in Asien und Afrika* (Hanover, 1858), and in English, entitled *Eight Years in Asia and Africa, from 1846 to 1855* (Hanover, 1859). A Hebrew version of the French edition, entitled *Sefer Mas'ey Yisrael* (The Book of Travels of Israel) was also published in 1859 in Lyck, Germany.

Benjamin arrived in Iran in the spring of 1850 and upon landing in the port city of Bushihr he visited the Jewish community in that city. In the course of the following weeks he proceeded northward, and arrived in the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan, Kashan, Tehran, Hamadan and Kirmanshah. In each of these cities he visited the local Jewish community and recorded his impressions and provided information

with regard to their numbers, their living conditions and general standing as well as other diverse matters related to Iran and its Jews in the mid-nineteenth century. Although on the whole Benjamin II was not equipped with adequate scholarship and scientific preparation (including familiarity with the history, society, literature, religions and languages of the lands and the Jewish populations he explored), nevertheless his book is a valuable source of information on various aspects of Jewish life in Iran during this period. The passage before us, originally entitled "The condition of the Jews in Persia," is a summary of Benjamin's main observations with regard to the actual living conditions and difficulties of the Jews in Iran in the 1850s. The points and conclusions outlined in this short summary are for the most part supported by many other contemporary sources and documents we possess. More significantly, the majority of the disabilities listed by Benjamin existed during the first half of the nineteenth century and earlier, and they persisted, in various degrees, until the early years of the twentieth century. For the original text of the passage see I.J. Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa, from 1846 to 1855*, op. cit., pp. 211–213. For Benjamin's biography, work and publications, see "Benjamin II., J.J.," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1902, vol. 3, pp. 25–26; "Benjamin II.," in *EJ*, vol. 4, pp. 526–527, and *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 13, 1864, p. 5.

Observations of Benjamin II

Among the Persian Jews are some who are very rich, and this wealth is the source of so many dangers, that they are obliged to conceal their treasures like crimes.¹ I comprise their oppressions under the following heads:

¹ Due to the arbitrary and fundamentally despotic nature of the Qajar political and administrative system in Iran throughout the nineteenth century, Jews and the members of other religious minorities were exposed (ordinarily more than the other unprotected and oppressed segments of the general population) to acts of confiscation, robbery, extortion and physical violence, perpetrated by assorted groups of strongmen and criminals, as well as by various government and local officials. Regarding the insecurity and anxiety of well-to-do Jews in mid-nineteenth century Iran, see the following observation by the Christian missionary Henry A. Stern, who conducted missionary work amongst the Jews of Iran in the years 1848–1851: "There are very many of the Israelites residing in this land who possess much wealth, while perhaps the mass are bowed down by absolute poverty. But even in the former case, so great is the rapacity and oppression of their Mahomedan rulers, that the very possession of wealth must

1. Throughout Persia the Jews are obliged to live in a part of the town separated from the other inhabitants; for they are considered as unclean creatures, who bring contamination with their intercourse and presence.²
2. They have no right to carry on trade in stuff goods.³
3. Even in the streets of their own quarter of the town they are not allowed to keep any open shop.⁴ They may only sell there spices

entail misery and constant anxiety in the minds of the rich." Cf. LSPCJ, 45 (1853), p. 46. For a similar view see the detailed report of I. Luria, headmaster of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school in Baghdad, on the general condition of the Jews in Iran during the third quarter of the nineteenth century: "In all their places of residence poverty prevails among them in a most terrible manner. Even the few among them, to whom God has granted some wealth, are afraid to be seen as such." See his report of January 4, 1873, in *Hamagid*, year 7, No. 16 (April 23, 1873), p. 142.

² Regarding the ritual impurity of Jews and non-Shi'ites in general, see Baha' al-Din 'Amili, *Jami-i 'Abbasi*, pp. 252–253. On the residential conditions of Jews in nineteenth-century Iran, see J.E. Polak, *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, pp. 23–24.

³ The diverse sources of information concerning the involvement of Iranian Jews in trade in the course of the nineteenth century reveal that with the exception of some Jewish merchants, mainly in the cities of Urumia, Hamadan, Kirmanshah, Sanandaj, Tehran, Kashan, Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan and Bushihr, Jews were not occupied in trade and commerce on a large scale. G.N. Curzon's observation regarding the limited involvement and influence of Iranian Jews in the field of commerce during the last decade of the nineteenth century is by and large substantiated by Jewish-Iranian and European sources. In Curzon's words: "The Jews of Persia rarely attain to a leading mercantile position." See his *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 510. As to the relatively small number of Jewish Iranian merchants during the second half of the nineteenth century, see AJA, 18 (1888–1889), p. 44, according to which "in Tehran, Hamadan and Kirmanshah there are a few (Jewish) merchants." On the Jewish merchants of Urumia, who were in partnership with local Muslim tradesmen and lost their property as a result of robbery, see the letter by the heads of the latter community to the secretariat of the Alliance Israélite, Paris, in AAIU, IRAN. IB., 20 bis. No. 10912, dated October 6, 1879. On the Jewish merchants of Yazd, who were occupied in the purchase and sale of silk and various products in 1889, see *Hazefirah*, year 16, No. 158 (July 17, 1889), p. 646. Regarding the prosperous Jewish-Iranian merchants of Bushihr in the 1890s, see the observation of Nurullah Hakim ("they are very well-off, being great merchants and bankers"), in JMI, August 1893, p. 119.

⁴ As Benjamin rightly points out, there were restrictions on the kinds of stores and shops that Jews were allowed to maintain even within the walls of their quarters. Thus, as far as the evidence points out, in most towns Jews did not have bakeries of their own, although they had their own sales of fruit and other eatables for their consumption. Much more consequential and damaging still were the restrictions on Jews having shops and workshops in the local bazaars that constituted the main centers and arteries of economic activity throughout the towns and cities of Iran. In the words of AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 93: "Most of the Jews (of Persia) carry on petty trades. Nowhere, except in Hamadan, are they allowed to have shops in the bazaars." Following intervention and pressure by the Jewish organizations of Europe, the latter restriction was officially cancelled by Nasir al-Din Shah in 1881. Cf. AJA, 11 (1881–1882), p. 33. The ban was practically lifted first in the capital city of Tehran in the course of the

and drugs, or carry on the trade of a jeweler, in which they have attained great perfection.

4. Under the pretext of their being unclean, they are treated with the greatest severity; and should they enter a street, inhabited by Mussulmans, they are pelted by the boys and mob with stones and dirt.⁵
5. For the same reason they are forbidden to go out when it rains; for it is said the rain would wash dirt off them, which would sully the feet of the Mussulmans.⁶
6. If a Jew is recognized as such in the streets, he is subjected to the greatest insults. The passers-by spit in his face, and sometimes beat him so unmercifully, that he falls to the ground, and is obliged to be carried home.
7. If a Persian kills a Jew, and the family of the deceased can bring forward two Mussulmans as witnesses to the fact, the murderer is punished by a fine of 12 tumans (600 piastres); but if two such witnesses cannot be produced, the crime remains unpunished, even though it has been publicly committed, and is well known.⁷

1880s, and thereafter in the other main cities, chief among them Isfahan and Shiraz. By the year 1892 there were tens of shops rented or owned by Jews both outside the Jewish quarter and inside the Bazaar of Tehran. Cf. LSPCJ, 82 (1890), p. 123; *ibid.*, 84 (1892), p. 133. Regarding such stores in Isfahan in 1890–2, see *ibid.*, 83 (1891), p. 122, and 84 (1892), p. 131. As to such stores run by Jews in Shiraz during the same years, see JMI, July 1893, p. 105.

⁵ As to the widespread forms and manifestations of physical violence and abuse inflicted by the Muslim populace on Jews on account of their being regarded as ritually impure, see H.A. Stern's detailed eye-witness descriptions in his *Dawnings of Light in the East*. For examples of such violence, committed mostly by the Muslim mob, see, in Shiraz, *ibid.*, pp. 123–124; in Isfahan, pp. 160–162; in Tehran, p. 194, and in Hamadan, p. 224. Such maltreatment of Jews in the streets of Shiraz was witnessed and recorded already in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the words of the British official William Francklin, who visited Shiraz in 1787, “these people (i.e., the Jews) are more odious to the Persians than those of any other faith; and every opportunity is taken to oppress and extort money from them; the very boys in the street being accustomed to beat and insult them, of which treatment they dare not complain.” Cf. W. Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786–7*, p. 60.

⁶ As to the fear of the Jews of Tehran to leave their quarter on rainy days in the mid-nineteenth century, see H.A. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, p. 195.

⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, the amount of blood-money to be paid to the heirs of a Jew killed or murdered by a Muslim was considerably less than the amount required in the case of a Muslim killed by another Muslim. In many recorded instances, however, even this comparatively small amount was not actually paid. In Hamadan, for example, in the year 1863, a Jew was killed by a Muslim in one of the nearby villages. The judge (in this case the governor of Hamadan) decreed the amount

8. The flesh of the animals slaughtered according to Hebrew custom, but as *Trefe*⁸ declared, must not be sold to any Mussulmans. The slaughterers are compelled to bury the meat, for even the Christians do not venture to buy it, fearing the mockery and insult of the Persians.
9. If a Jew enters a shop to buy anything, he is forbidden to inspect the goods, but must stand at a respectful distance and ask the price. Should his hand incautiously touch the goods, he must take them at any price the seller chooses to ask for them.
10. Sometimes the Persians intrude into the dwellings of the Jews and take possession of whatever pleases them. Should the owner make the least opposition in defence of his property, he incurs the danger of atoning for it with his life.⁹

of 18 tumans to be paid to the heirs of the killed man. The decree, however, was not carried out despite repeated protestations of the Jews in the city. See *Hamagid*, year 9, No. 4 (January 25, 1865), p. 28. For a similar case, which had occurred in the city of Sennéh (Sanandaj) in 1864, see *ibid.* In a number of cases the Jewish heirs of the deceased were afraid to demand the payment of the blood-money. See, e.g., the case of two youngsters who were killed by Muslims in 1875. The judge ordered the sum total of 24 tumans to be paid to the families of those killed. The amount was not paid and the families refrained from pursuing the case. Cf. *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 24 (April 2, 1875), p. 191. As to the case of a Jew who was killed by his Muslim debtor in Shiraz in June 1889, and his heirs conceded their right to blood-money, demanding only the amount owed to the victim (i.e., the sum of two tumans), see Sa'idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi'-i Ittifaqiyya*, p. 338.

⁸ Heb. *Trefah*, i.e., slaughtered animals and poultry in which some disease or defect has been found according to Jewish law and therefore declared unfit for consumption by Jews.

⁹ Assaults on the Jewish quarters, committed by local Muslim mobs, robbers, tribal bands, religious zealots and others, occurred in many of the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran until the early years of the twentieth century. For such an incidence of attack and looting of the Jewish quarter of Hamadan in the year 1860, see *Hamagid*, year 4, No. 44 (November 14, 1860), p. 175, and *ibid.*, year 7, No. 32 (August 12, 1863), pp. 251–252. On a similar attack and looting of Jewish houses in Urumia in 1879, see letter 1096/2 by the heads of that community to the Alliance Israélite, in AAIU, IRAN. IB. 18, received in Paris on October 6, 1879. For an instance of attack on the Jewish quarter of Shiraz in 1896, in the wake of Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination and the temporary lawlessness that prevailed there, see *Habazeleth*, year 26, No. 32 (May 22, 1896), pp. 249–250. Regarding the looting of the Jewish community of Kirmanshah as late as the year 1327 Q./1909–1910 C.E., see Mukhbir al-Saltana Hidayat, *Guzarish-i Iran*, p. 231. For details on an attack and looting of the Jewish quarter of Shiraz in 1329 Q./1911 C.E., committed by a band of the Qashqa'i tribe, see *ibid.*, p. 305.

11. Upon the least dispute between a Jew and a Persian, the former is immediately dragged before the *Akhund*,¹⁰ and, if the complainant can bring forward two witnesses, the Jew is condemned to pay a heavy fine. If he is too poor to pay this penalty in money, he must pay it in his person. He is stripped to the waist, bound to a stake, and receives forty blows with a stick. Should the sufferer utter the least cry of pain during this proceeding, the blows already given are not counted, and the punishment is begun afresh.¹¹
12. In the same manner the Jewish children, when they get into a quarrel with those of Mussulmans, are immediately led before the *Akhund*, and punished with blows.¹²
13. A Jew who travels in Persia is taxed in every inn and every caravanserai he enters. If he hesitates to satisfy any demands that may happen to be made on him, they fall upon him, and maltreat him until he yields to their terms.
14. If a Jew shows himself in the street during the three days of the *Qatl*¹³ (feast of mourning for the death of the Persian founder of the religion of Ali) he is sure to be murdered.¹⁴

¹⁰ Per. *Akhund*, i.e. “a learned Shi’ite clergyman,” “theologian,” and “preacher,” as well as a “Mulla,” and “teacher.”

¹¹ Regarding this common method of punishment in pre-modern Iran, known in European languages as “bastinado” (Per. *Falak*), see, e.g., C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, pp. 147–148.

¹² For such treatment of Jewish children in Urumia in the year 1892, see the letter from Urumia, number 9931/2, written on March 1, 1893, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6.

¹³ Spelled “Katel” in the text, the word literally means “killing” and “murder,” and within the Shi’ite tradition it refers specifically to the martyrdom of Husain, son of ‘Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third in the chain of the twelve Imams. Husain and his companions, seventy in number, were ambushed and put under siege by the Sunnite caliph Yazid, in the Muslim month of Muharram 61 Q./October 680 C.E. After ten days of suffering, Husain and his devoted companions were ruthlessly killed in the burning desert of Kerbela on the tenth of Muharram 61 Q./October 10, 680. The last three days of the siege, leading to Husain’s martyrdom, were and still are commemorated each year amidst an intense outpouring of religious emotions and mourning amongst Shi’ite believers.

¹⁴ The first ten days of the month of Muharram and particularly the last three days in that period (see above) were notably charged with religious emotions and zeal. In numerous recorded instances in the course of the nineteenth century, Jews as well as members of other religious minorities of Iran were subjected during these days of mourning to assaults, physical attacks and abuse by some Shi’ite groups or individuals. It is noteworthy that both of the major nineteenth-century pogroms against the Jewish communities of Mashhad (in March 1839) and Barfurush (in May 1866) broke out during these days of mourning in the month of Muharram.

15. Daily and hourly new suspicions are raised against the Jews, in order to obtain excuses for fresh extortions; the desire of gain is always the chief incitement for fanaticism.

These points give a clear insight into the wretched condition in which the Jews languish.

SOURCE 3

ON THE LEGAL AND ACTUAL CONDITION OF THE
JEWS OF IRAN IN THE YEAR 1873, AS REPORTED IN
THE JEWISH CHRONICLE OF LONDON ON
SEPTEMBER 12, 1873¹

The second annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association² has just been issued. It is very interesting, as the matters with which it deals are numerous and varied. The report announces a great development of the Institution during the year, and it commences with a manifesto of its purposes and an explanation of its scope.

The various matters dealt with in the report are thus grouped: 1. The Jews of Servia; 2. Education in the East; 3. The Agricultural School at Jaffa; 4. The Jews of Persia; 5. The persecution of the Jews of Roumania; 6. The outrages in Morocco; 7. The Jews of Damascus. Most of the subjects have already formed the subject of articles of information or comment in these columns.

With regard to the Jews of Persia a long and exhaustive communication from Mr. Lurion,³ President of the Bagdad branch of the

¹ For the full text of the above report, see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 233, September 12, 1873, p. 394.

² Founded officially on July 2, 1871, by the Jews of the British Empire, the Anglo-Jewish Association defined as its main objectives the promotion of social, moral and intellectual progress among the Jews, and the obtaining of protection for those who suffered in consequence of being Jews. Ever since its establishment the association took interest in the general condition and hardships of the Jews of Iran. Working in close collaboration with the Alliance Israélite Universelle (established in Paris in 1860) and the Board of Deputies of British Jews (headed by Sir Moses Montefiore in 1838–1874), the association was among the main Jewish organizations of Europe that extended diverse assistance to Iranian Jews during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward.

³ This is the Russian born Isaac Luria (spelled also Lurion), who was among the founders of the first Alliance Israélite school for boys in Baghdad in 1864. He served as the headmaster of that school until 1884. The report before us on the condition of the Jews of Iran during the third quarter of the nineteenth century was written by him on January 4, 1873, and forwarded to the heads of the Alliance in Paris. The latter organization subsequently forwarded it to the Anglo-Jewish Association and released it for publication in the Jewish press. For the full text of the report in Hebrew, see

Alliance Israélite Universelle, is printed. This letter advocates the appointment of an accredited delegate from the Alliance for protecting the Jews and improving their condition. The opening of a school is also recommended. It seems that there are 40,000 Jews in Persia.⁴ Their occupations are:

At Teheran, Hamadan, and in the whole of the north they trade in drugs, spices, and in articles of European manufacture; some few also in diamonds and pearls. There are many goldsmiths and a large number of doctors. At Ispahan the Jews engage in the meanest occupations, such as cleansing canals and latrines; they deal also in rags and old clothes. At Yazd they are employed in the cultivation and manufacture of silk. The women, too, are engaged in similar employments. At Shiraz they are musicians, singers and public dancers. Some of them are goldsmiths, and some merchants. Throughout Persia a large number of Jews leave their towns during certain seasons of the year, and repair to the villages and tents of the Beduins⁵ for the purpose of selling drugs, linen, and fancy articles.

The statement of Mr. Lurion is strangely at variance with the official assurance of the Persian Government made when the Shah was in Europe, that Jews were already emancipated in the Persian dominions, and that the rights extended to all other subjects of the Shah were freely shared by the Jews.⁶ According to Mr. Lurion they are suffering

Hamagid, year 17, No. 16 (April 23, 1873), p. 142. Regarding I. Luria and his writings and advocacy on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see also below, source no. 13, note 3.

⁴ Luria's estimate with regard to the size of the Jewish population of Iran in 1873 (i.e., 40,000 souls) appears to be overstated. The different sources at our disposal suggest that during this year (i.e. following the Great Famine of 1871–2), the number of the Jews in Iran did not exceed an approximate 20–25 thousand souls. On the size of the Jewish population of Iran during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., J.E. Polak's estimate (i.e., 2000 families ca. 1860), in source no. 4, below, note 4.

⁵ The reference here is to the numerous migrant tribes of Iran, which during the nineteenth century constituted some twenty-five percent of the country's total population.

⁶ Reference is made here to Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe in the summer of 1873 and his various meetings with leaders and representatives of the major Jewish organizations of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. In all of his meetings with the Jewish delegations, chief among them those in London (on July 4, 1873) and Paris (on July 12), the Shah reiterated the equality of all his subjects before the law. However, in response to specific grievances raised by the Jewish delegates with regard to various legal, socio-economic and physical hardships affecting the lives of the Iranian Jews, he promised that upon his return to Iran he would do his utmost in order to ameliorate both the physical security and the general living conditions of the Iranian Jews. Nasir al-Din Shah's meetings with the Jewish leaders of Europe, chief among them Sir

from special measures of intolerance, which we think it our duty to quote.⁷

If anyone fails in the fulfillment of his duty, or commits a crime against the government, the whole community is held jointly responsible.⁸

The Jews are forbidden to keep shops in the bazaars, except in the town of Hamadan.⁹

Moses Montefiore, and the Iranian monarch's assurances and announcements with regard to his Jewish subjects were much publicized in the Jewish press and publications of the period. See, e.g., *The Jewish Chronicle*, No. 222 (June 27, 1873), pp. 213–214, 220; No. 223 (July 4, 1873), p. 237; No. 224 (July 11, 1873), pp. 247, 251; No. 227 (August 1, 1873), p. 306. Cf. *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 29 (July 23, 1873), p. 266; No. 37 (September 17, 1873), p. 340; No. 40 (October 15, 1873), p. 363; No. 43 (November 5, 1873), p. 390; *Habazeleth*, year 3, No. 43 (September 14, 1873), pp. 311–312; No. 44 (September 21, 1873), p. 319. For the text of Nasir al-Din Shah's official assurance to the Anglo-Jewish Association "to improve the condition of the various Jewish communities of Persia," issued on July 5, 1873 by the Shah's ambassador to London, Mirza Malkum Khan, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, No. 227 (August 1, 1873), p. 306. For the Hebrew translation of the same, see *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 29 (July 23, 1873), p. 266, and *Mishloah Manot*, p. 12.

⁷ The following list of disabilities and hardships of Iranian Jews reported by I. Luria in 1873 are for the most part similar to those observed by Benjamin II in the 1850s. For the latter's observations, see above, source no. 2.

⁸ Collective punishment in its various forms was a common feature in the lives of the Jewish communities of Iran in pre-modern times. Numerous incidents of such punishments have been recorded in detail in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In the year 1878, for instance, a party of three Shiraz Jews, who were returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, landed in the port city of Bushihr. The Muslims accused them of having assailed and nearly killed a Muslim mendicant in the city. Acting under pressure exerted by the local Muslim inhabitants, the Deputy-Governor ordered his soldiers to arrest any Jew they could find in the city. The captured Jews were kept in prison all night without food and released on the following day after being heavily fined and punished. For a full description of this incident, see *AJA*, 7 (1877–1878), pp. 71–72. In the month of March 1883, a Jew of Tehran was found to be in the possession of an expensive stolen jewel. By order of the Chief of Police of Tehran, the warden of the Jewish community was thrown into prison and detained there for seven days, and thirteen additional elders of the community, including the Chief Rabbi, were arrested and kept in prison for four days. In the end the heads of the community were compelled to sign a bond pledging themselves to pay an enormous fine (the equivalent of £ 2,000). For the entire case, see *AJA*, 12 (1882–1883), pp. 19–24, and *BMAIU*, April 1883, p. 50. In Kirmanshah such measures of collective punishment, resulting from various disputes and conflicts between individual Jews and Muslims, were routinely carried out against the entire Jewish community during the second half of the nineteenth century. Cf. the testimony of the Governor of Kirmanshah to J. Bassan, director of the Alliance School in Hamadan, in *BMAIU*, October 1903, pp. 233–234.

⁹ Cf. Benjamin II, source no. 2 above, note 5.

On a wet day they cannot leave their quarters, as the damp clothes of a Mahommedan are considered to be polluted merely by coming in contact with a Jew.¹⁰

It very frequently happens that a Jew is falsely accused of having committed a public offence against the Mahommedan religion; and this, in a majority of instances, is done in order to enable some Musulman to free himself from a pecuniary engagement with the person accused.¹¹ The Jew is in such cases maltreated and imprisoned, and can only escape his doom by becoming converted.

The testimony of false witnesses who could easily be confounded and unmasked by the Judge, is received against the Jew.

The evidence and oath of a Jew is not accepted.¹²

The people maltreat our co-religionists in the most horrible manner in the open street, and no judge ever takes the part of the victim.

A Jew who is converted to Islamism inherits all the property of his relations;¹³ and there are unfortunately very few families in Persia, some member of which is not a convert.

¹⁰ Cf. H.A. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, p. 195.

¹¹ In Hamadan, during the Feast of Pentecost (Heb. *Shavu'ot*) in the year 1863, Jews who were singing religious hymns in their homes were accused of having reviled the Prophet Muhammad. Following a violent attack on the Jewish quarter, in which one Jew was killed and the ears of seven others were cut off, the Jews were forced to pay a large amount of money (i.e., two thousand tumans of gold) to the officials and some of the Muslim clergymen in the city. See *Hamagid*, year 7, No. 32 (August 12, 1863), pp. 251–252. In the same city, in 1875, a well-to-do Muslim borrowed a large sum of money from a certain Jew named Haim. When he was asked to repay his debt he accused the Jew of having reviled the Prophet Muhammad. The fleeing Jew found shelter in the house of a wealthy Muslim who took pity on him. Subsequently, however, he was dragged out of the house by an excited and angry mob. He was lynched and his body was set on fire. See *Habazeleth*, year 6, No. 10 (December 24, 1875), p. 78.

¹² Cf. Baha' al-Din 'Amili, *Jami'-i 'Abbasi*, pp. 366–367.

¹³ This law, which weighed heavily on the Jewish families and communities of Iran through the last decades of the nineteenth century, dates back to the time of the Safavid Shah 'Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629), in whose days the law was put into effect with regard to Armenians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Cf. L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, p. 74. The law was implemented in the case of Armenian families of Julfa (in Isfahan) and Urumia much through the last decade of the nineteenth century. Cf. R. Binning, *A Journal of Two Years Travel in Persia, Ceylon, etc.*, vol. 2, p. 80; A. Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, vol. 2, pp. 30–31; and I. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 240. It was equally imposed on the Zoroastrians in Yazd and in some other locations until the last decade of the nineteenth century. Cf. D.F. Karaka, *History of the Parsis*, vol. 1, p. 65, and N. Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town*, pp. 49–50. As to the Jews of Iran, the law was officially cancelled by virtue of a royal decree issued by Nasir al-Din Shah in the month of Jumada al-Ukhra 1297 Q./October 1880. Cf. BMAIU, January 1900, pp. 7–8. However, similar to a number of other royal and governmental

A Mussulman who kills a Jew has to pay to his relatives 140 Krans, and is immediately set at liberty.¹⁴ The priests are forbidden, moreover, to testify in favour of a Jew against a Mussulman.

It is impossible to appeal to a higher tribunal than that in which the sentence has been passed.

The Governors do not adhere to the table of taxes prescribed by the Divan of the Shah, but always extort at least three times as much. The taxes are collected in the most violent and harsh manner, and in cases of non-payment the chief members of the community are at once thrown into prison.¹⁵

Many who were compelled to embrace Islamism would gladly return to the religion of their fathers, did not the existing laws and the fanaticism of the people place them in danger of losing their lives, were they

edicts that were intended to remove the disabilities and restrictions to which the Jews were subjected, this latter edict too was only partially effective, and the law continued to be implemented in some of the Jewish communities until the first decade of the twentieth century. For the ruinous effects of this law in the Jewish community of Tehran during the 1870s, see the letter of the Chief Rabbi of Tehran to the Alliance Israélite headquarters, in AAIU, IRAN, IIC, No. 6912, written on 1 Adar 5634 (February 17, 1874). On the tragic effects of the law in Shiraz, see BMAIU, September 1878, pp. 150–151. As late as 1903 the law was still implemented in Kirmanshah. Cf. BMAIU, October 1903, p. 234. In some of the provincial towns, such as Gulpaygan, Jews suffered from the law as late as in the year 1905. See *ibid.*, January 1906, p. 18.

¹⁴ 140 Krans, i.e., 14 tumans. Regarding the relatively small amount of blood-money required in the case of Jews killed or murdered by Muslims, see Baha' al-Din 'Amili, *Jam'i-i 'Abbasi*, pp. 448–449. Cf. Benjamin II, source no. 2 above, note 8.

¹⁵ Much like other vulnerable and poorly protected segments and social groups of the Iranian population in the course of the nineteenth century, most of the Jewish communities of Iran were subjected to heavy taxes and brutal methods of tax-collection and extortions. Many instances of over-taxation and use of physical violence by officials and tax-collectors (both in the larger and smaller communities) have been documented. In Bushihr, for example, Jews complained bitterly before Rev. J. Wolff in November 1824, saying: "The gentiles in Persia do not only compel us to pay heavy tribute, but they have likewise set over us taskmasters." Cf. J. Wolff's journal of 1824, in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 177. On another occasion, some sixty Jews of Shiraz who had abandoned their native community and found asylum in the Ottoman controlled town of Basra, told Wolff that they had fled Shiraz due to oppression, heavy taxes and violence. In their words: "When we assembled in the synagogue (in Shiraz) we were often surprised by the entrance of a soldier, sent by the government, with an order in his hand to pay such and such sum to the Shah." Cf. *ibid.*, 18 (1826), p. 83. For similar cases of harsh and heavy tax-collection in the Jewish community of Isfahan in the 1860s–1870s, see C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, pp. 145–146; and *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 32. As to the same situation in Hamadan during the same period, see the letter of the heads of that community, dated 13 Elul 5624 (September 14, 1864), addressed to the editor of *Hamagid*, and published in that weekly, in year 9, No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and, *ibid.*, No. 4 (January 25, 1865), p. 28. For similar complaints in the community of Urumia, see BMAIU, September 1878, pp. 149–150.

to do so. At Mesched¹⁶ alone, the chief town of Khorasan, there are a thousand of these individuals. The whole community was converted about 34 years ago; they, however, secretly observe as much as possible the religion of their fathers; but were they to do so publicly it would cost them their lives.

¹⁶ I.e., Mashhad.

SOURCE 4

THE JEWS OF IRAN IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, AS OBSERVED BY DR. JACOB E. POLAK

Introduction

Austrian physician, ethnographer and scholar Jacob Eduard Polak (b. 1818 at Gross-Morzin, Bohemia; d. October 7, 1891). He studied medicine at Prague and Vienna, and about 1851, when an envoy of the Persian government went to Vienna to engage teachers for the first modern military and polytechnic school in Tehran (known as Dar al-Funun), Polak presented himself as a candidate. He arrived in Tehran in 1851 and soon achieved a reputation as a professor of medicine and anatomy as well as a competent physician. Having studied the Persian language, he soon enjoyed the special confidence of the monarch Nasir al-Din Shah. At first he lectured in French, with the aid of an interpreter, but after a year of residence in Iran he was able to lecture in Persian, and later published in that language numerous works in the field of medicine and anatomy, including a medical dictionary in Persian, Arabic and Latin, designed to provide a system of modern medical terminology in Persian. He also founded a state surgical clinic in Tehran, containing sixty beds.

As a personal physician to the Shah, as of 1852, Polak occupied a high position. However, a serious illness in 1855 obliged him to give up his professional work, although he continued his research and scholarly activity, particularly in the field of Iranian ethnography. He returned to Vienna in 1861, and in 1865 he published in Leipzig, in two parts, an extensive work on Iran and its diverse population, entitled *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner: Ethnographische Schilderungen* (Persia, the Land and its Inhabitants: Ethnographic Descriptions).

Born and raised in a Jewish family, Polak showed much interest and empathy towards the scattered and for the most part downtrodden Jews of Iran. During his ten years of residence and work in Iran he wrote several articles and reports on the ancient past as well as the present conditions and difficulties of the Iranian Jews in the mid-nineteenth century.

These accounts and articles, which were sent to the Jewish publications and organizations of Western and Central Europe, were published in the Jewish periodicals and magazines of the period and informed the European Jewish readership about the hitherto little known Jews of Iran, their traditions, living conditions and hardships. Noteworthy among Polak's writings and observations concerning the Jews of Iran in the second half of the nineteenth century is a long article which he wrote, while still in Iran (in 1856), for the year-book of the Jewish community of Vienna. See his "Die Juden in Persien und Mordechais und Esthers Grabmal," in *Jahrbuch für Israeliten* 5617 (1856–57), ed. Josef Wertheimer, Wien, 1856, pp. 142–151, and 152–160. An additional article by him on Iranian Jewry was published in 1856 in the German-language Jewish press of Leipzig, Prussia. See his "Persien," in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 20, No. 20 (August 25, 1856), pp. 477–479. The latter article contains much important information about the Jewish communities of Hamadan and Tehran. Upon his return to Vienna (in 1861), Polak wrote an extensive survey article on various aspects of the economic, communal and religious lives of the Iranian Jews. This survey, which was originally published in the Jewish periodical *Neuzeit* of Vienna, was soon translated into Hebrew, and published as "The Jews in Iran," in the Hebrew-language weekly *Hamagid* of Lyck, Prussia. See *Hamagid*, year 6, No. 48 (December 11, 1862), p. 383, and No. 49 (December 18, 1862), pp. 391–392. Polak's special interest in Iranian Jewry found further expression in a still longer article discussing the specific causes of their vulnerabilities in nineteenth-century Iran. In this article, which was also published in *Neuzeit* of Vienna in 1865, Polak called on the Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe to adopt a comprehensive public and diplomatic strategy in Europe in order to assist the scattered Jewish communities of Iran and rescue them from their multiple socio-cultural disabilities and physical threats. The latter article was translated from the original German and published subsequently in Hebrew and French. For the Hebrew version of this long article, entitled "The Jews in the Land of Persia," see *Hamagid*, year 9, issues number 20, 21 and 22 (May 25, 30 and June 7, 1865), pp. 154–155, 164 and 172 respectively. For the abbreviated version of the same article in French, entitled "Persécution Israélite," see *Archives Israélites*, vol. 26 (1865), pp. 440–445, 489–491.

The passage before us is a literal translation of the main excerpts from Dr. J. Polak's treatment of the Jews of Iran in his aforementioned

book *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, Leipzig, 1865, pp. 21–28. With some minor differences in details, the passage is identical with the author's article in the Hebrew *Hamagid*, year 6, No. 48 (December 11, 1862), p. 383, and No. 49 (December 18, 1862), pp. 391–392, referred to above.

For a Persian translation of the text before us, see Kaykavus Jahandari's painstaking and complete rendering of Dr. J. Polak's *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, entitled *Safarnama-yi Polak, Iran va Iraniyan*, Tehran 1361 Sh./1982, pp. 26–31.

For further information on Dr. J.E. Polak's biography, work and publications, see particularly K. Jahandari's *Safarnama-yi Polak*, pp. 5–8; F. Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran*, pp. 353–359; E. Jelinek, s.v. "Polak, Jakob Eduard," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1905 ed., vol. 10, p. 102. On Dr. Polak's special bonds of friendship with Nasir al-Din Shah, see I'timad al-Saltana, *Ruznamay-i Khatirat*, pp. 179 and 647.

Observations of J.E. Polak

As much as I asked the Jews of Iran time and again about the history of the emigration of the Jewish people to Iran, I did not succeed in acquiring from them any reliable information, because neither do they have at their disposal any historical records, nor do they possess any authoritative traditions concerning this matter. Finally, after much prodding on my part, a learned Jew brought me a book of history which was nothing but the Hebrew translation of the book of Josephus Flavius.¹ During the Sasanian times and even during the Islamic era Jews lived in large numbers in southern Iran and enjoyed power. They occupied

¹ This is Joseph b. Mattathias, known by his Latin title as Josephus Flavius and considered the greatest Jewish historian of antiquity. Born in Jerusalem c. 38 C.E. (d. after 100 C.E.), he belonged to a priestly family and was appointed governor of Galilee in 66 C.E. During the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple in 69–70 C.E., he joined the Romans and accompanied their general (soon-to-be emperor) Titus Flavius Vespasianus. He remained under imperial patronage in Rome, where he wrote his major works *The Jewish War*, *The Jewish Antiquities*, *Life*, and *Against Apion*. It is not clear to which of this historian's works is J. Polak referring here specifically. However, based on his article in the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid* (year 6, No. 48, December 11, 1862, p. 383) we learn that the book mentioned here was a Hebrew translation of *The Jewish Antiquities*. Furthermore, we are told that the copy of the latter book was brought to him by Mulla Eliyahu, who was the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Hamadan during the 1850s.

some regions in their entirety and some cities were filled with them; later on, however, due to oppression and persecution their numbers were much reduced. As a learned Rabbi of Hamadan told me with confidence,² the total number of the Jewish families in Iran is limited to two thousand families.³ Three large groups of Jews reside in Shiraz, Isfahan and Kashan, and smaller numbers live in Tehran, Damavand, Barfurush and Kazeran; some are scattered also in the Kurdish areas. The large Jewish community of Mashhad has dissolved, because the (Muslim) clergy accused them of some revolt and rebellion and told them that they would uproot and eradicate them; many of the Jews there have outwardly embraced Islam, while in secret they hold their

² Again, based on *Hamagid*, 1862, p. 383 (see note 2 above), Polak is referring here to the Chief Rabbi Mulla Eliyahu of Hamadan. According to the *Jewish Chronicle* of London, vol. VI, No. 33 (May 24, 1850), pp. 262–263, this rabbi's full name was Eliyahu bar Eliezer Eliyahu, who resided immediately opposite the main synagogue of Hamadan, which was known as "Beth Hakeneseth Hazaken," i.e., "The Old Synagogue." This synagogue, which was frequented by Mulla Eliyahu, was the largest of Hamadan's eleven synagogues. The Christian missionary Rev. H.A. Stern, of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who visited the Jewish community of Hamadan in March 1852, had the following words to say about this learned rabbi: "...I went direct to the house of Chacham Eliyahu, the Chief Rabbi, a man of considerable learning and great influence." Cf. *Jl*, August 1852, p. 291.

³ The estimate that the Jewish population of Iran in the mid-nineteenth century did not exceed two thousand families (roughly between ten to twelve thousand souls) is generally supported by other, and more specific sources. Although no detailed and comprehensive documentation on the Jewish population in the larger and smaller communities and settlements of Iran during the first half of the nineteenth century exists, the available sources roughly confirm Rabbi Eliyahu's general assessment. The missionary Joseph Wolff, who provided a list of the major and minor Jewish communities and settlements of Iran in 1824, and indicated the number of Jewish families living in each of them, estimated the total number of those families at some 2800 (or approximately between 14 to 17 thousand souls). See his report in *LSPCJ*, 19 (1827), p. 185. A similar estimate, i.e., 16,000 souls, was provided some forty years later in the detailed report of the British Mission in Tehran, prepared by Ronald Thomson. See his report of April 20, 1868, in FO 248/244. All the available figures and estimates pertaining to the number of the Jews of Iran until the 1870s point to a considerable decline in their numbers in comparison with the Safavid period (i.e., 1501–1722 C.E.). Cf., e.g., estimates by Christian missions in Iran, according to which Jews constituted the largest non-Muslim minority of Iran during the end of the 16th century, and numbered some one hundred thousand souls in the second half of the 17th century, in *A Chronicle of the Carmelites and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, vol. 1, pp. 158 and 364. For a discussion of the objective difficulties involved in determining the size of the Jewish population of Iran in the 19th century, see A. Netzer, "The Size of the Jewish Population in Iran in the Nineteenth Century" (in Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 127–133.

Jewish gatherings.⁴ Also, many of them fled to Herat, since they had ongoing relations with the large Jewish community in that region.

The Jews speak a dialect which is very much mixed with Old Persian,⁵ and also they are the only nationality in Iran that are able to pronounce

⁴ The history of the Jewish community of Mashhad and the events which took place there during and in the wake of the pogrom against that community on March 27, 1839 have been extensively documented and studied. Following charges of sacrilegious conduct by a Jewish woman during the Muslim holy month of Muharram, the Jewish quarter in the town was violently attacked by an enraged mob. Thirty-two Jews were killed, many injured and robbed, and some women and young girls were assaulted and kidnapped. Those who did not flee were forced to convert to Islam. The pogrom put an end to the official and recognized existence of a Jewish community in Mashhad, although the majority of the converted Jews kept their Jewish religion in secret and returned publicly to Judaism during the early decades of the twentieth century. For a useful list of published works and sources on the history of the community prior to the pogrom through the middle of the twentieth century, see B.D. Yehoshua-Raz, *From the Lost Tribes in Afghanistan to the Mashhad Jewish Converts of Iran* (in Hebrew), pp. 99–152, and 493–524. For an informative outline of the history of the community between the years 1746–1946, in Persian, see Y. Dilmanian, *Tarikh-i Yahudiha-yi Mashhad*. For further bibliographical sources and discussion regarding the secret communal and religious lives of the converted Jews and their descendants, in English, see R. Patai, *Jadid al-Islam, the Jewish “New Muslims” of Meshhed*; A. Levy, *The Jews of Mashad: Evidence and Documents Concerning the History of the Jews of Mashad*, and W.J. Fischel, “Secret Jews of Persia,” *Commentary* VII (Jan. 1949–June 1949), pp. 28–33.

⁵ In this paragraph Polak makes some broad generalizations with regard to what he calls “the dialect spoken amongst the Jews of Iran.” Contrary to Polak’s observation, however, Jews in pre-modern Iran spoke in several dialects, many of which were, indeed, closely related. In addition to the Neo-Aramaic dialect, which belongs to the Semitic family of languages and was spoken among the Jews of Kurdistan and western-Azerbaijan, the Jewish communities of central and southern Iran (including those of Hamadan, Kashan, Burujird, Gulpaygan, Nahavand, Khunsar, Isfahan, Yazd and their adjacent settlements) spoke in Iranian dialects that originated and evolved over many centuries from pre-Islamic Iranian languages. This major cluster of Iranian dialects spoken by the Jews in central and southern Iran shared numerous phonetic, morphological and lexical characteristics, as they originated from ancient and closely related Iranian languages which were in use in the area known as Media Major (an area stretching roughly from present-day Hamadan and its environs in the north to Isfahan and its nearby territories to the south). In addition to the above mentioned Semitic and Iranian dialects, the Jews of Iran spoke yet another jargon or “half language,” which was a hybrid linguistic medium created over the centuries by the Iranian Jews and served to protect the privacy of conversation among the Jews in the presence of gentiles. For a discussion of the ancient origins of the Iranian dialects spoken by the Jews of Iran, see E. Yarshater, “The Jewish Communities of Persia and their Dialects,” in *Memorial Jean de Menasce*, ed. Ph. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli, pp. 453–466, and A. Netzer, “Studies in the Spoken Language of the Jews of Iran” (in Hebrew), in *Culture and History: Ino Sciaky Memorial Volume*, ed. J. Dan, pp. 19–44. Regarding the Jewish-Iranian secret dialect, known as *Lotera’i* (as well as *Lufila’i* and other similar names), see E. Yarshater, “The Hybrid Language of the Jewish Communities of Persia,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 97 (1977), pp. 1–8. For further discussion and bibliographical references relating to the above spoken dialects, see H. Sahim, “Guyishha-yi Yahudian-i

the soft consonantal sounds that are produced by the tip of the tongue, whereas the Persians, however much they try, cannot enunciate them. Thus they pronounce the Persian word “*sal*” (meaning “year”) as “*thal*,” as in English. When they speak, they shake their hands a lot and they move their facial muscles, which is something the Persians avoid altogether, as they do not want others to have any notion of their inward thoughts and feelings. The educated class of the Jews writes and speaks the Hebrew language soundly and properly. However, ordinarily they write their letters in Persian by using the Hebrew characters.

The fundamentals of their faith and their religious laws are like those of the Sephardic Jews.⁶ However, polygamy is permitted among them, although because of the hardships in which they live they make use of it only under exceptional circumstances. Their festivals, too, are the

Iran,” in *Teru’a*, vol. 1, ed. H. Sarshar, pp. 149–170; idem, “The Dialect of the Jews of Hamadan,” in *Irano-Judaica* III, ed. Sh. Shaked and A. Netzer, pp. 171–181. Regarding the Semitic dialect spoken by the Jewish communities of Iranian Kurdistan and western-Azerbaijan, see S. Hopkins, “The Neo-Aramaic Dialects of Iran,” in *Irano-Judaica* IV, ed. Sh. Shaked and A. Netzer, pp. 311–327.

⁶ By “Sephardic Jews” (literally, “Spanish Jews”), Polak is referring to the descendants of Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal before their expulsion in 1492. Established communities of Sephardic Jews existed in North Africa, Italy, the Near East, Western Europe, America and the Balkans. Economically and culturally thriving Sephardic communities existed particularly under Ottoman sovereignty, and mainly in Constantinople, Salonika and Izmir. Sephardic religious practices and writings, particularly those related to various branches of Jewish law (Heb. Halakhah), synagogue service and sacred literature (in prose and poetry) reached the Jews of Iran through numerous direct and indirect channels. In addition to Hebrew printed books, which were imported to Iran from the above mentioned Sephardic communities of Italy (Livorno), Ottoman Empire (Constantinople, Izmir, Jerusalem) as well as other Jewish communities of the East (mainly Baghdad, and India as of the 1840s), a considerable number of Sephardic emissaries and rabbis from the main religious institutions of Palestine and the Ottoman Empire visited the scattered Jewish communities and settlements of Iran. Aside from collecting donations for their respective religious institutions, holy sites and endowments in Palestine, these Sephardic emissaries and rabbis provided religious guidance and answers to various questions that arose in the Iranian communities they visited. However, the above mentioned Sephardic channels and sources of influence, which affected the religious and cultural lives of the Iranian Jews, were ordinarily absorbed and incorporated into the older fabric of Judeo-Persian religious practices, beliefs and customs. For a useful guide to the Sephardic world of religious law and customs, see Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs*, 2 vols. As to the extent of influence of Sephardic codes of law amongst the Jews of Iran in pre-modern times, see A. Netzer, *Osar Kitvey ha-Yad*, pp. 20–22. Regarding the Sephardic identity of the majority of religious emissaries who visited the Jewish communities of Iran during the 18th and 19th centuries, see I. Ben-Zvi, “Meqorot le-Toldot Yehudey Paras” (Sources for the History of the Jews of Persia), *Sefunot* 2 (1958), pp. 190–196. Cf. J. Wolff, in *LSPCJ*, 19 (1827), p. 217; P.H. Sternschuss, *ibid.*, 38 (1846), p. 51, and J.E. Polak, in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 20, No. 20 (August 25, 1856), p. 477.

same. The Purim festival begins as they mention Haman's name⁷ and then knock on the doors. Their books of religious laws are copied and preserved by adhering to specific prescriptions.⁸ Among them also are found some fervent religious believers who lead an ascetic life and fast excessively between three to seven days.

These people live in utmost hardship and poverty. Concentrated together in a quarter of the city known as *mahalah-yi Yahud*, namely the Jewish quarter, they are compelled to build the doors of their houses so low that only by bending is one able to pass through them. The reason for this is that in the event they are attacked suddenly, they will be able to barricade themselves behind the doors easily. Some of the governors and their subordinates use any kind of real or fictitious offence committed by a Jewish individual as an excuse for extorting money from the entire community. Similar pretexts are exploited in order to increase the amount of the poll-tax (the *jizyah*) established by Muhammad to be paid by non-Muslim subjects.⁹ This continuous

⁷ Haman, the head minister of Ahasuerus, who, according to the *Book of Esther*, plotted to exterminate the Jews living throughout the ancient Persian empire (tentatively dated to the Persian period before 330 B.C.E.). His conspiracy was discovered and he was hanged following the intervention of Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai. The events depicted in the ten chapters of the *Book of Esther* and the deliverance of the Jews form the background for the observance of the Purim festival, celebrated each year on the 14th day of the Hebrew months of Adar.

⁸ J. Polak is referring here to Jewish laws and procedures that specify the processes of copying and preserving Jewish sacred material. These instructions are spelled out in detail in *Shulhan 'Arukh*, the authoritative code of Jewish laws, compiled by Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488–1575). See *Shulhan 'Arukh*, ed. Zvi H. Preisler, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 343–347.

⁹ Regarding the Islamic origin and justification for this tax, see the injunction in Qur'an IX:29. The poll-tax was paid by the Jewish communities of Iran throughout the nineteenth century. Together with numerous other forms of taxes, charges and payments imposed by local governors and officials, the poll-tax constituted yet another economic burden that weighed on the hard pressed and mostly impoverished Jewish communities across Iran. On the *jizyah* paid by the Jews of Shiraz in 1850, see R. Binning's statement: "There is no house-tax in Sheeraz, but a *jizya* or "poll-tax" is levied on the Jews and was formerly collected from the Armenians likewise." Cf. Robert Binning, *A Journal of Two Years Travel in Persia, Ceylon, etc.*, vol. 1, p. 279. On the same tax paid by the Jews of Isfahan, ca. 1850, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 126. On the heavy burden of the poll-tax in the Jewish community of Tehran in 1874, see letter by the heads of the community to the President of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris, written on 1 Adar 5634 (February 17, 1874), received in Paris on April 13, 1874, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6. No. 6912. For a discussion of the ruinous effects of extortions and abuses in taxation imposed by local officials on the Jewish communities of Yazd, Shiraz, Hamadan, Salmas (in Western Azerbaijan) and others in the second half of the 19th century, see, e.g., *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 24 (April 2, 1875), p. 191, and *ibid.*,

oppression and pressure has compelled many Jews to emigrate to Turkey and to other lands in the East, even though the government prevents this emigration in various ways; as a result one can emigrate from the country only by resorting to secret escape-routes. The position of the Jews of Afghanistan and Turkistan is significantly better and stronger, because in the latter countries the Jews are often the only ones who establish communication and trade relations between the various tribes and clans that are at war with each other.

In the year 1854, a Jewish resident of Jerusalem came to Tehran for the purpose of collecting donations.¹⁰ In response to my question as to the next stage of his journey, he replied that he was intending to go to Afghanistan and Turkistan. When I drew his attention to the dangers that lurked on the road for a European traveller, and pointed to the murder of Stoddart and Conolly,¹¹ he answered, saying: "For me the difficulty of crossing the land exists only in Persia, where whenever one passes through a city one is required to pay charges; as soon as I cross the border, moving from one tribe to another, they equip me with a Jewish guide who escorts me safely to my next destination. I say this on the basis of my experience, because I have made this very journey once before." Indeed, two years later that same person returned to Tehran safe and sound with a small amount of money. During the last takeover of Herat the Jewish community there was severely hurt and damaged by Prince Sultan Mirza, known as Hosam Saltana.¹² It was said that

No. 25 (April 9, 1875), p. 199. Cf. A long article in *The Jewish Chronicle* of London, cited in *The Jewish Times* of New York, vol. V, No. 8 (April 8, 1873), p. 115.

¹⁰ Elsewhere (in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, August 25, 1856, p. 478), J. Polak provides more information with regard to this emissary. In his words: "This man was born in Greece and lived in Jerusalem. He spoke fluent Italian, Greek, Arabic, Turkish, French and Hebrew. It is astonishing how these emissaries travel with no reservations. They set out on the road to Samarqand, Bukhara, Qandahar, Herat, Balkh and further in order to seek their coreligionists in various lands, lands that are replete with dangers for Europeans. They move from one station to another in the service of God."

¹¹ This is a reference to the British military officers colonel Charles Stoddart and captain Arthur Conolly, who were taken prisoner by the Emir of Bukhara (in 1842) and put to death under unclear circumstances. Cf. D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, pp. 56–7, 117. The missionary Joseph Wolff, who volunteered in 1843 to help investigate the fate of the two, was told that they had been beheaded on account of their irreverence towards the Emir of Bukhara and their attempts to instigate the tribes of Turkistan against the Bukharan ruler. Cf. J. Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara in the Years 1843–1845 to Ascertain the Fate of Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly*, pp. 188–192.

¹² This is the Qajar Prince Sultan Murad, known as Hosam al-Saltana (b. 1233 Q./1817–8 C.E.; d. 1300 Q./1882–3). A paternal uncle of Nasir al-Din Shah (he was

the Jews were having in their possession a piece of diamond which is renowned in the East and is known as “Sekkeh.” This jewel became an excuse for looting and torturing.¹³ Although it did not become known whether the diamond was actually found or not, the Prince collected an immense treasure, and as a gift he presented the king with a piece of diamond worth 800 tumans of gold.

The Jews make a living mostly by silk-weaving, glass-polishing, and working as silver and goldsmiths and jewelers; they make alcohol, liquor, wine, ammonia, salt, chloric acid, sulfuric acid and nitric acid, and they are skilled in combining and separating metals; because of this they are indispensable in the production of coins, where they

Muhammad Shah's brother and the thirteenth son of Abbas Mirza), Sultan Murad was governor of Khurasan and invaded Afghanistan in 1856. He captured Herat, Afghanistan's capital, in October 1856. Regarding him, see M. Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rjāl-i Iran*, vol. 2, pp. 104–110.

¹³ The sufferings of the Jewish community of Herat during and following the capture of the city by Sultan Murad Mirza's troops have been documented by eye-witness accounts in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian. Based on the latter evidence, as well as numerous independent sources, it emerges that following the capture of Herat by the Persian troops, the Jews in the city (the majority of whom were from Mashhad and had settled in Herat following the pogrom of March 1839 in their community) were intimidated, beaten, robbed of their possessions and finally expelled from Herat to Mashhad. The official justification for the ill-treatment and expulsion, offered by the Persian authorities, was that the Jews in the city had emigrated from Mashhad without governmental permission. The deportation, which began on the 19th day of Shevat 5617 (February 13, 1857), lasted about thirty days. In the course of the journey many of the deportees (who numbered according to various accounts between three to five thousand souls) perished due to hunger, sickness, violence and the extreme cold. Upon arrival in Mashhad, the Jews were detained in the eastern outskirts of the city, in a dilapidated inn named Baba Qudrat. After nearly two years of detention, during which time more than three hundred of the detainees died due to insufficient food, poor clothing, housing and sanitary conditions, the Jews were permitted by Nasir al-Din Shah to return to Herat. While some of the exiles remained in Mashhad, the majority returned to Afghanistan. They reached Herat on the 13th of Shevat 5619 (January 18, 1859) and resettled in their old houses. For a detailed account of the expulsion and its aftermath, see the Hebrew testimony of Mulla Matatiya Gurji, the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Herat towards the end of the 19th century, in B. Yehoshua-Raz, *From the Lost Tribes in Afghanistan to the Mashhad Jewish Converts of Iran* (in Hebrew), op. cit., pp. 110–111. For a similar account, in Judeo-Persian, see the eye-witness testimony of Binyamin ben Jani, in I. Ben-Zvi, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot* (1966), pp. 331–332; idem, *Nidhey Yisrael* (1953), pp. 103–105. For details on the harsh conditions under which the exiles were held in Mashhad, see Yisrael Mishael, *Beyn Afghanistan le-Eretz Yisrael (Between Afghanistan and the Land of Israel)*, pp. 21–22, and *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 22, No. 22 (April 26, 1858), p. 250; *ibid.*, No. 41 (October 4, 1858), p. 459. For further discussion and sources on the entire affair, see A. Levy, “The Expulsion of the Jews of Mashhad from Herat,” in A. Levy, *The Jews of Mashhad*, op. cit., ch. 2, pp. 1–18, and Y. Dilmanian, *Tarikh-i Yahudiha-yi Mashhad*, op. cit., pp. 38–41.

supervise the technical processes of this craft. Also, many of them are established physicians. One of the court physicians of the latter monarch Muhammad Shah was a Jew by the name of Haq-Nazar.¹⁴ Furthermore, they have a reputation as singers and musicians, and on account of this they are oftentimes invited to entertain guests at parties. In the year 1859, the mayor of Shiraz held a small banquet in my honor in his garden, on which occasion he hired the best Jewish musicians in town. Their music, which captivated the Persian guests to the utmost, sounded much like Polish songs, and even the nasal and the guttural sounds were produced in a similar manner by those Jewish singers. All in all, the Jewish community in Shiraz has a relatively good condition, because they enjoy the protection of the powerful family of Haji Qawam.¹⁵ Haji Qawam's ancestor was a Jew, and his father, named Haji Ibrahim, helped the present Qajar dynasty to ascend to the throne; later on, however, Fath 'Ali Shah¹⁶ ordered to put to death all the many members of Haji Ibrahim's family. Haji Qawam, who was

¹⁴ This is Hakim (i.e. physician) Haq-Nazar, son of Hakim Ya'qub, who was amongst the personal physicians of Nasir al-Din Shah's mother, Mahd 'Ulya. Born to an old family of Jewish physicians in Khunsar, he and his brothers (Hakim Mashiah and Hakim Mushch) moved to Tehran, where he soon gained a reputation as a skilled physician. For further information on him, see below, source no. 31, entitled "On the Jewish Community of Tehran in the Year 1875," note 9.

¹⁵ In the following lines Polak provides some general information with regard to Haji Qawam and his family. Considered as one of the powerful and well-connected politicians, administrators and strong men in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, Haji Qawam, whose full name and title was Haj Mirza 'Ali Akbar Qawam al-Mulk (born in Shiraz in 1203 Q./1788–9 C.E.), was the fourth son of Haji Ibrahim, the grand vizier of the second Qajar monarch Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834). Haji Ibrahim was put to death by Fath 'Ali Shah (in 1801) on suspicions of treason, and, in the words of the Qajar chronicle *Farsnama-yi Nasiri*, "his brothers, sons, and relatives, too, everybody at his respective place, were either killed or deprived of their right." Cf. H. Busse, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, op. cit., p. 99. Haji Qawam, who at the time of his father's downfall and death was about eleven years old, succeeded in regaining Fath 'Ali Shah's confidence and support (in 1245 Q./1829–30 C.E.), and was given extensive power and authority in Shiraz and in the province of Fars. In 1279 Q./1862–3 C.E., he was appointed by Nasir al-Din Shah to the prestigious office of administrator of the holy shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, considered the holiest Shi'ite site inside Iran. He died and was buried in the latter city in the month of Muharram 1282 Q./May–June 1865 C.E. Not much is known about the exact time and the circumstances under which Haji Qawam's ancestor, named Hashim, converted from Judaism to Islam. For Haji Qawam's biography, see M. Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol. 2, pp. 433–434. Regarding his father, Haji Ibrahim, who was instrumental in the ascendancy of the Qajar dynasty in Iran, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 21–28. Cf. H. Busse, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, op. cit., pp. 96–99. On Qawam family's influence in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, see Khan Malik Sasani, *Siasatqaran-i Dawra-yi Qajar*, pp. 50–51.

¹⁶ Reigned in the years 1797–1834.

at that time just a small boy, and is now an old man of seventy years, escaped that sad fate. He has the reputation of being the most cunning individual throughout Persia; it is he who succeeded in reestablishing the vanished glory of his family and reaching the age of seventy, despite the lofty position that he has attained. His son is that same mayor of Shiraz who hosted me.¹⁷

The only national monument that the Jews have in Iran is the tomb of Esther in Hamadan, or ancient Ecbatana, which tomb the Jews have been visiting since the earliest times.¹⁸ Here, in the middle of the Jewish

¹⁷ Among Haji Qawam's descendants two rose to prominence in the Qajar hierarchy. The elder of the two was Mirza Fath 'Ali Khan-i Shirazi, who served in various capacities under Nasir al-Din Shah, including governorship of Shushtar, Dizful and Arabistan, in 1855. The younger, and more powerful son of Haji Qawam, to whom J. Polak is referring here, was Mirza 'Ali Muhammad Khan (d. 1882), who during his years of career under Nasir al-Din Shah held numerous administrative and political positions in the city of Shiraz, in the province of Fars and elsewhere. Upon the death of his father, he received from the Shah his father's honorific title of "Qawam al-Mulk," i.e., "The Support of the Kingdom." On Haji Qawam's elder son, Mirza Fath 'Ali Khan, see H. Busse, *History of Persia under Qājār Rule*, op. cit., p. 206. On Mirza 'Ali Muhammad Khan, see *ibid.*, pp. 349–350, 419 and 446.

¹⁸ Here, through the end of the passage, J. Polak gives a description of the monument in which, according to ancient Jewish tradition in Iran, the tombs of Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai are found. As the holiest Jewish site within the borders of Iran proper, and due to its location in the center of Hamadan, the monument was visited all year around, and especially during the Purim Festival, by Jewish pilgrims from various communities and settlements across Iran and the Ottoman Empire as well as by various European travelers and visitors. Some of the latter visitors described in their diaries and travel-books the location and the general appearance of the shrine as well as the interior of the monument and its more distinct features. The detailed descriptions of the monument, most of which were recorded in the second half of the nineteenth century, agree and mostly complement each other. They portray the picture of a shrine, which despite its utmost religious and historical importance for the Jews of Iran and the East, was modest and unimpressive in its exterior as well as its interior structure, articles and ornamentation. Dr. C.J. Wills, who was in the service of the British Telegraph Department in Iran during the years 1866–1881, and visited the Tomb some few years after J. Polak, provides a description of the shrine which sums up the impressions of many other nineteenth-century Jewish and Christian visitors. In his words: "Hamadan has no show place save the shrines of Esther and Mordecai. A poor-looking, blue tiled dome some fifty feet in height; the rest of the building is in red brick, in many places muddled over. In the outer chamber is nothing remarkable. A low door leads to another apartment by a passage; on crawling through this inner passage, which can be done with discomfort, almost on hands and knees, one enters a vaulted chamber, floored with common blue tiles. There is no splendour here, and nothing to attract the cupidity of the Persians. In one corner lay a heap of common "cherragh," or oil lamps of burnt clay, covered with blue glaze, such as are used by the poor; these lamps will give a dull smoky light for some hours without trimming. Our Jewish guides informed us that twice a year the place is illuminated. In the centre of the apartment stood two wooden arks, almost devoid of ornament, but of considerable

quarter, there stands a small building with a dome, on top of which a stork has built a nest. Walls have been put around most parts of the entrance to the building. There exists just one small entrance to the building, and it consists of a small opening; it is only by bending that one can pass through it. This opening is being closed by a movable slab of rock, which serves as a door, and is devised as a protective measure against frequent attacks. Going through the opening, one enters a small corridor, where the names of many pilgrims as well as the year in which the mausoleum was reconstructed are inscribed.¹⁹ Through the corridor one then proceeds to a small square shaped hall, where a faint light shines in through a small window. In this hall are found two elevated shrines made of spruce-wood, and these are the tombs of Esther and Mordecai. All around these wooden chests are engraved Hebrew verses from the last chapter of the Book of Esther, as well as the names of three physicians at whose costs the tombs were repaired.²⁰

age; there were thickly sprinkled with small pieces of paper, on which were inscriptions in the Hebrew character, the paper being stuck on as is a label. Our guides could only tell us that pious Jewish pilgrims were in the habit of affixing these to the arks." Cf. C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, pp. 77–78. For other similar descriptions of the shrine, including drawings and sketches of the shrine from the second half of the nineteenth century, see H. Binder, *Au Kurdistan, en Mésopotamie et en Perse*, pp. 374–375; I. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 153–154. For complimentary details and impressions of the tomb, see E.N. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, pp. 158–159, and G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 567. For portrayals of the shrine in nineteenth-century Jewish publications, with references to the history of the Jews of Iran in general and the condition of the Jewish community of Hamadan in particular, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. XIII (August 8, 1856), p. 682, and vol. XIV (May 8, 1857), p. 997; *Habazeleth*, year 3, No. 36 (July 11, 1873), p. 267; *ibid.*, year 4, No. 1 (October 3, 1873), p. 4.

¹⁹ Elsewhere, in *Jahrbuch für Israeliten* 5617 (1856–1857), ed. Josef Wertheimer, Wien, 1856, p. 148, Polak gives the Hebrew year of 4474 (= 714 C.E.) as the year in which, according to the inscription inside the shrine, the monument containing the tombs was constructed.

²⁰ In the latter mentioned source (see note 20 above), pp. 150–151, Polak provides a diagram of the two wooden chests and gives the Hebrew inscriptions, including the names of the three physicians which were engraved on them.

SOURCE 5

THE STATE OF THE JEWS IN IRAN IN 1876,
AS REFLECTED IN THE REPORT OF THE
ANGLO-JEWISH ASSOCIATION (1876–7)

Introduction

During the Great Famine of 1871–2 in Iran, which had devastating effects on Iran's general population and equally caused considerable suffering and mortality in most of the Jewish communities of Iran, the Jews of Iran became the subject of much attention and concern in the Jewish communities of Europe and the Ottoman Empire and their respective organizations and publications. The increasing acquaintance of Jews in Europe and in other parts of the world with the multiple and deeply rooted plights and hardships of Iranian Jews received further impetus and press coverage during Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit in the various cities and capitals of Europe in the summer of 1873. The document before us, which consists of three related parts, appeared in the sixth annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, published in London in September 1877. In a manner which was typical of the publications of the major Jewish philanthropic organizations of Europe during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward, the document reflected the growing desire of these organizations to obtain factual information and data on various aspects and issues of Jewish life in Iran during this period. The various reports, accounts and testimonies about the Jews of Iran, which were written and compiled by different individuals (chief among them European visitors and professionals working in Iran, as well as communal officials and educators affiliated with the Alliance Israélite Universelle's educational and cultural activities among the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean basin), were forwarded to the Jewish organizations of Europe, as well as to state officials and influential figures in Britain, France and elsewhere. These reports relied on informants with varying degrees of knowledge and access to the Jewish communities of Iran, and, therefore, they contained information characterized by various degrees of accuracy and depth. However, such reports and accounts were complemented

by an increasing number of informative letters and reports written by the heads of the Jewish communities of Iran as well as individual Jews from different communities. This growing and diverse body of reports, letters and communications concerning the Jews of Iran during the last three decades of the nineteenth century was addressed first and foremost to Jewish philanthropic and communal organizations in Western Europe. As such, these reports and letters formed the basis of various evaluations, deliberations and actions by Jews in Europe and in other parts of the world, with the purpose of assisting the scattered and mostly isolated Jewish communities across Iran. The document before us consists of three excerpts. The first one (designated in the original text as I), was written and forwarded to the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association by Dr. M. Allatini, President of the Committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Salonica. The second excerpt (i.e., II) was addressed to the latter organizations by the heads of one of the Jewish communities of Iran, and the third (i.e., III) was forwarded by an anonymous correspondent. For the original text of the full report, see Appendix H, entitled “The State of the Jews in Persia,” in the *Sixth Annual Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, 1876–1877*, London, September 1877, pp. 91–92.

The Text of the Report

I

The Jews inhabiting Persia, generally speaking, are poor. They carry on petty trades which afford a scanty subsistence from hand to mouth, and nothing more. Secular instruction would be of immense benefit to the masses of Jewish people. The famine, with which Persia was afflicted some years ago, carried off a large number of Jews.¹ The ill-treatment

¹ This is a reference to the Great Famine of 1871–72 in Iran (see above), which affected most parts of the land and was caused mainly by a shortage of rainfall and precipitations during the years 1863–1871. The natural causes of the catastrophe were compounded by administrative mismanagement, corruption of officials and wholesale food merchants who benefited from the rise in the prices of staple foods, lack of accessible roads and adequate means of transportation, etc. In some regions of the country about a third to a half of the rural and urban population perished as a result of horrific starvation, diseases, crimes and disintegration of most of the organized and routine modes of human activity. As regards the natural causes of the famine,

to which they were subjected in former years has considerably subsided. There are also less conversions of Jews than formerly.²

Ormiah contains about 200 Jewish families, or houses, and has 4 synagogues.³ No Jewish school exists there, but the Jewish children might make use of the Persian schools. The Jewish population is comparatively less poor in that town than elsewhere in Persia, but there does not appear to be much eagerness to secure elementary instruction for the young.

Ispahan has 400 Jewish families, who are more destitute than the Jews in other places.⁴ A small number of them carry on a petty trade in yarn and silk, and in various trifling articles. The larger portion are day labourers and porters. Though extremely poor, they are not badly

see F.J. Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia, An Account of the Journeys of the Persian Boundary Commission, 1870–71–72*, vol. 1, pp. 95–98. For detailed and extensive eyewitness descriptions of the human suffering caused by the famine in the north, center and west of Iran, see, e.g., H.W. Bellow, *From the Indus to the Tigris*, pp. 311–445. For a discussion of the administrative and institutional factors contributing to the catastrophe, see S. Okazaki, “The Great Persian Famine of 1870–71,” pp. 183–192. For discussion and extensive documentation on the effects of the famine in the various Jewish communities, see the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*. As to the concrete consequences of this famine in the hard-hit community of Kashan (in which about one-third of the Jewish population evidently perished), see below, source no. 30, entitled “The Jewish Community of Kashan during the Great Famine of 1871–2.”

² Although no systematic documentation and study on the conversion of Iranian Jews to Islam and other religions (chiefly Bahaism and Christianity) in the course of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century exist, the scattered written and oral evidence suggests that while the conversion to the Bahai religion continued and increased during the 1870s–1920s, the conversion to Islam abated towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Greater measures of security and state protection afforded to the Jews of Iran, mainly as a result of the interventions and activities of Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe on their behalf, appear to have been among the main factors leading to a decline in the number of forced and voluntary conversions to Islam among the Jews of Iran. For a discussion of the historical causes and dimensions of conversions of Iranian Jews to Islam and other religions, see A. Netzer, s.v. “Conversion of Persian Jews to Other Religions,” in *ELr*, vol. VI, pp. 234–236.

³ For further information on the Jewish community of Urumia in the second half of the nineteenth century, see below, source no. 18, entitled “Standard Formula Used for the Appointment of the Head of the Jewish Community in the City of Urumia,” note 3, and source no. 34, entitled “Letter from the Community of Urumia with regard to the Condition of the Jews of Western Azerbaijan in the Years 1888–1893,” introduction and notes 1–2.

⁴ For further information on the Jewish community of Isfahan during the nineteenth century, see below, source no. 29, entitled “The Jewish Community of Isfahan in the year 1888.”

provided with schools, and especially with synagogues, but they do not derive much advantage from them.

In Teheran and in Hamadan there is a greater desire to obtain instruction,⁵ but the local resources are too insignificant for the establishment of schools. This is more particularly the case in the last-named place, which is inhabited by a Jewish congregation of 450 families.⁶ It contains 4 synagogues, superintended by 5 Rabbins. The Jews at Hamadan are extremely intelligent, and would greatly profit by a school. They had in recent years to suffer greatly from persecution, but since the appointment of the new governor they have expressed themselves satisfied with the measures adopted for their protection.

Some of the Teheran children are instructed by Persian Moullahs. The writer concludes by stating that if a movement were set on foot to establish a school in Teheran, where at present the Rabbins limit their instruction to the translation of the Bible, he would exert himself to promote the realization of such a laudable project.

⁵ For further information on the Jewish community of Tehran during the second half of the nineteenth century, see below, source no. 31, entitled "On the Jewish Community of Tehran in the Year 1875."

⁶ For detailed information on various aspects of community, family, culture, education, religion and history of the Jews of Hamadan in the 1840s, see a series of articles that were published in the course of the year 1850, by *The Jewish Chronicle*. For this most informative account of the Jewish community of Hamadan during this period, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI (1850), No. 24 (March 22), pp. 186–187; No. 32 (May 16), pp. 252–253; No. 33 (May 24), pp. 262–263; No. 44 (August 9), pp. 346–347; No. 45 (August 16), pp. 354–355; No. 46 (August 23), pp. 362–363; No. 47 (August 30), pp. 370–371, and No. 48 (September 6), pp. 379–380. The same articles were published with some minor omissions in *Archives Israélites*, 11 (1850), pp. 311–313, 423–425, 460–465 and 554–558. Regarding the general condition, needs and difficulties of this community during the 1860s, see the original letters and reports by the heads of the community published in *Hamagid*, year 4, No. 44 (November 14, 1860), pp. 175; year 7, No. 32 (August 12, 1863), pp. 251–252; year 9, No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and No. 4 (January 25, 1865), p. 28. For information on the condition of this community in the 1890s, including material and documents related to the outbreak of severe persecutions against the community inspired and led by the Shi'ite clergyman Mulla Abdullah of Hamadan during the years 1892–1896, see particularly the lengthy report of AJA, 22 (1892–1893), pp. 55–63, and, *ibid.*, 23 (1893–1894), pp. 17–18; 24 (1894–1895), pp. 13–14, and 25 (1895–1896), pp. 23–25. On the community during the last decade of the nineteenth century see also BMAIU, October 1900, pp. 159–162, and December 1900, pp. 211–214.

II

*(Extract from a Letter Addressed to the Association by the
Heads of a Jewish Community in Persia.)*

We ask you to improve our position, for there are malignant and constantly-recurring imputations, against which we can make no stand, and the object of which is to extort from us insupportable bribes and mulcts.⁷

Even the ordinary imposts are collected in the most arbitrary manner, and without previous assessment. Our children going to school, and even adults of our community when appearing in the public thoroughfare, are exposed to blows and insults. Knowledge is disappearing from Persia. We are in need of books and of teachers accredited by you.

We entreat you to employ your influence for our defence as a people, and for promoting knowledge amongst us. We also request you to supply our Beth Hamidrash⁸ with books.

III

(From a Correspondent)
[Translation]

There are ten Synagogues in Teheran.⁹ Instruction in the Bible is given by five Rabbins. Six Jews are medical practitioners, twenty deal in precious stones, twenty are silk merchants, ten work in silver, six are jewelers; the remainder are petty merchants, hawkers, and dealers in second-hand articles. Some of the Jewish women likewise engage in hawking.

⁷ Cf. above, source no. 3, entitled "On the Legal and Actual Condition of the Jews of Iran in the Year 1873," note 15.

⁸ Hebrew word, meaning "house of study" and "school."

⁹ Rev. J. Wolff, who visited the Jewish community of Tehran in March 1824, found there about one hundred Jewish families (roughly about 600 souls) with five synagogues. Cf. LSPCJ, 19 (1827), pp. 216–217. Some fifty years after Wolff's visit to Tehran, the Jewish population in the city had grown to three hundred families (about 1800 souls), whose communal lives were organized around ten synagogues. Cf. AJA, 4 (1874–1875), pp. 92–93. Both the rate of the demographic growth and the increase in the number of synagogues in the capital city were considerably higher than those in the other communities during the same period.

Most of the Jews in Persia carry on petty trades. Nowhere, except in Hamadan, are they allowed to have shops in the bazaar. In the other towns they are excluded from establishing themselves in such bazaars, but have shops in bazaars of their own. In Ispahan a great number of Jews are workmen and porters. In Shiraz many occupy themselves with the production of wine and alcohol.

SOURCE 6

THE JEWS OF IRAN IN THE YEAR 1888, AS REPORTED
BY MORRIS COHEN, EDUCATOR AND COMMUNAL
OFFICEHOLDER IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
OF BAGHDAD

Introduction

Morris Cohen was among the growing circle of modern-oriented communal officials in the Jewish community of Baghdad during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He arrived in Baghdad in 1878, on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, with the purpose of serving as English teacher at the Alliance Israélite Universelle's boys' school in the city. His success at his educational work during the following years and his active involvement in the lives of the local Jewish community won him the trust and appreciation of the communal leaders in the city. He married a Jewish woman from the community (in 1884), and was appointed (in November 1885) by the heads of that community to preside over the committee in charge of the community's financial affairs.

In addition to his activities in the fields of education and communal administration, M. Cohen was a skilled writer and reporter. His familiarity and ties with the Jewish communities of Baghdad and Iraq (including those of Kurdistan) enabled him to write numerous informative reports and articles concerning those communities. Furthermore, he took an interest in the condition of the Jewish communities in neighboring Iran, and conducted correspondence with some of them. The information that reached him through his various contacts and informants formed the basis of his reports and observations concerning the Jews of Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan, reports that he forwarded to the Jewish philanthropic and communal organizations of Europe. The report before us was written and forwarded by him to the Anglo-Jewish Association, and published in the latter organization's annual report in 1889. For the original text of the report, see the *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, 1888-1889*, September 1889, pp. 42-44, entitled "Appendix B, On the Jews in Persia and Turkish Kurdistan."

For further information regarding M. Cohen and his activities in the community of Baghdad, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequfat ha-Geonim 'ad Yameynu*, pp. 214–217, 292, 366. For his reports and articles on the Jews of Ottoman Iraq and Kurdistan, see, e.g., *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 44, No. 34 (August 24, 1880), p. 538, and No. 37 (September 14), pp. 587–588. For the Hebrew text of another detailed report by him on that community, originally sent to the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1884, see A. Ben Ya'acov, *ibid.*, pp. 215–217; *idem*, *Yehudey Bavel ba-Tequfot ha-Aharonot*, pp. 205–206.

The Report

The letters I have received from various towns in Persia in reply to my inquiries concerning their Jewish populations, are filled with lamentations and cries of despair. The condition of the Jews in almost every part of Persia is as wretched as can possibly be imagined, and the thought of being destined to continue suffering without any hope of relief leads them to despondency.

There is no link connecting the Persian Jews with their European brethren.¹ They are, so to say, cut off from the world, and their sorrows and grievances are scarcely known. Up to the present time no champion has taken up their cause, and without succor from Europe they are destined to bear the yoke of persecution for many a weary year to come. Efforts must be made to help these sufferers, to whom life is but a round of misery and woe, and we must endeavor to remove the reproach cast upon them in these parts of Asia.

Centuries of persecution have not failed to stamp their effect in deep, broad characters upon the Persian Jews. Despised and persecuted, they are unable to command respect, or to arouse feelings of humanity in the breasts of their oppressors. Debarred from carrying on the

¹ Due to the vast geographical distances that separated Iran from Europe, and given the lack of modern means of transportation and communication in most parts of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, letters, foreigners traveling or working in Iran, and telegraph (as of the 1870s) constituted the main means of communication between the scattered Jews of Iran and their coreligionists in Europe. The relative proximity of Baghdad to western Iran and the existence of diverse ties and relations between the Jews of Iran and those of Baghdad in the course of the nineteenth century made the latter populous and thriving Jewish community into a major intermediary between the Jews of Iran and their coreligionists in Europe and in other parts of the world.

ordinary trades of life, they have been compelled in many instances to earn their living by debased occupations. Taught by bitter experience to feel how unequal they invariably are to cope with the aggressions of the Mussulman population, they adapt their speech and conduct to their unfortunate condition. They passively submit to the vilest insults, whilst the petty acts of persecution gradually become habitual on the part of the Mussulmans. A Mussulman child may, with impunity, pull a Jew's beard and spit into his face. The poor Jew makes no complaint, and his resignation, taken as cowardice, is not calculated to act as a deterrent.²

It is impossible for a European to form a conception of the sentiments of a Persian towards a Jew. Taught by tradition and custom to despise the Jew, as being an infidel and an impure and defiled creature, it is no wonder that the Mussulman acts towards him in a disgraceful manner. It is impossible for Persians to imagine that in civilized countries the Jew is recognized as a human being who contributes his due share to the work and duties of society. The word "Jew" is considered as a term of disgrace, and is never used by a Persian without an apology for giving utterance to it. Is it surprising, then, that the Jews are ill-treated? Their cry for help will assuredly not fall ineffectually upon the ears of their brethren in lands where the blessings of education have rendered our coreligionists peaceful and prosperous. A movement may be set on foot for succoring our brethren in Persia by establishing schools in their midst, and by placing them on the road which leads to enlightenment and prosperity.³

The information I have received concerning the Jews in Persia relates to their numbers, their synagogues, their schools, where Hebrew is taught, and their various occupations. Here it has to be noticed that the Mussulmans never buy any kind of eatables from the Jews, because everything touched by a Jew is considered to become impure and defiled.

² For this and numerous other forms of violence and abuse inflicted on Jews and on their quarters, see above, source no. 2, entitled "The Condition and Disabilities of the Jews of Iran in the 1850s," note 5.

³ The belief in the power of education as a principal instrument of socio-cultural transformation and civil emancipation guided all the major Jewish organizations of Europe in their approach towards the centuries-long problems of the Jews of Iran. The proposal to establish modern schools for Iranian Jews was first raised in the meeting between the heads of the Alliance Israélite and Nasir al-Din Shah in Paris in July 1873. Although the Iranian monarch gave his approval to the idea already during that meeting, the first Alliance Israélite school for boys was established in Tehran only in February 1898.

Jews, therefore, dare not touch any such articles exposed for sale, as in that case they would be compelled to buy the victuals at any price the Mussulman vendor chose to exact. The Jews crowd together in their own quarters, where they have their own sales of fruit and other eatables. Their industry is naturally very limited, as they never work under Mussulman employ, and are studiously kept out of trades carried on by the Mussulmans. They are consequently compelled to go about hawking haberdashery, and their wives often accompany them. The consequences of these disabilities are very injurious. Almost everywhere the Jews are utterly wretched. There are very few merchants among them, a small number of them are petty dealers, and the greater portion are paupers. The synagogues are often used as schools for the teaching of Hebrew. No other subject is taught. In Teheran, Hamadan and Kermanshah there are a few merchants. In all the other towns the Jews are mostly hawkers. The Kashan district affords employment in the silk trade. Most of the letters I have received from Persia say there are no trades at all, and that the Jews are extremely poor. At Yezd, as also at Shiraz, the Jews are occupied with weaving.

SOURCE 7

REGARDING THE PROPER MANNERS OF ASSOCIATION
WITH UNBELIEVERS AND ADVERSARIES

Introduction

The following passage, which is in many respects representative of broadly shared Shi'ite Imami beliefs and attitudes towards Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians much through the early years of the twentieth century, is part of a larger chapter in a classic and popular work by Mulla Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (1037–1110 Q./1627–1698), known as one of the most prolific and influential Shi'ite scholars of Iran ever since the proclamation of the Shi'ite creed as the state religion of Iran in 1501. An authoritative jurist, collector and expounder of early Shi'ite traditions, as well as an unprecedentedly influential and productive author in the world of Twelver (Ar. *Ithna 'Ashari*) Shi'a, Majlisi was also a distinguished expert in bibliography, a well-read man in Islamic philosophy and an active and powerful figure in politics and judicial matters during the late Safavid period. Although Al-Majlisi's work, which embraced and touched upon the main categories and branches of Shi'ite law, theology and ethics, was addressed chiefly to specialized scholars and students of the Shi'ite Imami tradition, he also wrote numerous works and tractates that were designed for the broader circles of Shi'ite readers. While the main body of his scholarly work was written in Arabic, i.e. the common language of Islamic scholarship, his more popular-oriented books and treatises were written in Persian. In this latter category of writings, his goal was to convey to his readers what he perceived as the essential tenets of the Shi'ite creed and world-view. The passage before us, which contains various beliefs and statements ascribed to the founding authorities of the Shi'ite Twelver tradition, is part of one of the more popular works of Al-Majlisi in Persian, entitled *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*, i.e., "The Ornament of the Pious." Consisting of fourteen headings, each of which is divided into twelve chapters, the work discusses in a popular language both the cardinal beliefs of the Shi'ite faith as well as the exact manners in which these

beliefs and precepts ought to be implemented in everyday life. As such, the divisions and chapters of the book explain and prescribe in minute detail the proper manners of acting and behaving in such diverse areas of human life as dressing and appearing in public; eating and drinking; marriage, family life and education of children; health and hygiene; social intercourse; travel; commerce and trade; farming and husbandry; and more. Forming the eleventh chapter of the heading (number 10) entitled “With Regard to the Proper Manners of Associating with People, and the Rights of their Respective Sectors,” the passage reflects the conceived inequality and marginality of Jews and other recognized religious minorities living under Shi’ite sovereignty. Although not directly discussed and expounded in the book, a sharp and clear distinction is drawn in the passage before us between the community of Shi’ite believers on the one hand and the various denominations of protected unbelievers and heretics on the other hand. While the entire book extols the bonds of solidarity and fellowship amongst the believers and urges humane, tolerant and highly egalitarian conduct towards the various segments of the Shi’ite society, it cautions the readers to limit the application of those norms and ideals to the members of the Shi’ite community. For the original text of the translated passage before us, see Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Hilyat al-Muttaqin: Dar Adab va Sunan va Akhlaq-i Islami*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzaq A’lami, Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997, pp. 346–347. Regarding Al-Majlisi and the list of his popular works in Arabic and Persian, see E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4, pp. 416–418. As regards his prominent role in the development and dissemination of the Shi’ite doctrine, see Abdul-Hadi Hairi, s.v. “Madjlisi, Mulla Muhammad Bakir,” in EI, vol. V, pp. 1086–1088. As to his encyclopedic compilation in Arabic of Imamite traditions, known as *Bihar al-Anwar* (i.e., Oceans of Lights), see E. Kohlberg, s.v. “Behar al-Anwar,” in EI, vol. VI, pp. 90–93. For an outline of his life, work and contribution to the Shi’ite intellectual and social history in Iran in the course of the last three centuries, see H. Tarami, *Allama Majlisi*, pp. 11–257. For his detailed view of the desirable legal and general status of Jews and other protected religious minorities within the Shi’ite state and society, see his Persian work entitled “Risala-yi Sawa’iq al-Yahud” (i.e., The Treatise of Lightning Bolts against the Jews), in the collection *Bist-u Panj Risala-yi Farsi az ‘Allama Mawla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi*, ed. S.M. Rija’i, pp. 513–522. For the original text of the latter mentioned treatise, together with an English translation and discussion of the text,

see V.B. Moreen, in *Die Welt des Islams* 32 (1992), pp. 177–195. For a Hebrew version of the same article, see idem, in the collection *Sofrim Muslemim 'al Yehudim ve-Yahadut* (Muslim Authors on Jews and Judaism), ed. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 171–181.

From Hilyat al-Muttaqin

In a sound tradition from Imam (Ja'far al-) Sadiq¹ it is said that it is not right for a believer to enter into partnership with protected unbelievers, and that it is neither right that he shall trust them with some money so that they buy something for him, or that he shall entrust them with something, or make friends with them.

In another sound tradition from His Holiness Imam Musa,² peace be upon him, it is said that a Muslim should not eat from the same bowl with a Zoroastrian, nor should he sit with him on the same carpet or keep him company.

In another sound tradition he said that if you become needy of a Christian physician, there is no fear for you to greet him and pray on his behalf, for your prayer does not provide him with any benefit.

It is said by His Holiness the Apostle,³ peace be upon him: “Do not be the first to greet the People of the Book, and as they greet you by saying ‘peace be with you,’ answer them by (just) saying ‘with you’; and, in response to them, do not take them by the hand, nor address them by their nicknames, unless you are forced into these by necessity.”

¹ Al-Sadiq, meaning “The Trustworthy,” is the epithet of the sixth Shi'ite Imam, Abu 'Abd-Allah, son of Muhammad al-Baqir, who was born in Medina in 80 Q./699–700 (or 83/702–3). Regarded among most Shi'ites as one of the greatest of the Imams, he was a transmitter of Shi'ite traditions (*Hadiths*) as well as a teacher of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Numerous utterances, prayers and homilies defining the Shi'ite Imami doctrine have been ascribed to him. He died in 148/765.

² The seventh Imam of Twelver Shi'ites, Musa, who is known by his epithet as al-Kazim (i.e., ‘he who restrains himself’ or ‘who keeps silent’). Born in (or near) Medina on 7 Safar 128 Q./November 8, 745, he first came to prominence at the death of his father, Ja'far al-Sadiq (see note 1 above) in 148/765. A competent polemist, Imam Musa was renowned for his piety and saintliness. Various miracles and supernatural powers have been attributed to him. He is also venerated on account of numerous supplications and utterances as well as answers to legal queries ascribed to him. He died ca. Rajab 183/August–September 799.

³ I.e., the Prophet Muhammad.

In another tradition it is related that a certain person stated to His Holiness the Imam (Ja'far al-)Sadiq, saying: "I happen to go to the lands of the unbelievers, and people say that if you die there you will be assembled together with them (on the Day of Judgment)." His Holiness uttered: "If you die there, you will be assembled alone, and on the Day of Resurrection your light will be present before you."

In another tradition they asked His Holiness: "In what manner shall we pray on behalf of Jews and Christians?" He uttered: "Recite 'May God bless you in your world,' meaning 'may God give you blessing in your own world.'"

In another tradition he said: "If you shake hands with the Protected People, that is to say with Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, rub your hands against the earth or against a wall, and if you shake hands with the enemies of the House (of Islam), then go and wash your hands." The common view among the scholars, however, is that rubbing one's hands against the earth or against walls is required in cases in which the hand of the Muslim and that of the unbeliever involved are not wet.⁴

In another sound tradition from the Imam Muhammad (al-)Baqir,⁵ peace be upon him, it is said that if someone shakes hands with a Zoroastrian, he should wash his hands.

In another authentic tradition from His Holiness the Apostle,⁶ it is said that whoever sees a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian, should recite the following: "Praise be to God who preferred me over you by bestowing (upon me) the Islam as a faith, the Qur'an as a book, Muhammad as

⁴ That is to say, in case one of the hands involved in a handshake between a Muslim and an unbeliever is wet, the Muslim has to wash his hands in order to remove the ritual impurity that was passed unto him through the wetness of the unbeliever's hand. In case the hands are dry, the Muslim may rid himself of the lighter degree of contamination by the simpler act of rubbing his hands against the earth or against a wall.

⁵ This is the fifth Imam, Muhammad son of Zayn al-'Abidin. Known by the epithet al-Baqir, explained as meaning either 'the one who splits knowledge open (i.e., brings it to light),' or 'the one who possesses great knowledge,' he was born in Medina on 3 Safar or 1 Rajab 57 Q./December 16, 676 or May 10, 677. He became known upon the death of his father in 94/712-3, and his fame as a scholar soon spread beyond the immediate circle of his Shi'ite followers. The systematic public teaching of Imami law is said to have been initiated by him, and he is regarded as the first Shi'ite authority to formulate what were to become the basic theological and legal doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism. There is disagreement as to when he died, the date most commonly given being 117/735.

⁶ I.e., the Prophet Muhammad.

a prophet, ‘Ali as an Imam, the believers as brothers, and the Ka‘bah⁷ as the place unto which we pray.” By virtue of reciting this verse, God will not assemble him in hell with that unbeliever (that he saw).

⁷ Literally meaning “a cube,” *Ka‘bah* is the name of the cube-like structure in the center of the mosque and temple in Mecca. Due to its importance in the early history of Islamic revelation, it is regarded as the holiest site to Muslims of all sects and schools.

SOURCE 8

JEWS IN THE EYES OF THE CITY MOB, AS REFLECTED IN A STREET SONG THAT WAS CHANTED IN TEHRAN TOWARDS THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Introduction

Of Iran's an estimated Jewish population of 15–20 thousand in the mid-nineteenth century, and some 40 thousand towards the end of that century, the overwhelming majority were concentrated in the larger cities and provincial towns in the center, west and south of Iran. According to a detailed list of these larger communities and the number of their respective households, provided by the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1875, about three-quarters of all the Jews of Iran lived in the larger cities and provincial towns of the country, stretching from the cities of Urumia and Salmas in the north-west, to Yazd, Isfahan and Shiraz in the south and south-west regions of Iran. While the specific living conditions and the human environment in each of these scattered communities had their own history and distinct local variants, nevertheless the generally lower status and the limited occupational, social and political strength of the Jews in the majority of these cities and provincial towns had a most negative effect on the overall standing of the Jews in the eyes of their Muslim neighbors. While the available sources of information concerning the nature and extent of interaction between Jews and their Muslim neighbors in each of these individual communities point to the existence of diverse types of socio-economic and personal links and ties between Jews and Muslims in these cities and towns of Iran, nevertheless some common and fundamentally negative stereotypical perceptions of Jews had evolved over the centuries and struck roots among broad segments of the Muslim population. Such negative and harsh stereotypical perceptions of Jews were particularly widespread and consequential among the lower socio-economic strata of the Shi'ite population, in whose midst or vicinity most of the Jewish residents lived and worked. A wide and complex range of historical, social, economic and psychological connections and interrelations between marginalized Jews and the dominant Shi'ite state and society contributed to

a continuous state of tension and friction between the poor (or the impoverished) segments of the Shi'ite urban population and the Jews throughout the nineteenth century. The hard pressed strata of Muslim population in the larger cities and towns of nineteenth-century Iran (including the low wage-earners, the unskilled, the unemployed, the beggars, and particularly the local thugs and ruffians) were known for their bigotry and low esteem of Jews as well as the members of other religious minorities and social groups that were perceived (or depicted) as being deviants. Such negative views and stereotypes of Jews, that derived from diverse socio-religious and cultural sources of influence, were frequently translated into verbal abuse and physical violence toward individual Jews as well as entire communities.

The song before us is representative of a much larger body of documented material reflecting perceptions of Jews shared by the lower socio-economic strata of the Shi'ite population in the main cities and towns of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century. Created and chanted in the street jargon of Tehran in the latter years of the nineteenth century, it consists of five internally rhyming couplets and a refrain. Similar to other songs, sayings and expressions concerning Jews, that were part of the daily speech in various urban settlements of Iran during this period and earlier, it contains several derogatory terms and obscene references to Jews in the local spoken vernacular of Tehran. For the original text of the song and an explanation with regard to the specific social and religious context in which it was chanted by the mob of Tehran during the Muslim holy months of Muharram and Ramazan, see the extensive collection of documented sources on the social life, customs and beliefs in pre-modern Tehran, compiled by the scholar Ja'far Shahri, entitled *Tihran-i Qadim* (The Old Tehran), 5 vols., Tehran 1376 Sh./1997, vol. 3, pp. 377–378. For other relevant passages in the same work, that shed light on the generally low and degraded position and image of the Jews in the eyes of various segments of the Muslim population in the capital city of Tehran in the course of the nineteenth century, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 269 (regarding the coward Jewish wine sellers of Tehran); p. 407 (the Jewish quarter of Tehran being considered as the filthiest neighborhood of the city); vol. 2, p. 433 (Jews being intimidated by the Muslim masses and afraid to display public grief in their funerals); vol. 3, pp. 258–9 (Jews were regarded as being consumed by greed and avarice); p. 379 (Jews were easily recognized due to their shabby and appalling clothes and their

disheveled appearance); vol. 4, pp. 35–36 (the Jewish quarter in the city was considered a convenient target for assault by the mob and the poor); p. 71 (the water running in the bath-house of Jewish women was considered as having demonic and supernatural powers. It was applied to the bodies of infertile Muslim women and unmarried maidens as a cure); pp. 203–204 (Jews were regarded as sorcerers, producers of amulets, etc.).

For similar and fundamentally negative perceptions of Jews by other social groups and layers of the Muslim population in Tehran during the second half of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., ‘A. Mustawfi, *Sharh-i Zindagani-yi Man*, vol. 1, pp. 164–165. For such prevalent perceptions in the mid-nineteenth century, as reflected in the contemporary Persian sources, see, e.g., Z. Shirwani, *Bustan al-Siyaha*, p. 461. For further examples of these negative views, that persisted among various segments of the Muslim population in Iran through the second half of the twentieth century, see M. ‘A. Tajpur, *Tarikh-i Du Aqaliyyat-i Mazhabi: Yahud va Masihiyyat dar Iran*, pp. 47–107. Regarding the existence of such widespread and negative stereotypical perceptions of Iranian Jews, as reflected in the European sources of the first half of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., J. Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia*, pp. 69–70, and J. Morier’s semi-realistic and satirical presentation of social life and popular beliefs in Iran, in his *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, pp. 261–279. For the same views recorded in the second half of the nineteenth century, see S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, pp. 223–224; idem, *Persia: Western Mission*, pp. 224, 238.

The Street Song

The Jew,¹ who is without honor,
Is a nuisance from head to toe,
He is a lie from toe to head,
May scum² cover his father’s grave,
He is an enemy of the religion of Islam,

¹ Originally the term *juhud*, meaning “Jew” and “Jewish,” which had (and still has) pejorative connotations in spoken Persian.

² Originally the spoken form *khala*, meaning “vacuum (in the ground)”, and, by extension, “toilet” and “human refuse.”

Don't call him a Jew, he is an infidel,
His scarf, his gown and his shirt,
His property, his children and his wife,
Don't' say they are bad, for they belong to you,
Take them and do it³ (to them), they are lawful to you.

(refrain):

If the true religion is the religion of Islam,
The rest of the religions are rotten and vile.

³ Originally the imperative *bukun*, i.e. “do!” The verb *kardan* (i.e. “to do” and “doing”) has vulgar sexual meaning in spoken Persian.

SOURCE 9

THE JEWS OF YAZD BEING FORCED TO DISPOSE
OF THE CHARRED BODIES OF THE FOLLOWERS
OF BĀB, MASSACRED IN 1891

Introduction

Despite greater measures of physical security, legal protection and occupational opportunities that were afforded to the Jewish communities of Iran during the last quarter of the nineteenth century (mainly as a combined result of European intervention and growing centralization of the Iranian government and administration), nevertheless, the actual status and social ranking of Iran's Jewish subjects continued to reflect their old and deep-seated disabilities and vulnerabilities within the country's socio-religious order. The force of these general socio-economic disabilities and discriminatory regulations and mechanisms was particularly strong in the older cities and towns of Iran, in which the daily lives and activities of the local population were grounded in well-established and centuries-long social organizations, religious traditions and customary practices. The document before us, which deals primarily with the persecution and massacre of the followers of Bāb (see below) in the city of Yazd in the spring of 1891, indirectly and only tangentially touches on the low rank and comparatively inferior position of the Jews of Yazd as late as the 1890s. The passage produced below is part of a much longer historical and biographical sketch of the Babi movement and of the Baha'i religion, written in Arabic by a certain Mirza Muhammad Jawad of Qazwin. The writer, as is pointed out by himself in the above mentioned sketch, was one of the followers of Baha'ullah (i.e. Mirza Husain-'Ali Nuri, the founder of the Baha'i religion, 1233–1309 Q./1817–1892). He accompanied the latter to his exile in the Ottoman controlled city of 'Akka (in August 1868) and was in direct contact with him and his close circle of followers and associates until Baha'ullah's death on May 28, 1892. The Arabic text of the entire chronicle was translated into English by Prof. E.G. Browne, who published it, together with about ten other documents and papers related to various aspects of the Babi movement and its history

in Iran and abroad. For the original version of the passage before us, see E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, Cambridge 1918, pp. 41–43.

The broad historical setting as well as the specific local background for the acts of persecution and massacre of the Babis in Yazd, depicted in our document, have formed the subjects of various studies and references. The appearance of Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1235–1266 Q./1819–1850) as the proclaimed Báb (i.e. “The Gate” and “God-given Master,” through whom the community of Shi‘ite believers could communicate directly with the Hidden Imam and be guided towards the right path) marked a major event in the history of nineteenth-century Iran. Winning over an increasing number of disciples from the ranks of the Shi‘ite clerical establishment, as well as many followers from the other segments of the Iranian population, the Báb preached, among his other messianic and theological teachings, the need for radical social reforms, especially elimination of corruption among the political and administrative elite, purging of immoral clerics, legal protection of merchants, legalization of money lending, improvement in the status of women, etc. Perceived as a threat to the existing political and religious order, the Báb was seized by the government forces and executed by firing squad in Tabriz on July 8 (or 9) of 1850. However, an attempt by a group of Babi militants to assassinate Nasir al-Din Shah on August 8, 1852, a plot that nearly succeeded, contributed further to the Shah’s fear and intense personal hatred of the followers of Báb. During the next four decades, Nasir al-Din Shah and his state officials, army officers and courtiers on the one hand and the members of the Shi‘ite clerical establishment on the other hand joined forces in a protracted and ruthless suppression of the Babi movement and its major offshoot, headed by Baha’ullah. Cf. A. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 204–217; M. Momen, ed., *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions 1844–1944*, pp. 128–176, 251–256, 301–305; N. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, pp. 48–52; D.M. MacEoin, s.v. “Báb,” in *EIr*, vol. III, pp. 278–284, and J.R.I. Cole, s.v. “Bahā’-Ullāh,” *ibid.*, pp. 422–429.

The general outline of the events and the basic facts related to the arrest, torture and final massacre of the seven followers of Báb in Yazd in May 1891, as given by Mirza Muhammad Jawad of Qazwin in the passage before us, have been documented and corroborated, albeit with some variations in detail and emphasis, by several European and local residents of Yazd, who were in the city during or immediately after the time in which the gruesome events depicted in the passage took

place. As to the identity and the written accounts of these European witnesses (including a British military officer who was visiting in Yazd and a Dutch merchant who resided and conducted business in the city), see M. Momen, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844–1944*, op. cit., pp. 301–305. Similar and complementary versions of the events are provided by other sources (originally in Persian and English), chief among them letters by two different Iranian residents of Yazd, who had witnessed the atrocities in their native city. For the texts of these latter mentioned sources and versions, see E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, op. cit., pp. 295–308.

As to the generally low position of the Jews of Yazd, that is randomly implied in the document before us, the various available sources and studies concerning the Jewish community in this city during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indeed point to the overall marginal and downtrodden condition of the majority of the Jews in the socio-economic and administrative organization of this old mercantile city. Cf. W.J. Fischel, s.v. “Yezd,” in *EJ*, vol. 16, pp. 781–782, and particularly A. Levy, “Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Yazd she-be-Iran ba-Me’ah ha-Yod-Tet” (The Jewish Community of Yazd in Iran in the Nineteenth Century), *Ma’a lot*, year 13, no. 1 (September 1981), pp. 31–40. Of the city’s Jewish community of some two hundred families, or roughly 1200–1400 souls in 1875 (cf. *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 25, April 19, 1875, p. 199), and an estimated two thousand during the last decade of the nineteenth century (cf. G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 240), a small minority were well-to-do merchants. The majority of the Jews in the city, that had a general population of some 70 to 80 thousand people in the 1890s, eked a meager living in a variety of menial occupations, chief among them weaving of cotton, silk, wool and linen, peddling in the nearby villages, and production of wine and spirits, deemed unlawful by Islamic law. The Christian missionary Napier Malcolm, of the Church Missionary Society of Britain, who resided in Yazd for five consecutive years during the 1890s and worked closely with various religious and social groups of Yazd (including the Shi’ite majority, the large concentration of Zoroastrians, and the smaller community of Jews, who lived in two different neighborhoods in the town), summed up his observation with regard to the Jews of Yazd in the following words: “The Jews are in some ways less restricted than the Parsis (i.e. the Zoroastrians), but as they are still wretchedly poor, they are really much more down-trodden.” See his *Five Years in a Persian Town*, p. 44. For further elaboration on the generally weak and inferior

status of the ordinary Jews of Yazd, by consequence of their being considered impure by the Shi'ite population, as well as circumstances of prolonged geographical isolation and lack of effective foreign support and protection on their behalf, see *ibid.*, pp. 45–52, 108.

Multiple historical processes and events that took place inside Iran, and affected as well Iran's relations with the outside world ever since the advent of the Safavid empire in 1501, had led gradually and increasingly to the physical isolation and socio-economic marginalization of the Jewish communities of Iran, particularly ever since the reign of the Safavid Shah 'Abbas II (1642–1666). By the end of the 18th century, and much throughout the 19th century, the vast majority of the Iranian Jews, who similar to the Jews of Yazd lived in small percentages in the midst of a predominantly Shi'ite population in the larger cities and provincial towns of Iran, survived by performing a broad range of menial occupations and social functions that were held in contempt and ordinarily shunned by the Shi'ite population. Thus, as pointed out in our notes and discussions on previous documents, well through the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, some of the hard-pressed Jews of Isfahan were occupied as scavengers and sewer-cleaners; in Shiraz (and many other towns and cities of Iran) Jews were producers and sellers of wine and spirits as well as musicians, dancers and entertainers. In the capital city of Tehran, where the general condition of the Jews was relatively better and more protected than in other parts of Iran, they were buyers and sellers of worn-out clothes; some were moneylenders to the poorer strata of the Muslim population, and others were happy to obtain work at cleaning the city sewers or carding wool for rugs, etc. Cf. N. Robinson, *Persia and Afghanistan and their Jewish Communities*, pp. 19–21, and J.G. Wishard, *Twenty Years in Persia*, pp. 171–176, 198–208. Finally, as evidence of the generally poor and downtrodden condition of the majority of the Jewish subjects of Iran, still during the third and fourth quarters of the nineteenth century, we may cite the observation made by Dr. C.J. Wills, physician in the service of the British Telegraph Department, who lived and worked in Iran during the years 1866–1881. In his words: "As to the Jews, their position is terrible. Probably in no country in the world are they treated worse than in Persia. Beaten, despised, and oppressed, cursed even by slaves and children, they yet manage to exist, earning their living as musicians, dancers, singers, jewelers, silver- and gold-smiths, midwives, makers and sellers of wine and spirits. When

anything very filthy is to be done a Jew is sent for." See C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, p. 74.

From Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion

And latterly, in A.H. 1308 (A.D. 1891)¹ took place the persecution at Yazd, which was as follows. Eight of the Companions assembled in the house of one of the believers named Aqa Abdu'r-Rahim, where they occupied themselves with reading verses. But one who hated them, being aware of their meeting, went to the Governor Prince Jalalu'd-Din Mirza,² son of the Zillu's-Sultan,³ and informed him of their assembly. Thereupon the Governor ordered an officer to go to them, with as many private soldiers as might be necessary, and arrest them. And when they perceived what was happening, the master of the house and one of the eight visitors hid themselves, but the other seven were arrested and brought to the Government House and there imprisoned. After some days Prince Jalalu'd-Dawla summoned to his presence Shaykh Hasan the *Mujtahid*⁴ of Sabzwar and others of the Shi'ite doctors, and also the seven Baha'is⁵ mentioned above, and questioned the latter about their faith and creed in the presence of the two theologians mentioned above. They admitted that they belonged to this persuasion, whereupon Shaykh Hasan the *Mujtahid* and the other doctors pronounced them infidels and sentenced them to death. They were taken back to the

¹ I.e., on May 18, 1891.

² This is Sultan Husain Mirza, known as Jalal-Dawla, the eldest son of Mas'ud Mirza Zil al-Sultan, Nasir al-Din Shah's eldest surviving son (see note 3 below). Born ca. 1869, he was appointed in 1881 (aged only about twelve) as Deputy Governor of the province of Fars. In 1890, when Zil al-Sultan was made Governor of Yazd, he sent Jalal al-Dawla as his deputy. In 1894 he was appointed as Governor of Burujird, and made again Governor of Yazd in 1903. He was exiled to Europe in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution in 1908. Regarding him, see W. Sparroy, *Persian Children of the Royal Family*, pp. 146–157; M. Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844–1944*, pp. 523–524, and *ʿIṭimād al-Saltāna, Al-Ma'athir wa'l-Athar*, ed. I. Afshar, vol. 1, pp. 35–36.

³ Sultan Mas'ud Mirza, known by his honorary title as Zil al-Sultan (Shadow of the Emperor), 1850–1918, the eldest surviving son of Nasir al-Din Shah. In 1874 he became Governor of Isfahan and continued in this post for 32 years. Regarding him and his powerful position under Nasir al-Din Shah's reign, see below, source no. 29, entitled "The Jewish community of Isfahan in the year 1888," note 10.

⁴ I.e., doctor of theology and jurisprudence considered able to reach and deliver authoritative decisions on points of Islamic law, acting on his own judgment.

⁵ I.e., followers of Baha'ullah. See in the introduction above.

prison, and after some days the Governor sent for them, and turning to one of them called Aqa ‘Ali Asghar, the son of Mirza Abu’l-Qasim, ordered him to revile and curse his Master,⁶ or else suffer death. “O Governor,” replied the man, “thou hast no power over my [spiritual] essence, but my [bodily] frame is thine: do with it what thou wilt.” Thereat the Governor was angered, and ordered Aqa ‘Ali Asghar to be strangled in his presence, and he was strangled accordingly. Then he ordered the rest of them to be slain, each one in one of the quarters of the city. So they took them forth with soldiers and drums, and beheaded one of them named Mulla Mahdi near the telegraph office. Then they beheaded Aqa ‘Ali the son of Aqa Muhammad Baqir. And when they approached the house of Shaykh Hasan the *Mujtahid* they beheaded Mulla ‘Ali. They also slew Aqa Muhammad Baqir near the Mihariz Gate; and afterwards they brought the two brothers Aqa ‘Ali Asghar and Aqa Muhammad Hasan to the *Maydanu’l-Khan* (Square of the Inn). The executioner advanced to cut off the head of the elder brother Aqa ‘Ali Asghar. The younger brother Aqa Muhammad Hasan pressed forward, saying “Cut off my head first!” But the headsman did not accede to his request, but beheaded the elder brother. The Khan⁷ who was superintending the executions exclaimed, “How strong is the heart of this lad, and how great is his boldness!” Then he ordered the executioner first to open his body and plucked out his heart and his liver, and afterwards they bore him to the *Maydan* and cut off his head. He was only twenty-one years of age, and was newly wedded. After the martyrdom of these seven the roughs stoned their bodies and burned them with naphta, after which they compelled the Jews to carry these slashed and charred bodies away and throw them into a pit in the plain called Salsabil. Afterwards the Governor Jalal’ud-Dawla ordered the city to be illuminated with lights, and the people began to display their joy and delight. Shortly after this event one of the Companions named Ustad Jawad the cotton-carder was missed, and they found his body outside the city. Prince Jalalu’d-Dawla also took one of them named Hajji Mulla Ibrahim outside the city, where he and his satellites hewed him in pieces by the light of the moon.

⁶ I.e., the Bab. Cf. E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, op. cit., p. 301.

⁷ A commonly used honorific title, which originally meant “prince, nobleman, lord,” etc. In the nineteenth century it was a title given to military officers.

SECTION II
DEMOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFUSION

SOURCE 10

THE JEWISH POPULATION OF IRAN IN THE YEAR 1868, ACCORDING TO A REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE BRITISH LEGATION IN TEHRAN ON APRIL 28, 1868

Introduction

The task of determining or even cautiously estimating the size of the Jewish population of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century confronts the researcher with major objective difficulties. The obstacles and difficulties involved result both from a lack of appropriate sources as well as insufficient research and studies in the field. As far as the first half of the nineteenth century is concerned, our sources of information consist primarily of partial accounts and estimates provided mostly by Jewish travelers, Christian missionaries and some European visitors and officials (mainly British), who had visited some, but not all of the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran. The latter travelers and officials have provided us with information with regard to the number of Jewish individuals (or the number of Jewish families and houses) they found in the localities they visited.

Similar to other areas and subjects of research concerning the internal lives and communal organization of the Iranian Jews during the entire length of the nineteenth century, we do not possess any communal registers or records that might provide us with figures and data concerning the Jews living in the various communities and settlements across Iran's vast territories. Due to the absence of such communal records, and given the lack or inaccessibility of state archives and registers relevant to the Jews (including the fact that throughout the nineteenth century no complete population census was conducted by Iran's central government), the researcher is compelled to rely mainly on the accounts and testimonies of foreign sources. As it was already pointed out in the notes and explanations accompanying some of the previous sources and documents in this book, the foreign and particularly Jewish-European sources relevant to the Jewish communities of Iran grew considerably and progressively during the second half of the nineteenth century. This important body of foreign and European sources increased particularly

as of the 1860s, chiefly as a result of growing contacts and relations between the Jewish communities of Iran and the Jewish communal and philanthropic organizations of Western Europe (notably in Britain and France) and the Ottoman Empire (particularly those in Palestine and Baghdad). However, despite their considerable importance for the study of Iran's Jewish population and society during the second half of the nineteenth century, these latter mentioned Jewish-European sources provide us with little consistent and chronologically connected data. The gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions found in these sources relate both to the size of the various communities as well as the total number of Iran's Jewish subjects during the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as a result of the lack of firsthand and reliable Judeo-Persian and Iranian records, and due to the partial nature and inconsistencies of the foreign sources referred to above, we do not possess sufficient information to determine with any degree of certainty the exact size of Iran's Jewish population at any given point during the entire course of the nineteenth century. The latter conclusion applies even to the more limited task of determining the number of Jews who lived at any given time in the larger urban communities (such as those in Hamadan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Kashan and others), about whom, relatively speaking, we have more information than those in the medium-sized and smaller communities that were scattered across the country. Thus, considering the limitations of the information at our disposal on the one hand and the state of research on the subject on the other, it would be safe to say that the task of presenting even an approximate picture of Iran's Jewish population and the changes and fluctuations that affected its size and constitution in the course of the nineteenth century requires a considerable degree of caution. Such a task equally awaits further collection of reliable data from Jewish-Iranian, Persian and foreign sources as well as methodical and specialized examination of the material by experts in the field of demography.

As regards the selection before us, it is an excerpt concerning the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran and the estimated number of their respective populations in the 1860s. The list of the latter settlements and the various figures and observations pertaining to specific Jewish communities as well as the overall condition of Iranian Jewry during this period were part of a much larger report, consisting of some fifty handwritten folio pages, on the population, revenue, military force and trade of Persia, prepared by the British official Ronald Thomson, and submitted on April 20, 1868, to Charles Alison, the British Minister

Plenipotentiary in Tehran. The selection presented here forms part of a section in the report that treats the demographic make-up of the main religious minorities of Iran during the 1860s and the amount of taxes that each of them paid to the treasury of the Qajar state. As a preliminary remark to this section, that provides tables and detailed demographic and related data on Iran's religious minorities, R. Thomson, who at the time had lived and worked in Iran over twenty years, pointed out that "nearly all the revenue of Persia is contributed by the Mahomedan subjects of the Shah—the whole amount collected from the Christian population, Jews and Guebres (i.e. Zoroastrians) is very trifling." Furthermore, as far as the estimated number of Christians of various denominations, Jews and Zoroastrians during this period is concerned, the report informs us that the Christians, consisting of Armenians and Nestorians, constituted Iran's largest religious minority. The Armenians, estimated at some 4660 families, numbered about 26,000 souls. The Nestorians (mainly Roman Catholics and Protestants concentrated in Urumia and Salmas in Western Azerbaijan) numbered about 25,000 souls. The Jews, forming Iran's second largest religious minority, were, according to the report, scattered in about 35 cities, towns and provincial settlements in the various regions of Iran, and mainly in the northwest, center and southwest of the country, and they numbered about 16,000 souls. Finally, as regards the Zoroastrians, i.e., Iran's third largest religious minority at the time, we find the following observation in our report: "The Guebres, or Parsees, in Persia number 1200 families, or 7193 persons; they reside in Yezd and Kerman, where they are well treated by the inhabitants and authorities."

As to the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by R. Thomson with regard to the size of Iran's numerous Jewish communities and settlements, unfortunately we do not know what were the exact records and sources of information that were utilized by him in preparing his report. Nor do we know what were the methods of measurement and assessment that served him in his survey. Although in the introduction to the report he states that the entire material was based on "the best information that I have been able to collect on journeys performed in nearly every province of Persia," nevertheless, in light of various contemporary sources available to us now, it appears that Thomson's list of the Jewish communities was not complete. We know from several reports and accounts published by the Jewish organizations and publications of Europe, as well as from references and testimonies provided by Christian missionaries and Jewish travelers and emissaries

who visited Iran in the early 1870s, that in addition to the Jewish communities listed in Thomson's report (see in the selection before us) Jews lived in at least two dozen other known towns and provincial settlements in various regions of Iran. Thus, for example, according to the fourth annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, for the year 1874–5, that was prepared shortly after the Great Famine of 1871–2, during this time Jewish communities and settlements existed also in other towns and provinces. These latter communities, not mentioned in Thomson's report, include the towns of Naghada, Bukān, Suldūz and Sāwujbulāgh (all in Western Azerbaijan); Senijān (in the province of Sultānābād, or present-day Arāk); Qazvin (northwest of Tehran) and Kangāvar (in Kurdistan). In addition to the latter mentioned communities, about a dozen of smaller Jewish settlements, averaging between 20 to 50 families each, reportedly existed in the province of Fars (roughly between the city of Shiraz in the center of the province to the southern port city of Bushihr on the Persian Gulf). These settlements, most of which lived in extreme geographical isolation in the poor and thinly populated rural areas of the south, included, among others, the communities of Dayyer, Kūh-Zarg, Kangān, Zir-Rāh, Jā'inak, Drūd-Gāh, Chāh-Kūtāh, and others. Regarding the latter mentioned settlements of Western Azerbaijan and Fars, and the estimated number of Jewish families that lived in each of them in the early 1870s, see AJA, 4 (1874–1875), p. 93, reproduced below in our book as source no. 11. Moreover, in addition to these Jewish communities and settlements, that were not known to R. Thomson and thus were not included in his report, there exist numerous reliable testimonies by foreign travelers and Christian missionaries pointing to the fact that Jews in small numbers, at times a handful of individuals and as few as one or two families, lived in the various rural and provincial settlements of Iran. Regarding the existence of such small numbers of Jewish families and individuals in the various settlements of Iranian Kurdistan and central Iran (from Hamadan to Isfahan) during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., in the published accounts and reports of the Christian missionaries of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, namely LSPCJ, 75 (1883), pp. 108–109; *ibid.*, 88 (1895–6), pp. 122–126; and JMI, February 1894, p. 18; and, *ibid.*, January 1900, p. 13.

Taking into account the Jewish communities, settlements and scattered families and individuals that were not accounted for in Thomson's

report, it would be safe to conclude that the Jewish population of Iran during the 1860s–1870s was to some extent (but not considerably) larger than Thomson's estimate of 16,030 souls. A similar, though slightly higher, estimate of 3650 families (approximately 18,000 to 22,000) is given also by the Anglo-Jewish Association's 4th annual report (1874–5), p. 93. Finally, given the absence of any systematic census concerning the total Jewish population of Iran during the nineteenth century, and in order to illustrate the conflicting nature of the various reports and estimates concerning the volume of that population during the 1870s, we may refer here to the report of Isaac Luria, the headmaster of the Alliance Israélite school in Baghdad. In the latter's report, that was dispatched from Baghdad to Paris on January 4, 1873, we are told that on the basis of information that the report's author had obtained from the heads of the Jewish communities of Iran, he estimated that the Iranian Jews during this time (i.e. the end of 1872) numbered about forty thousand souls. Of that total, so we learn from the report, some 16,200 (roughly about forty percent of Iran's estimated Jewish population) were concentrated in eight of Iran's larger cities, namely, in Hamadan (3,000 souls), Tehran (3,000), Shiraz (3,000), Isfahan (2,400), Kashan (1,500), Yazd (1,500), Urumia (1,200) and Kermanshah (600). For the text of the latter report, see *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 16 (April 23, 1873), p. 142.

For the original text of R. Thomson's report, dated April 20, 1868, see FO 248/244. For the published text of the excerpt before us, see C. Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914*, pp. 31–33. As regards the author of the report, his close familiarity with Iranian society and culture and his uninterrupted professional and diplomatic work in Iran over a period of three decades (1848–1887), see D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, pp. 25, 28–9 and 38. For a discussion of the research-related difficulties involved in determining the volume of the Jewish population in Iran in the nineteenth century, and for partial figures provided mostly by Jewish travelers and Jewish European sources during the years 1827–1904, see A. Netzer, "The Size of the Jewish Population of Iran in the 19th Century" (in Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. II, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 127–133. As to the absence of any comprehensive national census in Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, see F. Tawfiq, s.v. "Census, in Persia," *EIr*, vol. V, pp. 142–143.

The Report

There are almost 16,000 Jews residing in different parts of Persia. They are mostly very poor and excepting in Tehran and some of the principal cities are most persecuted and oppressed by the Mahommedans. The towns and districts where they are permitted to reside are the following:

DISTRICTS	NO. OF PERSONS	TAXES, AS FAR AS THEY ARE KNOWN	REMARKS
		Tomans	
Tehran.....	1,500	150	Taxes extremely light. The Jews are not molested here; but they are not allowed to open shops in the bazaars. Double the amount is exacted
Hamadan....	2,000	600	
Kermanshah..	250	30	
Kerrind ¹	80	Much more is exacted, but they are miserably poor
Toosirkan ² ...	150	....
Nehavand ³ ...	200	....
Booroojird ⁴ ..	200	....
Khorumabad ⁵	250	....
Gulpaigan ⁶ ...	500	50	
Khonsar ⁷	200	40	
Shehrinow ⁸ ...	250	....
Cashan.....	750	
Ispahan.....	1,500	150	

(continued on next page)

¹ Present-day Kerend, situated in the province of Kurdistan, district of Shāh-ābād, about 80 kilometers to the east of Qasr-e Shīrīn.

² The city of Tūyserkān, in the present-day province of Hamadan, located south of the city of Hamadan.

³ Nahāvand, also in the province of Hamadan, about 130 kilometers to the east of Kermanshah.

⁴ The town of Burūjerd, in the province of Luristan, is located about 110 kilometers to the northeast of Khurramābād, the center of the province.

⁵ Khurramābād, the provincial center of Luristan.

⁶ The town of Gulpāygān, in the present-day province of Isfahan, about 105 kilometers to the south of Arāk.

⁷ Khūnsār (spelled Khwānsār), this town is also located in the present-day province of Isfahan, about 30 kilometers to the south of Gulpāygān.

⁸ I failed to identify this settlement.

Table (*cont.*)

DISTRICTS	NO. OF PERSONS	TAXES, AS FAR AS THEY ARE KNOWN	REMARKS
Yezd.....	1,000	500	
Sheeraz....	1,500	1,200	Said to be much oppressed
Kazeroon ⁹ ...	100	50	
Bushire ¹⁰	350	....
Oroomiah ¹¹ ...	1,000	600	Much more has been exactd for many years, but last summer their condition was improved
Selmas ¹²	400	....
Miandoab ¹³ ...	250	60	
Gerrooss ¹⁴ ...	300	....
Sekkez and Baneh ¹⁵	450	....
Gilan ¹⁶	150	....
Barferoosh ¹⁷ ..	350	....
Demavend ¹⁸ ..	150	....
Borazjoon ¹⁹ ..	100	....
Zerghoon ²⁰ ...	150	25	

(continued on next page)

⁹ The provincial town of Kāzerūn, in the province of Fars, is situated about 120 kilometers to the southeast of the city of Shiraz.

¹⁰ The port city of Būshehr is located on the northwestern coast of the Persian Gulf.

¹¹ The city of Urūmiyyah (spelled in a variety of forms) is situated in Western Azerbaijan and is on the western shore of a lake known by the same name.

¹² The provincial town of Salmās, also in Western Azerbaijan, is situated about 45 kilometers to the northwest of the city of Urūmiyyah.

¹³ The provincial town of Miāndūāb, situated in the district of Marāghch in Western Azerbaijan, is about 55 kilometers to the southwest of the city of Marāghch.

¹⁴ The district of Garrūs, in Iranian Kurdistan, is situated to the east of Sanandaj. In the 19th century the center of the district assumed the name Bījār.

¹⁵ Saqqez (spelled also as Sakkis), was and still is the name of the main northwestern district of Iranian Kurdistan. The central town of the district was also known by the same name. The provincial town of Bāneh, situated also in the latter district, is about 65 kilometers to the south of the town of Saqqez.

¹⁶ The province of Gilān lies along the southwestern shore of the Caspian Sea.

¹⁷ Bārfurūsh (the present-day city of Bābul) was the main commercial town of the Caspian province of Māzandarān.

¹⁸ The small town of Damāvand is situated about 75 kilometers to the east of Tehran.

¹⁹ The small provincial town of Borāzjān, in the province of Fars, is about 65 kilometers northeast of Bushihr.

²⁰ The small town of Zarqān, in the province of Fars, is about 35 kilometers north-east of the city of Shiraz.

Table (*cont.*)

DISTRICTS	NO. OF PERSONS	TAXES, AS FAR AS THEY ARE KNOWN	REMARKS
Jehroom ²¹	300	50	
Laur ²²	300	50	
Feeroozabad ²³ ..	300	30	
Darab ²⁴	100	25	
Koordistan ²⁵ ..	600	....
Gellehdar ²⁶ ...	150	....
Novendegan ²⁷	100	....
Total	16,030	....

In all the provincial districts, the Jews are more or less persecuted, and in places where the taxes are light it is owing more to their extreme poverty than to the forbearance of the authorities—as a general rule all over Persia, as much is taken from the Jews as can possibly be extorted from them. In Meshed, 25 years ago, the Jews were all forcibly converted to Islamism and many were massacred in the struggle which then took place, and in Barferoosh in 1866, a number of Jews were cruelly massacred and an attempt, which was nearly successful, was made to force them to become Mahommedans. In places where they are not protected by the presence of European officials, they are liable at any time to be subjected to similar acts of violence and outrage.

²¹ Jahrum, the main settlement of the rural district by the same name in Fars, is located about 200 kilometers south of the city of Shiraz.

²² Lār, the main town of the rural district known also by the same name in Fars, located east of Bushihr and about 360 kilometers south of the city of Shiraz.

²³ Fīrūzābād, the center of a rural district, known by the same name in Fars, is located about 115 kilometers to the south of the city of Shiraz.

²⁴ Dārāb, a provincial town in the district of Fasā, in Fars, is located about 110 kilometers to the east of the city of Fasā.

²⁵ This appears to be a general reference to the province of Iranian Kurdistan and its main city, i.e. Sench (or Sanandaj).

²⁶ Galehdār, a small rural settlement in the district of Bushihr, in Fars, located about 65 kilometers to the east of the town of Kangān.

²⁷ Nowbandegān, a small provincial town in the district of Fasā, in Fars, located 18 kilometers east of the town of Fasā.

SOURCE 11

THE DEMOGRAPHIC SIZE OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITIES AND SETTLEMENTS OF IRAN
FOLLOWING THE GREAT FAMINE OF 1871–2,
AS REPORTED BY THE ANGLO-JEWISH
ASSOCIATION IN 1875

Introduction

For the original version of the report before us, see the *Fourth Annual Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, in Connection with the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1874–1875*, London 1875, p. 93. The same identical report was published again in the sixth annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association (= AJA), 1876–1877, p. 93. In the original report, the size of the Jewish population in each community and district was given according to the number of families (and not individuals) that reportedly lived there in the years 1874–1875. The approximate number of Jews in each of the settlements was calculated and added by me in the three tables before us on the basis of six persons per family. Also, in the original report, the communities are listed without any apparent order and with no classification and explanations. The division of the communities into three separate groups of large, medium and small-sized settlements, and the arrangement in each of those three groups according to the declining order of their numerical size, are designed to provide us with some basic notions and distinctions concerning the demographic composition and the geographical distribution of Iranian Jewry during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The total number of the Jewish families listed in the report amount to 3,750 families, or roughly between 18,000 to 23,000 souls. Of that estimated total, some 2,450 families (approximately between 12,250 to 15,000 individuals) belonged to the larger communities of 100 to 500 families each, concentrated in ten of Iran's larger cities and towns. 490 families (approximately between 2,500 to 3,000 individuals) resided in communities of 50 to 80 families each in small provincial towns. The remainder, comprising some 810 families (roughly between 4,000 to 5,000 individuals) lived in

small provincial towns and rural settlements of 10 to 40 families each. As to the main regions and provinces in which the vast majority of the Jews lived, much like the information provided by Ronald Thomson (see previous selection), this report informs us that during the second half of the nineteenth century the Jews of Iran lived mostly in the regions stretching from Iran’s northwest (i.e., Western Azerbaijan and Kurdistan), through the center of the country (from Hamadan to Isfahan and their neighboring provinces), to the south and southwest (from Shiraz and its environs in the province of Fars to the southwestern district of Bushihr bordering on the Persian Gulf). Thus, due to various historical causes and more recent events and incidents that occurred in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, most of Iran’s provinces and districts in the north, northeast, east and southeast were devoid of substantial Jewish population and organized communities.

A. The larger urban communities with 100–500 families each

COMMUNITY	NO. OF FAMILIES	APPROXIMATE NO. OF PERSONS
Hamadan	450	2,700
Isfahan	400	2,400
Shiraz	300	1,800
Tehran	300	1,800
Kurdistan ¹	250	1,500
Urūmia	200	1,200
Kashan	150	900
Yazd	100	600
Gulpāygān	100	600
Salmās	100	600
Subtotal	2,450	14,700

¹ By “Kurdistan” the report seems to have combined the two relatively larger communities of Sench (or Sanandaj) and Kermanshah.

B. Medium-sized communities and settlements with
50–80 families each

COMMUNITY	NO. OF FAMILIES	APPROXIMATE NO. OF PERSONS	LOCATED IN
Sawujbulāgh ²	80	480	Western Azerbaijan
Būshahr	70	420	Persian Gulf
Jahrum	60	360	The province of Fars
Lār	60	360	The province of Fars
Garrūs ³	60	360	The province of Kurdistan
Sakkiz (= Saqqez)	60	360	The province of Kurdistan
Īrūzābād	50	300	The province of Fars
Senjān ⁴	50	300	The district of Sultanābad (present day Arāk)
Subtotal	490	2,940	

C. Settlements and towns with 40 families and less

COMMUNITY	NO. OF FAMILIES	APPROXIMATE NO. OF PERSONS	LOCATED IN
Qazvīn ⁵	40	240	Northwest of Tehran
Naqadah ⁶	40	240	Western Azerbaijan
Burūjerd	40	240	The province of Luristan
Kūh-Zarg ⁷	40	240	The province of Fars

(continued on next page)

² The town of Sawujbulāgh (presently known as Mahābād) was the main town of a district called by the same name. It is located about 130 kilometers to the south of Lake Urumia.

³ Regarding this district see the previous table, note 14.

⁴ Spelled “Senjan” in the report. This rural settlement is located in the present-day province of Arak (formerly Sultanabad), and is 8 kilometers away from the district of Arak.

⁵ Spelled “Kashbin.”

⁶ Spelled “Naghtan.” Located south of Lake Urumia.

⁷ Spelled “Couzar.” Located 59 kilometers south of the city of Shiraz.

Table (*cont.*)

COMMUNITY	NO. OF FAMILIES	APPROXIMATE NO. OF PERSONS	LOCATED IN
Nahāvand	30	180	The province of Hamadan
Khurramābād	30	180	The province of Luristan
Gīlān	30	180	Southwest of the Caspian Sea
Māzandarān	30	180	Southeast of the Caspian Sea
Tūyserkān	30	180	The province of Hamadan
Bāneh	30	180	The province of Kurdistan
Damāvand	30	180	East of Tehran
Zīr-Rāh ⁸	30	180	The province of Fars
Galehdār ⁹	30	180	The province of Fars
Ferghana ¹⁰	30	180	Not identified
Ziendjioub ¹¹	30	180	Not identified
Chāh-Kūtāh ¹²	25	150	The province of Fars
Dayyer ¹³	25	150	The province of Fars
Dārāb	25	150	The province of Fars
Burāzjān	20	120	The province of Fars
Nawbandegān ¹⁴	20	120	The province of Fars
Drūd-Gāh ¹⁵	20	120	The province of Fars
Kangān ¹⁶	20	120	The province of Fars
Jā'inak ¹⁷	20	120	The province of Fars

*(continued on next page)*⁸ Spelled "Ziré." Located 21 kilometers to the north of Burāzjān.⁹ Spelled "Ghelidar." Regarding this settlement see the previous table, note 26.¹⁰ Name of a province in northern Afghanistan.¹¹ Not identified as spelled in the report.¹² Spelled "Djakouta." Located in the district of Bushihr, this rural settlement is 38 kilometers south of Burāzjān.¹³ Spelled "Déar." Also located in the district of Bushihr, this small rural settlement lies on the road between the port city of Bushihr and the town of Kangān.¹⁴ Spelled "Novendghan." Regarding this settlement, see the previous table, note 27.¹⁵ Spelled "Deroukhah." Located in the district of Bushihr, this small rural settlement is 12 kilometers to the east of Burāzjān.¹⁶ Spelled "Kingawan." Located in the district of Bushihr, this rural settlement is about 235 kilometers southeast of the city of Bushihr.¹⁷ Spelled "Djein." Located in the district of Bushihr, this village is about 30 kilometers southwest of the town of Ahram.

Table (*cont.*)

COMMUNITY	NO. OF FAMILIES	APPROXIMATE NO. OF PERSONS	LOCATED IN
Afzar ¹⁸	20	120	?
Zohāb ¹⁹	20	120	The province of Kurdistan
Kerend ²⁰	20	120	The province of Kurdistan
Miānduāb ²¹	20	120	Western Azerbaijan
Kerman	20	120	Southeast of Yazd
Zirtaré ²²	15	90	Not identified
Suldūz ²³	10	60	Western Azerbaijan
Jiyān ²⁴	10	60	?
Hasan-Ali ²⁵	10	60	Not identified
Subtotal	810	4,860	

Total Number of Families Reported: 3,730

Total Number of Individuals: 22,380 (on the basis of six persons per family), or 18,650 (on the basis of five persons per family).

¹⁸ Spelled "Fázar." This is perhaps Afzar, located to the south of the town of Fīrūzābād. On the latter town, see the previous table, note 23.

¹⁹ Spelled "Zehab." This settlement is located in the precinct of Qasr-e Shirin in Kurdistan, close to the Iraqi border.

²⁰ Regarding this settlement see the previous table, note 1.

²¹ Spelled "Mia-yandau." Regarding this town see the previous table, note 13.

²² Not identified as spelled in the report.

²³ Located southeast of the city of Urumia.

²⁴ Spelled "Djehané," this is perhaps the settlement of Jiyān, in the district of Ardakān, in Fars.

²⁵ This is the name of a large number of rural and provincial settlements across Iran. It is not clear to which specific location the report is referring here.

ESTIMATES AND FIGURES ON THE JEWISH
POPULATION OF IRAN DURING THE YEARS 1889–1903,
ACCORDING TO EUROPEAN SOURCES

Introduction

As it was already pointed out in the notes to the last two sources dealing with the size of Iran's Jewish population in the course of the nineteenth century, the absence of complete and reliable statistics prevents us from arriving at any conclusive figures. Due to lack of any comprehensive census and documentation concerning both the identity and the demographic size of the numerous Jewish communities and settlements that were scattered in Iran's various regions, at this stage of research we have to rely mostly on estimates and partial figures found in diverse and oftentimes conflicting sources. Among the main sources of information containing demographic and related communal references to Iran's Jewish settlements and concentrations during the second half of the nineteenth century are a large body of reports, articles and accounts on Iranian Jewry published outside Iran. More informative and important among the latter sources, that were published during the 1860s–1910s, were those issued by the publications affiliated with Jewish communal and cultural organizations in Europe (particularly those of France, Britain and Prussia) and in the Ottoman Empire (notably those in Baghdad and Palestine). As far as the demographic size and the geographical dispersion of Iranian Jews during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century are concerned, the common view emerging from these Jewish European and Eastern published sources was that the Iranian Jews during this period numbered approximately forty thousand souls, and that a substantial portion of them lived in the larger cities and provincial towns of Iran's northwest, west, center and south. The latter demographic picture, that was based mostly on information and figures transmitted by the heads of the Jewish communities of Iran to communal officials and organizations in Baghdad and Western Europe, was in turn reflected in the non-Jewish press and publications of Western Europe.

Indeed, the general estimate according to which the Jewish population of Iran consisted of some forty thousand souls during the last quarter of the nineteenth century found its way to a large number of Jewish and non-Jewish publications both in the West and the East during the years 1875–1900. Thus, as early as 1873, we find the following assessment in the Jewish press and publications of Western Europe and North America: “The number of the Jewish inhabitants in the whole of Persia amounts to a little more than 40,000 souls. They are chiefly found in Tehran, Hamadan, Shiraz, Ispahan, Yezd, Ourmia, etc.” See *The Jewish Times*, New York, vol. V, No. 8 (April 18, 1873), p. 115. The latter information, so it appears, was based on a detailed report on the Jews of Iran, prepared by Isaac Luria, the headmaster of the Alliance Israélite school in Baghdad, and published in Hebrew and in a number of European languages in Europe and North America. For the Hebrew text of this report, see *Hamagid*, year 7, No. 16 (April 23, 1873), pp. 142–143. For the English version of the same, see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 233 (September 12, 1873), p. 394. The latter demographic estimate provided by I. Luria in 1873 (i.e., approximately 40,000 Jews) continued to be repeated in the Jewish publications of Europe and the Ottoman Empire during the 1880s as well. See, e.g., *Habazeleth*, published in Jerusalem, year 12, No. 2 (November 20, 1881), pp. 13–14, and, *ibid.*, year 18, No. 11 (December 30, 1887), pp. 85–86. Moreover, the same assessment was provided also by non-Jewish European professionals, officials and missionaries, who lived and worked in Iran during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The missionaries of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who continued their evangelical activity among the various Jewish communities of Iran during the 1890s, also put the number of Iran’s Jews at approximately forty thousand. See, e.g., LSPCJ, 81 (1889), p. 114, and, *ibid.*, 86 (1893–4), pp. 127–129. Similar, though less equivocal, estimates putting the number of the Iranian Jews at some 25 to 65 thousand souls in the 1890s, are also found in the accounts of European officials and North American missionaries who lived and worked in Iran during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Thus, for example, Lord G.N. Curzon, who among many other matters also provided data on Iran’s general population, noted in 1892: “Five years ago the number of Jews in Persia was conjecturally returned as 19,000; but I incline to the opinion that this total is below the mark. I have, indeed, been supplied with a table in which their total census is fixed at 65,000, but this appears to be a gross exaggeration.” See his *Persia*

and the Persian Question, vol. 1, p. 510. Similarly, while discussing the condition of Iran's religious minorities during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Dr. John G. Wishard, the director of the American Presbyterian Hospital at Tehran during the 1890s, observed: "There are supposed to be twenty-five thousand Jews in all Persia." See his *Twenty Years in Persia*, p. 171.

Given the lack of primary sources and reliable statistics required for assessing and measuring the size and constitution of Iran's Jewish population during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we are compelled to make use of various figures and estimates provided by European organizations and their affiliated individuals that were in direct contact with Iran's Jewish communities during the years under discussion. Particularly important among the latter mentioned European bodies and agencies were those of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (based in Paris), the Anglo-Jewish Association (in London), and the London-based Christian missionary establishment known as the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. The tables before us, consisting of estimates and figures that were published primarily by the three latter organizations, shed light both on the geographical location as well as the demographic size and strength of Iran's large, medium and small-sized Jewish communities and settlements during the years 1889–1903. Much like the two preceding sources containing the list of Iran's Jewish communities and their respective populations during the years 1868 and 1874 (see sources no. 11 and 10 above), the tables before us are far from exhausting the complete list of Iran's Jewish settlements and communities in the end of the nineteenth century. From numerous Jewish and non-Jewish published sources we know of the existence of scores of additional Jewish settlements and concentrations that were scattered mainly in the regions stretching from Iran's north and northwest to the south and southwest. According to all evidence, small-sized Jewish provincial and rural settlements existed during this period and throughout the nineteenth century in the Caspian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran as well as in the provinces of Astarabad (present-day Gorgan) and Khurasan in the northeast. Moreover, according to reports and accounts of Jewish travelers and Jewish-European officials (chief among them directors and emissaries of the Alliance network in the early years of the twentieth century), Jewish settlements consisting of five to twenty families were found in numerous villages in Iranian Kurdistan. Evidence concerning the existence of small numbers of Jewish families (also between 5 to 20) living in

remote rural and provincial settlements in the southwestern districts of Iran during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is found in various reports published by Jewish organizations of Europe. Unfortunately, however, we do not possess much specific information with regard to the names, exact locations and demographic sizes of these very small-sized Jewish communities. Nor do we know much about the human and environmental factors that affected their size and modes of existence in the remote areas in which they lived. Nevertheless, despite the gap in our knowledge concerning this segment of Jewish population in pre-modern Iran, according to all evidence it appears that, demographically, these small settlements did not constitute a substantial portion of Iran's overall Jewish population. The relative portion of these small-sized and undocumented Jewish settlements among the Jews of Iranian Kurdistan is a case in point and it may provide us with some insight with regard to Iran's other regions as well. According to a report from Seneh (i.e., Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Iranian Kurdistan), written by the Alliance Israélite official J. Bassan, who was studying the condition of the Jews of Iranian Kurdistan in 1901, the total number of Jews living in eleven towns and provincial districts in that province amounted to 9,550 souls. As to the number of Jews who lived in small groups (between 5 to 10 houses, and some with as few as 20 persons) in a large number of Kurdish villages, he estimated them at 2,550 souls. Cf. report of August 26, 1901, in BAIU, No. 26, année 1901, p. 68. Thus, according to Bassan's calculation, on the basis of detailed information he had obtained from what he termed as "most reliable witnesses," of an estimated total Jewish population of 12,000 souls in Iranian Kurdistan in 1901, some 20% were widely scattered in diluted numbers in small and remote villages in this mountainous province. As to the relative share of these "Jewish villagers" in Iran's other provinces, however, the impression that emerges from numerous nineteenth-century sources (chiefly accounts of Jewish travelers, testimonies of Christian missionaries and letters by the heads of the larger Jewish communities who were in contact with the smaller Jewish settlements in their peripheries) is that the proportion of these "Jewish villagers" was comparatively smaller in the other provinces and districts in which Jews lived in any substantial numbers. While this specific subject concerning the overall number of Jews who lived during this period in small numbers in remote rural settlements requires much further research and examination, the bulk of the demographic data in our possession leads us to the conclusion that during the second

half of the nineteenth century only a minority of Iranian Jews (perhaps not exceeding twenty percent of Iran's total Jewish population) lived in small concentrations in an unknown number of villages and provincial settlements. Indeed, figures and estimates published by the Jewish organizations of Europe as well as by the Christian missionaries mentioned above demonstrate that the vast majority of Iranian Jews during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century lived in some of Iran's major cities and larger provincial towns and centers. The tables before us, entitled "Estimates and Figures on the Jewish Population of Iran during the Years 1889–1903, According to European Sources," are a compilation of figures and data on the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran extracted from various reports and accounts published by European organizations (both Jewish and Christian missionary) that were closely involved with the lives of Iranian Jews during this period. The estimates and figures before us, grouped in four tables, suggest that the approximate number of Jews living in Iran (excluding those who lived in small numbers of some 1–20 families in villages and remote provincial districts) amounted to some 40–42 thousands. The geographical location, the type of settlement and the numerical size of the communities and settlements appearing in the tables before us further suggest that of the estimated 40–42 thousand Jews accounted for in the above-mentioned European sources, some 30–32 thousand lived in Iran's major cities and towns (see tables A and B). Of the latter substantial number, some estimated 20–22 thousand reportedly lived in five of Iran's larger cities (i.e., in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Hamadan and Mashhad), each of which had between 3 to 6 thousand Jews (see table A). Furthermore, some additional 10–12 thousand Jews resided in eight communities that were also located in cities and towns, each of which had about 1,000–2,500 Jews (see table B). This latter group of cities and towns included, according to the declining order of their numerical size, the communities of Kashan, Yazd, Seneh (= Sanandaj), Urumia, Bushihr, Kermanshah, Sakkis and Sawujbulagh. A third group of Iran's Jewish communities during the last decade of the nineteenth century consisted of those whose populations reportedly ranged between 400–900 souls each (see table C). Totalling an estimated 6,500 souls, these communities, located in Miānduāb, Garrūs, Burūjerd, Nahāvand, Naqadah, Salmās, Jahrum, Nowbandegān, Gulpāygān and evidently Bārfurūsh, were situated in towns and smaller provincial centers stretching from Iran's north and northwest to the center and southwest (i.e., Mazandaran, Western

Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Hamadan, Luristan and Fars). According to the same sources, some additional group, roughly comprising 4–5 thousand souls (see table D) lived in some twenty settlements and small sized communities, each of which had a Jewish population ranging between 50 to 450 persons. This latter group of small-sized communities, to which one should logically add numerous other small settlements about which no information and estimates are provided in our European sources, were by and large situated in the smaller provincial towns and remote rural districts in the provinces of Western Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Hamadan and Fars.

As to the abbreviations used in the tables before us in reference to the various European sources, see the general system of abbreviations employed in our book. The abbreviated form JE stands for *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols., New York and London, 1901–1906. For further geographical information concerning the exact location of the Jewish communities and settlements listed in the tables before us, see ‘Abd al-Rafi‘ Haqiqat (Rafi‘), *Farhang-i Tarikhi va Jughrafiya’i-yi Shahristan-hayi Iran*, op. cit., and particularly the extensive work entitled *Farhang-i Jughrafiya’i-yi Iran*, op. cit., which was compiled and published in 10 volumes by the Geography Department of Iran’s Military Staff during the years 1328–1332 Sh./1949–1953. The latter work provides an extensive amount of geographical, environmental and historical information concerning each of the urban, provincial and rural settlements in which the Jewish population of Iran continued to live until the 1940s. Especially important for our purposes are those volumes in the work that cover the provinces and districts in which substantial numbers of Jews continued to live in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. For the regions and localities that, relatively speaking, contained a larger number of Jewish communities and settlements in the course of the 19th century, see, particularly, the volumes in the latter work that deal with the provinces and districts of Western Azerbaijan (i.e. vol. 4); Kurdistan and Kirmanshah (vol. 5); Khuzistan and Luristan (vol. 6); Fars (vol. 7), and Isfahan and Yazd (vol. 10). For further demographic and related information concerning the communities and settlements mentioned in our tables, see also the following. On estimates of Jewish families and individuals in the various communities across Iran in the 1820s–1830s, see J. Wolff’s notes in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 185, and in his *Researches and Missionary Labours*, pp. 44–45. On the Jewish population in the Caspian provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan in the course of the 19th century and earlier, see the two following articles, in Hebrew, by

A. Netzer: “Jews in Mazandaran until the End of the 19th Century,” in *Society and Community, Proceedings of the Second International Congress for Research of the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage 1984*, ed. A. Haim, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 85–98, and “Jews in Gilan,” in *History and Creativity, the Third International Congress for Research on the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage*, ed. T. Alexander et al., Jerusalem 1994, pp. 215–232. For further information on the names, locations and demographic size of the Jewish communities of Western Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan during the 19th–20th centuries, see A. Ben-Ya‘acov, *Qehilot Yehudey Kurdistan*, op. cit., pp. 143–148.

A. The largest communities numbering between 3,000 to 6,000 souls each

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Tehran	1888–9	4,000	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Tehran	1898	6,000	BMAIU, July–Aug. 1898, p. 136
Isfahan	1894	5,000	JMI, Jan. 1895, p. 8
Isfahan	1903	6,500	JE, vol. 6, p. 660
Shiraz	1891	5,000	LSPCJ, 83 (1891), p. 124
Shiraz	1903	5,000 (1000 families, 220 houses)	BAIU, 28 (1903), pp. 104–5
Hamadan	1888–9	2,350	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Hamadan	1889	3,000	Jl, April 1889, p. 52
Hamadan	1894	3,500	JMI, May 1895, p. 78
Hamadan	1903	5,000	JE, vol. 6, p. 188
Sench (= Sanandaj)	1893	1,000 (about 200 families)	JMI, Feb. 1894, p. 19
Sench (= Sanandaj)	1900	1,900 (480 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Mashhad	1897	3,000	BAIU, 23 (1898), p. 71

B. Communities numbering between 1,000 to 2,500 souls each

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Kāshān	1889	2,500	LSPCJ, 82 (1890), p. 123
Kāshān	1888–9	3,000	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Yazd	1888–9	2,000	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44

(continued on next page)

Table (*cont.*)

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Urūmia	1888–9	1,000	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Urūmia	1890	2,000–2400 (400 houses)	Jl, April 1890, p. 61
Būshihr	1888–9	750	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Būshihr	1893	2,000	JMI, Aug. 1893, p. 118
Kermānshāh	1888–9	1,000	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Kermānshāh	1893	2,000 (120 houses, 450 families)	JMI, Feb. 1894, p. 21
Sakkis (= Saqqez)	1901	1,000 (180 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Sawujbulāgh	1901	1,000 (175 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68

C. Communities numbering between 500 to 900 souls each

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Miānduāb	1901	900 (160 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Bījār (= Garrūs)	1901	900 (150 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Burūjerd	1894	500	JMI, April 1894, p. 54
Burūjerd	1903	800 (80 houses, 150 families)	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 115
Nahāvand	1894	800	JMI, April 1894, p. 55
Naqadah	1901	800 (130 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Salmās	1901	700 (120 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Jahrum	1888–9	590	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Jahrum	1903	500	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 109
Nawbandegān	1888–9	650	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Nawbandegān	1903	300	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 109
Gulpāygān	1888–9	500	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Barfurūsh	1907	750	H.L. Rabino, Māzandarān and Astarābād, pp. 45–6

D. Communities and settlements numbering between 50 to 500 souls each

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Damāvand	1893	60 families	JMI, Dec. 1893, p. 180
Damāvand	1899	450 souls	LSPCJ, 92 (1900), p. 92

(continued on next page)

Table (*cont.*)

COMMUNITY	YEAR	ESTIMATED POPULATION	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Damāvand	1901	500 (60 families)	LPSCJ, 94 (1901–2), p. 100
Senjān	1894	450 (100 families)	JMI, April 1894, p. 54
Bāneh	1901	400 (60 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Būkān	1901	400 (60 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Ushnū	1901	300 (50 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Sā'inqal'eh	1901	250 (40 houses)	BAIU, 26 (1901), p. 68
Khūnsār (= Khwānsār)	1888–9	270	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Khūnsār (= Khwānsār)	1894	200	JMI, April 1894, p. 53
Zarqān	1890	300	LPSCJ, 83 (1891), p. 124
Zarqān	1893	300	JMI, July 1893, p. 103
Zarqān	1903	300	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Lār	1888–9	260	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Lār	1903	250	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Kargān	1888–9	260	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Dārāb	1903	200	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Galehdār	1903	200	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Kāzerūn	1888–9	110	AJA, 18 (1888–9), p. 44
Kāzerūn	1903	180	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Burāzjān	1893	143	JMI, Aug. 1893, p. 118
Firūzābād	1903	100	BAIU, 28 (1903), p. 108
Dawlatābād	1893	50	JMI, April 1894, p. 51
Kangāvar	1893	50	JMI, Feb. 1894, p. 22
Sultānābād	1893	30	JMI, April 1894, p. 54
Khumain	1893	25	JMI, April 1894, p. 54

SECTION III
ECONOMY AND MATERIAL EXISTENCE

JEWISH TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRAN ACCORDING
TO CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN SOURCES

1. *According to Dr. Jacob E. Polak,¹ 1850s*

The Jews make a living mostly by silk-weaving, glass-polishing, and working as silversmiths, goldsmiths and jewelers; they make alcohol, liquor, wine, ammonia, salt, chloric acid, sulfuric acid and nitric acid, and they are skilled in combining and separating metals; because of this they are indispensable in the production of coins, where they supervise the technical processes of this craft. Also, many of them are established physicians. One of the court physicians of the latter monarch Muhammad Shah was a Jew by the name of Haq-Nazar.² Furthermore, they have a reputation as singers and musicians and on account of this they are oftentimes invited to entertain guests at parties.

2. *According to Isaac Luria,³ Headmaster of the Alliance Israélite
Universelle School in Baghdad, 1873*

It seems that there are 40,000 Jews in Persia. Their occupations are:

At Teheran, Hamadan, and in the whole of the north they trade in drugs, spices, and in articles of European manufacture; some few also in

¹ Regarding this Austrian physician and ethnographer, who was Nasir al-Din Shah's personal physician during the 1850s, and his writings concerning the Jews of Iran, see in our book above, source no. 4, entitled, "The Jews of Iran in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, as Observed by Dr. Jacob E. Polak." For the original source of the excerpt before us see the latter's work *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, op. cit., p. 25. For the Persian translation of the excerpt, see K. Jahandari's *Safarnama-yi Polak*, op. cit., p. 28.

² This is Hakim (i.e. physician) Haq-Nazar, son of Hakim Ya'qub of Khunsar. Regarding him, see above, source no. 4, note 14, and below, source no. 31, entitled "On the Jewish Community of Tehran in the year 1875 . . .," note 9.

³ Regarding I. Luria and the complete text of his report on the Jews of Iran, published in *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 233, September 12, 1873, p. 394, see in our book, above, source no. 3, entitled "On the Legal and Actual Condition of the Jews of Iran in the Year 1873," notes 1 and 3.

diamonds and pearls. There are many goldsmiths and a large number of doctors. At Ispahan the Jews engage in the meanest occupations, such as cleansing canals and latrines; they deal also in rags and old clothes. At Yazd they are employed in the cultivation and manufacture of silk. The women, too, are engaged in similar employments. At Shiraz they are musicians, singers and public dancers. Some of them are goldsmiths, and some merchants. Throughout Persia a large number of Jews leave their towns during certain seasons of the year, and repair to the villages and tents of the Beduins⁴ for the purpose of selling drugs, linen, and fancy articles.

3. *According to the Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association (1876–7)*⁵

The Jews inhabiting Persia, generally speaking, are poor. They carry on petty trades which afford a scanty subsistence from hand to mouth, and nothing more. Secular instruction would be of immense benefit to the masses of Jewish people...; Oormiah contains about 200 Jewish families, or houses, and has 4 synagogues. The Jewish population is comparatively less poor in that town than elsewhere in Persia, but there does not appear to be much eagerness to secure (modern) elementary instruction for the young...; Ispahan has 400 Jewish families, who are more destitute than the Jews in other places. A small number of them carry on a petty trade in yarn and silk, and in various trifling articles. The larger portion are day labourers and porters...; In Teheran and in Hamadan there is a greater desire to obtain instruction, but the local resources are too insignificant for the establishment of schools...; in Tehran,⁶ six Jews are medical practitioners, twenty deal in precious stones, twenty are silk merchants, ten work in silver, six are jewelers; the remainder are petty merchants, hawkers, and dealers in second-hand articles. Some of the Jewish women likewise engage in hawking.

Most of the Jews in Persia carry on petty trades. Nowhere, except in Hamadan, are they allowed to have shops in the bazaars, but have

⁴ This is a reference to Iran's nomadic tribes.

⁵ For the complete text of this report, written by Dr. M. Allatini, President of the Committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Salonica, see AJA, 6 (1876–1877), pp. 91–92, reproduced as source no. 5 in our book, and entitled “The State of the Jews in Iran in 1876, as Reflected in the Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association (1876–7).”

⁶ During this time, i.e. 1875, Tehran's Jewish population consisted of some 300 families, or roughly between 1500 to 1800 souls. Cf. AJA, 4 (1874–1875), p. 93.

shops in bazaars of their own. In Ispahan a great number of Jews are workmen and porters. In Shiraz many occupy themselves with the production of wine and alcohol.

4. *According to Morris Cohen,⁷ Educator and Communal Officeholder in the Jewish Community of Baghdad, Reported in 1888–9*

The letters I have received from various towns in Persia in reply to my inquiries concerning their Jewish populations, are filled with lamentations and cries of despair. The condition of the Jews in almost every part of Persia is as wretched as can possibly be imagined.

The information I have received concerning the Jews in Persia relates to their numbers, their synagogues, their schools, where Hebrew is taught, and their various occupations. Here it has to be noticed that the Mussulmans never buy any kind of eatables from the Jews, because everything touched by a Jew is considered to become impure and defiled. Jews, therefore, dare not touch any such articles exposed for sale, as in that case they would be compelled to buy the victuals at any price the Mussulman vendor chose to exact. The Jews crowd together in their own quarters, where they have their own sales of fruit and other eatables. Their industry is naturally very limited, as they never work under Mussulman employ;⁸ and are studiously kept out of trades carried on by the Mussulmans. They are consequently compelled to go about hawking haberdashery, and their wives often accompany them. The consequences of these disabilities are very injurious. Almost everywhere the Jews are utterly wretched. There are very few merchants among them, a small number of them are petty dealers, and the greater portion are paupers. In Teheran, Hamadan, and Kermanshah there are a few merchants. In all the other towns the Jews are mostly hawkers. The Kashan district affords employment in the silk trade. Most of the letters I have received from Persia say there are no trades at all, and

⁷ Regarding M. Cohen and the full text of his report on the Jews of Iran, published in *AJA*, 18 (1888–1889), pp. 42–44, see source no. 6 in our book, entitled “The Jews of Iran in the Year 1888, as Reported by Morris Cohen.”

⁸ In some rare places, such as in the city of Yazd, Jewish men were reportedly hired as laborers in spinneries and weaving mills owned and managed by Muslims. Regarding this matter, see below, source no. 27, entitled “The Jewish Community of Yazd in the Nineteenth Century...”, notes 42–43, and cf. Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, op. cit., pp. 255–256.

that the Jews are extremely poor. At Yezd, as also at Shiraz, the Jews are occupied with weaving.

5. *On the Material Condition and Economy of Jews in Iran's Larger Cities in the 1850s, According to the Christian Missionary Rev. Henry A. Stern*⁹

*Shiraz*¹⁰

Having arrived in Shiraz (on January 13th, 1849) our greatest anxiety was to visit the Jews. We had already waited a long time, in anticipation that the storm would subside, but finding that the sky remained unchanged, and the sun invisible through the murky horizon, we wrapt our warmest clothing around us, and thus equipped, to the surprise of our landlord, started in search of the Jewish quarter. The streets are never particularly clean in any Persian town, but in rainy weather they

⁹ Arriving in Baghdad in 1844 for the purpose of establishing a Christian Mission and conducting missionary work among the Jews of Iraq and Iran, Rev. Henry Aaron Stern carried out missionary work in both countries until 1852. During the years 1847–1852, he performed several journeys to Iran's scattered Jewish communities. His impressions and observations with respect to the condition of Iranian Jewry in general and realities of life in the various Jewish communities and settlements in which he visited and worked in particular were recorded in his diaries, letters and reports. Many of the latter writings concerning the state of the Iranian Jews in the mid-nineteenth century were soon published in the monthly and annual proceedings of the British missionary establishment, known as the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, with which H. Stern was affiliated. The following passages, dealing with the material condition and occupations of Jews in the larger communities of Shiraz, Isafhan, Tehran and Hamadan, are excerpts from Rev. H. Stern's account of his journeys and missionary activities in the years 1848–1852 among the Jews of Iran and present-day Iraq, published as a book in London, in 1854, under the title *Dawnings of Light in the East*. In the latter book the author provides a large and important amount of factual information intertwined with subjective and fundamentally Christian and missionary oriented observations concerning the Jews of Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan. For an informative summary of H. Stern's missionary work among the Jewish communities and settlements of Iran during the years 1844–1852, see Rev. Albert A. Isaacs, *Biography of the Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, D.D.*, London 1886, pp. 43–65, and R.E. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, London 1973, pp. 113–116. For further discussion and bibliographical sources concerning Rev. Stern's relevance to the history of Iranian Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century, see in our book, below, source no. 27, entitled "The Jewish Community of Yazd in the 19th Century," note 12, and source no. 29, entitled "The Jewish Community of Isfahan in the Year 1888," note 6. Cf. W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908*, London 1908, pp. 260–261 and 300–302.

¹⁰ For the original text of the following passages on the Jewish community of Shiraz, see H.A. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, op. cit., pp. 122–123 and 128–129.

are most formidable; whole mountains of filth and dirt, accumulated in every corner, are swept away in the turgid torrent, which is formed by the heavy showers. The danger of creeping through such narrow, irregular, swamped thoroughfares, is aggravated by numerous holes, the receptacles of all that is disgusting and repulsive to the senses, and which abound in every city, notwithstanding the pretended abhorrence for material pollution. Careless, however, of all these obstructions, we paddled our way through dark, pestilential alleys and passages, to the desired quarter. There was a strong contrast between this and other parts of the town; the houses looked gloomy and decaying, the entrances narrow and low, and the doors were either of hard stone, or thick, strong wood, as if the owners of the miserable hovels were afraid that their wretched dwellings should be invaded by robbers, or other dangerous intruders. The streets, with the exception of a few lawless *lootees*,¹¹ who were returning from their drunken orgies, and some miserably clad and shivering Israelites, who were hastening home, appeared quite deserted; and we almost doubted whether this was an inhabited locality. We inquired after the synagogue, but all Jews we met, out of fear or suspicion, answered evasively and passed on; a Jew who understood Hebrew, and guessed that we were not natives, pointed us to a low building, which he said was the synagogue. The house to which we were directed was, however, not the place of worship, and we had to crouch with our wet and heavy clothing, through several low, narrow, and dark passages, before we came to the court where the humble house of prayer (no doubt for security and safety) stood, in a retired and secluded corner. Here we found no one except an old Jew, with haggard, hollow features, trembling from head to foot in his ragged sheep-skin cloak; he returned our salaam¹² with a servile sycophancy that furnished me at once with a vivid picture of the misery of the descendants of Abraham in this city.

The Sheerazees have always been considered the most accessible and liberal Persians; that narrow bigotry, fiery enthusiasm, and blind superstition, which characterizes the middle and lower classes of the Shee¹³

¹¹ Characterizing this social group, which had complex origins and diverse roles in Iran's pre-modern social history, H. Stern added the following footnote: "The lootees are the most notorious ruffians and criminals in Persia; they are very numerous, and in many towns; and keep, often, both the governor and people in awe of their power."

¹² I.e., "peace (be with you)" and "salutation."

¹³ I.e., Shi'ite.

sect, is not exhibited; still, many who abuse Mahomet,¹⁴ and deride his revelation, will draw their daggers, and unsheathe their swords, to force an inoffensive Jew to pay allegiance to the Arabian lawgiver.¹⁵ Many hundreds of Israelites, in order to save themselves from a violent death, constantly renounce the religion of their fathers. All the silk merchants in the bazaar Vakeel,¹⁶ the most extensive market, are proselytes; and their descendants, out of fear, strictly conform to all the rites of their new belief. I conversed with many of them; in the beginning they were very distant and reserved, but when we became more intimately acquainted, they laid aside this assumed restraint, and confessed their belief in Moses and the Prophets, and their contempt and abhorrence for everything connected with their adopted creed.

Sheeraz, from historical facts and traditional records, was once inhabited by a great number of Jews; but the unsparing severity with which they have been treated, and the many dangers and persecutions to which they have been exposed, has only now left the remains of a once flourishing community, who by their industry and activity, very much contributed to the wealth and opulence of the place. The present population of Jews does not exceed four hundred families, who live in frightful misery and deplorable indigence; their dwellings are low, dirty, and confined, and in a moist climate would engender disease, and breed pestilence. Their domestic life differs little from their neighbours. Their occupations are generally mean and sordid—hawking, telling fortune, writing fictitious amulets, or what constitutes their staple support in Sheeraz, keeping secret taverns, called Sherab-Khane,¹⁷ where the most intoxicating liquor is sold to the Persian debauchees; these evils increase many of their calamities and ills, and make their position so precarious and insecure.

¹⁴ I.e., Muhammad.

¹⁵ I.e., to the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁶ *Bazar-i Vakil*, meaning “the Bazaar of Vakil,” was the main center of commercial activity in Shiraz in the course of the 19th century. Its construction dates from the time of Karim Khan Zand (r. 1750–1779), the founder of the Zand dynasty, who chose and developed Shiraz as his capital city. On Bazar-i Vakil (named after Karim Khan, who was known by his title as “*Vakil*,” i.e. “Deputy” and “Viceregent”), see L. Lockhart, *Famous Cities of Iran*, p. 34, and K. Afsar, *Tarikh-i Baft-i Qadimi-yi Shiraz*, pp. 166–167.

¹⁷ The Ar.-Per. form “*sharab-khanah*” literally means “house of wine (or beverages),” and, by extension, “cellar” and “tavern.”

*Isfahan*¹⁸

According to a Persian historian, the Yehudiah formed one of the two towns which constituted Ispahan, and the extent of the Jewish quarter verifies the assertion. Frequently, in going from one family to another, I traversed a labyrinth of streets and lanes, pent up with decayed synagogues and ruined houses, without meeting with any living being, except troops of savage dogs, who were banqueting on the carcass of a camel, mule or horse, which a pious Persian had thrown there to annoy the Jews, and to feed the starving famished brutes.

The air of misery and wretchedness which distinguishes this quarter, accords too well with the touching picture of sorrow, grief and hopelessness, which characterizes its inhabitants. Each house is the abode of want and indigence, and every individual seems devoured by corroding cares, and bent down with a grievous load of affliction. Often in our visits to these sad dwellings, we beheld the most pitiful and affecting sights; the rooms looked dismal and unfurnished, the inmates haggard, sallow, and careworn; the children squalid, sickly and ragged; in fact, such utter destitution would swell the bosom, and make the tears of any but an unfeeling Moslem flow.

The hopeless condition of this oppressed and ill-treated people is aggravated by the dark and cheerless prospects which loom in their future. Hated, despoiled, and deprived of every chance whereby to earn his daily bread, the poor Jew—whose person many consider morally defiled, and whose very touch all believe communicates contamination—is compelled to have recourse to the most degrading pursuits, to gain a parsimonious existence. Many, consequently, lead a gypsy life, and by fraud and fortune-telling alleviate the wants of nature; others support themselves by peddling; and the rest pamper the appetites of the lootees,¹⁹ and sell arrack, wine, and other inebriating draughts. These miserable occupations, which must engender the worst principles and stifle every moral sentiment, are not selected by the Jew optionally, but he is driven into them by his oppressors. Many times have I spoken to individuals and congregations on this subject, and the reply was, “What are we to do? Shall we suffer our wives and helpless children

¹⁸ For the full text of the following excerpts on the community of Isfahan, see H. Stern, *ibid.*, pp. 155–157.

¹⁹ See note 11 above.

to starve before our eyes, or shall we sell our sons to Islamism and our daughters to those who devour us?"

*Tehran*²⁰

... But I will now shew how the afflicted remnant of Israel still groan under the accumulated miseries and woes, which a licentious and cruel populace can inflict upon them. The proximity to royalty one should suppose would afford them some shelter and protection, and secure their persons and property from the malevolent designs of the base, and the rapacity of the wicked; that such is not the case, the appearance of the Jews is the most tangible proof. In passing through the streets, bazaars, lanes or alleys, where you meet with people of all ranks and in every Eastern garb—amongst this motley variety, which parade the thoroughfares of this large town—it is impossible not to distinguish the ground-down Jew. His ragged and filthy dress, his cadaverous and haggard look, are unmistakable characteristics. The curse, which has pursued him for ages, is still legible in his bended gait and tattered apparel. In Arabia and Asiatic Turkey, where the name Yehudi implies everything that is despicable and odious, his position, compared with that of his brethren in Persia, is still easy and happy. He can at least trade and amass money; and though he does not openly parade his wealth and expose it to the eyes of the Mussulman, he still secretly derives comfort and pleasure from the consciousness of its possession. But the Persian Jew is allowed no such privileges; despised and trodden down, he lingers out day after day in languish and care, and at last droops under the burden of accumulated misery. . . . He is not only held in derision and contempt, but he cannot follow those pursuits which, even in the most blood-steeped period of his history, afforded him the feigned favour and protection of the potent against the encroachments and assaults of the rapacious and weak. The wily Persian has provided a remedy against such an ascendancy, by stopping every channel through which wealth can flow into the hands of the cunning and industrious Jew. Religious bigotry and implacable hate declare him morally defiled and impure; this debars him from all commercial enterprise, prevents him from engagement in any lawful traffic, and consigns him

²⁰ For the full text of the following excerpts on the community of Tehran, see *ibid.*, pp. 193–197.

to the most abject want and despicable occupations. In many towns he dare not, without imminent peril, frequent even the public bazaar; and when it rains, nothing but sheer necessity will drive him into the streets, for he might accidentally splash a believer with a little mud, or water, and bring upon his devoted head curses and ill-treatment. Many, many times have I seen the sallow, care-worn Israelite creeping along the loathsome, contaminating thoroughfares—where famished and disgusting curs wallowed in the filth and dirt which for months had accumulated—with a guarded and careful step, quite affecting and painful to witness.

The number of Jews inhabiting the royal city may be estimated at three hundred families; they occupy a separate quarter, which is distinguished by the stagnant vapours, which rise from the heaps of offal deposited there by their neighbours. The appearance of the houses correspond with the uncouth aspect of the locality—low, confined, unwholesome, and dilapidated; with doors so small, that any one who enters must be well practiced in the art of stooping and crawling, or else he runs the risk of breaking his head, or bruising his limbs. The dwelling of the physician already referred to,²¹ and those of some of the mullahs, are better and larger; a favour for which they are indebted to the credulity of the late king,²² who, in order to arrest the progress of the gout, had frequent recourse to the magic powers of these disciples of the celestial Rasiel, for which he liberally rewarded them. Mullah Rachamin,²³ on one occasion, actually performed over the royal head the ceremony of *Caparoth*;²⁴ and another rabbi, after a long preparation, by fasting, lavations, and other purifications, produced a most wonderful amulet, which the king wore round his arm for a considerable time. This credulity in the preternatural powers of the Jews, often gains them a powerful friend and protector. The worst of this is, that the science is degenerating, and what before was a monopoly of

²¹ I.e., the court physician Hakim Haq-Nazar. On him, see note 2 above.

²² I.e., the Qajar king Muhammad Shah (r. 1834–1848), the father of Nasir al-Din Shah.

²³ Mulla Rahamin was the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Tehran during the 1840s–1850s. Cf. H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, vol. 3, pp. 634 and 642.

²⁴ The Hebrew word “*kapparah*” (the plural form of *kapparah*, i.e. “Atonement Sacrifice”) refers to a ritual which is performed the day before the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and in the course of which a traditional “scapegoat” is sacrificed. According to the gender of the person for whom the ritual is performed, a rooster or a hen is swung three times around the persons’ head and a prayer is recited. The animal, which is thereafter sacrificed, symbolically takes on the suppliant’s guilt.

the learned Jew, has become the staple business of the mass. In every village and hamlet a bearded necromancer is to be seen once in the week, who, for a few *pools*,²⁵ will satiate the most voracious applicant with his wonder-working skill. I have heard many Jews condemn these nefarious and fraudulent practices; but what is the poor outcast to do? Cut off from every means of gaining an honest livelihood, debarred from all intercourse with his fellow-men, doomed to every mortification and mockery, how is he to live; and how is he to struggle against want, poverty and starvation? He must stoop to the most repugnant pursuits, and unwillingly become the crafty, sordid, proverbial Jew.

*Hamadan*²⁶

According to the most accurate information I could obtain, this ancient city is at present inhabited by five hundred Jewish families. They reside in a particular quarter, and in case of public commotion, which generally exposes them to the lawless rapacity of the covetous, and the malevolent persecution of the powerful, they close the gates of their Ghetto, and so enjoy a faint security till the storm has subsided. Their position is, however, at all times very sad and pitiable.

The avocations in which their industry endeavours to find the means of subsistence are very few, and oppressively restricted. Many are weavers of silk, workers in silver, tailors, and engravers, but the fanaticism of the mullahs grudges them even these humble trades, which, whilst they gain them sufficient to sustain life, make them at the same time feel all the worst pangs of poverty, want, and hopeless destitution.

²⁵ Per. "pul," i.e., "money" and "a small piece of copper coin."

²⁶ For the complete text of the following excerpt on the community of Hamadan, see H. Stern, *ibid.*, p. 244.

RECOLLECTIONS OF AN ITINERANT JEWISH PHYSICIAN OF GULPAYGAN, REGARDING THE YEAR 1811

Introduction

Located about 100 kilometers to the northwest of Isfahan, the provincial town of Gulpaygan (or Gulpadegan) had a Jewish community which dated back to at least the seventeenth century. Cf. W.J. Fischel, "History of the Jews of Persia under the Safavid Dynasty," (in Hebrew), *Zion*, 2 (1936–7), p. 227; idem, "The Jews in Mediaeval Iran from the 16th to the 18th Centuries," *Irano-Judaica*, ed. Sh. Shaked, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 296. Together with the town of Burujird, Gulpaygan formed one of the main commercial and administrative centers of the province of Luristan, and it had a settled Jewish community already during the first decade of the 18th century. We find the heads of the community in 1708 requesting the legal opinion of a learned rabbi of Jerusalem (i.e., Rabbi Yehuda b. 'Amram Divan) with regard to a complex case of polygamy and inheritance rights which had arisen in the community. Cf. Yehuda Divan, *Sefer Hut ha-Meshulash*, Constantinople, Heb. Year 5499 (1738–9 C.E.), an unpaginated book, question number 16. We do not have much information with regard to various aspects of this community during the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. However, from the information provided by the missionary Joseph Wolff about the size of the nearby and smaller community of Khunsar (i.e., 60 families or approximately 300 souls in 1824), we may assume that the community of Gulpaygan had at least as many Jews during the first half of the 19th century. Cf. J. Wolff, in *LSPCJ*, 19 (1827), p. 185. In, or about the year 1868, the community numbered about 500 souls. See R. Thomson's report of April 20, 1868, in *FO 248/244*. The latter estimate (i.e. 500 souls) is given also in the reports of the Anglo-Jewish Association during the years 1874–1889. Cf. *AJA*, 14 (1874–1875), p. 93, and report by Morris Cohen, teacher and communal functionary in the Jewish community of Baghdad, in *AJA*, 18 (1888–1889), p. 44. By the year 1906, the Jewish population in the town had doubled and numbered about 1000 souls. Cf. *BMAIU*, January 1906, pp. 17–18.

Similar to the Jewish community of Khunsar during the 18th and 19th centuries, the community of Gulpaygan had a proportionally large number of individuals and families whose hereditary profession was the practice of traditional medicine and healing. Although in the eyes of the Europeans who traveled or resided in Iran during the 19th century, these pre-modern Jewish doctors lacked proper scientific knowledge and technical tools and skills, nevertheless their presence and activity were felt through most parts of Iran. The French military officer Colonel Gaspard Drouville, who lived and worked in Iran in the years 1812–1813, observed that throughout much of Iran medicine and surgery were practiced by Jews, whom he characterized as “ill-prepared, ignorant and superstitious.” See G. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse*, volume 1, pp. 176–177. For similar views of Europeans concerning the medical expertise of Jewish and Muslim physicians and surgeons of Iran during this period, see, also, E. Flandin, *Voyage en Perse*, volume II, pp. 130–131, and particularly J.E. Polak, *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, pt. 2, pp. 192–196 (K. Jahandari’s Persian translation, pp. 396–401). Despite their inadequacies, however, the Jewish doctors, surgeons, druggists and healers were needed and trusted by various classes and segments of Muslim population both in towns and villages as well as among some of the migrant tribes of Iran. See A. Levy, “Jewish Physicians and Folk-Medicine in Persia,” (in Hebrew), *Qorot*, 3–4, 1973, pp. 209–215, and compare H. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, pp. 196–197, and I.J. Benjamin II, *Sefer Mas’ey Yisrael*, p. 82. The considerable trust and prestige enjoyed by these Jewish doctors and druggists in central and western Iran during the second half of the 19th century have been richly described and documented. Regarding the Jewish doctors of Kirmanshah treating Muslim patients in the town and its environs, see LSPCJ, 75 (1883), p. 109; in Damavand (east of Tehran), see JMI, December 1893, pp. 180–181, and May 1900, p. 72; in Dawlatabad (provincial capital of Malayir), Khunsar and Nahavand, see JMI, April 1894, pages 52, 53 and 54, respectively.

A large number of these Jewish physicians, druggists and healers were itinerant practitioners, who moved from one village or town to another, in search of work. Cf. I’timad al-Saltana, who points to such a Jewish physician from Hamadan, named Sulaiman, who was wandering about in the villages of Qazvin, in the month of Sha’ban 1306 Q./April–May 1889 C.E., in his *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, p. 634. Similarly, and with direct reference to the continued work of itinerant Jewish physicians of Gulpaygan through the last decade of the 19th century,

we find the following testimony in the diary of the Persian Jew turned-Christian missionary Nurullah Hakim, who was conducting missionary work in Luristan and Central Iran, in the summer of 1893. In his words: "On Thursday, the 17th (of August 1893), I arrived from Dawlatabad (present-day town of Malayir) to Imam Zadeh Hashim (about 100 kilometers southward on the Bakhtiari road from Dawlatabad), where I met with two Gulpaygani Jews, whom I took to my lodging, passing three hours with them. One was a physician and the other his druggist." See JMI, April 1894, p. 52.

The document before us depicts the experiences of such an itinerant Jewish physician of Gulpaygan (in the summer of 1811) in the provincial towns and villages tens of kilometers away from his native town. The physician, named Yehoshua, who was accompanied by another Jew (likely his druggist), wrote down this passage in Judeo-Persian in an empty space in the opening page of a Persian medical manuscript, which evidently belonged to him at the time. The manuscript, being a manual of medieval Persian and Islamic medical information and instructions, entitled *Qarabadin-i Shifa'i*, was compiled by Muzaffar b. Muhammad al-Husaini al-Kashani (d. 963 Q./1555–6 C.E.). Cf. C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature*, vol. II, pp. 245–246. The latter work is part of a large and historically important collection of some twenty manuscripts and a dozen printed books in the Persian language and script related to various branches of Islamic medical science. The latter works were purchased over the second half of the 18th century through the end of the 19th century by six successive generations of Jewish doctors in Gulpaygan, all of whom, so it appears, belonged to the same family. Based on the names, family relations and other information that have been written down in Judeo-Persian on the leaves and various pages of these manuscripts and books, the earliest purchaser and owner of these medical books in this old family of Jewish physicians of Gulpaygan was a certain Reuben, son of Yesha'yah "Rofe" (i.e. physician), who was known among the Muslims by the name of Hakim (i.e. physician) Rabi', son of Hakim Shafi', who purchased one of the above mentioned manuscripts in the year 1783. The above family collection, which among its other items contains several rare Judeo-Persian and Persian documents, notes and writings related to the Jewish community of Gulpaygan in the course of the 18th–20th centuries, is in the possession of Jewish National and University Library (= JNUL) of Jerusalem's Manuscripts Department, and is tentatively designated as "Rahmian Collection." I wish to thank Mr. Efraim Wust, librarian at the JNUL

Manuscripts Department, who informed me of the existence of this collection and most kindly provided me with his detailed descriptive catalogue of its items. For the original text of the passage before, us see JNUL, Ms. Ar. 478, f. 1a.

The Recollections

Poor luck is this:

On Sunday, the thirteenth day of the (Hebrew) month of Sivan 5571 (June 5, 1811), we departed from Gulpadegan.¹ For three days we were on the way. Then, for fourteen days we kept waiting in Mishkabad,² without finding even one single patient. At last, Hajji Rasul³ sent a messenger to me and took me to the village of Dih-Namak.⁴ His wife was sick. I treated her without medication and she recovered. However, he did not pay me a penny.⁵ We then went to Ashtian,⁶ to the house of Hajji Muhammad Taqi Mirza.⁷ Baba, the son of Sadiq,⁸ was suffering from a joint ailment. We agreed to treat him and receive the amount of...⁹ from him, besides the cost of the medication. In the meantime, another sick person showed up; but all of a sudden a certain Sayyid¹⁰ appeared and said: "I can cure this patient just in five days." As much as we argued (with them), we did not get anywhere. Finally, they looked

¹ The older name of Gulpaygan.

² A small 19th-century settlement in the district of Arak, north-east of Gulpaygan, it is located to the east of the present-day city of Arak. See *Farhang-i Jughrafiya'-yi Iran*, vol. 1, p. 290.

³ An unknown person. The Persian-Muslim title of "*Hajji*," i.e., one who made a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, may suggest that the man belonged to the respected and better-off people in his settlement.

⁴ One of the larger villages in the district of Mishkabad. See *Farhang-i Jughrafiya'-yi Iran*, *ibid.*, p. 290.

⁵ Actually, "he did not pay me one dinar."

⁶ Located to the north of the present-day city of Arak, Ashtian was one of the three main rural settlements in the district of Arak. See *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 15, and 'Abd al-Rafi' Haqiqat, *Farhang-i Tarikhi va Jughrafiya'-yi Shahristanha-yi Iran*, p. 32.

⁷ Unknown. Regarding his title of *Hajji*, see note 3 above.

⁸ Unknown.

⁹ The exact amount, indicated by a two-letter Hebrew abbreviation, is illegible.

¹⁰ The originally Arabic term of "Sayyid," i.e., "lord," "master," "sir," etc., pronounced "Seyyed" in Persian, was, and continues to be, an honorary title designating the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

for a good omen,¹¹ after which the Sayyid ordered and they threw us out. In fact all the sick people there looked for a good omen¹² to see whether I should treat them and give them medication. However, in each and every case the omen was inauspicious. As a result, they withdrew even the job that they had already assigned to me. (Furthermore) after five days that Sayyid brought out and presented Baba, who seemed to have recovered from his sickness, and everybody was now praising him, saying he was (as accomplished as) Plato.¹³ Now, despite the fact that I had in the meantime treated one of the patients there and given him medication, the people came to me and swore by God, saying: "We dreamt that any patient who would take your medication would die." In this way that option too came to an end. This was such a bad year for me to go through. Anyhow, I just wrote this down as something to be remembered. (Signed by) the young and humble Yehoshua.

¹¹ Originally, "*istikharah kardand*," i.e., "they asked favors (from God)" and "looked for divine signs" by means of looking in the Qur'an (or in any sacred or favorite book), or by using beads, etc.

¹² Again, "*istikharah kardand*." See above.

¹³ Originally, "*Aflatun ast*," i.e., "*He is Plato*," the ancient Greek philosopher, renowned in Persian folklore for his wisdom and knowledge of sciences.

JEWISH MINSTRELS AND DANCERS OF SHIRAZ IN 1888,
AS WITNESSED AND DESCRIBED BY THE LATE
PROFESSOR E.G. BROWNE

Introduction

As a result of prolonged legal, socio-economic and religious restrictions that were imposed on Iran's religious minorities, particularly ever since the promulgation and consolidation of Shi'ite religion and dogma in Iran under the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722), the members of Iran's religious minorities were pushed into adopting and fulfilling a variety of marginalized occupations and economic roles. A large number of such low-ranking occupations and economic functions were those that, while defined as strictly unlawful (*haram*) or abominable (*makruh*) by Shi'ite law, were, nonetheless, in demand by various segments of Iran's heterogeneous population. Indeed, trades and economic activities such as (1) production and sale of wine and alcoholic beverages; (2) purchase and sale of articles and substances defined as ritually impure (*najis*); (3) production and sale of musical instruments and those used for gambling; (4) midwifery and blood-letting for money; (5) money-lending (for interest) and money-changing; (6) goldsmith's and silversmith's work, as well as a number of other trades and occupations were regarded by Shi'ite law as either strictly forbidden or strongly disapproved of. Included among the professions regarded as unlawful by Shi'ite law, but in demand by broad sections of Iran's population in towns and rural districts, was that of minstrels, musicians, singers, dancers, jesters, and entertainers. Jewish performers, who had assumed the latter professions in the course of the nineteenth century and evidently earlier, earned a living by performing in a variety of private and public gatherings and events. The information at our disposal suggests that throughout the nineteenth century Jewish musicians, minstrels and assorted entertainers performed at gatherings and events held by diverse groups and strata of Iran's socio-economic hierarchy. From the information documented in Iranian sources (both Jewish and Muslim), we know that some of these Jewish professionals belonged to a distinguished circle of nineteenth-

century master performers and music-makers. This rather small group of accomplished Jewish musicians and performers, who performed for the powerful and privileged segments of the Muslim population in the larger cities, ordinarily enjoyed lucrative incomes and a certain degree of social prestige and protection. However, the same sources of information, complemented and corroborated by other (mostly European) testimonies, indicate that the vast majority of these Jewish musicians and entertainers in the course of the nineteenth century were folk-oriented and earned a living by performing mostly in the midst of the Muslim masses.

The passage before us documents the work and performance of such a typical band of Jewish musicians and entertainers of Shiraz in a private party that was held in that city in the spring of 1888. The author of the passage, who provides a firsthand and engaging picture of the performance and its specific upper-class social setting, is the late Professor Edward Granville Browne, the renowned and prolific scholar of Persian literature and Iranian culture. Coming from a wealthy British family engaged in shipbuilding, E.G. Browne (b. February 7, 1862, Gloucestershire—d. 5 January 1926, near Cambridge) initially studied and eventually completed his training in the field of medicine. However, an intense and lasting interest in the Middle East and its main languages, that was aroused in him when he was about fifteen years of age, led him to study on his own Turkish, Persian and Arabic. While pursuing his medical studies at Cambridge he also enrolled in the department of Oriental Studies at that university, and thus, in 1887 (at the age of twenty-five), he achieved both his final medical qualifications and a fellowship in Oriental Studies from his college, which enabled him to spend a year of travel and experience in Iran. Departing from England (in early June of 1887), he arrived in Iran (Tabriz) on October 23, 1887. In the course of the next twelve months, he traveled, mostly on horseback and by caravans, through Azerbaijan to Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd and finally Kirman. The account of his year-long travel and residence in Iran was published by him upon return to England, as a remarkable book, entitled *A Year Amongst the Persians*, and subtitled as *Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia, Received during Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Years 1887–8*, published by Adam and Charles Black, London 1893.

Proceeding from Isfahan en route to Shiraz, E.G. Browne reached the latter city in the middle of March 1888. As for the band of the Jewish minstrels and dancers described in the passage before us, Browne

first encountered them in a small village by the name of Marg, located some three parsangs (or 18 kilometers) south of Julfa of Isfahan. Referring to this band of Jewish musicians and entertainers, he noted: “We put up at a dilapidated caravansaray where nothing occurred to vary the monotony, except the arrival, some time after sunset, of a party of Jewish minstrels and dancing boys, who were, like ourselves, bound for Shiraz.” See his above mentioned edition of *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 221. In yet another note in the book, we are informed that those same wandering Jewish performers made a living also by entertaining the villagers who lived near the caravan road leading from Isfahan to Shiraz. In his words (*ibid.*, p. 223): “...The march (from the pervious caravan station) was absolutely without interest, and the village of Maksūd Beg, where we arrived about 4:30 p.m., was a most desolate-looking spot. Here we found the Jewish minstrels who had overtaken us at Marg, entertaining the muleteers and villagers with a concert in the caravansaray. The music appeared to me very pleasing.”

As regards information concerning the activity of the various groups of Jewish minstrels, performers and entertainers in various parts of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, there exist numerous written and oral sources (in Persian and European languages as well as in Judeo-Persian and Hebrew), in which the activity and interaction of these Jewish performers in the midst of their Iranian neighbors have been documented. All the above sources testify to the presence and activity of these Jewish performers both among the higher circles of Iran's socio-political and administrative elite (including the Qajar court and its aristocracy, high government and army officials, dignitaries and wealthy individuals affiliated with the ruling authorities), as well as among the middle and lower strata of the social ladder in towns and provincial districts. For nineteenth-century Persian sources referring to the work of Jewish musicians and male dancers at the Qajar court and among the Qajar princes, see Taj al-Saltana, *Khatirat*, p. 72, and the English version of the same work, in Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, ed. A. Amanat, p. 235, and particularly A.A. Shamim, *Iran dar Dawra-yi Saltanat-i Qajar*, pp. 421–422. For nineteenth-century European sources in which the appearance and work of these Jewish entertainers at the private residences of Qajar governors and high officials have been documented and described in some detail, see, e.g., (in Shiraz, in 1850s), E.J. Polak, *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, p. 25, and H. Vambery, *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien*, Pest 1867, pp. 236–237. In the latter work, the Hungarian scholar and explorer Hermann Vambery

provides a full description of a party held in the house of a high official in Shiraz, in the summer of 1862, in which Jewish boy-dancers were impersonating women.

As regards the generally low social standing and degraded image of minstrels and especially of dancers, street-performers and jesters in the eyes of the Shi'ite masses, among whom they mostly performed, see P.A. Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et en Perse*, Paris 1821, p. 203, and particularly A. Jourdain, *La Perse, ou tableau*, Paris 1814, pp. 314–315. As regards the negative image and low social standing of the majority of the Jewish performers, dancers and entertainers in the course of the nineteenth century, see G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 510. For detailed documentation of numerous cases of harassment, physical violence and abduction of Jewish musicians and performers of Shiraz, committed by some Shi'ite clerics and their followers in the city during the years 1889–1903, see Sa'idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi'-i Ittifaqiyya*, pp. 338, 409, 558, 595 and 716–719. For further discussion and information concerning this group of Jewish professionals and entertainers in nineteenth-century Iran, see A. Netzer, "The Jewish Community in Tehran from Its Beginning until the Constitutional Revolution, 1906," (in Hebrew), *Shevet va-'Am*, 2nd series, 4(9), Jerusalem 1980, pp. 258–259. As for the names and professional lives of the Jewish musical masters who performed at the court of Nasir al-Din Shah (in Tehran) and at the residences of the Qajar princes Zil al-Sultan (in Isfahan) and Jalal al-Dawla (in Yazd), see H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yâhud-i Iran*, vol. 3, pp. 665–666, and H. Sarshar, ed., *Esther's Children*, pp. 140, 144–145 and 158.

For the original text of the passage before us, see E.G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, op. cit., pp. 292–294. For a short outline of E.G. Browne's life, academic career and major publications, see M.G. Wickens, s.v. "Browne, Edward Granville," in EIr, vol. IV, pp. 483–488.

Jewish Minstrels and Dancers of Shiraz

Having now attempted to depict the city of Shîrâz—its palaces, gardens, shrines, pleasure-grounds, and places of resort—I must return once more to the life within its walls. As I have said, there was no lack of society, and I enjoyed opportunities of witnessing a variety of Persian entertainments. As I have already described the general features of these in speaking of Tehran, I shall endeavour to be as concise as possible in this place, merely noticing such points as were novel to me.

Two days after my arrival at Shíráz I was invited with the Nawwáb¹ to an entertainment given by an Armenian gentleman connected with the telegraph. On reaching the house soon after sunset I was cordially received by the host, who introduced me to his wife and another lady relative, and to his cousin, whom I have already had occasion to mention more than once as the companion of my excursions. The latter was about twenty-one years of age, had resided for a long time in Bombay, where he had been connected with the press, and spoke English perfectly, as did my host. The ladies preferred to talk Persian, in which language one of them was remarkably proficient, reading with ease the most difficult poetry. After a short while the other guests arrived. These were three in number: the Begler-begi,² a young and somewhat arrogant nobleman; a friend of his, less arrogant but more boisterous; and a turbaned and bearded philosopher. To the latter I was introduced as a student of metaphysics, and he at once proceeded to question me on the books I had read, the teachers with whom I had studied, and, finally, on some of those knotty problems which, long buried in oblivion in Europe, still agitate the minds and exercise the ingenuity of Persian schoolmen. I was fortunately relieved by the entrance of two Jewish minstrels and a dancing-boy, who had been engaged for our entertainment. The attention of the philosopher began to wander; his eyes were fixed on the evolutions of the dancer; his hands and feet beat time to the music. Wine was offered to him and not refused; metaphysic was exorcised by melody; and ere the hour of departure arrived, the disciple of Aristotle and Avicenna lay helpless on the floor, incapable of utterance, insensible to reproof, and oblivious alike of dignity and decorum. It is but just to say that this was the only occasion on which I witnessed so disgraceful a sight in Shíráz.

The Jewish minstrels of whom I have spoken appeared to be the favourite artists in their profession, for they were present at almost every entertainment of which music formed a part. One of the two men was noted for the hideous contortions into which he could twist his face. He was also, as I learned, an admirable mimic, and excelled especially in personating the Firangi Sáhib³ and the Muhammedan Mullá. These representations I did not witness, the former being withheld and of

¹ I.e., "Prince Governor (of Shiraz)."

² I.e., "Governor of the Province."

³ I.e., "European-Christian gentlemen." In British controlled India "sahib" was a title of courtesy, equivalent to "Mr." and "Sir."

respect for my feelings, and the latter reserved for very select audiences who could be trusted to observe a discreet silence; for a poor Jew would not willingly run the risk of incurring the resentment of the powerful and fanatical priests. The dancing-boy cannot have been more than ten or eleven years old.⁴ When performing, he wore such raiment as is usual with acrobats, with the addition of a small close-fitting cap, from beneath which his black hair streamed in long locks, a tunic reaching half way to the knees, and a mass of trinkets which jingled at every movement. His evolutions were characterized by agility and suppleness rather than grace, and appeared to me somewhat monotonous, and at times even inelegant. I saw him for the second time at the house of Hájí Nasru'llah Khán, the Ílkhání.⁵ On this occasion he superadded to his ordinary duties the function of cup-bearer, which he performed in a somewhat novel and curious manner. Having filled the wine-glass, he took the edge of the circular foot on which it stands firmly in his teeth, and, approaching each guest in turn, leaned slowly down so as to bring the wine within reach of drinker, continually bending his body more and more forwards as the level of the liquid sunk lower. One or two of the guests appeared particularly delighted with this manoeuvre, and strove to imprint a kiss on the boy's cheek as he quickly withdrew the empty glass.

⁴ In some recorded instances, dating from the first half of the nineteenth century, these skilled dancing-boys and acrobats (belonging to Muslim bands of entertainers) were as young as six or seven years only. In the words of James B. Fraser, who was present at a large public celebration marking the return of the monarch Fath 'Ali Shah to Tehran, on April 27, 1833: "During the whole of this time the dancers were dancing, and the musicians tearing away on their instruments; and certainly the tumbling performed by the dancers was the things of all others best of its kind, had there not been too much of it. There were four boys, I think, and a little creature, scarcely seven years old, as it appeared to us; and they not only danced, but tumbled and twisted their figures into every shape that suppleness of imagination could teach to suppleness of joint and muscle. They performed what is called "scorpions" in India—that is, lay on their bellies on the ground, and bent up back and legs, till their heels touched their heads, and every joint of the back in succession downwards, like a scorpion flourishing its tail..." For a full description of the event and the performers participating in it, see J.B. Fraser, *A Winter's Journey from Constantinople to Tehran*, 2 vols., New Burlington 1838, vol. 2, pp. 95–96.

⁵ I.e., "Tribal Chief," and "Military Commander."

DETAILS OF A COMMERCIAL PARTNERSHIP AND
DISPUTE BETWEEN TWO JEWISH MERCHANTS OF YAZD,
CA. 1880, REFERRED FOR JUDICIAL DECISION TO RABBI
YOSEF HAYYIM OF BAGHDAD

Introduction

Rabbi Yosef Hayyim (b. September 1, 1834, Baghdad–d. August 30, 1909, in the same city) was the leading rabbinic authority and scholar of Jewish law and Jewish traditional literature in Baghdad during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. He was born to an old and established family of rabbis, communal leaders and well-to-do merchants in Baghdad's expanding Jewish community. His grandfather, Rabbi Mosheh Hayyim, was Chief Rabbi and head of the rabbinic court in the city during the years 1787–1839, and his own father, Rabbi Eliyahu son of Mosheh (1807–1859), was rabbi, scholar and a wealthy merchant and philanthropist in the community. Yosef Hayyim received his early education in *heder* (i.e. traditional elementary school) and was tutored by his maternal uncle, Rabbi David Hay Ma'tuq (1815–1905), who, among his other capacities, served as the treasurer of the Alliance Israélite Universelle organization in Baghdad as of the 1860s. In 1848 (at the age of 14) he enrolled in the newly founded seminary for rabbinic training, called “Beyt Zilkhah,” that was established and personally directed by Rabbi ‘Abdallah Somekh (1813–1889), regarded as supreme authority in matters of Jewish law (*halakhah*) both in Baghdad and in the Jewish communities of Baghdadi origin throughout the Far East. Studying personally with Rabbi Somekh, the young Yosef Hayyim soon emerged as his master's most gifted and distinguished student. After four years of studies at the seminary, however, he embarked on an independent path and pursued his studies on his own, spending most of his time at the large private library in his home. In 1859, following the death of his father, he assumed all of the latter's rabbinic and communal responsibilities and, in the course of the next five decades, came to be recognized as the most influential rabbinic scholar, spiritual guide and

thinker in the Jewish community of Baghdad and in the main centers of rabbinic scholarship in the East, chief among them those in Ottoman Palestine, Constantinople, Izmir and Salonika. Despite the fact that throughout his life he did not occupy any public or official post, nor did he receive material support from the community's institutions, Yosef Hayyim was regarded as an uncontested religious authority both in Baghdad and in other Jewish communities of the East. A charismatic teacher and preacher, and a man of rigorous discipline dedicated to Jewish learning, Yosef Hayyim's areas of interest, scholarship and writing embraced an unusually broad range of fields and subjects. His uninterrupted work over a period of five decades produced a monumental body of rabbinic and literary-creative works, predominantly in Hebrew and some in Judeo-Arabic. These works, many of which have been (and continue to be) published in numerous editions ever since the 1870s, cover areas and branches as broad and diverse as Jewish religious law, commentaries on the various books of the Bible and the tractates of the Mishnah and Talmud; Jewish mysticism (or *Kabbalah*); homilies and eulogies; fables, parables, jokes and riddles; ethics and wisdom; prayers, supplications and religious poems; studies in prophetic literature, and more.

A significant part of Rabbi Yosef Hayyim's work was devoted to the examination and resolution of diverse religious and legal questions that were addressed to him on behalf of private individuals as well as rabbis and communal officials in Baghdad and elsewhere. A considerable number of such inquiries (Heb. *she'elot*), seeking Rabbi Yosef Hayyim's learned decision, arbitration and counsel, were addressed to him by Jews of Baghdadi origin in the colonies of India and the Far East as well as Jews who lived in relative geographical proximity to Baghdad, among them the Jews of Iran, Kurdistan, Ottoman Syria, Palestine and more. A large body of such religious and legal inquiries, that were submitted to Rabbi Yosef Hayyim, together with the latter's detailed deliberations, recommendations and answers (Heb. *teshuvot*) were preserved and they have been published ever since the rabbi's death in 1909. By virtue of the fact that the questions that appear in Rabbi Yosef Hayyim's work were ordinarily copied and written down by him from the original texts of these inquiries (as it is indeed customary in this specific branch of rabbinic literature commonly known as "respona literature"), by reading the texts of these inquiries one is able to obtain much authentic and valuable information pertaining to socio-cultural, religious and material conditions that prevailed in those communities.

The inquiry before us concerns a specific case of commercial partnership and dispute between two Jewish merchants of Yazd during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although the exact date on which it was written is not indicated by Rabbi Yosef Hayyim, we know that it was not submitted to him later than September 1892, because, as Rabbi Yosef Hayyim states in the beginning of the inquiry, the case was delivered to him by Rabbi Shelomo Hotzin (rabbi, writer and communal leader in Baghdad), who died on 8 Tishri 5653/September 29, 1892. The inquiry, one among a dozen of other undated questions and cases addressed to Rabbi Yosef Hayyim on behalf of various Jewish communities and individuals in Iran, is found in the latter's main collection of questions and answers entitled *Sefer Rav-Pe'alim* (see below). The information provided in the question before us throws some light on the nature and volume of commercial activity among Jewish merchants of Yazd who were involved in the purchase, sale and distribution of various commodities in their native town and in Isfahan, Tehran and other (unspecified) towns. Although the inquiry presents no more than an isolated and out of context case that does not inform us about the number, activity and relative economic strength of other similar merchants in Yazd and other locations in Iran, it does, nonetheless, provide us with some important socio-economic information and financial data. First, judging from the available documents and sources of information concerning the native (and not Ottoman and foreign) Jewish merchants of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, these merchants constituted a considerably small minority within their respective communities. The available information pertaining both to the first and second halves of the nineteenth century indeed confirms the numerous accounts and reports published by the Jewish organizations and publications in Europe. Thus, referring to the occupational and economic profile of Iranian Jews as late as 1888–9, we find the following observation in the annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association: "Almost everywhere the Jews are utterly wretched. There are very few merchants among them; a small number of them are petty dealers, and the greater portion are paupers. In Tehran, Hamadan and Kermanshah there are a few merchants." See AJA, 18 (1888–1889), pp. 43–44. The published sources and primary documents at our disposal (in Judeo-Persian, Hebrew and European languages) further point out that these rather small groups of Iranian-born Jewish merchants and financiers belonged mainly (and perhaps exclusively) to Iran's principal nineteenth-century towns and cities. Among the latter towns and urban

centers in which these Jewish merchants were active we may particularly point (from the northeast to the southwest) to: (1) Mashhad, until their forced conversion in 1839, and as secret Jews subsequently; (2) Urumia; (3) Hamadan (throughout the nineteenth century); (4) Kermanshah; (5) Sanandaj; (6) Tehran (mainly during the second half of the century); (7) Kashan; (8) Isfahan; (9) Yazd; (10) Shiraz; (11) Bushihr. As to the extent of capital and volume of their commercial and related business activities, the sources of information (and especially those dating from the second half of the nineteenth century) further suggest that the more affluent merchants, belonging to the latter mentioned urban communities, were involved in a broad range of wholesale purchase, sale, export and import of local and foreign products and commodities. Thus, with the expansion of commercial and economic ties between Iran and European countries and their affiliated agents and companies in the region, particularly during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, we find these well-to-do and active Jewish merchants of Iran trading in a wide range of products and commodities, among them drugs, jewelry, spices and articles of European manufacture, as well as diamonds and precious stones. Cf. *The Jewish Times of New York*, vol. V, No. 8 (April 18, 1873), p. 115. Evidence with regard to the commercial activity of this small group of affluent Jewish merchants is found also in letters and reports issued by various European (mostly British) commercial agents and officials. We learn that many among these prosperous merchants and traders transacted business with their Muslim counterparts, and some employed leading Muslim merchants as their agents. See letter of the head of British firm A. & T.J. Malcolm in Bushihr to Sir Albert Sassoon, dated July 25, 1884, in *AJA*, 14 (1884–1885), pp. 31–32. For further testimony on the affluence of these Jewish merchants and financiers, particularly those of Bushihr, see the following report by Mirza Nurullah Hakim, in *JMI*, August 1893, p. 119: “They (i.e. the Jews of Bushihr) are very well off, being great merchants and bankers.”

The information contained in the inquiry addressed to Rabbi Yosef Hayyim sheds light on the activity of what may be defined, in terms of Iran’s general economy, as “middle-range” or “medium-size” Jewish merchants, who were engaged in the purchase, sale and distribution of goods and products in the cities of Yazd, Isfahan, Tehran and other towns and locations whose names are not given. Whereas the aforementioned group of big merchants and financiers (particularly those in Mashhad, Hamadan, Tehran and Bushihr) were engaged in

large-scale and wholesale purchase and sale of various local and foreign goods and products, these “middle-range” Jewish merchants and traders depicted in our source were engaged in commercial activities involving smaller (but still substantial) amounts of capital. We have access to some private notes and business related letters and documents in Judeo-Persian, dating from the last decade of the nineteenth century, which provide important information with regard to the nature and volume of commercial activity among similar Jewish merchants in the other Jewish communities. From one of these illuminating letters, written by a Jewish merchant of Hamadan to his Jewish agent in another unspecified town in northwestern Iran (in the 1890s), we learn that they were engaged in the purchase and sale of agricultural and locally processed products, including opium, animal-furs, wax, gum tragacanth (Per. *katira*), and more. As to the volume of transactions, the said merchant directs his Jewish agent (also from Hamadan) to buy and sell in the amount of one hundred tumans per month. We further learn that the writer of the letter was in close business relations with some Jewish merchants of Baghdadi origin who had established their own colony of merchants in Hamadan. For the full text of this letter, found in a 19th-century Judeo-Persian collection, see BZI, Ms. 1071, f. 109b. On similar Jewish merchants, who were engaged in the purchase and sale of opium towards the end of the nineteenth century, see also BZI, Ms. 4579, f. 56b–57a.

Similar to the information found in the latter mentioned Judeo-Persian documents, the business and commercial data provided in the Hebrew inquiry before us attest to the common practice of commercial partnerships mostly between Jews. The inquiry further points to the existence of business relations and transactions conducted with Muslim merchants and financiers in Yazd, including the borrowing of relatively large sums (i.e. 400 tumans) of interest bearing credit from Muslim moneylenders in the city. Furthermore, despite the middle-range volume of the capital, transactions and profits involved (i.e., some hundreds but not thousands of tumans over a period of some six years), these merchants of Yazd and Isfahan, as depicted in the inquiry, had amounts of capital and revenue far beyond the average amount of income and wages earned by the vast majority of the Jews (and Muslims) in Yazd and in other communities during the same period. From diverse sources and documents that contain information and data on the occupations and economic conditions of the Iranian Jews in the course of the nineteenth century we know that the majority of the Jews in Yazd

and in many other cities and towns across Iran belonged to the lower income strata of the general population. In those sources we find that the daily income of a Jewish menial laborer (street-sweeper, stone-cutter and construction worker) in Isfahan in 1872–3 was $\frac{1}{2}$ kran, or approximately 1–1½ tuman per month. Cf. *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 37. We further know, from contemporary Persian sources, that the average monthly wages of Muslim laborers working in tobacco warehouses in Isfahan and Iran's other southern cities in 1892 was 2 tumans. Cf. H. Nategh, *Bazarganan dar Dad-u Sitad-i Bank-i Shahi va Rezhi-yi Tanbaku*, Paris 1992, pp. 111–113. The latter figures, representing the average monthly income of both Jewish and Muslim urban laborers during the years 1872–1892 (i.e., about 18 to 24 tumans per year), highlight the relative wealth and economic strength of the Jewish merchants depicted in the inquiry before us. We are told that the combined initial principal of the two merchants (put to use in Isfahan and Yazd, ca. 1880s) totaled the sum of 500 tumans, or roughly an equivalent of all the amounts of income earned by an average Jewish (or Muslim) laborer in Yazd and Isfahan over a period of twenty five years or more.

For further material and discussion on the Jewish merchants of Iran and their activity in Iran's various towns and regions in the course of the nineteenth century, see in our book, above, in the entire section treating the economy and material condition of Iranian Jews during this period. As regards the Jewish merchants of Yazd during the nineteenth century, see particularly below, source no. 27, entitled "The Jewish Community of Yazd in the Nineteenth Century, According to Azaria Levy." For further information on business relations and conflicts among the Jewish merchants of Sanandaj during the 1870s, see below, source no. 19, entitled "Communal Agreement Signed and Issued by the Religious Leaders of the Jewish Community of Sanandaj." Rare and highly informative letters and private commercial documents in Judeo-Persian and Hebrew, that shed light on the considerable economic power and network of Jewish merchants in Hamadan, Sanandaj and Bushihr during the 1890s, are found in the archives of Rabbi Ya'acov Shaul Elyashar (the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine during the years 1893–1906), at the Jewish National and University Library (= JNUL), Jerusalem, Arc. 4° 1271, files 633 and 634. As for the biography and writings of Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad, to whom the present inquiry on behalf of the Jewish merchants of Yazd was referred, a large body of works and literature is available. For an outline of his life and a list of his works and writings, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Ha-Rav*

Yosef Hayyim mi-Baghdad, Or-Yehuda 1984; idem, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequmat ha-Ge'onim 'ad Yameynu*, pp. 190–200. As regards Rabbi Yosef Hayyim's rabbinic stature and lasting influence on the development of religious law and thought among the Jews of Middle Eastern and North African extraction in the course of the twentieth century, see particularly Z. Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East: Studies in the Legal and Religious Thought of Sephardic Rabbis of the Middle East* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 47–49, 55–61; idem, "The Halakhic Literature of the Sages of Iraq in Modern Times" (in Hebrew), in *Pe'amim*, 86–87 (2001), pp. 33–42. As to the exact source of the present inquiry in Rabbi Yosef Hayyim's writings, see his extensive work in the field of responsa literature, entitled *Sefer Rav Pe'alim: She'elot u-Teshuvot*, 4 vols., Siah Yisrael Publishers, Jerusalem 1994, vol. 4 (Part *Hoshen Mishpat*), inquiry no. 2, pp. 84–86. For other inquiries and cases related to diverse aspects of religious, communal and economic lives among the Jews of Iran and referred to Rabbi Yosef Hayyim from several Jewish communities (among them those of Yazd, Shiraz, Kermanshah and Bushihr), see *ibid.*, vol. 2 (Part *Yoreh De'ah*), pp. 422–423, 438–439, 450–451; vol. 3 (Part *Even Ha-Ezer*), pp. 74–75, 100–101, 179–180, 347, 384, 390–391, and vol. 4 (Part *Hoshen Mishpat*), pp. 97–98.

Jewish Merchants of Yazd

In a question that has been delivered to me¹ by the honorable Rabbi Shelomo Hotzin² I have been asked the following by Jews who live in the towns of Persia:

¹ I.e. to Rabbi Yosef Hayyim.

² A rabbi, communal leader, writer and publisher in the Jewish community of Baghdad, Rabbi Shelomo Hotzin (b. 1843, Baghdad–d. September 29, 1892, in the same city) was an active and important figure among the communal officials and heads of the Jewish community in the latter city who took an active interest in the lives and existential concerns of Iranian Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century. Together with other communal officeholders and functionaries in Baghdad, such as Isaac Luria (headmaster of the Alliance school in Baghdad), Morris Cohen (teacher in the latter school and communal treasurer) and others, Rabbi S. Hotzin was in close contact with several Jews and communal heads and rabbis in Iran during the 1860s–1880s. Among his numerous other communal and scholarly activities in Baghdad, he published several Hebrew articles and reports on the Jews of Iran in the Jewish journals and periodicals of Europe. Equally important was his role as a link between the scattered Jewish communities of Iran and the communal leaders and organizations in Baghdad and Europe. He transferred to the latter leaders and organizations

In a partnership that was formed between Reuben and Shim'on,³ each of the two invested the amount of two hundred and fifty tumans,⁴ and they stipulated between them that Reuben would stay in the city of Yazd and Shim'on would move to the city of Isfahan; they further stipulated that Shim'on would stay in the city of Isfahan for a period of one or two years and that he would then return to Yazd, and upon his return (to Yazd) they would settle the accounts between them. Now, when Shim'on went to Isfahan and sold the merchandise which he had taken with him from Yazd, he wrote to Reuben his partner and told him: "The so and so merchandise I sold for 230 tumans,⁵ and the so and so merchandise for 220 tumans."⁶ When the letter reached Reuben in Yazd, he checked in his book and found that he had purchased each of the latter mentioned merchandises for the amount of 160 tumans, that is to say that on one of the sold merchandises he had made a profit of 70 tumans, and on the other one a profit of 60 tumans. (Seeing the profits made) Reuben went ahead and without Shim'on's permission took a loan with interest in the amount of 400 tumans and with the money that he borrowed he bought various kinds of goods and shipped them to Shim'on in Isfahan. When these goods reached Shim'on he sold them, but he kept with him those sums of money and did not send

letters and information which had been dispatched to him from Iran, and in which the diverse needs, hardships and requests of Iranian Jews were presented. Rabbi Hotzin's own reports on Iranian Jews as well as those letters and petitions by Iranian Jews that were transferred by him to Jewish officials and organizations in Baghdad and Europe contributed to the adoption of various concrete steps and actions by world Jewry in behalf of the Jews of Iran. For further information on Rabbi Shelomo Hotzin and his activities in the Jewish community of Baghdad, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequfat ha-Ge'onim*, op. cit., pp. 200–203; idem, *Yehudey Bavel ba-Tequfot ha-Aharonot*, pp. 100–102, 209–213. For bibliographical information regarding his numerous articles and reports on the Jews of Iran, see in Ben-Ya'acov's former mentioned work (i.e. *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequfat ha-Ge'onim*), p. 202, note 21. As regards his activity as an intermediary between the Jewish communities of Iran and the Jewish organizations and publications of Europe, see in our book below, source no. 35, entitled "Letter by the Heads of the Jewish Community of Tehran to Jewish Organizations of Europe...", note 1. For a short article by him treating specifically the Jewish merchants and spinners of Yazd, who had been severely damaged by the import to Yazd of silk that had been spun by competing workshops out of that city in the years 1886–1889, see his letter of 28 of Iyyar 5649 (May 29, 1889) from Baghdad, published in the Hebrew weekly *Hazefirah* of Warsaw, year 16, No. 158 (July 17, 1889), p. 646.

³ Fictitious names given to the parties involved so as to protect the anonymity of the litigants.

⁴ As to the value of the tuman (or 10 krans) during this period, see above, note 1.

⁵ Originally "23000 krans."

⁶ Originally "22000 krans."

to Reuben neither the principal nor the profit made on that principal. (Furthermore) Shim'on went and made partnerships with others; he bought and sold in Isfahan and shipped merchandise from one city to another. After this, having heard that Shim'on had purchased various goods and shipped them to Tehran, Reuben wrote (from Yazd) to Shim'on in Isfahan and told him: "The sums of money which I sent to you were a loan which I took from a gentile⁷ and I am paying interest on them for every single day that passes; why do you send merchandise to other cities while you buy and sell in Isfahan?" In reply Shim'on wrote to Reuben: "I do indeed send merchandise to other cities. (However) if this makes any profit, I do not take the profit only to myself; moreover, goods from Yazd make no profit, whereas here, in Isfahan, I buy and sell only if the merchandise makes a profit." When this letter reached Reuben (in Yazd), he said to himself: "Maybe this is a better way of doing business." Hence, he kept silent and waited for two years, but Shim'on did not come to Yazd. (Therefore) Reuben wrote another letter to Shim'on and said: "Please, either come (to Yazd) and let us settle the accounts, or else write in paper the specifics of the accounts and transactions so that I see what you have done." As for Shim'on's response, he listed in a letter every merchandise that he himself had sent (from Isfahan) to Reuben (in Yazd), but he did not write at what price had he bought and at what price had he sold and whether he had made a profit or incurred a loss. After that Reuben waited for another two years, but the account was not sent to Yazd, and so once again he wrote to Shim'on and told him: "Either come and let us settle our accounts, or write down the specifics of the accounts and the transactions and send them to me." But, once again, Shim'on wrote to Reuben (from Isfahan) and listed what he had sent to Reuben and what Reuben had sent to him, without indicating how he had sold the goods. Still, Reuben waited for two more years, but Shim'on did not arrive, and again Reuben wrote to him saying, either come (to Yazd), or write to me the specifics of the accounts and the transactions. But once again Shim'on wrote to him in the same way as he had done before. At long last, seeing the situation, Reuben traveled to Shim'on in Isfahan, and they summed up the accounts with one another, whereby it was found that Reuben had made a profit of two hundred tumans in Yazd, and Shim'on had made a profit of two hundred tumans in Isfahan, and

⁷ Originally the Heb. word "*goy*," which here evidently means "a Muslim."

that, additionally, Shim'on had made a profit of eight hundred tumans from other places, all of which profits from this partnership totaled the amount of one thousand and two hundred tumans. It was also found that Shim'on had given in consignment to a certain person some one hundred tumans' worth of merchandise, and that person went bankrupt, and thus Shim'on lost one hundred tumans, and that in addition to that he had gone into partnership with others, and they had sent him goods, on which he lost sixty tumans. Now, Reuben and Shim'on want to part. Reuben (who had stayed in Yazd) says: "I have witnesses that I took a loan in the amount of four hundred tumans, with interest, from a gentile, and it has been for six years now that I have been paying so-and-so interest. Now, I will take the profit that was made on my share of principal, and you will take the profit made on your share of the principal. In case you do not want to do so, give me the amount of the four hundred tumans that you kept with you for six years, and we will then divide up the profit into two, and whatever amount you lost in your transactions in other places should be incurred by you alone." As for Shim'on's response, he says: "Your initial investment of two hundred and fifty tumans was sufficient for me,⁸ and, therefore, I will not pay you the amount of interest that your loan accrued during the six years; I will neither give you any share of the profit that I made in other places, because our partnership was limited to Isfahan and Yazd only. Therefore, you shall take the two hundred tumans that you made in Yazd and I shall take the two hundred tumans that I made in Isfahan, and all the other profits that I made in other places or any amount that I lost shall all be mine. In response to the latter demands Reuben states: "You who claim that my initial investment of two hundred and fifty tumans were sufficient for you, why did you keep with you for six years the four hundred tumans that I had taken as a loan, and why didn't you come back to Yazd after two years, as we had indeed agreed and stipulated?" (And) Shim'on, in turn, responds to Reuben by saying that he had lots of merchandise in his possession, and that he had sold a lot on credit, and that is why he did not return to Yazd, a claim to which Reuben responds by saying: "Why didn't you write and send to me the specifics of the accounts and the transactions as I, in fact, wrote and requested you so many times"; to which Shim'on responds

⁸ I.e., "there was no need for you to take a loan."

by saying: “I said to myself that a profit made in Isfahan would be mine and a profit made in Yazd would be yours.”

Given the case presented above, we hereby request our learned teacher and master to instruct us as to how these two partners are to divide the profit between them, and what is to be done with the losses that Shim'on incurred on his own; and, be that by so doing your reward from Heaven be doubled.

SECTION IV
COMMUNAL ORGANIZATION AND
INNER COMMUNAL RELATIONS

SOURCE 17

THE OLD SYNAGOGUE IN THE CITY OF HAMADAN
IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, AS DESCRIBED
IN THE YEAR 1850 BY DR. ABRAHAM DE SOLA,
CHIEF RABBI OF THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE
CONGREGATION OF MONTREAL, CANADA

Introduction

Throughout the pre-modern times in Iran, the synagogue and its various functions constituted the heart and center of the religious, communal and educational lives among the organized Jewish communities across Iran. All the sources of information at our disposal from the nineteenth century, that contain references and data with respect to the synagogues in the various communities, demonstrate that regardless of each community's individual past history, geographical location or relative demographic size and resources, the synagogue fulfilled a number of closely related functions in the areas of religion, community and culture. Regardless of a given synagogue's size, physical condition and overall internal and external appearance, the synagogue provided first and foremost a sanctified location in which daily prayers during the week days and congregational services on Sabbath days and holidays were conducted during the entire Jewish annual cycle. In addition to the latter central function, that preserved and nurtured the collective religious identity and bonds of the congregants, the synagogue served as the community's main gathering place, where a variety of inter-personal and inner-communal interactions and transactions took place. Both the religious and socio-communal functions of the synagogue were, and still are, common to synagogues and Jewish congregations world-wide. In this respect, and as a communal institution, the synagogue in Iran in pre-modern times naturally shared numerous characteristics with those in other Jewish communities, and with those in Muslim lands in particular. Yet, in comparison with many of the Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa in the course of the 18th–19th centuries, and particularly those in the larger cities and towns of the Ottoman Empire (chief among them those in Istanbul, Damascus,

Jerusalem and Baghdad), the general position and the communal role of the synagogues in the lives of the communities of Iran appear to have been much more vital and central. Whereas in many of the Jewish communities under Ottoman sovereignty (especially those in the major Ottoman cities and towns across the Middle East) the synagogue was one among many other important communal bodies and institutions, in most of the Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the 19th century the synagogue constituted the principal and often-times the only center of Jewish communal life. The causes for this reality, which is described and documented in various primary and secondary sources, lie in the fact that the vast majority of the Jewish communities and settlements in Iran during the 18th and 19th centuries suffered from severe material hardships as well as diverse physical threats and communal predicaments. As the evidence at our disposal suggests, both in the larger urban communities (such as those in Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan and Kirmanshah), and particularly in the smaller settlements (scattered in the south, such as Zarqan, near Shiraz, and in north-western Iran, in the vicinity of Urumia), the communal institutions were few in number, and ordinarily they were struggling to survive and provide very basic services. As a result, in the majority of the Jewish communities of Iran during the 19th century, the synagogue and its affiliated bodies and services (among them elementary education, or *maktab*, charitable funds for the needy, ritual bath-houses, etc.) constituted the community's main institutions and physical assets. This general condition of material and communal distress, that prevailed in most of the Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the 19th century, was often-time exacerbated by the fact that in many (and evidently in most) of the communities Jews were not permitted to build new synagogues, but were only allowed to maintain and repair the old ones. Similar to many other areas and aspects of life among the scattered Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the 19th century and earlier, we do not have sufficient information with regard to the exact number and specific features and activities of the synagogues in the various Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century. This lack of information prevents us from forming a clear and detailed picture concerning the history and concrete role of this important institution in the lives of the various communities across Iran. The evidence we possess at this stage with respect to the various synagogues of Iran in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries is typically fragmentary and disjointed. For the most part, however, this partial information points

to considerable difficulties that the Jews of Iran had both in maintaining the existing synagogues and in generating and building new ones. In the old and comparatively better off community of Hamadan, for example, in the 1850s, the wall of one of the few surviving synagogues in the community caught fire. The Muslims in the town did not allow the Jews to extinguish it, and, as a result, the entire synagogue was burnt down. The heads of the community appealed to build a new synagogue instead, but their request was rejected by the governor, who, moreover, demanded a large sum of money in order to allow the community to rebuild the ruined synagogue. See *Hamagid*, year 7, No. 32 (August 12, 1863), p. 252. As far as the available sources point out, the Jewish community in the capital city of Tehran was among the very few in which new synagogues continued to be built throughout the nineteenth century. The relatively protected position of this community and its steady demographic and communal growth during the nineteenth century explain the increase in the number of synagogues in this rapidly growing city. We learn that in the year 1825 the Jewish community of Tehran numbered about one hundred families and they had five synagogues. See Rev. Joseph Wolff's journal of 1825, in *LSPCJ*, 19 (1827), p. 216. By the year 1886 the community had grown to some six hundred families, and they now had seven synagogues. See *Habazeleth*, year 16, No. 22 (February 19, 1886), p. 176. In the year 1896 the community already numbered about 4,000 souls, whose religious and communal lives were conducted in affiliation with fourteen small synagogues. See *AJA*, 26 (1896–1897), pp. 48–49.

The increase in the number of synagogues in Tehran during the nineteenth century, however, appears to stand in contrast with the situation that prevailed in most of the other Jewish communities of Iran during the same period. As explained above, in most of the larger and smaller communities the Jews were not only prevented from building new synagogues, but rather, they did not possess the material means and the required connections and local support to physically protect those synagogues that the community had inherited from the past. The generally poor and shabby condition of many of the synagogues in nineteenth-century Iran, as evidenced and described by numerous contemporary eyewitnesses, resulted both from material hardships and lack of adequate legal and physical protection, that characterized the lives of many of the isolated Jewish communities of Iran during this period. A description of the synagogue in the Jewish community of Kirmanshah in the 1840s, provided by the missionary Henry A. Stern,

sheds light on the generally poor and vulnerable condition of the synagogues in many other Jewish communities of Iran as well. Visiting the Jewish community of Kirmanshah together with his Christian colleague P.H. Sternschuss in May 1845, he wrote in his journal: “On May 16 (1845) we went to the Jewish quarter, which is situated in the lowest part of the town, and inquired for the synagogue; a crowd of Jews quickly surrounded us and conducted us to it. We had to wait several minutes while a messenger was dispatched for keys. On entering we descended into an extremely poor place of worship, affording the strongest evidence of poverty and oppression of the Jews here. They told us that they repeatedly laid down expensive carpets, and ornamented the books of the law, but the soldiers had as often broken in at night, and stolen every article of value.” See in his report on the Jewish community of Kirmanshah, in *JJ*, October 1845, p. 363. Three years later, while conducting missionary work in the Jewish community of Isfahan, H. Stern noted: “Frequently, in going from one family to another, I traversed a labyrinth of streets and lanes, pent up with decayed synagogues and ruined houses, without meeting with any living being, except troops of savage dogs, who were banqueting on the carcass of a camel, mule or horse which a pious Persian had thrown there to annoy the Jews and to feed the starving, famished brutes.” See his journal of March 1848, in his *Dawnings of Light in the East*, pp. 155–156. As regards the location and the immediate surroundings of Isfahan’s main synagogue, Stern further added: “...our journey, through the net-work of lanes, alleys, bazaars, and ruins, towards the synagogue, was a work which, without a guide, we could never have accomplished. The large synagogue, like all Jewish places of worship, is in the most inhabited part of the Ghetto, hemmed in on all sides by miserable and decayed houses, which in time of commotion or peace, serve as a weak defense against the intrusion of the fanatical destroyer, and the base robber.” *Ibid.*, p. 166. Descriptions and testimonies provided both by the communal leaders and rabbis in the larger Jewish communities of Iran in the second half of the 19th century, as well as accounts of foreign visitors during the same period, reveal that the centuries-old synagogues in Yazd, and particularly those in Shiraz and Isfahan, were mostly dilapidated, poorly maintained and unimpressive in their external appearance and internal furniture and ornamentations. However, despite their poor physical condition and humble interiors and assets, these synagogues and their annexes served as the main communal buildings in which the community’s various services and activities were performed. For a

testimony by the rabbis of Isfahan with regard to the run-down and crumbling old synagogues in their community during the second half of the nineteenth century, see below, source no. 29, entitled “The Jewish Community of Isfahan in the Year 1888.” For a similar description concerning the synagogues of Shiraz during the same period, see also below, source no. 24, entitled “From the Memoirs of a Learned Rabbi of Shiraz.” Regarding the modest and stark furniture and ornamentation of the old synagogues of Yazd (six in number) as late as the third decade of the twentieth century, see in the report of the representative of the Alliance Israélite in Yazd, dated July 1, 1926, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 8, No. 1979. Regarding the simple architecture and unassuming interior and furniture of the majority of Tehran’s fourteen synagogues during the last decade of the nineteenth century, see E.N. Adler, *Jews in Many Lands*, pp. 185–189. As regards the number of synagogues in the larger communities during the 1870s, i.e., 10 in Tehran, 4 in Hamadan, 5 in Shiraz, 10 in Isfahan, 10 in Yazd, 6 in Kashan and 3 in Bushihr, see AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 92.

The passage before us, in which a detailed description of the interiors of the Old Synagogue of Hamadan in the 1840s is given, is an important document among the mid-nineteenth-century Western sources that deal with the contemporary Iranian Jews in general and with the Jewish community of Hamadan in particular. Its author, Dr. Abraham de Sola (b. September 18, 1825, London–d. June 5, 1882, New York), was a distinguished rabbi, orientalist, writer and communal leader in Canada and North America. Having received a thorough training in Jewish theology and Semitic languages in London, Abraham de Sola, who belonged to a prominent family of Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Britain, was elected in 1846 (when only 21 years old) Chief Rabbi of the Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Montreal, Canada. In 1848 he was appointed lecturer, and in 1853 professor, of Hebrew and Oriental Literature at McGill University, in Montreal, and eventually became the senior professor of the latter university’s faculty of arts. In addition to a broad range of scholarly and rabbinic activities in Canada and in the United States of America until his death, A. de Sola was active and personally involved in numerous communal and philanthropic activities in the growing Jewish community of Montreal. It was in this context that shortly after his arrival in Canada (in 1847) he invited to Montreal a native Jew of Hamadan, by the name of Rabbi Nissim Ben Shelomo. Rabbi Nissim, so we learn from Dr. de Sola’s writings, that constitute our main source of information regarding this

interesting figure, was sent to Constantinople and London (in 1846) on behalf of the Jewish community of Hamadan, or more specifically by the authorities of the Synagogue of Mordecai and Esther in that community, in order to acquaint the Jews of Europe and the West with the hardships of his coreligionists in Iran and raise funds in their behalf. This little-known Jew of Hamadan, who as far as the evidence suggests may well have been the first Iranian Jew who reached Canada, arrived in Montreal on October 6, 1848 (on the day before the Day of Atonement). The next evening, at the solemn congregational service, Dr. de Sola, in his capacity as Chief Rabbi of the Congregation of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Montreal, made a stirring appeal on behalf of the Jews of Iran. A collection of seventy dollars resulted, which, although not inconsiderable in those days, was not even sufficient to cover the expenses of Rabbi Nissim's lengthy journey to Canada. It was therefore decided to make a public appeal at a lecture by Rev. de Sola, the entire proceeds of which were to be devoted to the relief of the Jews of Iran. The lecture, which was much publicized in Montreal, took place on October 26, 1848, and it drew a considerable audience of Jews and Christians, among them the Speaker of the House, the Attorney-General, judges, professors, clergymen, scholars and journalists. In the words of the *Montreal Transcript*, issue of October 28, 1848: "Dr. de Sola amply fulfilled his auditors' expectations. His depiction of the suffering of the Jews in that remote country (i.e., Iran) greatly moved their hearts and left a deep impression on all present."

Rabbi Nissim stayed in Montreal as Dr. de Sola's guest for five weeks. During that time he served as an informant to Dr. de Sola with respect to Iranian Jews in general, and in connection with the Jewish community of Hamadan in particular. The detailed information and testimonies that were conveyed by Rabbi Nissim to Dr. de Sola were soon published in a series of articles, in English, by the latter, in *The Jewish Chronicle of London* (Old Series) in the course of the year 1850. Entitled "Notes on the Jews of Persia under Mohammed Shah," *Obtained from one of themselves*, these articles were, according to Dr. de Sola's introductory note to the editor of *The Jewish Chronicle*, based on two of his lectures on behalf of the Jews of Iran. The series appeared in eight separate issues of *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI (1850). It is noteworthy that the articles under discussion were among the earliest references to the Jews of Iran in the Jewish press of Europe. Furthermore, in addition to their importance in the chronicle of the evolving contacts and relations between Iranian Jewry and the Jewish communities of the West in the

course of the nineteenth century, these detailed articles provide rich and rare factual information on diverse aspects of life among the Jews of Hamadan during the 1840s and earlier. Included among the subjects treated in these articles are the Jewish community of Hamadan's communal institutions and buildings; their dwellings, etiquettes, domestic economy, family lives, recreations, dress, educational system, marriage, communal feasts, customs, occupations and trades, and more. For the texts of these eight informative pieces by Dr. de Sola, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI (1850), No. 24 (March 22), pp. 186–187; No. 32 (May 16), pp. 252–253; No. 33 (May 24), pp. 262–263; No. 44 (August 9), pp. 346–347; No. 45 (August 16), pp. 354–355; No. 46 (August 23), pp. 362–363; No. 47 (August 30), pp. 370–371; and No. 48 (September 6), pp. 379–380. The above series was concurrently translated into French and published, in *Archives Israélites* of Paris, vol. 11 (1850), pp. 311–313, 423–425, 460–465 and 554–558. The passage before us, that depicts the Old Synagogue of Hamadan, is reproduced verbatim from *The Jewish Chronicle's* issue No. 33 (May 24), pp. 262–263, referred to above. As regards Dr. Abraham de Sola and his varied scholarly, communal and philanthropic activities in Canada and the U.S.A., see J. Jacobs, s.v. "Abraham de Sola," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, pp. 432–433, and particularly B.G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, 2 vols., Montreal 1945, vol. 1, pp. 133–143, 149–150, 156–161 and 171–172. For Dr. de Sola's own account of his relations with his Jewish-Iranian informant, Rabbi Nissim Ben Shelomo, and Dr. de Sola's appreciation of Rabbi Nissim's knowledge and authenticity as an informant on the Jews of Hamadan, see Dr. de Sola's letter of 18th of Ab 5609 (August 6, 1849), published in *The Occident* (the news and literary Jewish periodical of Philadelphia that appeared during the years 1843–1869), vol. VII (1849), pp. 315–317. Regarding Rabbi Nissim's visit to Canada and the hardships of the Jewish community of Hamadan, that led to his journey in quest of assistance in their behalf in Europe and Canada, see I. Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life*, Philadelphia 1944, pp. 77–80, 694 (n. 26).

The Old Synagogue of Hamadan

...The market, in the centre of the city (of Hamadan), is completely walled round; so that a stranger would experience difficulty in finding it unless duly directed. The noise of thousands of voices gives notice to its

proximity. Arrived at the walls, the entrance is through seven principal gates, to wit: two east, two, with a door, west, one north, and two south. There are no shops in the city, therefore all must go to the market. In consequence of this regulation, the market contains every description of store; thus, the southern part is appropriated to the sellers of cattle, corn, barley, rice, beans and the like articles; while the other parts are indiscriminately occupied by the stores of dry goods, and other artisans. The marketing hours display a scene of indescribable confusion, more especially in the corn and cattle markets; but after mid-day the latter is entirely deserted.

The Christians' churches are exceedingly plain, as they are not allowed to build steeples, erect crosses, or to use bells. Accordingly, when the congregation are to be summoned to prayer, a man passes through the streets beating a board with a stick, or he knocks at their gate.¹ At Easter they repair for worship to a very ancient building on a mount, about two hours' journey from Hamadan.

The next building we have to notice will be the Synagogue. There are eleven Synagogues in Hamadan, four of which are very extensive.² The foundation of the largest, which is called "*Beth Hackeneseth Hazaken*," or Old Synagogue, is said to have been laid by Mordecai. It is therefore also called "*Beth Hackeneseth shel Mordechai*," or Mordecai's Synagogue. The Chief Rabbi of Hamadan, Rabbi Eliyahu bar Eliezer Eliyahu,³

¹ During this time (i.e., the 1840s), some very few Christian families lived inside the city of Hamadan. Rev. Henry A. Stern, who visited the city with his missionary colleague P.H. Sternschuss in May 1845, noted: "In Hamadan there are about fifteen Christian families; and in a village, not far distant from it, there reside sixty or seventy families of Christians. By far the greater number of the (Christian) inhabitants are Armenians." See his journal of May 23, 1845, in *JII*, December 1845, p. 415. Thus, the Jews constituted the largest non-Muslim concentration in the midst of a predominantly Shi'ite population.

² As regards the size of the Jewish population of Hamadan and the number of their synagogues in 1845, H.A. Stern further observed: "The Jewish population of Hamadan consists of about 340 families; some have indeed asserted that there are as many as 4,000 souls, (and) others have estimated as high as 500 families, but as far as we could ascertain, there are not more than 350 or 400 families. They have three synagogues. The two largest of these we frequently visited; the third, they told us, was very small." See *ibid.* As far as the more recent history of the community in Hamadan was concerned, however, the heads of the community told Stern as follows: "A hundred years since (i.e., ca. 1740), there were thirteen synagogues in this place, and a very great number of Jews, but the Ishmaelites have only left us three, and one which was erected a few years since, they destroyed before it was completed." *Ibid.*, p. 412.

³ Rabbi Eliyahu was the Chief Rabbi of Hamadan during the 1840s–1860s. As late as the year 1864 he still served as the main religious and spiritual leader of the community, for we know of a long letter that was written and signed by him and

more particularly frequents this Synagogue. His residence is immediately opposite the Synagogue entrance. Behind are three Mikva'oth⁴ or baths, with running water, the property of the congregation, and free to all members.

There are two entrances to the Synagogue. Its interior presents a striking difference from that of a similar building in Europe or America. There are no galleries nor seats of any description, but the whole congregation are seated on the floor,⁵ their shoes having been taken off previous to their entrance, and deposited in a place outside appropriated for them. As regards the absence of seats, there is no difference between Synagogue, church, or mosque. The only article of furniture in the Synagogue is the Tebah or reading desk, which consists of a sloping platform placed between two pillars reaching from the roof to the ground. At the base of the Tebah is a kind of bench for the reader to stand on, sufficiently broad to enable him to make three or four steps backward; on each side of him there is a bench for the wardens;⁶ two of whom stand near him during the time the law is read. The one on his right holds in his hand a silver plate, on which is engraven the Decalogue in Hebrew characters, which is kissed by every one called to read. The furniture of the rolls of the law is also different from that of European Synagogues. They⁷ are suspended in portable boxes, made to open with hinges; and when closed, form very neat, some very elegant cabinets. There are handles outside the case by

eleven other heads of the community. For this letter, which was addressed to the editor of the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid*, and in which Rabbi Eliyahu explains in detail the community's numerous economic, legal and physical difficulties, see the letter of Elul 13, 5624 (September 14, 1864), published in *Hamagid*, year 9, No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and No. 4 (January 25, 1865), p. 28. Regarding Rabbi Eliyahu's authority and high standing in Hamadan, see also above, source no. 4 entitled "The Jews of Iran in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, as Observed by Dr. Jacob E. Polak," note 2.

⁴ Heb. *Mikva'ot* (pl. of *miqveh*) are ritual baths, used mainly by married women after their menstruations, and by brides, before nuptial.

⁵ Sitting on carpeted floors was customary in all the synagogues of Iran through the early years of the 20th century. For a description of the basic furniture in the synagogues of Tehran in the 1880s, see, e.g., the following account in *Habazeleth*, year 7, No. 22 (February 19, 1886), p. 177: "In all of them there are no chairs to sit on, and no tables, but only woolen sheets spread on the ground, on which the worshippers sit in the way that is common among the people of the East." Cf. E.N. Adler, *Jews in Many Lands*, op. cit., p. 189.

⁶ Here, in the original article, Dr. de Sola adds the following footnote: "The office of warden continues through life; and so highly is it esteemed that many give large sums of money to obtain it."

⁷ I.e., the Torah rolls.

which the reader rolls the manuscript to whichever side he desires. The cabinets are enveloped with very beautiful cloaks, and have the usual silver bells. The last time the Mahometans⁸ spoiled the Jewish quarter, and found these bells in the house of one of the wardens, they returned them saying, “Yours is the house of God, although you worship Him in it after a strange and wrong manner. Take back the things devoted to His service.” The Hechal or Ark, unlike those of western Synagogue, consists of a mere niche or hollow in the wall. It has no doors, but a curtain before it. The rolls of the law are deposited in one row upon a very handsome cloth. In the Synagogue of Mordecai, there are, say, 150 of these rolls; in the minor Synagogues the number averages from 80 to 20.⁹ Neither Church nor Synagogue may be whitened or lime-washed exteriorly. On one occasion, the Israelites, desiring to rebuild one of their Synagogues, gave some two hundred dollars,¹⁰ considered a large sum, to induce the Khan¹¹ to permit them to build it with a white exterior. The Khan took the bribe, but refused the permission. During the reign of Mahommed Shah¹² they were not permitted to build a Synagogue elsewhere but on the site of one of the old ones; and even to do this they would have experienced much difficulty. In the court of the Synagogue of Mordecai stands the *Bachur Midrashi*, or school for youths, where the higher branches of Hebrew literature are studied. But, of this as well as of the *Jeshiba*,¹³ or college, we shall speak hereafter.

⁸ I.e., the Muslims.

⁹ Such large collections of Torah rolls were reportedly found also in the synagogues of the other older Jewish communities of Iran during the first half of the nineteenth century. For the exceptionally high number of such rolls in one of the old synagogues of Isfahan, named the Shalem Synagogue, see the following testimony of Rev. Joseph Wolff, who visited the Jewish community of Isfahan in January 1825: “(Entering the Shalem Synagogue) I first of all took a view of the copies of the Law of Moses, which are written upon skin. I never saw in my life a larger collection of copies of the Sepher Torah (Law of Moses, sic) than I did here; there were about 250 ancient copies written upon skin.” See his journal of 1825, in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 213. In Hamadan most of these rolls were produced by the local Jewish scribes, who were known among the Jewish communities across Iran for their fine calligraphy. Cf. JMI, May 1895, pp. 78–80.

¹⁰ Dr. de Sola does not indicate the sum in the original Iranian currency.

¹¹ I.e., evidently, the governor of Hamadan.

¹² I.e., the years 1834–1848.

¹³ Heb. *Yeshivah*, i.e., “seminary” and “Talmudic school of higher education.”

STANDARD FORMULA USED FOR THE APPOINTMENT
OF THE HEAD OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
(HEB. *NASI*) IN THE CITY OF URUMIA, CA. 1898¹

This is the form to be used for whoever is appointed as the head of the community,² and following is its wording:

¹ Following is the text of a standard form which was used for the appointment of *Nasi* (i.e. the head of the Jewish community) in the city of Urumia. Written in Hebrew, the text of this form appears together with about three dozen other standard forms which were in use in that community during the second half of the 19th century. Among these forms we find drafts of wills, powers of attorney, leases and contracts of real estate, as well as terms of guardianship over orphans, marriage contracts, bills of divorce and letters of appointment for emissaries to be sent to other communities to collect donations for the needy members of the community of Urumia. The broad range of these forms, each of which spells out specific terms and conditions for various inter-personal, financial, legal and communal transactions, attests to the existence of a body of customary rules and procedures which regulated and governed the communal lives of the Jews in Urumia in the 19th century. The forms under discussion are part of a Judeo-Persian collection which, rather typically, contains diverse Hebrew and Judeo-Persian literary, folkloristic and communal material, and was evidently copied in Urumia between the years 1898–1917. Designated as manuscript number 937, the collection is in the possession of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem. The specific form translated above appears in f. 40a of the manuscript. For further information regarding this collection of communal documents, see A. Netzer, *Osar Kūvey ha-Yad*, pp. 86–87.

² The Hebrew honorific term *Nasi*, i.e. “president,” “chief” and “prince,” was the title of the heads of the larger Jewish communities of Iran, roughly through the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to the requirements of his position and responsibilities (which included the collection and payment of taxes to the government, representing the community vis-à-vis officials and important local groups and individuals, and, mainly ensuring security and orderly life within the community), he ordinarily belonged to well-to-do and established families of the Jewish community. Together with the religious and spiritual leader of the community, i.e. the chief rabbi and judge (*Hakham* and *Dayyan*, respectively), he formed the backbone of the dual communal leadership in the larger towns and cities of Iran. Known also by the Persian administrative term of *kadkhuda* (i.e., “head of a ward, a quarter or a village”), in some communities, such as Shiraz and Tehran, the *Nasi* acted in cooperation and coordination with a small council of seven to thirteen elders and representatives of the community, who for the most part belonged also to the established and respected families. For further information on this important communal office and the personal and socio-economic qualifications required for being appointed to the position in various communities, see, e.g., in Mashhad (prior to the pogrom and forced conversion of the community in March 1839), J. Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours*, pp. 93–95; in Tehran, see particularly *Habazeleth*, year 16, No. 16 (January 8, 1886), pp. 124–125; *ibid.*, No. 22

By agreement of all the members of the holy community of Urumia,³ who are sheltered under the wings of the Kingdom of Persia, may its glory increase, we have hereby appointed so-and-so..., the son of so-and-so..., to head the entire community in all their affairs inside and in all their dealings outside. We have elected him to be a head over us, and hereby we, the members of this holy community, acknowledge that we accepted the aforementioned so-and-so..., the son of so-and-so..., out of our own good will and wholeheartedly, so that he serves as our head, and appears before the government authorities, and goes wherever needed. He will be in charge of our affairs inside and our dealings outside, and he shall be standing firm to serve (the community) with all his strength and to the best of his ability; and, as a fee for his services we have taken upon us to pay him the amount

(February 19, 1886), pp. 176–177; and *Archives Israélites*, 50 (1889), p. 247. Regarding this position in Isfahan, see JI, August 1846, p. 289; as to Shiraz, see *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 25 (April 9, 1875), p. 199. For the same position in the smaller community of Kashan in the mid-19th century, see JI, August 1846, p. 298.

³ Located to the south-west of Lake Urumia (in Western Azerbaijan), the city of Urumia had a Jewish colony whose history dated back to at least as early as the first half of the 18th century. See, e.g., the testimony of the elders of that community to the European Jewish traveler and researcher Judah Tscharni, in *Hamagid*, year 5, No. 43 (November 8, 1871), p. 340, and compare Z. Shazar, “Urmiiyah,” in *Yeda‘-Am*, vol. 14, No. 35–36 (1969), pp. 3–4. Inhabited mainly by Christian Nestorians, Armenians and a dominant Shi‘ite population, the Jews numbered about 2500 souls, out of a total population of approximately 35 thousand, during the last decade of the 19th century. Cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 94; idem, *Persia: Western Mission*, p. 245. We possess various sources of information concerning the demographic growth and the relative strength of this north-western Jewish community during the second half of the 19th century. Having an estimated population of one thousand souls in 1868 (see the British official R. Thomson’s report of April 20, 1868, in FO 248/244), the community of Urumia was spared the devastating effects of the Great Famine of 1871–2. As a result, the community attracted a large number of destitute Jewish refugees (from famine stricken communities in western and southern Iran). See *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 45. We learn of 200 Jewish families or houses (i.e., roughly between 1200 to 1500 souls) who lived in that community by 1877. Due to their occupations and trades (as merchants, petty land-owners, shop-keepers, pedlars and craftsmen), the Jews of Urumia were comparatively less poor than Jews in other communities of Iran. They had four synagogues and they conducted their communal lives in affiliation with them. See AJA, 6 (1876–77), p. 91. The last two decades of the 19th century marked an additional growth in the community’s size and strength. By 1890, the number of the houses in the community had risen to 400, numbering altogether about 2500 souls, who spoke Aramaic and lived in the midst of a Muslim and Christian population of 30 to 40 thousand. Cf. JI, April 1890, p. 61, and G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 536.

of so-and-so...,⁴ on the condition that he strives with all the strength and power that he possesses, that he acts promptly (and) with no delay whatsoever. Signed here, in the city of Urumia, on this...day of the month of..., in the year..., with all the terms and stipulations being firm, clear and abiding.

⁴ In addition to the salary paid to him by the community, in some cities, such as Tehran, the head of the community received also a monthly allowance from the government, and, further, enjoyed additional payments from the members of his community. According to *Habazeleth*, year 16, No. 16 (January 8, 1886), p. 125: "(In Tehran) the kadkhuda (i.e. the head of the community) collects taxes and brings them to the government's treasury. (Further) he receives every month a fixed sum of money from the government, which sum is supplemented by small amounts of tax which he receives from the members of the Jewish community on occasions of marriage and divorce as well as sale and purchase of houses and plots of land."

SOURCE 19

COMMUNAL AGREEMENT¹ SIGNED AND ISSUED BY THE
RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF
SANANDAJ ON 22 OF TEVET 5635 (DECEMBER 30, 1874)²

May the Almighty God be with us
as He was with our forefathers,

may He not forsake and abandon us, may He be our support and help forever, and may the Children of Israel be fruitful, that they may multiply and increase and the earth be filled with them.³ The twenty-second day of the month of Tevet in the (Hebrew) year 5635 (December 30, 1874).

Our help being found in the Name of the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, be that this wish of ours is achieved by our hands:⁴

We, the holy community of the city of Senneh,⁵ may God protect it, hereby confess that we made an agreement, (and) just as our holy fathers

¹ The Hebrew rabbinic term *haskamah*, i.e., “agreement” and “agreed upon decision,” signifies a binding agreement reached by the religious authorities of a given community.

² Written in Hebrew, the text of the following agreement appears together with a dozen other communal and private documents and notes in a notebook that, according to all evidence, belonged to an anonymous rabbi or religious functionary in the Jewish community of Sanandaj during the years 1870–1910. The majority of the documents found in this rather rare collection are copies of original communal documents, mostly in Hebrew and some in Judeo-Persian, which the owner of the notebook either wrote down himself or else copied in his own handwriting from the originals which were apparently available to him. The above notebook, together with some other 18th–19th-century communal and private papers belonging to the members of the community of Sanandaj, are presently in the possession of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. Designated as IR. 6363, the text of the above agreement appears roughly in the middle of the notebook which, similar to many other Judeo-Persian collections, still remains unpaginated and uncatalogued.

³ The last sentence is a quotation from Exodus 1:7.

⁴ Following the introduction, here begins the substantive part of the agreement.

⁵ “Sennah,” pronounced also as “Sannah,” is the older name of present-day Sanandaj, the administrative and commercial capital of Iranian Kurdistan. Compared to many pre-Islamic and early Islamic towns and cities, in which Jewish communities maintained continuous life through the twentieth century, Senneh is relatively new. It

used to reach such agreements when they were united and successful, likewise we, who for some years now were divided by disunion and slander, seeing that such was the state of affairs, girded ourselves, and, having repented, and without any coercion whatsoever, but rather willingly and wholeheartedly, we reached an agreement;⁶ we forgave one

began its urban development and expansion during the first half of the 17th century, about the year 1046 Q./1636 C.E. Cf. Burhan Ayazi, *A'īnah-yi Sanandaj*, Sanandaj 1371 Sh./1992, p. 15. However, there is evidence that as early as the mid-17th century Jews already maintained well-established and organized communal lives in this commercially important center. See, e.g., letters and documents written by the Jews of this city in the year 1668, in connection with the powerful messianic movement led by Shabbetai Sevi (1626–1676). Cf. Meir Benayahu, “Sabbatian Liturgical Compositions and Other Documents from a Persian Manuscript” (in Hebrew), *Sefunot*, vol. 3–4 (1960), p. 19. The community persisted through the 18th century. The Jewish traveler David D'Beth Hillel, who visited the community in 1820, found there about 300 families, with some very rich merchants and the rest mostly craftsmen. The community had two small synagogues. See W.J. Fischel, *Masa' le-Kurdistan, Paras u-Vavel* (Journey to Kurdistan, Persia and Babylonia), *Sinai*, vol. 4, booklet 1, Jerusalem 1939, p. 24. In 1875, the community consisted of 250 families [see AJA, 4 (1874–5), p. 93], who enjoyed relative tolerance in the midst of the predominantly Muslim-Sunni population. In 1891, the Jewish population of this city was estimated at 200 families, living side by side with 30 thousand Muslims and about 50 families of Nestorian and Roman Catholic faith. By this time the community had two very large synagogues, and its members were merchants, physicians of much influence, shop-keepers in the bazaars and artisans. Mirza Nurullah Hakim, who visited the community in 1891, and was familiar with the overall conditions of this community and its standing in comparison with other Jewish communities of Iran during the latter years of the 19th century, observed that “nowhere in Persia are the Jews so comfortable as in Senneh.” See the latter’s detailed report on the Jewish community of Senneh, in JMI, February 1891, pp 19–21. For a thorough and informative survey of this community during the first decade of the 20th century, see the report of the headmaster of the boys school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in that city, Mr. Canetti, to the headquarters of AIU in Paris, dated December 28, 1911, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6. No. 7581.

⁶ Despite the relatively prosperous and protected position of the community of Senneh (see above), it was torn from inside by various conflicts and divisions. The document before us sheds light on some of the main causes for these internal strifes. In addition to wide socio-economic gaps between the poor and the relatively rich, which characterized most if not all of the larger Jewish communities of Iran throughout the 19th century, in the case of Senneh, business and commercial disputes amongst the Jewish merchants of the community led some of them to appeal to the local governor and seek his legal intervention against their coreligionists. Such recourse to Muslim authorities and courts undermined both the judicial autonomy and the moral authority of rabbis and religious judges who were traditionally authorized to settle interpersonal, legal and financial disputes between the members of the Jewish community. The agreement before us was thus issued in an attempt to assert and preserve the authority of the rabbis on the one hand and decrease inner-communal discord on the other hand. In another document in the same collection (IR. 6363, at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People), however, we learn about bitter conflicts and rivalries that divided the rabbis of Sanandaj themselves during the latter years of the 19th century. Such conflicts, some of them physically violent, amongst the rank and

another, and thus we took a sacred oath, so that we become united, that we no more place any burden upon the yokes of our fellow brethren, but rather help and assist each other and remove any burden that may weigh upon our fellows, so that God, blessed be He, perhaps takes pity upon us and redeems us from this trouble, and causes the yoke of exile to be removed from our necks, and so that if, heaven forbid, a misfortune is inflicted upon us, either by the ruling authorities or by the gentiles, then all of us shall stand together and not allow any loss to be caused to a fellow Israelite. However, should it happen that we resist but not succeed in our efforts, then the loss shall be shared by all of us, as, indeed, on this second day of the week, when the Torah scroll was placed upon the ark, we placed our (written) agreement on top of the sacred Book of Torah, and took a sincere oath, to the effect that should any fellow Israelite be overtaken by trouble then all of us shall be with him, sharing his hardship with him, may God be with us. And, further, should it happen that some person owes his (Jewish) fellow, and the said person does not listen to him, then he should come to the synagogue and submit his claim before our holy assembly, whereupon, we shall do justice with him. There is no permission for anyone whatsoever to report on his fellow neighbor, and should it be brought to our notice that some person has appeared before the Governor and reported or betrayed the property of an Israelite to gentiles, or disclosed the secrets of Jews to the Governor, or caused any loss to his fellow Jewish neighbor, or gone to tradesmen and gentiles and said that this Israelite is so and so, then all of us will stand against him together, and thus, before the Book of Torah, he will be excommunicated and damned by the Word of God; he will be damned in the daytime, and

file members, as well as amongst the religious and communal leaders, were common in many of the Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the 19th century. For documented instances of such bitter conflicts within various communities, see, e.g., the case of the community of Hamadan, where some of the members accused the head of that community of embezzling communal taxes, and thus led to his deportation and imprisonment in Tehran in the winter of 1866. Cf. the report of the British minister plenipotentiary in Tehran, Charles Alison, to the British Foreign Office, in FO 60/296, document No. 17, dated January 31, 1866, and *Hamagid*, year 10, No. 13 (March 28, 1866), p. 100, and, *ibid.*, No. 46 (November 28, 1866), pp. 363–364. On bloody rivalry between two leading physicians of the community of Tehran, see H. Mizrahi, *Yehudey Paras*, pp. 134–135. On bitter conflicts amongst the rabbis of Yazd and their respective followers in connection with the collection of donations for charitable funds in Palestine, see I. Ben-Zvi, “New Sources for the History of Persian Jewry,” (in Hebrew), *Sefunot*, 2 (1958), document 12, pp. 211–212.

he will be damned at night, and he shall have no share in the God of Israel; he shall be under a ban, and he shall be excommunicated, may his name be blotted, and may his memory be erased!

He shall be expelled and excluded from our community, thus we submit; and (furthermore) we will write a letter and send it to our sovereign and great King Nasir al-Din Shah.⁷ Yet, if he repents, and by beating himself he abandons his evil inclination, so much the better, for he who listens to us shall live in safety.

Peace be upon all the descendants of Israel, amen; may this be Thy will, and may the Almighty, by right of our holy Torah, lend strength to this agreement.

⁷ The last sentence reflects the great degree of trust and appreciation that most of the Jewish communities of Iran felt towards Nasir al-Din Shah and his intentions concerning the Jews of Iran. In a large number of letters and documents issued by the heads of various communities during Nasir al-Din Shah's long years of reign (1848–1896), and particularly following the latter's first visit to Europe and his meetings with leaders of European Jewry, we find numerous expressions of appreciation and trust towards the Shah and his personal involvement in improving the status and living conditions of his Jewish subjects. See, e.g., the letter of the heads of the community of Barfurush (following the violent outrage against the Jews of that community in May 1866), in *Hamagid*, year 11, No. 18 (May 8, 1867), p. 140, and, *ibid.*, No. 19 (May 15, 1867), p. 147. In a letter from the heads of the community of Isfahan to the heads of the Alliance Israélite, Paris, they praised Nasir al-Din Shah for being "an honest and benevolent king." See AAIU, IRAN. IIC. No. 8962, dated 13 of Heshvan, 5650 (November 8, 1889), received on December 8, 1889. Compare also a letter from the heads of the community in Urumia, in which we read: "The Shah is a very good man; however, he resides in his capital city, and the Jews (of Urumia) cannot tell him about their troubles." *Ibid.*, IRAN. IIC. No. 9931/2, received on May 17, 1893. For various petitions and grievances which were addressed to Nasir al-Din Shah by Iranian Jews during the years 1872 to 1885, see M. Ettehadiéh Nezam-Mafi, "The Council for the Investigation of Grievances," p. 59. Cf. H. Nategh, *Karnama-yi Farhangi-yi Farangi dar Iran*, p. 124.

SECTION V
CULTURE AND EDUCATION

JEWISH CULTURE AND EDUCATION IN IRAN IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY, ACCORDING TO THE LATE
PROFESSOR EZRA SION MELAMMED (1903–1994)

Introduction

Born in Shiraz, the talmudic scholar, philologist and educator E.S. Melammed was taken to Ottoman Palestine by his father, Rabbi Raha-mim Melammed ha-Cohen (1864–1932), when he was two. Growing up in a new neighborhood, among the first built out and to the west of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, many of his neighbors were hard pressed and struggling Jews who had emigrated from Iran. He received his early education from his father, and later, studying in an elementary religious school and completing his high school studies in a religious seminary, he attended (ca. 1920) the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was among the very first students to enroll in the Department of Jewish Studies in that university, where he studied Bible, Talmud, Jewish history as well as Greek language and literature and Greek and Roman history. He completed his M.A. in 1933 and his Ph.D. (in Babylonian Talmud) in 1941. He taught in teachers' seminaries in Jerusalem (1935–52), worked at the Ministry of Education (1952–56), and taught Bible at the Hebrew University (1964–1972) and Talmud at Bar Ilan and Tel-Aviv Universities still after his retirement in 1972. He was elected to the Hebrew Language Academy and to the Higher Archaeological Council in Israel (in 1956 and 1963 respectively). In recognition of his outstanding contribution to scholarship, he was awarded (in 1987) the Israel Prize, the most prestigious award conferred annually by the State of Israel upon a handful of individuals recognized for their exceptional contributions and achievements in various fields.

An eminent scholar, teacher and honorary rabbi, Professor Melammed was interested in a broad range of Jewish and related literatures and topics. However, as a native speaker of Persian, and being intimately involved and familiar with the religion, literature and folklore of the Persian speaking Jews, with whom he maintained close personal and

communal ties, he devoted part of his extensive research and publications to subjects and texts that dealt directly with the literary and cultural heritage of Iranian Jews. In addition to critical edition and study of some Judeo-Persian texts treating the books of the Bible and the tractates of the Mishnah, chief among them a Judeo-Persian translation or *tafsir* of the Biblical Psalms, ordered by the Persian monarch Nadir Shah (r. 1736–1748) and completed in 1740 in Isfahan, Professor Melammed also edited and published some of his late father's writings in Judeo-Persian (i.e., Persian language scribed in Hebrew characters) and in Hebrew. These latter mentioned Judeo-Persian texts, edited and studied by Professor Melammed, as well as his own studies and writings related to the literature, religion and general culture of the Iranian Jews, shed light on important aspects of religious and spiritual lives among the Jews of Iran during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The passage before us is part of a longer Hebrew article by Professor Melammed, entitled “Ha-Yehudim be-Faras lifney Shishim Shanah” (The Jews in Persia Sixty Years Ago). For the full text of this article, see the Hebrew periodical *Sinai*, year 14, vol. 29, issue 7–8, Jerusalem, Nisan-Iyyar 5711 (April 7–June 3, 1951), pp. 359–370. In addition to the passages concerning the general state of culture and education among the Jews of Iran, the article contains much useful information and insights with regard to Iranian Jewry through the early decades of the twentieth century. It treats a number of important and related subjects according to the following order: (1) The Jewish communities of Iran and the ruling authorities; (2) pogroms and religious persecutions; (3) the forced converts of Mashhad; (4) Jewish converts and (Jewish) Baha'is; (5) Jewish culture; (6) education; (7) the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle; (8) communal leaders; (9) economic conditions; (10) family lives; (11) yearnings for Zion; (12) Hebrew bibliography on the history of the Jews of Persia.

Regarding Professor E. S. Melammed's biography, academic work and publications in the wide-ranging areas of Jewish studies and humanities, see Z. Kaddari, s.v. “Melamed, Ezra Zion,” in *EJ*, vol. 11, pp. 1275–6; G. Fuzailov, *Hakmeyhem shel Yehudey Paras ve-Afghanistan*, pp. 100–102. For an outline of his life and discussion of his affinity with the Jews of Iranian extraction, together with a list of his published works and those related specifically to Iranian Jews, see A. Netzer, “Yadi az Mashahir-i Yahud-i Iran: Ezra Sion Melammed,” in *Pādyāvand*, ed. A. Netzer, vol. II, pp. 345–364. For further relevant information concerning his family

background, see the memoir of his father, Mulla Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen, below, source no. 24, entitled "From the Memoirs of a Learned Rabbi of Shiraz."

As far as the general state of Jewish culture as well as the institutions and methods of Jewish education in Iran during the nineteenth century are concerned, the information and the observations provided by Professor Melammed in the passages before us are complemented and supported by other sources and studies published by other scholars during the last decades. Chief among the studies devoted to Jewish education in Iran during this period and later are those conducted and published by Dr. Avraham Cohen, lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Department of Education. Particularly important for the understanding of the traditional elementary education among the various Jewish communities of Iran is Dr. Cohen's Hebrew article, "'Maktab' ha-'Heder' ha-Yehudi be-Faras" ('Maktab': The Jewish 'Heder' in Persia), in *Pe'amim*, 14 (1892), pp. 57–76. For further discussion of this same topic, see also his "Meqomah shel ha-Safah ha-Ivrit ba-Hinukh ha-Yehudi be-Faras" (The Place of the Hebrew Language in the Jewish Education in Iran), in *Ummah ve-Lashon*, ed. M. Zohari et al., Jerusalem 1985, pp. 377–380, and "Iranian Jewry and the Educational Endeavors of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," *JSS*, XLVIII, number 1 (1986), pp. 15–19. As to the common methods of instruction and curriculum in the Jewish *maktab* in Iran, see also the relevant article by R. Patai, "Ha-Hinukh ha-Ivri ba-'Adat ha-Anusim be-Mashhad" (The Hebrew Education in the Community of the Forced Converts of Mashhad), in *Edoth*, 1 (1945–6), pp. 213–226. For further informative material on the subject, see H. Mizrahi, *Yehudey Paras*, pp. 77–82; idem, "Minhagim u-Masorot" (Customs and Traditions), *Edoth*, 3 (1947–8), pp. 88–91. As to the state of Jewish culture and Judeo-Persian literary tradition in the course of the nineteenth century in Iran, see the notes below, and note 29 in particular.

1. *Jewish Culture*

The knowledge of the Persian Jews in Jewish literature was very scanty. They knew the Bible, i.e. the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Hagiographa, in Judeo-Persian translation, which is canonical translation with some variations in the versions among the various cities. The

sages (Heb. *Hakhamim*) and the rabbis studied also the *Shulhan 'Arukh*¹ codex, and dealt with *Eyn Ya'acov*,² which is called by them by the name *Ma'amar*,³ and studied also homiletic commentaries on the Bible (*midrashim*),⁴ and the *Midrash Tanhuma*⁵ in particular. They read, although they did not understand, also in the *Book of Zohar*,⁶ and this reading also had a special melody. The Talmud came to be forgotten among them a few generations ago, as if it had never reached them. My late father⁷ told me that about sixty years ago⁸ an old woman brought from Baghdad the Six Orders of the Mishnah (Heb. *Shas*), printed out in large volumes in Wilna,⁹ and she dedicated them to a synagogue in Shiraz. The heads of the community rushed and took to their houses every single volume of the book as a remedy and blessing. Manuscripts were not preserved. The Sephardic prayer-book printed in Livorno¹⁰

¹ Literally meaning "Prepared Table," *Shulhan 'Arukh* is the name of the authoritative code of Jewish law, authored by Joseph Caro (1488–1575). Consisting of four parts, it is derived from Caro's larger codex of Jewish law, entitled *Beyt Yosef* (i.e., House of Joseph).

² Authored by the Spanish-born Talmudic scholar Jacob b. Solomon Ibn Habib (1460?, Spain–1515/6, Salonica), this work is a collection of *Aggadic* (i.e., Jewish legendary) passages and ethical exhortations derived mostly from the Babylonian, and some from the Jerusalem, Talmud. The main object of the author in this book was to familiarize the common reader with the ethical spirit of Talmudic literature. This popular work, which was and still is often edited and annotated, served as a textbook among the religious and traditional circles in the Jewish communities of Europe and the East. Cf. "Habib, Jacob (Ben Solomon) Ibn," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, 1904 ed., p. 124, and E. Mielziner, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 1894 ed., p. 76.

³ Heb. *ma'amar*, i.e., "saying," "injunction," "essay" and "chapter."

⁴ Heb. *midrash*, i.e., "study," refers specifically to a method of interpreting the scripture with the purpose of elucidating legal points (*Midrash Halakhah*), or bringing out lessons by means of stories or homiletics (*Midrash Aggadah*).

⁵ Known also as *Midrash Yelammedenu*, this fourth-century collection of homiletic and *Aggadic* literature treats all the five books of the Pentateuch.

⁶ Heb. *Zohar*, i.e., "Splendor," is the title of the major work of Jewish mysticism (*Kabbalah*), written in Aramaic. On this work see below, source no. 24, entitled "From the Memoirs of a Learned Rabbi of Shiraz," note 27.

⁷ I.e., Mulla Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen (1864, Shiraz–1932, Jerusalem). Regarding him see below, source no. 24, note 1.

⁸ I.e., ca. 1890.

⁹ The ancient Lithuanian city, and the capital of the present-day independent state of Lithuania, which was a major center of Jewish learning and publications in various branches of Talmudic literature during the 18th–20th centuries. See B. Ratner, s.v. "Wilna," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 1906 ed., pp. 525–530.

¹⁰ The Italian seaport city in Tuscany (known also as Leghorn) in which a Jewish community existed already in 1583, and where a large number of Spanish Marranos found refuge in 1590. Through the end of the 19th century the Jewish community in this thriving commercial town consisted mainly of descendants of Spanish and Portuguese immigrants who preserved their old Sephardic traditions, including the

conquered the synagogue in Persia, and hand-written prayer books were stored away in Genizah¹¹ and vanished.¹²

On Sabbath days, following the *Musaf*¹³ prayer, they used in some of the communities to read in the ethical passages from “*The Two Tablets of the Covenant*,”¹⁴ as the latter passages had been printed in the larger edition of the Pentateuch, published in Livorno.¹⁵ Also, on Sabbath afternoons, they would gather in the synagogue and engage themselves in the reading of the Torah and Rashi¹⁶ and *Midrash Tanhuma*,¹⁷ or in reading songs of praise from the Book of Psalms (*Tehillim*). On certain

synagogue ritual and prayer books. The rabbinate of Livorno, that had close ties with the Jewish communities in the East, was widely known for its scholarship. A Hebrew printing-press was established in the community already in 1650. Another one was established there in 1703. These printing houses, that were active through the first decades of the 20th century, published a large number of prayer-books and works in various branches of Jewish law and literature, especially for the Jewish communities in the East. Some of these printed books reached the scattered Jewish communities of Iran through diverse routes and by means of different contacts between the Jews of Iran and Jewish visitors and rabbinic emissaries who arrived in Iran mostly from the Jewish communities of Palestine, Constantinople, Baghdad and other Ottoman controlled territories during the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹¹ Heb. *Genizah*, i.e., “place of concealment,” usually in a synagogue, for disused sacred books, writings and ritual articles containing the Hebrew language.

¹² We do not know the exact time in which the Sephardic prayer-book replaced the older version that was in use for centuries among the Jews of Iran. The fragmentary available evidence suggests that this process likely took place during the 18th century and was completed by the mid-19th century. Cf. A. Netzer, *Osar Kûtvey ha-Yad*, pp. 26–27. For the annotated text and discussion of the old version of the prayer-book (i.e., one that reflects heavily the text of the prayer-book authored by the Babylonian Rabbi Saadia Gaon, 882–942 C.E.), see Sh. Tal, *The Persian Jewish Prayer Book* (in Hebrew), pp. 19–22, in particular.

¹³ Heb. *Musaf*, i.e. “Added (Prayer),” refers to the additional prayer service for Sabbaths and festivals, immediately following the morning prayer (*Shaharit*).

¹⁴ Originally the Heb. *Shelah*, which is an abbreviated name for the work entitled *Sheney Luhot ha-Berit*. The work, which was authored by the German Kabbalist (Jewish mystic) Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (ca. 1555, Prague–1630 Safed), is a compendium of Jewish religious teachings. It consists of the essentials of Jewish ethics; laws of the Jewish holy days; instructions concerning the daily observance of Jewish religion and its rituals; treatment of the weekly portions of the Pentateuch, as well as an essay on the principles of rabbinic law. Regarding this work and its author, see G. Deutsch, s.v. “Horowitz, Isaiah,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, 1904 ed., pp. 465–466.

¹⁵ See note 10 above.

¹⁶ The abbreviated Hebrew title of Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki (1040, Troyes, France; died there July 13, 1105), the leading authority and commentator on Bible and Talmud. His commentary on the Bible has become the standard guide across the Jewish world and it has accompanied almost every edition of the Pentateuch. He also produced a commentary to nearly the whole of the Babylonian Talmud, and as such printed in almost every edition of the Talmud.

¹⁷ See note 5 above.

Sabbath days, such as *Shabbat Shuvah*¹⁸ and *Shabbat Hagadol*,¹⁹ etc., the preacher would sermonize before the congregation on current affairs, while drawing on legendary and homiletic expositions of the Scriptures (*aggadah* and *midrash*), and spicing his discussions of various points of law (*dinim*) by using numerological interpretations (*gimatra'ot*) as well as acronyms and abbreviated phrases (*notarikonim*). Some exceptional few appointed time for study also during the weekdays. During these study times, mostly after the morning prayer, they used to read in the book of *Hoq le-Yisrael*.²⁰ Among the Jews of Shiraz this latter book assumed a new name and it was called "*Qevi'ot*."²¹

2. Education

As soon as the (male) child began to speak his father taught him to answer (the blessings and the benedictions) by saying "amen!" As he grew a little more, he was taught the blessings (*berakhot*) and the first verses of the *Shema*²² prayer. When he grew more, they would bring him to the teacher for beginners (*melammed dardagey*). From now on the child's education was handed over to the teacher, who taught and disciplined the child according to the oldest method. The stick, the strap, the stocks and the confinement punishments reigned in the traditional elementary school (*heder*). Nevertheless, there were among the teachers also men of stature and pedagogical talent, who, through their wonderful personalities, did not only bestow knowledge to their students, but

¹⁸ Known also as *Shabbat Teshuvah* (i.e., the Sabbath Day of Repentance), this is the Sabbath that falls between the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement.

¹⁹ Meaning "The Great (or High) Sabbath," this is the Sabbath preceding Passover.

²⁰ Literally meaning "Law for Israel," this book was authored by the Kabbalist and Talmudist Rabbi Hayyim ben Joseph Vital (1543, Safed–May 6, 1620, Damascus), a disciple of the influential Kabbalist Isaac Luria, known as Ha' Ari (1534–1572). The work, which was designated for the Jewish masses, became popular across the Jewish communities in Europe and in the East. It is comprised of excerpts from the Bible, Talmud, Zohar as well as judgements gleaned from works of post-Talmudic scholars of Jewish law, known as Posekim. It further contains ethical elaborations on the weekly portions of the Pentateuch. Regarding the use and considerable popularity of this book among the Jews of Iran through the twentieth century, see Rabbi Yedidia Shofet, *Khatirat*, pp. 348–349.

²¹ I.e., "set, established (practices)."

²² Heb. *Shema'* (literally meaning "hear!") is the first word, and hence the name of the prayer, contained in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21, and Numbers 15:37–41. It begins with the verse "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4), and is recited daily in the morning and evening services.

also virtues and good manners, and their students were obliged and grateful to them all the days of their lives.

Ordinarily, the instruction was individual. Upon entering the elementary school (*heder*),²³ the child would learn the shape of the (Hebrew) letters, and following is the order of instruction: The teacher would teach each child only once, and would then hand him over to a boy who was older than him, so that the child, together with a group of other children, would go over the shape of the letters, while during that same time the teacher would occupy himself with the older children. After an hour the smaller children would be called to a test, and woe to the pupil if he had not learned in the meantime, and woe to his little "teacher" as well. The fear of these teachers was great, and the mere mention of their names by the parents served as a magical device to induce the boys to fulfill their command and wish.

As soon as a child learned the letters, he would begin to attach them to the vowels, and would afterwards start reading. Once the child finished reading, and was found proficient in reading all the difficult passages in the Bible, in the Books of Job and Daniel,²⁴ as well as the (Aramaic) *Onkelos*²⁵ translation, he would quit and go out to help his father in his trade or in some other labor. A considerable percentage, sons of the well-to-do or those who loved the study of the Torah, continued to study *tafsir*, i.e., translation of the Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa, orally and in a set and established fashion: The boy would see with his eyes the Hebrew word in the original (Hebrew) text and utter the corresponding word in Persian. At first the youth would learn to translate part of the weekly portion of the Torah, and following that he would proceed to learn the entire portion, and then

²³ Until the appearance of modern oriented schools among the Jews of Iran (beginning roughly with the establishment of the first Alliance Israélite Universelle boys' school in Tehran in 1898), this institution of traditional elementary education, called *Heder* in Hebrew, was known among the Jews of Iran by its Persian names as *maktab-khanah* (house of study) and *mulla-khanah* (the mulla's house). See A. Cohen, "Maktab: Ha-'Heder' ha-Yehudi be-Faras," op. cit., pp. 57–60. Cf. A. Netzer, "Qorot Yehudey Paras me-Re'shit ha-Me'ah ha-Yod-Tet" (History of the Jews of Persia from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century), in *'Edot Yisrael*, ed. A. Shtal, vol. 2, p. 268.

²⁴ For reading purposes per se, the books of Job and Daniel are relatively more difficult than other books of the Bible. Job contains archaic vocabulary in Hebrew, while Daniel's twelve chapters contain portions (2:4–7:28) written fully in Aramaic.

²⁵ The second-century (C.E.) teacher and convert, to whom is ascribed the Aramaic translation of the Bible.

the *Haftarah*²⁶ chapters and the Five Scrolls,²⁷ and after that the early Prophets and the latter Prophets, the Book of Psalms and the rest of the Biblical scriptures, through the books of Job and Daniel. The study of the *tafsir* lasted for three to four years. With this the course of study would reach its end and only a few exceptional students studied also the *tafsir* of the Mishnah or that of the *Ma'amar*, i.e. the book of *Eyn Ya'acov*.²⁸ In order to facilitate the work of the teachers and the self-taught students, they composed books of translated words, called by them *mikhlol*, i.e. “inclusive” and “complete” wordbooks, in which the translations of the difficult and rare words were given according to the order of their appearance in the text. Such comprehensive wordbooks were composed for the assorted books of the (Hebrew) Bible, as well as for the Mishnah and *Eyn Ya'acov*. Complete (Judeo-Persian) translations I have only seen for the (Biblical books of) Psalms and Lamentations and for (the Mishnah) tractates *Sabbath* and *Avot*.²⁹

²⁶ Heb. *Haftarah* (pronounced also as *Haftorah*), i.e. “conclusion” and “discharge,” is the appellation of supplementary reading of a chapter from the Prophets, recited in synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals following the reading of the weekly portion from the Pentateuch.

²⁷ These five scrolls are: (1) Song of Songs; (2) Ruth; (3) Lamentations; (4) Ecclesiastes; and (5) Esther. The Song of Songs is read at Passover; Ruth at Pentecost; Lamentations on the ninth day of Ab, in commemoration of the destruction of the First Temple; Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles; and Esther, at Purim. For a bilingual (Hebrew-English) edition of these five texts and their respective functions in Jewish liturgy, see P. Birnbaum, *Five Megilloth*, New York 1973.

²⁸ See note 2 above.

²⁹ The late Professor E.S. Melammed did not have access to an extensive body of Judeo-Persian Bible translations as well as numerous treatments of Jewish texts that were produced by Persian speaking Jews in Iran and Central Asia roughly between the 10th and the 19th centuries C.E. This large and diverse treasure of translations, commentaries and adaptations of Hebrew and Jewish works, the majority of which are still in the form of unedited and little studied manuscripts, attest to the existence of a long tradition of literary and religious creativity among the Jews of Iran. This tradition, which thrived mostly in the more established urban communities of Iran during the 14th–17th centuries, fell on a path of stagnation and gradual decline in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries due to diverse historical and cultural causes and processes that had detrimental effects on other areas of Jewish life in Iran as well. The old Judeo-Persian tradition of literary and religious creation, that fed on diverse Jewish, Iranian and Islamic written and oral sources, came to a virtual end during the first two decades of the twentieth century, mostly due to processes of modernization in the fields of education, society and general culture among the Jews of Iran. For further discussion and bibliographical guide with regard to Judeo-Persian literature, see the following: A. Netzer, *Muntakhab-i Ash'ari-i Parsi az Athar-i Yahudian-i Iran*; idem, *Osar Kitvey ha-Yad shel Yehudey Paras be-Makhon Ben Zvi*; Vera B. Moreen, *In Queen Esther's Garden: An Anthology of Judeo-Persian Literature*; H. Sarshar, ed., *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, particularly pp. 63–93, and 437–450; D. Yeroushalmi, *The Judeo-Persian*

The tuition paid to the teacher was by and large according to the amount of work accomplished, that is by contract. Following are some details that were copied from the notes of a respected teacher:³⁰ In payment for teaching the alphabet, a blanket and a pillow; for connecting the letters and the vowels, the amount of two tumans and one kran, or two tumans and a half; for reading, the amount of two tumans and a half or three tumans, or three tumans and a half. For connecting the letters and further reading in the Scriptures, six tumans; for Bible translations (*tafsir*), over a period of three and a half years, the amount of four tumans and a half. The goal set in the area of reading was to achieve fluency in reading the prayers, i.e., both those that are read out loud, and those that are whispered (*lahash*), including the prayers of the Day of Atonement and the New Year, as well as (the reading of) the Bible, the (Aramaic) translation³¹ of the Bible, the *Haftarah* and the (Biblical books of the) Prophets.

Also, as regards the tuition, there were some who paid it according to time, that is to say the amount of such and such per week, or such and such per year. The price paid to the teacher was not fixed, but was rather in accordance with the ability of the (pupil's) father, and according to the latter's generosity or stinginess. There were cases in which the teacher accepted children of the poor free of charge and without any tuition whatsoever, even though no institution stood behind him. The tuition was paid in installments and a sizeable amount remained in the hands of the father until the completion of the job, i.e., until the time in which the student would take an examination before a group

Poet 'Emrānī and His Book of Treasure, particularly pp. 3–41, and 435–443. For specific discussion and bibliography on the Judeo-Persian tradition of Bible translations, see works cited above, as well as the following articles and studies: W.J. Fischel, "The Bible in Persian Translation," *Harvard Theological Review*, xlv (1952), pp. 3–45, and three recent articles, in Hebrew, by Sh. Shaked, D. Yerushalmi and T. Gindin, in *Pe'amim*, 84 (2000), pp. 12–20, 21–39, and 40–54, respectively.

³⁰ It appears that the writer is alluding here to his father, Rabbi Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen, who was a rabbi and teacher (Heb. *Melammed*) in the Jewish community of Shiraz during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

³¹ Originally the Heb.-Aram. term *targum*, which refers to a relatively large body of Aramaic translations to the books of the Bible, composed presumably in Palestine and Babylonia in the course of the 2nd–8th centuries C.E. More important and known among these translations are *Targum Jonathan* (i.e., Palestine Targum to Prophets); *Targum Onkelos* (see note 25 above); *Targum Shenī* (collection of homilies on the Book of Esther); *Targum Yerushalmi I*, known also as Pseudo-Jonathan (being a Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch), and *Targum Yerushalmi II* (being also a Palestinian Pentateuch *Targum* to certain passages, verses and words, dating from different periods).

of knowledgeable men, or read in public passages from the devotional hymns (*Ẓemiroṭ*), or complete the *Haftara* portion in the (books of the) Prophets. In case the teacher succeeded in his work and completed it before the appointed time, he would also earn a bonus, e.g., a garment, a cone of sugar or a belt, all according to the state of things between the giver and the recipient. Also, there were times in which the garment or the product were part of the teacher's salary and they were specified as such ahead of time.³²

³² On similar customs and practices in the field of primary education, that were prevalent among the Muslim population and evidently influenced the Jewish minority throughout the pre-modern era, see, e.g., R. Arasteh, *Education and Social Awakening in Iran*, pp. 5–7; A. Mustawfi, *Sharh-i Ẓindagani-yi Man*, vol. 1, pp. 233–249, and N. Najmi, *Tihran-i Ahd-i Nasiri*, pp. 404–407.

SOURCE 21

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY OF HAMADAN IN THE 1840s,
ACCORDING TO DR. ABRAHAM DE SOLA'S
ACCOUNT, PUBLISHED IN 1850

Introduction

The article before us, which describes the educational system and the specific curriculum employed at the various stages of instruction in the Jewish community of Hamadan in the mid-nineteenth century, was written by Dr. Abraham de Sola (1825–1882), Chief Rabbi of the Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Montreal. The information related to the various aspects of Jewish education, culture and tradition in the ancient community of Hamadan was relayed to Dr. de Sola by a certain Rabbi Nissim Ben Shelomo, a member of the Jewish community of Hamadan, who had traveled to London and Montreal on behalf of his congregation. The account before us was part of a series of eight articles on the Jews of Iran and the Jewish community of Hamadan in particular, published by Dr. de Sola in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London in the course of the year 1850. For the original text of the article reproduced here in its entirety, see the *Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI, No. 46 (August 23, 1850), pp. 362–363. For further information regarding Dr. de Sola and the circumstances which led to the publication of the above mentioned series of articles on the Jews of Hamadan in the *Jewish Chronicle*, see source no. 17 above, entitled “The Old Synagogue in the City of Hamadan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” introduction. The information provided in the article before us with respect to the educational system in the Jewish community of Hamadan mostly confirms and compliments the data and the observations provided by the late Professor E.S. Melammed with regard to the methods and contents of primary education among the Jews of Iran in pre-modern times. For Professor Melammed’s article, see source no. 20 above, entitled “Jewish Culture and Education in Iran in the Nineteenth Century.” Both of the sources (by Prof. Melammed and Dr. de Sola) presented above attest to a high degree of similarity and

uniformity in the underlying goals, methods and institutions of education that prevailed in the larger Jewish communities of Iran prior to the establishment of modern-oriented schools (for boys and girls) in these communities as of the year 1898 and onward.

The Educational System in Hamadan

When a female child is born, the parents, on the sixth day of its birth, make a feast for all their female relatives and acquaintances, called *shashia*, i.e., feast of the sixth day, also styled as the women's feast. Should the parents be poor, the entertainment is provided by a society called *shashia koopsah*, or "Sixth Night Society," who take care that there shall be no difference discoverable between the poor man's feast and that of the rich man. The child is named on this night, the ceremony being performed thus:—before the company sit down, the child is brought into the festive room, and a friend having inquired of the father the name he wishes her to bear, proceeds to give her this name, following a prescribed formula;¹ the feast then proceeds with great hilarity until the morning. But little more is seen of the young lady until the day of her marriage, her education being entirely acquired from her mother, who, in addition to her domestic duties teaches her prayers, and oversees her religious education generally. The sciences of sewing, knitting, carpet-making, and the like, she generally acquires at the house of a friend. A practical knowledge of cooking is considered by all classes indispensable. Engaged in these pursuits she remains under her mother's tutelage till she attains her ninth to her thirteenth year, when she is married. It is seldom, indeed, that a maiden remains single after her fifteenth year.

When a male child is born, the *Shashia*,² or feast for the women, takes place on the sixth night; and on the seventh day, if the parents are poor, the treasurer of the "Society of Elijah the Prophet" calls and gives them money sufficient to provide for the morrow, when the child is named, another feast, equal to that made by the richest member of

¹ For a similar ceremony (known in Jewish tradition as *zeved*) in the community of Shiraz during the second half of the nineteenth century, see source no. 24 below, entitled "From the Memoirs of a Learned Rabbi of Shiraz," note 32.

² Derived from the Persian (originally Pahlavi) word *shash* (modern Per. *shesh*), meaning "six."

the community on a similar occasion. On the morning of the eighth day, after service in the synagogue, the sexton³ proclaims there a “feast of Elijah” at the house of such a one, and invites the congregation to go thither. They all attend accordingly, even the Chief Rabbi; but he only stops to give the child his blessing, and insert the name and the date of his birth in the register he keeps.⁴ The child is named, and the feast proceeds—the company singing various religious hymns and songs until a late hour. The time permitted for the child to remain at home is five or six years, during which period he receives an elementary education from his father, who then sends him to school. His progress here will be better seen if we now devote a short time to examining the management and discipline of *Bathé Midrashioth*, or Jewish schools of Hamadan.

The *Yeshiba*, or college, excepted, the Jews of Hamadan have no establishments which they appropriate solely for educational purposes. Their schools do not consist of buildings belonging to the community, or maintained by individual enterprise, but are kept at the houses of certain members of the congregation, who, with the greatest willingness, devote them to this use. Four houses, at least, must be in requisition at one time, these being necessary, from the plan of education adopted. To give some idea of this plan, we will now give the names of the four schools, and briefly sketch the subjects of study and the manner of school government. We have first the *Mikra Midrashi*, or Scripture school, in which the young tyro acquires the rudiments of Hebrew, a knowledge of the occasional blessings said by Israelites, and an ability to read in the Hebrew Pentateuch from Leviticus to the end.⁵ He commences with Leviticus because it treats of the sacrifices, and he must be early imbued with the sentiment of sacrificing everything to his duty to the Almighty. In this school he generally remains three years; it may be longer, according to his capacity. On attaining a certain proficiency in

³ Known among the Jews of Iran by the Hebrew term of *shammash*, i.e., “janitor” and “caretaker.”

⁴ We do not know whether such birth registers were kept in the other Jewish communities of Iran as well. Communal registers, records and documents such as the one referred to here would contain highly valuable data and information concerning the internal lives of the various Jewish communities of Iran in the pre-modern era. Unfortunately, however, even if such and other registers were customarily maintained in the various communities, they have either not survived or are presently unknown and inaccessible to researchers.

⁵ Cf. E.S. Melammed, source no. 20 above, note 23.

his elementary studies he is promoted to, secondly, the *Targum Midrashi*, or translation school, where he usually stays two or three years longer. The subjects of study here are the Pentateuch, translating it into Aramaic,⁶ from Genesis to the end, with the *Targanin*,⁷ or musical and rhetorical accents, the Targum⁸ of Onkelos,⁹ and the commentary of Rashi.¹⁰ These are his morning exercises. In the afternoon he learns to write Hebrew, and to repeat his prayers. He is then advanced to thirdly, the *Din Midrashi*, or law school, in which are taught the Prophets, Hagiographa, *Shulchan Aruch*,¹¹ or digest of Jewish law, the first three books of the *Yad Hachazakah*¹² of Maimonides, and the *Haphtaroth*¹³ with the musical intonation. Here he remains for two years longer, when he enters, fourth, the *Bachur Midrashi*, or youths' school. Here he makes his first acquaintance with the Talmud, commencing his studies therein at the first treatise.¹⁴ The Jerusalem Talmud is generally used, but the

⁶ In the vast majority of the Jewish communities of Iran the pupils at this level were taught to translate the books of the Hebrew Bible into Judeo-Persian and not into Aramaic, as stated by Dr. de Sola.

⁷ Derived from the Heb. verb *naggen*, i.e., "to play a musical instrument."

⁸ The Aramaic word *targum* means "interpretation," and "translation."

⁹ Regarding this second-century (C.E.) Aramaic translation to the Bible, see also source no. 20 above, note 25.

¹⁰ The Heb. acronym for Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki (1040–1105 C.E.), the renowned commentator of the Bible and the Talmud.

¹¹ On *Shulhan 'Arukh*, see source no. 20 above, note 1.

¹² Commonly known as *Mishneh Torah* (i.e. Copy of Torah), *Ha-Yad ha-Hazakah* is Maimonides' encyclopedic exposition of Jewish religion and its laws. Considered the first systematic codification of Jewish religious law (Heb. *Halakhah*), the work covers the broad range of religious tenets and laws contained in the Scriptures and in their related Talmudic and rabbinic treatments. In this work the commandments of the Torah are divided into fourteen groups, and each group constitutes a book. The first three books of the work, which according to the passage before us formed part of the curriculum at the third stage of Jewish education in Hamadan, were: (1) *Sefer ha-Mada'* (The Book of Knowledge), which treats the articles of the Jewish faith; (2) *Sefer ha-Ahavah* (The Book of Love), which discusses the precepts that must be observed in fulfilling the love and service of God; and (3) *Sefer ha-Zemanim* (The Book of Times), which presents the laws that pertain to special seasons and times of the Jewish calendar, such as Sabbath days and the festivals.

¹³ Plural form of the Heb. *Hafarah*, i.e., a chapter from the Prophets read in the synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals after the reading of the weekly portion from the Pentateuch.

¹⁴ Known by its Heb. title as *Berakhot* (i.e. "Benedictions"), this tractate is found both in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud. It deals with the recital and origin of the various benedictions.

Babylonian is also studied.¹⁵ He also reads here in the *En Yahcob*,¹⁶ a book containing the various *Agadoth*,¹⁷ or moral and traditional narratives found in the Talmud. This is generally perused as far as treatise Sanhedrin.¹⁸ When he has acquired the necessary proficiency in these studies, he is worthy of sitting among the *Talmidé Hachamim*, or students of *Yeshiba*.¹⁹

¹⁵ As far as the instruction and general knowledge of Talmud in the various Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century is concerned, the testimony of the Iranian Jews themselves and the accounts of Jewish visitors, Christian missionaries and others suggest that with some exceptions (such as in the community of Hamadan) the Talmud was not taught. The same sources of information further reveal that very few Iranian Jews during this period were familiar with Talmudic literature. Already during the end of the eighteenth century we hear from the Judeo-Persian scholar and poet Siman Tov Melammed of Yazd, Herat and Mashhad, that the vast majority of the Jews living in Iran did not have any notion of Talmud. See his *Sefer Hayat al-Ruh*, published by the brothers Yisrael, Netanel and Binyamin Shaulof, Jerusalem 1898, f. 8b. We learn from the missionary Rev. Joseph Wolff, who visited the Jewish community of Tehran in 1825, that no Talmud was taught in the Jewish schools in the capital city. See his journal for the year 1825, in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 216. A similar testimony is provided by Dr. Jacob E. Polak, who alluding to the state of Jewish education and scholarship among the Jews of Iran in the 1850s, noted: "They (i.e. the Persian Jews) are familiar with the Mishnah but do not know the Talmud." See his article, entitled "Persien," in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 20, No. 35 (August 25, 1856), p. 478. Finally, as late as the 1890s, we find the following general observation made by the Iranian Jew turned-Christian missionary Nurullah Hakim. In his words: "The Persian Jews, who are not Talmudists, can be reached by Missionaries, who are permitted to preach from the Synagogue pulpit. As the Jews are not Hebrew scholars, it is, therefore, necessary to interpret in the Judeo-Persian language." See his report in LSPCJ, 82 (1890), p. 122.

¹⁶ Regarding this work and its author Jacob b. Solomon Ibn Habib (b. ca. 1460, Spain), see source no. 20 above, note 2.

¹⁷ I.e., legends.

¹⁸ Treating the fourth tractate in the Mishnah order *Nezikin* (i.e. Damages), this tractate of the Talmud deals primarily with the composition and competence of courts of different kinds as well as criminal law.

¹⁹ Heb. *Yeshiva*, or Talmudic college and academy, was and still is the most important institution of higher religious education across the Jewish communities of the world. However, all the primary and secondary sources of information at our disposal indicate that in the vast majority of the large and small Jewish communities of Iran during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this institution did not exist. The information provided here by Dr. de Sola with regard to the existence of a yeshiva in the Jewish community of Hamadan in the mid-nineteenth century represents an exception among the educational institutions of Iranian Jewry known to us from the nineteenth century. The absence of such colleges and frameworks for more advanced and specialized studies in Jewish law and in the various branches of Jewish scholarship led some of the Iranian Jews to seek higher education and rabbinic training outside Iran, and especially in Baghdad, which was among the important and thriving centers of Jewish scholarship and learning during this period. As regards Jewish students from Iran and Kurdistan who studied at one of the main rabbinic seminaries of Baghdad, founded in 1840 by Rabbi 'Abdallah Somekh (1813–1889), see *Der Israelit*, 28 (1887), pp. 549–550, and

The hours of study in the junior schools are, during the summer months, from nine till twelve in the morning, and in the afternoon from three till six. In winter, the hours are from ten till twelve in the morning, and from one till three in the afternoon, when they repair to the synagogue for prayers. The manner of dismissing the pupils is characteristic enough. Clocks or watches not being in common use, the progress of time is only learnt by the clash of cymbals and the sound of trumpets, played at certain intervals by the soldiery in the streets. But as it may happen that the teacher, engaged in the business of the school, does not hear these, he makes a mark on the wall, the approach of the sun to which apprises him of the progress of the hours, almost as accurately as had he a watch or clock there. As may be supposed, in proportion to the proximity of the sun to the mark are the number of anxious glances cast thereat, glances given even at the risk of receiving the summary punishment inflicted for inattention—the *Damar*,²⁰ or leathern strap; and even as the sun has but barely reached the sign, no consideration can deter the whole school from bursting forth into the loud and general chorus of “Rabbi, do you not see that the sun is on the sign?” The Rabbi then rises from the floor, and the pupils standing around him in a circle repeat after him, word for word, the *Kadish*, or glorification of God’s name, and also the Scriptural readings contained in Genesis xlviii:16,²¹ Deuteronomy xxiii:26,²² and Proverbs I:8.²³ They then kiss their hands as a mark of respect to their master, and the business of the day is over.

A. Ben-Ya‘acov, *Toldot ha-Rav ‘Abdallah Somekh*, Jerusalem 1949, pp. 22–23. For details concerning a scholar from the Jewish community of Salmas (about 45 kilometers north-west of Lake Urumia), who studied in Baghdad in the 1850s and returned to his community upon the completion of his studies, see *AJA*, 6 (1876–1877), p. 99.

²⁰ The originally Ar. form *damār* literally means “destruction” and “desire for vengeance,” and, hence, “harsh punishment.”

²¹ Forming part of the patriarch Jacob’s blessing to his favorite son Joseph and the latter’s sons Ephraim and Manassch, Genesis 48:16 reads: “The angel who hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named in them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

²² Selected from the long list of religious and ethical commandments spelled out in Deuteronomy, this verse reads: “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s standing corn, then thou mayest pluck ears with thy hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.”

²³ I.e., “Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother.”

The Rabbi or teacher is as much respected by the parents as he is feared by the children. His influence is not confined to the school, but extends also to the home. Parent and teacher do not look with indifference upon each other's efforts; but they cordially unite to make the youth a religious and useful member of society, a feature in the educational system of the Persian Israelites surely worthy of general adoption. The Rabbi does not administer the *Damar*²⁴ for inattention or remissness at school only, but he applies it to the pupils' hands and feet, just as vigorously, if they have been guilty of disrespectful or turbulent behaviour at home.

The masters have various titles, according to the rank they occupy in teaching—thus the teacher of Mikra Midrashi would be called *Calipha*,²⁵ or junior teacher; of the Targum Midrashi, *Sainah*,²⁶ or senior; of the Din Midrashi, *Malleh*,²⁷ or superior; and of Bachur Midrashi, *Rabbi*, master or principal. The wardens of the synagogue generally visit the schools weekly, to ascertain that the masters do not neglect their duty. If, after being weighed, they are found wanting, they are forthwith dismissed, and others appointed in their place—a rather summary mode of proceeding, perhaps, but one doubtless calculated to secure the progress of the pupils. The rate of school charges for each pupil is, in the Mikra, or junior school, 4 Shachi,²⁸ a Turah, or box containing some 10 lbs. of flour, and a fowl every month. In the Targum Midrashi 6 Shachi, 1½ Turah of flour, 2 pitchers of wine, and 2 fowls—and so the other schools in proportion. This is the ordinary payment of both rich and poor, the charges for the latter being paid at the community's proper expense. We now dismiss the subject of schools and teachers with the one additional remark, that, the subjects of study excepted, there is perhaps but little difference between Jewish and Christian schools, certainly not in their government and discipline.

²⁴ See note 20 above.

²⁵ The originally Ar. form *khalifa*, means "successor," "vicar," and "deputy." In addition to its primary denotations it also assumed the meaning of "monitor (of a school)."

²⁶ I failed to identify the origin of this word.

²⁷ This word appears to be a variant pronunciation of the Per. (originally Ar. form) *mullā*, i.e., "master," "school master" and "learned man."

²⁸ This is the Qajar currency known as *Shāhi*, twenty units of which equaled 1 qiran (or tenth of a tuman).

A PASSAGE FROM A JUDEO-PERSIAN HOMILETIC
COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, COMPOSED BY
COMMENTATOR AND POET BINYAMIN, SON OF
ELIYAHU OF KASHAN, CA. 1824

Introduction

As far as literary activity among the Jews of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century is concerned, the large body of extant Judeo-Persian and Hebrew manuscripts in the various public and private collections generally attest to a decline both in the quantity and quality of original works composed by Iranian Jews during this period. Rather than creating new and original compositions in the various branches and genres of Judeo-Persian and Jewish religious literature (including works and writings in prose and poetry dealing with Jewish canonical texts, Jewish law, theology, philosophy, mysticism, etc.), the Jewish Iranian writers, poets, commentators and translators were mostly engaged in preserving or replicating works and subject matters that had been produced in the course of the previous centuries. A broad examination of the manuscripts that were produced in the various Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century reveals that the vast majority of the literary-oriented and religious writings of the Iranian Jews (both in prose and verse) were written in Judeo-Persian, and only a very small number were composed in Hebrew. The over-all impression that emerges from this corpus of nineteenth-century original and reproduced works is that the educated circles of Iranian Jews were not engaged in rich and high-level activity in the diverse branches of Jewish and Judeo-Persian literatures. This impression becomes stronger when we compare the literary and religious writings of the Iranian Jews during this period with those of their coreligionists in the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. In the latter lands (and particularly in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt) Jewish rabbinic scholars, commentators, thinkers and poets were engaged in a thriving and extensive intellectual and literary activity. The latter scholars and authors wrote predominantly in Hebrew (i.e., the common language

of Jewish scholarship), and their works, many of them complex and innovative, were deeply steeped in the diverse branches and sources of Jewish literature and scholarship. In Iran, in sharp contrast to the condition in the main centers of Jewish learning situated in the Arabic and Turkish-speaking lands of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, the rather few original compositions that were produced by the Iranian Jews were essentially folk-oriented. Both in terms of their topics as well as their linguistic fabric and general contents and styles, these few original works in Judeo-Persian were geared and adapted to the literary taste, educational background and fundamentally religious world-view of the ordinary Persian-speaking Jews. In the rather small number of original works in Judeo-Persian, that were composed during this period by Jewish-Iranian writers, poets, commentators and translators, we further discern the strong and widespread presence of Jewish legendary and homiletic motifs and sources, known in Jewish traditional literature as *Midrash* (literally meaning study of the Scriptures). The centuries-long fascination of the Persian-speaking Jews with this particular method of approaching and interpreting the Bible and the Jewish Scriptures is well demonstrated in an extensive body of Judeo-Persian and Hebrew *midrashic* (i.e. homiletic) works and compilations. Rather than approaching and analyzing the Biblical text in a cerebral, abstract and legalistic method, the Iranian Jews over the centuries displayed a profound attraction and love for poetic, legendary and mythical treatment of the various books and chapters of the Hebrew Bible. In addition to translating into Judeo-Persian the major Hebrew homiletic collections, the Judeo-Persian commentators, translators and poets oftentimes incorporated these homiletic fables, legends and teachings in the body of their respective works. The passage before us, composed by a nineteenth-century poet and commentator of Kashan, is a representative sample of a much longer Judeo-Persian homiletic commentary to the Pentateuch. We do not know much about its author, except that he was a commentator and poet in the Jewish community of Kashan, a community in which a center of Jewish learning existed without interruption ever since the fifteenth century and possibly before. We learn that he completed his homiletic commentary on the weekly chapters (Heb. *Parashot*) of the five books of the Pentateuch in 1824, and gave it the (Heb.) name *Mat'amey Binyamin*, literally meaning "Binyamin's Delicacies." The complete work, which consists of sermons and homiletic interpretations of selective passages from the weekly portions of the Pentateuch, offers the reader and the listener legends, fables, parables and interpretations derived

from a broad range of Biblical and post-Biblical sources and compositions. These sources include the various books of the Bible (i.e., the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Hagiographa), the Aramaic Onkelos translation to the Bible, the various midrashic collections on the Bible (including the *Midrash Rabbah* and the *Midrash Tanhuma*), as well as the eighteenth-century *Midrash Talpiot* (see below), the various tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, parts of the Mishnah (mainly the ethical and didactic Tractate Avot), excerpts from the works and sayings of rabbinic sages (Heb. *Hazal*), the mystical Book of Zohar, prayer-books, and the works of the prominent medieval Jewish commentators, among them Maimonides, Rashi and the fourteenth-century Rabbi Ya'acov son of Asher (b. 1270, Germany—d. ca. 1343, Spain), author of the extensive work on Jewish law, commonly known as *Arba'ah ha-Turim* (The Four Columns). The underlying purpose behind the various sermons and commentaries in *Mat'amey Binyamin* is to present and elucidate the fundamental teachings and values of the Jewish faith and tradition. As to the language and general style of the sermon before us, similar to the large number of Judeo-Persian midrashic works and sermons that were authored or compiled during the 14th–19th centuries, the text naturally reflects the strong influence of the spoken language. Words, features of speech and repetitions derived from colloquial Judeo-Persian provide the text with a considerable degree of idiomatic fluency and simplicity. Furthermore, in a manner that is typical of the entire work, the passage before us dwells on one phrase in the entire Biblical chapter and uses it as a point of departure for the development of the sermonizer's own subjective views and ideas. Thus, instead of treating the main subject of the Biblical chapter (Leviticus 9), which deals with animal sacrifices and their prescribed laws, the passage dwells on the first and unrepresentative phrase in the chapter. For the original Judeo-Persian text of the sermon before us, see *Mat'amey Binyamin*, BZI, Ms. 915 f. 58a–58b. For a printed version of the same Judeo-Persian text, albeit with some minor differences in wording, see Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen, *Sefer Zikhron Rahamim* (English title: “Zichron-Rahamim: Sermons to Torah in Jewish Persian”), 2nd edition, ed. E.S. Melammed, Jerusalem 1985, pp. 172–173. For further bibliographical information regarding Binyamin son of Eliyahu and his writings in prose and verse, see A. Netzer, *Osar Kitvey ha-Yad*, pp. 23–24. For other manuscripts of *Mat'amey Binyamin*, see BZI, Mss. 1069, 4507 and 4521.

Homiletic Passage

Commentary on Leviticus 9:1–2 (i.e., And it came to pass on the eighth day...)¹

It has been said in the Midrash that wherever there appears (in the Bible) the phrase “and it came to pass,” the phrase speaks of suffering,² as, for instance, in the verse “and it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus,”³ where we find that the pains of Israel grew and became heavy, or in the verse “and it came to pass in the days when the judges judged,”⁴ where we learn that a famine broke out there and every one was moaning and saying “ah, woe to us”; and, further, in the verse “and it came to pass in the days of Ahaz.”⁵ Why, the question arises, is it so also in the latter case? The answer is that Ahaz wished to stop and abolish the study of Torah and the worship of God, much like in the parable that is told about a nurse who had been entrusted to nurse the son of a king, meaning that she should feed that infant and give him milk. As to that nurse, however, she hated the king and did not want that child to grow and flourish; such being the case, she thought and said to herself: “If I kill the son of the king, the king, too, will kill me as punishment; so, what is it that I should do? I should instead come and withhold the milk that I give to the boy, that is, I shall no longer nurse the child, until he becomes sick and dies, so that the king’s heart shall burn with pain.” Now, who is the king implied in this parable? It is the King of Kings of all Kings, the Holy One blessed be He; and

¹ The full text of Leviticus 9:1–2 is as follows: “And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel; and he said unto Aaron: ‘Take thee a bull-calf for sin-offering, and a ram for burnt-offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord.’”

² As to the origin of this statement, which is attributed in the Midrash to the Men of Great Synagogue, see *Midrash ha-Gadol* (forming a collection of ancient Rabbinic homilies to the Pentateuch), *Sefer Bere’shit* (The Book of Genesis), ed. S. Schechter, Cambridge 1902, pp. 608–609.

³ Esther 1:1.

⁴ Ruth 1:1.

⁵ This is King Ahaz, son of Jotham, who, according to II Kings 16:1–4, “Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not that which was right in the eyes of the Lord his God like David his father. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel and, likewise, made his son to pass through the fire according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and offered in the high places, and on the hills, and under every leafy tree.” For a similar characterization of Ahaz in the Bible, see II Chronicles 28:1–5.

who is the child? It is Israel, that has been called “the favorite child (of God)”;⁶ and who is the nurse? It is Ahaz the King, because he wished that nobody should mention the name of God;⁷ he thought and said to himself: “If I come to the Children of Israel and say to them all of a sudden ‘come, abandon the worship of God and cling to my idol,’ all the people of Israel will rise against me at once and will kill me; instead, I better go and take away from Israel the Torah, that is Israel’s source of life; and, from that point on, as (the Children of) Israel will not be studying the Torah, little by little they will become devoid of right manners,⁸ they will rebel against God, and in the end, they will completely wash their hands of God’s worship, and they will not worship him any longer.”⁹ So he came, and what did he do? He hung a sword on the door of every synagogue and every house of study and he announced to the public, saying: “I demand from my subjects just one thing, and that is that they shall not go to synagogues and houses of study, because whoever shall go to a synagogue or a study house will be killed by this sword.”¹⁰ Immediately all the children of Israel cried out and said: “Woe to us for the faith of Israel will not last any more,” which explains why it was said “and it came to pass in the days of Ahaz.” As to the Holy One, blessed be He, however, what did He do? He came and reduced the life of Ahaz and cut it short, and, just as Ahaz was in the middle of his life, He took him to hell. As for the Israelites at that time, though, they wished to mourn the death of Ahaz and hold lamentations in his behalf. Seeing that, the Holy One blessed be He reduced and cut short the day in which Ahaz died, so that it soon became night, and this was done so that no time would

⁶ Cf. Jeremiah 31:20.

⁷ See note 5 above.

⁸ Originally the Heb. *derekh eres*, i.e., “civility” and “good manners.”

⁹ For the Talmudic origin of this latter paragraph, see Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 10a: “Why was he called Ahaz? Because he seized (Heb. *ahaz*) the synagogues and the houses of study...”

¹⁰ This latter story about King Ahaz hanging swords on the doors of synagogues and study houses does not appear in the original Biblical text. Cf. note 5 above. This story as well as the other details in our sermon concerning God’s intervention in behalf of Israel and the divine punishment meted against Ahaz are post-Biblical and Talmudic embellishments added to the original Biblical account of Ahaz, as told in II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28. For the Talmudic source of the latter story, see Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 10a and 103b. For further Talmudic and Midrashic sources regarding Ahaz, his wickedness and punishment (sources and motifs that are reflected in our passage), see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, VII vols., Philadelphia 1968, vol. IV, p. 264 and vol. VI, pp. 360–376.

be left for lamentations and mournings for the sake of Ahaz. And, furthermore, just as the sage, the author of the book *Midrash Talpiot*,¹¹ has said, mourning, lamentations and recitation of the teachings of the Torah in behalf of the dead indeed entail much and a great deal of benefit and blessing for the sake of the dead, as they rescue the dead from the verdict of hell, lifting him high up.¹² Our sages of blessed memory have said that (as soon as) Ahaz died in the second hour of the day,¹³ the day instantly turned into night.

¹¹ The reference here is to Rabbi Eliyahu ha-Cohen of Izmir (d. 1729), one of the prominent commentators and authors of ethical and homiletic works during the 1680s–1720s. A prolific author, he wrote and published over thirty books. His work *Midrash Talpiot*, referred to here (see note 12 below), is an extensive manual of Jewish lore. Organized alphabetically and discussing diverse entries and topics pertaining to the fundamentals of Jewish faith, lore and tradition, this mystically oriented work provides passages and citations gleaned from some three hundred books and treatises. The work was first printed in lithograph form in Izmir, a few years after the author's death. Regarding Rabbi Eliyahu's life and major works, see M. Margalioth, *Encyclopedia le-Toldot Gedoley Yisrael*, 4 vols., Tel-Aviv 1973, vol. 1, pp. 138–140.

¹² See Eliyahu ha-Cohen, *Sefer Midrash Talpiot*, Izmir 1736, f. 87a.

¹³ Cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 96a: "For Rabbi Yohanan said: 'That day in which Ahaz died was (made of) two hours.'"

SONG OF PRAISE AND PRAYER FOR
SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE

Introduction

As it was already pointed out in the explanations to the sources and references related to literature and literary activity among the Jews of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, the rather small number of original works that were produced by the Jews of Iran during that period were written mainly in Judeo-Persian (i.e., the Persian language scribed in the Hebrew script, containing lexicon and general features deriving from the history, culture and religion of the Persian speaking Jews). Furthermore, in terms of their topics, sources and overall characteristics, these nineteenth-century Judeo-Persian works closely followed patterns and conventions that had been established within the literary tradition of the Iranian Jews in the course of Iran's Islamic history, and particularly ever since the tenth and eleventh centuries. More importantly, the bulk of this rather small body of nineteenth-century original works (indeed a small body when compared with those composed during the 14th–17th centuries) were suited to the literary tastes and levels of education and sophistication among the ordinary Jewish readers. Both the language of these writings, that reflects the dominant influence of the spoken Judeo-Persian idiom, as well as the common motifs and literary devices that are employed in them, turn these writings into fundamentally folk-oriented works. However, hand in hand with this latter small group of original works and texts in Judeo-Persian (including a number of Hebrew works translated or paraphrased into Judeo-Persian for the sake of the common readers), we find that rabbis, sages and small circles of educated Jews in the various communities were engaged in the writing of letters, petitions, poems, and assorted private and community related papers and documents in the Hebrew language. Although the production and the circulation of this category of Hebrew writings were naturally limited to small circles of rabbis, sages and better-educated Jewish families and individuals in the larger urban communities (among them communal heads, physicians and some

well-to-do merchants), nevertheless these Hebrew writings constitute one of the valuable and little studied areas of Jewish literature and culture in pre-modern Iran. Similar to the other hand-written documents and texts that were produced by the Iranian Jews prior to the appearance and growing use of the print during the first half of the twentieth century, this unique body of Hebrew writings is presently scattered and housed in several public and private collections, mainly in Israel, Western Europe and the United States of America. These nineteenth-century Hebrew writings of the Iranian Jews provide an important source for a better understanding of the cultural and intellectual profiles of the learned and better-educated circles in the various Jewish communities of Iran prior to their modernization and massive transformation in the course of the twentieth century. At this stage of research we are unable to clearly outline and describe the contents of this dispersed body of Hebrew writings produced by the Iranian Jews, since the manuscripts of these texts and writings have neither been properly collected and classified nor studied in any great detail. Nevertheless, a partial and impressionistic observation to be made about them is that a large and significant part of them, amounting to some tens of dozens, were written by Jewish rabbis and heads of the various communities of Iran to numerous Jewish communal leaders and organizations in Western Europe. These letters and petitions, in which rabbis, judges, communal leaders and functionaries in the various communities appealed to their coreligionists outside Iran in a broad range of requests and matters (among them calls for humanitarian assistance, financial aid, diplomatic and political intervention in behalf of Jewish individuals and communities in Iran), attest to their writers' solid knowledge of the Hebrew language. They equally reveal an in-depth familiarity with the Biblical scriptures and with the different works and branches of traditional Jewish literature. We possess ample evidence from diverse nineteenth-century sources, chief among them the accounts of the Christian missionaries that were in close contact with the Jews of Iran, that the rabbis, sages, judges and assorted educated Jews across Iran in the course of the nineteenth century generally read, wrote and spoke in Hebrew. Contrary to the Jewish masses of Iran during this period and earlier, that normally spoke in one of the Iranian (or Aramaic) dialects and had a reading (but not comprehending) ability of Hebrew, the small circles of rabbis and individuals belonging to the traditional educated layer were bilingual. By and large, these individuals and circles had an active command of Judeo-Persian (and Aramaic in the Neo-Aramaic

speaking communities of Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan). Some, but evidently very few among these bilingual Jews, were also familiar with the Persian-Arabic script and had a reading ability of the literary Persian. Most of them, however, were able to read, write and converse in Hebrew. The missionary Rev. J. Lotka (of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews), for instance, who conducted evangelical activity in the various Jewish communities of Iran in the 1880s, indicated that all the discussions with him in those communities were carried on in Hebrew. See his report, in *LSPCJ*, 75 (1883), p. 109. Even in the smaller provincial communities in southern Iran, such as the one in Kazerun (about 120 kilometers south-west of Shiraz), the local rabbi in the 1840s conducted his conversations with the missionaries Rev. P.H. Sternschuss and Rev. H.A. Stern in Hebrew. See *Jl*, May 1846, p. 153.

With the gradual expansion of communication and contacts between the Jewish communities of Iran and the Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe and the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century, there occurred a considerable growth in the number of letters that were written and addressed by the rabbis and heads of the different communities to assorted Jewish officials and institutions out of Iran. The majority of these letters were written in Hebrew and they expressed the hardships, needs, challenges and hopes of Iranian Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century. These letters were for the most part prompted by socio-economic hardships, physical insecurities, legal discriminations and a host of other distresses to which many of the Jewish communities of Iran were subjected. However, while appealing for humanitarian, material and moral support to their coreligionists beyond the borders of Iran (and particularly to the strong and more prosperous communities of Britain and France), the writers of these letters and petitions also described their own general living conditions and referred to some particular events and incidents that had taken place in their respective communities. Both the factual information as well as the selective and subjective view of the various hardships and incidents contained in these letters provide the reader with a unique source of information and insight for the study and understanding of Jewish life and culture in Iran in the course of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, in addition to their importance as a valuable source of historical information, these Hebrew letters and petitions oftentimes contain literary and stylistic traits that turn them into creative and artistic works in their own right. Deeply grounded in

the various Hebrew and Aramaic sources and texts of medieval Jewish literature (including the books of the Hebrew Bible and their commentaries, the tractates of the Mishnah and Talmud, the Midrash or homiletic commentary on the Biblical canon, works of Jewish mysticism, medieval Hebrew philosophy, poetry, liturgy and more), the language of these letters is the Hebrew language employed in pre-modern rabbinic writings. However, hand in hand with words, phrases and textual allusions that are part and parcel of rabbinic and traditional Hebrew writings, these letters and petitions many times contain full or partial sections that are poetic and lyrical in their essence. Although the specific themes of these poetic and literary sections are naturally connected to the immediate subjects and matters that are being discussed in these letters, nevertheless, for the most part they can be read and appreciated as independent pieces of Hebrew literary prose and poetry.

The passage before us, i.e., a song of praise and gratitude dedicated to the eminent nineteenth-century Jewish leader and philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), is an excerpt from a longer letter addressed to Sir Montefiore by the Jews of Hamadan at the end of the Great Famine of 1871–2. Composed mostly in rhymed prose, the letter was written and signed on the 28th of Sivan 5632 (July 4, 1872), by seven rabbis and notables of the Jewish community of Hamadan, headed by a certain El'azar son of Binyamin. From the letter we learn that despite the fact that the long and ravaging famine had come to an end in the wake of heavy rains and precipitations during the winter of 1871 and the spring of 1872, nevertheless the prices of food were still very high, and about five times above those that were current before the outbreak of the famine. We are further told that the vast majority of the Jewish families of Hamadan during this time were miserably poor and in need of urgent material relief. While the letter thanks Sir Montefiore and the Jewish philanthropic organizations of Britain and France for the material aid they had extended to the famine-stricken Jews of Iran in the course of the years 1871–2, it calls upon Sir Montefiore to provide further assistance to the needy and suffering Jewish families of Hamadan. For the full text of the letter, in which Sir Montefiore is portrayed and lauded as the foremost champion and protector of the scattered Jewish communities of Iran, see Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, archival file 311, document no. 34. As regards the Great Famine and its effects on the Jewish communities of Iran, see, e.g., source no. 30 in our book, entitled “The Jewish Community of Kashan during the Great Famine of 1871–2.” Regarding Sir Moses Montefiore’s diverse

efforts and activities in behalf of the Jews of Iran, and the great esteem and authority he enjoyed among the various Jewish communities of Iran, see A. Netzer, “Montefiore ve-Yehudey Paras” (Montefiore and the Jews of Persia), *Pe’amim*, 20 (1984), pp. 55–68, and source no. 35 in our book, entitled “Letter by the Heads of the Jewish Community of Tehran to Jewish Organizations of Europe with regard to the State of the Community of Barfurush...,” note 26. For further prose samples of Hebrew letters, petitions and documents that were written by rabbis and learned individuals in Iran and which possess literary and poetic characteristics, see particularly the text of a letter by the heads of the community of Isfahan, dated 1 Tamuz 5657 (July 1, 1897), and addressed to the secretariat of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. Entitled “Qehilat Isfahan Meshava‘at le-‘Ezrah mi-Kiah” (The Community of Isfahan Cries Out for Help from the Alliance Israélite Universelle), the text of this letter was published together with an introduction and notes explaining its varied literary and religious sources by S. Schwarzfuchs, in *Pe’amim*, 6 (1980), pp. 74–78. For other similar letters and documents, translated and annotated in our book, see source no. 31, entitled “On the Jewish Community of Tehran in the Year 1875...,” and no. 24, entitled “From the Memoirs of a Learned Rabbi of Shiraz...” As regards the role and diverse usages of the Hebrew language in the educational and cultural lives of the Jewish communities of Iran in pre-modern times until the mid-twentieth century, see A. Cohen, “Meqomah shel ha-Safah ha-‘Ivrit ba-Hinukh ha-Yehudi be-Faras” (The Place of the Hebrew Language in the Jewish Education in Persia), op. cit., pp. 377–391.

Song of Praise and Prayer

And therefore,
 O Merciful and Compassionate Father,
 You, who hear one's prayers,
 Who hearken to one's moanings
 And listen to one's yearnings,
 Listen, please, to this prayer and petition of us,
 Who, rejected and cast away,
 In this bitter and rash banishment,
 Are grieving in distress and trouble,
 In ruin and misfortune.

And yet,
We, the hungry and the thirsty,
In this den of oppression,
Together and in one voice,
Offer a prayer,
For an abundance of life and peace,
For them, the graceful, the lovely and the sweet,
Who dwell before you, O Lord,
In safe and tranquil dwellings,
Like roses that are settled in their gardens,
And like heavenly beings,
That subsist in the Garden of Eden.

Two, though, being better than one,¹
Mordecai and Esther,² the righteous ones,
Pray before you, O God Almighty,
On behalf of our father and shepherd,
Our champion and friend in need,
Sir Moses Montefiore;
Protect him, O Merciful, and bless him,
Who attends to us in times of alarm,
He, the knight of a splendid house,
Moses, our master;
May you, O God, protect and sustain him,
That he may long live in his realm,
He, even as all members of his household,
And his kin, and all that graze in his pasture;
Please, O God Supreme,
Shield and save him,
From all foes and enemies;
Guard him, O Almighty,
From all harm and injury,
Keep him, through your might,
And let him shine upon us with his light,
With glory, and without end.

¹ The latter phrase is a partial quotation from Ecclesiastes 4:9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour."

² Mordecai and Esther, from the Book of Esther, who according to ancient tradition are buried in the city of Hamadan.

SECTION VI
RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL LIVES

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF A LEARNED RABBI OF SHIRAZ:
MULLA RAHAMIM MELAMMED HA-COHEN
(SEPT. 16, 1864, SHIRAZ–JAN. 12, 1932, JERUSALEM)¹

*In the Name of Almighty God
May We Endeavor and Succeed*

In the Name of God I will now begin to write my family history:

I confess before you O Lord, My God and the God of our forefathers, that I have much sinned, transgressed and committed crimes before you. Indeed, from the very day that I was born the evil inclination² came upon me instantly and seduced me, and, ever since that day until this very day, it does not let go of me. And therefore, this being the case, I have come now to narrate all that passed upon me, that is all the afflictions and the sufferings, for afflictions purify one's sins.³

¹ Born (on 25 Elul 5625) in Shiraz, Rabbi Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen emigrated to Ottoman Palestine in 1906. He and his family settled down in Jerusalem, where he was soon recognized as one of the main religious and spiritual leaders of the expanding community of Persian-speaking Jews in Palestine.

In addition to a variety of religious, educational and public activities in Jerusalem until his death (on 4 Shevat 5692), he wrote a large number of books, tracts, and homiletic commentaries in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian. His elder son, the late Professor Ezra Sion Melammed of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1903–1994), a distinguished scholar of biblical and rabbinic literature, edited and published some of the works authored by his late father. The following memoir, too, written in Hebrew by Rabbi Rahamim Melammed towards the end of his life, was edited and published, together with brief notes, by Prof. E.S. Melammed, in Giora Fuzailov's Hebrew book, *Hakhmeyhem shel Yehudey Paras ve-Afghanistan (The Sages of the Jews of Persia and Afghanistan)*, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 73–86. The present passages from the memoir provide some first-hand information with regard to various aspects of religious, communal and family lives amongst the Jews of Shiraz during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For biographical and other information on Rabbi Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen, and his son E.S. Melammed, see G. Fuzailov's above-mentioned book, pp. 87–102, and A. Netzer, "Yadi az Mashahir-i Yahud-i Iran," in *Padyāvand*, ed. A. Netzer, vol. II, Los Angeles 1997, pp. 345–364.

² Heb. *yesser ha-ra'*, i.e. "evil impulse" and "evil inclination."

³ The latter phrase is a quotation from Talmud, *Berakhot* 5a. Compare *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, ed. I.H. Weiss, Wien 1865, p. 77.

The day of my birth was on the 25th of Elul 5625 (Sept. 16, 1864). When I reached the age of three my mother died. My mother had given birth also to a daughter, who died at the age of one, about twelve months after the death of my mother. Following my mother's death I was an only child, without a mother, and my father, Rabbi Haim, son of the learned Rabbi Shemuel Cohen-Sedeq, was a rabbi and one of the respected people in the Jewish community (of Shiraz). He was a communal teacher, and every day he was in grief over the death of my mother, but he would not take a wife, saying: "I have no joy, for I will find no one like my (deceased) righteous wife." And, because of this, he would beat me for not learning the Torah. For three years he remained unmarried, until he found a virgin woman, who was a capable and virtuous woman, like my late mother, and who loved me more than my own father. She would all the time bend over me, and shelter me, so that he would not beat me, saying to him: "He is an only child, his mother has died, and he is in pain; will you please teach him with patience and not with harshness?" Indeed, they took pity on me from the heaven above. I learned for nine years, and, blessed be the Lord, my mind was open and receptive, so that by the time I was eleven years old I was already preaching in public. People were so happy to hear sermons from me that they would say: "What a wonder, he is just a little boy and he is (already) a preacher." And, whenever they had to recite the *Qaddish* prayer⁴ they would say: "The preacher has not reached yet the age of *Bar-Mitzvah*, and, therefore, he does not count."⁵ And, because of this, they used to call me "Mulla Kuchik," meaning "Little Rabbi." I was pleased that God, blessed be He, taught them to call me "the Little."⁶

My father told me that I should teach (male) children, since our family were teachers in the community, and I listened to him. Among the boys who were studying under me there were some who were older than myself, but they were happy. Also, on every Sabbath day they used to invite me to preach in the synagogues.⁷ Even though there were in

⁴ Heb. *Qaddish*, or mourner's prayer for the departed, is recited a number of times in each of the daily congregational prayers, provided that at least ten male adults (over the age of thirteen) be present.

⁵ Heb. *Bar-Mitzvah*, i.e. the age of thirteen, when a Jewish male assumes religious responsibility and is considered an adult. See also note 4 above.

⁶ An expression of the writer's humility.

⁷ During this time, ca. 1877, the Jewish community of Shiraz had ten synagogues. See *Persian Famine Relief Fund: Report and Balance Sheet*, London 1873, p. 8, and compare

Shiraz preachers who were bigger and older than me, they were pleased to hear me preach.

When I reached the age of sixteen, on the 25th day of Elul 5640 (Sept. 1, 1880), I became dangerously ill, and I fainted on the eve of the Day of Atonement.⁸ They asked the main rabbis of the city, and among them my maternal uncle Mulla Raphael Shem-Tov, who was in the midst of the evening services, and, seeing my life-threatening illness, he told them that immediately and without any delay they should feed me medicine. As for me, however, I was unconscious and would not hear all these words. Due to my sins and iniquities, however, all this caused them to feed me medications.⁹ By the eve of the festival of Tabernacles,¹⁰ thank God, I recovered a bit. Everybody was crying for me, and my kind and righteous aunt, named Khanum, was attending to my needs and watching over me; until one day they told my father that he should take a wife for me. When people heard of this, some man approached my father, saying: “(take) my daughter,” and some woman said: “(take) my daughter,” until my father decided that my wife should be a certain maiden, named Esther,¹¹ and he postponed the marriage until the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul 5642,¹² that is the date of my birth, and upon the completion of my eighteenth year, as it is said: “At eighteen one is ready for marriage.”¹³ Praised be the Almighty God, for the twenty-fifth day of the Hebrew month of Elul was both the day of my birth as well as the day of my marriage and wedding ceremony.

Now, on the day after the festival of Tabernacles my father said to me: “I can no longer provide for you, except for Sabbath meals for you and for your wife; go and earn bread for your wife.” However, he gave me one private room in the house. When I heard these words I became very sad. I cried and said: “O God of the universe, all the

the report on the Jews of Shiraz in *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 25 (April 9, 1875), p. 199, according to which there were nine synagogues in the city. During the last decade of the 19th century the community continued to have ten synagogues. See Mirza Nurullah Hakim's report in LSPC, 83 (1891), p. 124. Idem, JMI, July 1893, p. 104.

⁸ I.e., on Tuesday, the 9th of Tishri 5641 (Sept. 14, 1880).

⁹ Thus forcing him to break his fast.

¹⁰ I.e., by Sunday, the 14th of Tishri 5641 (Sept. 19, 1880).

¹¹ According to Prof. E.S. Melammed's notes (see in G. Fuzailov's above-mentioned book, p. 74, note 17), at the time of her marriage she was called Bibi-Ma, and only towards the end of her life was she called Esther.

¹² I.e., Sept. 9, 1882.

¹³ The Mishnaic *Tractate Avot*, 5:24.

money that I had was taken for the (wedding) expenses, what shall we do now without any money for living expenses?" Yet, I had three and a half qerans still left.¹⁴ I went out with a broken heart and bought bread for half a qeran. Praised be the Almighty for having brought me to that point; however, I had no work, and my only labor consisted of my study of the Torah. Whereas it is written in the Torah that "one shall cheer his wife whom he has taken,"¹⁵ I and my wife were in grief. For a few Sabbath days we went to dine at my father's table, but we were ashamed. My kind and righteous wife then said: "All that we eat during the whole week is quite enough; do we need to eat (at your father's table) also on Sabbaths?" So, from that time on we ate alone in our room. Anyhow, my joy and desire were in (the study of) the Torah, and I did not abandon my studies neither during the day-time nor at nights; my soul yearned for (the study of) the Torah, and even though no distinguished rabbi and master was to be found in our city,¹⁶ little by little I would look into the commentaries and the laws, learning and deducing one thing from another.

On Sabbath days the caretakers of the synagogues would come to call me, to give sermons to their congregants. There were ten synagogues in our city,¹⁷ and I used to pray at the one that was the biggest of all the synagogues in our city, and was ironically called "the Little Synagogue," like my own name, which was "the Little Rabbi." During the early afternoon prayers on Sabbaths, I used to begin the services on time and end at eleven at night, three or four hours of which were conducted entirely by heart. At times we would read (the afternoon prayer) out loud and without repeating after the leader of the prayer, in order to maintain the third Sabbath meal.¹⁸ This was done so not because I wanted so, but because of the congregants who wished (to allow more time) to hear me sermonize. And also, on every Sabbath, I used to preach after the service, so that as a result, the congregants

¹⁴ On the value of qeran (= kran) in the 1880s, see source 16, introduction.

¹⁵ Cf. Deuteronomy 24:5, "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the host, neither shall he be charged with any business...; and he shall cheer his wife whom he has taken."

¹⁶ Regarding the lack of prominent rabbinic teachers and scholars in Shiraz during the second half of the 19th century, see, e.g., Yehiel Fischel Kestilman, in *Mas'ot Sheliah Sefat be-Arsot ha-Mizrah*, ed. A. Ya'ari, Jerusalem 1942, pp. 60–61.

¹⁷ Regarding the number of the synagogues in Shiraz during this time (ca. 1885), see note 7 above.

¹⁸ Heb. *Se'udah Shelishit*, eaten on the termination of *Sabbath*. The purpose of not repeating after the cantor was to save time.

of the synagogue in which I prayed would be angry with me, saying: "Why do you, who have a regular synagogue, go to another synagogue?" I would then be embarrassed and say: "Do you think I go there out of my free will? The janitors take me by force, and they fight with each other; they take me against my will." Sometimes I would not go with them, so they would return (to their synagogues) disappointed. What could I, or rather what should I tell you? In the day the heat consumed me, and by night the frost,¹⁹ being occupied with the study of Torah and with work.

There were a few groups of students who were studying with me: One group after the morning prayer, one group in the mid-day, at noon-time, because they had to go to their work and trade, as they had family members depending on them, and thus they would return every day and study. Another group studied with me after the evening prayer at the Little Synagogue, where I used to pray, and still another group, which met with me on Sabbath, after the morning meal until the study time (preceding the late afternoon service). There were times they would not allow some other person to sermonize in their congregations, fighting and forcing the synagogues' caretakers to come and take me to their synagogues. Also, I had a Torah scroll all to myself in my room, and I would pray there on my own. There were times that I would be fasting (during the day) and students would come to study with me after the evening service. I would not tell them that I was fasting on these Mondays and Thursdays, or on Mondays following the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover, and on several other days of fasting, including the eves of every new month.²⁰ On days such as these, I would be teaching till three hours after midnight,²¹ when they would finish their lessons, and only then would I go home. My wife would then be angry and cry out to the neighbors, "He has been fasting and returning home only now! He who has headaches and chest-pains and is weak and goes every day to the doctor for being sick." What

¹⁹ The last two sentences are a quotation from Genesis 31:40.

²⁰ Fasting on Mondays, Thursdays and the Eves of the New Moon (the latter occasion being known also as *Yom Kippur Qatan*, or the Lesser Day of Atonement), was, and still is, practiced by the very pious. These days of fasting, however, are not mandatory, as specified in the authoritative code of Jewish laws, known as *Shulhan 'Arukh* (the "Prepared Table"). On the mandatory and recommended days of fasting, for both private and public purposes, see *Qissur Shulhan 'Arukh*, ed. S. Ganzfried, New York 1927, part three, pp. 54–56, 67–70.

²¹ I.e., seven-eight hours past the time permissible to break the fast.

could I do? I would listen and keep silent. Sometimes these students of mine would hear these words and be embarrassed, saying: “We did not know.” And the neighbors would then talk to me, saying: “Why do you act like this? Your good wife is right and her words are true.”

After eating, I would sit and write new interpretations of the Torah, either in the holy language of Hebrew, or homilies²² in (Judeo-)Persian, for the sake of benefiting the community. My intention was to print the material, but there was no money, nor was there any printing press in our community.²³ I used to write at nights, since I did not have time to write during the day. And even so, I was accustomed to rise before dawn in order to perform the midnight prayer²⁴ at home, because, due to difficulties of living in exile, it was not the custom of our city to come to the synagogue to perform the midnight prayer. The guards would arrest anybody who was outside his house after midnight, accusing him of being a burglar.²⁵ Because of this, everybody would perform (the midnight prayer) in his own house. This was the case except for the time of *Selihot*,²⁶ in which period the guards knew that everybody went to the synagogue, so they would not have an excuse to say anything.

In the course of each year I would finish the three parts of the *Book of Zohar*,²⁷ and every single day I would read eighteen chapters of the *Mishnah*,²⁸ and the Psalms, and the *Daily Selections*;²⁹ and on every Sabbath, during the entire year, I would read the five books of

²² Heb. *Midrash*, i.e., “study” and “homiletic interpretation of the Scriptures,” in particular.

²³ The first Hebrew and Judeo-Persian printing house amongst the Jews of Iran was established during the second decade of the twentieth century in Tehran. Cf. A. Netzer, “Shalom: Nakhustin Nashriya-yi Fars-Yahud,” in *Padyawand*, ed. A. Netzer, vol. I, Los Angeles 1996, pp. 299–300.

²⁴ Heb. *Tiqun Hasot*.

²⁵ On the prohibition to leave one’s house after midnight, and the harsh conduct of the night guards in Shiraz towards those who violated the law, see Sa’idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi-i Ittifaqiyya*, pp. 22 and 49.

²⁶ Heb. *Selihot*, i.e., penitential prayers and hymns recited on days of fast and trouble, and especially during the Penitential season in the month of Elul, which begins before the Jewish New Year (*Rosh ha-Shanah*) and concludes with the Day of Atonement (*Yom ha-Kippurim*).

²⁷ Heb. *Zohar*, i.e., “splendor,” is the title of the major work of Jewish mysticism, attributed to the Mishnaic sage Simeon bar Yohai, but written mostly in Spain in the 13th century by Moses de Leon.

²⁸ In order to complete the reading of the entire *Mishnah* in the course of one month.

²⁹ Heb. *Ma’amadot*, i.e., selected passages from the Bible, Mishnah and Talmud, to be read after the morning prayer (*Shaharit*).

the Torah, the Prophets and the Hagiographa, and Mishnaic sections, besides laws.³⁰

It was my custom to wrap myself with my praying shawl and my phylacteries and go with the rise of the dawn to the synagogue, in order to be amongst the first ten congregants.³¹ Once (wrapped in this manner), in early dawn, a man saw me on the way to the synagogue, and he was frightened by my appearance, thinking I was a ghost; he was so terrified that he fell ill and his health was in danger. Ever since that time I stopped with that custom, and I would wrap myself with the praying shawl only when I arrived at the synagogue's courtyard. I thought this was better, so that no other person's health would be endangered.

Now, two and a half years had thus passed and my wife had not yet conceived. I was in great distress on account of this matter, until my prayers were granted and she became pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter, and I made a celebration³² and named her Tuti,³³ calling her after my late mother, whose name was Tuti. I had been waiting for a son, but the Almighty blessed be He granted me a daughter. I told myself it is all for the best, as "a daughter first-born is a good sign for sons,"³⁴ praised be the Lord.

I had saved an amount of ten tumans for the expenses of a circumcision and a feast, but, since this was a daughter, I began to renovate the synagogue in which I prayed. This synagogue was supported by twelve pillars which had been built many years before. These pillars had ball-shaped and painted knobs at their tops, and Muslim craftsmen had made gentile inscriptions over them, which were about seven hundred years old. The height of each pillar was about twenty cubits from the top to the bottom,³⁵ but their upper parts were tilted because of age, and caving in. All the congregants were afraid that there might be an

³⁰ Heb. *Dinim*, i.e., "laws," "judgements," "verdicts" and "legal rules."

³¹ Heb. *asarah*, literally "ten," is the Judeo-Persian equivalent of the Hebrew *minyan* or quorum. It refers to the minimum number of ten male adult Jews required in order to maintain a congregational prayer.

³² Heb. *Zeved*, which literally means "gift" and "bounty," refers to a feast and ceremony marking the birth of a female infant. Guests are invited on Sabbath to the home of the parents, the new-born girl is then brought before the guest of honor who blesses her and announces her name.

³³ Per. *Tuti*, literally "a parrot," was a popular female name in pre-modern Iran.

³⁴ Talmud, *Bava Batra* 120a.

³⁵ Heb. *ammah*, i.e., "forearm" and "cubit," is about 43 to 56 centimeters. Each pillar was, therefore, about 10 meters (33 feet) high.

earthquake and there would be great danger to the people,³⁶ because at least three hundred souls used to pray there. This was such a large and spacious synagogue that in the course of the services people would call on the leader of the prayers and say to him: “Please read in a loud voice.” And, on New Year’s Day and on the Day of Atonement, when I was the cantor during the evening services, more than five hundred men, women and children would be in the synagogue. On the Great Sabbath³⁷ and on the Sabbath Day of Repentance,³⁸ when I would give sermons to the entire congregation, there would be at least two thousand people in the synagogue.³⁹

Seeing this, I thought that with the money that I had reserved for the circumcision expenses I should rather build a supporting wall for the synagogue, so that the pillars would stand upright and not collapse. I thought this was better use of the money than a circumcision feast. All the worshippers at the synagogue were surprised the day I began to renovate the synagogue. They said: “For forty years we had an old head and manager in our synagogue who did not pay attention, and did not have money, and finally he immigrated to the holy city of Jerusalem; how is it that you have been our treasurer and cantor for only six months and there is money for renovation?” I said: “With God’s help everything will be all right.” From that day on I desired earnestly to renovate the synagogue. And, as the congregants realized this, they, too, became interested; so, one person would vow to contribute, while another one would make an immediate donation. The wealthier ones among the synagogue’s congregants, who had been praying there for some years and not paid attention (to the synagogue’s condition), as they saw that I was so interested in the matter, they too volunteered to build one supporting wall. I was fortunate and privileged to build the

³⁶ Such earthquakes were a common feature of life in the province of Fars and in the city of Shiraz. On some particularly devastating quakes in the city during the 19th century (chief among them one in the month of Shawwal 1239 Q./July 1824), see K. Afsar, *Tarikh-i Baft-i Qadimi-yi Shiraz*, pp. 230–232. For dates and descriptions of such frequent quakes in Shiraz and its environs during the years 1878–1904, see Sa’idi-Sirjani (op. cit.), pp. 88–89, 104, 250, 320, 411–412, and more.

³⁷ Heb. *Shabbat Hagadol*, the Great (or High) Sabbath, preceding Passover.

³⁸ Heb. *Shabbat Teshuvah* (known also as *Shabbat Shuvah*), the Sabbath which falls between New Year and the Day of Atonement.

³⁹ Although the statistics regarding the exact size of the Jewish community of Shiraz during the last quarter of the 19th century vary, it appears that they numbered about 5,000 souls and occupied about 430 houses in 1891–3. See, e.g., LSPCJ, 83 (1891), p. 124, and JMI, July 1893, pp. 104–105.

wall which was on the western side of the synagogue, where the Ark of Law⁴⁰ was located, and where we would stand to pray facing Jerusalem, may it be built speedily; and, therefore, I was later privileged to come and pray before the Western Wall,⁴¹ for God blessed be He measures one's reward in accordance with one's deeds.

Also, I had decorative paintings made for the synagogue, and sixty-three lamps for each of the walls, against the sixty-three letters which make up the Divine Name;⁴² and, on top of each of the lamps there were flower-shaped ornaments. Furthermore, since there was no one in our city who would embellish the central lamp of the synagogue with decorative designs and inscriptions, I sent money to the city of Isfahan, and had them do the inscriptions and send the lamp to us. They also drew a crown over the top of the lamp and inside the ceiling, and covered it with glass, as it was a custom in our city. So the entire community (of Shiraz) now praised the synagogue, saying it looked like the Holy Temple. And, taking notice of what I had done, the other synagogues in our city were now also moved to renovate, and so men and women in the community would congratulate me for what I had done. Also, we added some land to the synagogue, so that the area which included the twelve pillars was enlarged by four more pillars, and thus the synagogue was expanded to the west by a third, that is twenty to thirty square cubits more. The additional lot was donated by two partners. One was on behalf of a certain man who had died without having any sons, but who had a daughter that inherited from him; and the other one, the husband of the latter woman, who was well-to-do, and I requested that he donate money in order to enlarge the synagogue....⁴³

...in short, my wife and I now had a first-born daughter. We used to play and entertain ourselves with her, until one year after her birth, when she became sick with smallpox and died. We were crying day

⁴⁰ Heb. *Heykhal*, known also as *Aron ha-Qodesh* (the Holy Ark), where the Torah scrolls are kept in the synagogue.

⁴¹ Known also as the "Wailing Wall," i.e., the section of the western supporting wall of the Temple Mount, which remained intact since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. Here Rabbi Melammed is alluding to his emigration and arrival in Jerusalem in 1906.

⁴² One, among various numerical representations of God's names and aspects, believed to be possessed of miraculous and mystical powers.

⁴³ From here through the beginning of the next translated paragraph there is a long passage describing in detail various disputes and conflicts surrounding the renovation of the synagogue. This passage has been deleted in the translated text above.

and night. My righteous and good-hearted aunt, Khanum,⁴⁴ who was childless and loved me like a son, did not leave us during the entire seven days of mourning, consoling us all the time. My wife became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. This one, too, grew till she was three, and she died. I was in grief and distress, weeping and moaning, praying, entreating with God and fasting, until my wife conceived again and gave birth to a daughter who survived. She was named Khanum-Jan, that is (the Hebrew name) Hannah. Thank God she grew up, and, by the time she was six years old, people would come asking to marry her. The custom of our city was that by the time girls were six or seven years old they would be betrothed, and they would then allow three or four years for the boy and the girl to grow, at which time the marriage would take place. I had a student whose father was alive, but whose mother had died. He was rather humble. Some rich people also came to ask for her hand, but I was not interested. I was rather interested in a certain youth, who every Sabbath used to read the weekly portion of the Torah for the congregation. I was fond of him. It took a year and a half until the matchmaking took place. After that, he used to boast that he had become a rabbi's son-in-law. Still, I helped him, and so my daughter became a spouse to the groom, whose name was Shaul Sar Shalom Cohen. At that time my daughter was small, about seven years old; she used to cry every day, and her mother was very sad. Also, her mother-in-law used to beat her with a whip and a stick, so much so that she became sick and was injured in her hands and feet. We treated her with various medicines until she recovered.

(As for my wife) she became pregnant again afterwards, but miscarried when she was in her third month. To make things brief, she conceived again and gave birth to a male child, thank God. We conducted the circumcision, with joy and feast; until he was three years old. On the Day of Passover he came with me to the synagogue. However, on the third day of the holiday he became sick with diphtheria, and on the sixth day of the holiday he died. Heaven and earth and all the worshippers, women and children were crying, until I fainted; a few people came and stood by my head; I then took and held the boy in my arms and stood in the midst of the people, and I said: "O Lord of the universe, let my son be a sacrifice for every son of Israel, and let no son of Israel be like me; let him be a sacrifice for all the children

⁴⁴ Already mentioned above.

of your house of Israel.” Pity me for that hour, as all the congregants, men, women and children, were crying, wailing and pouring tears. What can I say and what should I say about this time of my life, that was for me like the destruction of the Holy Temple. This was so until they grabbed the boy from my hands by force and carried him away to bury him. I was kissing the dead boy, and I lost consciousness once again. For a long time afterwards I was not able to speak. Even now I am not able to write and tell everything that came to pass then, for, after my son died, I became sick a few times, until my wife conceived again, and this time too she miscarried.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Out of fourteen children that Rabbi Melammed’s wife gave birth to, only four survived. See Prof. E.S. Melammed’s testimony in G. Fuzailov’s book (op. cit.), p. 88.

AN ACCOUNT OF PILGRIMS ON THEIR WAY TO THE
TOMB OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL (LOCATED ABOUT
15 KILOMETERS TO THE NORTH OF AL-NAJAF, IN
SOUTHERN IRAQ), IN THE YEAR 1809

Introduction

One of the common expressions of religious faith and devotion amongst the Jews of Iran in pre-modern times was manifested in pilgrimages to sacred tombs and sites located in Iran and in the neighboring territories. Due to insecure and unpaved roads, particularly in the remote rural and tribal regions of Iran much through the first quarter of the twentieth century, such journeys and pilgrimages often involved physical hardships and dangers. The text before us gives the account of a small group of such Jewish pilgrims of Iran, who on their way to the tomb, believed to belong to the prophet Ezekiel, were attacked and nearly killed by a band of robbers. Written in colloquial Judeo-Persian, the account was scribed in minute and neatly shaped cursive letters in the margins of one of the pages of a Judeo-Persian translation of the biblical Book of Psalms, dating from 1740. See BZI, Ms. 905, f. 14b.–15a. The text was translated into Hebrew and published together with notes and a short discussion of its religious and historical context, by the late Prof. E.S. Melammed, in “Tafsir Tehillim be-Farsit,” [Commentary on the (Book of) Psalms in Persian], in *Sefunot*, vol. 9 (1965), pp. 317–319. It is noteworthy that the account was jotted down by the narrator (apparently the owner of the manuscript) in the margin of Psalm XX, which begins with the verse “The Lord answers thee in the day of trouble,” and whose central theme is God’s rescuing the believer from the perils of death. Regarding the pilgrimage of some Jewish families of Tehran and Bushihr to the tomb of Ezekiel, during the feast of Pentecost (*Shavu’ot*) of the Hebrew year 5630 (May 1870), see *Ha-Dover Mesharim* of Baghdad, 25th of Iyyar 5630 (May 25, 1870), p. 23.

Account of Pilgrims

In the Name of God

In the year five thousand and five hundred and sixty-nine as of the creation (= 1808–9 C.E.),¹ on the twenty-eighth day of the month of Sivan (= June 12, 1809), one hour after the day-break, in the vicinity of the town of Khizr-Abad,² ‘Ali Khan, brother of Husain Khan (known as) Fili, together with the son of ‘Ali Murad Khan³ and ten men mounted on mules, showed up. May the names of the wicked rot! As soon as they arrived, they greeted us, saying: “May it be a bright day,”⁴ to which we responded, saying: “Good bright day!” (Then) they asked: “Is there any caravan behind you?” We said: “Yes, there is.” They went away. Having gone the distance of about half a farsang,⁵ and seen that there was no caravan or anything (else) behind us, they came back to us. They had now armed themselves, all of them holding lances in their hands and (with) shotguns on their shoulders. (They appeared) all of a sudden, may this not happen even to our enemies! They rushed towards us, and so we got off our horses and began throwing stones and grabbing sticks against these wicked rogues. Zayn al-‘Abidin, our caravan leader, also grabbed (his?) rifle. As soon as they saw that we were showing resistance, those bandits grabbed on to their lances and rifles against us and began to fire bullets at us, like rain. About two and a half to three hours we fought each other. (About) four or five of us were wounded by the bullets. Zayn al-‘Abidin, the caravan leader, was hit; so was also a young man by the name of Binyamin, a nephew of Mulla Dawood of (the city of) Khunsar,⁶ but, thank God, he was not seriously harmed. We fought so much that we became exhausted; we gave up all hope for our lives and our property. We asked each other for forgiveness and called upon the Holy One, blessed be He. We prayed and said: “O prophet Ezekiel, the rein slipped away from our hands;

¹ I.e., September 22, 1808–September 10, 1809.

² Spelled in the text as Qizr-Abad, this provincial town is located 48 kilometers to the west of the city of Yazd. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya’i-yi Iran*, vol. 10, p. 78.

³ Names of robbers who, as can be deduced from the text, were known and dreaded in the area.

⁴ Originally, the Persian greeting *nur bashad*, i.e., “may there (or it) be light.”

⁵ One *farsang* (or *farsakh*) is about one league, or three miles.

⁶ The commonly used name for the town (and district) of Khunsar, located north of Isfahan and about 30 kilometers to the south of Gulpaygan.

we, though, are not men of war; we are a bunch of helpless⁷ Jews, with no defense, and with no fault of our own either; this gentile too has fallen;⁸ our wives and children are waiting for us to return; we have come all this way for the sake of (fulfilling) a commandment, would that we all be sacrificed for the soul of King David, who has said: ‘The Lord preserveth the strangers’;⁹ O God, listen to our cry!’ As we were in the middle of all this, we saw a few horsemen (approaching) from the opposite side; they were Arab soldiers¹⁰ mounted on horses with silver-white shining saddles. They (finally) reached us, (and) as soon as the robbers saw that the horsemen had come to our help they turned to their horses and ran away. (Now) the horsemen and we, too, went after the robbers. As the robbers realized that they could not cope with the horsemen, they fled and went away. The horsemen captured and brought one of the mules of the robbers that was loaded with provisions. The Holy One, blessed be He, worked such miracles and wonders for our sake that one would say these horsemen were angels. Every day the Holy One, blessed be He, works miracles for the sake of Israel, (but) we are blind from inside and we do not understand. The Holy One, blessed be He, performed such miracles and wonders for our sake. May you know peace, (and) blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord.¹¹

...¹² son of Mulla Yadigar.

⁷ Originally, Per. *bi dast-u pa*, literally “without hands and feet,” i.e., “inept,” “incompetent” and “useless.”

⁸ I.e., the caravan leader mentioned above.

⁹ Psalms 146:9.

¹⁰ Originally *qazzaq*, i.e. “kozak,” “soldier,” and “fighter.”

¹¹ The last sentence is a partial quotation from Jeremiah 17:7. The full verse there reads: “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose trust the Lord is.”

¹² The first name of the narrator is blurred and illegible.

A QUESTION IN MATTERS OF FAMILY LAW, IN THE
JEWISH COMMUNITY OF TEHRAN, ADDRESSED TO
THE SEPHARDIC CHIEF RABBI OF PALESTINE IN 1898

Introduction

Available archival records and published sources from the mid-eighteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth century reveal that rabbis and heads of the Jewish communities of Iran during those years referred diverse religious and legal questions to rabbinic authorities outside Iran, and particularly to rabbis and judges residing in Palestine and Baghdad. The considerable reliance of rabbis, Jewish communal leaders and educated individuals in Iran upon the religious authority and erudition of Jewish sages and rabbis residing in (or originating from) the main centers of Jewish religious learning in Palestine and Baghdad is richly documented in the writings and responses of the leading Jewish sages and rabbis of Palestine and Baghdad during the period under discussion. As to the document before us, it presents a complex and painful case of a married woman in the Jewish community of Tehran who had converted to Islam voluntarily around the year 1898. The document exemplifies the kinds of religious issues and human dilemmas that emerged in the various Jewish communities of Iran, and which the rabbis and Jewish scholars in those communities found themselves incapable of resolving. However, whereas the vast majority of similar questions and inquiries addressed to rabbis and judges of Palestine and Baghdad were written in Hebrew by Iranian rabbis, the letter before us was written in French, and addressed to the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine by a non-Iranian Jew, i.e., Joseph Cazes, the director of the Alliance Israélite school in Tehran during the years 1898–1901.

Arriving in Tehran in the summer of 1898, J. Cazes, director of the Alliance Israélite school in Beirut, was assigned the task of representing the Alliance organization in Iran and establishing (or rather reorganizing and expanding) the first Alliance school for boys, which had been officially inaugurated in the Jewish quarter of Tehran on April 15,

1898. In addition to his energetic pursuit of the educational objectives of the Alliance in Tehran, that resulted in the enlargement of the boys' school and the founding of the first school of its kind for Jewish girls in Tehran, Cazes, much like the future representatives and directors of the Alliance educational network in Tehran and the other communities, took an active interest in the general condition and the internal affairs and problems of the local community. It was in the latter context that he addressed the letter before us to Rabbi Ya'acov Shaul Elyashar (b. 1817, Safed–d. 1906, Jerusalem), who was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine (Heb. *Rishon le-Sion*) during the years 1892–1906. A man of varied interests, activities and contacts across the Jewish communities of the East and the West over a period of five decades, Rabbi Elyashar was a prominent scholar of Jewish law as well as a linguist fluent in a number of Middle Eastern and European languages. Due to his earlier education and training in Jewish law, he was appointed judge (Heb. *Dayyan*) in Jerusalem in 1853, and head of the Jewish court (*Av Beyt-Din*) in that city in 1869. During his long years of work and activity as a scholar, judge and chief rabbi, he wrote thousands of responses to questions that were referred to him by rabbis, communal officials and assorted individuals from numerous Jewish communities and settlements across the world. The letter before us is one among two dozen extant letters, questions and requests, that were addressed to Rabbi Elyashar by rabbis and a number of Jewish individuals from the Jewish communities of Tehran, Hamadan, Yazd and Bushihr, roughly between the years 1880–1906. For the original handwritten letter of Joseph Cazes, translated and presented below, see the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Arc. 4° 1271, file 635. As to Rabbi Elyashar's reply to J. Cazes, unfortunately no record is found in the latter mentioned archival file. As regards other specific cases pertaining to family law in the community of Tehran, cases that were referred for decision to Rabbi Elyashar's jurisdiction, see *ibid.*, three Hebrew letters addressed by Rabbi Avraham Ben Aqa Baba of Tehran, dated 16 Shevat 5647 (February 10, 1887), 1 Iyyar 5666 (April 26, 1906), and 24 Tamuz 5666 (July 17, 1906). For a question addressed to Rabbi Elyashar with regard to a business dispute between a Jewish merchant of Yazd and his Jewish colleague of Hamadan, see the Hebrew letter of Mordecai son of Hajji El'azar of Yazd, dating from the (Heb.) year 5659 (1888–9), *ibid.*, file 634, document no. 239. For various cases

involving family disputes and business conflicts in the community of Yazd, submitted for arbitration to the latter authority during the 1890s, see *ibid.*, file 114. As regards correspondence between the Chief Rabbi of Yazd (i.e., Mulla Mosheh son of Yisshaq Or Sharga, known as Aqa Baba) and Rabbi Elyashar during the years 1900–1, see below, source no. 27, entitled “The Jewish Community of Yazd in the Nineteenth Century,” note 48. Finally, for the originals of six Hebrew letters that were addressed to Rabbi Elyashar by the wealthy heads of the Jewish community of Bushihr in the (Heb.) year 5657 (1896–7), and in which they requested the latter’s personal intervention and arbitration in order to resolve a bitter conflict among some Jews of Iranian extraction in Jerusalem concerning the ownership rights of a communal synagogue named Degel Avraham, see *ibid.* (i.e., JNUL, Arc. 4° 1271), file 633.

As regards the author of the inquiry before us, i.e., Joseph Cazes, and his educational and communal activities in behalf of the Jews of Tehran, see A. Confino, *L’Action de l’Alliance Israélite en Perse*, Alger (1946?), pp. 53–60, 65–68; N. Leven, *Cinquante ans d’histoire: L’alliance Israélite Universelle (1860–1910)*, 2 vols., Paris 1920, vol. 2, pp. 259–260; and A. Cohen, “Yehudey Iran ve-ha-Mif’al ha-Hinukhi shel ‘Kol Yisrael Haverim’,” (The Jews of Iran and the Educational Endeavor of the Alliance Israelite Universelle), *Pe’amim*, 22 (1985), pp. 119–120. As regards Rabbi Y.S. Elyashar’s biography and an outline of his activities and writings, see G. Bat Yehuda, s.v. “Elyashar, Jacob Saul Ben Eliezer Jeroham,” in *EJ*, vol. 6, pp. 692–3; I. Ben-Zvi, in *Osar Yehudey Sefarad*, 6 (1963), pp. 7–16; and M.D. Gaon, *Yehudey ha-Mizrah be-Eres Yisrael*, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1938, vol. 2, pp. 62–68. For further discussion and sources with regard to correspondence on matters of religious law between the rabbis of Iran and Jewish sages and judges residing in Ottoman Palestine and Baghdad during the 18th and 19th centuries, see my article (in Hebrew), entitled “The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Jewish Communities in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Background and Trends,” in *Sefunot*, new series, vol. 8 (2003), pp. 267–269, and notes 92 and 99 in particular.

The Inquiry

Tehran
August 29, 1898

Venerable Chief Rabbi:

Although I have not had the privilege of knowing you in person, I take the liberty to address and submit to your esteemed authority a religious question which the rabbis here declare themselves incapable of resolving. This question concerns a Jewish woman who has become Muslim out of her own free will. On account of this fact she has become unlawful to her (Jewish) husband, and the latter is obliged to disavow her and give her a divorce.¹ However, despite all the pleadings, all the warnings and all the grief involved, the said husband refuses to give her this divorce. What can the woman do under these circumstances, or, what can the authorities do in order to hand her the divorce which her husband refuses to grant?

This, Sir Chief Rabbi, is the question, and you will be rendering our community a great service by consenting to resolve it.

Please, venerable Chief Rabbi, accept the expressions of my heartfelt and most respectful sentiments.

(signed): J. Cazes

¹ As to the validity of this requirement in Jewish law, see, e.g., the following provision in *Shulhan Arukh* (i.e., Code of Jewish Law): "It is mandatory to divorce a bad woman who is of a quarrelsome disposition and is not as modest as a respectable woman in Israel should be, even if it is the first marriage." Cf. S. Ganzfried, *Code of Jewish Law: Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*, trans. into English by H.E. Goldin, revised new edition, New York 1963, vol. 4, p. 9 (chapter 145, article 24).

SECTION VII
ASPECTS OF LIFE AND HISTORY IN THE
LARGER COMMUNITIES

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF YAZD IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY, ACCORDING TO AZARIA LEVY,
SCHOLAR OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF IRAN

Introduction

Following are translated excerpts from a long Hebrew article by Mr. Azaria Levy, dealing with the Jewish community of Yazd in the nineteenth century. A scholar of Iranian Jewry and its history, A. Levy's research and publications cover diverse but closely related areas and topics pertaining to history, society, economy, culture and communal lives of the Iranian Jews, particularly prior to their rapid modernization in the course of the twentieth century. Noteworthy among this scholar's publications, mostly in the form of articles in Hebrew, and some in English, are the following: (1) Those that investigate the history of the Jews of Mashhad (particularly ever since their forced conversion in March 1839); (2) articles that treat various topics and areas in the history of Iranian Jews in pre-modern times, including the general condition and history of some specific Jewish communities, such as those of Isfahan and Yazd. As to A. Levy's articles concerned with the Jews of Mashhad, see particularly his "Evidences and Documents for the History of the Jews of Mashad," (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim*, 6 (1980), pp. 57–73, and "The Herat Expulsion, 1856–1859," (also in Hebrew), *ibid.*, 14 (1983), pp. 77–91, as well as his monograph, in English, entitled *The Jews of Mashad*, Jerusalem, 1998. For his publications dealing with the general history of the Iranian Jews in pre-modern times, see particularly his Hebrew articles: "The Jews of Persia in the Nineteenth Century," *Kivunim*, no. 8, summer 1880, pp. 71–90; "The Jewish Press in the Nineteenth Century as a Source for the History of the Jews of Persia," *Yad la-Qore'*, vol. 19, issue 1–2 (1980–1), pp. 47–51; "Sources for the Study of Persian Jewry in the 18th and 19th Centuries," in *Hagut Ivrit be-Arsot ha-Islam*, ed. M. Zohari et al., Jerusalem 1981, pp. 315–326, and "Persecution of Jews in Persia in the 19th Century," *Ma'alot*, year 10 (November 1978), pp. 15–20. As regards his publications dealing with the history of individual Jewish communities of Iran through the first half of the

twentieth century, see his (Hebrew) articles “The Jewish Community of Isfahan During the Recent Generations,” *Ma‘alot*, year 14 (September 1982), pp. 61–68, and “On the Jewish Education in Persia in the 19th Century, Prior to the Establishment of the Alliance,” *Ma‘alot*, year 10 (April 1978), pp. 7–13. This latter article touches on the cultural condition of the Jews in the larger communities of Iran prior to their educational modernization.

The article before us, which deals with the Jewish community of Yazd in the course of the nineteenth century, draws on written sources and oral testimonies that were collected and studied by the writer. Entitled “Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Yazd she-be-Iran ba-Me’ah ha-Yod-Tet” (The Jewish Community of Yazd, Located in Iran, in the 19th Century), this article was also published in *Ma‘alot*, year 13 (September 1981), pp. 31–40. I would like to thank Mr. Azaria Levy for kindly allowing me to translate and include his article in the present book.

The Community of Yazd

With the exception of a few Jewish communities in Iran, such as those in the cities of Mashhad and Tehran, the origins of most of the Jewish communities in this land are not known and we know but very little about them.¹ That the Jews of Iran were city dwellers also in the distant past is almost an ascertained assumption. The problem of the insufficiency of sources required for the writing of the history of the Jewish communities of Iran is as much the problem of (inadequate)

¹ No Jewish community existed in Mashhad prior to the time of the Iranian ruler Nadir Shah Afshar (r. 1736–1747). According to the oral tradition current among the Jews of Mashhad, it was this latter ruler who brought Jews from Qazvin and Dilman (in the districts of Gilan and Mazandaran) to the north-eastern province of Khurasan. According to this tradition, some of those Jews settled in the city of Mashhad, sometime between 1735–6 and 1760. Cf. A. Levy, *The Jews of Mashhad*, op. cit., pp. 1–2. As to the origins of the Jewish settlement in Tehran, all we possess are oral testimonies recorded in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. According to these accounts, the first Jews who settled in Tehran (then a small provincial town) arrived there approximately during the mid-18th century (ca. 1745). The community began its gradual growth as of the year 1786, when Aqa Muhammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty (d. 1797) established Tehran (officially on March 13, 1786) as the capital of the newly founded dynasty. Cf. A. Netzer, “The Jewish Community of Tehran from its Beginning until the Constitutional Revolution, 1906” (in Hebrew), *Shevet va-Am*, ed. D. Siton, second series, 4 (9), Jerusalem 1980, pp. 248–251.

self-awareness among the Jews of Iran.² It is possible that there exist oral traditions and various information that have not been committed to writing yet, and therefore this is one of the tasks that are assigned upon those who are engaged in the investigation of the history of the Jews of Iran. The need is to discover these traditions, reconstruct them and connect them to what is known to us from the writings. As to these writings, they consist of letters and memoirs of Jewish religious emissaries³ to Iran, as well as those of travelers, diplomats and Christian missionaries who visited far-away and isolated communities and wrote about them. Generally, the Jews (of Iran) constituted a small minority in the midst of the Muslim population, and, as a result, it was difficult for outside visitors to approach and closely follow the life of the community. The work of reconstruction is done, therefore, by way of collecting notes and allusions that join into a more complete and clear picture regarding the lives in the areas of society, economy as well as religious and secular leadership in each community.

The study of the Iranian Jews' past teaches that Jews were deterred from exposing themselves before foreigners. Among the nineteenth-century writings on the Jewish communities of Iran there stand out those that were produced by Christian missionaries from Europe. The reason for this matter becomes clear when we consider the fact that those who sought to propagate their religion had to collect as much and as diverse information about the communities as they could. The foreign diplomats, on the other hand, were in need of the service of the members of the religious minorities in Iran, such as the Armenians, Zoroastrians and Jews, and this was, ordinarily, for the purpose of protecting (the British interests in) India.⁴ Some of the missionaries

² Concerning this matter, i.e. a common lack of awareness among the Jews of pre-modern Iran with regard to their past history, cf. J.E. Polak's observation, in source no. 4, above, entitled "The Jews of Iran in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, as Observed by Dr. J.E. Polak."

³ Heb. *Shadarim* (literally meaning "messengers of our masters") refers to emissaries who were sent to the various Jewish communities, mostly on behalf of Jewish institutions of charity and learning in Palestine.

⁴ For a discussion of the general background and the motivations behind services that were provided by some Iranian Jews to British officials and agents in Central Asia (e.g. in the form of intelligence, supply of cash-money and assistance in releasing British prisoners), see W.J. Fischel, *Ha-Yehudim be-Hodu* (The Jews in India), Jerusalem 1960, pp. 178–203. Included among these Iranian Jews were some members of the Jewish community of Mashhad who had fled their town and found shelter in the Sunni-dominated city of Herat (Afghanistan), following the pogrom and forced conversion in their community in 1839. See *ibid.*, pp. 181–187.

were Jews who had converted to Christianity,⁵ and as such they could collect as much information as possible in the Jewish communities in which they visited and worked. The Jews, on the other hand, felt much isolation and hardship in their dispersed communities, and, therefore, they were flattered by the fact that foreigners from Europe displayed interest in them.

Among the emissaries of institutions of charity and Jewish learning in Palestine, who visited in Iran in the nineteenth century, was also Yehiel Fischel Kestilman, an emissary on behalf of the Jewish community of Safed. In his remains he left memoirs from his travels in the Middle East during the years 1859–1860. Yehiel F. Kestilman stayed in Iran for a few months and afterwards he described the manners of life in some of the communities that he had visited.⁶ He also pointed out the amounts of money that these communities had donated. Particularly important is the information that he provides with respect to Jews' numbers. The manuscript of the memoirs was published as a book by Avraham Ya'ari, under the title "The Journey of the Emissary of Safed in the Lands of the East."⁷ Kestilman's book constitutes an important source of information on the Jews of Iran in the last century.⁸ Even though one discerns in his words disappointment with the Iranian Jews' mode of life, as well as with their low level of education and the manner in which they fulfilled the Jewish commandments, i.e., things that appeared as puzzling in the eyes of a devout Hassidic Jew⁹ of Safed, nonetheless the writer was able to present a faithful picture of what he saw and heard. It is likely that this poor state, in which the Jewish communities of Iran existed, appeared rather inviting to the Christian missionaries who assessed that their work would be thus easier. Nev-

⁵ A. Levy is referring here particularly to a group of European Jews who had converted to Christianity and worked as missionaries in the service of the British evangelical institution known as the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews.

⁶ Landing in Bushihr aboard a boat that brought him from Basra, Kestilman arrived in Shiraz on the 25th of Kislev 5620 (December 21, 1859). In the course of his journeys in Iran, that lasted about six months, he visited the Jewish communities of Bushihr, Shiraz, Yazd, Isfahan, Kashan, Tehran, Hamadan and Kirmanshah.

⁷ A. Ya'ari, ed., *Mas'ot Sheliah Sefat be-Arsot ha-Mizrah*, Jerusalem 1942.

⁸ I.e., the 19th century.

⁹ Heb. *Hasid*, i.e., a follower of the teachings of the Jewish mystical and pietistic movement known as Hassidism, that was founded in Eastern Europe by the charismatic Rabbi Israel b. Eliezer, known as Ba'al Shem Tov, or "Master of Good Name" (1700–1760).

ertheless, despite the fact that the Jews were subjected permanently to pressures from the Muslims, they did not submit to the missionaries, and only at the end of the nineteenth century were there found some young educated Jews in Iran who converted to Christianity.¹⁰ There have been some among the scholars who have summed up the achievements of the Christian Mission among the Jews of Iran in the nineteenth century, and it has become evident that the results do not match the efforts and resources that were invested by the missionaries.¹¹ Joseph Wolff and Henry Stern, two Jewish converts to Christianity, were the prominent ones among the missionaries who worked among the Jews in Iran.¹² Since they were closely familiar with Judaism, they knew how

¹⁰ Reference is made here to some tens of young Jews, mainly from the larger communities in the cities of Tehran, Isfahan and Hamadan, and a few from the smaller communities such as Damavand (located east of Tehran). Exposed to Christian missionary activity, that was conducted mainly by the members of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews as well as the Church Missionary Society of Britain and the American Protestant Mission, these youths were mostly baptized by the missionaries of these latter mentioned missions. The more known and active among this small group of Jewish Iranian converts during the last two decades of the nineteenth century was Mirza Nurullah Hakim, who belonged to a prominent family of Jewish physicians of Tehran. He received his early modern education in Tehran and continued his studies in Christian institutions in London during the 1880s. Upon return to Iran (in December 1888) he was charged with the task of directing the missionary activities of the London Society among the Jewish communities of Iran. Regarding him, see below, source no. 32, entitled "The Jewish Community of Tehran and the Cholera Epidemic of 1892," introduction. As to the names, identities and the general family and educational backgrounds of these young (and a few middle-aged) converts, some of whom belonged to established families of rabbis, physicians and merchants in the larger urban communities of Iran, see, e.g., in Isfahan, the reports in *Jl*, August 1890, p. 126, and in *JMI*, September 1894, p. 140; in Hamadan, *Jl*, August 1889, p. 118, and October 1889, p. 149; in Tehran, cf. *LSPCJ*, 93 (1900–1901), pp. 146–148, and, *ibid.*, 94 (1901–1902), pp. 99–100.

¹¹ For a discussion of this matter and relevant Christian missionary sources that point to the relatively limited success of the Christian mission amongst the Jews of Iran during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, see W.J. Fischel, "The Jews of Persia, 1795–1940," *JSS*, 12 (1950), pp. 146–151.

¹² The colorful German Jew turned-Christian missionary, traveler and researcher Rev. Joseph Wolff conducted missionary work among the Jews of Iran intermittently between the years 1824–1845. For the account of his work and travels among the Jewish communities of the south, center and north-eastern Iran, see particularly his journal for the years 1824–1825, published in the *Nineteenth Report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews*, London 1827, pp. 172–223. For his work and diverse contacts with the Jews of Iran in the year 1831, see *Journal of Rev. Joseph Wolff for the Year 1831*, London 1832, pp. 42–48, and, more importantly, his *Researches and Missionary Labours*, Philadelphia 1837, pp. 42–75. Additional material, though indirectly related to his contacts with the Jews in Iran in the 1840s, is found in a scattered manner in his *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara in the Years 1843–1845 to Ascertain the Fate of Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly*, London 1848. See also his *A Mission to Bokhara*, ed.

and by what means to try and win the hearts of the Jews in the Jewish communities in this land.

In the (Hebrew) year 5649 (= 1888–9 C.E.) the Jews of Isfahan complained to the correspondent of the German-language journal *Der Israelit*,¹³ in an article that was translated and published in the Hebrew weekly *Habazeleth*, saying that a certain person, a European, had offered to build for them a bathhouse and an educational institution.¹⁴ After some time, however, they found out that the said person had been a Christian and a missionary, and then, of course, they rejected the offer.¹⁵ Similar events occurred in the Jewish community of Yazd and in some other communities at the end of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the missionaries, the emissary Yehiel F. Kestilman sought to collect money for the sake of the Jewish community of Safed. However, according to his own words, he did not content himself with collecting donations, but he also gave advice and delivered decisions in matters of Jewish law.¹⁶ In his tone of speech there is, unfortunately, a measure of presumptuousness; it may have been due to this that he did not succeed in penetrating the social fabric of the communities he visited, something that the aforementioned missionaries did, to the contrary, manage to accomplish.

A British consulate was established in the city of Yazd in the year 1894. In the same year was also published a consular report that gave

and abridged by G. Wint, New York 1969, particularly pp. 197–214. As regards the missionary Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, who was also a German-born Jew who converted to Christianity in his youth, his main years of direct missionary work in the midst of the Jewish communities of Iran took place during the years 1847–1851. As regards his own detailed account of his work among the Jews of Iran, including an important body of factual data and subjective views and observations concerning a large number of the Jewish communities of Iran during the mid-nineteenth century, see particularly his *Dawnings of Light in the East; with Biblical, Historical, and Statistical Notices of Persons and Places Visited during a Mission to the Jews, in Persia, Coordistan, and Mesopotamia*, London 1854, pp. 91–202. For further information on his activity among the Jews of Iran, see A.A. Isaacs, *Biography of the Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, D.D.*, London 1886, pp. 43–65, and W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908*, London 1908, pp. 465–466. For a short outline of his work in Iran, see JMI, September 1894, p. 139, and March 1899, p. 35.

¹³ This Jewish weekly was founded in Mayence, Germany, in 1860.

¹⁴ For the full text of this article, which was published in the Hebrew weekly *Habazeleth*, year 19, No. 19 (January 25, 1889), pp. 148–149, see below, source no. 29, entitled “The Jewish Community of Isfahan in the year 1888...”

¹⁵ As to the identity of this missionary, i.e. most likely Rev. J. Lotka of the London Society, see in the latter mentioned document on the community of Isfahan, note 6.

¹⁶ See Y.F. Kestilman, *Mas'ot Sheliah Sefat be-Arsot ha-Mizrah*, op. cit., pp. 60–61.

an account of the population in the city and in which some information was provided about the Jewish community in this city. In the report was stated, among other matters, that the Jewish community of Yazd was divided into two neighborhoods that were separated from each other by the local bazaar. Yehiel Kestilman, who had visited in Yazd some thirty years earlier (in 1860), said the Jewish settlement in this city numbered 120 houses.¹⁷ He further added that most of the Jews in the city were poor but good-hearted people. It is not reasonable to assume that the community was split between the years 1860 to 1894, and it is clear that the location of the neighborhoods had existed since older times. Kestilman, evidently, did not notice this fact, or else he did not find it appropriate to indicate it. To Kestilman's credit, however, it should be said that he observed that these were pious Jews who cleaved to their religion more than their coreligionists in the other communities in Iran, and this despite their poverty.

From oral sources, i.e. conversations that were conducted with Jews who originated from Yazd, we know of an expression that was current among them, that is (the Persian terms) "*in mahalleh*" and "*ūn mahalleh*," meaning "this neighborhood" and "that neighborhood." Moreover, we know from other sources, that is from reports by directors of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school in the city,¹⁸ that each of these two neighborhoods-groups had its own separate leadership. From another source we learn that despite the fact that the Jews in Yazd lived adjacent to the bazaar, they were forbidden from trading in it until the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁹

The city of Yazd is situated roughly in the southwest region of the country, on the border of the desert that covers nearly half of Iran's territory. In the year 1867, there lived in this city 40,000 inhabitants, including some 1,000 Jews and 7,000 Zoroastrians.²⁰ When one looks

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸ The Alliance school (for boys) in Yazd was established in 1928.

¹⁹ Regarding this restriction, that was applied to the Jews and Zoroastrians of Yazd through the last decade of the 19th century, see N. Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town*, pp. 46–47. On this disability in the rest of the Jewish communities of Iran (except for Hamadan), roughly through the last decade of the 19th century, see above, source no. 2, entitled "The Condition and Disabilities of the Jews of Iran in the 1850s, according to the Jewish Explorer I.J. Benjamin," note 4.

²⁰ Cf. the British official R. Thomson's report of April 20, 1868 on population, revenue, military force and trade of Persia, in FO 248/244. Regarding the Jews of Yazd in the mid-nineteenth century, see the report by the British consul K.E. Abbott, dated February 14, 1851: "There is also (in the city of Yazd) a small community of

at the maps of the cities in the Muslim East, one notices that the city center, which ordinarily is small, contains the bazaar, the mosque, the government buildings and the institutions of education and culture. Around these institutions grew the residential neighborhoods. Adjacent to the dwelling places of the Muslims there lived, ordinarily, the members of the various religious minorities, such as Jews and Christians. In the cities of Yazd and Kirman,²¹ these minorities included also the Zoroastrians, meaning the ancient inhabitants of Iran who were pushed to these two remote towns by Iran's Muslim conquerors.²² The location of the living quarters of the religious minorities close to the government buildings was not accidental but resulted from their desire to obtain relative protection. Similarly, their settling near the bazaar resulted from their need to earn a livelihood.

Jews, stated by them to consist of 50 families, who, in common with Guebres (i.e. Zoroastrians) have hitherto apparently suffered a good deal from oppression." See A. Amanat, ed., *Cities and Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran, 1847–1866*, London 1983, p. 132.

²¹ Located about 395 kilometers to the southeast of Yazd, this old desert city hardly had any Jews during the first half of the 19th century. A populous city during the second half of the 18th century, it was severely ruined and depopulated in 1794, when the soldiers of Aqa Muhammad Khan (the founder of the Qajar dynasty) waged war against the city and its governor. By the year 1813, the city, which was still largely neglected and deserted, had a population of some 20,000 souls, of which a small proportion were Zoroastrians and very few were Armenians, Hindus and Jews. See J.M. Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, London 1813, pp. 197–198. In 1849, however, Consul K.E. Abbott pointed out that "there is hardly a Jew in the place, and there are no Armenian inhabitants." See his *Cities and Trade*, op. cit., p. 149. According to various written and oral sources at our disposal, it appears that the number of the Jews in the city grew in the course of the Great Famine of 1871–2, during which time a handful of Jews left the famine stricken city of Yazd and settled in Kirman. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that the famine affected Kirman as well, the Jews in the city are not mentioned among the organized Jewish communities that received aid from European Jewry during the famine. Cf. *Persian Famine Relief Fund, Report and Balance Sheet*, published by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, London 1873, pp. 6–7. Notwithstanding, according to a census that was conducted by the city's governor, in the year 1878 there were in the city 39,000 Muslims, 1,340 Zoroastrians and 85 Jews. See G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, pp. 244–245. By the year 1894–5, Kirman's total population had grown to an estimated 50,000 souls, of whom about 37,000 were Shi'ite Muslims, and the remainder consisted of various religious minorities and Muslim sectarians, including 3,000 Bahais, 1,200 Sufis (i.e. Islamic mystics) and 70 Jews. See P.M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran*, London 1902, p. 195. As to the general condition and the origin of the Jews in Kirman during this period, Sir P.M. Sykes' observation was: "...making a living as petty dealers they live in a wretched condition. They are an offshoot of the larger Yazd (Jewish) colony, which is said to have traveled east from Baghdad." Ibid., p. 197.

²² The Muslim conquest of Iran was completed by the mid-7th century C.E.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there were seventeen residential neighborhoods in Yazd. As to the city's center, it is said that it had been in existence ever since the fourteenth century C.E. Jews are mentioned in Yazd also since that period.²³ The scholar Ya'qub Dilmanian, who investigated the history of the Jewish community of Mashhad,²⁴ maintains that following the great massacre carried out by the Mongols in northern Iran, the Jews who left Khurasan settled in Yazd and in its surroundings. Likewise, there is evidence from the seventeenth century that Jews were found in the city and its environs during that time.²⁵

Yazd is located near the crossroads of commercial routes that pass from the north to the south and from the east to the west.²⁶ The fact that already in early times Jews were engaged in the trade of caravans that transported spices, silk, precious stones and other expensive commodities from China and India through routes that crossed the city of Yazd, may explain the establishment of a Jewish colony in this place.²⁷ Also, since Yazd was located by the side of the famous Silk Road, it was noted as one of the manufacturing centers of silk and opium.

The Jews of Yazd were known as modest and pious people. Malcolm,²⁸ one of the missionaries who resided in this city, wrote at the

²³ According to the late W.J. Fischel, the Jewish community of Yazd dates back to no later than the ninth century C.E. In his words: "That Yezd (sic) was a center of Jewish scholarship in the Middle Ages is attested by a ninth-century Hebrew manuscript of Later Prophets that was found there." See his article "Yezd," in *EJ*, vol. 16, p. 781. For further information regarding the latter mentioned old manuscript from Yazd, see Alexander Marx, "Die Bücher und Manuskripte der Seminars-Bibliothek auf der Ausstellung der New Yorker Stadtbibliothek," in *Soncino-Blätter*, II (1927), p. 114.

²⁴ See the Persian text of his *Tarikh-i Yahudiha-yi Mashhad*, trans. into English by V. Nabavian, and entitled *History of the Jews of Mashad, 1746-1946 A.D.*, New York 1997.

²⁵ Cf. W.J. Fischel, "The Jews in Mediaeval Iran from the 16th to the 18th Centuries: Political, Economic, and Communal Aspects," p. 269.

²⁶ Cf. L. Lockhart, *Famous Cities of Iran*, pp. 59-60.

²⁷ Cf. the testimony of the 12th-century Jewish explorer Benjamin of Tudela, in *Jewish Travellers: A Treasury of Travelogues from 9 Centuries*, ed. E.N. Adler, 2nd ed., New York 1966, p. 57. Regarding these Jewish merchants during as early as the first half of the 9th century C.E., see the following evidence provided by the Iranian geographer Abu al-Qasim 'Ubaid-Allah ibn Khurdadbih, dating from ca. 817 C.E.: "They (i.e., Jewish merchants) go to ar-Ramla (in Palestine), visit Damascus, Al-Kufa (in Iraq), Baghdad and al-Basra, cross Ahwaz, Fars, Kirman, Sind, Hind, and arrive at China." *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁸ I.e., the British missionary Napier Malcolm, who lived and worked in Yazd during the last decade of the nineteenth century. For his detailed eyewitness account on Yazd during this period, see note 29 below.

end of the nineteenth century that the Muslims in the city respected the Jews on account of these qualities of theirs and by reason of their belonging to the People of the Book.²⁹ The city was called *Dar al-ʿIbadat*” (or “House of Worship”) by Muslims, and “Little Jerusalem” by the Jews. It is known for certain that the Jews of Yazd suffered less than their coreligionists in the other cities from persecutions and acts of violence. This should, perhaps, be attributed to their being compliant and shy people. Yet, precisely because of these characteristics, it is difficult for us to understand the division that existed in the community. We may perhaps explain it by assuming that the two neighborhoods were established as a result of waves of immigration that occurred during different periods. Moreover, among the Jews of Iran there exists the tradition of loyalty to the extended family connected to the father’s house. This may explain the barriers such as those that existed in the community of Yazd. The self-separation was so sharp that no marriage took place with a partner from the other neighborhood.

As it was already pointed out, in the year 1860 there were in Yazd about one hundred and twenty houses of Jews that were divided into two neighborhoods. In one neighborhood there were fifty and in the other one about seventy. The larger neighborhood expanded at a more rapid pace, so that by the year 1894 it already had about one hundred and twenty houses. By the way, in marriage certificates that have reached us from the Jews of Yazd we find that the parents of the bridegroom provided housing for the newly wed couple. Also, as far as we know, the community’s well-to-do Jews lived in the smaller neighborhood, which was known as “*in mahalleh*” (i.e. “This Neighborhood”). In the marriage certificates there are mentioned some individuals who bore the title of *Hājji*,³⁰ by virtue of their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We know beyond doubt that a pilgrimage such as this could have been afforded only by someone who was a person of means.³¹ Furthermore, while the

²⁹ N. Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town*, London 1908, pp. 52–53.

³⁰ The originally Ar. *Hājji* is the honorific title of one who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

³¹ Regarding this rather small group of well-to-do Jews of Yazd in the 19th century, most of whom were merchants and some among whom made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to the other sites and towns sacred to Jews in Ottoman Palestine, see in the highly informative Hebrew book on the Jews of Yazd, entitled *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh* (From Yazd to the Holy Land), ed. Yosef Sheraga, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 158–159, 205–206. Compiled and edited by Y. Sheraga, one of the descendants of Rabbi Or Sharga (the Jewish community of Yazd’s admired religious and spiritual leader of the 18th century, see below), this important source book is devoted in its entirety to the Jewish

rich lived in the small neighborhood, most of the rabbis of the community lived in the larger neighborhood, or "That Neighborhood." We do not know with certainty whether there existed economic and class differences between the people belonging to the two neighborhoods, but this is definitely possible.

The Jewish community of Yazd in the nineteenth century had about ten synagogues,³² religious schools, a bathhouse, and other communal institutions.³³ In a marriage certificate dating from the Hebrew year of 5609 (= 1848–9 C.E.) there is mentioned a synagogue named "*Nāzim*," that was adjacent to the bridegroom's house. In another marriage certificate from the Hebrew year of 5621 (1860–1 C.E.) mention is made of a synagogue in the name of Shelomo Hanina. In yet another such certificate from the year 5625 (1864–5 C.E.) there are mentioned two alleys by the names of "*Sinjīd Sītān*" and "*Nārij Qal'ah*," that were in the neighborhood. As late as 1926, the principal of the Alliance school mentions the Great Synagogue of Yazd, whose arched ceiling was supported by large pillars.³⁴

The scholars of Iran's economy maintain that in a desert town such as Yazd there grew talented merchants due to necessities of reality only, since trade was almost the only branch that provided those who engaged in it with a relatively comfortable existence. And, indeed, in search after sources of livelihood, the Jews of Yazd traversed the length

community of Yazd and the accounts of those members and families of the community who emigrated and settled in Ottoman Palestine, and particularly in Jerusalem, in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. The rich primary material in the book, though presented mostly in a scattered and uncritical manner, provides much valuable firsthand information about the Jewish community of Yazd during the 18th–20th centuries, including their oral traditions, biographies of their religious and communal leaders, aspects of their communal lives as well as memoirs, events and periods related to the community's old and more recent history in Iran and in Jerusalem.

³² Cf. AJA, 6 (1874–1875), p. 92. For the names and descriptions of some of these synagogues, see Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, pp. 116–117.

³³ Particularly important among these communal institutions in Yazd during the 19th century and the first decades of the twentieth century was the rabbinic court (Heb. *Beit Din*). This court's decisions and opinions were respected in Yazd and in other Jewish communities of Iran that regarded the rabbis and judges of Yazd among their main religious and spiritual leaders. For the text of a judgement issued by this court in the year 1878, written in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian and dealing with cases of family law and inheritance allotment in the community, see Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, pp. 168–169.

³⁴ See in the long report of the representative of the Alliance in Yazd regarding the community's general condition and resources prior to the opening of the Alliance school in the city, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 8. No. 1979, dated July 1, 1926.

and the width of the land, in most cases as tradesmen. Moreover, in the course of their wanderings, many of the Jews of Yazd settled down in the other towns of Iran, such as Tehran, Mashhad, Hamadan and Kirmanshah. The traveler Ephraim Neumark³⁵ mentions a certain Mulla Yehezqel of Yazd, who was teacher and ritual slaughterer in the Jewish community of Kirmanshah.³⁶ He also mentions Mulla Ya'qub of Yazd, who had settled in Hamadan.³⁷ The Jewish elders of Hamadan also told E. Neumark that the said Mulla Ya'qub had been the first who, about fifty years earlier, had taught Torah to the Jewish children in the city. Neumark wrote the account of his visit to Iran in the year 1885. Another native Jew of Yazd, by the name of Mulla Siman Tov, wandered from Yazd to Mashhad, and was recognized there as a gifted man, a great scholar and miracle worker.³⁸

From the various sources of information at our disposal, however, it emerges that the percentage of the merchants in the community was not large, and that the vast majority of the people in the community lived in material hardship³⁹ and eked out a living either by weaving and spinning silk, cotton, wool and linen, or by peddling. In the 1870s, during the years of the Great Famine, the silk industry in the town was

³⁵ The Lithuanian-born Ephraim Neumark (b. October 17, 1862) was an emissary on behalf of institutions of Jewish learning and charity in Tiberias. He left the latter city on December 17, 1883, and after visiting the larger Jewish communities of Syria and Iraq he arrived in Iran (from Baghdad). In the course of the following months in 1884–5, he visited the Jewish communities of Kirmanshah, Nahavand, Tuysirkan, Burujird, Hamadan and Tehran, and the forced converts of Mashhad. He documented his observations and findings with regard to the condition of the Jews and the Jewish communities in the lands he visited. The manuscript of his journal was annotated and published by A. Ya'ari. Regarding this work, see note 36, below.

³⁶ E. Neumark, *Masa' be-Eres ha-Qedem* (A Journey in the Land of the East), subtitled "A Journey to Syria, Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, Persia and Central Asia", ed. and annotated, together with an introduction, by A. Ya'ari, Jerusalem 1947, p. 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁸ Regarding Rabbi Siman Tov Melammed (d. ca. 1800), his life and work, see W.J. Fischel, s.v. "Melammed, Siman Tov," in *EJ*, vol. 11, p. 1376; G. Fuzailov, *Hakhmeyhem shel Yehudey Paras ve-Afghanistan*, op. cit., pp. 37–48, and particularly A. Netzer, "Siman Tov Melammed: Melummad Parsi-Afghani ve-Sifro Hayat al-Ruh" (Siman Tov Melammed: A Persian-Afghani Scholar and His Book Hayat al-Ruh), *Pe'amim*, 79 (1999), pp. 56–95.

³⁹ On the severe poverty among the vast majority of the Jews of Yazd during the 1880s, cf. the account of the British civil service official Edward Stack, who was in Yazd in the spring of 1881 and was requested by the heads of the Jewish community of Yazd to intervene and facilitate the transfer of relief funds that had been sent by Sir Moses Montefiore for the poverty stricken members of the community. See E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, 2 vols., New York 1882, vol. 1, pp. 269–270.

severely damaged. The continuous drought resulted in the death of the local silk-worms, and, therefore, the producers of silk in the city moved to engage themselves in the spinning of cotton and linen threads, the raw material for which had to be imported from afar.

As to the livelihood of the wandering peddlers, in Yazd and its surroundings the peasants were occupied in growing wheat, tobacco, cotton and opium, as well as cultivating fruit trees and raising cattle. Thus, the wandering peddlers had an ample space to engage in exchange trade that consisted of supplying the peasants with clothes and commodities produced in the cities, in exchange for agricultural products. The agricultural products were then converted by these peddlers into manufactured goods and supplied to the peasants, and so on and so forth. The trade in spices and inexpensive goods that were imported from India through Iran's southern seaport also had a fairly important place in the livelihood of these Jewish peddlers of Yazd. In Iran, for instance, people drank almost no coffee, but tea that was imported from India. The merchants of Yazd and Kirman supplied this important commodity to the country's provinces in the north and the west. The Jewish peddler, who went around in the villages and in the outskirts of the cities, had become a recognized figure across Iran. Despite the dangers that awaited them they continued in their labor due to the necessity of making a living. Not once did these Jewish peddlers compete with their (Muslim) colleagues by selling their merchandise at lower prices, something that aroused against them the wrath of their competitors. However, not only peddlers did wander in the villages and rural areas but also Jewish physicians.⁴⁰ These physicians visited also the nomadic tribes, they treated the sick and supplied medicines and amulets against evil eyes, infertility and other serious ailments.⁴¹ Jewish women, too, were engaged in peddling, but their work was done inside the cities, and their goods for sale were medical drugs and jewelry for women. Furthermore, as regards the economy of the Jews of Yazd, we may point to an exceptional phenomenon in Iran, that is, Jews in Yazd were hired as laborers in the spinneries and weaving mills of Muslims.⁴²

⁴⁰ Regarding these itinerant Jewish physicians of Iran, see above, source no. 14, entitled "Recollections of an Itinerant Jewish Physician of Gulpaygan."

⁴¹ Cf. Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, pp. 255–256.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 111, where we are told that the wages paid to these Jewish laborers were less than those paid to their Muslim counterparts.

The British missionary N. Malcolm, who lived and conducted missionary work in Yazd at the turn of the nineteenth century, pointed out that the Muslim inhabitants of Yazd respected the Jews in their city on account of the latter being learned, devout in their religion, diligent and dedicated to their work.⁴³ Here, perhaps, lies the answer to the question as to how it came about that the Jews in Yazd were hired as laborers in the spinneries and weaving mills whose owners were Persian Muslims.

Among the religious scholars of the community of Yazd, who attained fame, was Rabbi Or Sharga, the community of Yazd's chief rabbi and religious leader.⁴⁴ The members of this family served in rabbinical positions in Yazd over two centuries. Mulla Or Sharga (the name means "light of candle" or "a small light") was the first in the family who became known for his scholarship and piety. As spiritual leader in the community, he raised many disciples who continued to pass on his teachings to future generations. Moreover, numerous miraculous deeds were attributed to him. He died in the (Hebrew) year 5554 (1793–4).⁴⁵ However, until these days the members of the Jewish community of Yazd, who have settled in the Bukharan neighborhood in Jerusalem, are fastidious in holding an annual festivity in his memory.⁴⁶

Among the rabbis of the community of Yazd, who were descended from Rabbi Or Sharga (The First), mention should be made of his son, Mosheh, and his grandson, Yishaq (the son of Mosheh).⁴⁷ The name of the latter mentioned member of the Or Sharga family is mentioned in marriage certificates from the (Heb.) years 5599 (1838–9 C.E.), 5607 (1846–7), 5609 (1848–9) and 5625 (1864–5). We find his name also in a sermon that was written by him. Rabbi Or Sharga's great-grandson, i.e. Mulla Mosheh son of Yishaq,⁴⁸ is also mentioned in the

⁴³ N. Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian town*, pp. 52–53.

⁴⁴ Regarding the life and prominence of this 18th-century religious and spiritual leader of the community of Yazd, see G. Fuzailov, *Hakhmeyhem shel Yehudey Paras ve-Afghanistan*, pp. 25–36, and Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, pp. 143–157.

⁴⁵ According to a tradition preserved among the Jews of Yazd, Rabbi Or Sharga died on the 28th of Heshvan 5554 (November 3, 1793).

⁴⁶ Cf. Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, p. 152.

⁴⁷ Regarding these two descendants of Rabbi Or Sharga, who served as chief rabbis in Yazd during the first half of the 19th century, see *ibid.*, pp. 149–153.

⁴⁸ Known more commonly among the Jews of Yazd and Iran by his surname as Aqa Baba, this great-grandson of Rabbi Or Sharga was the chief religious and spiritual leader of the community of Yazd during the 1870s–1920s. Rabbi Mosheh's authority and decisions in matters pertaining to Jewish law and Jewish practice were recognized

documents we possess. In the (Heb.) year 5623 (1862–3), he ordained a young member of the community of Hamadan to serve as a ritual slaughterer and examiner, and in the year 5648 (1887–8) he wrote an introductory approval to a book, entitled *Minhat Avraham* (i.e. “Abraham’s Offering”), written by the emissary Avraham Halawah of Jerusalem.⁴⁹ Indeed, the name of this great-grandson of Rabbi Or Sharga was so well known that the said emissary, who was sent on behalf of the rabbis of Palestine, sought his blessing for his book. Notwithstanding, we know that during the 18th and 19th centuries the rabbis from Or Sharga’s family were not the only ones who served in rabbinic positions in the community of Yazd. In a letter from the year 1782, for example, some other rabbis are also mentioned. Likewise we hear of rabbis such as Hajji Hillel Ha-Cohen, Mulla David ben-Shelomo, Mulla Ya’cov Sofer and others, who served in rabbinic capacities in the community during the 19th century.

Unfortunately, the piety and good citizenry of the Jews of Yazd did not always guarantee them protection. In the year 1888, for example, the Jews in the city were required to attach to the lapels of their garments a patch designed to identify them as Jews. The chief Muslim religious authority of Yazd during that time did not content himself

as well in the other Jewish communities of Iran during his long years of tenure. For further information regarding his activities and influence in Yazd and other communities of Iran, see *ibid.*, pp. 157–169. This rabbi, who in his official seal made use both of Hebrew and Persian scripts, and referred to himself by the Persian-Islamic epithet of *‘Abd, Musa* (i.e., the servant, Moses), conducted correspondence with the rabbis of Palestine. We have access to three of his original letters in Hebrew, addressed to the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Shaul Ya’cov Elyashar (1817–1906). One letter concerns a halakhic (i.e., Jewish law) problem involving a Jewish man from the community of Yazd (named Yehezqel Ya’cov Kermani), who, having abandoned his wife in Yazd, had settled down in Jerusalem and was refusing to grant his wife a divorce. See letter of 15th of Adar Second 5660 (March 16, 1900), in JNUL, Arc. 4° 1271, file 114, document 1. Two other letters by Rabbi Aqa Baba throw much light on the relations that existed between the religious heads of the community of Yazd and the rabbinic authorities in Palestine in the end of the 19th century. In these two letters Rabbi Mosheh b. Yisshaq (Aqa Baba) expresses his utmost esteem and devotion towards the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine and emphasizes his reliance on the latter’s religious authority and learning. Interestingly, as a token of his admiration for Rabbi Elyashar and his son, Mulla Aqa Baba sends him as a gift fine silk handkerchiefs made in Yazd. For these two letters, see *ibid.*, letters number 2 and 3, dating from the (Heb.) years 5662 (1901–2) and 5660 (1899–1900), respectively. For the text of another letter, addressed by Rabbi Mosheh to the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Palestine in the (Heb.) year 5689 (1928–9), see Y. Sheraga, *Mi-Yazd le-Eres ha-Qodesh*, pp. 162–167.

⁴⁹ Regarding this emissary of Jerusalem (1858–1924) and his book, see A. Ya’ari, *Sheluhey Eres Yisrael*, pp. 854 and 877.

with the decree regarding the patch but demanded to impose additional restrictions on the Jews in the city. Consisting altogether of thirteen clauses, these edicts demanded, among other matters, that Jews shall be prohibited from building houses higher than their Muslim neighbors, and that they shall not install in their buildings air towers that were commonly built for the purpose of ventilation in desert towns such as Yazd.⁵⁰ Likewise, Jews were required not to wear jewelry and not to use spectacles, as spectacles were regarded by traditional Muslims as an identifying mark for (Western) education and culture. Similar edicts and prohibitions were imposed also on the Jews in the community of Isfahan.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For the exact wording of these thirteen restrictions, and the circumstances that led to their temporary and partial application against the Jews of Yazd, see R.E. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, pp. 117–118.

⁵¹ Regarding these edicts against the Jews of Isfahan in 1892, see G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, n. 510. On specific economic and occupational restrictions imposed on the Jews in this city, see, e.g., *Archives Israélites*, 59 (1898), p. 316. For similar prohibitions and regulations demanded by the Shi'ite clergy against the Jews of Hamadan in 1892, see AJA, 22 (1892–1893), appendix C, pp. 60–63, and *Archives Israélites*, 54 (1893), p. 190.

THE JEWS OF SHIRAZ IN THE 1890s

1. *The Jewish Community in the City in 1892, as Reported by the Christian Missionary Mirza Nurullah Hakim*,¹ in the *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, July 1893, pp. 103–105

Introduction

Together with the Jewish communities of Hamadan, Isfahan, Yazd and Kashan, the Jewish settlement in Shiraz was among Iran's oldest Jewish communities in the course of the nineteenth century. According to traditions current in Iran and among the Jews of Shiraz in particular, Jews settled at an early period in this central city of the Province of Fars, which, according to the various medieval Muslim geographers, was founded during the first decades of Iran's Muslim conquest (i.e., ca. 74Q/693 C.E.). Cf. L. Lockhart, *Famous Cities of Iran*, op. cit., p. 30, and K. Afsar, *Tarikh-i Baft-i Qadimi-yi Shiraz*, op. cit., pp. 37–38. As to the early history of the Jews in the city and the exact time in which they began their settlement there, however, we do not possess any reliable evidence. The twelfth-century Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (Spain), who among many other lands and territories in the East also visited some of Iran's western and southern regions (ca. 1170 C.E.), pointed out that, "four days distance southward (from Isfahan) is Shiraz, which is the city of Fars, and 10,000 Jews live there." Cf. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, edited and translated into English by M.N. Adler, London 1907, p. 58. Yet, despite the reasonable assumption that Jews did indeed live in the city some centuries before the establishment of the Safavid state (in 1501 C.E.), we do not possess sufficient sources of information to form even a partial view of this Jewish settlement in the years that preceded the rise of the Safavid dynasty. Written sources and references in Judeo-Persian and particularly

¹ For information regarding him and his missionary activity among the Jews of Iran, see in our book, below, source no. 32, introduction.

in European languages, that provide us with partial testimonies and facts with regard to the lives of the Jews in this city, date back to the 1660s. The latter sources and references increase to some degree during the eighteenth century and expand progressively in the course of the nineteenth century. It is unfortunate that much like the other Jewish communities and settlements of Iran in pre-modern times no systematic research and investigation has so far been devoted to the history and diverse aspects of life in this important city. Neither have there been any attempts to collect oral traditions as well as written historical records and documents that may provide us with a better knowledge and understanding concerning the history and interrelated aspects of life in this and other old Jewish communities prior to Iran's growing modernization and transformation in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As far as the Jews of Shiraz during the Safavid period are concerned, however, we learn from numerous European sources that they formed a substantial element among the city's non-Muslim population. The French traveler and explorer Jean Chardin (1643–1713), whose extensive writings and eyewitness impressions of Iran during the years 1664–1677 are among the more significant sources of Iranian history during the mid-Safavid period, provides some information about the Jews of Shiraz at the end of the reign of Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642–1666). In the course of his first journey to the city (ca. 1666–7), he observed: "I should not forget to point out that Jews, Armenian Christians and Latin missionaries, who are barefoot Carmelites, are established here. These diverse people enjoy all the freedom to practice their religions." Cf. *Voyages de Chevalier Chardin en Perse, et autres lieux de l'Orient*, ed. L. Langlès, 10 vols., Paris 1811, vol. 8, p. 446. Likewise, Chardin's contemporaneous countryman, the traveler and explorer Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), who visited the city in the 1660s, observed that "the Jews of Shiraz, who descend from the Tribe of Levi, number about six hundred families. They are engaged in the production of wine and they produce between 100 to 120 thousand *manns* per year (1 *mann* weighing about 9 pounds); however, since this is the main trade of these poor people, the governor of Shiraz takes from them a share of their profit. Also, since the Persians and other Muslims in the city are not permitted to make wine, they (i.e. the Jews) are regarded as making a living by being engaged in a grave sin." Cf. J.B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes*, 3 vols., Paris 1678, vol. 1 (voyages en Turquie et de Perse), p. 734. According

to Tavernier (*ibid.*), the Jews of Shiraz during this period (i.e. the 1660s) produced more than half of the entire amount of the wine in the city, most of which was sold for export to European companies from France, England, Holland and Portugal. The latter companies, so we learn, shipped and sold the Shirazi wine to the towns of India. That the production of wine and other alcoholic beverages, deemed unlawful and condemned strongly by Shi'ite law, constituted the main source of livelihood among the Jews of Shiraz also during the 18th century, is also attested to in European sources dating from the 1780s. However, in the latter sources, in which we find more detailed information about the general standing, living conditions and the outward appearance of the Jews in the city under the rule of the Zand dynasty (r. 1749–1794), we learn of the striking poverty in which the Jews of Shiraz lived. The Dutch traveler and explorer Carsten Niebuhr, who visited the city in 1765 and described at length the city's life, population and institutions during that time, observed that "like most of the cities of the East, the Jews of Shiraz dwell in a separate quarter of their own, and they live, at least outwardly, in great poverty." See C. Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie et en d'autres pays circonvoisins, traduit de l'Allemand*, 2 vols., Amsterdam 1776–1780, vol. 2, p. 139. Further evidence pointing to the generally poor and oppressed condition of the Jews in the city during the 1780s is found in the testimony of the British official William Francklin, who was in the service of the British East India Company, and visited the city during the months of March–April 1787. In his words: "The Jews at Shirauz (sic) have a quarter of the city allotted to themselves, for which they pay a considerable tax to the government, and are obliged to make frequent presents: these people are more odious to the Persians than those of any other faith; and every opportunity is taken to oppress and extort money from them; the very boys in the street being accustomed to beat and insult them, of which treatment they dare not complain." See W. Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786–7*, London 1790, p. 60.

It appears that the underlying weaknesses and hardships of the Jews in Shiraz, described by European travelers in the second half of the eighteenth century, continued and further increased during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, as regards the overall standing and actual living conditions of the Jews among the city's predominantly Shi'ite population, all the sources of information from the first and second half of the nineteenth century portray a fundamentally poor, oppressed and harassed community until the early years of

the twentieth century. Long established and religiously grounded legal discriminations as well as social and economic restrictions on the one hand, and an absence of effective physical and administrative protection in the city's traditional organization on the other hand, resulted in the social, economic and cultural marginalization of the Jews in this capital city of the Province of Fars. Although similar restrictions and debilitating conditions affected, in varying degrees, the lives of the Jews and other religious minorities in Iran's other towns and settlements through most years of the nineteenth century, nowhere in the other larger cities and towns were the majority of the Jews as poverty-stricken and legally and physically unprotected and downtrodden as in Shiraz. The enormity of the disabilities, extortions and harassments in the city towards the end of the eighteenth century and the first years of the following century resulted in the conversion of a large number of Jewish families and individuals to Shi'ite Islam. The same difficulties, compounded by numerous other problems and ills that equally affected the lives of the city's general population during the war-ridden and turbulent years leading to the rise of the Qajar dynasty in the 1790s, further resulted in the flight of some Jewish families from Shiraz to Ottoman controlled cities of Basra, Baghdad and elsewhere. The Christian missionary Rev. Joseph Wolff, who had arrived in Basra (in southern Iraq) on May 24, 1824, noted in his journal that "the Jews of Bussorah (sic), and those of Persia who reside in Bussorah, give a melancholy account of the condition of the Jews in Persia. The Jews there are more oppressed than their countrymen in the Ottoman Empire. There are sixty Jews in Bussorah, who sought an asylum in a land of a tyrant, on account of the greater oppression which they suffered in Persia. Eliau (sic) Ben Avraham Levi, a native of Shiraz, called on me. I asked him the reason for having left Shiraz, where his wife and children are. He replied, 'On account of the hardness of our captivity, which is great, through the abundance of our sins. When we are assembled in the synagogue, we are often surprised by the entrance of a soldier, sent by government, with an order in his hand to pay such and such sum to the Shah. Our law forbids us to curse the king, and for this reason I will not do so; but I must say, we wait anxiously for the redemption, for heavy is our captivity, heavy is our burden, heavy is our slavery.'" See Rev. J. Wolff's report in *LSPCJ*, 18 (1826), p. 83. Arriving in Shiraz in January 1825, Rev. Wolff characterized the condition of the Jews in the city as follows: "...I had been warned what I must expect visiting the Jews at Shiraz, and the description of their misery had not been exag-

gerated. A Persian Mussulman, of whom I had inquired about their condition some time before, had said, 'first, every house of Shiraz with a low, narrow entrance, is a Jew's house. Secondly, every man with a dirty woolen or dirty camel's-hair turban is a Jew. Thirdly, every coat much torn and mended about the back, with worn sleeves, is a Jew's coat. Fourthly, every one picking up old broken glass is a Jew. Fifthly, every one searching dirty robes, and asking for old shoes and sandals is a Jew. Sixthly, that house into which no quadruped but a goat will enter is a Jew's.' All of which things, of course, came into my mind, as, in company with two Armenians, I approached the street where the Jews resided. It was in the month of January, 1825, and, therefore, in the depth of winter, and all was cold and frozen. The street was only a few yards in width; all the houses were like pig-styes, and even these were in ruins from the effects of the recent earthquake. Men, women and children were lying about the street—many of them ill, naked or in rags—women with their children at the breast, exclaiming 'Only one *pool*, only one *pool*!' (*pool* being the Persian word for farthing)." Cf. *Travels and Adventures of the Rev. Joseph Wolff D.D., L.L.D.*, London 1861, pp. 215–216.

The generally wretched and downtrodden condition of the Jewish community of Shiraz in the 1840s–1850s is also well documented in the European and Jewish sources of the period. The British official and traveler Robert B.M. Binning, who arrived in Iran (from India) and recorded in detail his impressions and findings in several towns and localities in mid-nineteenth-century Iran, made the following observation with regard to Shiraz and its Jews in the year 1850: "The entire number of houses (in Shiraz) is said to be about 5,000, exclusive of ruins, and the population consists of 30,000 souls. There are a good many Jews in Sheerauz (sic). Numbers of this expatriated people are to be found in all the cities of Persia, where they have existed for many ages; there are more than 400 families of them, in this city. They all live in the same quarter; and their houses are distinguished by very low doorways; as if to render entrance difficult to anyone unaccustomed to go on his hands and knees. They exist in great poverty, and in perpetual dread of the Moslems, who hold them in utter contempt, and often treat them with much severity. It is a common rumour, that the Jews occasionally steal young Moslem children, in order to sacrifice them, at some of their occult ceremonies. A similar belief once prevailed in Europe; and served, as it does now in Persia, as a convenient excuse for any piece of cruelty practiced on the miserable Israelites." See

R.B.M. Binning, *A Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon, etc.*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 269–270. Comparing the position and number of the Jews in the city with those of the Armenians, Binning added: “Armenians are now very few in Sheerauz. Their number does not comprise more than thirty individuals; men, women and children included. In former years, the Armenian population of this city comprised between 3000 and 4000 souls; but since trade and manufactures have decayed, they have gradually deserted it, for more eligible places. These Christians have never been contemned and trampled on, like the Jews. They have always kept a certain position in society, and maintained some sort of respect, among the Mahomedan citizens.” Ibid., pp. 271–272.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Jews of Shiraz constituted a poor and marginalized demographic group in a city that itself was largely stagnant and suffering from numerous internal conflicts and factional and political strifes and tensions. Much like several other cities and towns in Iran's southern and central provinces, in which Jews and other religious minorities had lived in large numbers during the Safavid period (among them Lar, Kerman, Yazd and Isfahan), the city of Shiraz had undergone a considerable degree of physical destruction ever since the heyday of the Safavid era under Shah ‘Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629). Despite extensive investments in the maintenance and development of the city's public buildings and institutions under Karim Khan Zand (r. 1750–1779), who chose Shiraz as his capital city and promoted it as his main political and administrative stronghold, throughout the nineteenth century Shiraz displayed extensive ruins and traces of past wars, natural disasters, tribal raids as well as ongoing public neglect and decay. Whereas during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas I Shiraz was second only to the magnificent Safavid capital city of Isfahan and was noted for its large population, economic strength and prosperity, by the end of the eighteenth century it had been much diminished in its size, general strength and influence. The British nobleman Herbert Thomas, who, in 1628, visited Shiraz in the company of a British mission to the court of Shah ‘Abbas I, noted that “Sheraz (sic), the pleasantest of Asiatic cities, is at this day second city for magnificence in the monarchy of Persia.” See T. Herbert, *Travels in Persia, 1627–1629*, abridged and edited by Sir W. Foster, first published 1929, reprint, Florida 1972, pp. 68–69. However, the Afghan invasion, wars and incessant political, tribal and factional conflicts in the region of Fars during the years 1722–1794 had severely damaged and weakened the city. The British official and visitor Edward S. Waring, who visited the city in 1802 and provided

a detailed description of its various physical, historical and human aspects, summed up his overall impressions of the city in the following words: "Sheeraz, I am apt to believe, will disappoint those who have imagined it a populous and noble city. 'It is worth seeing, but not worth going to see.' The town is by no means so large as is reported; it is surrounded by a wall, tenable against cavalry, and has six gates. Many of the streets are so narrow, that an ass loaded with wood stops your way if you are on horseback (I speak from experience); and the houses are generally mean and dirty. But we now see Sheeraz to great disadvantage, Agha Muhammad, the late Qajar king, having destroyed an excellent stone wall with very strong bastions, which was deemed by the Persians almost impregnable, and several of the best houses in the place. Notwithstanding the concurring praises of every Persian author, I very much doubt whether Sheeraz ever merited the extravagant commendations which have been lavished on it...; I should suppose the town to be about five miles in circumference; it took me a little more than an hour to walk my horse round it." Cf. E.S. Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz, by the Route of Kazeroon and Feerozabad*, London 1807, pp. 30–31. Similarly, the learned British officer John M. Kinneir, who provided a meticulous account of the city's physical and urban features in 1809, observed: "Shiraz has a pleasing, rather than a grand appearance. It is surrounded with beautiful gardens, the principal of which is that of the Vakeel. The lofty domes of the mosques, seen from afar, amidst the trees, diversify and enrich the view; but on entering the city, the houses, which are in general small, together with the narrow, filthy streets, give the stranger but a mean idea of the second city in the empire...; the inhabitants of Shiraz, who, according to the best information I could obtain when in that city, amount to about forty thousand, enjoy one of the finest climates in the world, and have nothing to regret, but the want of a wise and liberal government. The commerce of the city is extensive, and has greatly increased since a few years past; but I have never been able to learn the exact amount of their exports and imports. The principal trade is with Bushire, Yezd and Ispahan. From the former it imports sugar, pepper, cinnamon, chintz, glass, hardware, piece-goods, etc. These articles they export to Yezd and Ispahan, receiving, in return, the manufactures of those cities." Cf. J.M. Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, London 1813, pp. 62–64.

The city's demographic size as well as its fundamental urban features and economic characteristics appear to have continued without major changes through the mid-nineteenth century. According to the British

Consul K.E. Abbott's report on the city's general state in the years 1849–50, "like many other towns in Persia, Sheeraz has evidently seen its best days, and ruins now occupy a portion of its area. In general, however, the houses are crowded much together, are on a smaller scale than those of other Persian Cities and generally possess a less amount of garden or court yard attached to them. Those of the Upper Classes are handsomely ornamented with Gilding and Painting within. The streets are remarkably narrow and uneven and loopholed turrets and barricades are frequently seen on the Walls and roofs of the houses, indicating the occurrence of insecurity and danger. The habitations are for the most part of burnt brick, which is an improvement on the general style of Persian houses, the roofs flat and in spring they become covered with a growth of Grass. The Court Yards and Gardens are planted with Orange, Lemon and Sycamore Trees...; Sheeraz has never apparently possessed any manufactures of consequence; In the present day a few good Swords, Daggers, Knives and Guns are manufactured there..." Cf. *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran, 1847–1866*, ed. A. Amanat, op. cit., pp. 174–175. As far as the size of the city's overall population and the conditions of the religious minorities is concerned, K.E. Abbott pointed out that from several estimates he had obtained, the overall population of Shiraz (in 1850) amounted to 35,000 or 40,000. As to the city's quarters, the large number of Shi'ite religious institutions and the general condition of the city's non-Muslim population there, he further noted: "The place is divided into 12 principal Wards or Parishes, and possesses about 53 Mosques, 64 Baths, 9 Medressehs or Colleges and 15 Caravanserais. About 400 or 500 families of Jews (residing in 212 houses), 8 of Armenians and 15 of Guebres are found here; the first named possess 9 synagogues and 4 schools and are a squalid miserable race living in a revolting state of filth, they are chiefly workers in Gold and Silver, Silk thread and embroidery; the Armenians, who were formerly much more numerous, but many of whom have deserted the place from the insecurity to life and property which so often exists there, have their church; I have alluded to the unhealthiness of the Climate in this City, and to the probable cause of it; during winter and until April it is generally pretty free from disease, but later in the year dangerous fevers are very prevalent and Sheeraz has probably been more fatal to Europeans than any other spot in Persia, though few have been resident there for any length of time." Ibid., p. 175.

Numerous written accounts and descriptions of Shiraz and its Jews during the mid-nineteenth century, similar to that of Consul Abbott's cited above, point to the generally poor and distressed condition of the Jewish community in the city. Included among these accounts and sources during the mid-nineteenth century and onward are eye-witness accounts and reports of several Jewish European travelers, as well as European nationals, officials and travelers, who visited or resided and worked in Iran. Particularly informative among the latter sources are the reports and writings of Christian missionaries, mainly those affiliated with the London-based Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who, with some intervals, conducted evangelical work among the Jews of Shiraz and other Jewish communities and settlements during the 1840s–1910s.

Although in his general survey on the Jews of Iran in the 1850s, Nasir al-Din Shah's Austrian Jewish physician J.E. Polak noted that, compared to the Jews in Iran's various towns and settlements, the Jews of Shiraz enjoyed a relatively good condition as they were protected by the powerful Qawam family, whose ancestor, named Hashim, had allegedly been a Jewish convert to Islam, nevertheless, in all the other eyewitness accounts of Jewish travelers and Christian missionaries during the 1850s–1860s we learn of the striking poverty and hardship in which the Jews of Shiraz lived. (For J.E. Polak's observation on the Jews of Shiraz, see his *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner*, op. cit., p. 25, and source no. 4, in our book, entitled "The Jews of Iran in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, as Observed by Dr. Jacob E. Polak," notes 15–16.) Conducting missionary work in the community in the winter of 1849, Rev. Henry A. Stern provided a most gloomy description of the living conditions as well as the physical, legal, social and economic condition of the Jews in the city. Commenting on the physical appearance of the Jewish quarter in comparison with the city's other neighborhoods, he wrote: "The streets are never particularly clean in any Persian town, but in rainy weather they are most formidable; whole mountains of filth and dirt, accumulated in every corner, are swept away in the turgid torrent, which is formed by the heavy showers. The danger of creeping through such narrow, irregular, swamped thoroughfares, is aggravated by numerous holes, the receptacles of all that is disgusting and repulsive to the senses, and which abound in every city. Careless, however, of all these obstructions, we paddled our way through dark, pestilential alleys and passages, to the desired quarter. There was a strong contrast

between this and other parts of town; the houses looked gloomy and decaying, the entrances narrow and low, and the doors were either hard stone, or thick, strong wood, as if the owners of these miserable hovels were afraid that their wretched dwellings should be invaded by robbers, or other dangerous intruders.” For the detailed and much longer description of the Jewish quarter in Shiraz and the various aspects and manifestations of the Jewish disabilities and hardships in the city life, see H.A. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, op. cit., pp. 122–129, and source no. 13, selection 5, in our book, entitled “On the material Condition and Economy of Jews in Iran’s Larger Cities in the 1850s, According to the Christian Missionary Rev. Henry A. Stern.” Similar characterizations and observations concerning the sad condition of the Jews in Shiraz and the strained state of their physical, material and communal affairs are found in the accounts of Jewish travelers from Europe and emissaries on behalf of religious institutions in Palestine and other provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the 1840s–1860s. Among his other impressions and findings concerning the Jews of Shiraz, the traveler and explorer Israel Joseph Benjamin (known as Benjamin II), who visited the Jewish community in the spring of 1850, noted in his travel-book: “Only about twenty years since, nearly 3,000 Jews lived in this once magnificent and flourishing city. By persecutions, oppressions, and odium of all kinds, more than 2,500 of them were compelled to go over to the Mussulman sect of Ali. Although outwardly apostate, a great number of these families still preserve in their hearts the faith of their fathers, and even find means of having their children circumcised in secret. Nine synagogues in the town testify to the former greatness of the Jewish community; now, unfortunately, they are almost all laid waste.” See I.J. Benjamin, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, op. cit., p. 188. While describing several cases of persecution and abuse that had been perpetrated against the Jews in the city shortly before his visit in the city (among them the imprisonment and severe beating of the head of the community, Mulla Eliyahu, by the order of the chief Shi’ite clergyman in Shiraz), he described in detail the tragic fate of a young Jewish woman in the city. The account, cited below, sheds light on the particularly vulnerable, and legally and physically unprotected, position of Jewish (and other non-Muslim) women in many parts of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century and earlier. Numerous similar cases and instances of rape, abduction, beating and forced marriage by various classes of the local Muslim population have been documented in many of Iran’s other Jewish communities and settlements during

this period. In Benjamin's words: "Another circumstance, which may give an idea of the desolate condition of the Jews (in Shiraz), is the following. A rich Persian took a fancy to a Jewish girl, and sought her in the house of her parents. As, however, these visits became dangerous, he tried to persuade the girl to adopt the Mussulman faith, so that she might become his wife. 'My parents would die of grief,' said the Jewess, 'if I forsook my religion.' 'You hear it,' said the Persian to his companions, 'she will embrace the Islam faith.' Notwithstanding all her protestations he hurried to the Achund (Priest and Judge), and corroborated by his companions, stated to him that the maiden wished to embrace Islamism. The Achund immediately caused the girl, who had been meanwhile concealed, to be sought for at her parents' house; the messengers treated the parents most cruelly, and their daughter was dragged before the Achund. At the end of two days the prescribed purifications were concluded, and the girl begged for permission to walk to the terrace in order to enjoy the evening air. This was allowed, and she threw herself down from the terrace and fractured her skull. The Persians, who knew the cause of this suicide, heaped the most dreadful insults on the dead body, hacked it to pieces, and left it in the streets. Only during the night did the Jews venture to collect the remains, and bury them." Ibid., p. 186.

The Jewish emissary Rabbi Yehiel Fischel Kestilman of Safed (Palestine), who was sent to the communities of Syria, Iraq and Iran on behalf of the religious and charity institutions in his native town, arrived in Shiraz on December 21, 1859 (25 Kislev 5620). He spent six weeks with the Jews in the city and recorded what he saw and understood with regard to various aspects of life in this community. His detailed account similarly provides us with some firsthand information on a Jewish community which, in its extreme oppressed condition, stood out not only in comparison with the Ottoman Jewish communities which he had visited (among them those of Aleppo and Damascus in Syria and Baghdad and Basra in Iraq), but also in comparison to Iran's other generally hard-pressed communities during that same period. In his words: "In the city there are about three hundred (Jewish) houses or more, but, on account of our iniquities, they are all poor. According to what I saw, and to the best of my understanding, it is doubtful that even those who are better off among them would have more than two hundred gold coins (Heb. *zhuwim*). Their trades and occupations consist mostly of dealing in worn-out clothes and rags and used articles, meaning that they go to the houses of the Muslims and buy those articles

from them. Those who are better off among them are silversmiths and are engaged in silver-work. Even the ritual slaughterers (*shohatim*) and communal judges (*dayyanim*) work as silversmiths and goldsmiths; Shiraz the city, though, is a rather flourishing town with plenty of resources and produces, and it abounds with commerce; the city's main market is luxurious and well-supplied, but everything is in the hands of the Muslims, and they do not let the Jews raise their heads. Oftentimes they accuse them falsely and they beat them so much until, out of suffering, they are forced to be converted. Indeed, they constantly make false charges against them in the city and by beating them with much cruelty they inflict physical injuries upon them in order to cause them to convert. Also, they seize their money and their properties, and, unfortunately, there are no courts and no judges to protect them...; as to the state of their education and culture, unfortunately, there is not to be found among them even one who is learned and knowledgeable like those who are found among us; there is no one among them who is learned and capable to speak before kings and ministers, not one who knows the language, laws and writings of the Persians and is able to speak and write in their language. They are all bowed down and wretched in their own eyes." See Y.F. Kestilman, *Mas'ot Sheliah Sefat be-Arsot ha-Mizrah*, op. cit., pp. 60–61. A similar eyewitness testimony on the dire condition of the Jews of Shiraz, with direct reference to libels and accusations leveled against them by the Muslim residents in the city, is found in the written account of another rabbi, Raphael Katzin, who had visited the Jewish community in the city in the year 1840. The latter rabbi, a native of Damascus (b. 1818), was appointed by the Ottoman monarch Sultan 'Abd al-Majid as the Chief Rabbi (*Hakham-Bashi*) of Bagdad in 1849. In the years preceding his appointment in Bagdad, i.e. in 1840–1841, Rabbi Katzin visited and resided in the Jewish communities of Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran, Hamadan and Urumia. Witnessing the diverse hardships of Iranian Jews, he wrote a long letter and petition spelling out the threats that, in his view, endangered the very existence of Jews in Iran, and addressed it to Sir Moses Montefiore and to other Jewish leaders and philanthropists in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire. For the text of this highly informative letter, see his *Iggeret Maggid Mesarim*, Constantinople, Hebrew year 5608 (1847–8 C.E.). Regarding the Jews of Shiraz in the latter document, see *ibid.*, p. 4.

Among the many broad historical and local factors that resulted in the particularly vulnerable and oppressed condition of the Jews in Shiraz in the course of the nineteenth century, we should particularly

point to the fact that as of the 1840s (and apparently some years earlier) the Jews in the city constituted the largest group of non-Muslim subjects in the city living in the midst of a predominantly Shi'ite and religiously homogeneous population. According to the various sources of information at our disposal, by the mid-nineteenth century, the bulk of the Christian (mostly Armenian) and Zoroastrian residents of Shiraz had either migrated from the city or else been assimilated into the city's Shi'ite majority population. As pointed out by R. Binning (see above), the Armenian population in the city, that had comprised some 3,000 to 4,000 souls during the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, had been reduced to some 30 individuals by 1850. See R. Binning, *Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon, etc.*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 271–2. We further know from the reports of Christian missionaries that the number of Armenian residents in the city had not grown by 1892 and consisted of some thirty souls only. See JMI, July 1893, p. 104. As to the city's other religious minority, i.e., the Zoroastrians, we learn that by the 1880s, they had almost completely disappeared. E.G. Browne, who visited the city in 1888, noted that "the number of Zoroastrians in Shiraz does not exceed a dozen. They are all merchants, and all natives of Yezd (sic) or Kerman." See his *A Year Amongst the Persians*, op. cit., p. 288. In addition to the fact that throughout the 1840s–1890s very few native Armenians and Zoroastrians had remained or survived in the city, during most years of the nineteenth century there were hardly any significant number of foreigners (Europeans, Christians and others) in the city. In the words of Binning, written in 1850, "there are hardly any strangers—that is to say, persons not subjects of the Shah of Persia—in this city: perhaps not more than half of a dozen individuals, myself included." Ibid., p. 272. From other sources we learn that the above social and demographic reality in the city continued through the 1860s–1880s. The Prussian Ambassador to Iran, the scholar Dr. Heinrich Brugsch, who visited the city in October 1860, pointed out that "among the foreign residents in the city one may mention the blacks, who have been brought to Iran, through Bushihr, from Zanzibar; the number of these blacks in the city is relatively large. A number of Hindus, Arabs, Turks and one European national (the Swedish physician Dr. Fagergreen) also live in the city." See H. Brugsch, *Reise der Perussichen Gesandtschaft nach Persien, 1860 und 1861*, 2 vols., Leipzig 1862, translated into Persian by M. Kurdbachih and entitled *Safari bi Darbar-i Sultan-i Sahibqaran*, 2 vols., Tehran 1367 Sh./1988, vol. 2, p. 486. Likewise, the Hungarian scholar, traveler and

adventurer Hermann (Arminius) Vámbéry, who visited the city in 1860, did not find there more than a handful of foreign Christian residents. See his *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien*, op. cit., pp. 236–238. The same European travelers, who visited the city during the second half of the nineteenth century, also tell us of various degrees of suspicion, hostility and violence directed at them by ordinary Muslims in the city. In the words of H. Brugsch: “The people of Shiraz, who are famous for their hospitality, are, nevertheless, zealous and religious, and they do not have a favorable view of foreigners and non-Muslims. We noticed this while we were passing through the Bazaar, for, despite the fact that we were in the company of a group of officials, notables and guards, some in the market took advantage of the commotion that was occasioned by our visit and threw stones at us and at our horses.” Cf. H. Brugsch, *ibid.*, p. 460. As for the general insecurity of Europeans in the city and various acts of hostility and violence directed at foreign visitors and travelers inside the city and in its environs, see (in 1850), in the testimony of Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, op. cit., pp. 182–183, and (in 1881), in the account of Jane Dieulafoy, in *Safarnama-yi Madam Dieulafoy*, translated into Persian by I. Farahvashi, Tehran 1361 Sh./1982, pp. 411–412.

The sources and testimonies cited above portray a reality in which throughout the 1840s–1890s the Jews of Shiraz constituted a substantial group of non-Muslim subjects in a city that was characterized by a low degree of tolerance toward foreigners and religiously different individuals. The Jews in the city numbered some 350 to 400 families (approximately 1800–2000 souls) in the 1840s, who lived among the city’s estimated population of some 30,000 souls. See JI, May 1846, p. 157, and LSPCJ, 38 (1846), pp. 55–56. By the year 1892, they comprised some 5,000 souls in a city that had an estimated population of 55,000 people. See JMI, July 1893, p. 104. Thus, throughout the 1840s–1890s, the Jews in the city formed a rather large and conspicuous demographic group (numbering a few times as many as all the other religious minorities and non-Muslim foreigners in the city combined). Similar to the demographic position of Jews in Isfahan and Hamadan in the course of the nineteenth century (and unlike the situation in Yazd and Urumia in which, respectively, large concentrations of Zoroastrians and Christians lived), the Jews of Shiraz constituted the largest group of religious minority living in the midst of a predominantly Shi’ite population. This demographic condition on the one hand, and the existence of deeply rooted social, economic, legal and other disabilities

affecting the lives of the Jews in the city on the other hand, accounted for a continuous state of socio-religious tension and physical friction between the Shi'ite majority population and the Jews who were found in proportionately large numbers at the bottom and on the margins of the city's political, socio-religious and cultural hierarchy. Despite the increasing efforts of the central government to provide more protection to the Jews in the city and to ameliorate their general condition (particularly as of Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe in 1873), the anomalous and vulnerable demographic condition of the Jews in the city persisted through the first decade of the twentieth century. The underlying demographic, socio-religious and historical plights and hardships of the Jews in the city were further compounded by numerous other local, regional and environmental variables and occurrences that equally affected the lives of the city's general population. Devastating earthquakes, floods, diverse types of epidemics and plagues, periodic shortage of food and famines (particularly in 1871–2) as well as occasional raids by nomadic tribes and robbers and breakdown of public order in the city, etc., formed the human and physical environment in which Jews in the city lived, struggled and survived.

For further sources and selections in our book that deal with different areas of life among the Jews of Shiraz in the course of the nineteenth century, see, source no. 4 (concerning their legal and actual position in the 1850s); source 13, selection 5 (their living conditions and occupations); source 15 (their general culture and educational system); source 20 (aspects of their religious, communal and family lives); source 37 (their early immigration to Ottoman Palestine), and source 38 (their grave condition and sufferings during the Great Famine of 1871–2). For additional sources of information regarding their general history and diverse aspects of their communal lives and distresses in the course of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, see, particularly, L.D. Loeb, *Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran*, New York-London-Paris 1977, pp. 11–34; A. Confino, *L'Action de l'Alliance Israélite en Perse*, op. cit., pp. 128–151; *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, op. cit., pp. 9–10, 18–20, 27–28, 37–39 and 55. Highly useful information, documents and reports related to the living conditions and major events in the community during the 1870s–1910s are found in the archives and publications of the Alliance Israélite. As for the more informative among the reports published by the latter organization, see BMAIU, No. 9 (September 1878), pp. 150–151; No. 7 (July 1897), p. 87; No. 5 (May 1903), pp. 100–118; Nos. 2–3 (February–March 1904), pp. 29–38;

Nos. 4–5 (April–May 1905), pp. 62–64; Nos. 6–7 (June–July 1905), pp. 94–100; No. 1 (January 1906), pp. 16–17; Nos. 5–6 (May–June 1907), pp. 51–56; Nos. 7–8 (July–August 1907), pp. 90–92; Nos. 4–6 (April–June 1909), pp. 75–77; Nos. 1–3 (January–March 1910), pp. 18–21, and Nos. 10–12 (October–December 1910), pp. 228–247.

The City of Shiraz, According to JMI, July 1893, pp. 103–105

Shiraz is the capital of Fars, the southern province of Persia. The town is nearly 175 miles from the Persian Gulf and 312 miles from Ispahan, and lies in a valley surrounded on four sides by high mountains. It has lovely gardens, orchards, and orange groves, both outside and inside the town; and the appearance is so beautiful that when the traveler looks upon it for the first time from the top of the hill, he thinks he is entering into a veritable palace of delight. Shiraz is also known in Persia for its flowers (especially its roses, which are the best in the world), kholar wine,² which is exported to all parts of Persia, India and Europe, and for its musicians, who are mostly Jews, and make a good deal of money by their profession.

The inhabitants of Shiraz have poetical tastes, and recite many verses while passing through the streets and bazaars. They are fond of pleasure and when they have finished their daily work, go in companies to the fields and gardens with their kalians or water pipes. Many of them also take intoxicating liquor with them.

The population of Shiraz consists of 55,000 Mohammedans, 5,000 Jews, and 30 Armenians. The Mohammedans are well-to-do merchants, trading with India and Egypt. The produces of Shiraz and the Provinces of Fars are opium, cotton and wine. The last two articles are very largely exported to India, Hong-Kong, and Java. The cases and bales are sent to Bushire by caravan, and shipped from thence. The imports, *via* Bushire, are chiefly articles from India and England, except sugar, which is brought from France. The British trade is flourishing in the south of Persia, and the British Government has a good influence. The

² This special type of Shirazi wine was called after the grapes out of which it was made. In the words of the British physician Dr. C.J. Wills, who lived in Shiraz in the 1870s and witnessed the production of this particular wine: “The *Cholar* (sic) grape is generally white. These grapes, being grown on terraces on the mountains, cannot be irrigated; hence the keeping properties of the wine. Probably no other wine would keep, made in such a hot climate as Shiraz is, more than a year. That from the Cholar grape never goes bad.” See C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, op. cit., p. 232.

Indo-European Government telegraph lines commence at Bushire, and go to Shiraz, Isfahan, Kashan, Kum and Teheran.

The Jews of Shiraz

Shiraz has the largest Jewish population in the south. Their number is 5,000, and they occupy 430 houses in their own quarter, called Mahale Yahoodian, i.e., "the quarter of the Jews." They have ten large synagogues,³ two Chief Rabbis, and five schools, where the children study Hebrew. No one knows the Talmud except the Rabbis. They read Hebrew in order to be able to say their prayers in the synagogue. Not one Jew in Shiraz can read the Persian language, or speak it properly. They speak a jargon Persian, quite different from the Jews of other parts of Persia. All the Jews are very anxious to have a proper school in which to learn the Persian and European languages.⁴ By occupation they are goldsmiths and silversmiths, and have their shops in the back streets of the Mohammedan quarter. There are a good many petty merchants, who go to Fessa⁵ and Jahroom⁶ to buy opium, and return to Shiraz, where they sell it to the Mohammedans on credit. Most of the Jews are workmen working even in Moslem houses, because they are stronger and better than the Mohammedan workmen. Others are musicians, wine merchants, and publicans, who pay, under compulsion, a duty of 900 tamans for selling wine. Nowhere in Persia are the Jews so badly persecuted as in Shiraz. The chief Mollah⁷ has promulgated the following laws with regard to them:

³ This is the same number of synagogues in the community reported in 1873. Cf. *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, op. cit., p. 8. According to *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 25 (April 9, 1875), p. 199, the community had nine synagogues in 1875. On the poor physical condition of these synagogues, see in the memoir of Mulla Rahamim Melammed ha-Cohen, source no. 24 in our book.

⁴ The first modern-oriented school for the Jews of Shiraz, in which literary Persian, French and a number of secular and Jewish traditional subjects were taught, was founded by the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1903.

⁵ This is the rural district of Fasā, located some 165 kilometers to the east of Shiraz.

⁶ The district of Jahrum is located some 200 kilometers to the south of Shiraz.

⁷ This is "Mulla," i.e., "a learned man," "priest," "clergyman," etc. This seems to be a reference to the Shi'ite clerical leader Sayyid 'Ali Akbar Fāl Asiri of Shiraz, who, among his other religious and political activities in Shiraz and other cities, was behind numerous actions and incitements against the Jews in the city during the 1880s–1890s. For detailed chronological documentation and description of numerous acts of harassment and assault against the Jews of Shiraz, inspired and committed by Sayyid 'Ali Akbar and his followers during the years 1880–1899, see Sa'idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi'-i*

- 1st. "They must not wear ordinary clothes like the Mohammedans." This law is carried to such an extent that no Jew dare to put on a black hat like the Moslems.
- 2nd. "The Jews must not ride on horse, mule, or donkey to the towns." (I did not see one Jew acting contrary to this law.)
- 3rd. "A pervert to the Mohammedan religion has a right to claim the whole property of his deceased relative." At the present time the perverts have not so much power as before, and dare not claim the whole of the property, but they trouble their relatives, and get about 500 kerans from them, and then leave them in peace.
- 4th. "If a Mohammedan is in debt to a Jew, the Jew must not force him to pay, but the Moslem may pay his debt at his own pleasure; but if a Jew owes to a Mohammedan he must pay him on the first notice."
- 5th. "If a Mollah or priest beats a Jew in the street or abuses him, that Jew must not return the abuse, but must pass on quietly."

These laws are in some respects similar to those enacted by the Mollahs of Ispahan for the Jews of that town.⁸ About six years ago, when Prince Zel-El Sultan⁹ was the Chief Governor of the whole of the South of Persia, he ordered the Chief Mollah of Shiraz to be brought to Ispahan, because he used to trouble the Jews.¹⁰ He obeyed the order, and came to Ispahan, where he was kept until June, 1888, when the Prince was deposed. He then returned to Shiraz and commenced his enmity against the Jews.

Ittifaqiyya, op. cit., pp. 139–140, 158–160, 337–339 and 409, 509, 559. Cf. AJA, 19 (1889–1890), p. 29. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar died and was buried in Shiraz in mid-August 1901. Cf. Sa'idi-Sirjani, *ibid.*, p. 646. Regarding him and his role in anti-government activities in Iran in the 1890s, see H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906*, Berkeley 1969, pp. 210–211.

⁸ For the specifics of these edicts and restrictions, that consisted of thirteen clauses and were issued by the leading Shi'ite clergyman Aqa Najafi in Isfahan in September 1889, see JI, November 1889, pp. 166–167.

⁹ This is the powerful Qajar Prince Mas'ud Mirza (1850–1918), who was the Governor of Fars and several other provinces in the south and center of Iran during the years 1866–1888. Regarding him see in our book, below, source no. 29, note 9.

¹⁰ Cf. Sa'idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi'-i Ittifaqiyya*, p. 158.

2. *The Community in 1895, According to The Jewish Chronicle of London, April 10, 1896*¹¹

The Jews of Shiraz

Shiraz, December 1895

“Their position is terrible. Probably in no country of the world are they worse treated than in Persia. Beaten, despised and oppressed, cursed even by slaves and children, they yet manage to exist, earning their living as musicians, dancers, singers, jewelers, silver and goldsmiths, midwives, makers and sellers of wines and spirits. When anything very filthy is to be done, a Jew is sent for”¹²—and, one might add, woe betide him if he refuse. Such is the report given by Dr. Wills, for nearly a score of years a resident in the country, in his “Land of the Lion and the Sun,” and had I not lived in Morocco, I should undoubtedly have endorsed his verdict as a result of the enquiries and observations I have made there myself. In this city¹³ their condition is such that there is continual falling away to Islam, to the usual inducements of which is added a law that any Jew so doing becomes *ipso facto* the heir of all his immediate relatives. For the first few generations, till intermarriage with Persians has somewhat obliterated the national type, these are distinguished by the epithet “Jadidi” or “New’un.”

The quarter in which they live, though not separated from the rest of the town by walls, is perfectly distinct, and may easily be recognized, even if none of the inhabitants be about, by their squalid appearance, by the more than usual contortions of the narrow streets, at frequent intervals crossed by floors and arches beneath which it is necessary to

¹¹ The following eyewitness account on the Jewish community of Shiraz was written by a traveler named J.E. Budgett Meakin. We do not know much about him and his professional background other than what he tells us in the article, i.e., that he had previously lived in Morocco and had written about the condition of the Jews in that land. His impressions and observations on the Jewish community of Shiraz, however, are in agreement with numerous other testimonies and reports written and published by others during the same period. For the original text of the article, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, No. 1410 [New Series], April 10, 1896, p. 15.

¹² This excerpt is a quotation from Dr. C.J. Wills’ aforementioned book (see note 2 above), *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, p. 74.

¹³ I.e., in Shiraz.

stoop, although on foot—an effectual barrier to mounted wanderers, or to haste in any—by the still lower doorways on either side, and by the indescribable odours which proceed therefrom. On the other hand, the roofs afford an easy means of escape to those who understand the way, though full of pit-falls to those who do not. Having obtained the services of one of the inhabitants, on the occasions of my visits I preferred this method of investigation, looking down into many a courtyard of every sort, and only descending for some special reason. The great fear was how long the mud-plastered boughs on which we walked would support the steadily increasing throng by which we were attended, which assumed quite alarming proportions on the production of a camera, to the use of which they had no objections whatever.

The synagogues I visited were dirty, ill-kempt places, very much like those in the interior of Morocco, and the rolls,¹⁴ kept in an inner room which had to be lighted by a spluttering lamp, were very inferior, and almost devoid of ornamentation. They are obtained from Baghdad, though printed copies come from Leghorn, Vienna, Warsaw and Calcutta. The Synagogues in Shiraz are 10 in number,¹⁵ and the population they supply was estimated by the Chief Rabbi at over 3,000. Their Rabbi, who declared that this appellation was not a title, but his family name, has two colleagues and six *shochets*.¹⁶ No more than six or seven of the families were, in his estimation, worth 2,000 tománs, or £ 400 in houses and cash, the latter portion not exceeding 700 tománs, so that few have money to lend.

Many are, however, money-changers, and some goldsmiths and merchants, or rather peddlers, who have the reputation of being also receivers of stolen property, which they sell in Baghdad.¹⁷ Some are engaged in building and kindred trades, and others buy rags and old clothes, but all appear in a condition of great poverty. Few occupations can be more profitable to them than the manufacture of wine, from the refuse of which they distill a most ardent spirit in as much demand as the wine among their irreligious Muslim neighbours. The highest daily wage is twenty to thirty shahis,¹⁸ at present 5d. to 7½d. I was assured

¹⁴ I.e., the Torah scrolls.

¹⁵ Cf. note 3, above.

¹⁶ Heb. *Shohet*, i.e., “ritual slaughterer.”

¹⁷ Regarding the involvement of some of the Jews of Shiraz in the purchase and sale of stolen property and merchandise during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see Sa’idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi-i Ittifaqiyya*, op. cit., pp. 50, 152–3 and 235.

¹⁸ Twenty shahis were equal to 1 kran (or tenth of a tuman).

by the Rabbi and others that neither public women nor houses of ill-fame existed, and that in the only one recent case of adultery they had wished to kill the man, but that the Governor had sent him away; and that the woman had also left the place. Boys are married from 15 to 18, and girls from 10 to 12. The chief musicians of the place are Jews, and these, dressing like Persians, are often better treated than the others, though both they and their Muslim colleagues are sometimes ducked in tanks as part of the day's amusements.¹⁹

In the matter of personal appearance there is no need of much description, but I was struck by the unhappy looks in the faces of all, and the prevalence of bleared eyes, and the complexion of most of the boys was remarkably clear. The dress worn does not differ greatly from that of the Mohammedans, though I do not think they ever wear the tall black lambs' fleece hats peculiar to this country, and formerly their clothes had to be patched.²⁰ They are, however, still prohibited from riding in towns, and from using horses anywhere. They never travel alone, or even venture far from their own quarters, to which it is fear, not law, which restricts them. I came across an instance in Borasjun,²¹

¹⁹ In the course of some public and official celebrations, such as those held to mark the Persian New Year (*Naw-Ruz*) or to honor foreign dignitaries, Jews in Shiraz, Isfahan and Tehran were thrown into tanks of water in order to entertain and amuse the guests and the crowd. This practice is reported to have continued through the last decade of the nineteenth century. For a detailed eyewitness description of the New Year celebration in Tehran, held in the presence of Nasir al-Din Shah on March 21, 1867, in which numerous groups of entertainers participated and a band of local Jews were cast repeatedly into a tank of water, see C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, op. cit., pp. 51–52. For the same ritual repeated during the last decade of the nineteenth century in Tehran, see the following testimony of Ella C. Sykes: "...At the great Persian festival of Nu Ruz (New Year's Day), the Shah shows himself to his subjects—who are all clad in new garments...; a poet recites an ode in His Majesty's praise, bands play different airs at the same time; wrestlers, acrobats and conjurers perform, and the ill-used Jews are ducked again and again in the tanks amid the merriment of the crowd." Cf. E.C. Sykes, *Persia and its People*, London 1910, pp. 53–54. On the Jews of Isfahan who were thrown into a water tank during a reception held by the Prince Governor Zil al-Sultan in the honor of a foreign (Japanese) official, see C.J. Wills, *ibid.*, p. 377.

²⁰ According to the Jewish emissary of Safed, Rabbi Y.F. Kestilman, who visited the Jewish community of Shiraz in 1860, there were no major differences between the dress worn by Jews and Muslims in the city. He, however, noted that Jewish men were strictly forbidden to wear the common hat, made of wool, that was worn by Muslim men in the city. Furthermore, since there were no major differences in the dress of Jews and Muslims, Jews were required to wear identifying badges. Cf. Y.F. Kestilman, *Mas'ot Sheliah Sefat be-Arsot ha-Mizrah*, op. cit., p. 62.

²¹ Located about 65 kilometers to the northeast of Bushihr. The Jews in this small provincial town numbered about 20 families in 1875 and some 140 souls in 1893.

a town one day from Bushire, of wholesale, official persecution, which I immediately laid before the British Resident, who is forwarding the complaint to Tehrán. The farmer of the caravanserai, in league with the Governor, has all native travelers of no importance beaten or otherwise molested if they refuse to put up at his place, and if they object to his extortionate prices for food which he will not permit them to purchase outside, his men take possession of something belonging to them. In addition to this, Jews are made to pay 5 krans (2s.) a head, and their women subjected to a brutal examination under the pretext of ascertaining if toll is to be charged for two, which is done whenever possible. For these occurrences I have the evidence of the Armenian clerk of the Indo-European telegraph, who has seen the thing more than once, and protested in vain. The Persian telegraph clerk, with the nominal rank of major, has his office in the caravanserai, and maintains three horses, a mule and a donkey, besides possessing a wife and a male and female slave.

I could only hear of one Jew in Government employ, the Shah's herbalist. On the arrival of a new Governor the Jews have to go before him and slaughter a cow, and on the occasion of Moharram, lamentations for the deaths of Hasan and Hosain, they have to beat their breasts to satisfy any Mohammedan bully, for even a child may beat a Jew, or spit at him, and never fear. In winter they are freely snowballed without permission to retaliate. Most are too poor to pay the Governor to listen when they have complaints to make, so they have to suffer silently, although they gratefully acknowledge their condition to be very much improved since their London brethren interested themselves on their behalf. If one is killed, the Government, not the relatives, takes the blood-money, and the murderer at most loses a finger-joint.

I regret that I have not been able to draw a more promising picture, but I hope that in Tehrán, under the eyes of so many European officials, things are managed better. They certainly are in Bushire, where some of the Jews do very well as money-handlers, and other businesses, but it is to be feared from all accounts that out in the remoter districts, wherever they are to be found, their lot is still worse. Even in Shiraz, at the time of the recent scare, they were in very sore straits, and fondly imagining that the Sassoons²² and Rothschilds, as soon as their

²² This is a reference to the members of the renowned family of merchants, philanthropists, statesmen and men of letters, who originated from Baghdad. Among the members of the Sassoon family who extended diverse forms of material, humanitarian

plight was made known, would feed them all, they could with difficulty believe that the amount received from one little more than covered the cost of the telegrams, while the other only left a few pounds among hundreds.

The old story of child-sacrifice was brought against the Jews here by a Mohammedan with whom I discussed it, and from time to time it has formed an excuse for murderous riots. It was in consequence of a disturbance raised on this ground that the Jews fled from Tabriz, which to-day boasts no residential community of them. Within recent years, too, one of their number in Urumiah was beheaded and burned by the mob on this account. During the present century many of those in Mashhad in Khorasan turned Moslems at the knife-edge during a similar riot on account of the charge of killing a dog in derision at the Mohammedan sheep-feasts. In 1866, at Barfurush, 18 men and six women were killed because cholera was attributed to the Jews.

and diplomatic assistance to Iranian Jews during the second half of the nineteenth century, mention should be made particularly of Sir Abdullah or Albert Sassoon (1818–1896), and his half-brother Reuben David Sassoon (1835–1905). For details of Reuben D. Sassoon's personal involvement in collecting and distributing financial aid to the Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the Great Famine of 1871–2, see in 3 letters exchanged between him and Sir Moses Montefiore (during the months of September–November 1871), in BZI, Sassoon Collection, file no. 4. As regards Sir Albert Sassoon's philanthropic and material assistance to Iranian Jews, see, e.g., AJA, 14 (1884–1885), pp. 30–31, and AJA, 20 (1890–1891), pp. 31–32.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ISFAHAN
IN THE YEAR 1888, AS DEPICTED BY THE HEADS
OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE HEBREW WEEKLY
HABAẒELETH,¹ JANUARY 25, 1889

Introduction

Together with the Jewish communities of Hamadan (with an estimated population of 450 families in 1874–5), Shiraz (300 families) and Tehran (also 300 families), the ancient Jewish colony of Isfahan (with 400 families) was among the four largest Jewish communities of Iran during the second half of the nineteenth century. Cf. AJA, 4 (1874–1875), p. 93, and AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 91. Once the most important Jewish center under the Safavid rule, particularly as Isfahan was expanded and transformed into a vast capital and metropolitan city of the Safavid empire (in 1597–8) under Shah ‘Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629), the Jewish community of Isfahan underwent steady economic, communal and demographic decline, especially following the devastating siege and destruction of the city by the Afghan tribes in 1722. Of the city’s total population of about three hundred thousand souls (including relatively large numbers of Armenians, Christians, Jews and other denominations), about one-third perished in the course of the siege that was laid on the city between March 12 to October 22, 1722. See *The Chronicle of Petros Di Sarkis Gilanentz concerning the Afghan Invasion of Persia in 1722*, pp. 20–21. (According to L. Lockhart, two-thirds of the inhabitants of Isfahan perished due to starvation and diseases in the course of the siege that ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Safavid empire. See the latter’s *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, pp. 169–170.) Following the demise of the Safavid rule and the transfer of the capital city to Shiraz (under Karim Khan Zand, in 1766) and thereafter to Tehran (by the founder of the Qajar dynasty, in 1786), the Jewish community

¹ *Habazeleth*, year 19, No. 19 (January 1889), pp. 148–149. A summary of this article was published also in *Archives Israélites*, 50 (1889), p. 247.

of Isfahan lost the relative strength and centrality it enjoyed amongst the Jewish communities of Iran. It was additionally weakened by long periods of physical insecurity, economic and professional disabilities and communal stagnation. The precarious condition of the Jews in the city, much through the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, resulted, among other historical and local factors, from their being the largest non-Muslim group living in the midst of a predominantly Shi'ite population characterized by homogeneous beliefs and deeply rooted religious institutions and practices. Unlike the Armenians and the other Christian residents of Isfahan, who resided in a separate and protected colony situated to the south of the city, known as the New Julfa, the Jewish community was situated in different quarters of the old city, chief among them those of Jubara, Dardasht and Gulbar. Thus the Jews lived in the midst of Muslim quarters that dated back from the pre-Safavid period. However, despite their vulnerable position, that resulted from continuous socio-religious tensions and frictions with the Shi'ite populace in the city and in the nearby villages and settlements of Isfahan, the Jewish community of the city constituted the largest Jewish colony of Iran during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the year 1824, they numbered about 500 families. Cf. J. Wolff in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), 185. In 1831 (1247 Q.) they occupied 500 houses (out of a total of 25 thousand houses, of which 1,000 were inhabited by Christians and Armenians of Julfa, and 300 by Sunni Muslims). Cf. Zayn al-'Abidin Shirwani, *Bustan al-Siyaha*, pp. 80. The Christian missionary P.H. Sternschuss of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who conducted missionary work in the community during the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, estimated the Jewish population of the city at about 300 families (or roughly between 1500 to 1800 souls) in the spring of 1846. See his diaries of Feb. 18–March 18, 1846 on the Jewish community of Isfahan, in *JJ*, August 1846, pp. 296–299.

Following the Great Famine of 1871–2, which had severe effects in Isfahan as well, the Jewish community in the city still numbered about 1700 souls in 1873. Cf. *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 32. Based on several independent accounts and sources at our disposal, it appears that the community began to expand (both due to natural growth as well as improvements in the general level of security and living conditions of the community under the governorship of Prince Zil al-Sultan), following Nasir al-Din Shah's first meeting with Jewish leaders of Europe in the summer of 1873. The growth in the community's size continued

unabatedly through the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, the community numbered about 400 families (2,000–2,400 souls) in 1876/7. See AJA 6 (1876–1877), p. 91; 3,000 souls in 1889; see JI, November 1889, p. 166, and 3,700 souls in 1891/2; see G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 510. The community had an estimated 5,000 souls in the years 1895–1900; cf. JMI, January 1895, p. 8, and Williams A.V. Jackson, *Persia, Past and Present*, p. 265. By 1910 the Jews of Isfahan numbered about 6,000 souls. See N. Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire: L'Alliance Israélite Universelle (1860–1910)*, vol. 2, p. 265.

As is the case with the study of all Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century and earlier, we possess a very small body of primary and archival sources concerning the community of Isfahan. Neither has there been sufficient and systematic research and investigation dealing with the formation and history of the major Jewish communities of Iran ever since the early Islamic period (i.e., mid-7th century C.E.). The amount of available data and information in different languages related to various aspects of history, culture and communal lives of the Jews of Isfahan (much similar to those of the other larger communities of Iran) increases progressively as of the second half of the nineteenth century. The growing contact between the Jewish communities of Iran and numerous Jewish organizations, publications and individuals, particularly in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, resulted in the transmission and recording of diverse information concerning the Iranian Jews at large and the condition of specific communities in particular. For a survey of the history and traditions concerning the formation of the ancient Jewish settlement of Isfahan (known as *Yahudiya*) from pre-Islamic times to the end of the Qajar period (1925), see W.J. Fischel, "Isfahan, the Story of a Jewish Community in Persia," in the *Joshua Starr Memorial Volume*, pp. 111–128. For a collection of primary references which shed light on the Jewish community of Isfahan during the 16th–20th centuries, see A. Levy, "Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Isfahan ba-Dorot ha-Aharonim" (The Jewish Community in Isfahan in the Course of the Recent Generations), *Ma'alot*, 14 (1882), pp. 61–68. For eyewitness impressions regarding the difficult and deplorable conditions of the Jews of Isfahan in the mid-19th century, see I.J. Benjamin II, who visited the community in 1850, in his *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, pp. 189–194, and Yehiel Fischel Kestilman, the traveler and emissary from the city of Safad, who visited the community in 1859, in his travelogue (ed.

A. Ya'ari), pp. 64–68. For reports and articles containing much valuable information about various aspects of Jewish life in Isfahan during the last three decades of the 19th century, see M. Seligsohn, "Ispahan," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 ed., vol. 6, pp. 659–660, and numerous reports and letters concerning the Jews of Isfahan published in Jewish European and Christian missionary publications, chief among them those of AJA, AIU and LSPCJ, referred to above. Regarding the community's general condition towards the end of the 19th century and the gradual changes and improvements introduced in the community's life following the establishment of the first Alliance school in the city in August 1900, see also N. Leven, op. cit., pp. 265–268, and A. Confino, *L'Action de l'Alliance Israélite en Perse*, pp. 73–107. As regards Persian sources and writings which contain information relevant to the condition of the Jews of Isfahan in the nineteenth century, one should first and foremost point to those that document and explain the considerable strength and vividity of Shi'ite beliefs, practices and institutions which affected the lives of the Jews in Isfahan. Deeply rooted discriminatory notions and attitudes towards non-believers (and Jews among them) frequently assumed intolerant and at times violent expressions. This was particularly the case amongst some groups and individuals that either belonged to the Shi'ite clerical establishment in the city, or else had traditional socio-religious bonds and identification with the comparatively large number of Shi'ite authorities and functionaries that existed in the city. In Isfahan, as elsewhere in the larger cities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, expressions of intolerance and maltreatment towards Jews were more endemic and widespread amongst the lower socio-economic strata of the Shi'ite population. Regarding the considerable influence of the Shi'ite establishment in Isfahan and the fostering of religious bigotry and fanaticism by some of its leading members in the course of the nineteenth century, see Y. Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahya*, vol. 1, pp. 37–44, 50–56. For nineteenth-century Persian historical, urban and socio-cultural works on the city of Isfahan, which throw light on the overall physical and human environment in which the Jews lived, see particularly Muhammad Mahdi b. Muhammad Riza al-Isfahani, *Nisf-i Jahan fi Ta'rif al-Isfahan*, ed. M. Sutudah, and Mirza Hasan Khan Jabiri Ansari, *Tarikh-i Isfahan*, ed. J. Mazahiri. For rich and useful information on Isfahan, its people and various aspects of its contemporary life, customs and institutions, as perceived by foreign (mostly European) travelers during the 18th–19th centuries, see Firouz Eshraghi (sic), *Isfahan az Did-i Sayyahan-i Khariji*, pp. 238–605. For a

brief history of the city through the end of the nineteenth century, including bibliographical references, see A.K.S. Lambton, "Isfahan," EI (1978 ed.), vol. IV, pp. 97–105, and L. Lockhart, *Famous Cities of Iran*, pp. 14–18.

The Community of Isfahan in the Year 1888

In response to questions put by the correspondent of the journal *Der Israelit* of Mayence² to the (Chief) Rabbi of the Jewish community of Isfahan concerning the situation of that community, the (Chief) Rabbi of Isfahan has, among his other words, replied as follows:

The community has twelve synagogues,³ one of which serves as a house of learning for Torah and religious law for the community. All of these (synagogues) are very old and about to collapse, and they are supported and kept together by assorted pieces attached to each other.

There are eighteen teachers who teach Torah to the youth of our community. Each of them teaches at his own home, because there is no special house for the instruction of the children in our community, as we are all poor and do not have the means to buy or build such a house.

Not long ago we lost our teacher and master Rabbi Yequitiel, may his soul rest in peace. Almost all the sons of our community were his pupils and studied under him.⁴

(As regards trades and professions) some of the members of our community are peddlers; some are caravan-leaders, as Isfahan lies on the main road leading from Rasht, which is on the Caspian Sea, to (the southern sea port of) Bushihr. As such, large caravans pass through Isfahan, and the Jews prepare for the caravan owners beasts of burden for their journey, and supply them with food and provision for the road, and lead them to their desired destinations. Therefore, they are called caravan-leaders. Some other members of the community are laborers

² The German weekly *Der Israelit*, published in Mayence, Germany, was founded in 1860 by M. Lehman. The journal represented the views and interests of Orthodox Judaism. Cf. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 ed., vol. 6, p. 672.

³ This is the number of synagogues in Isfahan during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Cf. AJA 4 (1874–1875), pp. 35–36, and AJA 10 (1880–1881), p. 92.

⁴ Other than the details provided here, no further information concerning this rabbi is available.

and there are some who are occupied in silk-work. The state of our livelihood is not fine.⁵

Some years ago, a Christian priest came here and offered to establish for us schools and build us a bathhouse.⁶ Thinking that he had been sent to us by our Jewish brethren in Europe, we accepted his offer. However, it was soon made known to us that he had been an emissary of the Christians, with the purpose of deceiving and leading us astray, and (thus) we sent him away.

A few days ago, two (Jewish) peddlers who were going about with their merchandise in the villages around our city were killed, and in their death they sanctified the Name of God, since their murderers demanded from them to convert their religion (to Islam) and save their lives by doing so.⁷ They, however, refused to do so, and thus they gave away their lives for the sake of sanctifying the Name of God, blessed be He. Generally speaking, the work and livelihood of the (Jewish)

⁵ As stated above, the most common trade amongst the Jews of Isfahan during the second half of the nineteenth century was peddling. In 1898, about one thousand Jews (out of an estimated Jewish population of five thousand) were occupied in peddling and retail trade in the city and in the neighboring villages of Isfahan. See *Archives Israélites*, 59 (1898), p. 316. Among other common trades and occupations of the Jews of Isfahan throughout the nineteenth century, not mentioned in the text, reference should be made to production and sale of wine and alcoholic beverages (such as *'Araq*), and purchase and sale of old clothes. Jews made a living also as nightmen, rag-pickers, scavengers, sewage-cleaners and other menial and low-income occupations. Cf. *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 301 (Jan. 1, 1875), p. 642.

⁶ This seems to be a reference to Rev. Jacob Lotka, of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. He arrived in Iran (Hamadan) on Oct. 25, 1881, and for two years conducted missionary work in a large number of Jewish communities and settlements in western and central Iran. He arrived in the community of Isfahan on Oct. 2nd, 1883. On Lotka's missionary activity amongst the Jews of Iran during this period, see Rev. W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews*, pp. 466–473. On his arrival in Isfahan, see *ibid.*, p. 472. As to Lotka's own reports regarding his activity among the Jews of Iran during this period, see LSPCJ, 74 (1882), pp. 127–128, and *ibid.*, 75 (1883), pp. 108–111. Rev. Lotka's work amongst the Jews of Isfahan and other communities had been preceded, with some lapses in time, by Rev. H.A. Stern (1847–1851), Rev. H.J. Brühl (1851), and Rev. J.M. Eppstein (1857). On the activity of these latter missionaries prior to Lotka's arrival in Iran, see *JJ*, March 1889, p. 35.

Due to difficult material conditions, the Jewish community of Isfahan did not have a bathhouse of its own. In 1880 the community applied to the Anglo-Jewish Association for assistance to “establish a school for boys and build a bathing-house for the community.” See *AJA*, 10 (1880–1881), pp. 35–36.

⁷ According to a letter addressed by the heads of the community of Isfahan to the Alliance Israélite, Paris, the murder of these two peddlers took place in the district of Chahar Mahal (south-west of Isfahan). See *AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6. NO. 8962*, written on 13 Heshvan 5640 (November 7, 1889).

peddlers in our city is poor, despised and dangerous. The (Muslim) peasants humiliate and abuse them; they beat and harass them, and not infrequently they also rob them of everything they have.⁸

The governor of our city is the Prince Zil al-Sultan, the son of our king Nasir al-Din.⁹ He is one of the righteous of the nations who favors the Israelites and is good and benevolent to us. Many times he alleviated the burden of the taxes from upon us, and on a few occasions he paid for us from his own purse the tax which we are obligated to pay to his father's treasury. This enlightened prince and governor is indeed worthy of honor and glory. Kindly mention his name and praise him in your major journals, and send (them) to us, so that we can show them to him. (The translator of the present letter in *Der Israelit* rightly points out that it is appropriate that the societies of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association send a letter of gratitude to this prince in recognition of his benevolence and kindness towards our brethren who take refuge in his shadow.)¹⁰

⁸ At the bottom of the above mentioned letter (see note 7, above) by the heads of the community of Isfahan to the headquarters of the Alliance Israélite (NO. 8962, of November 7, 1889) we read the following postscript note: "If you want to know about our sufferings, (then) today, that is Thursday the 13th of the (Hebrew) month of Heshvan 5640 (Nov. 7, 1889), a gentile (Muslim) man was coming from the villages and he had three loads of rice with him. Thinking that he was a Jew the (Muslim) villagers caught him and beat him so much that he died. As much as he implored with them (saying) that he was a gentile (Muslim), they did not accept. This (incident) became known today. (We swear) by the truthfulness of the Torah, this is how they beat the Jews until they die."

⁹ This is Prince Mas'ud Mirza (1266–1336 Q./1850–1918), Nasir al-Din Shah's oldest surviving son, who only second to the monarch himself was the most powerful and feared figure in the Qajar ruling dynasty during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Due to the fact that his mother, 'Iffat al-Saltana, did not descend from the Qajar lineage, he was not appointed heir apparent to the Shah, and ultimately did not ascend the throne when Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896. A forceful and ambitious man with capacity for shrewd and ruthless pursuit of his numerous goals, interests and whims, he was appointed Governor General of the important provinces of Fars (in 1866) and Isfahan (in 1874). During the next fourteen years, his governorship and effective control were considerably expanded and they roughly encompassed third of all the provinces and districts of Iran, mainly those in the south, the west and the center of the country. The rise in Zil al-Sultan's overall political, economic and military power eventually alarmed Nasir al-Din Shah, who (in 1305 Q./1888) stripped him of his position in the vast territories under his control and limited his official appointment to the governorship of Isfahan. He served in the latter position through the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. See M. Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol. 4, pp. 78–100; N. Shahid, "Zil-al-Sultan," *Rahavard*, vol. 13, No. 50 (1998–9), pp. 260–266, and G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, pp. 416–461.

¹⁰ The remarks in parentheses appear in the original Hebrew article. Such letters of gratitude on behalf of the Anglo-Jewish Association were indeed sent periodically to Zil

The name of the head of our community is Rabbi Mosheh son of Yehoshu'a.¹¹ Rabbi Hizqiyah son of Mordechai is the judge and the tax-collector, and Rabbi David son of Shelomo is president and the head of the Jewish community of our city.¹²

Undersigned by the writer of the letter,
Rabbi Abraham son of Rabbi Yehezqel.¹³

al-Sultan. For the texts of such letters, see, e.g., AJA, 11 (1881–1882), pp. 31–32. For Zil al-Sultan's acknowledgement and appreciation of such letters, see AJA, 14 (1884–1885), pp. 29–30. On expressions of gratitude to Zil al-Sultan in the Jewish European press, see an article by the *Jewish Chronicle* of London, cited in JI, March 1889, p. 47.

¹¹ This is the Chief Rabbi (but not the *dayyan*, i.e. the communal judge) of Isfahan, whose signature appears also on a long letter to the Anglo-Jewish Association, describing the circumstances of a bloody attack on the Jewish community of Isfahan that had occurred during the Jewish New Year of 5650 (September 26–27, 1889). For the text of the latter document, see Bodleian Library, Dep. C.M.J. d. 52/3, received on March 19, 1890. In this letter, however, the Chief Rabbi's name is given as Mosheh son of Yeshu'ah (and not Yehoshu'a). No other information about this rabbi is available.

¹² The names and signatures of the latter two persons appear also at the bottom of letter NO. 8962 to AIU (see note 7 above), and the aforementioned letter to AJA, depicting the attack on the Jewish community of Isfahan (see note 11 above). No further information regarding these two communal officials is found in the sources that were accessible to me.

¹³ The name and signature of this person appear also at the bottom of both of the aforementioned letters from Isfahan to AIU and AJA. See note 12 above. No further information on this rabbi is available either.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF KASHAN DURING THE
GREAT FAMINE OF 1871–2: TESTIMONY OF ASHER,
SON OF YUSEF, A NATIVE OF KASHAN (CA. 1872)¹

This written passage is in the handwriting of Mr. Asher (son of the family) of Mr. Yusef:²

I now come to the eve of the feast of Passover of the (Hebrew) year 5632 (1871–2 C.E.).³ People could not afford buying unleavened bread. They did not bake unleavened bread for sale. The rich people ordered wheat and had it baked for them. As to the poor (however), there were no provisions and no food for them to buy. Neither did they have the money to do so. The Holy One, blessed be He, performed a miracle, (whereby) Rothschild's son-in-law⁴ sent money in the amount of one

¹ Consisting of nineteen lines in Judeo-Persian, this testimony, written by a Jew of Kashan who had survived the Great Famine of 1871–2, provides some firsthand information with regard to the effects of the famine on his native community. The account, which was evidently scribed by the eyewitness himself, named Asher, was inserted onto one of the blank pages of a Judeo-Persian collection belonging to his own family. The collection contains manuscripts of various Judeo-Persian poems and works (among them the popular work *Shahzadeh va Sufi*, composed in 1688 by the poet Elisha' ben Shemu'el), as well as a printed book of Hebrew liturgical poems (entitled *Pizmonim*), published in Calcutta in 1842 by El'azar ben Mari Aharon Sa'adiya 'Iraqi, the founder of the first Hebrew printing press in India in 1841. This collection of miscellaneous works and writings is presently in the possession of Ms. Mohtaram Joseph (Shams) of Los Angeles, who was married to the late Mr. Abdollah Shams, a descendant of Mr. Joseph, mentioned in the passage. I wish to thank Ms. Joseph for allowing me access to her collection and for bringing this particular document to my notice.

² It appears that this short introductory line (written in small cursive letters in blue ink) was added at a later time by a family member.

³ Originally, the Hebrew year 5632, which began on September 16, 1871, and ended on October 2, 1872. The Passover holiday of this year began on April 23, 1872 and ended on the 29th of that month.

⁴ This seems to be a reference to Joseph Mayer Montefiore (1816–1880), nephew of Sir Moses Montefiore, and President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (1874–1880), who was personally involved in collecting and distributing money to the needy Jewish communities of Iran during the famine. He, however, was not a son-in-law but rather a grandson of Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744–1812), the leading founder of Rothschild's financial empire. His mother, Henrietta (1791–1866), was married to Sir Moses Montefiore's younger brother, Abraham (1788–1824). On Joseph Mayer

thousand tumans⁵ for (the Jews of) Kashan. It was so destined that the money came in just on the day before Passover.⁶ The poor and the rich received (it) and bought wheat-flour for nine krans per mann;⁷ rice for eight krans per mann;⁸ beans for eight krans per mann; mung-beans⁹ for eight krans per mann; lentils for eight krans per mann; unroasted chick-peas for eight krans per mann;¹⁰ roasted chick-peas, one tuman (per mann); sesame oil, two tumans (per mann).¹¹ As to meat, though, no fresh meat was to be found, because no slaughtering was done on

Montefiore, see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, p. 667. On his leading role in extending aid to the famine-stricken Jews of Iran during this time, see the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, pp. 5–7, and particularly p. 27.

⁵ An amount of 17,975 pounds sterling was collected by the Board of Deputies of British Jews in London and Europe and distributed to an estimated population of 18,000 Jews of Iran, i.e., one pound (worth about 2.3 tumans) per individual. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

⁶ That is on Monday, April 22, 1872. According to the report of the *Persian Famine Relief Fund* (p. 30), at the request of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran, Charles Alison, sent an amount of £200 to the Jews of Kashan on April 18, 1872. Another installment, in the amount of £300, had been sent by him to the same community on March 5, 1872. On the basis of the current exchange rate of 23 krans per £1 (*ibid.*, pp. 40 and 49), the total amount thus sent to Kashan during the months of March and April was about 1150 tumans.

⁷ Ten krans (or qerans) were equal to one tuman and ten thousand dinars. The weight measure current in Kashan during this time was the *mann* of Tabriz, which is equal to 6.5 lb. (nearly 3 kilograms). On the weight measures and currencies of Kashan in the course of the nineteenth century, see H. Naraqī, *Tarikh-i Ijtima'i-yi Kashan*, p. 261. By the end of 1871 the prices of staple foods in Kashan had increased about twenty times in comparison to the period before the famine. See *ibid.*, p. 264, and cf. S. Okazaki, *The Great Persian Famine of 1870–71*, p. 183. In the city of Shiraz, which was also severely hit by the famine, the average daily income of a Jewish family during the spring of 1872 was about half a kran, while “every household is obliged to have at least 3 krans a day, if one wants to feed his family upon dry barley bread.” See letter of the heads of the Jewish community of Shiraz, dated February 1872, in the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 37.

⁸ The price of quality rice in Kashan in the year 1268 Q. (1851–2 C.E.) was 0.7 kran per mann. Cf. Naraqī, *ibid.*, p. 261. The price given in our document represents an increase of over ten times in the price of this commodity. The prices of food listed by our witness are in agreement with what is known from other sources and they confirm the conclusion that Kashan, together with Yazd, Isfahan and Mashhad, were among the hardest hit cities during the famine. For prices of food in various localities in Iran during the famine, see C.P. Melville, “The Persian Famine of 1870–72: Prices and Politics,” pp. 137–145.

⁹ Persian “mash.”

¹⁰ The price of unroasted chick-peas was 0.5 kran per mann before the famine. Cf. Naraqī, *ibid.*, p. 262. Here, too, the price given by our source represents a sixteen-fold increase in the price.

¹¹ The price of cooking oil, of unspecified kind, was 2.5 krans per mann before the famine. *Ibid.*, p. 261. The price cited here is eight times higher.

the eve of the holiday. Would that no year like this shall ever appear again. From the beginning of the rise in the prices until this date¹² six hundred people had died,¹³ most of whom were buried without shrouds; no living beings were left anymore; all were looking like the dead; (however) as we reached the (Hebrew) year of 5633¹⁴ (1872–3 C.E.), God intervened and provided such plentiful means of subsistence that wheat was now available at the price of one tuman and six krans per kharvar;¹⁵ bread for...¹⁶ per mann. Livelihood was now so abundant that no one believed. Thank God that we survived and made it through a year like that. O God, may a year such as (the Hebrew year of) 5632 (1871–2 C.E.) never again befall anybody, however rich one may be. So be it (and) may this be Thy will!

¹² I.e., April of 1872.

¹³ According to the report of the *Persian Famine Relief Fund* (p. 35), the number of people who died as a result of the famine in the Jewish community of Kashan was three hundred. The figure given here (i.e. six hundred) would imply that over one-third of the Jewish population of Kashan had perished during the famine. The missionary H. Stern, who visited the Jewish community of Kashan in 1848, found there about 200 families, or roughly 1200 souls. See his *Dawnings of Light in the East*, pp. 171 and 182. The British official R. Thomson estimated their number at 750 in 1868. See his report of April 20, 1868, FO 248/244. In Isfahan, 1300 out of a Jewish population of 3,000 souls perished during the famine, i.e., approximately 40%. See the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 55.

¹⁴ The Hebrew year 5633 began on October 3, 1872 and ended on September 21, 1873.

¹⁵ One *kharvar* (literally “an ass-load”) was equal to one hundred *manns* of Tabriz (see note 7 above). This would mean 0.16 kran per mann, as opposed to 8 krans per mann during the famine, i.e., about fifty times cheaper. According to this figure, with the cessation of the famine towards the end of 1872 the price of wheat fell far below what had been current before the outset of the famine. According to Naraqi (op. cit., p. 261), prior to the famine the price of wheat in Kashan had been 0.24 kran per mann.

¹⁶ An illegible Hebrew abbreviation.

ON THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF TEHRAN IN THE
YEAR 1875, AS REPORTED BY THE CHIEF RABBI OF THAT
COMMUNITY TO ISAAC ADOLPHE CRÉMIEUX,
PRESIDENT OF THE ALLIANCE ISRAËLITE
UNIVERSELLE, PARIS¹

In the Name of God may we endeavor and succeed

(Addressed) from here, Tehran, the capital city of His Majesty King of Persia, may God safeguard and protect it, (and) written on the twenty-sixth day of the month of Tamuz 5635 (July 29, 1875), to the noble protectors of the scattered sheep of Israel, that is, the benevolent deputies of the Jewish communities in the French Empire, and chief and foremost among them our lord and master the eminent Isaac Adolphe Crémieux,² may his name endure forever, and may God the

¹ The following letter, originally in Hebrew, was written by the Chief Rabbi and Judge of the Jewish community of Tehran, Bakhaj ben Yehezqel Hamadani, to the heads of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. Consisting of two handwritten pages, it was formulated in direct reply to a series of questions addressed by the presidency of the Alliance Israélite to the heads of the Jewish community of Tehran. The inquiries concerned the general condition of the Jews of Tehran and were related to the prospects of establishing a school in that community by the Alliance organization. The idea of establishing such a school, first in Tehran and afterwards in the other main Jewish communities of Iran, was initially discussed by Jewish leaders of Europe and the Ottoman Empire with Nasir al-Din Shah, during the latter king's first visit to Europe in the months of the summer and autumn of 1873. The questions presented by the Alliance Israélite to the heads of the community of Tehran, answers to which were given in the letter before us, were intended to provide communal information relevant to the establishment of the first modern Jewish school in the capital city of Iran. Designated as IRAN.IIC.6. No. 9847 in the archives of AIU in Paris, the letter was signed on the 26th of Tamuz 5635 (July 29, 1875).

² Born in 1796 in Nîmes, France (d. Paris, 1880), I.A. Crémieux was a leading French statesman and the most prominent Jewish communal leader of France during the second half of the 19th century. He served as minister of justice in 1870, and was made a life senator in 1875. In 1863 he was chosen president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and served in that position until 1866; he served again in that capacity from 1868 to the end of his life. During Nasir al-Din Shah's visit to France, Crémieux conferred with him on July 12, 1873 at the head of a delegation representing the AIU, and presented the Iranian monarch with a petition calling on the Shah to take practical steps in order to improve the physical security and the general status and living conditions of Iranian Jews. Nasir al-Din Shah, who was deeply impressed by Crémieux's

Almighty sustain and protect him, as well as all the leaders of that honorable society.³

Having wished you an abundance of life and well being, and kissing the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet, we, the miserable brethren of yours who reside in the cities of Persia, are, indeed, inferior amongst the nations; we suffer from the yoke of exile, and yearn for God's salvation, while praying for help from our brothers, the members of the Society of Alliance Israélite Universelle, may God protect and prolong their lives.

We hereby wish to inform your eminence that your fine and clear letter reached us, and that we rejoiced much to receive your communication. Furthermore, the books which you had dispatched⁴ have already reached us, as they were delivered to us by Mr. Isaac Luria, the headmaster of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school in Baghdad.⁵ We

authority and political status in France (see *Safarnama-yi Nasir al-Din Shah*, Isfahan, Mash'al Pub., n.d., p. 141), agreed in principle to allow the establishment of special schools for the Jews of Iran, with the help and supervision of the Alliance Israélite. The Shah's promise to Crémieux, however, did not materialize until a quarter of a century later, when, on February 22, 1898 (on the first day of the Jewish festive month of Adar 5658), the first AIU school, for boys, was launched in the Jewish quarter of Tehran. On A.I. Crémieux see, e.g., *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York 1941, vol. 3, p. 407. As to the content of Crémieux's discussion with Nasir al-Din Shah, see *Mishloah Manot el Beney Yisrael me-Eres Paras*, Paris 1874, pp. 12–15.

³ I.e., the Association of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris.

⁴ This is a reference to the protocols of meetings between the leaders of the Jewish organizations of Europe and the Ottoman Empire with Nasir al-Din Shah, during the summer and autumn of 1873. These protocols, and the texts of the petitions on behalf of the Jews of Iran, which had been presented to the Shah and his officials (in Berlin, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna, Rome and Constantinople) were collected by the AIU, translated into Hebrew and sent to over fifty Jewish communities across Iran. Forming a printed booklet of thirty pages, these protocols and reports, which were entitled *Mishloah Manot* (literally "Purim Gifts"), were designed to uplift the morale of the hard-pressed Jewish communities of Iran and inform them of the concrete steps and activities that were undertaken on their behalf in various European capitals. For the full text of this booklet, see *Mishloah Manot el Beney Yisrael me-Ers Paras* (i.e., *A Delivery of Festive Gifts to the Children of Israel in the Land of Persia*), published by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris 1874. As to the role of the heads of the Jewish community of Tehran in receiving and distributing the copies of this book to the main Jewish communities of Iran, see also the earlier letter of the chief rabbi of Tehran, Bakhaj ben Yehezqel, to the headquarters of the AIU, in AAIU, IRAN.IIC. No. 9071/2, dated 18th of Adar Alef 5635 (February 23, 1875).

⁵ Isaac Luria (spelled also as Lurian), who during the years 1867–1884 served as the headmaster of the first Alliance Israélite boys' school in Baghdad. A native of Russia, he arrived in Baghdad in 1850, where, together with a small group of communal activists, he devoted himself to the promotion of modern education amongst the Jews of that city. In addition to his activities in the fields of education and culture amongst the Jews of Iraq, he took much interest in the welfare and general living conditions

distributed them to all the cities across Persia, and also informed them as to the way they had been sent to them. According to what I have heard, a society has already been established in Hamadan by our fellow Jewish brothers who live in that city,⁶ and, furthermore, I wrote to all the cities of Persia, calling on our brothers to establish such societies in affiliation with the Society of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. As to the reason for the delay in establishing such a society in this very city of Tehran, it should be stated that a variety of reasons have caused this delay. Despite the fact that our monarch is benevolent, and so is also his deputy,⁷ both of whom wish to ensure the welfare of each and every

of the Jewish communities of Iran. He published numerous informative articles in the Hebrew and Jewish press of the period about the disabilities and general hardships that characterized the lives of the majority of the Iranian Jews much through the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, in numerous instances he acted as an intermediary between the Jews of Iran and the leaders of the Jewish organizations in Europe. For his biography and activities in Baghdad, see Avraham Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequmat ha-Ge'onim 'ad Yameynnu*, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 288–289. Regarding his relations with and activities on behalf of the Jewish communities of Iran during the 1860s–1870s, see, e.g., *Hamagid*, year 10, No. 49 (December 19, 1866), p. 388 [in connection with his activity on behalf of the Jews of Barfurush, following the pogrom against that community in May 1866]. *Ibid.*, year 16, No. 20 (May 22, 1872), p. 237 [in connection with his activity on behalf of the Jewish communities of Iran during the Great Famine of 1871–2]. See also his detailed report on the legal and socio-economic position of the Jews of Iran, which originally appeared in the *Jewish World*, and was translated into Hebrew in *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 16 (April 23, 1873), p. 142.

⁶ The information provided here by Rabbi Bakhaj suggests that the first semi-modern cultural association ever established by the Jews of Iran was inspired by the Alliance Israélite and was set up in 1875 in the Jewish community of Hamadan. As early as 1870, that is ten years after the establishment of the AIU in Paris, ten Jewish professionals in Tehran (i.e., six physicians and four jewelers) had joined the latter association in Paris and by paying membership dues were receiving the publications of the AIU in the French language. For the full names and professions of these early modern-oriented Jews of Tehran, see BAIU, 2^e semestre, 1870, p. 69. However, we know of no organized association of such modern-oriented Jews of Tehran during this period.

⁷ Originally the Hebrew term *mishneh*, i.e., “deputy” and “viceroys.” By this term reference is made to Nasir al-Din Shah’s grand vizier, Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar (b. 1239 Q./1823–d. 1298 Q./1880). For the same usage of the term in direct reference to Mirza Husain Khan’s name, see Bakhaj ben Yehetzqel’s earlier letter of 18th of Adar Alef 5635 (February 23, 1875) to I.A. Crémieux, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC.6, No. 9071/2, received on April 16, 1875. Mirza Husain Khan had accompanied the Shah during his journey to Europe and been personally involved and present in all of Nasir al-Din Shah’s meetings with the various Jewish delegations in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire. Known for his progressive and reformist views, he was in favor of improving the status and general socio-economic position of the religious minorities of Iran, and Jews among them. On Mirza Husain Khan’s favorable attitude towards the Jews of Iran, and his decision to send fifteen young students from the poor Jewish families of Iran to study in Europe at the expense of the Iranian government, see, e.g., *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 37 (September 17, 1873), p. 340, and *Mishloah Manot*, op. cit.,

nationality and linguistic group living under their rule, nevertheless the masses of the gentiles have since long been accustomed to tormenting the Jews; and, also, there are amongst us many converts from earlier years, who cause us much trouble and incite hatred between us and the Persians;⁸ may God reward them in accordance with their deeds.

As regards the nine questions which you have asked, following are the answers to each and every one of them:

First, concerning the Jews who live today here in Tehran, they are from the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd, Damavand and Hamadan, and their work consists of going around to the doors of the (Muslim) gentiles, to buy worn-out clothes and sell them to Muslim traders. They have no other means of subsistence because the Muslim clergy-men do not permit the Jews to sit in the market-place and engage in the purchase and sale of goods. We have no other occupation because of the fact that they tell us: “You are impure and it is not possible to conduct business with you,” and so on and so forth.

pp. 26–27. On his support of establishing modern schools for the Jews of Iran, see BMAIU, May 1874, p. 8.

⁸ The reference here is to Jewish converts to Shi‘ite Islam. For a variety of personal and inner communal tensions and conflicts in most of the Jewish communities of Iran throughout the 19th century, some of these Jews turned-Muslims, commonly known as *Jadid al-Islam* (i.e., Newly Converted to Islam), would turn zealously against their former co-religionists, and even against their own parents, siblings and close relatives. There exist numerous references and testimonies in the Jewish-Iranian sources, as well as in the Jewish-European writings of the period, which attest to this phenomenon in Tehran and in other Jewish communities of Iran throughout the 19th century. In 1822, for instance, one of the two leading rabbis of Tehran, by the name of Aqa Baba Shirazi, converted to Islam. Having changed his name to Riza (the name of the eighth and much revered Shi‘ite Imam, whose shrine is located in the city of Mashhad), he wrote a harsh and intensely inflammatory anti-Jewish book, entitled *Manqul al-Riza*. Aqa Baba’s conversion and his anti-Jewish polemical treatise only added to the existing xenophobic and anti-Jewish views and practices which were current amongst parts of the Shi‘ite clergy and particularly amongst the urban masses of Tehran. See H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, vol. 3, pp. 566–569. Cf. J. Wolff, in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 217. On the detrimental effects of Aqa Baba’s above-mentioned book on the Jews of Tehran, see also Yisrael ben Yosef Binyamin (Benjamin II), *Sefer Mas‘ey Yisrael*, Lyck 1859, p. 89, and A. Netzer, “Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Tehran...” (The Jewish Community in Tehran since its Beginning until the Constitutional Revolution of 1906), in *Shevet va-Am*, 2nd Series, 4 (9), ed. David Siton, Jerusalem 1981, p. 261. Regarding such anti-Jewish converts in Isfahan in the early 1880s, see AJA, 10 (1880–1881), p. 36. As to the same phenomenon in the small sized community of Tuyserkan (south of Hamadan), see BMAIU, No. 1, January 1900, p. 9, and No. 9–10, September–October 1906, pp. 160–161. For a thorough and insightful discussion of the background and the causes of such voluntary Jewish conversions to Islam in the mid-nineteenth century in Iran, see *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI, No. 48 (September 6, 1850), p. 380.

As to your questions about the education of our children, etc., we have five teachers who teach these children who go to school. When they leave the school they go to learn the profession of silk-weaving or silk-work or similar occupations, and a few of them go with their fathers to buy worn-out clothes from the houses of the (Muslim) gentiles.

As to what you asked about the working conditions of our teachers, some of them make a living from the small amount of tuition that they receive from teaching the children, and, in addition, they also occupy themselves as tailors, book-binders and scribes of bills. When the late physician Yehezqel⁹ was still alive, he used to pay the salary of one teacher, and he also used to provide food for the orphaned and (for the) needy pupils, so that the teacher would teach these pupils and receive his salary from this physician. However, it is a year now since the latter has passed away, and thus the wages for that one teacher have perished. As to the salaries of the other teachers, the parents of the boys pay them tiny small amounts, and that, too, with difficulty and hardship.

As to your request that the children write in their own handwriting letters in the French and English languages, they are not able yet to do so; although the French alphabet has been taught (to them), they have not learned it well. With God's help I will later on have them write in Hebrew as well as in Persian and French, and, Sir, I will send them to your eminence, praying that God protect and prolong your life.

As to your question why our children do not learn in the language of the country and do not acquire its manners, as I wrote to you in my letter previously, the people of Persia consider the Jews and (the followers of) other religions as impure, and they do not allow Jews to

⁹ This is Hakim (i.e., physician) Yehezqel, known also as Hakim Haq-nazar (d. 1873), the son of Hakim Ya'qub. He was amongst the personal physicians of Nasir al-Din Shah's mother, Mahd 'Ulya. Born to an old family of Jewish physicians in the Jewish community of Khunsar, he and his brothers Hakim Mashiah and Hakim Musheh (the latter being the father of the Jew turned-Christian missionary Mirza Nurullah Hakim, see source no. 32), moved to Tehran in 1854. A handsome and charismatic man, he soon gained a reputation as a skilled physician and began practicing medicine at Nasir al-Din Shah's harem. He was reputable in the Jewish community of Tehran for his charitable acts on behalf of the poor and needy, and, being without sons, he donated large amounts of money for the education of poor and orphaned children. For further biographical information regarding him, see H. Levi, *op. cit.*, pp. 748–751. Regarding his coveted position and wealth in the Jewish community of Tehran, his constructing a synagogue and a clinic inside the quarter, and the assertion that he and his two aforementioned brothers were the only Jews of Tehran who owned a stable and were allowed to ride horses in the capital city of Tehran (ca. 1870), see H. Mizrahi, *Yehudey Paras*, Tel-Aviv 1959, pp. 134–135.

study in their script and in their language. As to myself, I am rather a newcomer to this city, having been a native of the Jewish community of Hamadan.¹⁰ I know their literature,¹¹ but nowadays a few of the children learn to write Persian with the help of a Persian teacher.

And as to your question concerning the titles of the teachers here in Tehran, there are teachers for the instruction of the Torah, the Scriptures and rabbinic teachings.¹² We do not have teachers who teach the Persian language or other languages and writings. As to the estimated salary of these teachers, if they should teach the entire day and throughout the year, their salary will amount to the sum of six-hundred to seven-hundred francs.¹³ And, as to the school expenses, including the rent for a house, these will amount to three thousand francs.¹⁴ As to possible sources of income, none but very small amounts can be found. Having established such schools in other lands, you yourselves know the expenses involved. As to us, however, we will mobilize ourselves and

¹⁰ In the following lines Mulla Bakhaj, the son of Yehezqel, provides some general information about himself. Born in Hamadan, he moved to Tehran, where, following the death of Mulla Ishaq, the Chief Rabbi of Tehran, he was elected as Chief Rabbi and Dayyan (communal judge) of Tehran in 1870. He served in that position until his death some time after the year 1876. Cf. H. Levi, op. cit., p. 642. Based on what we can gather from his own extant and available writings, i.e. mainly letters in eloquent Hebrew which he wrote to the headquarters of the AIU and to other Jewish organizations in Europe, he was descended from a family of rabbis in the community of Hamadan. See, e.g., his long letter to the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, cited in the *Report of the Persian Famine Relief Fund*, London 1873, p. 35. Mulla Bakhaj was among the religious leaders of Iranian Jewry in the second half of the 19th century who were supporters of educational, cultural and social reforms in the Jewish communities of Iran along the broad ideas and goals promoted by Jewish cultural and philanthropic associations of Europe. As attested by himself, he was among the devoted readers of the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid*, which was published in Lyck, Germany, and adhered to reformist and liberal views associated with the Jewish Enlightenment Movement (Hebrew *Haskalah*) of Europe. On Bakhaj being subscribed to *Hamagid*, see his letter of Adar 1st, 5634 (February 17, 1874) to the heads of AIU, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6. No. 6912, received in Paris on April 13, 1874. Bakhaj's son, named Rahamim Mulla Bakhaj, was among the active members of the cultural and educational board of the Jewish community of Tehran (known as *Hebrah*), which in the late 1890s were directly involved in the establishment of the first AIU school in Tehran. Cf. the Jewish-Iranian communal publication *Sina*, first year, No. 9 (10 Shahrivar, 1328 Sh./September 1, 1949), p. 1.

¹¹ I.e., the literary Persian language and its literature.

¹² Originally the Hebrew abbreviation *Razal*, i.e. "(the teachings of) our rabbis of blessed memory."

¹³ During this time (1875–6) the exchange rate for the French franc in Tehran was about 10 francs per tuman. See G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 513.

¹⁴ I.e., about 300 tumans.

turn to assist the Society (of the Alliance Israélite Universelle). At the present time we are some fifteen people who as a committee oversee the Society's branch (in Tehran). We hope, if God helps us, that during the coming week we shall be able to prepare everything and send you by the next postal dispatch the list of family-names of all the members and their respective donations. We hereby convey our deepest gratitude and respect to you the esteemed and honorable leaders of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. On behalf of the community of Tehran, I remain, Sir, your humble and most obedient servant.

Signed by:

Bakhaj, son of

Yehezqel, from the people

of Hamadan, who resides

presently in Tehran

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF TEHRAN AND THE
CHOLERA EPIDEMIC OF 1892, REPORTED BY MIRZA
NURULLAH HAKIM, IN THE *JEWISH MISSIONARY*
INTELLIGENCE, LONDON, MARCH 1893, PP. 44–45

Introduction

Mirza Nurullah (Tehran, 1863–London, 1925) was born to a prominent family of Jewish physicians in Tehran. His father, Musheh Hakim (d. August 16, 1881), was among Nasir al-Din Shah's court physicians. As a youngster, Mirza Nurullah (who spelled his name in English as Norollah) was exposed to the activity of Christian missionaries affiliated with the American Protestant Mission, as well as those working amongst the Jews of Iran on behalf of the Church of England. He proved highly receptive to evangelical teachings and, thus, despite much opposition from his family, he embraced Christianity as a youth, and was baptized in Tehran. After consultation with Rev. James Bassett of the American Presbyterian Mission, however, he decided to seek an education in England, with the purpose of returning to Iran and conducting missionary work amongst the Jews of Iran. Arriving in London in 1884, he was sponsored by the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews and was soon enrolled in the Hebrew Missionary College of London. Following two years of studies and two additional years of missionary work and training at Mogador, Morocco (1887–1888), he returned to Tehran on December 4th, 1888, in charge of the London Society's Mission amongst the Jews of Iran. During the next three decades Mirza Nurullah was actively involved in a broad range of missionary, educational and humanitarian activities amongst the Jews of Iran, and particularly in the larger communities of Tehran, Isfahan and Hamadan. In addition to his being highly educated and intimately familiar with the language, culture and internal lives of Iranian Jews, he was methodical and thorough in recording and reporting in detail about diverse aspects of life amongst the Jews of Iran. His frequent reports and diaries in English, giving an account of his activities and observations concerning the various Jewish communities of Iran during

the years 1893–1910, appeared frequently in the monthly and annual publications of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. The following report, documenting the course and effects of the cholera epidemic in the Jewish community of Tehran in the summer of 1892, is in many respects representative of his conscientious and highly informative body of writings. It contains much useful information and data about the Jewish community of Tehran during this time and sheds light on a rather untypical case of cooperation and solidarity between the Jewish rabbis of Tehran and the heads of the Shi‘ite clergy in that city in the course of the devastating epidemic. For Mirza Nurullah’s family background, and his father’s relations with the missionary H. Stern, see H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yāhud-i Iran*, vol. 3, pp. 743–752, and H. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, p. 196. For his education and missionary training in London and Mogador and his return to Iran, see *JJ*, May 1889, pp. 71–74, and *LSPCJ*, 79 (1887), p. 131; *ibid.*, 80 (1888), p. 127, and 81 (1889), pp. 114–115. As to a decision on behalf of his family to send him to Paris at the age of thirteen in order to receive education in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (a decision that did not materialize), see *BMAIU*, vol. IV, March 1876, pp. 42–43. On his missionary work and the high degree of trust and esteem he enjoyed among the Jews of Iran, see R.E. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, pp. 117–118, 121–122 and 134. The parentheses in the following passage appear in the original text.

The Cholera Visitation

“I believe that a trustworthy account of the cholera visitation in Persia during July, August, and September¹ will be of interest. It was first noticed in Meshed (the capital of the province of Khorasan), where thousands of pilgrims go from all parts of Persia to visit the tomb of the eighth Imam, called Imam Reza.² The cases were reported to be nearly 800 daily, and the number of deaths reached 500.³

¹ Of the year 1892.

² Ar. *Rīza* (Per. Reza), being the honorific title and the common name of ‘Ali ibn Musa Kazim (153–203 Q./770–813 C.E.), the eighth Shi‘ite Imam, whose sepulcher in Mashhad is the most venerated and visited Shi‘ite site inside Iran.

³ This particular outbreak of cholera epidemic in Iran, one among many in the course of the 19th century, originated in Baku (the capital city of the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan), and spread northward to Russia and southward to Iran. It

“From Meshed the disease spread to other towns of Khorasan, till it made its appearance in Teheran on the 2nd of August (the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem).⁴ The Jewish quarter was the first to be infected, many Jews dying. As soon as it appeared, the Jews left their houses and shops and went either to Demavend or to Ispahan, on a pilgrimage to the Saint house of Sarah the daughter of Asher.⁵ For upwards of twenty-eight days all the Jewish shops were closed, synagogue worship was suspended, and there was no rabbi to slaughter meat. Almost all the Jewish physicians left the quarter, except Dr. Mirza Mahdi (my brother, who was baptized in Teheran in the year 1888),⁶ and no Mohammedan doctor would visit Jewish patients. The exact number of Jews who died of cholera, according to Jewish statistics issued afterwards, was 225.⁷ The disease soon after spread amongst the Persians in Teheran, and for upwards of eight days the

reached Tehran on or about July 25, 1892 (i.e., early days of the month of Muharram 1310 Q.) through the provinces of Khorasan (the cities of Damghan and Simnan) and Gilan (the city of Rasht). See H. Nategh, *Musibat-i Waba va Bala-yi Hukumat*, pp. 18–19. According to some estimates, up to one hundred thousand people (out of an estimated total population of 7–8 million in Iran) died as a result of this epidemic in 1892. Cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persia: Western Mission*, p. 311.

⁴ I.e., the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Ab 5652.

⁵ Highly revered among the Jews of Iran, the site associated with and known as Sarah Bat Asher (i.e., Serah, daughter of Asher, the granddaughter of the Jewish patriarch Jacob, mentioned in Genesis 46:17) is located near the village-town of Pir Bakran (in the district of Lanjan) about 60 kilometers to the south of Isfahan. According to ancient Jewish belief, Serah (pronounced Sarah by the Jews of Iran) was blessed by Jacob and enjoyed eternal life. According to this belief, she was among the Jews who were exiled to Babylon (following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.). The site dedicated to her consists of a cave and an ancient prayer house. Cf. S. Sorudi, “Ha-Meqomot ha-Qedoshim shel Yehudey Paras” (The Holy Sites of the Jews of Persia), in *Yehudey Iran*, ed. A. Netzer, pp. 121–123.

⁶ Mirza Nurullah’s older brother, Mahdi, a physician by profession, was born ca. 1850 and died in May 1899. He had close relations with Mirza Nurullah and assisted him in his various missionary and relief activities amongst the Jews of Tehran. He was survived by a daughter, named Sultan, and a son, named Jacob, both of whom were baptized by Mirza Nurullah in 1899. Cf. JMI, September 1899, pp. 141–142 and March 1900, p. 46.

⁷ According to another source (S.G. Wilson, op. cit., p. 311), this number reached 250. The latter figures suggest that about 5 to 6 percent of the Jews of Tehran died as a result of the epidemic. In 1881 the Jews of Tehran numbered about 2500 souls. See *Habazeleth*, year 11, no. 39 (November 20, 1881), pp. 13–14. In 1886 the number was estimated at 3,000 (*ibid.*, year 16, no. 22, February 19, 1886, p. 176), a number which had grown to about 4,000 in 1889. Cf. *Archives Israélites*, vol. 50 (1889), p. 247. In 1892, the year of the epidemic, G.N. Curzon estimated the Jewish population of Tehran at about 4,000. See his *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 510.

number of deaths went up from 200 to 1,000 daily.⁸ The Mohammedan shopkeepers closed their shops and fled. In many houses dead bodies were left unburied for a day or two. The prices of provisions went up very much, and it was very hard for poor Jews and Armenians to get bread, which was a most serious thing.

"The European residents of Teheran soon started a Cholera Relief Fund and helped the American Missionaries to open their hospital in Teheran. The Revs. J.L. Potter,⁹ L.F. Esslestyn,¹⁰ and S.L. Ward¹¹ gave their services and visited the houses where patients could be found. The disease also appeared in Shemiran (the summer resort of Teheran), and the village in which I had taken up my residence suffered most. Out of 500 inhabitants, 125 persons died in ten days. Miss S.L. Smith,¹² M.D. (American Missionary), offered her services for this village. The death-rate amongst Europeans and Armenians was much less than amongst Jews and Mohammedans, on account of the mode of living. Of the ninety Christians in Dizashub¹³ not one died.

"It is customary in Persia, when famine or any kind of plague visits the country, for all the mollahs (priests) and rabbis to call their followers to prayer. The places appointed for assembly are cemeteries, where

⁸ This figure is supported by various contemporary Persian and European sources. See, e.g., I'imad al-Saltana, *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, p. 829, and Y. Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahya*, vol. 1, p. 116. Cf. H. Nategh, *Musibat-i Waba*, op. cit., p. 19. According to Nasir al-Din Shah's personal physician, the French Dr. Feuvrier, who was in northern Tehran during this period, between August 20 to August 23, close to 800 people died in Tehran daily. See his *Sih Sal dar Darbar-i Iran*, pp. 397–398. According to the latter source, most of the victims in Tehran belonged to the poorer classes who did not have the material means to flee from the infected city. Most of the Jews of Tehran during this time belonged to the poorer socio-economic strata.

⁹ Arriving in Iran in 1874, Rev. J.L. Potter was the shepherd of the American Presbyterian Church of Tehran, and conducted missionary and relief work amongst Christians, Jews and Muslims in Tehran in the 1890s. See J. Elder, *History of the American Presbyterian Mission in Iran*, p. 33.

¹⁰ He conducted various missionary and relief work in Tehran during this period and was to head the American hospital in Mashhad, where he died of typhus in 1918. See *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹¹ This is Rev. Samuel L. Ward, the director of the American school in Tehran during the years 1887–1898. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹² The first female American physician who arrived in Iran, in 1889, on behalf of the American Presbyterian Mission, and served in Iran for some thirty-four years. During the cholera outbreak of 1892, she attended the sick in the mountain villages to the north of Tehran. See *ibid.*, pp. 42–43, and Wilson, op. cit., pp. 259–260 and 310.

¹³ "Dizashub," a village in the mountainous area to the north of Tehran, which together with the other nearby villages of Tajrish, Zargandah and Rustam-Abad were hard hit by the epidemic. On the effects of the cholera in Dizashub compare Dr. Feuvrier, op. cit., pp. 395–396.

they pray to God for mercy. Accordingly, the chief Mohammedan priest appointed a day in August and invited the Moslems to prayer. The Chief Rabbi, on hearing of this, appointed the same day and asked the Jews also to go out for prayer. A procession started from the Jewish quarter, consisting of about 500 Jews carrying a scroll of the law in front, beating their breasts, and reciting prayers in Hebrew. The Mohammedan mullahs sent Moslems to protect them, and also lamps and candles to be lighted and carried in front of the Pentateuch. When the Jews reached their cemetery, they were met by a large crowd of Mohammedans who had gone out for that purpose, and the two parties prayed together for mercy. Afterwards the Moslems accompanied the Jews to one of the synagogues, where they again prayed. On another occasion the Jews were invited by the Persians to their mosque for prayer. They went (an unheard thing for Jews to put their feet in a Persian mosque!) and worshipped together.

“This dreadful disease also appeared in Tabriz (the capital of the province of Azerbaijan), Hamadan, Yezd, and Ispahan.”

ON THE CONDITION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF
HAMADAN IN THE YEAR 1864, ACCORDING TO A LETTER
BY THE HEADS OF THAT COMMUNITY TO JEWISH
LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF WESTERN EUROPE

Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the course of the many centuries that preceded it, the Jewish colonies of Hamadan and Isfahan constituted Iran's two oldest Jewish settlements. Having maintained a continuous existence in the city throughout Iran's Islamic history (i.e., ever since the mid-7th century C.E.), the foundation of the Jewish colony in Hamadan evidently dated back from some three centuries prior to the advent of Islam in Iran. As far as the beginning and subsequent history of the Jewish settlement in this important western Iranian city are concerned, however, no comprehensive archeological and historical studies have so far been conducted. The lack of scholarly investigation on the one hand and the non-availability of reliable information concerning the beginning and early history of the Jewish settlement in the city (much like the state of research and knowledge concerning Iran's other old Jewish settlements such as those of Isfahan and Yazd) have led to the acceptance of old traditions and popular beliefs as representing historical truth. The blending of old beliefs and oral accounts that appear to contain grains of historical evidence have typically resulted in confusion and misunderstanding as to the origin and early history of the Jewish settlement in Hamadan. Located 160 miles (256 kilometers) west-southwest of Tehran, Hamadan is generally identified with the ancient Ekbatana-Hagmatana of the Achaemenid empire. Known and referred to in the Bible as Ahmetha (Ezra 6:2), the city was used as a summer residence by the Achaemenian kings, whereas Susa (the Hebrew Shushan) served as the administrative capital of the empire, and Persepolis (in the southwest) as the empire's ceremonial capital. According to an ancient tradition that gained currency both among the Jews in Iran and outside Iran's borders, Esther, the bride of Ahasuerus (whom modern scholars seek to identify with the Achaemenid

emperor Xerxes I, r. 486–465 B.C.E.), founded the Jewish colony in Hamadan. Moreover, according to the same popular tradition, Esther and her cousin, Mordecai (the protagonists of the Biblical Book of Esther), were both buried there. The ascription of the founding of the Jewish colony in Hamadan to Esther as well as the authenticity of the long sanctioned belief that Esther and her cousin were both buried in the city have been questioned on various archaeological, historical and textual grounds. The founding of the Jewish colony in Hamadan evidently took place some centuries after the Achaemenid period, and, according to some Iranian sources, it evidently occurred only during the Sasanian period (220–634 C.E.). Cf. L. Lockhart, *Famous Cities of Iran*, pp. 47–48. The suggestion that Jews in large numbers were found in the main provincial centers of western Iran during the Sasanian period is found in pre-Islamic Iranian sources (in the Pahlavi language) that deal with Iran's geography, history and administration in pre-Islamic times. In a Pahlavi geographical composition, entitled *Shahristānīhā ī Erān*, or "The Provinces of Iran" (a catalogue of the provincial towns and capitals of Iran under the Sasanian kings put into writing in the 9th century C.E.), we are told that Shūshandukht, the Jewish wife of the Sasanian king Yazdigird I (r. 399–420), founded the city of Shūsh, known in Jewish tradition by the name of Shushan ha-Birah. See M. Zand, "Jewish Settlement in Central Asia in Ancient Times and in the Early Middle Ages" (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim*, 35 (1988), p. 8. According to the same Pahlavi source, Shūshandukht is further said to have founded a Jewish colony in Shūsh, or Susa, located in the present-day province of Khuzistan, in the southwest of Iran. Cf. Lockhart, *ibid.*, p. 48. While the latter mentioned Pahlavi source speaks specifically of the founding of a Jewish colony by Shūshandukht in Shūsh, located far away from Hamadan, in another section it also states that Shūshandukht, who was "the daughter of the head of the Jewish exiles in Babylon," founded the Jewish colony of Hamadan. See E.E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran*, London 1935, pp. 105–106. Ever since their settlement in the latter city (apparently during the reign of Yazdigird I, i.e., 399–420), Jews referred to the city as Shushan ha-Birah, i.e., "Shushan the Royal Palace," as well as "Shushan the Capital City." In the opinion of the archaeologist Professor Ernst E. Herzfeld, who examined the archaeological and historical context of the beginning of the Jewish settlement in Hamadan and pointed to the plausible identity of the Jewish figures that are buried there: "The Jewish colonies of Hamadan and Isfahan do not go back, as it is suggested, to the Assyrian

and Neo-Babylonian epoch, but to the beginning of the fourth century A.D., and the combination is obvious: the so-called tomb of Esther is the tomb of queen Suzan (i.e. Shūshandukht), who founded the Jewish colony there. In Shūshandukht, the mythical queen Esther became a reality; after 800 years her name was forgotten, her role not." See E.E. Herzfeld, *ibid.*, p. 106.

Hand in hand with numerous historical, religious and communal factors that elevated the standing of this Jewish community in the eyes of Iranian Jews throughout the centuries, the very existence of the Jewish shrine believed to contain the bodies of Esther and Mordecai further enhanced the prestige and significance of this ancient colony in the religious identity and collective heritage of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements. Moreover, as far as the relations between the Jews of Iran and their coreligionists outside Iran's borders are concerned, the latter community was, and still is, perceived as the most ancient and authentic symbol of Jewish life within the political and cultural frontiers of Iranian civilization. Indeed, in the diverse written and oral sources of Jewish religion, tradition and literature created and recorded in the course of the centuries (and particularly ever since the redaction of the Talmud in the 7th century C.E.), the Jewish community of Hamadan and the Biblical-mythical figures of Esther and Mordecai with which it is closely associated, came to represent more than any other Jewish colony or site in Iran the continuity of Jewish life in Iran ever since the Biblical times. The latter Jewish sources and texts, chief among them the books and scrolls of the Hebrew Bible in which the city of Shushan (Esther 3:15) and Shushan ha-Birah (Esther 2:3, Daniel 8:2 and Nehemia 1:1) are mentioned, formed the sources of diverse images, associations and notions concerning the Jews of Hamadan as well as the Jews of Iran. Indeed, in the traditional Jewish sources and texts that shaped the common notions and perceptions of world Jewry with regard to the Jews of Iran until recent times, the Jewish community of Shushan and its ancient Biblical and post-Biblical associations gave rise to a host of semi-historical and mostly fictional and romantic notions concerning the past and present of Iran's Jewish inhabitants.

As regards the history of the Jewish settlement in Hamadan during the late Sasanian and early Islamic eras, however, we possess scanty references and allusions. In the eighth century (C.E.), a native Jew of the city, named Yehuda Yudghan, headed the Jewish messianic and sectarian movement initiated by Abu 'Isā of Isfahan. See L. Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, New Haven 1952, pp. 51, 334–336 and 391. That the

city had a large Jewish community in the 11th and 12th centuries is attested by the famous Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the city and recorded in his travel-book (ca. 1162), that “Hamadan is the great city of Media, where there are 30,000 Israelites.” He further noted that “in front of a certain synagogue there are buried Mordecai and Esther.” See *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. and trans. into English by M.N. Adler, op. cit., p. 57. Moreover, we know from the letters of the Babylonian scholar Samuel ben Ali, the prominent and influential head of the main Talmudic academy in Baghdad (d. 1194), that an academy (Heb. *Yeshivah*) existed in Hamadan during his time, and that the latter institution was active under the auspices of the Jewish authorities in Baghdad. (Cf. H.C. Cohen, s.v. “Hamadan,” in JE, vol. 14, pp. 803–804). That the community was a center of Jewish learning after the Mongol invasion (beginning of the 13th century), may be deduced from the fact that the famous Rashid al-Din Fazlallah (b. 1247), the Jewish physician, vizier, historian and scholar in the service of the second Mongol ruler Abaqa (r. 1265–1281), was born and evidently raised in the Jewish community in the city. See W.J. Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Mediaeval Islam*, New York 1969, pp. 119–123, and A. Netzer, “Rashīd al-Dīn and His Jewish Background,” in *Irano-Judaica* III, eds. S. Shaked and A. Netzer, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 118–126. The history of the community in the 14th and 15th centuries (i.e., during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods) is as much shrouded in obscurity. However, with the establishment of the Safavid state (in 1501), and particularly during the second half of the 17th century, we learn of the community’s growing hardships. The Judeo-Persian poet Baba’i ben Lutf of Kashan, who chronicled and described in verse the persecutions of the Jews throughout Iran under Shah ‘Abbas I (r. 1595–1628), and particularly during the reign of Shah ‘Abbas II (r. 1639–1666), informs us that the Jews of Hamadan suffered especially at the hand of Muhammad Beg, the fanatical vizier of ‘Abbas II. The latter, so we are told, gave them the alternatives of embracing Islam or of leaving the country empty-handed. Those who refused to do either were put to death. Moreover, similar to the conditions that prevailed during this period in Iran’s other larger Jewish communities, the offer of rich rewards for apostasy occasioned a considerable number of conversions among the Jews in the city. Following the invasion of the Afghan tribes to Iran in 1722, that resulted in the fall and disintegration of the Safavid state, the newly crowned Afghan ruler Muhammad Shah massacred, in 1725, a great number of Jews in Hamadan, among

them the Chief Rabbi of the community, named Mulla Musa. Another massacre occurred by order of Tahmasb Quli Khan, better known as Nadir Shah (r. 1735–1747). Cf. M. Seligsohn, s.v. “Hamadan,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, p. 188.

As regards the general condition of the community during the late 18th century (i.e., the years coinciding with the rise of the Qajar dynasty), the different sources and testimonies dating from those years and the beginning of the 19th century all point to diverse hardships and plights that severely damaged the communal and individual lives of the Jews in the city. That the community underwent considerable decline in its demographic size as well as in its communal institutions and overall security and prosperity is evidenced by observations made by European travelers and officials as well as oral testimonies and letters written by communal heads and rabbis of Hamadan during the 1820s–1840s. As to the decline in the number of the Jews living in the city and the significant decrease in the number of the communal institutions and synagogues in the community ever since the mid-18th century, in oral testimonies given by the heads of the community to Christian missionaries in the 1840s, we find both bitter complaints about the current hardships of the Jews in the city during the 1820s–1840s as well as information concerning the community’s more recent history and decline. In a conversation with the Jewish-born German missionary Rev. Henry A. Stern, that took place in Hamadan on May 15, 1845, the Chief Rabbi of Hamadan spelled out the community’s current hardships and pressures (among them high and disproportionate taxes, diverse forms of legal discrimination and restrictions, extortions, and physical and psychological violence perpetrated routinely against the Jews in the city by officials as well as various groups and individuals belonging to the Shi’ite population in the city). When asked by H. Stern: “Has your community here (i.e. in Hamadan) always remained as it is now?,” the Chief Rabbi replied, saying: “No. A hundred years since (i.e., ca. 1740s), there were thirteen synagogues in this place, and a very great number of Jews, but the Ishmaelites have only left us three, and one which was erected a few years since, they destroyed before it was completed.” For the full text of the latter conversation, which contains much relevant information on the general living conditions and hardships of the Jews of Hamadan in the 1840s and earlier, see in the report of H. Stern in *JJ*, December 1845, pp. 412–415. As a general summary of the testimonies of the rabbis and communal heads of Hamadan concerning the overall condition of the community

during the 1820s–1840s, H. Stern further added: “I will now give you some particulars relative to the state of oppression in which our Jewish brethren are kept by the Moslems, which I have learned from the (Jewish) mullahs: I. They have not justice rendered unto them. Any Gentile can inflict upon them any punishment he may choose, with the greatest impunity; II. They dare not dress themselves respectfully, else they would be suspected of being rich, and would consequently be plundered; III. If they possess anything of value, the Moslems are sure to seize it; IV. It is dangerous for a Jew to go out on Friday, that being one of the Moslems’ sacred days; V. When it rains, they are subject to great annoyances if they go out, as they may splash a Moslem, and so pollute him; VI. Whenever a Moslem charges them with a crime, the whole town is sure to believe it, and they are ready to massacre them all. Last year some pilgrims from Masjid (i.e., the Mosque of) Ali (in Najaf, in southern Iraq) spread a report that Jews in Baghdad, aided by the (Sunni) Turks, had effected some mischief. The whole town was immediately in an uproar. The Moslems cried ‘The Jews are our enemies and must be destroyed.’ And it was only by payment of a large sum of money that they escaped from destruction. Their position in Hamadan is indeed painful, and the marks of oppression are visible in every countenance. In Baghdad, the Jews are fine noble-looking men, and walk with all the gravity imaginable; here, they go about with their heads bowed down, their countenance pale and emaciated; and their cringing slavish appearance and demeanour stamps them all with the badge of oppression. In Hamadan there are thirty Jewish families who came from Khorassan, where they were so fiercely persecuted a few years since that they were glad to escape on any terms; some fled to the adjacent countries, others saved themselves by professing Islamism. Such is the condition of the Jews in Persia. We were told that they were less oppressed in Teheran; but this we shall soon have an opportunity, I trust, to ascertain—and will send you the result of our inquiries in a future letter.” See *ibid.*, p. 413.

Evidence pointing to the fact that the community was confronted with numerous hardships, legal restrictions and physical threats during the early years of the nineteenth century (i.e., difficulties that had persisted ever since the mid-18th century and evidently earlier) is found in eyewitness accounts and reports of European travelers and officials who visited the city during the 1810s. Some of the main problems and disabilities of the Jews in the city, that resulted from the particular urban, demographic and administrative characteristics of Hamadan, persisted

through the last decade of the nineteenth century. Chief among the latter we should point to the presence of numerous strong Shi'ite clerical families in the city that held and fanned anti-Jewish beliefs and sentiments; the traditional system of government and administration in the district of Hamadan that catered to the Muslim population in the district and inside the city and imposed disproportionately heavy taxes and charges on the Jewish merchants and laborers in the city, and, the fact that the Jews formed a substantial and by large the biggest non-Muslim denomination living in the midst of a predominantly Shi'ite population in the city. Some of the hardships, hazards and weaknesses that characterized the lives of the Jews in the city during the 1810s were already visible and apparent even to foreign travelers and European officials that were visiting the city or passing through it. The well-known British traveler, author and diplomat James Morier, for example, who visited the city in 1815, observed that "two hundred families of them (i.e., Jews) live in a state of great misery, paying twenty tumans monthly to the Government, and are not permitted to cultivate the ground, or to have landed possession." See J. Morier, *Second Journey Through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor*, London 1818, p. 226. The French diplomat and writer Eugène Flandin, who served as an attaché at the French embassy in Teheran during the years 1840–1841 and visited the city in 1840, observed that the Jews in the city still numbered about two hundred families (i.e., approximately 1200–1400 souls), living in a city whose entire population consisted of some 4 to 5 thousand people. Flandin found a very small number of Christian families in the city, thus pointing to the fact that the Jews formed a disproportionately large and conspicuous group of non-Muslims living in the midst of the city's Shi'ite population. Thus, according to the figures provided by Flandin, and supported by other European sources (principally reports of Christian missionaries during this period), during the 1840s the Jews of Hamadan constituted about 20 percent of the city's total population. As to the livelihood and occupations of the Jews in the city, Flandin pointed out that a large number of the Jews in the city were engaged in the fabrication and sale of what he called "an immense quantity of ancient-looking Greek and Sasanian coins." Cf. E. Flandin, *Voyage en Perse*, 2 vols., Paris 1851, vol. 1, pp. 382–385.

While the accounts of European travelers and officials dating from the 1810s–1840s provide us with valuable but essentially disjointed and impressionistic observations with regard to the Jews of Hamadan and their general conditions, the notes, reports and journals of Christian

missionaries (chiefly those of the London-based Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews) provide us with much detailed and concrete data and information on the Jews of Hamadan as of 1845. The information provided by the latter missionaries on the living conditions and hardships of the Jews of Hamadan during the mid-nineteenth century are substantiated by numerous other accounts and eyewitness reports by Jewish professionals and emissaries from Europe and the lands of the Middle East, who lived, worked or traveled in Iran during this period. In the writings and testimonies of the latter group of European and Middle-Eastern Jews on various aspects of communal, material and cultural lives among the Jews of Hamadan in the 1840s–1850s, we come across information and descriptions that are fundamentally similar to those provided by the European missionaries. Among the European Jewish professionals and explorers who resided and traveled in Iran in the 1850s and wrote highly detailed and informative accounts and reports on the Jews of Hamadan in the 1850s, mention should particularly be made of Nasir al-Din Shah's Austrian physician, the ethnographer and scholar Dr. Jacob E. Polak. (Regarding him and the list of his writings on the Jews of Iran during the 1850s–1860s, see in our book, above, source no. 4, introduction.) In a long and detailed article on the city of Hamadan and the living conditions and vulnerabilities of the Jews in the city in the mid-nineteenth century, J.E. Polak provided an account that in its essential points and observations confirms and supplements Rev. H.A. Stern's report (in *JII*, December 1845, pp. 412–413), cited above. In Polak's words: "The Jewish colony of Hamadan lives in a special quarter in the midst of the town, in a ghetto. Their sanctuary is a small monument, built in the shape of a dome, and, according to tradition, contains the tomb of Mordecai and Esther. The Jews earn their living by all kinds of gold-and-silver work; by glass cutting, silk-weaving, dealing in old clothes and skins. Many of them are masons, blacksmiths, tailors, and shoemakers, while some make wine and distill liquor out of raisins. They are also occupied in the production of coins for only they know how to make and prepare the tools that are needed for this purpose. A few among them also know how to polish precious stones. Among them are found also some who practice medicine, which they study according to the works of Avicenna, who is buried in Hamadan. They live under great difficulties, because they are considered impure outcasts; they are constantly exposed to the caprices of the governor, who uses every pretext to plunder them; should a Jew appear in the street dressed decently, or

on horseback, the spectators are indignant at him for daring to appear like a true Muslim believer. Should he, on the contrary, be dressed miserably, he is followed by a crowd of young rascals, who throw mud and stones at him.” For the complete text of the latter article, see E.J. Polak, “Ha-Yehudim be-Eres Paras” (The Jews in the Land of Persia), in *Hamagid*, year 9, issues 20, 21 and 22 (May 25, 30 and June 7, 1876), pp. 154–155, 164 and 172, respectively. For an abbreviated version of the same article in French, entitled “Persecution Israélite,” see *Archives Israélites*, 26 (1865), pp. 440–445, 489–491.

Despite the numerous legal disabilities, socio-economic restrictions and continuous physical threats and insecurities that affected the lives of the Jews in Hamadan during the first and second halves of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community of Hamadan was among Iran’s four largest Jewish concentrations throughout the century (the three others being those of Shiraz, Isfahan and Tehran). Moreover, all the available sources of information reveal that despite the diverse harassments, hardships and challenges that faced the members of the community and its struggling communal bodies throughout the course of the nineteenth century, in relative terms, and when compared with most of Iran’s other larger and medium-sized Jewish settlements, the community of Hamadan was better organized, economically stronger, and educationally and culturally it enjoyed an advantageous position. Furthermore, as of the second half of the nineteenth century, with the gradual demographic growth and communal ascendancy of the community in the capital city of Tehran (i.e., a community that among other factors enjoyed a higher degree of physical security, legal protection and socio-economic opportunities due to its proximity to the central government, the court and the foreign legations in the city), the communities of Tehran and Hamadan constituted Iran’s two stronger and more influential Jewish communities. Indeed, owing to the considerable geographical diffusion of Iran’s Jewish population in the course of the nineteenth century, and the fact that particularly as of the fall of the Safavid state in 1722 no central and representative Jewish leadership on a state level existed in Iran, the communal heads and influential families and individuals of Hamadan and Tehran assumed and fulfilled some of the roles and responsibilities of such badly needed leadership. In their relations and dealings with local and state officials as well as with various influential persons and groups inside Iran, and particularly in their growing contacts and relations with the Jewish organizations and leaders in Western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire (as of

the 1860s), the heads of the communities of Tehran and Hamadan oftentimes appeared and acted as representing the collective needs, hardships and aspirations of Iran's scattered Jewish communities and settlements.

The relative strength and influence of the Jewish community of Hamadan in the course of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century resulted from numerous closely related historical, inner-communal and cultural factors that distinguished the lives of the Jews in this old community. In addition to the ancient aura and religious sanctity that the colony enjoyed among the Jews of Iran and the neighboring territories, many of whom performed pilgrimages to the shrine of Esther and Mordecai throughout the Jewish annual cycle, the community enjoyed several unique economic, communal and cultural characteristics that contributed to its overall internal resources and enhanced its standing in comparison to Iran's other larger and mostly oppressed urban communities, among them the communities of Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan. As far as the available written and oral sources demonstrate, despite the considerable decline in the size of the community and its respective assets and resources as of the first half of the 18th century, the community succeeded in preserving and maintaining its traditional organized functions and institutions throughout the nineteenth century. We know from various independent sources that during the first half of the nineteenth century, and as late as the 1890s, the communal lives of the Jews in the city were conducted in affiliation with three large synagogues, the largest of which, known as the Old Synagogue, or the Synagogue of Mordecai, had as many as one thousand congregants. See *JJ*, December 1845, p. 415; *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI, No. 33 (May 24, 1850), pp. 262–263; *AJA*, 6 (1876–1877), p. 91; and *JMI*, February 1894, p. 18. The community owned several properties and buildings, among them three public baths (Heb. *Miqva'ot*), affiliated with its synagogues. Furthermore, it enjoyed incomes from donations provided by Jewish pilgrims as well as by the Jews of Hamadan themselves who visited the shrine of Esther and Mordecai in the city and participated in congregational prayers and various services held at the site during Sabbath days and Jewish holidays, and particularly during the Purim Festival. See Menahem S. Ha-Levi, *Masevet Mordekhay ve-Ester* (The Tombstone of Mordecai and Esther), Jerusalem 1932, pp. 19–22. The latter assets and incomes enabled the community to provide various services to its members. Noteworthy among such services were those extended to the needy members of

the community by means of charities collected by the community's synagogues. In addition to its dual system of communal leadership, that was headed by a chief rabbi (who led and superintended the ecclesiastical and internal legal affairs of the community) and a President (Heb. *Nasi*), who represented and protected the community in its relations with officials and local individuals and groups, the community had a relatively large number of well-to-do and influential families who were actively involved in the lives and affairs of the community. The existence of a significant number of well-to-do merchants, traders and dealers in the community (particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century), resulted, among other reasons, from the fact that until the 1870s Hamadan was the only city in Iran in which Jews were allowed to establish themselves in the local bazaars. In the words of the annual report of the Anglo-Jewish Association, published in 1877: "Most of the Jews of Persia carry on petty trades. Nowhere, except in Hamadan, are they allowed to have shops in the bazaar. In the other towns they are excluded from establishing themselves in such bazaars, but have shops in bazaars of their own." See AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 93. The existence of the latter layer of influential and well-connected merchants, wholesale traders, financiers and physicians in the city, many of whom were directly involved in the daily affairs and struggles of the community, contributed to the overall financial and material resources of the community. Although on the basis of all the primary and secondary sources available to us on the Jews of Hamadan we know that throughout the nineteenth century the vast majority of the Jewish families in the city were economically hard-pressed or extremely poor, the existence and presence of numerous wealthy and resourceful Jewish merchants and traders in Hamadan enabled the community to protect and preserve itself and function as an organized community. Moreover, the economically stronger families and individuals enabled the community to provide basic needs and services, among them the payment of the community's collective taxes and charges to the government and the provision of services in the areas of welfare, religion, education and culture, etc. For further information on the Jews of Hamadan and their communal bodies and functions during the mid-nineteenth century, see in our book, above, source no. 17 (entitled "The Old Synagogue in the City of Hamadan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century"), and source no. 21 (entitled "The Educational System in the Jewish Community of Hamadan in the 1840s"). For additional sources on various aspects of communal, material and family lives among the Jews of Hamadan

in the 1850s, see the series of articles published by Dr. Abraham de Sola in *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. VI (1850). For the exact bibliographical references of the latter articles, see source 17 in our book, introduction.

In addition to the various communal bodies and activities that insured the continuation of Jewish life in the city, the community of Hamadan was among Iran's few and dwindling centers of Jewish learning and traditional scholarship in the course of the nineteenth century. Together with the communities of Yazd, Kashan and Tehran, Hamadan was known as having several old rabbinic families and educated circles who were familiar with the different branches of traditional Jewish law, literature and scholarship. Moreover, during the second half of the nineteenth century, and as early as the 1850s, we know of the existence of some educated families and individuals in the community who, in addition to their active knowledge of Judeo-Persian and Hebrew, were also familiar with literary Persian as well as Arabic and French. As far as we can learn from the available sources, the latter phenomenon, that had considerable importance for the overall cultural and educational orientations among the educated elite in the community, was limited mostly to the communities of Hamadan, Tehran and Bushihr. In comparison with Iran's other urban and provincial Jewish communities during most of the nineteenth century, the latter communities were in a greater degree of physical, social and commercial contact and relations with foreign and European subjects and agencies. In this respect, the better educated individuals and circles in the communities of Hamadan and Tehran were the precursors of modern-oriented cultural and educational trends that later on (as of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward) gained strength among Iran's other larger and smaller Jewish communities. At this stage of research we do not know precisely what were the specific socio-cultural channels and conditions through which some of the educated Jews of Hamadan acquired their knowledge of classical Persian and Arabic and particularly their familiarity with French and evidently other European languages as early as the mid-nineteenth century. This entire chapter concerning the early exposure of the Jews in the community to both local Persian and foreign European sources of cultural influence and change still awaits research and investigation. The available and mostly scattered and disjointed sources of information, however, seem to suggest that the growing commercial, social and cultural contacts of the Jews of Hamadan with the Jewish community of Baghdad, as well as the growing activity of Christian missions in Hamadan as of the 1840s, account

for the acquisition of European languages and adoption of modern oriented notions and horizons by some educated Jewish individuals and circles in this important commercial city.

Referring to the general level of education and scholarship among the Jews of Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, the renowned French writer, thinker and diplomat Comte Arthur de Gobineau, who lived and served in Iran during the years 1855–1858, noted that “the Jews (of Persia) have doctors of religion some of whom are very learned. I was truly struck with astonishment one day when one of these erudite Jews spoke with me with admiration about Spinoza and asked me for some explanations with regard to Kant’s philosophical system.” See Le Comte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale*, Paris 1866, p. 65. In the latter mentioned work, Gobineau spoke particularly of Mulla Lalazar of Hamadan, who, in his words, had assisted him to translate from French into Persian the acclaimed philosophical treatise of the French mathematician and philosopher Descartes, known as *Discours sur la méthode*. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 101. Some among these learned Jewish individuals and families of Hamadan were in close social and cultural contact with educated and learned Muslims in the city during the 1860s and 1870s. The Christian missionary J. Lotka of the London Society, who conducted evangelical work among the Jews of Hamadan during the 1870s–1880s, reported in 1882 that “some six years ago a party of influential Jews and Moslems (in Hamadan) used to gather at the house of (the convert) Hezekiel Chayim for the purpose of discussing diverse topics of learning.” See J. Lotka’s report in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. C.M. J.d. 52/3, document no. 7, entitled “Recent Conversion of Jews at Hamadan.” The existence of several educated Jewish families and individuals in Hamadan, who kept abreast of the cultural and educational reforms in the Jewish community of Baghdad, was among other reasons that the educated Jews of Hamadan displayed a high degree of receptiveness to new and untraditional influences in the areas of general culture, religion and education. From letters that were written by the heads of the communities of Tehran and Hamadan to the secretariat of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris in 1875, we learn that the first modern-oriented cultural society among the Jews of Iran was established in the community of Hamadan ca. 1875. Interestingly, the chief rabbi and communal judge of Tehran during the years 1870–1876, i.e. Mulla Bakhaj Hamadani, was born, raised and educated in Hamadan. From several highly illuminating autobiographical and communal details and references that appear in the letters and

petitions written by the latter learned rabbi to Jewish organizations and publications in Europe and Baghdad we learn much about the cultural profile and intellectual orientation of the educated circles in Hamadan in the 1870s and onward. For a representative sample of the latter body of writings, that reflect some of the pro-Western and modern-oriented trends among the rabbis and educated circles of Hamadan during this period, see source no. 31 in our book, entitled “On the Jewish Community of Tehran in the year 1875,” and note 10 in particular. For another relevant sample, i.e., a literary passage in Hebrew composed by rabbis and communal heads of Hamadan in the summer of 1872, see also in our book, above, source no. 23, entitled “Song of Praise and Prayer for Sir Moses Montefiore.”

Letters and other writings produced by rabbis and educated individuals from Hamadan, as well as information provided by Christian missionaries, European visitors and Jewish travelers and emissaries, who visited or worked in the Jewish community of Hamadan during the 1860s–1890s, point to the considerable responsiveness of the Jews in the community towards opportunities and promises entailed in Western-oriented ideas in general and towards educational and socio-religious transformation in particular. The Jewish emissary Ephraim Neumark of Tiberias (in Ottoman Palestine), who visited the Jewish community in the city in 1884 and provides us with valuable information with regard to diverse areas and hardships of life among the Jews of Hamadan in the 1880s, noted that out of the 800 Jewish families (or roughly 4,000 souls) who lived in Hamadan in 1884, some 150 families had embraced the Baha’i faith. Cf. E. Neumark, *Masa’ be-Eres ha-Qedem*, op. cit., pp. 80–81. In addition to conversion to the latter faith, that was known for its innovative and profoundly reformist tenets and messages, a growing number of Jewish families in the community enrolled their children (boys and girls) in the schools and educational programs run by the Christian missions in the city. Some of the latter missionary schools and frameworks, chief among them the American Presbyterian Mission and the Anglican London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, had established their schools and missionary facilities inside the Jewish quarter. Cf. JMI, February 1894, p. 18, and E. Neumark, *ibid.*, p. 80. The diverse activities and services of the latter Christian missions among the Jews of Hamadan (i.e., activities that along with their primary evangelical goals attended to the urgent needs of the local community in the areas of education, health and general relief and welfare) further resulted in the conversion of several Jewish families

and individuals to Christianity. Despite the persistent struggle of the rabbis and communal leaders of Hamadan against the activities of Christian missions among the Jews in the city, the number of the Jewish converts in the community was on the rise during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and it continued until the establishment of the Alliance school in the community in the year 1900. According to one account, in the year 1881 the congregation of Jewish Christians in Hamadan consisted of as many as forty men, thirty women and twenty children. See S.G. Wilson, *Persia: Western Mission*, op. cit., pp. 251–253. Cf. J. Elder, *History of the American Presbyterian Mission in Iran*, translated into Persian by S. Azari and entitled *Tarikh-i Misiyun-i Imrika'i dar Iran*, Tehran 1333 Sh./1954, pp. 45–48. For further details on the activity of the American Presbyterian Mission amongst the Jews and Armenians of Hamadan and the cooperation between Jewish and Armenian leaders in the city to stem the activity of the Christian missions amongst their members, see in the testimony of S.G.W. Benjamin, the first accredited American minister to Iran who served in that capacity during the years 1882–1885, in his book *Persia and the Persians*, London 1887, p. 231.

The growing communal needs, religious and cultural tensions and socio-economic gaps and divisions that affected the internal lives of the community during the second half of the nineteenth century were further aggravated by continuous frictions and conflicts between the Shi'ite majority population in the city and the Jews, who formed a substantial and by far the largest group of non-Shi'ites living in the city. Numbering some 200 families in 1815 (see J. Morier, *Second Journey Through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor*, op. cit., p. 226), the Jewish population had more than doubled by 1852 and consisted of some 500 families. See Rev. A.A. Isaacs, *Biography of the Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, D.D.*, London 1886, p. 62. In the year 1875, following the horrific Great Famine of 1871–2, that took the lives of many Muslims, Jews and others in the city, the community's population was estimated at some 450 families. See AJA, 4 (1874–1875), p. 93. The community, however, grew steadily and significantly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. By the year 1889 the Jews in the city were estimated at some 3,000 souls (out of an estimated total population of 25,000 people). See JMI, April 1892, p. 52. By the year 1894, their numbers had reached 3,500 (out of an estimated total population of 30,000). See JMI, May 1895, p. 78. According to various accounts, by the year 1903 the Jewish population in the city had reached some 5,000 souls. See, e.g., *the Jewish Encyclopedia*,

vol. 6, p. 188, and A.V.W. Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, London 1906, p. 148. In contrast to the rather substantial and conspicuous number of Jews in the city throughout the nineteenth century, the Armenians and other Christians in Hamadan formed a relatively small demographic group of non-Shi'ites inside the city. As late as the last decade of the nineteenth century, the total number of Armenians and all the other Christians in the city did not exceed some 60 families. Cf. JMI, May 1895, p. 78. Moreover, in contrast to the Jews, that constituted a large but fundamentally unprotected religious minority living in the midst of the Shi'ite population, the Armenians and the members of the other Christian denominations in the city were relatively shielded and enjoyed a higher degree of physical protection and legal status due to their affiliation with various European and Christian powers and agencies. In the words of the traveler and explorer Isabella Bird, who visited the city in the year 1890, and observed the relative status and condition of the Jews and Christians in the city: "The Jews are supposed to number from 1500 to 2000 souls and are in the lowest state of degradation; they are daily kicked, beaten, and spat upon in the streets, and their children are pelted and beaten in going to and from the school which the Americans have established for them. Redress for any wrongs is inaccessible to them. They get their living by usury, by the making and selling of wine and *arak*, by the sale of adulterated drugs, by peddling in the villages, and by doing generally the mean work from which their oppressors shrink. Many of them have become Moslems, the law being that a convert to Islam can take away the whole property of his family. A large number have, it is believed, joined the secret sect of the *Bābis*...; (As to the Armenians), there are a number of Armenians in Hamadan, and several villages in the district are inhabited exclusively by them. There are also villages with a mixed Persian and Armenian population. They all speak Persian, and the men at least are scarcely to be distinguished from Persians by their dress. They are not in any way oppressed, and, except during occasional outbreaks of Moslem fanaticism, are on very good terms with their neighbours. They live in a separate quarter, and both Georgians and Protestants exercise their religion without molestation. They excel in various trades, especially carpentering and working in metals. Their position in Hamadan is improving, and this may be attributed in part to the high-class education given in the American High School for boys, and to the residence among them of the American missionaries, who have come to be regarded as their natural protectors...; the population of Hamadan is "an unknown

quantity." It probably does not exceed 25,000, and has undoubtedly decreased. Seyyids (i.e., Muslims believed to be the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and *mullahs* form a considerable proportion of it, and it is one of the strongholds of the *Bābis*." See I.L. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, first published by J. Murray, London 1891, new edition, 2 vols., London 1988, vol. 2, pp. 155–156.

Although the accounts and descriptions provided by European travelers with regard to the Jewish community of Hamadan (as well as those concerning the Jews in other towns and provinces in Iran) were ordinarily based on outside observations and general impressions, and as such they oftentimes reflect a lack of familiarity with the internal affairs and less visible aspects of life in the community, nevertheless, many of those reports and observations identified and described the external manifestations of deeply rooted weaknesses, hardships and deprivations in which the vast majority of Iran's Jewish subjects lived much through the end of the nineteenth century. The latter cited eyewitness account of Isabella Bird on the Jews of Hamadan, recorded in 1890, touches upon some of the major legal, physical and socio-economic hardships in the community that resulted from the fundamentally precarious and poorly protected condition of the vast majority of the Jews in the city as late as the last decade of the nineteenth century. From numerous letters, documents and oral testimonies provided by rabbis, communal heads and ordinary members of the Jewish community of Hamadan during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, it emerges that the generally poor, oppressed and threatened appearance of the Jews in the city was a genuine reflection of numerous disabilities, plights and threats that affected the lives of the community and its members during the entire course of the nineteenth century. The document before us, i.e. a letter by the heads of the community of Hamadan depicting some of the major hardships of the community in the 1860s, is instructive in several respects. It was written by the Chief Rabbi of Hamadan, i.e. Mulla Eliyahu, son of El'azar Eliyahu (d. 1865), who was considered as one of the most learned and admired communal and spiritual leaders of the community of Hamadan during the entire course of the nineteenth century. (Regarding him and his authority in Hamadan, see source no. 4 in our book, note 2, and particularly M.S. Ha-levi, *Masevet Mordekhai ve-Ester*, op. cit., pp. 7–8). Reflecting the rather organized structure of the community, the letter was signed by the community's chief rabbi and followed by eleven other heads and notables of the community

(altogether twelve in number, an allusion to the twelve tribes of ancient Israel). Written in rabbinic Hebrew and in rhymed prose, the letter was addressed in person to Eliezer Lipmann Silbermann, the editor of the first Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Maggid* (i.e., *The Declarer*), which had begun its appearance as a weekly in Lyck (Eastern Prussia) in 1856. The weekly, that dealt mostly with cultural, literary and social subjects of interest to the Jewish communities of Western and Central Europe, was inspired mostly by the intellectual ideas and the world-view of the European Enlightenment Movement. The heads of the communities of Hamadan and Tehran in the 1860s and 1870s were familiar with the latter weekly, and some of them, among them the Chief Rabbi of Tehran (the aforementioned Mulla Bakhaj of Hamadan), were among its devoted readers. [See in the letter of Rabbi Bakhaj ben Yehezqel Hamadani to the secretariat of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, in AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6, No. 6912, dated 1 Adar 5634 (February 17, 1874), received in Paris on April 13, 1874.] We do not know what were the precise channels through which this and evidently other European publications and writings reached the rabbis and the better educated individuals in the communities of Hamadan and Tehran during this relatively early period in the relations between the Jewish communities of Iran and the Jewish cultural and philanthropic organizations of Europe. However, there are indications that this specific important weekly was dispatched to Hamadan and Tehran by reform-minded educators and communal officials in the Jewish community of Baghdad, most of whom were involved in the cultural and educational activities of the Alliance in the latter city. Being aware of the growing influence of the Jewish press in the lives and affairs of the Jewish communities in Europe and beyond, the heads of the community of Hamadan sent their letter to Isaac Luria, the headmaster of the Alliance school in Baghdad, who transferred it to the editor of *Hamagid*. The editor of the weekly published the letter, together with some editorial notes and recommendations as to how to assist the Jews of Hamadan, in two consecutive issues of *Hamagid*, namely No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and No. 4 (January 25), p. 28. The factual information and the implicit references contained in the letter before us confirm what we know from numerous other sources with regard to the overall condition of the Jewish community of Hamadan during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century and earlier. Among other matters, the letter speaks on behalf of the Jews of Hamadan as well as the rest of the Jewish communities of Iran during this period. Reflecting the

considerable need and desire of the Jews of Hamadan to obtain political and diplomatic intervention by Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe on their behalf, the letter describes and analyzes the roots and symptoms of the major hardships and disabilities underlying the individual and collective lives of the Jews in the city during the 1860s. Chief among the hardships spelled out in the letter are: (1) The heavy burden of disproportionately high taxes and charges imposed on the community, and diverse forms of extortion to which the community's institutions and members were subjected; (2) absence of basic physical security in the city as a result of daily acts of violence and psychological terror inflicted on the Jews in the city by local Muslim residents; (3) the prevalence of governmental and administrative incompetence, opportunism and corruption both in Hamadan and in other parts of the country, further aggravating the condition of the unprivileged and poorly protected segments of the general population, and Jews among them; (4) the growing number of Jews converting to Islam in Hamadan as a result of various economic, social and psychological pressures and inducements exerted on the Jews in the city by local Muslim officials and religious authorities; (5) the occurrence of new and changing patterns of physical violence against the Jews in the city stemming from religious bigotry of the local mob and incitement by some of the local Shi'ite clerics; (6) some recent cases of killings of Jews in Hamadan and Senh (= Sanandaj), that were ignored and remained uninvestigated by the officials.

For further sources of information and references relevant to the Jewish community of Hamadan during the second half of the nineteenth century, in addition to those already mentioned above, see the following: I.J. Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa*, op. cit., pp. 202–205; C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, op. cit., pp. 74–79; J. Bassett, *Persia: The Land of the Imams. A Narrative of Travel and Residence, 1871–1885*, New York 1886, pp. 131–134, 332–336; idem., *Persia: Eastern Mission. A Narrative of the Founding of the Eastern Persia Mission*, Philadelphia 1890, pp. 175–177, 202–233; 'Ayn al-Saltana, *Ruznama-yi Khatirat-i 'Ayn al-Saltana (Qahriman Mirza Salur)*, ed., M. Salur and I. Afshar, vol. 1, Tehran 1374 Sh./1995, pp. 339, 376–378; H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 523, 639–640, 657–665, 773–776; I. Ben-Zvi, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot*, op. cit., 340–341, 346–348, 361–386. For further valuable reports and surveys on the general condition of the community and specific events and developments that affected the lives of the Jews in Hamadan during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, see

particularly in AJA, 22 (1892–1893), pp. 19–24, and appendix C, in the latter report, pp. 55–63, dealing in detail with the outbreak of severe acts of persecution against the entire Jewish community of Hamadan, inspired and led by the Shi'ite cleric Mulla Abdullah in the years 1892–1893. Cf. *Archives Israélites*, 54 (1893), pp. 19, 82–83. Additional useful information is found in JMI, May 1895, pp. 78–79; BAIU, No. 25 (1^{er} et 2^e semestres), 1900, pp. 76–89; BMAIU, October 1900, pp. 159–162, and December 1900, pp. 211–214; and A. Confino, *L'Action de l'Alliance Israélite en Perse*, op. cit., pp. 110–125.

Letter by the Heads of the Community of Hamadan

Hamadan
13 Elul 5624
(September 14, 1864)

Addressed by us, the downtrodden and burdened members of the Jewish community of Hamadan, to the noble leaders of our brethren in the British Kingdom, and first and foremost among them His Eminence Sir Moses Montefiore;¹ the venerable Chief Rabbi of Britain, the sage Nathan Adler ha-Cohen;² and the Society of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the city of Paris and its esteemed and honorable president, Mr. Isaac Crémieux.³

We, the scattered sheep of Israel who reside in the city of Hamadan or Shushan ha-Birah, wish hereby to inform you of the many ills and hardships that afflict our lives in this city. First, on account of the many taxes and charges that are laid upon us we find ourselves utterly helpless and distressed, so much so that no one among us knows what to do any longer. Indeed, all that we hear are the words: “Bring us

¹ The prominent Jewish leader and philanthropist of Britain (1794–1885). Regarding him and his activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see, in our book, source no. 23, introduction, and particularly source no. 35, note 26.

² This is Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler (1803–1890), the German-born Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. He was installed as chief rabbi on July 9, 1845. Regarding him and his diverse religious and philanthropic activities, see s.v. “Adler, Nathan Marcus,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pp. 198–199.

³ The French statesman and senator (1796–1880), who was one of the founding fathers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris in 1860. Regarding him, see, in our book, source no. 31, note 2.

money and gold!" Thus, the fruits of our labor and everything that is dear and of value to us belong to them, to the effect that we are exceedingly impoverished. They embezzle our money and possessions and leave us the scraps.

In addition to the above said, they beat and torment us. They beat the adult and the children and the elderly and the youth, so that fathers and sons in our community are being killed in the market-places and in the streets, without anyone there to take pity on us and show us compassion. Thus, in the morning we wish for the night to fall and at night we dread the break of the dawn. All the above, notwithstanding, we wish to inform you, our esteemed brethren, that, Heaven forbid, it is not against our sovereign, His Majesty the King of Persia,⁴ that we are raising our voices and crying out. Heaven forbid! Our lord and sovereign, His Majesty the King, is himself a man of faith and a merciful king, who grants justice to all who seek it, acting most generously towards all his subjects. Indeed, the king himself responds most justly to all grievances and he acts with righteousness and in accordance with all measures of justice, good faith and fairness, never wishing any oppression, extortion or robbery. Despite all the king's benevolent intentions, however, the troubles ensue from the chiefs and officials in the kingdom as well as from those who are charged with authority in managing the affairs of the kingdom, among them an assortment of princes, counselors and notables. Indeed, many misdeeds, wrongdoings and disturbances are routinely committed by the latter named. They serve in various capacities as guides and mentors, officers of law and judges, who rule over the common people, and they are the ones who guide and direct the common people to wreak havoc and destruction.

As to the sum of taxes assigned by His Majesty the King upon the Jews in the city, it amounts to eight hundred tumans imposed on the (owners of) houses and on those who trade in the market.⁵ However,

⁴ I.e., Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896).

⁵ According to the statement of the chief rabbi of Hamadan to Rev. H.A. Stern, dated May 26, 1845, during this time the Jewish community in the city consisted of some 300 families. They were required to pay the collective amount of forty tumans per month to the governor, whereas all the Muslim families in the city combined (estimated at some 1500 households) were required to pay the monthly amount of twenty tumans. Cf. *JJ*, December 1845, p. 412. According to the report of the British official R. Thomson, submitted in April 1868, the official amount of annual taxes imposed on the community of Hamadan during that year was 600 tumans. He, however, pointed out that in practice double the amount was exacted. See his report of April 28, 1868, in FO 248/244, reproduced and discussed in our book, below, as source no. 10. As to

they increase the burden of the said amount and collect as much as three or four times that amount. The weight of the taxes is so overbearing that many a Jew says to himself: "I am sick and tired of life on account of all these."⁶ He asks himself: "Why shall I have such a life any more; I shall surely have peace if I walk in the paths of the other gentile nations and people." Indeed, owing to the numerous hardships and sufferings that afflict him, many a Jew such as this forsakes the religion of his fathers and goes to worship other gods.

Moreover, due to the extreme and cruel fanaticism of the gentiles, in case a Jew dies and one of the members of his family (having converted to Islam) comes forth and claims that he is the legitimate heir to the deceased, even if the deceased has a number of sons and daughters and family members, then the said convert precedes all the others in the inheritance. In fact, all the others are obliged to do as he wishes and they all shall satisfy him, as indeed the common law and practice require them to do, for, otherwise, the judges and clergymen in the city write and sign unanimously a verdict to punish or put to death whoever opposes the law. Thus, they beat and torture the heirs of the deceased with such severity until the latter do as the law requires and return home empty-handedly.

In addition to the troubles and plights spelled out above, it has been a few years now that the Jews in the city are faced with yet another form of harassment. Every year now there emerges from the families of the Muslim clergy in the city a wrathful individual who, holding an axe in his hand, goes around in the market-places and in the nearby streets and alleys and calls out loud: "O 'Ali! O 'Ali!"⁷ He leaps and twirls in circles frenetically, and the masses of people go after him with

the fact that the Jewish community of Hamadan was considered a lucrative and highly desirable source of income and taxes for governors of Hamadan during the last decade of the nineteenth century, see in the diary of 'Ayn al-Saltana (the deputy-governor of Hamadan in 1890–1), in his *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, op. cit., pp. 339 and 376.

⁶ This is a quotation from Genesis 27:46. The original biblical verse reads: "I am sick and tired of life because of the Hittite women."

⁷ I.e., 'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, the first Imam and founder of the Shi'ite tradition. A cousin as well as a son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali served as the fourth successor to the Prophet. He was killed in the year 40 Q/661, at the age of 59. An exalted figure and a source of inspiration in Shi'ite history and religion, 'Ali is lauded by believers and invoked by numerous names and epithets. More commonly used among the latter are his heroic titles of "Commander of the Faithful" (Ar. *Amir al-Mu'minin*), "The Lion of God" (Ar. *Asad-Ullah*; Per. *Shir-i Khuda*), and "The Lion" (Ar. *Haydar*).

excitement, chanting and repeating after him. Whenever they run on their way into a Jew who would not utter their chants and slogans, they inflict on him deadly blows, using heavy axes and hammers made of iron; they hit him over his head or over his thighs and legs, causing him severe injuries. There are several people among us who have been injured in this manner and fallen ill. Also, you probably know or have heard of what happened to us some five years ago, when they falsely accused us of having mocked the Prophet (Muhammad), and how they punished and fined us in the amount of one thousand tumans and inflicted on us numerous humiliations and insults.⁸ They treat us in this manner every single day and they lodge against us libels and false charges with the intention of embezzling our possessions and crushing our bodies and spirits. They, alas, will succeed if God Almighty does not help us. Please be assured, however, that not only for the sake of ourselves, the Jews of the community of Hamadan, are we pleading before you and begging you to deliver us from our troubles, but rather for the sake of all our Israelite brethren who reside in Persia and are caught between pain and trouble. Just during this past week, in the city of Seneh,⁹ they killed a Jewish man in the city's market, and no one inquired about his death; and in this city,¹⁰ a month ago, they killed a

⁸ The particulars of this specific incident were described in a letter that was written by seven rabbis and heads of the community of Hamadan and sent to Sir Moses Montefiore. The letter was subsequently published in *The Jewish Chronicle* of London and in the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid*. According to the letter, sometime during the spring of 1860, the Jews of Hamadan were accused of having committed an act of abomination against the Muslim faith. Heightened religious emotions among the Shi'ite residents in the city resulted in an attack on the Jewish quarter. Some of the Jews found shelter in the house of one of the Shi'ite clergymen in the city. The governor, however, catering to the Muslim residents and their clerical leaders inside the city, imprisoned and tortured a large number of Jews. By order of the governor, so we are told, the thumbs and toes of several of those arrested were amputated. Others lost their ears or noses. Following the latter physical punishments, the Jews were forced to march through the streets of Hamadan while being jeered by the passers-by and the mob. In addition to the latter punishments, the community was forced to pay to the governor a fine in the amount of 20,000 krans (i.e. 200 tumans). For the complete text of the letter, which was written and signed in Hamadan on 18 Sivan 5620 (June 8, 1860), see *Hamagid*, year 4, No. 44 (November 14, 1860), p. 175. For another similar outbreak, which occurred in Hamadan during the month of May 1863, and in the course of which a Jew in the city was lynched and several others were severely injured on charges of vilifying the Prophet Muhammad, see in the detailed letter from the Jews of Hamadan, published also in *Hamagid*, year 7, No. 32 (August 12, 1863), pp. 251–252.

⁹ I.e., the present-day Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Iranian Kurdistan, located west of Hamadan.

¹⁰ I.e., in Hamadan.

Jew in one of the nearby villages, and, again, about a year ago,¹¹ they killed a certain Jew and cast away his body in the fields, and the wild beasts fed on his corpse, so that nothing save his bones and disfigured body were left. In such cases, if the relatives of the killed person find the strength and appear before the Governor, and if the latter ascertains that their statement is sound and truthful, they decree the amount of eighteen tumans to be paid as blood money. However, oftentimes even the said amount is not paid to the relatives of the person killed.

Wherefore, in light of all that was spelled out above, we have hereby come to plead before you, the esteemed and honorable brethren of ours, begging that you increase and spread your loving kindness over us; may you, please, think of a good idea and thought that can be put into action. We, though, pray that whatever steps and actions are taken by you may entail our deliverance and well-being, for, truly, upon you and your deeds are our eyes set. We pray and hope that you redeem us from our troubles and from our poor conditions and degradations, as, woefully, no spirit of life is left to us.

Written and signed here in the Jewish community of Hamadan, in the Hebrew year of 5624,¹² with abundance of wishes for your strength and joy and years of life and peace.

The young and humble Elia'u (sic) El'azar Elia'u¹³

The young and humble Aharon son of Rabbi Shelomo

The young and humble El'azar Hayyim

The young and humble Ya'acov Mordechai

The young and humble Menasheh son of Ya'acov

The young and humble Abba son of Yosef

The young and humble Ye'udah (sic) Binyamin

The young and humble Yehudah Ashayya

The young and humble El'azar son of Binyamin

The young and humble 'Ezra son of ... (?)

The young and humble Ya'acov Eliyahu Yisrael

The young and humble David El'azar Yudi (sic)

¹¹ I.e., ca. September 1863.

¹² I.e., the year 1864.

¹³ The Chief Rabbi of Hamadan (d. 1865). Regarding him, see in the introduction above, and source no. 4, note 2.

LETTER FROM THE COMMUNITY OF URUMIA WITH
REGARD TO THE CONDITION OF THE JEWS OF
WESTERN AZERBAIJAN IN THE YEARS 1888–1893

Introduction

What follows is a letter by the heads of the community of Urumia in which they describe various incidents of violence and persecution against the Jews of Western Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan. The letter throws light on the generally precarious condition of the Jewish communities of northwestern Iran during the second half of the nineteenth century. Written in Hebrew, the letter was addressed to the secretariat of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris, and to the headquarters of the Anglo-Jewish Association, London. Unlike the majority of similar letters, which were sent by the heads of the Jewish communities of Iran to various Jewish organizations and leaders in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, this one is not signed at its bottom, nor does it give the names of its writers. Designated as document number 9931/2, the letter, written on March 1, 1893, was received at the headquarters of the AIU on May 17, 1893. For the original text, see AAIU, IRAN. IIC. 6.

The geographical term used in the letter to signify the territories of Western Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan is the Hebrew “Paras Qatan,” literally meaning “Small” or “Lesser Persia.” The origins and history of Jewish migration and settlement in these northwestern regions of Iran are obscure. Although the Jews of Kurdistan and northwestern Iran believe themselves to be the descendants of the exiles from the kingdoms of Israel and Judea, not much is known about them in the historical records until the mid-12th century C.E. Cf. W.J. Fischel, “The Jews of Kurdistan a Hundred Years Ago,” *JSS*, 6 (1944), pp. 195–197; A. Ben-Ya‘acov, *Qehilot Yehudey Kurdistan*, op. cit., pp. 14–15, and “Kurdistan,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 ed., vol. 7, pp. 585–586. Despite numerous historical, cultural and religious bonds and characteristics that were shared by the widely scattered Jewish settlements in these regions (chief among them the use of the Neo-Aramaic dialect

as their main spoken language), the lives of the Jewish communities and settlements under Iranian-Shi'ite control differed in some basic respects from those who lived within the nominal borders of the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Although the Jews of Ottoman Kurdistan suffered during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from numerous legal, physical and socio-economic disabilities and hardships resulting chiefly from their actual subjugation to the authority of their local Kurdish lords and strongmen, they were not ordinarily persecuted on religious grounds. Cf. Y. Toby, "Yehudey Bavel (Iraq ve-Kurdistan)" [The Jews of Babylonia (Iraq and Kurdistan)], in *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Arsot ha-Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 32–33. In Iran, however, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Jewish communities of Western Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan were subjected to continual acts of persecution, discrimination and assaults committed by their Muslim-Shi'ite (and at times Christian) neighbors. As regards pogroms and numerous instances of blood libel and violence against the larger communities of Urumia, Salmas, Maragha, Tabriz and others during the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, see W.J. Fischel, "The Jews of Kurdistan a Hundred Years Ago," op. cit., pp. 222–225; idem., "Masa' le-Kurdistan, Paras u-Vavel" (Journey to Kurdistan, Babylonia and Persia), being a translation into Hebrew of relevant passages from the nineteenth-century Jewish traveler David D'Beth Hillel's travel book, outprint, Jerusalem 1939, pp. 20–22. Cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persia: Western Mission*, pp. 237–238. For sources documenting instances of blood libel and other religiously motivated persecutions of Jews in the northwestern town of Salmas during the first and second half of the nineteenth century, see I. Ben-Zvi, *Nidhey Yisrael* (The Exiled of Israel), Tel-Aviv 1953, pp. 106–107, and *The Jewish Times*, New York, vol. 1, No. 32, October 8, 1869, pp. 6–7.

As regards the general status, demography, economy and related communal and socio-cultural lives of the Jews in this region during the nineteenth century and earlier, we possess scant and scattered information. The traveler David D'Beth Hillel, who among his extensive exploratory journeys to Jewish settlements and communities of the Middle East and India visited the Aramaic speaking Jews of the Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan in the year 1826/7, provides us with much valuable information and data with regard to the demography, occupations, language, communal lives and general living conditions of the Jews in northwestern Iran. Cf. W.J. Fischel, "David D'Beth Hillel: An Unknown Jewish Traveler to the Middle East and India

in the Nineteenth Century,” *Oriens*, 10 (1957), pp. 240–247. In these vast territories, which were characterized by an exceptionally diverse population divided along tribal, ethnic, religious, linguistic and factional lines, he found sixteen rural and urban Jewish settlements and colonies, of which eleven (including those in the towns of Banah, Sakiz, Sawujbulagh, Mianduab and Garus) had an average of about 20 families each. See W.J. Fischel, “The Jews of Kurdistan a Hundred Years Ago,” *op. cit.*, pp. 210–211. The four largest Jewish communities of Western Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan during this time (i.e. 1826) were those of Senneh (nowadays Sanandaj) and Kirmanshah, each consisting of about 300 families (roughly 1500–1800 souls), and Urumia (200 families) and Salmas (100 families). *Ibid.*, p. 211. After about half a century, i.e. in 1873/4, while the smaller communities of Banah, Sakiz, Sawujbulagh and others, mentioned above, had almost doubled and reached an average of 40–50 families each, the larger communities of Senneh, Kirmanshah, Urumia and Salmas had not grown in size in comparison to 1826. See *AJA*, 4 (1874–1875), p. 93. As was the case with the Jewish communities of Iran in the other major geographical regions in which they lived, chiefly those in the south, the southwest and the center of the land, a steady rate of demographic growth appears to have taken place also in the Jewish communities of Iranian Kurdistan and Western Azerbaijan during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Thus, according to figures that were collected and published by J. Bassan, the headmaster of the first Alliance Israélite school in Hamadan, by the year 1901 the community of Banah had grown to 60 families (from 30 in 1873), the community of Sakiz had now 180 families (compared to 60 in 1873); Sawujbulagh (present-day Mahabad) had now 175 Jewish families (compared to 80 in 1873), and the community of Mianduab had grown to 175 families (from an estimated 20 families in 1873). Bassan estimated the total Jewish population of Iranian Kurdistan and Western Azerbaijan in 1901 at twelve thousand. For the latter’s detailed list of the Jewish communities and settlements in this region, including the exact number of their respective houses and synagogues, see *BAIU*, deuxième serie, No. 26, 1901, p. 68.

Most of the Aramaic speaking communities and settlements of northwestern Iran continued their existence until the year 1948, when, in the wake of the establishment of the State of Israel, substantial numbers (and in some cases the entire members) of these communities immigrated to Israel. Regarding the exact number of the Jews in those communities prior to their departure to Israel during the years

1948–1953, see I. Ben-Zvi, *Nidhey Yisrael*, op. cit., pp. 42–43; A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Qehilot Yehudey Kurdistan*, op. cit., p. 143, and particularly the detailed report prepared by the communal and immigration organizer Shalom Kamani, dated November 11, 1950, and addressed to David Ben Gurion, in file S6/5430, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

The Letter from the Community of Urumia

Written today, the 13th of the month of Adar 5653 (March 1, 1893), and addressed by us, the poor and downtrodden members of the community of Urumia,¹ may God protect it, with a thousand greetings and blessings to you, our charitable brethren, Children of Israel (and) members of the holy associations in Paris and London, may the Almighty preserve and sustain them in life.

Following our best wishes for your well-being, we hereby would like to reveal to you that we, the (Jewish) people who live in northwestern Iran, are hard-pressed, persecuted, harassed, beaten and killed year after year by officials and ordinary gentiles, and there is no one to take pity on us, nor is there anyone for us to trust save our God in Heaven.

In the town of Sawujbulagh² there was a (Jewish) man by the name of Shaul, whose son Pinhas had a good-looking wife. A Muslim cler-

¹ Located in the center of a highly fertile plain (about 80 kilometers long and 30 kilometers wide), and at a distance of some 20 kilometers from the western shore of Lake Urumia, lay the city of Urumia. Due to its central location, surrounded by some 300–400 villages, and lying on the road which connected Western Azerbaijan with the Ottoman Empire, Russia and beyond, Urumia served as the main commercial and administrative city of the entire district. Cf. G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, pp. 535–536. With an estimated population of 30 thousand residents in 1890, consisting mostly of Turkish speaking Shi'ite Muslims, the city also had a few hundred Christians (mostly Nestorians and Armenians) as well as some two thousand Jewish inhabitants, whose community dated back to some centuries earlier. See S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, pp. 93–95, and A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Qehilot Yehudey Kurdistan* (The Communities of the Jews of Kurdistan), p. 144. For further information on this community during the 19th century and earlier, see source no. 18 in our book, notes 1–3.

² Currently known by the name Mah-abad, the town of Sawujbulagh (also called Suj-Bulaq and Sublaq) is located to the south of Lake Urumia, about 130 kilometers from the city of Urumia. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya'i-yi Iran*, vol. 4, p. 512. The town served as the administrative and commercial center of a district which bore the same name. See S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 99. The town, which in the year 1892 appeared to be dilapidated and poverty stricken, had a mixed population of about ten thousand people, the majority of whom were Kurds and the remainder consisting of “a mixture of Persians, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Jacobites and Nestorians, speaking five different languages.” Ibid., p. 100. The Jewish community in the town, which numbered about

gyman in the town, named Mulla Qadir,³ coveted her; so, he invited Pinhas to his house, where he ordered his servants, and they killed him with knives. Following that, he forced the killed man's wife to apostasize. However much the Jews cried out and protested, nobody listened to them.

This and more. In the Hebrew month of Tamuz 5652 (June 25–July 24, 1892), two Jews went out from the town of Naqadah⁴ to sell merchandise in the village of Lachin.⁵ These were Eliyahu son of Mashiah, and his son, David. The two of them were killed and their property was robbed. The Jews heard of what had happened, and so the brother of the killed man, i.e. Michael son of Mashiah, and a relative of his, named Yusef, set out and went to Lachin to find the bodies of the killed ones. They found their property among the gentiles, whereupon the villagers attacked and killed them too inside the village. No matter how much the Jews tried, they did not succeed even in taking back the property of those who were killed. (Also) the governor, who was in charge of the town of Sawujbulagh at the time, did not pay attention to them.⁶

70 families or approximately 400 souls in 1873 (see AJA, 4, 1873–1874, p. 93), occupied some 175 houses in 1901, numbering about 1000 souls and having one synagogue. Cf. BAIU, No 26, 1901, p. 68. The Jewish inhabitants of the town made a living by “peddling drugs and manufactured commodities in the nearby villages, dyeing cotton goods, lending money, making gold and silver lace and selling groceries.” See Isabella L. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 207; cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 107; idem, *Persia: Western Mission*, pp. 246–247.

³ Other than what we are told in the letter, no further details about this person are available.

⁴ Popularly known and pronounced also as “Naqadeh” and “Naqad,” this town was (and still is) located some kilometers to the north of Sawujbulagh. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya-i-yi Iran*, vol. 4, p. 529. In the year 1881 the town had some 60 Jewish families, roughly about 360 souls, most of whom were linen-weavers and tailors. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 ed., vol. 7, p. 586. Cf. A. Ben-Ya‘acov, *Qehilot Yehudey Kurdistan*, op. cit., p. 147. By 1901 the Jewish population of the town had grown to some 800 souls who occupied 130 houses and had one Synagogue. Cf. BAIU, No. 26, 1901, p. 68. In the year 1948 Naqadah had about 150 Jewish inhabitants, all of whom immigrated to Israel by 1953. See I. Ben-Zvi, *Nidhey Yisrael*, op. cit., p. 43.

⁵ Located about 5 kilometers to the southeast of Sawujbulagh. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya-i-yi Iran*, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 472.

⁶ During the period referred to in the letter (i.e., 1888–1893), and some years earlier, the Jews of Sawujbulagh were subjected to numerous hardships, acts of violence and extortions committed by local Muslim residents and government officials. In two long letters that the members of the community sent to the heads of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1879, they described at length numerous instances of maltreatment and abuse inflicted on them in the town. According to these letters, the governor and the officials in the town either ignored various libels, acts of violence, killings and forced

In the town of Eshnu,⁷ in the month of Tevet 5653 (December 19, 1892–January 17, 1893), they destroyed and pillaged the synagogue, and also killed an eighteen-year-old girl named Leah, the daughter of Zebulun. (Also) they tore two Torah scrolls to pieces, and however much the Jews cried out and protested nobody listened to them.

This and more. In the city of Urumia, in the month of Adar 5653 (February 15–March 17, 1893), El'az son of Binyamin went to the village of 'Askarabad⁸ to sell merchandise. He went there together with his servant. They killed El'az, but his servant escaped and the people of 'Askarabad did not manage to seize him, and so he saved himself, or rather the Almighty God, blessed be He, saved him. Also, in the same town of 'Askarabad, five years earlier,⁹ Cohen Yonah and his son had gone together to sell merchandise. At night, the innkeeper and his people got up and killed them, and no matter how much we tried we did not succeed in bringing back their bodies and their possessions, for they would not deliver them to us because the owner of the said village

conversions that were perpetrated against them, or else collaborated with the local Muslim residents and clergymen who were involved in these acts. In both letters the heads of the community begged the presidency of the Alliance Israélite to intercede on their behalf before the Iranian monarch Nasir al-Din Shah. For the texts of these two letters from Sawujbulagh, which provide much firsthand information about the nature and perceived causes of maltreatment and general insecurity of the Jews in Sawujbulagh and other towns and settlements near Urumia, see letters No. 9721, dated 1 Shevat 5639 (January 25, 1879), received in Paris on April 18, 1879, in AAIU, IRAN. IB. 20 bis, and, *ibid.*, No. 356, dated 15 Sivan 5639 (June 6, 1879), received on July 4, 1879.

⁷ Known also as Ushnaviyya (as well as Ushnuya, Ushnu and Ushni), the town was, and still is, located about 60 kilometers to the southeast of Lake Urumia. Inhabited by Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Nestorians and Jews, the town was the center of a district which was known by the same name. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya'i-yi Iran*, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 24. In the year 1881 some 80 Jewish families lived in the town; they had one synagogue containing five or six Torah-rolls. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, p. 586. The general lack of security in the region, resulting among other reasons from recurrent bloody incursions and lootings by Kurdish tribes, exacerbated the disabilities and persecutions that were imposed on the Jews in this town. These combined hardships caused some of the Jews in Eshnu and in the nearby town of Miandubab to abandon their religion and convert to Islam. See *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 3 (October 7, 1885), p. 23, and cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, op. cit., p. 98. The community of Eshnu continued to exist through the first half of the twentieth century. In 1948 the town had about 100 Jewish inhabitants, all of whom had immigrated to Israel by the year 1953. Cf. I. Ben-Zvi, *Nidhey Yisrael*, op. cit., p. 43.

⁸ Located about 20 kilometers to the northwest of the city of Khoy, north of Lake Urumia. Cf. *Farhang-i Jughrafiya'i-yi Iran*, vol. 4, p. 331.

⁹ I.e., in 1888.

is a strong man in Urumia. His name is Khusraw Khan, and he is so strong that he does not listen even to the governor of Urumia.

Also, in the month of Sivan 5652 (May 27–June 25, 1892), two young brothers by the names of Gedaliah, fifteen years old, and his younger brother, Michael, twelve years old, were coming to Urumia from a nearby village, within walking distance from Urumia. The (Muslim) gentiles caught them (intending) to kill them. God, the Protector of Israel, overpowered them, whereby Gedaliah pulled the weapons from their hands, and as a result the palm of one of the assailants was cut. The boys fled and were thus saved from being killed. However, the (Muslim) gentiles went to the governor of Urumia, who arrested Gedaliah and beat him three hundred times with wet sticks. They punished him in this manner because there was no one to pity him or show any compassion towards him. Many and many bad occurrences such as this befall and visit us every single year, but we cannot inform our king because of the officials and the governors. Our king, His Majesty Nasir al-Din Shah, is very benevolent, but he resides in the capital city of his kingdom and no Israelite can tell him these troubles. We cannot tell them even to your excellencies; nonetheless, we told them to you due to the excess of our sufferings. For the sake of God, please do not let it be known that we told you. Thank God you are wise and knowledgeable and you will deliberate among you as to how to inform our king, may his glory ever increase, with regard to these troubles. We plead and entreat before you not to remove your attention from over us. Our eyes are lifted up towards our Father in Heaven and towards your help and assistance. May it be the will of God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, to send us a deliverer, even in your days and our days, a savior from Judea, and would that Israel shall dwell in safety, amen.

LETTER BY THE HEADS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
OF TEHRAN TO JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS OF EUROPE
WITH REGARD TO THE STATE OF THE COMMUNITY
OF BARFURUSH, FOLLOWING THE POGROM IN THAT
COMMUNITY IN MAY 1866¹

To the eminent heads and defenders of the Jewish people, that is the righteous union of the deputies of the Jewish communities and their leaders,² and first and foremost among them the honorable Mr. Isaac Luria,³ may your honor enjoy well-being, comfort and boundless regard,

¹ Above is a letter by the heads of the community of Tehran concerning acts of violence and persecution perpetrated against the Jewish community of Barfurush (present-day Babul, the largest town of Mazandaran) during the months of May 1866–January 1867. The original letter in Hebrew, together with enclosures addressed in Persian by the heads of the community of Barfurush, were sent to Isaac Luria, the headmaster of the school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Baghdad (1867–1884). Upon receipt, he submitted the letters to Shelomo Bekhor Hotzin, rabbi, communal leader, writer and publisher in Baghdad (b. 1843–d. 1893), and the latter forwarded the material (on March 6, 1867) to the Hebrew language weekly *Hamagid*, which was among the leading Jewish publications of Europe, and had been appearing regularly in Lyck, Germany, ever since 1856. Both the letter from Tehran and the enclosure from Barfurush were subsequently published in *Hamagid*, year 11, No. 18 (May 8, 1867), p. 140, and No. 19 (May 15, 1867), p. 147.

² Based on what follows, this seems to be a reference to both the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Society of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. The former, being the representative organization of British Jewry, dates back from 1760, and at this time was led by Sir Moses Montefiore, who served as president of the Board during the years 1838–1874. The Alliance was officially established in Paris in 1860, and during this time (1866–1867) was headed by Narcisse Leven, who was one of the six founding fathers of the society.

³ I. Luria (spelled also Lurian), who was born in Russia. A watchmaker by profession and a man of progressive views, he arrived in Baghdad in 1850, where in collaboration with a group of reform-minded Jews of Baghdad he established in 1864 the first Jewish modern school for boys, under the sponsorship of the Alliance. He remained in Baghdad and headed the school until 1884. In addition to his varied educational and cultural activities in the Jewish community of Baghdad, he took an active interest in the condition of Iranian Jews. His articles and reports concerning the living conditions and hardships of Iranian Jewry during this period were published in various Jewish European publications. Regarding him and his activities in the Jewish community of Baghdad, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel mi-Sof Tequfat ha-Ge'onim 'ad Yameynnu* (*The Jews of Babylonia from the End of the Geonite Period until Our Days*), pp. 278–279. On his

and may we all witness the advent of our redeemer, so be it, and may this be Thy will, O Lord.

Having wished you an abundance of life, and kissed the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet, we, the lost brothers of yours in the land of Persia, pray and beg you not to overlook the enormous burden of our plight in the Diaspora, as we are disgraced by our neighbors and mocked and derided by those who surround us. (Indeed) we have already written to you and described to your honor the full gravity of our oppression.

Now (regarding the community of Barfurush),⁴ we heard that our king,⁵ may his glory ever ascend higher, ordered to build their houses

writings and activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see source no. 31 in our book, above, note 5.

⁴ According to various sources, the beginning of the community of Barfurush (referred to also as the community of Mazandaran) dates back from the time of the Safavid Shah Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629). Cf. H.L. Rabino, *Mázandarán and Astarábad*, p. 13. Around the 1820s it had about two-hundred families. See Wolff's diary of 1824, in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 185. On the eve of the violent events against the community, i.e., in 1866, it had an estimated population of one thousand souls, most of whom were occupied in peddling and retail trade. See A. Netzer, "Montefiore ve-Yehudey Paras" ("Montefiore and the Jews of Persia"), *Pe'amim* 20 (1984), p. 59. On Saturday, May 20, 1866, the Jewish quarter was violently attacked and looted by outraged Muslim residents. The immediate trigger for the assault on the entire community was the alleged beating to death of a young Muslim girl (aged about nine) by a Jewish vendor of clothes, who refused to take back fabric sold to her father in the amount of 3 krans. Although various conflicting accounts and details surrounding the circumstances of the young girl's death were subsequently given by the Jews of Barfurush on the one hand and by various Muslim residents, officials and clergymen on the other hand, the death, which occurred on the sixth-day of the holy and religiously charged Muslim-Shi'ite month of Muharram (1283 Q), resulted in an indiscriminate assault on the entire Jewish community. In the course of the outrage, six women and eighteen men were killed (two of the latter being besmeared with petroleum and burned alive), an unknown number were injured, women and young girls were raped, and houses and buildings belonging to the community were looted and set on fire. A large group of the Jewish inhabitants fled the town and hid in the woods, while the remaining ones were forced (or under the circumstances chose) to convert to Islam. The pogrom as well as its background and aftermath have been richly documented. Chief among the archival sources dealing with the pogrom as well as the diplomatic efforts of the European and Ottoman representatives in Tehran to assist the victims are the reports of the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran, Charles Alison, in FO 60/295, FO 60/297 and FO 60/298. Additional primary information concerning the events in the community are found in A. Netzer's above mentioned article, "Montefiore and the Jews of Persia," pp. 59–60; *Letter Books of Sir Moses Montefiore, 1865–1870*, in Mocatta Collection 9, University College, London, pp. 179–180, 188, 205 and 225; *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, ed. L. Loewe, 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 190–191. General reference to the pogrom and its effects on the community are found in G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, pp. 379–380, and especially in A.H. Mounsey, *A Journey through the Caucasus and the Interior of Persia*, pp. 273–282.

⁵ I.e., Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896).

and give them the amount of eighteen thousand tumans (in compensation). However, until this time⁶ they have not given them any money whatsoever, and it is being said that the governor of the town took for himself and swindled a few thousand tumans, and he is unwilling to give them any money whatsoever.⁷ Two men from (the Jewish community of) Mazandaran⁸ escaped and came here to Tehran. A few times they wrote letters, and, putting all their troubles in writing, they wanted to deliver those letters to the hands of His Majesty the King, but the officials prevented them and did not allow their letters to reach the king, so that the king does not know about these matters.⁹ (Furthermore) the Jews of Barfurush have returned to their true religion and are Jewish in all respects. However, they have no houses, no money and no furniture. They neither have a synagogue nor any prayer books. They only have a ritual slaughterer¹⁰ by the name of Mulla Binyamin,¹¹ who is a good and honest man. He slaughters for

⁶ I.e., about the 19th of the Hebrew month of Tevet 5627 (December 27, 1866), when the heads of the community of Barfurush had sent their letter of complaint to the heads of the community of Tehran. Cf. *Hamagid*, year 11, No. 19 (May 15, 1867), p. 147. According to the latter communication, which was sent nearly seven months after the pogrm in Barfuruth, no relief and financial compensation had yet been awarded to the victims, despite strict orders issued to this effect by the Shah.

⁷ According to the British official A.H. Mounsey, who was stationed in Tehran and together with the British Minister Charles Alison was involved in the diplomatic efforts to extend relief and protection to the victims of Barfurush, the exact amount of compensation authorized by Nasir al-Din Shah was 16,000 tumans. This amount, however, was ultimately reduced to 3,800 tumans, as most of it was, so we learn, misappropriated by various ministers and officials. See A.H. Mounsey, op. cit., pp. 280–281.

⁸ I.e., Barfurush.

⁹ Despite Nasir al-Din Shah's increasing efforts to be accessible to his Jewish and other subjects, particularly following his visits to Europe (in 1873 and 1878) and his meetings with and promises to Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe, the Jews of Iran were ordinarily intimidated by state and local officials to approach the king and present their grievances. As observed by the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1877: "The Jews (of Persia) are unable to bring their complaints before the Shah through fear of drawing upon themselves the vengeance of their persecutors." See AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 62. Compare *The Jewish Times of New York*, vol. V, No. 8 (April 18, 1873): "Owing to the great difficulty of approaching the Shah and the fear of death looming before them if a step in that direction is discovered, the Jews have hitherto been prevented from protesting or making a complaint about the wrongs imposed upon them." For similar observations see also AJA, 4 (1874–1875), p. 58, and AJA, 5 (1875–1876), p. 28.

¹⁰ Heb. *shohet*.

¹¹ This is Mulla Binyamin Ze'ev ben Eliyahu, the communal judge, ritual slaughterer and circumciser (Heb. *dayyan*, *shohet* and *mohel*, respectively), who served the community after the pogrom. In the summer of 1882, i.e. sixteen years after the events in the community, he still served as the main religious guide and authority for the Jews of

them and they pray (without prayer books) by heart. (Furthermore) they do not have food to eat and beverages to drink, nor any clothes to protect them from the heat of the day and the cold of the night. (Also) they have written a letter in the Persian language and enclosed it inside this letter. Please give it to Mr. Barukh,¹² may God protect and prolong his life, so that he translates it for you. And, please, also read below what they have written to us, from which you will understand the full gravity of their troubles; you will also learn what the minister of the city, named Mirza Masih,¹³ answered them. May God blessed be He work a miracle for them and the people of the Society (of the Alliance Israélite Universelle) save them from the hands of their plunderers. We are afraid to relate to you all the matters and troubles of ours and theirs;¹⁴ we have already written to you that the European Ministers¹⁵ have kept completely silent; we do not know whether they have done so out of fear,¹⁶ or due to some other reason; whatever the reason may be, we only pray that the Almighty grants you and your

Barfurush. In a letter written by him to the Jewish organizations of Europe on 22 of Sivan 5642 (June 9, 1882) he provides information about himself and about the sad material and religious conditions in his native community still years after the pogrom. For information regarding him and the community of Barfurush in 1882, see BZI, archival file 311, letters 41 and 42.

¹² No information is available about him.

¹³ The term used here to designate Mirza Masih's official position is the Hebrew word *sar*, i.e., "chief," "prince," "ruler," "minister," etc. Mirza Masih, however, was the *vazir*, i.e., "minister" or "chief administrative official," subordinate to the Governor General of Mazandaran, ca. 1283 Q/1866–7 C.E. Cf. I'timad al-Saltana, *Al-Ma'athir wa'l-Athar*, ed. I. Afshar, vol. 1, p. 103. According to a report submitted by a Russian agent who investigated the events in the community of Barfurush, Mirza Masih was in personal contact with Nasir al-Din Shah and received his direct orders from the Shah, who at the time of the pogrom was resorting and hunting with an entourage of about 4,000 guards, servants and courtiers in his summer camp in Mazandaran. See Charles Alison's communication entitled "Russian agent at Barfurush to J. Zenoviev," dated June 7, 1866, in FO 60/297.

¹⁴ Cf. note 9 above.

¹⁵ I.e., British, French and Russian delegates who were interceding on behalf of the Jews of Barfurush.

¹⁶ The pressure exerted by the British and French Ministers on the Shah and his officials to act against the perpetrators of the violence, some of whom belonged to the Shi'ite clergy in Barfurush, led to strong anti-Christian and anti-European sentiments in Tehran. The French and particularly the British representatives in Tehran were explicitly warned and threatened by some of the leading Shi'ite clergymen in Tehran to stop their interference on behalf of the Jews of Barfurush and to the detriment of the Shi'ite community of believers. Under these circumstances the British diplomats in Tehran feared a physical attack by an instigated mob against their Mission. For further details, see Mounsey, *op. cit.*, pp. 279–280.

sons and daughters good health, long life, comfort and peace, and that He adorns all your undertakings with an abundance of joy as well as utmost strength, success and contentment.

Your young and humble devotee,
Bakhaj the son of Yehezqel.¹⁷

And following is the letter which was written by the holy community of Barfurush and sent to the capital city of Tehran, to our master and teacher (Rabbi) Bakhaj,¹⁸ may God watch over him and preserve him in life. The letter, written in the Persian language, was translated into [the holy language of] Hebrew word by word and letter by letter, and this is its language:¹⁹

“We, the people of Mazandaran,²⁰ hereby submit our supplication before the supreme and holy community in the city of Tehran, may God protect it, and before our esteemed master and teacher, the honorable Rabbi Bakhaj,²¹ may God watch over him and preserve him in life, and before the esteemed and revered physician, Mr. Mashiah,²² may God

¹⁷ This is Mulla Bakhaj, the chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Tehran during the 1870s. Born and educated in an old family of rabbis in Hamadan, he moved to Tehran, where he was officially appointed as the chief rabbi of the community, ca. 1870. According to Habib Levi (who relied on the testimony of his father, Rahamim Khodadad), Mulla Bakhaj died in 1875. See his *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, vol. 3, p. 642. However, it seems that Mulla Bakhaj lived at least till the summer of 1876 (see his handwritten signature and words of confirmation in Judeo-Persian, dated 4 Tamuz 5636/June 26, 1876, authorizing a bill of real estate transaction in the Jewish quarter of Tehran, in BZI, archival file 311, document 46). About a dozen letters and communal documents written and signed by Mulla Bakhaj during the years 1866–1876 have been preserved in the archives of the AIU in Paris and at the BZI in Jerusalem. Some of his letters, including the one presented above, were published in the Jewish publications of Europe during those years. For further information on him and his activities on behalf of the Jewish communities of Iran, see also source no. 31 in our book, above, note 10.

¹⁸ See note 17 above.

¹⁹ From here, through the end of the document, the letter of the Jews of Barfurush, which had been written to Rabbi Bakhaj on 19 Tevet 5627 (December 27, 1866). Cf. *Hamagid*, year 11, No. 19 (May 15, 1867), p. 147.

²⁰ I.e., the community of Barfurush.

²¹ See note 17 above.

²² The reference here seems to be to Hakim (i.e., physician) Mashiah, son of Hakim Mushch, who belonged to a well-to-do family of Jewish physicians with ties with the members of the royal court in Tehran. The family was known for its charitable acts on behalf of needy and downtrodden Jews in Tehran and in other communities. He died on 12 Sivan 5653 (May 27, 1893). See H. Levi, op. cit., p. 751.

protect and sustain him. We beg that they watch over their brothers. Thanks are due to God, for we were granted half a life, as you know. The letter which you had sent to us on behalf of our entire community reached us; we rejoiced very much and we trust in God that you and we will all rejoice soon together in the advent of Messiah, the Son of David, so be it, O God, and may this be Thy will.

You wrote to us that the honorable people (of the Jewish community) of Baghdad as well as the people of Paris and London wrote and pointed out that we should inform them what it is that we are requesting, and that they would fulfill our request. Such being the case, we inform you of our desire as follows:

It is now for approximately five hundred years that we have been living in this province, in the city of Barfurush,²³ under the hands of the gentiles. We were engaged in our own trades and we prayed in our own synagogues. In every synagogue there were found ten Torah scrolls. We (also) had teachers for our children, and we lived in security until recent days, when this calamity befell us, when, for no reason, these cruel people attacked us without mercy. First of all they looted all our properties and burned our synagogues. And (afterwards) they killed maliciously twenty-two people from among us, including elderly, youth, women and virgins; and they captured our wives and daughters, like the captivity of Jerusalem. We searched for several days for each of them until we found them and brought them back to us, while, in the meanwhile, a husband did not know what had happened to his wife, and a wife did not know about her husband. And after all this, we are now hungry as well as naked, and we possess nothing save our (ancestral) faith, the Law of Moses, son of Amram, and God's mercy. And, indeed, you esteemed Mulla Bakhaj, you are a brother of ours, and you surely know that we can no longer live in the city of Mazandaran due to the

²³ This would mean that the Jewish community of Barfurush was established ca. 1360 C.E. However, according to testimony of the Jewish elders of that community, recorded in 1859, the colony had been formed from remnants of those Jewish colonies planted in Mazandaran by Shah Abbas the Great, ca. 1510. Cf. H.L. Rabino, *Mázandarán and Astarábad*, op. cit., p. 13. On seven thousand Jewish families that were settled by Shah Abbas in the newly built commercial city of Farah-Abad (on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea, about 40 kilometers to the east of Barfurush), see Pietro della Valle's diary of February 1619, in his *Voyages*, trans. into Persian by C. Chafa, Tehran 1969, p. 443. Cf. W.J. Fischel, "History of the Jews of Persia under the Safavid Dynasty in the 17th Century" (in Hebrew), *Sion*, 2 (1936-7), p. 277.

fact that our trade is conducted in the villages, and so every two of us used to go together to some village in peace and come back in peace. Now, however, on account of our many sins, we cannot get out of the city and go more than six kilometers away,²⁴ because they hate us and every single day they threaten us, saying that they want to destroy us; and if, God forbid, they stop fearing the king, they will make another libel against us, and they will not leave behind a trace and memory of us. Therefore, and that being the state of affairs, you told us that they had written to you from Paris (saying) that we should let them know what our request is. This is our request, we beg that they evacuate us in a friendly manner from this city and settle us in some other city which they may know of.²⁵ And please believe us that we do not have even the travel expenses for such a purpose. Thus, even if they are not inclined to act on our behalf, may they, please, act for the sake of our holy fathers, and even as (our prophet) Moses, the son of Amram, delivered the Children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, so may His Excellency Sir Moses Montefiore save us from the hands of this nation,²⁶ as no strength is left in us to suffer anymore; and, as you,

²⁴ Originally, Heb. *parsah*, i.e. one *parsang*, about 4 miles.

²⁵ The idea to relocate the Jews of Barfurush following the pogrom was shortly contemplated by the heads of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. For documents detailing the possibility of “transferring the Jews of northern Iran to Algeria and those of southern Iran to India,” see reports on the Jews of Barfurush and the general conditions and disabilities of Iranian Jews in 1866, submitted by Bernheim to A. Crémieux, in AAU, IRAN. IIC. 4–8, document no. 199, dated July 4, 1866, and document (without number) of November 4, 1866. Due to a variety of political and financial considerations, however, neither the Jews of Barfurush nor those of other communities of Iran were ultimately relocated by Jewish organizations of Europe in the course of the nineteenth century.

²⁶ The analogy between Moses the prophet and deliverer of ancient Israel and Sir Moses Montefiore, drawn in this and many other letters and documents written by Iranian Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century, attests to the exceptional prestige and admiration that Sir Moses enjoyed amongst the Jews of Iran. As far as we know, Montefiore’s long years of overt and covert philanthropic activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran began in the wake of the bloody pogrom and forcible conversion of the Jews of Mashhad in the spring of 1839. His intercession continued in connection with the Jews of Barfurush, who were allowed to return to their ancestral religion largely due to Montefiore’s influence and direct contacts with the high echelons of the British foreign ministry. Montefiore’s significant material and moral assistance to the hard-pressed Jewish communities of Iran persisted in the course of the Great Famine of 1871–2 in Iran, which according to all evidence was the most devastating human and demographic catastrophe in nineteenth-century Iran.

Montefiore’s personal meeting with Nasir al-Din Shah (during the latter’s first journey to Europe), a meeting that took place at Buckingham Palace on June 24, 1873, contributed much to the formation of closer personal ties between the Iranian monarch

the people of the community of Tehran, are informed and aware of the many troubles, sufferings and incidents that have afflicted us, will you please also write a letter in the holy language of Hebrew and address it to His Excellency,²⁷ and inform him of our request, inasmuch as the Holy One, blessed be He, deprives no created being of its reward, neither in this world nor in the world to come.”

and the leaders of European Jewry. Further contacts and relations between Montefiore (and his Jewish counterparts in Europe) and Iranian diplomats, officials and notables paved the way for the issuance of various royal and governmental decrees in favor of the Jews of Iran. Such declarations, solicited by Montefiore and the Jewish leaders and organizations of Britain and France, were accompanied by some practical measures by the Iranian government with the intention of improving the actual status, security and living conditions of Iranian Jews during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. On Sir Moses Montefiore's biography and activities on behalf of various Jewish communities and causes, see *The Century of Moses Montefiore*, ed. Sonia and V.D. Lipman, Oxford University Press, 1985. Regarding his activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see P. Goodman, *Moses Montefiore*, Philadelphia 1925, ch. XI (Persia and Morocco), pp. 124–150, and particularly A. Netzer, “Montefiore ve-Yehudey Paras” (Montefiore and the Jews of Persia), op. cit., as well as I. Ben-Zvi, “Te'udot be-Yemey ha-Shah Nasir al-Din,” (Documents for the History of the Jews of Iran in the Days of Nasir al-Din Shah), in *Receuil Littéraire en L'Honneur de Abraham Elmaleh*, Jerusalem 1959, pp. 1–11. For Montefiore's own letters and documents concerning the Jews of Iran, see note 4 above. As regards his stature amongst the Jews of Iran and his image as foremost savior and protector of downtrodden Jews of Iran, see letter and hymn of praise by the heads of the Jewish community of Hamadan, addressed to Sir Montefiore in gratitude for his material support to the Jews of that community during the Great Famine of 1871–2, in BZI, archival file 311, letter no. 34, dated 28 Sivan 5632 (July 4, 1872).

²⁷ I.e., to Sir M. Montefiore.

SECTION VIII
MAJOR EVENTS AND PROCESSES

EARLIEST REPORTS IN THE JEWISH PRESS OF
WESTERN EUROPE CONCERNING THE JEWS OF
IRAN AND THEIR HARDSHIPS: *THE VOICE OF JACOB*,
LONDON, APRIL 25, 1845

Introduction

The Jewish press and periodicals of Europe in the nineteenth century played a major role in acquainting the world Jewry with Iranian Jews and their hardships. By raising and discussing the multiple problems and difficulties of Iran's Jewish subjects, they were instrumental in mobilizing and extending diverse assistance to Iranian Jewry. At this stage of research we are unable to offer even a partial list of these many newspapers, weeklies, periodicals as well as cultural and communal publications in Europe that drew the attention of their respective readers to the specifics of Jewish life in Iran. The considerable increase in the volume and influence of these Jewish journals and periodicals inside Europe reflected the gradual and significant changes and improvements that, in varying degrees, had affected the lives of the majority of European Jews during the 17th and 18th centuries, and particularly ever since the French Revolution of 1789. The latter changes and improvements, both in the civil status and general living conditions of Jews, stemmed from closely related historical currents and processes in the areas of general culture, political thought, economy, science, education and technology that had taken place in continental Europe and influenced the lives of diverse groups and populations inside Europe and beyond. However, the latter historical changes were more comprehensive and tangible in the Jewish communities of Western and Central Europe. As far as the relative levels of civil equality, security and actual participation in diverse areas of human activity are concerned, the Jews of Britain, France, Germany and Austria generally fared better than their coreligionists in Eastern Europe. Indeed, as a result of their improved socio-economic conditions as well as their strong communal organizations and influential leaders, the main centers and institutions of Jewish life in Britain, France, Germany and Austria enjoyed a considerable degree

of prestige and influence not only in Western Europe but throughout the Jewish communities of the East and the West. The considerable prestige enjoyed by the latter Western European Jewish organizations and leaders among the scattered Jewish communities of the world did not stem merely from the reputation and legendary power of some of the more well-known leaders and public figures of Western European Jewry, such as Sir Moses Montefiore of Britain (1784–1885), Senator Adolphe Isaac Crémieux of France (1796–1880), Baron Maurice de Hirsch of Germany (1831–1896), and the members of Rothschild's financial dynasty in London, Paris, Vienna and elsewhere. The considerable esteem and influence of Western European Jewish organizations and leaders among the Jews of Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East derived as much from the fact that as of the early 1840s the Jewish organizations and leaders of Western Europe demonstrated genuine concern and solidarity towards their less fortunate coreligionists in Eastern Europe, North Africa, Yemen and the Middle East.

In the activity of the various Jewish communal and philanthropic organizations of Western Europe in behalf of distressed and persecuted Jews across the world, particularly as of the 1840s, a pivotal role was played by the Jewish press of the period. These newspapers, magazines and periodicals, chief among them those published in English, French, German and Hebrew, did not only collect and print news and articles related to diverse aspects of life in their respective cities and communities. Regardless of their local agendas and specific communal and cultural orientations, these newspapers and periodicals ordinarily published information on diverse aspects of history, society, culture and contemporary life among Jews in other lands. The information and commentaries thus published on the current conditions and hardships of Jews in far away territories did not only inform the local communities with respect to the difficulties in those communities, but frequently urged and encouraged the readers to mobilize and extend diverse forms of humanitarian and moral assistance to those hard pressed Jews. No less important was the role that these periodicals and publications often times played in gathering information and evidence on needy or persecuted Jews and passing them on both to Jewish communal officials as well as government authorities and other individuals and bodies that were in a position to provide overt or covert assistance to distressed individuals and communities in other countries. In this respect, hand in hand with the communal and philanthropic organizations of Europe, the Jewish press and periodicals also served as “guardians” and “watchdogs” in

behalf of distressed and persecuted Jews in other parts of the world. However, while addressing urgent humanitarian causes and missions across the Jewish communities of the world, the Jewish newspapers and periodicals of Europe and North America also devoted considerable effort to identify and analyze the more profound and underlying roots and causes of Jewish disabilities in various parts of the world. In the vast majority of the Jewish newspapers, magazines and periodicals of Europe and North America during the second half of the nineteenth century, the overall vulnerabilities and hardships of Jews in other parts of the world were attributed to what they perceived as lower levels of historical progress and development in those lands and societies. The latter views and notions were shared by broad circles of educated and mostly secular and modern-oriented Jews in Western Europe, who were in positions of leadership in their own local communities and societies, and equally exerted influence in other Jewish communities and organizations in other parts of Europe and beyond. These essentially Euro-centric perceptions and views of other non-Western societies and their respective Jewish populations, however, existed and operated hand in hand with a sincere and genuine desire to extend diverse forms of assistance to their scattered and ordinarily downtrodden coreligionists in Eastern Europe and across the lands of North Africa and the Muslim East. Common bonds of Jewish solidarity and brotherhood lay at the basis of diverse and growing efforts to gather and disseminate information on distressed Jews wherever they were found. Thus, the general conditions and difficulties of Jews in "less developed" lands and societies of Eastern Europe (particularly Russia, Poland and Rumania), North Africa and the "Orient" (particularly the Ottoman Empire, Yemen and Iran), occupied an increasingly important place in the Jewish press and periodicals of Western Europe throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

As regards the specific coverage of Iranian Jews and their perceived difficulties in the Jewish press of Western and Central Europe during the period under discussion, the extensive and highly informative body of material at our disposal demonstrates that both in terms of quantity and quality this material grew progressively as of the 1850s. Secondly, the news, articles and commentaries that appeared in this wide-ranging body of newspapers, weeklies, periodicals and journals with regard to the Jews of Iran were ordinarily prompted and colored by harsh and traumatic events, incidents and acts of violence and persecution that occurred in the various Jewish communities of Iran during the

1830s–1890s. More importantly, the diverse news, reports and opinions concerning the Jews of Iran in these newspapers and periodicals (including those that were published in Central Europe, Poland, Russia and in Ottoman Palestine and Baghdad) record and reflect in detail the various stages of the evolving contacts and relations between the Jews of Europe, North America and the Ottoman Empire with their coreligionists in Iran. As such, the above sources provide us with much valuable and authentic information on the significant role played by the Jews of Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the annals of Iranian Jewry in the course of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century.

As far as we know at this stage of research, the article before us, entitled “The Jews in Persia and Bokhara,” was among the earliest references made to Iranian Jews in the Jewish press of Western Europe. It was published in the London-based newspaper *The Voice of Jacob*, which, in the words of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 9, p. 604): “...was the first Jewish English newspaper deserving of the term.” A proponent of modern reform in Judaism and Jewish religion, the newspaper appeared during the years 1841–1848, and defined itself as “a publication of the Anglo-Jewish Periodical Press, for the promotion of the spiritual and general welfare of the Jews, by the dissemination of intelligence on subjects affecting their interests, and by the advocacy and defense of their religious institutions.” Together with other initial references and reports on Iranian Jews, that were published in the Jewish press of Western Europe in the 1840s, the article marked the beginnings of a growing acquaintance on the part of the Jewish communities of Europe with the generally wretched and oppressed condition of Iran’s scattered Jewish communities. Although the article before us combined the treatment of the Jews of Iran with that of the Jewish communities of Bukhara, in its bulk and import it was devoted to the Jewish community of Mashhad and the repercussions of the pogrom in that community some six years earlier. The violent acts perpetrated by the local Shi’ite population in the spring of 1839 put an end to the official and orderly existence of a Jewish community in that important religious and commercial city, and resulted in the forced conversion into Islam of all the Jews who remained in the city. The sources on which the article relied consisted of (1) letters that had been written by the Jews of Mashhad to Sir Moses Montefiore, and (2) a letter by the German Jew turned-Christian missionary Rev. Dr. Joseph Wolff, whose close relations with the Jewish community of Mashhad dated

back to the 1820s. Rev. Wolff wrote the letter concerning the condition of the Jews of Mashhad (and addressed it to Sir Moses Montefiore) while he arrived in Mashhad en route to Bukhara to investigate the whereabouts of two British military officers who had disappeared in Bukhara. Both in its general terms of reference as well as in its specific details and recommendations as to how to ameliorate the hardships of the Jews of Mashhad (see in the text), the article was representative of an increasing number of reports, articles, commentaries and editorials on the Jews of Iran and their perceived needs and hardships published in the Jewish press of Western and Central Europe through the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, many of the latter reports and features were translated into other languages and published in the Jewish journals and publications of the period, particularly in North America, Eastern Europe and Ottoman Palestine and Iraq (and their ethnically affiliated settlements and colonies as far as India and Australia). In this varied body of Jewish press and publications during the second half of the nineteenth century, the fate and ordeals of the Jews of Mashhad were frequently invoked. Associated with other ongoing cases and incidents of violence, persecution and discrimination in a large number of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements during the 1840s–1890s, the forced converts of Mashhad came to symbolize in the Jewish press of the period the collective hardships and perils of Iran's Jewish subjects. More importantly, however, the pogrom against the Jewish community of Barfurush (in Mazandaran) in May 1866, the horrors of the unprecedented famine of 1871–2, and the three much publicized visits of the Iranian monarch Nasir al-Din Shah to Europe (in the years 1873, 1878 and 1889) became subjects of growing interest and attention in the Jewish press. The latter particular events and developments, as they were perceived and presented in the Jewish press and publications of the period, fulfilled a crucial role in mobilizing and directing the Jews in Europe and in other parts of the world to intervene on behalf of the Jews of Iran and provide them with diverse forms of assistance.

For the original text of the article before us see *The Voice of Jacob*, London, vol. IV, No. 101, 18th of Nisan 5605 (April 25, 1845), p. 149. As regards the gradual changes and improvements in the general condition of Jews in Western Europe, that resulted in their ascendancy to positions of leadership in the affairs of world Jewry in the course of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., I. Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life*, op. cit., pp. 3–41 and 81–92. Cf. C. Roth, *A Short History of the Jewish*

People, London 1936, pp. 337–378. As for the growing strength of Jewish cultural, communal and philanthropic organizations in Western Europe that extended assistance to troubled Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and in the Muslim East, see, with regard to Britain, in A.M. Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England*, London 1908, pp. 327–334; with regard to France, I. Elbogen, *ibid.*, pp. 33–36. As regards the considerable growth of the Jewish press in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, and for information concerning the history and orientation of the individual publications in various countries and languages, see s.v. “Periodicals,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, pp. 602–640. As for initial references to Jews in Muslim lands and their hardships, reflected in the Jewish press of Britain, see, e.g., on the Jews of Yemen, in the article entitled “Jews in Aden,” published in *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. I, No. 21 (June 27, 1845), p. 189. For similar early references to the disabilities and hardships of the Jewish communities in the Muslim East, published in the Jewish periodicals of France as early as 1841, see, e.g., articles on the Jews of the Ottoman Empire, in *Archives Israélites*, Paris, vol. II (1841), pp. 216–222, 270–274 and 480–483. For other early references to the lives and difficulties of the Iranian Jews, published in the Jewish press of Britain during the 1840s, see the article entitled “Persecution of the Jews in Persia,” in *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. V, No. 9 (December 1, 1848), p. 72. As to what appears to be among the first treatments of Iranian Jews and their hardships in the press of German Jewry, see Dr. Jacob E. Polak’s article, entitled “Persien,” in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, Leipzig, year 20, No. 35 (August 25, 1856), pp. 477–479, and a short report on the extreme sufferings of the Jews of Herat (Afghanistan), who had been stripped of their possessions and deported en-masse (in the cold winter of 1857) to the outskirts of Mashhad, following the occupation of Herat by Persian troops in October 1856. The report, originally published in the *Bombay Gazette of India*, appeared also in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 22, No. 41 (October 4, 1858), p. 569. Finally, for further discussion of the Jewish press of the nineteenth century as a source of historical information on the Jews of Iran, see A. Levy, “The Jewish Press in the Nineteenth Century as a Source for the History of the Jews of Persia” (in Hebrew), *Yad la-Qore’*, vol. 19, issue 1–2 (1980–1), pp. 47–51.

The Voice of Jacob, *April 25, 1845*

The Jews in Persia and Bokhara: For the following particulars, we are indebted to letters addressed to Sir Moses Montefiore,¹ and politely placed at our disposal for the public information. Our readers will remember the catastrophe which befell the Jews of Meshed some time ago.² On the last day of the Ramadan, the Moslems are accustomed to sacrifice a lamb—called the sacrifice of Bairam (or Abraham). A Jewish woman having on that day happened to kill a dog, in order to plunge a diseased limb in its entrails (a common practice in the East), the act was represented as a mockery of the Mahomedan rite, and the whole population rose upon the Jews, slaughtering 30 or 40 families at the first outburst,³ and offering the alternative of conversion to the rest. Of these, the Rabbi and about 50 or 60 more families pronounced the confession of Israel (the *Shema*),⁴ and stretched their necks to the executioners; the rest simulated conversion to Mahomedanism, but only sought the opportunity to escape to other cities, and relapse to Judaism. About 100 retreated to Hamadan, and 200 to Herat and Cabool,⁵ but with great difficulty; for many were intercepted and forced back. The miserable people who remain, in relating these facts to Sir Moses Montefiore, under date of 12th Tishri 5605,⁶ represent their danger as extreme, for they are constantly accused of observing the Jewish Sabbath and other requirements in secret, and threatened with extermination. Their letter complains, that 600 of their sons are being trained as Mahomedans in their schools, and it prays ardently for the coming of Messiah. We

¹ Among his other communal and philanthropic activities at this time, Sir M. Montefiore served as president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the representative organization of British Jewry, founded in 1760.

² The pogrom against the Jewish community of Mashhad occurred on the 12th of Nisan 5639 (March 27, 1839). For further information and bibliographical sources concerning this community, see in our book, above, source no. 4, entitled "The Jews of Iran in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, as Observed by Dr. Jacob E. Polak," notes 4 and 13.

³ According to eyewitness testimony by the members of the community, the number of those massacred in the course of the outburst was thirty-two. Cf. B.D. Yehoshua-Raz, *From the Lost Tribes in Afghanistan to the Mashhad Jewish Converts of Iran* (in Hebrew), op. cit., pp. 108–109, and Y. Dilmanian, *Tarikh-i Yahudiha-yi Mashhad*, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴ The Hebrew imperative *Shema*, literally meaning "Hear!", signifies the declaration of God's unity in Jewish faith. It is so called for the first word of the daily prayer derived from Deut. 6:4–9, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

⁵ Both cities located in Afghanistan.

⁶ I.e., September 25, 1844.

rejoice to hear, that it is likely the benevolent knight⁷ will enlist all the interest he can, in behalf of these miserable people.

*The Jews of Balkh*⁸ write a very curious letter, full of blessing and prayers for the success of Sir Moses' arms.⁹ They complain bitterly of oppression; they may not ride on horseback in the market-place, nor dress agreeably, being compelled to wear caps of black skin, and girdles of hair. There are 30 Jewish houses in Balkh, and one synagogue. They reply to Sir Moses' inquiries concerning Bokhara, that it contains 2,500 houses of Jews, and but one synagogue, having five dependent houses. The writers suppose that Dr. Woolf,¹⁰ as well as poor Stoddart and Conolly,¹¹ were all Jews, seeing that the letters from Sir Moses Montefiore to them express so much interest in behalf of these unfortunate officers.¹²

⁷ I.e., Sir M. Montefiore.

⁸ Known in ancient European sources as Bactriana, Balkh was an extensive and important province of Greater Khorasan and northern Afghanistan in pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. The Mongol invasion in the 1220s put an end to the existence of several Jewish settlements and colonies in that region. During the nineteenth century Balkh was the name of the provincial capital by the same name in northern Afghanistan, about 60 kilometers to the south of the Oxus River and a short distance to the west of the present-day town of Mazar-i Sharif. It had some tens of Jewish families in the 1840s. Cf. B.D. Yehoshua-Raz, op. cit., p. 155.

⁹ Here the editor of *The Voice of Jacob* added the following explanatory footnote: "A wish characteristic of the region, where there is no idea of prosperity secured otherwise than by force of arms."

¹⁰ I.e., the German Jew turned-Christian missionary and explorer Rev. Joseph Wolff, who conducted missionary work among the Jews of Iran during the years 1824–1845. See above, in the introduction.

¹¹ These are the British military officers Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly, who disappeared and were killed in the course of their military and intelligence activities in Bukhara. Regarding them and Rev. Joseph Wolff, who embarked on a humanitarian mission to Iran and Bukhara to investigate their fate, see in our book, above, source no. 4, note 11.

¹² In the course of his missionary activities amongst the Jews of Iran and Central Asia, Rev. J. Wolff often presented himself as a Jew. Referring to his own missionary work among the Jews of Tehran and Isfahan in 1831, for example, he noted in his journal: "I travel as a Jewish Rabbi, dressed in long garments, who goes about to preach that Jesus is the Son of God." See his *Journal of Rev. Joseph Wolff for the Year 1831*, London 1832, p. 44. Cf. his report for the year 1824, published in LSPCJ, 19 (1827), p. 127, where in response to a question by the rabbi of the southern community of Kazerun (named Mulla David) as to his identity, he responded: "I am a son of Israel." It is noteworthy that other Christian missionaries, who like Rev. J. Wolff were affiliated with the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, also presented themselves to the local Jewish population as being Jews. See, e.g., the reports of Rev. P.H. Sternschuss and Rev. H.A. Stern in JI, May 1846, pp. 154–155 (in the communities of Kazerun and Shiraz), and, March 1849, p. 89 (in Hamadan).

Extract from a letter addressed by Dr. Wolff, to Captain Grover, dated in Lazeretto, at Trebizonde, Feb. 9th, 1845.

After relating at length the sufferings and persecutions of the unfortunate Israelites at Meshed, the Doctor thus writes:

“A regular inquisition is now established against them at Meshed! I spoke on their account to the Chief Priest of Muhamedans, Meerza Hadjee Askeree, by name, and I informed him of the interest, which all the powers of Europe were now taking in the welfare of the Jews, and especially the British Government, and that the Russians also try to ameliorate their condition; that therefore, it would redound to his honour, and increase his reputation if he would protect the *Islaam Jedida*,¹³ the new Mussulmans of Meshed. He promised solemnly to do so, and therefore, if the friends of the Jews in England would send presents to the following personages at Meshed, the Jews would fare well, until something more substantial could be done for their good, and effect the free exercise of their religion.¹⁴ Presents ought to be sent to:

- 1st. His Highness the Asaff-ood Dowlah (Viceroy of Khorassaun).
- 2nd. Hajee Meerza Askeree, the Imam of the Great Mosque at Meshed.
- 3rd. Hajee Meerza Hashem, his brother.
- 4th. Meerza Moosa Khan, Metualli,¹⁵ of the Mosque of Meshed.
- 5th. The Farash Baashee, (Director of Police) at Meshed.

At the same time, letters ought to be written to the Shah of Persia, and Hajee Meerza Agasee, his Prime Minister at Tehran, that the Jews of Meshed should be allowed with their wives and children to emigrate to Tehran, for if once there many of them would go hence to Jerusalem.”

Army and Navy Club.
4th April, 1845.

¹³ I.e., newly converted to Islam.

¹⁴ Here, in a second footnote, the editor of the newspaper comments: “The system of presents can scarcely be contemplated with favour; for the justice or mercy which is only to be bought, is soon rendered scarce and dear.”

¹⁵ This is the Ar.-Per. administrative term *mutawalli*, i.e., “superintendent or treasurer of a mosque, custodian of a religious site or endowment,” etc.

REPORT OF THE BRITISH CONSUL IN JERUSALEM
CONCERNING THE CONDITION OF PERSIAN
IMMIGRANTS IN OTTOMAN PALESTINE IN 1892.
FO 195/1765, NO. 6

Introduction

Among the more important historical and demographic trends that affected the individual and communal lives of Iranian Jews in the course of the nineteenth century and onward we should point to diverse forms of migration (inside Iran), emigration and immigration to numerous destinations and territories beyond Iran's borders. Similar to other cases and processes of emigration among Iran's religious minorities in the course of the nineteenth century and onward, the movement of Iranian Jews abroad was caused by diverse motivations and triggers and assumed vastly different individual and communal manifestations. The particular importance of this process in the history of Iranian Jews in the course of the last two centuries is not limited to its effects on the size and demographic make-up of Iran's Jewish population in modern times. From a historical point of view, the formation of new communities and centers of Iranian emigrants out of Iran's borders in the course of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century marks a new stage in the collective lives of Iranian Jewry in modern times. The sources of information at our disposal suggest that in many respects the process of Jewish emigration from Iran during the nineteenth century was a continuation of some common migratory trends and patterns among the Jewish communities of Iran in the course of the previous centuries. An array of personal, communal and collective causes and impulses (among them search of livelihood and betterment of material conditions, trade, personal and family considerations, communal tensions and conflicts, local hardships, religious and ethnic affiliations and ties with Jewish communities outside Iran, etc.) are known to have led to the migration and emigration of Iranian Jews to far away lands throughout Iran's Islamic history (i.e., ever since the mid-7th century). In the course of the 16th–19th centuries, Persian and Aramaic speaking

Jews of Iran traveled and settled in lands and communities stretching from India, Afghanistan and Central Asia in the East, to Russia (to the north) and the vast territories and provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the West. However, while constituting a continuation of old and centuries-long patterns and modes of resettlement among the Jews of Iran, all the available sources equally suggest that both in terms of its increasing numbers as well as in its new destinations and importance in the future lives of Iranian Jewry, the nineteenth century marked a new stage in the history of Iran's Jewish communities. Indeed, in retrospect it appears that the first sporadic and semiorganized groups of Jewish emigrants from Iran, that began to arrive and settle in Ottoman Palestine (and particularly in Jerusalem) during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, took part in the creation of what ultimately became the largest concentration of Iranian Jews and their descendants outside of Iran's borders.

Numerous interconnected events, processes and variables that shaped Iran's history in the course of the 18th–19th centuries and earlier, had a direct and mostly detrimental effect on the lot and general condition of Iran's highly diffused Jewish population. Many of the latter historical events and realities equally had an indiscriminate and detrimental effect on most if not all the other sectors and groups of Iran's diverse population. Among the latter events and upheavals, that served as a ground for various demographic developments (among them diverse forms of dislocation, internal migration, emigration and general demographic decline), mention should be made of the devastating invasion of the Afghan tribes to Iran's settled provinces in 1722 and the subsequent fall and disintegration of the Safavid state; lack of internal security and public order, and effects of continuous bloody wars and power struggles waged among various ethnic, tribal and political factions. These wars began with the fall of the Safavids and continued (with some intervals) until the establishment of the Qajar state (in the 1790s); widespread epidemics (mainly typhus, smallpox, plague and cholera); unsanitary conditions and low pre-modern level of medical services, that combined with generally poor nutrition and inadequate hygiene accounted for high mortality rate among infants and adults; natural disasters (such as earthquakes and floods) and periodic outbreaks of famine. These, and the predominantly agrarian, traditional and pre-industrial state of Iran's economy, social organizations and human resources, had a stagnating and negative effect across Iran's general population throughout the 18th and most of the 19th centuries. However, in addition to the

latter mentioned historical events and condition, that had negative effect on the growth and welfare of Iran's general population, throughout the period under discussion there existed particular factors and conditions that further affected the size and composition of Iran's Jewish population. Chief among the latter factors and forces were: (1) Decline, destruction or total disappearance of numerous Jewish communities and settlements (such as the community of Tabriz in the 1790s, Mashhad in 1839 and Barfurush in 1866) as a result of violent persecutions and pogroms; (2) conversions, both voluntary and forced, to Islam, and voluntary conversions in significant percentages to the Baha'i faith and in smaller numbers to Christianity; (3) emigration to several countries and territories outside Iran, chief among them Afghanistan, Central Asia, Ottoman Iraq and Ottoman Palestine.

As far as the actual volume of Jewish migration and emigration from Iran and its relative effect on the overall size of Iran's Jewish population in the course of the nineteenth century are concerned, however, much like many other areas and aspects of Jewish life in Iran during this period and earlier we do not have sufficient and detailed sources of information to reach any definitive conclusions. Neither have there been any systematic studies or attempts to collect information and data relevant to this subject. The sources that contain direct or indirect information and reference to the diverse aspects of Jewish emigration from nineteenth-century Iran (a phenomenon that continued throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, and grew considerably with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran) are typically fragmentary and disjointed. These sources of information and data appear haphazardly in diverse and mostly unrelated primary and secondary sources, among them notes and reports of Christian missionaries and Jewish travelers that point to the movement and emigration of Iranian Jews to Iran's neighboring territories; numerous references in the Jewish press and periodicals of the period; letters (both private and communal) by the Jews of Iran to Jewish leaders and organizations in Europe and elsewhere testifying to their strong desire to leave Iran and resettle in other countries; memoirs of Jewish emigrants and their descendants relating to the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, etc. The latter sources, however, provide us with important information as to the diverse causes and manifestations of this important demographic and historical process among Iran's Jewish communities. A broad consideration of the latter

sources and references, juxtaposed with relevant Iranian and European sources, lead the researcher to the general conclusion that both the causes as well as the actual proportions of Jewish emigration from nineteenth-century Iran were mostly determined by the harsh local and internal conditions that prevailed in Iran in general and among Iran's Jews and other religious minorities in particular. Given the overall inability of the Qajar state and its institutions to provide solutions to Iran's multiple internal problems and external threats and challenges, large segments of Iran's heterogeneous and divided population were subjected to increasing measures of pressure, mismanagement, exploitation and violence. The latter hardships, especially those stemming from Iran's growing economic and socio-political difficulties and tensions during the second half of the nineteenth century, had a particularly detrimental effect on those segments of the general population that were traditionally and historically less protected and sociologically and politically weaker. The latter unprivileged groups, chief among them the unpropertied peasantry, the urban poor, various political and religious dissidents and most communities of the religious minorities were among those social and demographic components of nineteenth-century Iran that each with its own distinct historical traits, weaknesses and adaptation mechanisms, were more exposed to diverse forms of harassment and oppression. Positioned at the bottom of an old and sanctioned pyramid of power (dating back to pre-Safavid and Safavid norms, practices and institutions), the latter hard-pressed groups of population were, as such, exposed to prolonged and recurrent forms of physical harassment, financial and material exploitation, psychological terror and diverse forms of discrimination.

The harsh and oppressed condition of the Iranian peasantry (that constituted the largest demographic group in nineteenth-century Iran) has been richly documented. Subjected to growing amounts of taxation (particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century), plundered by soldiers, robbers and strongmen, and ordinarily exploited by their landlords, peasants in various provinces of Iran fled their villages and migrated to places where they could not be reached by landlords, tax-collectors and soldiers. For a discussion of the causes of this common form of dislocation and migration inside Iran, that epitomized the lawlessness and harsh inequality to which the peasantry was subjected, see A. Seyf, "Despotism and the Peasantry in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview," *Iran*, 31 (1993), pp. 137–147. Cf. A.K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, London 1953, pp. 169–173.

The worsening of economic conditions in Iran and the appearance of employment opportunities in the Russian controlled provinces lying to Iran's north, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, resulted in the movement of a sizable Iranian population to Russia. (Over 1.7 million Iranian nationals, of the country's estimated total population of 9–10 millions in the 1890s, moved to the adjacent Russian territories during the years 1890–1913.) Iranian subjects, among them many merchants, also emigrated to the towns of the Ottoman Empire, India and northern Africa (Egypt). Cf. A. Seyf, *ibid.*, p. 145, and G.G. Gilbar, "Demographic Developments in Late Qajar Persia, 1870–1906," *Asian and African Studies*, Autumn 1976, vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 152–153.

As far as the emigration of Iran's religious minorities in the course of the nineteenth century is concerned, we know that despite their vastly different identities, living conditions and communal and collective characteristics, they were among those segments of the Iranian population that took an active part in the general process of migration and emigration from the country. Moreover, the available sources and studies further suggest that the processes of migration and emigration among the latter groups throughout the nineteenth century were related to: (1) the diverse hardships and plights that equally affected the lives of the general population; (2) particular disabilities, hardships and deprivations that were unique to the religious minorities and resulted mostly from their status as unequal and discriminated non-Muslim subjects within the predominant Shi'ite state and population; (3) new and increasing opportunities for the improvement of their personal and communal lives in other lands and territories (mainly in India, the Far East, Russia and the Ottoman Empire), where they were granted more protection and enjoyed larger degrees of social, economic, religious and cultural freedoms. Thus, following the Treaty of Turkomanchai (between defeated Iran and victorious Russia in 1828), which made provision for the mass emigration of Iranian Armenians to Russian-held territories, some 45,000 Armenians (out of an estimated 100,000 in the 1810s) emigrated to several Russian-controlled provinces. Furthermore, a large number of Armenian merchants, professionals and others moved to India as well as to the Ottoman Empire and other destinations in pursuit of economic and other goals during the second half of the nineteenth century. Cf. G.A. Bournoutian, "Armenians in Nineteenth-Century Iran," in *The Armenians of Iran*, ed. C. Chaqueri, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–57, and C. Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran*, *op. cit.*,

pp. 57–59. As to the Zoroastrians, we learn that out of an estimated population of 10,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and some 7,200 in 1854 and 9,300 in 1892 (see C. Issawi, *ibid.*, pp. 63–64), some 12% emigrated to India during the years 1855–1861. See G.G. Gilbar, “The Persian Economy in the Mid-19th Century,” *op. cit.*, p. 184, and A. Seyf, “Despotism and the Peasantry in Iran in the Nineteenth Century,” *op. cit.*, p. 145.

As to the number of Iranian Jews who crossed Iran’s borders and settled in other countries and territories during the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, however, we do not possess sufficient records and data to arrive even at an estimated figure. Nevertheless, as regards the motivation and general willingness to emigrate from Iran, in numerous letters written by the heads of some of the more populated communities during the first and second halves of the nineteenth century we learn of a strong desire among broad sections of Iran’s Jewish population to leave the country and settle in countries and territories with better prospects of physical protection and general welfare. Thus, in letters and appeals from the Jews of Mashhad (to Sir Moses Montefiore, following the pogrom in their community in 1839), Barfurush (to Jewish communal leaders in Baghdad and to the heads of the Alliance Israélite in Paris following the massacre and the forced conversion in their community in 1866), Hamadan (to the Jewish organizations of Europe during and following the Great Famine of 1871–2) and Isfahan (to the Anglo-Jewish Association in London following the outbreak of violence and a general closure against the entire community imposed by incited Muslims in September 1889), the heads of those communities begged their influential coreligionists in Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire to enable them to leave their native communities and to emigrate to other countries. In a letter by the heads of the Jewish community of Isfahan to the leaders of British Jewry, written in the fall of 1889 and received in London on March 19, 1890, we read: “In the event that you are unable to intervene on our behalf and provide us cure and remedy, will you please persuade the King (Nasir al-Din Shah) to order the Muslims to buy our houses, so that we will have sufficient means to cover our expenses to travel to other places.” For the original text of this long and informative letter by the chief rabbi and communal leaders of Isfahan, see Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Dep. C.M.J.d. 52/3 (box 52, envelope 3). The same request was repeated in another letter by the communal leaders of Isfahan to the presidency of the Alliance Israélite in Paris.

While describing in detail their general lack of security and diverse material and communal plights, they added; “If we had sufficient food and means to cover our expenses, we would leave this place.” See letter of 13 Heshvan 5650 (November 7, 1889), in AAIU, IRAN. IIC.6. No. 8962, received in Paris on December 8, 1889. As to the desire of many among the forced converts of Mashhad to emigrate to Ottoman Jerusalem in 1845, see in the letter of Rev. J. Wolff, published in *The Voice of Jacob*, vol. IV, No. 101, April 25, 1845, p. 149. For a similarly strong desire among the Jews of Barfurush to emigrate from Iran, see in our book, above, source no. 35, entitled “Letter by the Heads of the Jewish Community of Tehran to Jewish Organizations of Europe with Regard to the State of the Community of Barfurush, Following the Pogrom in that Community in May 1866.” In their letter to the heads of the relatively more protected community of Tehran, dated January 6, 1867 (see the latter mentioned source in our book, notes 19 and 25), the persecuted, disorganized and impoverished Jews of Barfurush wrote: “...we beg that they (i.e., the Jewish organizations of Europe) evacuate us in a friendly manner from this city and settle us in some other city which they may know of.” Reports pointing to the widely shared desire and hope of Iranian Jews to emigrate from Iran during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were also published in the Jewish press and periodicals of the period. Thus, in an article in the Hebrew magazine *Habazeleth* of Jerusalem in the year 1881, pertaining to the general condition of Iranian Jewry during the time, we read: “The number of the Jews living in the provinces of Persia is about 40,000, and they all wish to leave this miserable land, but none of them knows where to go.” See *Habazeleth*, year 11, No. 2 (November 20, 1881), p. 13.

The diverse hardships of the vast majority of Iran’s Jews, and particularly those that stemmed from their lack of physical security, entrenched legal and social discrimination, and widespread material and economic deprivation in most of the communities (difficulties that were further compounded by the numerous burdens and hardships that equally weighed on Iran’s general population), accounted for a continued process of Jewish migration and emigration from Iran throughout the nineteenth century. While a considerable number of these emigrants moved to the more tolerant Sunni-controlled destinations and territories adjacent to Iran’s borders (chief among them Afghanistan, Turkistan and Bukhara to the northeast, and Baghdad and Basra to the west), we know of numerous families and individuals who moved to British

controlled India (particularly to Bombay and Calcutta) and to the Ottoman cities of Palestine (particularly to Safed in Galilee and to Jerusalem). The available sources and documents, however, suggest that the two largest concentrations of Jewish emigrants from Iran in the course of the nineteenth century had settled in Herat (in Afghanistan, following the pogrom of 1839 in Mashhad), and in Baghdad (mainly due to ongoing religious, communal and economic ties between the Jews of Iraq and the Jewish communities of Iran, and significant improvements in the lives of the Jewish communities of Baghdad and Basra under the direct control of Ottoman governors as of 1831). On 200 Jewish families who fled Mashhad and settled in Afghanistan, Turkistan and Bukhara subsequent to the pogrom in their community, see A. Levy, "The Expulsion of the Jews of Mashhad from Herat, 1856–1859," in *The Jews of Mashhad*, op. cit., pp. 1–2, and B.Z. Yehoshua-Raz, *From the Lost Tribes in Afghanistan to the Mashhad Jewish Converts of Iran* (in Hebrew), op. cit., pp. 110–111. As regards the relatively high concentration of Jews of Iranian descent in Baghdad during the 1890s, see the following observation by the Christian missionary Charles H. Stilman, recorded in 1892: "Since I came to Baghdad in December 1889, I have never heard the number of the Jews of Baghdad estimated at less than 30,000. Besides these, who are Ottoman subjects, there are a very large number, said to be about 3,000, who, being subjects of Persia and other countries, have not their names enrolled in the government books." See *JL*, January 1892, p. 6. For further information and discussion on the continued movement of Jewish emigrants, refugees and travelers from Iran to the Jewish communities of Baghdad, Basra and Ottoman Palestine in the course of the nineteenth century, see my article "Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Jewish Communities of Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Background and Trends" (in Hebrew), *Sefunot*, new series, vol. 8 (23), Jerusalem, 2003, pp. 239–276. On some 60 Jews of Shiraz who had fled their community and found refuge in Basra due to religious persecutions, heavy taxes, abductions and violence committed against them in their native city during the 1820s, see the testimony of Rev. J. Wolff, in *LSPCJ*, 18 (1826), p. 83. On 150 refugees from various Jewish communities in Iran who arrived in Baghdad in dire poverty and in poor health and sought shelter in that more organized and prosperous community during the months of the summer and autumn of 1866, see *Hamagid*, year 10, No. 50 (December 26, 1866), p. 396. As to the estimate that following the migration of impoverished and famine-stricken Jews from Iran to Iraq, the number

of Iranian Jews in Baghdad had reached some 500 in 1875, see the report of Jacob Obermeyer (b. 1845–d. 1935, scholar and teacher at the Alliance Israélite school in Baghdad), in *Hamagid*, year 20, No. 2 (January 12, 1876), pp. 12–13.

As part of the general trend of Jewish migration and emigration from Iran during the years under discussion, we know of a growing number of Jewish individuals and families from the country's different communities who arrived and settled in Ottoman Palestine, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century and onward. As to the general causes and drives behind this gradually increasing trend among the various communities (mainly among the Jews of Shiraz and its adjacent Jewish settlements in the province of Fars, and in smaller numbers among those of Isfahan, Kashan, Tehran, Hamadan and Mashhad), all the available sources suggest that local hardships in Iran and strong religious aspirations and yearnings for ancient Jewish sites and symbols in Palestine played major roles in their decision to emigrate. Despite considerable physical hardships, hazards and sacrifices that were involved in the long and tasking journeys from Iran to Palestine (hardships that resulted among other reasons from the slow pre-modern means and modes of transportation, insecure roads, illnesses, numerous charges and payments to authorized and unauthorized officials and individuals at the various stages of the journey, etc.), throughout the nineteenth century and earlier Jews from Iran's larger and smaller communities arrived in Palestine for pilgrimage, and some eventually ended up settling in Jerusalem or in the three other towns (i.e. Tiberias, Safed and Hebron), held sacred in Jewish tradition. The growing improvements in naval transportation in the region in the course of the nineteenth century, particularly the opening of the Suez Canal (in November 1869) facilitated the traffic between Iran's southern seaports (particularly that of Bushihr) and the ports and towns of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. The new route (from the Persian Gulf to India and from there to Palestine) served as a safer and more affordable alternative to the existing overland traffic from Iran to Palestine (that led from Baghdad to northern Iraq and from there to Syria and Palestine). As such, it facilitated and enhanced the travel and emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.

The two documents before us record and depict the troubles of some sixty emigrant families from Iran (chiefly from the community of Shiraz), who had arrived in Ottoman Palestine and wished to settle there in violation of Ottoman policy. The facts and details contained in both

of the documents presented below (i.e., report by the British Consul in Jerusalem, John Dickson, to the British Foreign Office, and an enclosure by Rev. A. Ben Oriel of the Presbyterian Alliance Mission in Jerusalem) are corroborated by several other reports and accounts by Jewish communal officials and eyewitnesses published in the Hebrew press of the period (*Habazeleth*, February 1892) as well as in a number of books and memoirs. Although this relatively large group of emigrants eventually succeeded in averting the Ottoman expulsion orders and, assisted by the heads of Jewish philanthropic and communal organizations in Palestine, managed to settle in Jerusalem, their material and general living conditions continued to be extremely difficult for many years to come. However, despite the diverse economic, communal, cultural and other hardships and dislocations that awaited these and other similar Jewish emigrants in Palestine during this period, Jewish emigration from Iran's various Jewish communities continued and increased progressively. By the year 1917 (in which the Ottoman rule ended and the British control of Palestine began), the number of Jewish emigrants from Iran living in Palestine (and predominantly in Jerusalem) was estimated at some 1500. According to various official and unofficial accounts, by the year 1948, in which the State of Israel gained its independence, an estimated 20 to 30 thousand Jews of Iranian extraction lived in that country. The latter estimated number was significantly augmented by a major wave of immigration from Iran that brought some thirty thousand Iranian Jews to Israel just during the years 1948–1953. The process of immigration from Iran to Israel is known to have continued, albeit with some fluctuations, ever since 1952–3 to the present.

For the original source of the documents before us, see FO 195/1765. For the reproduced version of both documents, see A.M. Hyamson, ed., *The British Consulate in Jerusalem in Relation to the Jews of Palestine, 1838–1948*, 2 vols., London 1939–1941, vol. 2 (1862–1914), pp. 477–480. For further sources and discussion on the migration and emigration of Iranian Jews to various lands and destinations over the course of the nineteenth century, see the following: (1) As regards the emigration and settlement of Iranian Jews, chief among them merchants and refugees, in India (particularly in Bombay, Calcutta and Cochin), during the 18th–19th centuries, see A. Ben-Ya'acov, *Yehudey Bavel ba-Tefusot* (Babylonian Jewry in Diaspora), Jerusalem 1895, pp. 111–112, 138–139 and 247, and, W.J. Fischel, *Ha-Yehudim be-Hodu* (The Jews in India), Jerusalem 1960, pp. 181–198. (2) With regard to Jewish migration from Iran (particularly from Mashhad) to Afghanistan, Turkistan and Bukhara (under Russian control as of 1876), see Y. Dilmanian, *Tarikh-i*

Yahudiha-yi Mashhad, op. cit., pp. 38–47. (3) As to the diverse causes and forms of Jewish migration, emigration and traffic from Iran to Ottoman provinces and towns in the course of the 18th–19th centuries, see my aforementioned article in *Sefunot*, vol. 8 (23), Jerusalem 2003, pp. 248–273. Finally, for further sources and discussion concerning the emigration of Iranian Jews to Palestine (under the Ottoman control until 1917, and particularly under the British Mandate between April 1920 to May 14, 1948), see M. Yazdani, *Asnad-i Muhajirat-i Yahudian-i Iran bi-Filastin*, Tehran 1374 Sh./1995, and my article “Yos’ey Iran be-Yisrael” (Jews of Iranian Extraction in Israel), in *Edot—Edut le-Yisrael*, ed. A. Mizrahi and A. Ben-David, Netanya 2001, pp. 27–49.

Report of The British Consul

Jerusalem, February 14, 1892

With reference to my Despatch No. 28 of the 5th of August last,¹ I have the honour to report that nearly two months ago about 60 families of Persian Jews landed at Gaza and Jaffa with the intention of settling down in Palestine. The Authorities, however, informed them, that, in conformity with the Regulations recently published by The Sublime Porte,² immigrant Jews were not permitted to establish themselves in the Country, but that those who wished to visit this City³ as pilgrims would be allowed from one to two months to carry out that object, after which they would have to depart. These Persian Jews, although thus cautioned, paid no attention to the warning, and being poor and homeless, became a burden to the Rabbis and the Jewish community in general, on whom they were dependent for Charity. At the expiration of the allotted time they were told that they must quit the country, and were given a few days to prepare for their journey; but they declined to leave the place, and the police were accordingly instructed to compel them to depart by force on the 8th instant. Some of the representatives of the various Societies interested in the welfare of immigrant Jews in Palestine, among whom there were one or two British Subjects, undertook to Supply the wants of these Jews and to see that provision was

¹ I.e., August 1891.

² I.e., the Ottoman Government.

³ I.e., Jerusalem.

made for their journey to the coast,⁴ if they were permitted to remain a few days longer; and I brought this fact unofficially to the knowledge of His Excellency The Governor of Jerusalem. His Excellency, however, declined to allow any relaxation of the Regulations, stating that the orders which he had received from Constantinople were very stringent and that the Persian Jews, who had already notice to quit, must leave on the day appointed. They were nevertheless permitted to remain until the following day, when the police began to oblige them to take their departure in carts and carriages, and the result was a considerable amount of rough treatment at the hands of the officials. As nearly all these Persian Jews are a hardy and robust set, the police officials had in many instances to use force to compel them to obey, and in the excitement and confusion which ensued, several painful scenes occurred, such as mothers being separated from their children, men and women being packed together in a small room for a while to keep them quiet, etc., but as far as I can ascertain, it does not appear that any deliberate acts of cruelty were practised upon them. I have the honour to enclose herewith, an extract from a letter which I have received from a Gentleman, a British subject, who was present at the scene, giving some further details about the Affair.

Most of these Jews are now in the Jewish Colonies at or near Jaffa waiting to embark for Persia or elsewhere, and they are being looked after, more or less, by the representatives of the "Alliance Israélite" and other benevolent persons. Had they been permitted to settle in the country, they would have been, in consequence of their extreme poverty, a heavy burden on the charity of their coreligionists, and an embarrassment to the local Authorities, who were utterly unprepared to cope with contingencies of this kind.

(Enclosures to No. 6)

FO 195/1765. Extract.

Letter from the Rev. A. Ben Oliel of the "Presbyterian Alliance Mission,"

Dated Jerusalem, Feb. 11, 1892

Last Tuesday at 3 p.m. there was a large crowd of Jews and others before the new Stores, or shops, on the Jaffa Road, in front of Fiel's

⁴ I.e., the Mediterranean seaport of Jaffa.

Hotel, and in coming near I heard piteous female cries issuing from one of these stores. Those inside were trying hard to force the doors open, while police and a set of Moslem roughs were piling big stones against the doors, the police striking any who succeeded in putting head or hands out. I at once realized what the violent scene meant.

As you know, several groups of Persian Jews, driven away, it is avowed, by persecution, have, within the last two months arrived in Jerusalem, via Jaffa. They are computed at 50, 80 and 100 families, but I have found no evidence to warrant an estimate exceeding 50 to 60 at most, or of over 150 individuals, children included.⁵

The Jewish community offered these exiles a plot of land near Siloan⁶ to settle upon, but not satisfied with it, they had an altercation with one of the Acting Rabbis, who imprudently called the police to quell the tumult. This came to the knowledge of the Pasha,⁷ who thereupon telegraphed to the Porte, and received orders to expel them from the Country.

Accordingly the police had been all day and were still hunting for the Persian Jews on every side and driving them by blows into that extemporised store-prison, to be kept penned up like wild beasts, till all could be collected and marched away back to Jaffa to be shipped off.

I was told of a woman caught in the street and marched off by brute force, and she was shrieking piteously for the baby she left in her miserable hovel. Another, I was assured, being “enceinte” was taken with pains under the blows which hurried her to the prison-store. The scene was heart-rending and outrageous to all humane feelings.

I remonstrated with the police against this inhuman, cruel treatment of these poor exiles, particularly the women and girls, but they were too excited and infuriated, and replied roughly that they were acting by superior orders. To the question had they committed any crime, there was no reply except that it was no business of mine.

⁵ According to the Hebrew magazine *Habazeleth*, that was published in Jerusalem and reported on this entire affair, these emigrants indeed numbered some 150 people. See *Habazeleth*, year 22, No. 17 (February 12, 1892), p. 130, and *ibid.*, No. 19 (February 25, 1892), p. 148.

⁶ This is the Arab village of Siluan, which was (and still is) located some five kilometers to the south-east of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.

⁷ I.e., the Ottoman Governor of Jerusalem.

Feeling sure you⁸ would generously interpose your good offices to mitigate their sufferings, I decided to call on you at once; but on the way I learnt that you had already sought an interview with the Pasha, who put you off with the plea that it was a matter of internal administration; as also that you were from home.

I therefore called on Mr. Nessim Bachar, superintendent of the "Alliance Israélite's" School and Industrial Manufactories, a Hebrew gentleman of great influence and sound judgment.⁹ I found three of the leading Rabbis waiting to see him on the same distressing subject. He came soon, and fully an hour was spent in Conference and consultation. It was decided to seek to obtain a respite, that they might not be marched on foot, in a cold night, men, women and young children, goaded on by mounted soldiers; to provide them with lodging and food; and to arrange to send them off in batches on carts. It was understood that over 80 had already been collected forcibly in the prison-store. I offered to shelter them in my house, at least that night, till some other accommodation could be found, as also to supply their immediate wants; but it was judged best to lodge them in the precincts of the principal Synagogue. As the Pasha was known to be irritated with solicitations for these persecuted exiles efforts were made to communicate with the Chief of the Police, who, however, was found to be away at Jaffa. By my advice two Rabbis were sent to the prison-store to try and stop the shrieks and bitter crying of the distressed women with the tranquilizing assurance that efforts would be made to alleviate their hardships; and this had the desired effect.

Night came on and nothing had been accomplished and so Mr. Nessim and some Rabbis summoned courage and called on the Pasha, and

⁸ I.e., John Dickson who served as British Consul in Jerusalem during the years 1891–1904.

⁹ This is Nissim Behar (1848, Jerusalem–1931, New York), founder of modern Hebrew education in Palestine. A graduate of the Alliance Israélite Universelle's Teachers Institute in Paris in 1869, he taught in Syria and Bulgaria and headed the Alliance school in Constantinople (1873–1882). In 1882 he initiated the founding of the new Alliance school in Jerusalem and served as its headmaster. In addition to his educational and administrative engagements, Behar was among the influential leaders of the Jewish settlement in Jerusalem and often times served as a liaison with the Ottoman authorities in the city. It was in the latter capacity that he intervened and interceded on behalf of the hard-pressed Iranian emigrants under discussion. He served as the headmaster of the Alliance school in Jerusalem until 1897 and was sent (in 1901) to represent the Alliance organization in the U.S.A. He emerged as a public figure in American Jewry and continued his diverse communal and public activities in North America until his death. Cf. EJ, vol. 4, pp. 393–394.

they happily succeeded in obtaining the requisite respite and delay by becoming guarantees for the execution of the Porte's orders, pledging themselves to send the exiles out of the Country. Yesterday some 30 were sent off in carts, and the remainder will be sent off on Sunday or Monday. They go under the guardianship of a Rabbi and accompanied by an interpreter.

One aggravating circumstance is that these Jews speak Persian and not Arabic;¹⁰ another that they are mostly poor, having spent their little all in defraying the expenses of their long journey by sea and land. They are a robust, and hardy set, these Persian exiles, and even the women are remarkably muscular. They would therefore have proved an acquisition in this land of slothful and lazy people.¹¹

Mr. R. Scott-Moncrieff,¹² the philanthropic friend of the Russian refugee Jews, and the poor generally at Jaffa, here, etc., very generously provided these distressed people with food during the day.

¹⁰ In addition to Arabic, which was the dominant spoken language in Jerusalem during this period, Ladino (or Judeo-Spanish) was spoken among the Jews of Sephardic origin in the city, and Yiddish (the vernacular of Eastern and Central European Jewry) was in use among the Jews of Ashkenazi origin. The Persian-speaking emigrants from Iran did not speak the latter languages and thus the language barriers further exacerbated their socio-cultural hardships.

¹¹ Due to the lack of secular education and modern professional training among the vast majority of the Iranian emigrants to Palestine during the 1890s–1920s, the bulk of these emigrants eked out a living by means of various menial and physical labors. As to the more common occupations among these early emigrants in Ottoman Jerusalem (i.e., construction workers, masons, porters, water drawers, pedlars, etc.), see in the memoirs of Raphael H. ha-Cohen, a first-generation emigrant from Shiraz, who arrived in Jerusalem with his parents in 1890 (at the age of 7), and grew up in the community of Iranian emigrants in the city, in *Avanim ba-Homah* (Rocks in the Wall), Jerusalem 1970, pp. 37–43. Cf. the testimony of Aharon Cohen, born also to a family of emigrants from Shiraz, who had settled in Jerusalem in 1884, in his *Qol Qore' va-Elekh* (A Voice Called and I Went), Kibbutz Dalia 2000, pp. 27–28. For further information on the occupational profile of the Iranian emigrants in Ottoman Jerusalem, see particularly Y. Ben-Arieh, *Yerushalayim ba-Me'ah ha-Tesha' Esreh* (Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century), Jerusalem 1977, p. 407.

¹² R. Scott-Moncrieff was a member of the Christian philanthropic organization, called “The Society for the Relief of Persecuted Jews,” which was active during this time in Jerusalem. Cf. A.M. Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 480 and 566.

THE GREAT FAMINE OF 1871–2 IN IRAN AND THE
BEGINNING OF ORGANIZED ACTIVITY ABROAD ON
BEHALF OF IRANIAN JEWS. FROM THE REPORT OF
THE PERSIAN FAMINE RELIEF FUND, PUBLISHED BY
THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS,
LONDON 1873, pp. 8–16

Introduction

Among the major events in the history of the Iranian Jews in the course of the nineteenth century, that contributed considerably to the expansion and strengthening of relations between world Jewry and the Jewish communities of Iran, we should point particularly to the famine of 1871–2 in Iran. Both the background as well as the course and general effects of this extreme catastrophe in Iran at large and among Iran's Jewish communities in particular have already been mentioned and discussed on several occasions in our present book. (For a discussion of the human sufferings and general effects of this famine in one representative Jewish community, see above, source no. 30, entitled "The Jewish Community of Kashan during the Great Famine of 1871–2.") In some of the other sources and documents presented and examined previously, this disaster, which on account of its unprecedented enormity came to be known as "*Qahti-yi Buzurg*" or "the Great Famine," was mentioned or discussed in terms of its direct and immediate impact on the various Jewish communities and settlements across Iran. Regarding the general demographic effects of this famine (hereafter, "the famine") on Iranian Jewry as a whole, and on specific Jewish communities during the years 1871–5, see particularly source no. 5, entitled "The State of the Jews of Iran in 1876, as Reflected in the Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association (1876–7)," note 1, and source no. 11, entitled "The Demographic Size of the Jewish Communities and Settlements of Iran Following the Great Famine of 1871–2."

As it has already been pointed out and emphasized in the various notes and references related to the catastrophe under discussion, as far as the major events and developments in the collective lives of Iranian

Jewry in the course of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century are concerned, the impact and the future significance of the famine went far beyond the individual tragedies and harsh communal dislocations that were caused by it in the vast majority of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements. In many respects the outbreak of the famine (in the spring and summer of 1871) and its growing scope and heavy death-toll (during the winter of 1871 through the early summer of 1872) mark a turning point in the relations between the Jewish organizations of Europe and Diaspora with their hard-pressed and struggling coreligionists living in Iran. The magnitude of the starvation, diseases and sufferings on the one hand and the staggering failure, incompetence and corruption of Iran's state and public institutions and authorities to provide for the most basic necessities of life during two consecutive years on the other hand, further alerted the Jewish leaders and organizations in the West and in many other parts of the world to the multiple plights and existential threats to which the vast majority of Iran's scattered Jewish communities were subjected. During the years and decades that preceded the famine, the general familiarity of world Jewry with the Jewish communities of Iran and their living conditions was limited mostly to Jewish philanthropic and communal leaders as well as to some few Jewish scholars and educated individuals and circles in parts of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The growing coverage of the famine and its horrors in the Jewish press of the period considerably increased the knowledge and awareness concerning Iranian Jews in numerous Jewish communities and congregations in many parts of the world. The latter press and media coverage informed a large number of new congregations and rank and file members in many parts of Europe, North America, Australia and as far as South Africa, the colonies of India and the Far East, of some of the general characteristics, deprivations and needs of Iran's Jewish minority. The diverse news, reports and commentaries about Iran and its starving Jewish communities during the years 1871–2 contributed for the first time to the emergence of a public debate in the main organized Jewish communities of Western and Central Europe with regard to the urgent humanitarian needs as well as the long-standing disabilities, weaknesses and hardships of Iran's scattered and poorly protected Jewish communities. The inception and gradual growth of public awareness and opinion in the Jewish communities of Europe concerning the multiple plights and needs of Iranian Jews during the famine resulted in turn in an extensive humanitarian, public

and diplomatic campaign, particularly in the main capitals and cities of Europe, with a view to provide the Jews of Iran with emergency relief on the one hand and with long-term humanitarian, moral and diplomatic assistance on the other hand. Although the mobilization and efforts of the Jewish organizations and leaders during the famine were directed first and foremost at providing urgent and badly needed financial and humanitarian relief to the famine-stricken communities inside Iran, the relief campaign that emerged in the course of these two years was to become the initial stage of a growing activity on the part of Jewish organizations, leaders and other individuals (particularly in Britain, France, Germany and Ottoman Iraq) on behalf of Iran's Jewish communities.

In retrospect we know that the slow and gradual improvements in the general condition of Iranian Jews during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century were caused and influenced by numerous closely connected historical processes, developments and changes, that took place both inside Iran as well as in Iran's relations and general position vis-à-vis foreign powers and external forces and influences. Chief among the internal changes and developments that accounted for some degree of amelioration and improvement in the overall condition of Iran's Jewish subjects during the years 1873–1906, we should point to the following: (1) a growing, though clearly slow and partial, process of administrative centralization and general modernization and reform inside Iran. The latter reforms, inspired by European models, took place in the areas of bureaucracy, communication, transportation and military forces, etc. The more significant among the latter reforms and innovations were the introduction of telegraph (as of 1851); improvements in the mail and postal services, with the help of Austrian advisers and administrators (as of 1875), and the formation of cavalry and infantry units organized, equipped and trained by Russian and Austrian military officers between the years 1878–1881. These and some other modern-oriented reforms and measures increased to some extent the ability of the central government to assert its authority also in the districts and particularly in cities and towns that lay far away from the capital. The vast majority of Iranian Jews during the nineteenth century were inhabitants of cities, provincial towns and districts located far away from the capital city. The administrative and governmental centralization during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward provided them with larger measures of state protection and assistance. (2) Another

area of historical change and evolution inside Iran, that contributed significantly to the amelioration of the general status and condition of Iran's religious minorities during the years 1896–1906, consisted of an array of related processes and events in Iran's society, economy, politics and general culture that culminated in the Constitutional Movement and Revolution of 1905–6. The latter socio-political, cultural and ideological revolution led to the creation of a more representative and inclusive socio-political and ideological order, in which the religious minorities were officially granted unprecedented civil rights as well as political representation in Iran's newly-founded parliament. Yet, despite the latter mentioned significant processes inside Iran that contributed to a general improvement in the status and living conditions of Iran's religious minorities, as far as the specific changes and improvements in the condition of Iran's Jewish subjects during the last quarter of the nineteenth century are concerned, the bulk of the information and evidence at our disposal suggest that such changes and improvements were introduced and implemented by the Qajar court and its officials in direct response to the lobbying, intercessions and pressures that were applied by influential Jewish leaders and organizations in Europe (particularly in Britain and France) and in the Ottoman Empire, as of the Great Famine of 1871–2.

The document before us, which consists of excerpts from the report of the Board of Deputies of British Jews published in London shortly after the cessation of the Great Famine, provides important and detailed information on the leading role played by British Jewry in the general campaign to extend emergency relief to Iran's famine-stricken Jewish communities during the years 1871–2. The document further chronicles the events both inside Iran and in Britain that led to the emergence of the latter relief campaign and the establishment of the specific Persian Famine Relief Fund by the members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in London. The information, explanations and documents contained in the report before us equally shed light on the circumstances that led to the inception of a growing public debate and campaign in Europe and in other parts of the world aimed at assisting Iran's endangered Jewish communities and settlements. We know that what began as a limited relief and emergency effort during the Great Famine evolved and expanded in the course of the subsequent years into a much broader public, diplomatic and humanitarian effort by some of the main Jewish communal and philanthropic leaders and organizations of Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire for the

purpose of assisting their coreligionists in Iran. The general goals and activities of the latter Jewish organizations and leaders during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward were twofold. First, to address and alleviate as much as possible the immediate and urgent needs and distresses of the various Jewish communities and individuals across Iran. Second, to address and inquire into the more deep-rooted and underlying causes and factors behind the continuous weaknesses and disabilities that affected the lives of Iran's Jewish minority. The broad objective of these inquiries and investigations was to devise strategies and adopt concrete steps and measures leading to a fundamental change in the overall position and living conditions of Iranian Jews.

In the course of the previous sections and discussions in our book we touched briefly on the natural and human causes of the Great Famine and the magnitude of the devastation and suffering that were caused by it in most regions of Iran during the years 1871–2. As far as our specific and rather narrow focus on the effects of this famine on the evolving views and positions of world Jewry vis-à-vis Iran and its Jewish population is concerned, however, we should pay particular attention to the manners in which the harsh and negative information and reports emanating from Iran and its Jewish communities during the famine shaped and determined some of the basic perceptions and positions of world Jewry with regard to Iran and its troubled Jewish subjects. The latter set of perceptions and views concerning Iran, shaped under the immediate influence of the frightful reports and descriptions of the Great Famine, conjured up the picture of a land and a society that were utterly wretched, backward and underdeveloped and in which Jews and most other religious minorities had been persecuted and victimized for many years. Such views concerning Iran and its downtrodden Jewish inhabitants constituted the backdrop for a growing number of actions and initiatives by Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe on behalf of Iranian Jews both in the course and in the aftermath of the famine.

As for the natural causes of the Great Famine in Iran, from the winter of 1863–4 (with a single exception of 1865–6), the rains had been regularly below the average. Lakes, springs and subterranean canals (Per. *Qanats*) all over the country sank lower and lower every summer. The crops, nevertheless, had been generally good and abundant until the summer of 1869. During the sixth winter (i.e., that of 1869–70), however, almost no rain fell over wide areas of the country, and in the following year (i.e., 1870–1), only the western and southern provinces

were blessed with any precipitation. Many regions did not have a single drop of rain during the two years of 1869–70. The provinces of Khurasan, Isfahan, Yazd and Fars were particularly hard-hit. The drought was followed by a very sharp rise in grain and food prices. By the month of June 1870, the price of wheat in the rural districts and towns stretching from the port city of Bushihr in the south to Tehran and Mashhad to the north and the northeast, had almost doubled in comparison to previous years. In Isfahan the prices of most staple foods had almost tripled. By the spring and early summer of 1871, the situation had deteriorated still further. The lack of rain caused agricultural production to fall to an extremely low level and the price of wheat skyrocketed. In vast regions of the country, and particularly in Fars, Yazd, Isfahan and Khurasan, the scarcity of food and the sharp rise in their prices led to mass starvation, followed by epidemics, particularly among the peasantry and the urban poor. The situation in the city of Kashan, for example, which even in normal years was dependent on food imports from other provinces for eight months of the year, was particularly serious. There, by the end of 1871 and during the spring of 1872, the price of wheat was twenty times that of the former price. Similarly, Isfahan and Yazd, which relied heavily on grains from the provinces of Fars, Kirmanshah and elsewhere, suffered on a large scale. In most parts of Iran during this time, the average annual income of laborers and wage earners (in towns) and peasants (in rural areas) was hardly sufficient for the purchase of one-tenth of the wheat necessary for the sustenance of a family for a year. The shortage of wheat and other staple foods in most parts of the country had dire human, social, environmental and demographic consequences. Those who could not afford bread, ate dogs, cats, rats and other animals. The situation gave rise to numerous reports of cannibalism, of abduction and killing of children and women for the purpose of eating their flesh. There were even reported cases of parents killing and eating their children, while others withheld from their starving children the little food they could afford so as to shorten their lives and spare them further suffering. Cf. Muhammad I. Rizwani, “Sanadi az Qahti-yi Sal-i 1287 Hijri Qamari,” in *Barrasiha-yi Tarikhi*, year 3, Nos. 3–4 (August–November 1968), pp. 145–150; S. Okazaki, “The Great Persian Famine of 1870–71,” op. cit., pp. 183–184; J. Lovett and E. Smith, *Eastern Persia, An Account of the Journeys of the Persian Boundary Commission, 1870–71–72*, 2 vols., London 1876, vol. 1, pp. 95–96; H. Naraqi, *Tarikh-i Ijtima’i-yi Kashan*, op. cit., p. 264; and H. Jabiri-Ansari, *Tarikh-i Isfahan*, ed. J. Mazahiri, op. cit., p. 34.

Although various sources and studies provide different figures concerning the population loss nationwide, the cautious estimate among scholars in the field is that the famine claimed one and a half million lives, which would represent 20–25 percent of Iran's estimated total population of 6–7 million. Cf. S. Okazaki, *op. cit.*, p. 185, and particularly G. Gilbar, "Demographic Developments in Late Qajar Persia, 1870–1906," *op. cit.*, pp. 143–144; *idem*, "The Persian Economy in the Mid-19th Century," *op. cit.*, pp. 177–178.

As to the death toll among Iran's highly dispersed Jewish communities and settlements, we do not possess complete and reliable documentation. Nevertheless, according to letters and petitions written by rabbis and heads of some of the hard-hit communities and addressed to the Jewish organizations of Europe, it appears that in the south and center of the country some of the communities lost as much as 20 to 40 percent of their members. According to the latter testimonies, some of which are corroborated by other independent sources, by February 1872 (i.e., 3–4 months before the famine eased), the Jewish community of Yazd had lost some 400 (out of an estimated population of 1000 souls reported in 1868). In Shiraz, 1,300 people (out of an estimated population of 3,000) had died by the end of the famine. In Isfahan, 400 people (out of an estimated community of 1,500 reported in 1868) had died. In Kashan, some 300 (and according to the testimony of a local survivor, some 600) had died (out of an estimated community of 750, also reported in 1868). As to the considerably high rate of mortality in Kashan, see particularly source no. 30 in our book. In the capital city of Tehran, where the poor segments of the general population enjoyed some degree of aid by government officials, charitable funds and local philanthropists, some 400 Jews (out of an estimated community of 1,500 in 1868) had perished during the famine. For the latter figures on the death toll in the various communities, see in the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, *op. cit.*, p. 35 (regarding the fatalities in Yazd, Kashan, Isfahan and Tehran), and p. 55 (in Shiraz).

In some of the particularly damaged towns in the center and south of the country, famished refugees from the drought-stricken and abandoned villages and rural settlements who flocked to those towns were reported to disinter from graveyards and eat the bodies of the dead. As early as the beginning of May 1871 (i.e., about a year before the famine eased), Charles Alison, the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran, reported to the British Foreign Minister in London, saying: "My Lord; as to your request, I do not consider the time propitious for the establishment of an agent at the town of Yezd (sic); the south

of Persia is still suffering severely from the effects of the famine, and I am credibly informed that guards had been placed over the public cemetery at Yezd to prevent the starving population from digging up the dead bodies and eating them.” See in the report of C. Alison to the British Foreign Office, dated May 6, 1871, in FO 248/273. In Shiraz, the largest city of the province of Fars, the British official H.V. Walton reported in mid-March 1871 to C. Alison in Tehran, that “People are dying in hundreds for want of food and men and women force themselves into my house refusing to leave till they get food—I report this to your Excellency in case of anything happening hereafter.” See in the report of H.V. Walton to C. Alison, dated March 14, 1871, in FO 248/274. For another relevant report, also from Shiraz, alluding to the invasion of a burial ground in the city by starved individuals, see in the report of the British Agent in the city, named Meerza Ibrahim, also to C. Alison, dated April 28, 1871, in FO 248/274.

Reports and communications on the enormity of the disaster across Iran and its effects on the Jewish communities and settlements in the country reached the Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe during the early summer of 1871. In a letter from the city of Tabriz (the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan), written on June 5th 1871 and addressed to Sir Moses Montefiore, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the British Consul General in Tabriz, Captain Henry M. Jones, informed Sir Montefiore of the grave condition of the famine-stricken Jewish community in Shiraz. In his words: “Knowing your sympathy for the sufferings of your co-religionists everywhere, I take the liberty to address you on behalf of the Jews at Shiraz, who are at present reduced to great want and misery, through the famine which is now devastating Persia...; they number, I learn, about 300 families..., and my informant assures me that unless relief comes very speedily, sickness and starvation will shortly annihilate the entire community...; the Persian Government will do nothing. Were they even to relieve the sufferings of the Musulman population their means would be exhausted. The few Europeans dwelling in Persia have already given what they could in the aid of the starving Christians of Isfahan, and as the wretched Jews know not where to look for relief, and have no one to plead their cause, I consider it my duty to bring their cause to your notice, trusting that it may be in your power, in some degree, to relieve them.” While the British Consul’s letter referred in particular to the alarming condition of the Jewish community in Shiraz, it drew the attention of Sir Montefiore and other Jewish leaders and officials

in Britain also to the hardships and sufferings of Jews in other communities, among them those of Hamadan, Urumia and Yazd. (For the complete text of the latter communication by H.M. Jones to Sir M. Montefiore, see in the document before us, reproduced as source no. 38 in our book.) Upon receipt of Captain Jones's letter, Sir Montefiore urgently dispatched a personal donation (in the amount of £100) in aid, to be distributed among Jewish, Christian and Muslim sufferers in Shiraz. He furthermore called upon the members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews to address the several Jewish congregations in London and throughout Britain "to institute steps with a view to the speedy alleviation of the awful misery to which our unfortunate coreligionists are subjected." Responding to Sir Montefiore's urgent call, an emergency meeting of the Board was called on 13th of July 1871, in which a number of resolutions were adopted. Chief among the latter decisions were: (1) That an appeal be made in writing to presidents of all Jewish congregations throughout the United Kingdom, urging them to take the speediest steps in order to obtain subscriptions from their own congregations and from other donors; (2) that an appeal be published in two of the main English-language newspapers of British Jewry, i.e., in the "Jewish Chronicle" and the "Jewish Record"; (3) that all donations raised be transferred to three officials of the Board appointed for this purpose; and (4) that the President of the Board transmit the funds to the needy communities.

Following the Board's decisions, an appeal to the Jews of Britain was subsequently published in the said newspapers, and circulars were dispatched to the presidents of several congregations in the United Kingdom, urging them to adopt the promptest measures to collect subscriptions. In the meantime (i.e., during the months of August–October 1871), despite increasing reports from British consuls and officials in Iran and from individual Jewish communities and settlements across Iran pointing to the worsening of the famine, little more than £1,500 had been raised. The month of November 1871, therefore, marked the beginning of a new phase in the mobilization of British Jewry on behalf of their suffering coreligionists in Iran. Realizing that despite the wide circulation which had been given to the appeal of the Board and its President, Sir M. Montefiore, during the previous months, the amount of donations collected had proved totally insufficient to meet the growing dimensions of starvation and fatalities among Iran's Jews, the Board resolved to expand its appeal beyond the Jewish communities and congregations of Britain. Accordingly, the Board resolved, on

November 21, 1871, that in addition to its continuing efforts inside Britain, it issue appeals to the principal Jewish congregations in the British Colonies and particularly those on the continent of Europe and in America. More specifically, the Board resolved that the appeals be published in the “Jewish Chronicle” of London and in the Jewish papers in the principal cities of Europe. Reflecting the desire of the Board to alert the Jewish communities across the world to the immediate sufferings and needs of Iran’s Jewish communities, the Board further resolved to appeal directly to more than 300 Jewish congregations in all parts of the world, advertise in a large number of newspapers in Continental Europe and elsewhere, and conduct extensive correspondence with relevant officials, individuals and agencies in the English, French, German, Hebrew and Persian languages.

During the months of July 1871–February 1872 and onward, Sir M. Montefiore, as well as other members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, engaged in extensive correspondence, contacts and meetings with high-ranking British, Iranian and other officials and individuals for the purpose of providing relief and diverse forms of humanitarian assistance to the Jewish victims of the famine. At the same time, the members of the Board were in continuous correspondence and contact with a growing number of Jewish communal and philanthropic officials and functionaries in Britain, across Europe and other parts of the world. Documents, letters and telegrams testifying to the extensive efforts of the Board and its leaders to maximize the amount of donations in Britain, Europe and beyond are found in several archives, collections and published sources. For the copies of handwritten letters exchanged between Sir Moses Montefiore and the well-to-do Jewish philanthropist Reuben David Sassoon with regard to the collection of donations and their imbursement to the Jewish victims of the famine in Iran and Baghdad, see, e.g., letters of September 14, September 28 and November 2, 1871, in BZI, Sassoon Collection, file no. 4. For the texts of several letters by Sir M. Montefiore and other heads of the Board to British and Iranian officials concerning the Jews of Iran in the course of the famine, see A. Netzer, “Montefiore and the Jews of Persia” (in Hebrew), *Pe’amim*, 20 (1984), op. cit., pp. 60–64, and *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, ed. L. Loewe, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 244–246.

The reports and news on the deteriorating condition of the famine-stricken Jews and others in Iran during the months of January and February of 1872 were so alarming that Sir M. Montefiore, then

eighty-eight years of age, reached the decision “to go to Persia to endeavour to ameliorate the condition of the Jews.” Cf. *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 245–246, and P. Goodman, *Moses Montefiore*, op. cit., pp. 130–131. It was only due to the firm warning of senior officials at the British Foreign Office as to the dangers involved in such a long and arduous journey that Sir Montefiore was dissuaded from materializing his decision.

The combined efforts of the Persian Famine Relief Fund and numerous Jewish congregations and communal organizations in Europe and in other regions of the world ultimately accounted for the collection and distribution of some £19,000. Considering that during the years 1871–2 the exchange rate for 1 pound sterling stood at 2 to 2.4 tumans (i.e. 20 to 24 krans), the total amount of the donations amounted to approximately 42,000 tumans (420,000 krans). The latter sums were distributed (during the months of July 1871–October 1872) to an estimated Jewish population of 20,000 Jews living in some 50 Jewish communities and settlements scattered across Iran’s cities, provincial towns and rural districts (for the list of these communities and the amount they received, see the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, op. cit., pp. 30–31). As to the purchase power of these donations and their actual contribution to the famine-stricken communities, the said amount of £19,000 roughly amounted to 1 pound (i.e. 20–24 krans) per individual. Given the fact that in the hard-hit communities of Shiraz, Yazd, Isfahan and Kashan during the winter of 1871–spring of 1872, an average family of 5–6 members needed 3 krans per day (i.e., 90 krans per month) in order to live on dry barley bread only, the amount of 20–24 krans per person (or 110–132 krans per average family), provided by the Famine Relief Fund, appear to have sufficed for a little more than one month of bread supplies for an average starving family. (Regarding the daily income and needs of an average poor Jewish family in Shiraz in the month of February 1872, see the *Persian Famine Relief Fund*, p. 37. For prices of food and average incomes of various groups of population across Iran in the course of the famine see, particularly, C.P. Melville, “The Persian Famine of 1870–2: Prices and Politics,” op. cit., pp. 133–145.)

The donations raised and distributed by the Fund were far from meeting the diverse material distresses of the victims. However, the growing contacts and communications between Jewish leaders and communal activists on the one hand, and between numerous European and Iranian officials and individuals across Europe and inside Iran in the

course of the famine, and particularly after its cessation, on the other hand, contributed to the alleviation of some of the long-standing hardships that had underlined the lives of the vast majority of Iran's Jewish communities and settlements since the eighteenth century and earlier. Indeed, in many respects, the Great Famine marked the beginning of a new stage in the relations between Diaspora Jews and their afflicted and oppressed coreligionists in Iran. First, the famine resulted, for the first time, in the emergence of an orderly and institutionalized Jewish effort, predominantly in Europe, to provide material and humanitarian assistance to Iran's Jewish subjects. Second, the diverse relief and humanitarian activities on behalf of the Jewish victims of the famine led to the formation of a significant network of philanthropic, diplomatic, inter-communal and professional contacts and resources mobilized on behalf of Iran's poorly protected Jewish subjects and communities. The latter network of contacts and activities, that came into existence in the course of the Great Famine, grew considerably during the years 1873–1896 and accounted for diverse forms of moral, humanitarian and diplomatic assistance to Iranian Jewry during the last quarter of the 19th century.

Finally, as an integral and important part of the emerging campaign on behalf of the Iranian Jews during the Great Famine, we should point to the central role played by the Jewish press of the period. Here, too, the important role and contribution of Jewish newspapers, periodicals and publications, that appeared in various languages in the main communities and centers of world Jewry during the famine, had two different, though closely related aspects. The first, and by far the more immediate and urgent task of the Jewish newspapers, particularly in Great Britain, France and Germany, and to a lesser degree in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, was to inform their respective Jewish readers and publics about the gravity of the Great Famine in Iran and its devastating human effects on its Jewish victims. Hand in hand with detailed descriptions of the ordeals and sufferings to which Iran's Jewish communities were subjected, the various Jewish newspapers, magazines and periodicals appealed to their readers to mobilize and donate to the best of their ability to the Persian Famine Relief Fund. Even a partial and hasty examination of the Jewish press of Europe and North America during the months of September 1871–June 1872 (i.e., the months in which the famine intensified) reveal the crucial role played by the latter newspapers and their respective editors, staff-members as well as a large number of communal and philanthropic leaders and

officials in the fund-raising campaign among the Jews of Europe, North America and other parts of the world. [For the detailed lists and names of individuals and congregations across Europe and North America that donated to the victims of the famine, as well as the exact amount contributed by each of them in the course of 1872, see in *Hamagid*, year 6, Nos. 3, 8, 20, 23, 25, 26, 32, 34, 36, 37, 45 and 49 (January 17–December 18, 1872). Among the individuals and congregations that assisted their famishing coreligionists in Iran were a large number of donors both from the main capitals and cities of Europe as well as from small provincial towns and communities in remote districts of Eastern Prussia, Poland, Romania, Russia and North America.]

The second, and by far the more lasting and historically important aspect of the activity of the Jewish press in the course of the Great Famine was connected to the major role played by those newspapers and publications in acquainting large sectors of the Jewish public with the sad living conditions and diverse threats and distresses to which the vast majority of Iranian Jews were subjected. The growing number of news, reports and other journalistic features devoted to Iranian Jews in the course of the Great Famine marked the beginning of a trend that grew progressively during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward. The increasing volume of information and discussion on Iranian Jews in the Jewish press and publications of Western and Central Europe as of 1871 familiarized larger circles of educated Jews as well as general readers in the Jewish Diaspora with the past and current hardships and needs of Iranian Jewry. The initial acquaintance with Iran and its Jews among the organized Jewish centers and congregations in Western and Central Europe received further impetus during the three trips of the Iranian monarch Nasir al-Din Shah to Europe during the years 1873, 1878 and 1889. The latter widely publicized journeys of the Shah and his large and colorful entourage in the main towns, cities and capitals of Europe aroused much curiosity and interest throughout Europe, and they became subjects of numerous reports, articles and stories in the press and magazines of the continent. However, the same visits, that became topics of numerous informative as well as exotic and sensational reports and stories on “the ancient land of Persia” and its “Oriental culture and Asiatic manners and institutions,” further drew the attention of Jewish readers and better educated circles in the West to the general condition and difficulties of Iran’s Jews. In the course of all the three visits of Nasir al-Din Shah to the main European capitals and cities, Jewish leaders and prominent heads

of the major Jewish organizations of Europe (chief among them the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Alliance Israélite Universelle) met with the Iranian monarch and raised before him their concerns, requests and recommendations as to how to ameliorate and improve the general conditions of his Jewish subjects. Although the specific circumstances and contents of the latter meetings with the Shah differed from one visit to another, the basic views, positions and solutions of the latter Jewish leaders concerning the Jews of Iran derived mainly from their perception of Iran's inherent weaknesses and shortcomings as a fundamentally backward, despotic, corrupt and trouble-ridden state and society. The latter views and perceptions of Jewish leaders and philanthropists of Western Europe concerning Iran and the precarious state of its Jewish minority stood at the basis of diverse initiatives and actions intended to assist the Jews of Iran and improve their overall condition during the last three decades of the nineteenth century and onward. In retrospect, however, it appears that among the major events and factors that formed and cemented the perceptions of the Western European Jewish public and its influential leaders with regard to Iran and its downtrodden Jews, a special role was played by the traumatic events and descriptions of the Great Famine. The large number of news, reports and testimonies on the horrors of the famine, that reached the Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe as of June 1871 (and many of which were circulated and published in the Jewish press of the period), shaped and conditioned the manners in which the latter influential leaders of European Jewry viewed Iran and conceived of general ideas and concrete actions to assist their Iranian coreligionists. Indeed, all the available sources of information concerning the effects of the Great Famine on the evolving perceptions and positions of Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe concerning Iran and its poorly protected Jews point to the fact that among the latter personalities and organizations (that became instrumental in improving the lots of the Iranian Jews during the years 1871–1906), the horrors of the Great Famine, Iran's wide-ranging weaknesses and the oppressed condition of Iran's Jews and other religious minorities were perceived as manifestations of more profound and deeply rooted problems that plagued the land and the lives of its diverse population. Realizing the slim prospects of short-term reforms and structural changes required for a meaningful and effective amelioration in the status and living conditions of Iran's highly scattered Jewish population, in the course of the Great Famine, and

particularly in its aftermath, the Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe resorted increasingly to diverse forms of diplomatic pressure as well as lobbying and intercessions with Iranian heads of the state and with high-ranking European officials and authorities. The fundamentally critical and mistrustful views and perceptions of the latter European Jewish leaders and organizations with regard to Iran, its institutions and long-standing weaknesses, however, owe their early origin to the grim reports that emanated from Iran and its afflicted Jewish communities in the course of the Great Famine. A large number of such reports and communications were published in the Jewish press of Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, North America and elsewhere. Thus, for example, in a report from the headmaster of the Alliance Israélite school in Baghdad, that was written on March 28, 1872, and was published in the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid* of Lyck, Germany, the readers were told: “Despite the heavy rains and snows that have fallen throughout Persia during this winter (i.e., the winter of 1871–2), the shortage of food and the severe famine still continue. The inhabitants of Persia eat the flesh of their fellow humans, and the bodies of the dead are cast everywhere on the earth. This is the situation throughout Persia’s western districts where they lack food, and among the people of Hamadan, considered the garden of Persia, parents literally eat their own children, and in Kirmanshah the bodies of those who have died of famine are thrown to the streets. Here, in Baghdad, the well-to-do people are able to help the poor, so that there is no need to send donations to this city. In contrast to here, however, the situation in Persia is still critical. Please pursue your efforts on behalf of Iran’s miserable Jews.” See *Hamagid*, year 6, No. 20 (May 22, 1872), p. 237. Echoing the widely shared view that the poor condition of Iran’s general population and the sufferings of its Jewish subjects during the famine were a function of Iran’s fundamentally stagnant and underdeveloped institutions and practices, the Hebrew weekly *Ha-Levanon*, published in the old and well established Jewish community of Mainz (or Mayence) in Western Germany, observed during the peak of the famine in January 1872: “The government of Persia is tyrannical and it is incapable of caring for its subjects. It is important for the people in Europe to know how callous and merciless the government of Persia is towards its destitute subjects and how it does not do a thing to help those who are perishing in the country.” See *Ha-Levanon*, year 8, No. 20 (January 24, 1872), p. 158. Last, but not the least, anticipating the arrival of Nasir al-Din Shah in London in early June of 1873, as

part of the Iranian monarch's first visit to Europe during the spring and summer of 1873, *The Jewish Chronicle* of London summed up the emerging sentiments and consensus among the major Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe with regard to Iran and the ways in which European Jewry should and could assist Iran's poorly protected Jews. In an article entitled "The Shah of Persia," the latter influential weekly thus wrote shortly after the cessation of the Great Famine: "The visit of the SHAH of Persia offers special interest to the Jews. If one were inclined to indulge in historical reminiscences, one could not fail to remember the interesting association of Persia with our sires, in early days recorded in the Bible. However, the peculiar position of the Jews of Persia is such that we must not content ourselves to signalize the visit of the SHAH by adding to our historical researches and archaeological investigations. Material interests demand our consideration. The sufferings of our brethren in Persia are very great. Our brethren are not only subjected to the misfortunes incidental to the peculiar physical conditions of a country in which famine and drought are often present, but also to the political oppressions to which they are subjected. We do not blame the Shah or the Central Government, except in so far as the government is necessarily responsible for all acts of those who are subordinate to the despotic authority at Teheran. There can be no doubt that the Jews suffer severely from the tyranny of their Mahomedan rulers, and from the fanaticism of their Mahomedan fellow-countrymen. It is proposed, indeed, that committees or deputations of Jews at the instance of the Anglo-Jewish Association shall present petitions to the Shah on behalf of their Persian coreligionists; but we have reasons to believe that these efforts will be of no avail unless supplemented by an effort made by the British Government on behalf of the Persian subjects of the SHAH. If the Jewish community were to obtain the interest of our Government to urge the advisers of the Persian Monarch to act with mercy and justice towards the remnants of Israel scattered throughout the Persian dominions, their sad condition might not only be alleviated, but permanently improved. The opportunity must not be lost." For the full text of the latter article, see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 221 (June 20, 1873), p. 197.

For further articles and writings on the Great Famine that were published in the Jewish press of Europe and North America during the years 1871–3, see the following sources. In addition to their direct and immediate contribution to the relief efforts on behalf of the victims of the famine, these and other Jewish newspapers and journals

played an important role in the emerging campaign to improve and possibly transform the condition of Iran's Jewish minority during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. As it was already pointed out, the latter campaign, which grew considerably in the aftermath of the Great Famine, was formed and directed principally in the main Jewish communities of Western Europe, and it subsequently reached other communities and centers of Jewish life in Continental Europe, as well as in parts of the Ottoman Empire (mainly Constantinople and Baghdad) and North America. It should be emphasized that many of the reports and articles that were published in the Jewish press of the period in connection with the famine and its devastating consequences contained rich and important information related to diverse aspects of life among the Jews of Iran in general and in specific communities and localities in particular. As for the more important and informative among these articles and reports, published in the Hebrew language press of Europe in the course of and shortly after the Great Famine, see particularly in *Hamagid*, year 5, No. 37 (September 20, 1871), p. 292; No. 39 (October 11), p. 308; No. 43 (November 8), p. 337; year 6, No. 2 (January 17, 1872), p. 24; No. 8 (February 21), pp. 83 and 86; No. 20 (May 22), p. 237; No. 22 (June 5), p. 264; year 7, No. 14 (April 2, 1873), p. 131; No. 16 (April 23), p. 142 and 144; No. 23 (June 11), pp. 208–9; No. 24 (June 18), p. 220; No. 29 (July 23), p. 266; No. 37 (September 17), p. 340; No. 40 (October 15), p. 363; No. 43 (November 5), p. 390; No. 44 (November 12), p. 399. For additional material published during the same period of time in the Hebrew-language weekly *Ha-Levanon*, see, year 8, No. 17 (January 3, 1872), p. 129; No. 18 (January 10), p. 142; No. 20 (January 24), p. 158; No. 21 (January 31), p. 166; No. 25 (February 28), pp. 197–8; No. 28 (March 20), pp. 220–1; No. 34 (May 1), p. 274; No. 36 (May 15), p. 290; No. 37 (May 22), p. 302; year 9, No. 39 (March 27, 1873), p. 311; No. 43 (June 25), p. 343; No. 44 (July 2), p. 347; No. 46 (July 16), pp. 362–3; No. 49 (August 6), p. 388; No. 50 (August 13), pp. 396–8. For the considerable coverage of the famine and its aftermath in Jewish journals and newspapers that appeared in European languages, see, in addition to those already cited above, in the following: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, vol. 35, No. 33 (August 15, 1871), p. 659; vol. 36, No. 4 (January 23, 1872), pp. 66–7; No. 11 (March 12), pp. 207–8; No. 16 (April 16), p. 313; vol. 37, No. 11 (March 11, 1873), p. 172; No. 13 (March 25), pp. 211–2. As to the echoes of the Great Famine amongst the Jewish communities of North America,

and the contribution of the Jewish press in the latter communities to the emergence of an organized campaign on behalf of Iranian Jewry during Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe, see, e.g., in *The Jewish Times of New York*, vol. 3, No. 45 (January 5, 1872), p. 743; vol. 5, No. 8 (April 18, 1873), pp. 115–6; No. 12 (May 16), p. 185; No. 21 (July 18), pp. 324–5; No. 23 (August 1), pp. 355–6; No. 27 (August 29), p. 419. For extensive and illuminating information on the views and sentiments of Jewish communal leaders, organizations and individuals who were involved (particularly in Britain and France) in initiating and coordinating the campaign on behalf of the Iranian Jews on the eve and in the course of Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe and the Ottoman Empire, see particularly in *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 207 (March 14, 1873), p. 728; No. 208 (March 21), p. 751; No. 209 (March 28), p. 763; No. 211 (April 11), p. 26; No. 215 (May 9), p. 89; No. 221 (June 20), p. 197; No. 222 (June 27), pp. 213–4, 217 and 220; No. 223 (July 4), pp. 233–4; No. 224 (July 11), pp. 247 and 251–2; No. 225 (July 18), p. 260; No. 226 (July 25), p. 282; No. 227 (August 1), pp. 301 and 321; No. 229 (August 15), p. 334; No. 232 (September 5), p. 378; No. 233 (September 12), p. 394; No. 234 (September 19), pp. 422–3; No. 235 (September 26), p. 427; No. 237 (October 10), p. 467; No. 238 (October 17), p. 478.

REPORT OF THE PERSIAN FAMINE RELIEF FUND

... The Persian Famine Relief Fund owes its origin to the following letter received in the month of July, 1871, by Sir MOSES MONTEFIORE,¹ Bart., the President of the Board,² from Capt. HY.M. JONES, Her Britannic Majesty's Consul General at Tabreez,³ a town of Northern Persia:

¹ Regarding Sir M. Montefiore (1784–1885) and his long years of philanthropic activity on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see in our book, particularly source no. 23, entitled “Song of Praise and Prayer for Sir Moses Montefiore,” and source no. 35, note 26.

² Founded in 1760, the Board of Deputies of British Jews was the representative organization of British Jewry. It was headed by Sir Montefiore during the years 1838–1874. Cf. above, source no. 3, note 2.

³ The administrative capital and the largest city of Iranian Azerbaijan, in north-western Iran.

BRITISH CONSULATE-GENERAL, TABRIZ, PERSIA,

June 5th, 1871.

Sir,

Knowing your sympathy for the sufferings of your co-religionists everywhere, I take the liberty to address you on behalf of the Jews at Shiraz, who are at present reduced to great want and misery, through the famine which is now devastating Persia.⁴ They number, I learn, about 300 families, and have always suffered great oppression at the hands of their Mussulman masters; you may conceive how abject and degraded is their position when you hear that their protector is the public executioner.

My informant assures me that, unless relief comes very speedily, sickness and starvation will shortly annihilate the entire community. Their sufferings must, indeed, be extreme, when they have impressed their Mussulman fellow-subjects, usually so callous and indifferent to the distress of others.

The Persian Government will do nothing. Were they even to relieve the sufferings of the Mussulman population, their means would be exhausted. The few Europeans dwelling in Persia have already given what they could in aid of the starving Christians of Isfahan, and as these wretched Jews know not where to look for relief, and have no one to plead their cause, I consider it my duty to bring their case to your notice, trusting that it may be in your power, in some degree, to relieve them.

There are several colonies of Jews in Persia, at Hamadan, Uroomia, Yezd, I believe, and elsewhere, all oppressed and downtrodden, as are all their co-religionists in these regions. None, however, are enduring the frightful amount of suffering which is borne by the Jews of Shiraz.

In the event of their co-religionists in England taking steps to alleviate this great misery, I would recommend their communicating by telegram (as speedily as possible) with Her Majesty's representatives at Teheran,

⁴ On the history of the Jewish community of Shiraz and its general condition in the course of the nineteenth century, see source no. 28 in our book. On the severe hardships of the Jews in the city in the course of the Great Famine, see also source no. 30, note 7.

who will appoint some trustworthy agent at Shiraz to distribute their bounty among the most necessitous of the sufferers there.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,
(Signed) HENRY M. JONES, Consul-General.

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE, Bart., &c.

The President,⁵ with his usual alacrity and benevolence, immediately dispatched £100 to Captain JONES, as his own personal offering, in aid of the sufferers of all creeds; he also addressed a letter to this Board,⁶ acquainting them with the intelligence which he had received, and urging prompt and vigorous measures to meet the emergency.

The following are Copies of the President's letters to CAPT. JONES and to this Board:

GROSVENOR GATE, PARK LANE
LONDON, 2nd July, 1871.

SIR,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your esteemed letter dated 5th ultimo, in which, prompted by a noble feeling of humanity, you have brought to my notice the present unfortunate state of my brethren in Shiraz caused by the famine now prevailing in Persia.

I lost no time in laying your communication before the Board of Deputies of British Jews in London, in hopes that they would, as far as may be in their power, endeavour to alleviate the sufferings of the above city.⁷ In the meantime, however, I request you will allow me to hand you per enclosed three “lettres de credit circulaire.” One hundred pounds sterling, as a humble offering of myself: £50 of this sum I would

⁵ I.e., Sir M. Montefiore.

⁶ I.e., the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

⁷ I.e., the city of Shiraz.

entreat you to give to the Jews, £25 to the Christians and £25 to the Mussulmans in Shiraz.

With regard to the great oppressions to which the Jews generally have been subjected in Persia, I beg leave to state that by the kind intercession of H.B. Majesty's Ambassador in Teheran,⁸ I was permitted, in the year 1866, to lay my humble petition in behalf of the Jews before his Majesty, the Sháh, NAZIER-UDDIN,⁹ and had at that time the high gratification of being informed, through Her Majesty's Government, that the SHÁH had given immediate orders to the SIPEHSÁLÁR¹⁰ to the effect that every possible care should henceforth be taken of the Jews, so that thenceforth they should be treated with justice. It is for this reason a matter of deep regret to me, and as I have no doubt, to every friend of humanity, to hear that the officer, under whose special care the Jews had been placed, should have ceased to act in accordance with the distinct orders of His Majesty, the SHÁH.

Being anxious to impress on the minds of my brethren in Shiraz the gratitude they owe you for having made known their state of misery to the Jews in England, I have addressed the enclosed letter to the Spiritual head of their Community, and I will deem it a great favour if you will kindly have it forwarded to the proper authority.

I need not assure you, Sir, how fully I appreciate your advocacy in behalf of my brethren; every lover of justice will admit you have rendered a great service to the poor and oppressed; the consciousness alone of so noble an act is no doubt the highest gratification to you.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
With great esteem,
Your most obedient Servant,
MOSES MONTEFIORE

⁸ I.e., Charles Alison.

⁹ I.e., Nasir al-Din. Sir Montefiore is referring here to his efforts on behalf of the Jews of Iran following the pogrom against the Jewish community of Barfurush (in Mazandaran) in May 1866. Regarding the events in the latter city, see source no. 35.

¹⁰ Literally meaning "Commander in Chief of the Army," Sipahsalar was the title of Mirza Husain Khan Mushir al-Dawla (1823–1880), Nasir al-Din Shah's reform-minded and progressive prime minister and counselor. Regarding him and his advocacy on behalf of Iranian Jews, see also source no. 31, note 7.

Captain H.M. JONES,
Her Britannic Majesty's Consul-General,
Tabreez

EAST CLIFF LODGE, RAMSGATE.

3rd July, 1871.

TO THE LONDON COMMITTEE OF DEPUTIES OF THE
BRITISH JEWS, ETC. ETC. ETC.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honor to hand you, enclosed, a letter which I received from Captain H.M. JONES, Her Britannic Majesty's Consul-General at Tabreez, Persia.

Immediately on receipt of this dispatch I communicated by telegram to Captain JONES my intention to transmit by post my personal offering in aid of the suffering Jews, Christians, and Mussulmans of the city of Shiraz, and I have since had the gratification to forward a letter of which the accompanying is a copy.

While I deeply regret to have occasion to trouble you upon so painful a subject, I feel very earnestly that you will cordially participate in my anxiety to institute steps with a view to the speedy alleviation of the awful misery to which our unfortunate co-religionists are subjected, and though I am well aware that the Board have at their disposal no funds wherewith to contribute to so desirable an object, I have the satisfaction to remember that on all occasions our Community have made a most liberal response to any appeal which unfortunate circumstances have compelled the Board to address to the several Congregations.

Having in mind this fact, I have the less hesitation in commending to your favorable consideration the cause of our unfortunate brethren in Persia.

I have the honor to be, Gentlemen,
Yours faithfully,
MOSES MONTEFIORE.

A meeting of the Board was held on the 13th July, 1871, when Resolutions were adopted, of which the following are copies:

1. That this Board has learnt with feelings of the deepest sorrow and commiseration, of the state of destitution to which the Jewish community of Shiraz, in Persia has been reduced by reason of the famine at present prevailing in Persia.
2. That this Board is anxious to adopt the promptest measures for affording relief to the sufferers.
3. That the President be requested to forward a copy of his letter to the Board, with extracts from the letter of Captain JONES, and a copy of his letter in reply to the President of every Jewish congregation in the United Kingdom, and to urge on such President, in the name of the Board, to take the speediest steps in order to obtain subscriptions from the congregation over which he presides, and from individual congregants in aid of the sufferers.
4. That an appeal be published in the "Jewish Chronicle"¹¹ and the "Jewish Record."¹²
5. That the best thanks of this Board are eminently due to its revered President, Sir MOSES MONTEFIORE, Bart., for having, with his usual zeal and solicitude on behalf of suffering humanity, communicated to the Board the particulars of the calamity in question.
6. That this Board desires to record its high appreciation of the benevolent feelings of which Captain JONES' communication affords such gratifying evidence.
7. That the following gentlemen will be happy to receive contributions: J.M. MONTEFIORE,¹³ Esq., Vice President of the Board, 4, Great Stanhope Street, May Fair; its Treasurer, M. VAN PRAAGH, Esq., 119, Oxford Street, and MR. LEWIS EMANUEL, its Solicitor and Secretary, 36, Finsbury Circus.
8. That the President of this Board be requested kindly to undertake the transmission of the Fund to be collected by the Board.

¹¹ The weekly *Jewish Chronicle* was established in London in 1841. Still in existence, the weekly was the oldest as well as the largest circulating and influential newspaper of British Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century and afterwards.

¹² The *Jewish Record* was also an English-language weekly which began its appearance in London in 1868. Cf. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 625.

¹³ This is Joseph Mayer Montefiore (1816–1880), the nephew of Sir Moses Montefiore, who served as President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews during the years 1874–1880. Regarding him and his activities on behalf of the Iranian Jews during the famine, see source no. 30, note 4.

An appeal to the Jewish public was consequently inserted in the “Jewish Chronicle” and the “Jewish Record,” and circulars were dispatched to the Presidents of the several congregations in the United Kingdom, urging them to institute the promptest measures with a view to the collection of subscriptions.

The Board having subsequently received intelligence, both from Her Britannic Majesty’s Consuls, and from several Jewish communities in Persia, that the famine was increasing, and had extended to other towns, it was found necessary in a few weeks to renew the appeal. The amount which had at that time been subscribed had proved totally inadequate to meet the fearful amount of starvation and destitution which prevailed, and although most earnest appeals had been, from time to time, published, as well in the Communal journals as in the London daily and leading Provincial papers, little more than £1,500 had been collected.

The president continued to receive telegrams and letters from His Excellency the late CHARLES ALISON,¹⁴ Esq., C.B., the British Minister at the Persian Court, and from other Government officials, but too sadly confirming the accuracy of the previous Reports. The several Home and Colonial congregations were therefore earnestly enjoined to assist in mitigating the effects of a calamity which appealed to the sympathy of every right-feeling Jew, in whatever part of the globe he might happen to reside.

In the month of November, 1871, the cry of distress from Persia became still more lamentable. Notwithstanding the wide circulation which had been given to the Board’s appeal, the amount which had been subscribed had proved altogether insufficient to meet the emergency, and painfully conscious of its inability to afford adequate relief to its unfortunate co-religionists unless larger funds were forthcoming, the Board determined to make yet another effort on their behalf. It accordingly met on the 21st November, 1871, and having taken the subject into its serious consideration, unanimously resolved as follows:

“That this Board, deeply impressed with the increased distress prevailing among the Jews in Persia and the neighbouring districts, which the Board has learnt has extended to Bagdad, make a fresh and urgent

¹⁴ The British Minister Plenipotentiary and the head of the British Legation in Tehran during the years 1860–1872.

appeal to the Jewish communities in this country in aid of their famishing brethren. That the Board likewise issue appeals to the principal Hebrew congregations in the Colonies, on the Continent of Europe, and in America. That appeals be published in the "Jewish Chronicle," and in the Jewish papers in the principal cities on the Continent of Europe."

To give due effect to the above resolution, it was found necessary to appeal to upwards of 300 Jewish congregations in all parts of the world, to advertise in a large number of newspapers on the Continent and elsewhere, and to conduct a very extensive correspondence in the English, French, German, Hebrew, and Persian languages. The action adopted by the Board was speedily attended with gratifying results, and contributions came in from all quarters but notably from Germany.

Subscription lists have been from time to time advertised in the "Jewish Chronicle" and other papers. A copy of each subscription list has been forwarded to every foreign collector of funds.

The total subscriptions received to the date of this Report amount to £18,991 13s. 10½d., contributed by many thousands of subscribers, here and abroad.

PRESENTATION OF ADDRESSES TO THE SHAH ON
BEHALF OF THE JEWS OF PERSIA
THE JEWISH CHRONICLE, JUNE 27, 1873, PP. 213–214

Introduction

Among the major events during the second half of the nineteenth century that contributed significantly to the formation of direct and personal contacts between the heads of the Qajar state and prominent leaders of European Jewry we should point to the journeys of the Iranian monarch Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896) to Europe. The latter innovative and much publicized trips of the Shah, considered the first ever undertaken by a Muslim Iranian monarch to the lands of Christian Europe, took place in the years 1873, 1878 and 1889. Viewed from various angles related to Iran's fundamentally weak and vulnerable position vis-à-vis the West in the course of the nineteenth century, Nasir al-Din Shah's travels to Europe are significant and illuminating. Both on a symbolic level as well as in concrete and practical terms, these trips represent important junctures in the complex but essentially unequal relations between Iran's weak, underdeveloped and threatened monarchy on the one hand and the far stronger and advanced states, economies and military powers of Europe on the other hand. Although each of the three journeys of the Shah to the many lands, capitals and towns of Europe had its own immediate local and international settings, they were, among numerous other reasons, intended to acquaint the Shah and his retinue with the achievements of modern European civilization. Nasir al-Din Shah's visits and meetings with an array of leaders, government officials and prominent figures across Europe in the course of his three trips equally reflected the hope and desire of the Iranian monarch and his officials to strengthen Iran's limited independence, safeguard its territorial integrity and obtain badly needed economic investments and diverse forms of technological assistance. Despite the elaborate receptions that were accorded to the Shah and his attendants in the course of the three journeys across Europe, however, the visits further exposed to the European states and their respective

publics Iran's deep-seated weaknesses, inadequacies and dependencies. The Shah and his colorful entourage, who arrived in Europe driven by a mixture of cultural curiosity, political purpose as well as whims and extravagant pursuit of pleasures, were unable to conceal from the European governments and their publics the many ills and plights that beset the ailing Iranian monarchy and the lives of its highly fragmented and conflicted population. The latter endemic problems and deficiencies adversely affected the lives of the vast majority of Iran's population in the areas ranging from health, hygiene and nutrition, to security, economy, administration, transportation, public services, welfare, etc.

Nasir al-Din Shah's journeys to Europe afforded the host governments and their affiliated political and economic interest groups (chiefly those connected with the British and Russian governments) opportunities to obtain various political, economic and commercial concessions from the Iranian monarch and his officials. The same visits, however, also afforded the main Jewish leaders and organizations of Western and Central Europe with an opportunity to meet in person with Nasir al-Din Shah and demand from him to protect their downtrodden coreligionists in Iran and adopt practical measures to ameliorate their general condition. The two long reports before us, both published in London immediately after meetings between Nasir al-Din Shah and Jewish delegations in London and Paris, contain firsthand information on the contents of the meetings between Jewish leaders of Britain and France with Nasir al-Din Shah in the course of the latter's first journey to Europe during the spring and summer of 1873.

Both the general background as well as the course and implications of Nasir al-Din Shah's first journey to Europe have been subjected to various historical examinations and appraisals. As far as we can learn from various sources that deal with Nasir al-Din Shah's final decision to embark on his first trip to the lands of Europe (the latter sources include Nasir al-Din Shah's own notes and writings on the matter; references provided by his close circle of aides and officials, material found in European diplomatic reports, etc.), the Iranian monarch's general desire and wish to visit Europe dated back to some few years before 1873. In response to the efforts that were being made by his ambassador in the capital of the Ottoman Empire to obtain the agreement of the Ottoman authorities to a visit by Nasir al-Din Shah to the Ottoman controlled Shi'ite holy sites in southern Iraq, Nasir al-Din Shah wrote to the latter ambassador in 1287 Q./1870-1: "First, it is my intention to travel to Europe, and this goal is never forgotten by me; I am waiting for the

appropriate time and opportunity, and, God willing, if I am granted life, I hope that before my years exceed the age of forty I will be entering Europe; right now three more years are left until that date.” (For the original hand-written letter of Nasir al-Din Shah to Mirza Husain Khan Mushir al-Dawla, his trusted envoy in Istanbul, see I. Taymuri, *‘Asr-i Bikhbari ya Tarikh-i Imtiyazat dar Iran*, Tehran 1332 Sh./1953, pp. 9–10. On Nasir al-Din Shah’s passion for travel and excursions, and his detailed journal of his travel and pilgrimage to the Shi‘ite holy sites in Iraq in the fall of 1870, that constituted his first journey beyond Iran’s borders, see Nasir al-Din Shah, *Shahriyar-i Jadahha: Safarnama-yi Nasir al-Din Shah bi ‘Atabat*, ed. M.R. ‘Abbasi and P. Badi‘i, Tehran 1372 Sh./1993. For the journal of his excursions inside Iran, see, e.g., his account of travel to the Caspian Province of Mazandaran in the fall of 1892 Q./1875, in *Ruznama-yi Safar-i Mazandaran*, ed. I. Afshar, Tehran 1336 Sh./1957.)

The available sources, mostly those in Persian, further suggest that Nasir al-Din Shah was urged and encouraged by a close circle of educated and reform-minded officials and advisers to visit Europe, so that he and his companions would observe and study closely the diverse manifestations of Europe’s advanced civilization and institutions. Among the latter circle of progressive aides and officials some had acquired their education in Europe, and almost all had spent years of diplomatic service in the cities and capitals of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Central Asia and British controlled India. Among the latter officials and members of the Qajar elite, who encouraged the Shah to travel to Europe, the most influential were: (1) Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar, formerly Mushir al-Dawla, who was appointed as Nasir al-Din Shah’s prime minister on November 13, 1871 (regarding him see in our book, source no. 31, note 7); (2) the well-known reformist, intellectual and diplomat Mirza Malkum Khan (1833–1908), who had received his education in France and served as Iran’s minister plenipotentiary in London during the years 1872–1888; (3) Mirza Sa‘id Khan, known by his title as Mu‘taman al-Mulk (1815–1883), who during many years of service as governor of several provinces was among Nasir al-Din Shah’s trusted officials and served as Iran’s foreign minister during the years 1852–1873 and 1879–1883; and (4) the reform-minded and capable official Hasan ‘Ali Khan Garrusi (1822–1899), known as Amir Nizam, who was among Iran’s prominent military, administrative and diplomatic office-holders during Nasir al-Din Shah’s long years of

reign. Among his many positions and missions over a period of some six decades, Hasan 'Ali Khan served as Iran's minister in Paris in the years 1859–1866, and during those years he used his influence with Nasir al-Din Shah in order to persuade the Shah to visit Europe and make use of modern European models and practices in order to reform and improve the generally poor and stagnant condition of the Qajar state. [For the biographies and reformist views of the latter mentioned Qajar officials who played a major role in inducing Nasir al-Din Shah to undertake his first journey to Europe, see M. Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 406–426 (on Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar); vol. 4, pp. 139–154 (on Mirza Malkum Khan); vol. 2, pp. 66–70 (on Mirza Sa'id Khan), and vol. 1, pp. 358–367 (on Hasan 'Ali Khan Garrusi). It is noteworthy that the latter mentioned reform-minded officials, with the exception of the foreign minister Mirza Sa'id Khan, accompanied the Shah in the course of his first journey to Europe. For further discussion on the subject and on the general background to the journey, see H. Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, Berkeley 1973, pp. 101–126; F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914*, New Haven 1968, pp. 111–116, and M. Pur-Shalchi, *Miwahha-yi Dar: Tarikh-i Junbishha-yi Mardumi va Mazhabi-yi Millat-i Iran dar Qarn-i Hazir*, 2 vols., Tehran 1376 Sh./1997, vol. 1, pp. 59–85.]

Despite Nasir al-Din Shah's desire to visit Europe as early as in the year 1870, numerous preoccupations and internal problems compelled him to postpone his plan (chief among the latter difficulties were insecure borders in the northeast and the state of chaos and mass suffering resulting from the protracted Great Famine in the years 1871–2). It was not until the fall of 1872 that the Shah's planned journey was officially announced. On September 5th, 1872, the foreign minister Mirza Sa'id Khan (see above) officially notified the foreign legations in Tehran of the Shah's decision to embark on a trip that was slated to take him to the main countries and capitals of Europe. Thus, pursuant to official invitations extended to the Shah by several emperors, kings and heads of governments, among them those of Russia, Austria, Germany, France and Britain, the Shah and his large entourage of some seventy princes, ministers, high military and civil officials and courtiers departed from Tehran on April 20th, 1873. Crossing Iran's border at the Caspian seaport of Anzali on May 7th, in the course of the next five months the Shah's itinerary over sea and land brought him first to Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg), and from there to Germany,

Holland, Belgium, England, France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and, again, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. He arrived back in Tehran on September 23rd of the same year.

Nasir al-Din Shah's first journey to Europe took place shortly after the cessation of the devastating Great Famine of 1871–2. As it was already discussed in the previous section of our book (see above, source no. 38, entitled "The Great Famine of 1871–2 in Iran and the Beginning of Organized Activity Abroad on behalf of Iranian Jews"), the news and reports on the vast human suffering and horrors of the famine were widely circulated by the Jewish press and by Jewish communal and philanthropic organizations across the Jewish communities of Europe, North America, the Ottoman Empire, and as far as India and Australia. The latter news and reports, which described in detail the miseries of Iran's Jewish inhabitants in the course of the latter unprecedented catastrophe, further alerted the attention of the major Jewish leaders and organizations of the West to the harsh and oppressed condition of Iranian Jews in most of the towns and provincial settlements across Iran. Nasir al-Din Shah's scheduled journey across Europe provided the main Jewish leaders and organizations of the European continent with a rare opportunity to meet with the Shah and his senior officials and intercede on behalf of their Iranian coreligionists. Thus, with the official announcement of the Shah's planned journey in early September of 1872, the prominent Jewish leaders and philanthropic organizations of Western Europe and their affiliated and like-minded communal institutions and publications across Europe began the organization of a well-coordinated campaign on behalf of Iranian Jews. The broad aims of the latter collective efforts, which repeated themselves also in the course of the Shah's two subsequent journeys to Europe in the years 1878 and 1889, were: (1) to welcome and meet the Shah and his officials in the main cities and capitals of Europe and present them with petitions on behalf of Iran's Jewish subjects; (2) to arrange for official and unofficial meetings with the Shah and his senior aides and convey to them general grievances as well as specific requests and recommendations intended to alleviate the hardships and disabilities of Iranian Jews and improve their overall standing and living conditions.

Following a plan that was conceived by the heads of the Anglo-Jewish Association in London and coordinated in close collaboration with the presidency of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, it was decided that in every capital of Central and Western Europe where the Shah was to stay or pass, delegations of most influential local Jews would

present to the Shah personally petitions on behalf of the Jews of Iran. The plan, which had been meticulously prepared, was carried out throughout Nasir al-Din Shah's visit in the capitals and some of the main cities of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. It started in Berlin, on June 4th, 1873, where a Jewish deputation consisting of the heads of the Alliance committee in the German capital presented a petition to the Shah. The same was done in Amsterdam, on June 10th (by a committee representing the main Portuguese and Ashkenazi congregations in the city); in Brussels, on June 17th (by the representative leaders of the local community); in London, on June 24th (by two separate delegations formed by the representatives of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the latter headed by Sir Moses Montefiore); in Paris, on July 12th (by a delegation on behalf of the Alliance, headed by the veteran French statesman Isaac Adolphe Crémieux, the president of its central committee); in Vienna, on August 6th (by a deputation of Viennese leaders on behalf of the Alliance organization in the city), and, finally, in Istanbul, on August 20th (by a delegation on behalf of the heads of the Jewish community and the representatives of the Alliance organization in the capital of the Ottoman Empire). For further information on the meetings of the latter delegations with the Shah and texts of the petitions that were submitted to him and to his senior officials, see in BAIU, 2^e semestre 1875, pp. 93–113. For the Hebrew version of the same petitions as well as the protocols of the meetings with Nasir al-Din Shah and his officials, see in *Mishloah Manot el Beney Yisrael me-Eres Paras*, op. cit., pp. 3–28.

Not only in the large metropolitan centers of Europe were petitions presented to the Shah or his senior officials. Even in smaller cities and towns of Europe, through which the Shah and his retinue passed, delegations consisting of prominent heads of the local Jewish communities awaited the Shah and presented him with appeals. Thus, for example, following the Shah's visit in Berlin, he arrived in the German city of Wiesbaden. In the words of *The Jewish Chronicle of London*, which reported on the effort exerted by the Jewish community in this German city on behalf of their coreligionists in Iran: "On the 8th instant (i.e., the month of June 1873), the Shah of Persia paid a visit to Wiesbaden, where, as it was rumoured, he intended to make a stay of three days. Dr. Lehman, the editor of (the German language weekly) *Israelit* states in his paper that he had been urged on many sides to follow the example set at Berlin, and placed before the rulers of Persia a petition for the improvement of our Jewish brethren in that empire. Dr. Lehman

yielded to the consideration that it might be of service if His Majesty learned in the several places visited by him in the civilized portions of Europe, that the Jews are deeply sympathetic with their brethren in the distant East. The deputation, consisting altogether of five gentlemen, therefore took themselves to the palace where the Persian Monarch, as guest of the Emperor, had fixed his quarters with a suite of 80 persons. The deputation, thereupon, met with the Grand Vizier, who explained to the deputation that the Shah had already received a petition in Berlin, to the same effect. Dr. Lehman, however, observed and stated to the Grand Vizier that their object was to attest that everywhere the Jews take the liveliest interest in the welfare of their brethren in Persia, and that their interest had been practically demonstrated during the Persian famine by the bountiful collections that had been set on foot. The petition states that as the Jews of Persia do not enjoy the same amount of liberty as the other subjects of his Persian Majesty, an appeal is made for civil, political and social emancipation of the Persian Jews. Such equality would have the effect, as has been in Europe, of enabling our brethren to excel in the domains of arts, sciences, commerce and industry.” For the full text of the latter passage, see in *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 222 (June 27, 1873), p. 214.

Petitions and representations in the same spirit were also forwarded to the Shah, through the medium of his prime minister (Mirza Husain Khan), by representatives on behalf of the Anglo-Jewish Association in the English cities of Manchester, Liverpool and Portsmouth. Cf. *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 223 (July 4, 1873), p. 237, and No. 224 (July 11, 1873), p. 251. Even the Jews of Australia took part in the petition movement. In the words of the annual report of the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association, published about a year after Nasir al-Din Shah’s journey: “The movement initiated by the Council (of the Anglo-Jewish Association) last year in behalf of the Jews of Persia proved successful, and evoked a spirit of unanimity which in itself evidenced in no small degree the benefit of associations akin to our own. In every capital of Europe, through which the Shah passed, addresses were presented to him, all framed on the same model, and all praying him to relieve our brethren in his dominions. And not only was this done in Europe, but even our Australian brethren followed suit; for from Melbourne—the seat of our Victorian branch—came a petition to the like effect, signed by the heads of the various congregations in the Australian colonies, and thus giving expression to the Jewish feelings which animate our brethren in the southern hemisphere. This

petition was forwarded to Persia, through the kindness of the Foreign Office; and intelligence has just reached us that it has been placed in the hands of Nasser Ed-Din, and favourably received." See *AJA*, 3 (1873–1874), pp. 18–19.

Behind the petition movement and the organized campaign on behalf of the Iranian Jews in the course of Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe stood the intention of Jewish leaders of Europe to impress the Shah and his senior officials with the considerable strength and influence enjoyed by European Jewry. Thus the basic strategy that was adopted consciously and deliberately by the heads of the major Jewish organizations and communities in Western Europe was to acquaint the person of the Shah and his senior officials with the progress and achievements that the Jews in the various countries of Europe had attained by virtue of their emancipation and increasing integration in the lives of their respective national states. The fundamental message thus conveyed to the Shah by the various Jewish leaders and deputations across Europe was that if the Jews of Iran were afforded genuine civil equality, state protection and favorably socio-economic and cultural opportunities (similar to those that had been granted to the Jews in Central and Western Europe ever since the French Revolution in 1789), they, too, would be transformed from an oppressed and marginalized religious minority into an integral and productive part of the Iranian general population. Moreover, the consorted effort of prominent Jewish leaders and public figures in the capitals of Europe and the Ottoman Empire was to make the Shah and his high ranking officials take note of the considerable political, financial and international clout and network of connections enjoyed by prominent Jewish individuals and circles in the main capitals and centers of power across Europe. Given the considerable fragility and weakness of the Iranian state and its institutions vis-à-vis the broad strategic, economic and military threats and challenges posed by the European powers (chief among them colonial Britain and expansionist Russia), and in light of the growing economic and budgetary strains and difficulties of the Iranian government during the 1860s and onward, the influential and enterprising Jews of Europe could constitute an important and potentially useful element in Iran's efforts to obtain economic investments and enlist financial and political support across Europe. Of special importance among the latter group of influential Jews of Europe were a large number of international financiers and bankers. Some among the latter mentioned were members of old and established Jewish families involved actively in communal and

philanthropic causes, while many others belonged to a growing class of nineteenth-century Jewish entrepreneurs, investors and developers with commercial interests and activities in various parts of Europe as well as in the Middle East and the Far East. Well aware of their relative strength both internationally as well as locally within their own individual states, the leaders of the major Jewish organizations and communities from Western and Central Europe sought to draw the attention of the Shah and his senior officials to the benefits and advantages that Iranian authorities could expect and derive from improving the condition of their poorly-protected coreligionists in Iran.

Among the meetings between Nasir al-Din Shah and the various Jewish leaders and deputations in the capitals of Europe during the months of June–August 1871, particularly important and consequential were those that took place in London and Paris. The importance of the meetings in these two central capitals of Western Europe drew from a number of closely related factors. First, as far as British Jewry in general and its major communal and umbrella organizations during this period are concerned, London served as the center for the Jews of the British Empire. Two of the major intra-communal organizations of British Jewry during the 1870s, namely the Board of Deputies of British Jews (dating from 1760 and led at this time by Sir Moses Montefiore) and the Anglo-Jewish Association (founded in 1871) were the principal initiators and organizers of the general campaign on behalf of the Iranian Jews. Of the latter two, as it was explained in some detail in our book (see above, source no. 38), the Board of Deputies and its president Sir Moses Montefiore had been involved in numerous public and confidential activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran ever since the 1840s. Naturally, therefore, the influential and well-connected leaders of British Jewry affiliated with the latter two major organizations formed the two main deputations that conferred with Nasir al-Din Shah (on June 24th, 1873), and presented to him their grievances as well as their views and recommendations concerning the Jews of Iran. Secondly, in close coordination with the Anglo-Jewish Association (which was dedicated to the protection and promotion of Jewish rights across the Jewish Diaspora by diplomatic means), the Alliance Israélite Universelle of France (the first modern international Jewish organization founded in 1860 in Paris) sought and was granted an audience with the Shah in Paris on July 12th, 1873. In a deputation which was headed by the veteran French statesman Isaac Adolphe Crémieux, President of the Central Committee of the Alliance, and which included among other

Jewish leaders the Chief Rabbis of France and Paris, the representatives of French Jewry repeated in essence the views, complaints and recommendations that had been addressed to the Shah by the British delegation in London.

As regards the historical outcome and the long-term achievements of the meetings with the Shah in London and Paris, we should point to the following. First, despite the fact that throughout his meetings with Jewish leaders and representatives, the Iranian monarch denied and rejected vehemently the claim that his Jewish subjects were unprotected, discriminated and persecuted, following his meetings in London and Paris he conceded that upon return to Iran he would pay particular attention to the various points and grievances that had been raised before him in London and Paris, with a view to improve the overall condition of his Jewish subjects. Thus, following his two separate meetings in London with Sir Moses Montefiore and with the delegation of the Anglo-Jewish Association (see in the texts reproduced as source no. 39 in our book), the Shah, through his Minister Plenipotentiary in London, Mirza Malkum Khan, issued the following official announcement to Sir Moses Montefiore: "Buckingham Palace, July 5th, 1873. I am commanded by His Majesty the Shah to acknowledge the receipt of your memorial, praying that favour and protection may be generally extended to the Jews in Persia. His Majesty has always manifested solicitude for the welfare of his subjects, without distinction of class or creed; and he will take care that no injustice or undue severity is shown to the Jewish community, whom you rightly characterise as loyal, peaceable, and industrious citizens. His Majesty thanks you for the good wishes you have expressed in regard to him. (signed) Malcom." For the text of the latter announcement, see L. Loewe, *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 256.

Similarly, in the form of an official reply to the representation of the Anglo-Jewish Association in London, Malkum Khan, in mid-July 1873, issued the following announcement to the council of the latter organization: "I am commanded by the Shah to acknowledge the receipt of your address congratulating His Majesty on his arrival in England, and praying for the redress of certain grievances and disabilities under which it is stated that the Jews in Persia labour.

His Majesty is certainly desirous that no distinction should be made between various classes of his subjects in regard to the enjoyment of religious freedom and civil rights, and he will accordingly on his return to his country give attention to the various points which you have

brought to his notice, with a view of improving the condition of the various Jewish communities in Persia, whom he has always regarded as industrious and loyal citizens.

His Majesty also thanks you for the many kind wishes you have expressed toward him. (signed) MALCOM." See *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 227 (August 1, 1873), p. 306.

The two above cited announcements in the name of Nasir al-Din Shah constituted the first royal declarations of their kind in which the disabilities and hardships of Iranian Jews were officially, albeit reluctantly, acknowledged. Moreover, the generally poor and precarious condition of Iran's scattered Jewish communities were addressed and considered separately and independently of the plights and disabilities of Iran's other religious minorities. In this respect the above official declarations attested to the success of Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe to obtain from the Shah and his officials a recognition of the distinctive problems and needs of Iranian Jews and a commitment by the Iranian government to adopt particular and preferential measures regarded necessary for their protection, welfare and advancement. Thus, the royal announcements, and particularly that which was addressed to the council of the Anglo-Jewish Association, contained a pledge by the Iranian monarch to look into the specific grievances and points which had been raised by the leaders of British Jewry, with a view to improve the general condition of Iran's Jewish subjects. Both of the declarations received broad coverage in the Jewish press and communal publications of Europe and the Ottoman Empire and they were presented and hailed as significant achievements of European Jewry in their efforts on behalf of Iran's hard pressed Jewish minority. [For the texts and discussions of the above announcements in the Jewish press of Germany, see, e.g., in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 37, No. 31 (July 29, 1873), pp. 505–506, and year 39, No. 3 (January 12, 1875), pp. 42–43, and particularly in *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 29 (July 23, 1873), p. 266, and No. 40 (October 15, 1873), p. 363. For the rather extensive coverage of the same in the English-language press of British Jewry, see, e.g., in *The Jewish Chronicle* (New Series), No. 227 (August 1, 1873), pp. 306, 322–323; No. 234 (September 12, 1873), p. 394, and No. 238 (October 17, 1873), p. 487. For the translated text of Nasir al-Din Shah's announcement to Sir Moses Montefiore and profuse expressions of gratitude to Nasir al-Din Shah in the Hebrew-language press of the Ottoman Empire, see, e.g., in the weekly *Habazeleth* of Jerusalem, year 4, Nos. 2–3 (October 24, 1873), pp. 9–10.]

In light of the historic importance of Nasir al-Din Shah's announcement in London, the English text of the latter declaration (dated July 5th, 1873 and addressed by Mirza Malkum Khan to Sir Moses Montefiore) was translated soon into Hebrew and Persian and reproduced in the form of an ornamented lithographed sheet. Copies of the latter document with the lithographed autograph of Sir Moses Montefiore were shortly afterwards dispatched by Sir Moses to some fifty of Iran's main urban and provincial Jewish communities. [For the detailed list of these communities and settlements, see *Hamagid*, year 17, No. 40 (October 15, 1873), p. 363.] In order to inform both the Jews and the non-Jewish inhabitants in the various towns and settlements in Iran with respect to the efforts that were made on behalf of the Iranian Jews in Europe, and in order to publicize Nasir al-Din Shah's pledge to protect and promote his Jewish subjects, Sir Montefiore called on the heads of the various Jewish communities to post a copy of the latter tripartite document (featuring the original English declaration and its Hebrew and Persian translations) at the entrance of every synagogue. Moreover, as a token of gratitude to the Iranian monarch, in the form of four Hebrew lines added at the bottom of the latter document, Sir Montefiore urged the Jews of Iran "to give thanks to the just and righteous monarch Nasir al-Din Shah for his noble treatment of his Jewish subjects and pray for the prolongation of his reign." [For a photograph of the latter document, see R. Kashani, *Yehudey Paras, Bukhara ve-Afghanistan*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 29. For a general discussion on the document and the central role played by Sir M. Montefiore in the organized campaign on behalf of Iranian Jewry in the years 1871–1873, see A. Netzer, "Montefiore ve-Yehudey Paras," op. cit., pp. 60–67.]

As for the practical and noteworthy results of the meeting between Nasir al-Din Shah and the representatives of the Alliance in Paris, already in the course of the audience (on July 12th, 1873), the Shah gave his agreement to the establishment of modern-oriented schools for Iranian Jews under the directorship of the Alliance. A day after the latter meeting, in which the Iranian prime minister Mirza Husain Khan and Iran's minister plenipotentiary in London Mirza Malkum Khan were also present, the minutes of the audience with the Shah were signed by the President of the Alliance and fourteen members of its central committee, and, on the same day, confirmed and countersigned by the Iranian prime minister. Moreover, two days after the meeting (i.e., on July 14th), in a letter addressed to Iran's prime minister, the President

of the Alliance proposed that following the agreement granted by the Shah with regard to the establishment of Alliance schools for Iranian Jews, (1) the Shah should make known throughout Iran his royal promise of protecting the establishment of Alliance schools in Iran; (2) a school should be established first in Tehran, and the appointment of its headmaster and teachers would be the responsibility of the Alliance Central Committee; (3) the school premises should be provided by the government of Iran and the hiring and salaries of Persian teachers for the school should also be the responsibility of the Iranian government; (4) with the agreement of the Iranian authorities, and at the expense of the Alliance, some Jewish youths from Iran would be sent to Paris for education; upon return to Iran the latter would be employed in the management of Alliance schools in Iran; (5) the expenses of the Alliance school in Tehran would be the responsibility of the Alliance Central Committee. If, with the consent of the Iranian government, other schools were founded in other locations, their expenses would also be born by the Alliance Central Committee.

In an official response to the latter proposals, the Iranian prime minister informed the President of the Alliance on July 18th, stating: "I receive with satisfaction the proposal you made on behalf of the Society of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Government of my august master, His Majesty the Shah, will readily accord its kind patronage to the schools which that society will establish and sustain in Persia for the moral development of the Jewish population." The letter further confirmed the agreement of the Iranian Government to the specific proposals that had been submitted by the President of the Alliance and emphasized that the Iranian Government would act as soon as possible to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of Alliance schools.

As far as the actual establishment of modern schools for Iranian Jews under the directorship of the Alliance organization is concerned, however, numerous obstacles and disagreements delayed the implementation of the agreed-upon plan for a rather long period of time. It was not until April 1898 (i.e., twenty-five years after the meeting in Paris between Isaac A. Crémieux and Nasir al-Din Shah, and nearly two years after the latter's assassination) that the first Alliance school for boys was established inside the Jewish quarter of Tehran. Following the inauguration of the latter school in the capital city, other Alliance schools were subsequently founded in the larger communities of Hamadan (in 1900), Isfahan (in 1901), Shiraz (in 1903), Sanandaj (in 1903)

and Kermanshah (in 1904). In the wake of the establishment of Alliance schools in the latter cities, a few other communities, among them those of Tuyserkan and Nahavand (in 1906), Kashan (in 1911) and Gulpaygan (in 1914) were given assistance by the Alliance to establish and maintain their own schools. The founding of the Alliance schools (for boys and girls) together with several closely related cultural and communal activities and measures adopted by directors and emissaries of the Alliance in favor of Iran's larger and smaller Jewish communities were among the important factors during the first two decades of the twentieth century that contributed to a gradual improvement in the lives of Iranian Jews, particularly in the larger cities. The educational and related welfare and diplomatic activities of the Alliance organization in Iran were designed to ameliorate and uplift the generally poor and vulnerable position of Iran's Jewish subjects and lead to greater participation and integration of Iranian Jews in the diverse spheres of Iranian society, economy and general culture. The latter endeavors and activities of the Alliance in favor of Iranian Jewry coincided for the most part with numerous historical, political and ideological processes and developments inside Iran which marked Iran's uneasy transition from a fundamentally pre-modern and traditional Islamic monarchy towards a more Western-oriented, egalitarian and increasingly secular and modern-oriented state and society. The latter processes and changes inside Iran, particularly as of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6, ultimately resulted in relaxation or substantial removal of some of the major disabilities and long established discriminatory laws and practices which had affected and shaped the lives of Iran's religious minorities. The new trends, reforms and state legislations during the first decade of the twentieth century and onward represented a radical departure from religious, socio-political and cultural norms and institutions which dated back to the Safavid era (1501–1722) and earlier. These late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century changes and developments, which had significant impact both on the legal and actual position of Iran's religious minorities, were further expanded and accelerated under the autocratic rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–1941), and particularly during the years of the centralist, Western-oriented and secular monarchy of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–1979). In retrospect, however, it appears that the initial and essentially slow and fragmented changes and improvements in the general condition of Iranian Jews (i.e., changes and improvements that began during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the

twentieth century) grew progressively under the reign of Reza Shah and reached their peak during the 1960s–1970s. The latter improvements in diverse areas and aspects of individual, communal and collective lives of Iranian Jews during the years 1906–1979 stemmed from greater measures of physical security, civil rights, socio-economic opportunities and religious freedoms that were afforded to Iranian Jews as well as to the members of Iran's other recognized religious minorities. These twentieth-century changes and improvements, which were introduced and guaranteed first and foremost by the Iranian state and its affiliated arms and institutions, resulted in unprecedented levels of involvement, participation and integration on the part of Iranian Jews in many (but not all) areas of activity in the general lives of the Iranian state, society, economy and culture as of the 1920s until today. Indeed, the collective history of Iranian Jews in the course of the twentieth century and the accounts of its individual communities and settlements during the eventful decades of the last century point to the profound changes that transformed the lives of Iranian Jews from an utterly oppressed, persecuted and threatened religious minority (much through the end of the nineteenth century) into an increasingly active, enterprising and productive segment of Iran's general population (ever since the beginning of the twentieth century). An overview of the general history of Iranian Jews in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and particularly ever since the beginning of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign in 1848) indicates that some of the improvements in the general condition of Iranian Jews during the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century can be traced to actions and decisions of Nasir al-Din Shah and his officials. In the various sources and discussions in our book which deal with the fundamentally poor and oppressed conditions of the vast majority of Iranian Jews through most years of the nineteenth century, we referred more than once both to the desire as well as the pragmatic interests and exigencies of the Qajar state to protect its Jewish and other non-Muslim subjects. Nasir al-Din Shah's first journey to Europe and his meetings with the leaders and representatives of European Jewry discussed above at length did indeed constitute an important and historic event in the lives of Iranian Jews in the course of the nineteenth century. Nasir al-Din Shah's personal encounter with the powerful representatives of European and Ottoman Jewry on the one hand and the sustained pressure and lobbying of European governments and officials (chief among them those of Britain and France) on behalf of Iran's

poorly protected Jews on the other hand bore fruit. Upon his return to Iran in September 1873, and much through the end of his reign in May 1896, Nasir al-Din Shah himself and some of his senior officials and appointed governors (among them the prime ministers, the Shah's elder and powerful son Mas'ud Mirza Zil al-Sultan and some of the provincial governors who belonged to the extended Qajar royal family) displayed increasing concern and attention to the diverse plights, grievances and difficulties of Iran's highly scattered Jewish communities and settlements. The diverse primary and secondary sources of information that throw light on the basic positions and actions of the Iranian government with respect to Iranian Jews following Nasir al-Din Shah's first journey to Europe attest to the considerable sensitivity and responsiveness of the Shah and his high-ranking officials to the views, demands and complaints of Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe. The same sources and documents equally point to Nasir al-Din Shah's determination and conscious effort to address both the hardships and grievances of individual Jews as well as providing physical protection and various forms of support and assistance to the country's vastly diffused Jewish minority. The efforts of Nasir al-Din Shah and his high-ranking officials to maintain friendly and conciliatory relations with Europe's Jewish leaders and organizations following the Shah's first journey to Europe are evidenced in a large body of archival documents and published reports in several languages dating from the years 1873–1896. Thus, for example, in a long letter that was written by the chief rabbi of Tehran in February 1875 and addressed to I.A. Crémieux and the Central Committee of the Alliance in Paris, we are told that as soon as Nasir al-Din Shah's prime minister (Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar) was informed that the Hebrew protocols of the Shah's meetings with the Jewish leaders of Europe had reached the heads of the Jewish community of Tehran, he approached the latter and requested to obtain a copy of the protocols. The prime minister, so we learn from the letter, intended to translate the protocols into Persian, as he was anxious to be appraised of their contents and intended to respond on them in writing to the heads of the Alliance organization. (For the original text of the letter written and addressed by the chief rabbi of Tehran to the heads of the Alliance organization in Paris, see AAIU, IRAN.IIC.6. No. 9071/2, sent from Tehran on or about February 23, 1875, and received in Paris on April 16, 1875.) The sustained efforts of Nasir al-Din Shah and his senior officials to reassure the Jewish leaders and organizations of Europe with respect to concrete actions

and measures that were being taken by them in favor of Iran's Jewish subjects are clearly reflected in numerous cases and instances during the years 1873–1896, in which either individual Jews or entire communities were subjected to various forms of violence, crime and mistreatment. In the city of Hamadan, where religious tensions and physical frictions between Jews and Muslims were endemic throughout the nineteenth century (see source no. 33 in our book), in the fall of 1875, a Jew named Yehuda was accused by local Muslims of having reviled the Muslim faith. According to reports that arrived from Hamadan and Baghdad and were published in the Jewish press of Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the man was seized and beaten to death by enraged Muslims in the city and his body was subsequently set on fire. [Cf. *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 1 (October 7, 1875), p. 3, and *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, year 39, No. 40 (September 28, 1875), p. 649; No. 41 (October 5), p. 555; and No. 43 (October 19), p. 696.] Responding forcefully to the outrage, the government arrested the culprits and punished them. It further announced that the central government would not allow any discrimination among the kingdom's diverse religious and ethnic denominations. See *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 3 (November 5, 1875), p. 19, and particularly in a detailed letter by the heads of the Jewish community of Hamadan to Sir Moses Montefiore, in BZI, archival file 311, document 22, written on the 5th of the Hebrew month of Adar 5645 (February 20, 1885). Following the latter incident, in an effort to assure the Jewish leaders of Europe that the Shah and his government would do everything in their power in order to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in Hamadan and in other parts of the country, the Prime Minister Mirza Husain Khan sent a personal conciliatory telegram to the President of the Alliance, emphasizing his own special sympathy and favorable attitude towards the Jewish people. *Habazeleth*, year 5, No. 5 (November 19, 1875), p. 40. Shortly after the latter incident, towards the end of April 1876, the Jewish community of Hamadan was once again on the verge of another outrage. The body of a Muslim woman was found inside the Jewish quarter and the Muslims in the city accused the Jews of having murdered her. Although the investigation of the local authorities revealed that the woman's body had been cast by some Muslims into the Jewish quarter, groups of Muslim residents took up arms and threatened to attack the Jewish quarter. Seeing the gravity of the situation, Nasir al-Din Shah issued warnings which were announced in all the mosques of Hamadan, stating:

“Should the hair of one single Jew be caused to fall, Hamadan will be destroyed.” Cf. BMAIU, No. 7, July 1876, pp. 104–105.

Nasir al-Din Shah’s greater measures of awareness and attention to the hardships and vulnerabilities of his Jewish subjects following his first visit to Europe extended both to the larger urban communities as well as to the smaller settlements in the remote provincial districts. For example, in the provincial town of Zarqan (located in the province of Fars and 35 kilometers to the northeast of Shiraz), the Jews, numbering some tens of families in 1875, were subjected to extortions, mistreatment and violence at the hands of the local officials. The hardships had reportedly been so severe that a large number of those families converted to Islam in order to obtain some protection and be spared their plights. Following an intercession by Sir Moses Montefiore through the British Foreign Office in February 1875, Nasir al-Din Shah acted most promptly and instructed his elder son Zil al-Sultan (at the time the powerful and feared governor of the province of Fars) to take the Jews of Zarqan under his own personal protection and take whatever measures necessary in order to insure the physical safety and religious freedom of the Jews in that small town. [For further details on the latter affair, see in the letter of the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran, William Taylour Thomson, to Sir Moses Montefiore, published in *Hamagid*, year 20, No. 17 (May 3, 1876), p. 145.] The available sources further reveal that Zil al-Sultan, whose power and influence extended to numerous provinces beyond Fars, and included also the provinces of Isfahan, Yazd, Irak, Luristan and Khuzistan, spread his protection of Jews also to the communities of Bushihr, Burujerd, Nahavand, Kermanshah and others during the 1880s [see AJA, 11 (1881–1882), pp. 29–35, and 14 (1884–1885), pp. 29–32.] Moreover, in addition to larger measures of physical protection and general attention granted by Nasir al-Din Shah and his senior officials to Iran’s Jewish subjects, the Shah introduced some administrative reforms with the intention of exercising more direct and personal control over the affairs of his Jewish subjects. According to a royal decree issued in the month of Zilhijjah 1295 Q./October 1878, the responsibility for handling the affairs of Iran’s Jewish minority was placed in the hands of Iran’s ministry of foreign affairs. (See BAIU, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres 1879, p. 20.) Also, as part of Nasir al-Din Shah’s general efforts to improve the legal position of Iranian Jews, and in direct response to the representations of the British envoy in Tehran, in October 1880 the Shah officially abrogated the

inheritance law, which allowed Jewish converts to Islam to deprive their relatives of their rights of inheritance. [For the translated text of the latter royal decree, see BAIU, No. 24, 1899, pp. 63–64. Cf. AJA, 11 (1881–1882), p. 33, and *Habazeleth*, year 26, No. 29 (May 1, 1896), p. 226.] The Shah further issued a decree allowing the Jews to open shops in the city bazaars [see AJA, 19 (1889–1890), p. 27], and in the form of a personal commitment to the leaders of British Jewry, he pledged to grant the Jews of Iran the same rights and concessions which had been accorded to Iran's Zoroastrians and Christian Nostorians. [See AJA, 11 (1881–1882), p. 33.]

Despite the considerable good will and determination of Nasir al-Din Shah and his close circle of officials to address the plights of Iran's Jewish subjects and improve their overall position, the historical conditions and realities that had long been responsible for the diverse existential hardships and disabilities of Iranian Jews changed but little through the end of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign in 1896 and some years thereafter. The philanthropic organizations and leaders of European Jewry, and chief among them those of Britain and France, continued to be informed of ongoing hardships, routine mistreatments and daily threats and abuses to which individual Jews as well as entire communities were subjected through the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, rich and detailed information and documentation found in various archives as well as in the Jewish press of Europe (and particularly in the publications of the Anglo-Jewish Association and those of the Alliance relating to the years following Nasir al-Din Shah's first visit to Europe) reveal that the solutions to the continuous plights of Iranian Jews during the last quarter of the nineteenth century lay beyond the good intentions but limited power of the Iranian monarch. The fundamentally outdated, underdeveloped and stagnant nature of the Qajar state and its diverse institutions were short of generating the broad socio-political, cultural and environmental changes that could significantly ameliorate the position of Iran's hard pressed Jewish minority. Thus, on the eve of Nasir al-Din Shah's second visit to Europe in the summer of 1878, the prevalent view among the Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe was that the overall condition of Iranian Jews had changed but very little ever since the Shah's first meetings with the heads of European Jewry five years earlier. Reflecting the latter broadly shared opinion, in an article entitled "The Shah Again in Europe," *The Jewish Chronicle of London* commented in the following words on the ongoing

difficulties of Iranian Jews and their deeply rooted causes: "It is quite true that not much has come of the demonstration made five years ago when he (i.e., Nasir al-Din Shah) visited our metropolis. We have not heard of any perceptible improvement in the condition of the Jews in Persia. Things are pretty much as they were. But we have no right to ascribe the disappointment to any want of good will on the part of the Shah. Persia, unfortunately, is large, and the Shah far off. There is little intercommunication between the provinces and the capital. The fanaticism of the people, moreover, is as great as their greed. All these circumstances operate to the detriment of the unfortunate Jews. The Shah's orders at a distance from the court may be disregarded with impunity, his authority set aside by provincial governors. Misrepresentations are not easily discovered and the Shah is at all times liable to be deceived by bigoted or rapacious servants. Nevertheless, there is something in it that we have not heard anything during the last five years of fierce persecutions which at one time were chronic in Persia; nor of individual flagrant acts of violence, which at one time were matters of almost daily occurrence. Some good has therefore been done by the solicitations on behalf of his Jewish subjects addressed to him on his former visit in Europe. (Yet), it is a fact that of the several projects for the benefit of the Persian Jews discussed at the time when the Shah paid his visit to Europe not one came to anything. It was all a straw fire. Not even the proposal of the Alliance to get some Persian lads educated in Europe was carried out. The failure of the first attempt was sufficient to discourage it. No second attempt was made. Yet a good Jewish school at Teheran would be an immense boon to the Jews of Persia. Not only because a good education is at all times a benefit, but also because the presence of a European headmaster in itself might be made to exercise a most salutary influence extending far beyond his sphere of immediate activity..." For the full text of the latter article, see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 486 (July 19, 1878), p. 3.

Absence of significant change in the general condition of Iran's Jewish subjects during the 1880s, evidenced by a large number of incidents and grievances from across Iran reported to the Jewish organizations of Western Europe, prompted the latter bodies to meet again with Nasir al-Din Shah during his third (and last) journey to Europe in the summer of 1889. In advance of the Shah's arrival in London in the beginning of July 1889, the heads of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews resolved to meet again with Nasir al-Din Shah and draw his attention to what Sir Julian Goldsmid, President of the

Anglo-Jewish Association, called “the lamentable condition of Persia’s Jewish subjects.” Cf. *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 1058 (July 5, 1889), p. 12. In words reminiscent of those that had been expressed by Jewish leaders of Western Europe during Nasir al-Din Shah’s first visit to Europe, Sir Goldsmid further noted: “Many of the grievances which we dealt with on the previous occasion, we shall have to refer to again, and especially the way which provides that a Jew who turns Mahomedan has the right to claim the property of his family. Under these circumstances some among us ask ‘what is the good of making any representation?’” See *ibid.*

Guided by gloomy reports on the condition of the Jews in Iran, and particularly in light of a detailed report which had been written and dispatched from Baghdad by the educator and communal activist Morris Cohen (see source no. 6 in our book), the heads of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews resolved to request an audience with the Shah and present him with another petition. Accordingly, on July 4, 1889, a deputation on behalf of the latter organizations, headed by Lord Rothschild and Sir Julian Goldsmid, met at Buckingham Palace with the Shah and presented him with an address on behalf of his Jewish subjects. Cf. *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 1057 (June 28, 1889), pp. 14–15, and, *ibid.*, No. 1058 (July 5, 1889), p. 7. In addition to a request to facilitate the establishment of modern schools for Jewish children and promote higher education among Iran’s Jewish subjects by admitting them on an equal footing with Iran’s Muslim subjects to schools established by the Iranian government, the address concluded by stating: “Finally, we petition your Majesty to renew throughout the provinces of Persia those gracious edicts which your Majesty has promulgated during the last sixteen years, and which through their repetition will still more effectually imbue all races, creeds and classes with principles of equality and enlightened toleration. For it occurs in some of the remoter provinces of your vast Empire, where the authorities have not the advantage of studying immediately and continuously your Majesty’s enlightened and benevolent wishes, that many of the old usages of which your Majesty has disapproved are still resorted to, and in consequence the Jews in those regions are subjected to harsh and degrading treatment.” For the full text of the latter address, see *AJA*, 19 (1889–1890), pp. 26–28.

For sources and discussions in our book that deal with the continuation of the old plights and the fundamentally unchanged condition of the Iranian Jews during the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

see in our book, above, particularly source no. 5 (entitled “The state of the Jews in Iran in 1876”), source no. 6 (The Jews of Iran in the year 1888), source no. 28 (The Jews of Shiraz in the 1890s), source no. 29 (The Jewish community of Isfahan in the year 1888), source no. 31 (On the Jewish community of Tehran in the year 1875), source no. 32 (The Jewish community of Tehran and the cholera epidemic of 1892), source no. 34 (Letter from the community of Urumia with regard to the condition of the Jews of Western Azerbaijan in the years 1888–1893), and, below, source no. 40 (Situation of the Jews in Hamadan, October 1892).

For an extensive body of reports, documents and updates on diverse instances of violence, discrimination and persecution in many of Iran’s larger and smaller Jewish communities through the first decade of the twentieth century, see particularly in the publications of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association during the years under discussion. For some common and more representative forms and expressions of violence, mistreatment and discrimination that were directed at the Jews in the larger communities during this period, see, e.g., in Urumia, in the year 1878 (murderers of several Jews in the city and in the nearby villages are not punished), reported in BMAIU, September 1878, pp. 149–150; in Tehran, in 1883 (the head of the Jewish community is imprisoned and tortured and thirteen other elders arrested and forced to pay an exorbitant amount of money as a collective fine on account of the involvement of a Jew of Tehran in an act of robbery), reported in BMAIU, April, 1883, p. 5 and, *ibid.*, July 1883, pp. 100–101, and AJA, 12 (1882–1883), pp. 20–25; in Tehran, in 1897 (the Jewish quarter is besieged by incited Muslims and clerics demanding the Jews to wear an identifying badge), reported in BMAIU, June 1897, pp. 70–73, and, *ibid.*, July 1897, pp. 86–88; in Hamadan, as late as 1908 (ongoing instigations by some local Shi’ite clerics against the entire Jewish community), reported in BMAIU, September–October 1908, pp. 88–92, and, in the same city, in 1910 (Muslim riots against the entire community break out as one of the Jews of Hamadan is accused of having committed an indecent act against a Muslim woman), reported in BMAIU, April–May–June 1910, pp. 64–69; in Isfahan, as late as 1907 (some Muslim clerics demand that the Jews in the city wear an identifying badge), reported in BMAIU, January–February 1907, pp. 21–22; in Shiraz, in November 1905 (the Jewish quarter is invaded and pillaged by incited Muslims), in BMAIU, January 1906, pp. 16–18. For numerous cases and incidents which throw light on the

lack of security and continuation of old disabilities in the medium-sized and smaller Jewish communities and settlements during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century, see, e.g., in Tuyserkan and Gulpaygan (the Shi'ite inheritance law is still carried out in 1905, i.e., some twenty-five years after it was officially cancelled by Nasir al-Din Shah), reported in BMAIU, January 1906, pp. 7–9, 17–18 and, *ibid.*, September–October 1906, pp. 159–168; in Kermanshah, as late as 1909 (the Jewish quarter is attacked and pillaged by local Muslims and several Jewish families become homeless), reported in BMAIU, September–October 1907, pp. 117–118; in the remote and poorly protected Jewish settlements in the province of Fars (among them those in Jahrom, Nowbandegan, Zarqan, Darab, Kazerun, Lar, Dayer and Firuz-Abad), as late as 1907, the local Jews continue to be subjected to diverse forms of physical violence, old disabilities and religiously-motivated persecutions and harassments. See in BMAIU, May–June 1907, pp. 51–56.

Presentation of Addresses to the Shah

On Tuesday,¹ among the many official deputations received by the Shah of Persia at Buckingham Palace, were two deputations on behalf of the Jews of Persia. The Board of Deputies of British Jews² sent a delegation, consisting of the President, Sir Moses Montefiore,³ Bart.,

¹ I.e., on June 24, 1873.

² The representative organization of British Jewry dating from 1760. Hand in hand with its activities devoted to safeguarding and promoting Jewish interests, in the course of the 19th century the Board took an active part in the struggle for political emancipation of British Jewry and in protecting and assisting distressed and persecuted Jewish communities overseas. In the pursuit of the latter goal the Board enlisted the good offices of the British Government.

³ The outstanding and influential Jewish philanthropist and leader of British Jewry, Sir M. Montefiore (1784–1885) became president of the Board (see note 2 above) in 1838, and apart from a brief interval held that office until 1874. Regarding him and his long years of humanitarian activity on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see in our book, above, source no. 23.

the Vice-President, Mr. Joseph Mayer Montefiore,⁴ and two members of the Board, Mr. Morris S. Oppenheim⁵ and Mr. Joseph Sebag⁶

The dignified appearance of the venerable President, Sir Moses Montefiore, who wore the uniform of a Deputy-Lieutenant, seemed to produce an agreeable impression on the Shah and his suite, to whom probably some intimation had been made of the projected visit of Sir Moses Montefiore to Persia, to intercede for his distressed brethren—an intention only abandoned in deference to the wishes and the apprehensions of the friends of Sir Moses.⁷

The Anglo-Jewish Association⁸ also sent a deputation, consisting of Mr. Julian Goldsmid,⁹ M.P. (who introduced his colleagues), Mr. Serjeant

⁴ A nephew of Sir M. Montefiore, Joseph Mayer Montefiore (1816–1880) was a banker and director of the Alliance Insurance Company. A grandchild of Mayer Amschel Rothschild, the founder of the Rothschild financial dynasty, he served as President of the Board during the years 1874–1880. Regarding him and his involvement in philanthropic activities on behalf of the Jews of Iran, see in our book, above, source no. 30, note 4.

⁵ During this time M.S. Oppenheim was a member of the British Parliament.

⁶ Joseph Sebag Montefiore (1822–1903) was the son of Sir Moses Montefiore's eldest sister. A financier by profession, he was one of the leading members of London Stock Exchange, on which he amassed a large fortune. Among other capacities, he served as lieutenant of the city of London. In 1895 he became president of the Board, and in 1896 he was appointed by the King of Italy as Italian consul general in London. He was knighted in the same year.

⁷ This is a reference to Sir M. Montefiore's intention during the winter of 1872 to travel to Iran for the purpose of assisting the country's famine stricken Jews. Ultimately, however, his intention did not materialize. Regarding this specific point, see L. Loewe, *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 245–246, and source no. 38 in our book, introduction.

⁸ Founded officially on July 2, 1871, and modeled after the Alliance Israélite Universelle of France, the Anglo-Jewish Association was formed by Jews of the British Empire. The association defined as its primary objectives "the promotion of social, moral and intellectual progress among the Jews, and the obtaining of protection for those who may suffer in consequence of being Jews."

⁹ English baronet, privy counselor and a member of the British Parliament, Sir Julian Goldsmid (1838–1896) was among the prominent leaders of British Jewry during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The eldest son of Frederick D. Goldsmid, also a member of the British Parliament, Sir Julian served as vice-president of the Anglo-Jewish Association during the years 1871–1886, and as its president in the years 1886–1895.

Simon,¹⁰ M.P., Baron George de Worms,¹¹ Mr. F.D. Mocatta¹² and Mr. Reuben D. Sassoon.¹³

Although the two addresses were presented by different bodies in the community, they had the same object; and it will be gratifying to both to be assured, as we are happy to state, that the Shah received the addresses with remarkable cordiality and expressed his earnest desire to continue the protection which he had always accorded to the Jews in his Empire.

¹⁰ Sir John (Serjeant) Simon (1818–1897) was among the founders of the Anglo-Jewish Association. English serjeant at law and a politician, he was elected to Parliament in 1868 and reelected four consecutive times in the course of the years 1874–1886. During his long years of activity in the Parliament and in British politics he acted as an advocate of oppressed and persecuted Jews in Rumania, Morocco, Russia and Serbia.

¹¹ The eldest son of the financier Baron Solomon Benedict (1801–1882), Baron George de Worms (1829–1912) was a member of the affluent and influential de Worms family, tracing its origin to Frankfurt, Germany, whose descendants were prominent in British finance, politics, arts and philanthropy. Among his other capacities, Baron George served as vice-president of the British Royal Society of Literature in the years 1896–1900.

¹² Frederick David Mocatta (1828–1905), financier, communal activist, philanthropist and scholar, belonged to the financial firm of Mocatta & Goldsmid, which, among its other activities, served as bullion-brokers to the Bank of England. In 1873 he retired from the latter firm and devoted himself almost exclusively to the study and advancement of philanthropic causes and projects. He served as vice-president of the Anglo-Jewish Association during the early years of the 20th century and was elected (in 1900) as president of the Jewish Historical Society of England.

¹³ This is Reuben David Sassoon (1835–1905), son of David Sassoon (1792–1864), and a half brother of Sir Abdullah (Albert) Sassoon (1818–1896), all members of the most affluent and powerful mercantile and financial dynasty of the Sassoons. Popularly known as “the Rothschilds of the East,” the network of trade, economic enterprises and contacts of the Sassoons spread from India and China in the East to the lands of the Middle East and Europe. In addition to his rather moderate engagement in his family business, Reuben (much like his older and far more influential brother Sir Albert) was involved in communal and philanthropic activities both in and outside England. He was known for his close social connections with the members of the royal family in Britain and was a personal friend and traveling companion of the Prince of Wales. Both Reuben and Sir Albert were involved in numerous humanitarian and diplomatic efforts to assist the Jews of Iran during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. On Reuben D. Sassoon’s involvement in the relief activities on behalf of the Jewish communities of Iran during the Great Famine of 1871–2, see in our book, above, source no. 38, and particularly in his correspondence with Sir Moses Montefiore during the months of September–November 1871, in BZI, Sassoon Collection, file 4. For further biographical information regarding him, see S. Jackson, *The Sassoons*, London 1968, pp. 52–54 and 84–89.

THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES

His Majesty the Shah of Persia having intimated through his ambassador that he would receive a deputation of four members of the Board of Deputies so as to enable them to present him an address of welcome which had been adopted by the Board, the following gentlemen, viz.: Sir Moses Montefiore, Bart., President, Mr. J.M. Montefiore, Vice-President, Messrs. Joseph Sebag and M.S. Oppenheim, waited upon His Majesty at Buckingham Palace at 10 o'clock on Tuesday last.¹⁴

The deputation having been ushered into the presence of His Majesty, Sir Moses Montefiore presented to him the address of welcome in which the Board earnestly besought His Majesty's protection for the Jews of Persia.

The address which had been translated into the Persian language by Dr. L. Loewe,¹⁵ was engrossed on vellum and handsomely illuminated. The Shah, who was attended by his Grand Vizier,¹⁶ received the address most graciously, and stated, through Sir Henry Rawlinson,¹⁷ that he had always desired to protect the Jews, and that he would do his best to promote their happiness.

¹⁴ I.e., June 24, 1873.

¹⁵ Born and educated in Germany (at the University of Berlin), the English Orientalist Louis Loewe (1809–1888) traveled to the Middle East, where he studied Eastern languages, among them Arabic, Persian and Turkish. In 1840 he was introduced to Sir M. Montefiore, and ever since till the latter's death in 1885 he became Sir Montefiore's personal aide, interpreter and companion. He published several works in the field of oriental linguistics, and served as the head of Jews' College (opened in London in 1856) and principal of a theological college established by Sir M. Montefiore in London in 1869. For his work entitled *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, see the list of bibliography in our book.

¹⁶ I.e., Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar (see above, introduction).

¹⁷ This is Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895), who served in Iran (1833–1838), Afghanistan and India (1839–1843), and among his many assignments and positions also served as the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran during the years 1859–1860. On account of his personal relations with the Shah, as well as his acquaintance with the Persian language, Sir Rawlinson was appointed by the British Government to attend upon the Shah during his stay in England and accompany him from place to place. In the latter capacity he was present at the meeting under discussion. On Sir H. Rawlinson's work and residence in Iran, see D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, op. cit., pp. 22–23; on his role during Nasir al-Din Shah's 1873 visit to England, see G. Rawlinson, *A Memoir of Major-General Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson*, London, New York and Bombay 1898, pp. 266–270.

The following is the text of the address:

To His Most Gracious Majesty Nazer Eddin Shah, the Mighty
Ruler of Persia, Exalted Glory and Lasting Peace.

May it Please Your Majesty,—We, the London Committee of Deputies of the British Jews, for ourselves, and for several congregations whom we represent; humbly and respectfully offer to your Majesty the grateful homage of our esteem, and the expression of our cordial welcome on the auspicious occasion of your visit to this country.

We highly value the privilege of being permitted to approach the Great Monarch to whom are entrusted the destinies of so many thousands of our coreligionists, and we feel confident that your Majesty's subjects professing the Jewish religion will ever prove themselves loyal, peaceable and industrious citizens, so as materially to contribute to the prosperity of the country in which they live, and to merit the favour and protection which we most earnestly entreat your Majesty to extend to them.

We trust that your visit to this kingdom will be a source of as much satisfaction to your Majesty as it is a cause of sincere gratification to the people of this country.

We venture to hope that this manifestation of our sentiments will be graciously received as an evidence of the solicitude which we, the London Committee of Deputies of the British Jews, feel, in common with the British nation at large, for the long life and happiness of your Majesty, and for the advancing prosperity and glory of the dominions under your Majesty's rule.

Signed on behalf of the Board,

MOSES MONTEFIORE, President

Grosvenor Gate, Park Lane, June 24th, 1873.

THE ANGLO-JEWISH ASSOCIATION

On Tuesday last, a deputation from the Anglo-Jewish Association, consisting of Mr. Julian Goldsmid, M.P., Mr. Serjeant Simon, M.P., Baron George de Worms, Messrs. F.D. Mocatta and Reuben D. Sassoon, accompanied by the solicitor and secretary, Mr. Herbert S. Lousada, waited by appointment on His Majesty the Shah of Persia,

at Buckingham Palace, for the purpose of presenting the petition of the Association and its branches on behalf of our suffering brethren in His Majesty's dominions. The petition is elegantly bound in morocco and gold, the arms of His Majesty being inlaid in the centre of the covers. It is in the form of a book, or rather portfolio. The petition is printed in Persian and English, the signatures following the Persian translation.

The deputation having been introduced, the petition was presented to H.M. the Shah by Mr. Julian Goldsmid, and His Majesty in graciously accepting it expressed through the medium of Sir Henry Rawlinson the great interest he felt in his Jewish subjects, and said that he had always desired and had protected his Jewish subjects and would continue to do so in the future.

The deputation then thanked his majesty and retired.

Owing to the short notice given to the Council¹⁸ by the Persian Minister and to the limited number which it was determined should form the deputation, many gentlemen were prevented from joining it.

The following is the text of the petition:

To the High and Mighty Sovereign the Shah of Persia, unto whom may God grant a long, peaceful, prosperous reign, and establish his Throne in the hearts of all his subjects throughout his vast dominions.

May it please your Majesty, we, the President and Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association, which is connected with the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, whose object it is to promote in every country the social, moral, and intellectual well-being of our brethren in faith, presume to approach your Majesty's August presence and to give expression to the joy which we feel, in common with all the inhabitants of this realm, on the occasion of your Majesty's gracious visit.

As Jews, however, we have special reason to hail with delight the auspicious arrival of your Majesty, the mighty and illustrious sovereign who wields the sceptre of the only surviving empire of the Ancient World; for in our minds Persia is identified with the name of the great King Cyrus, who is immortalized in history as the author of the edict which secured to the Jews liberty of worship together with the full and unfettered exercise of civil rights. It is our earnest prayer that the

¹⁸ I.e., the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association.

applause and gratitude of mankind which have followed the memory of that magnanimous Prince through thousands of years may also wait, after a long and glorious reign, on the name of your Majesty, who sits on Cyrus' throne.

Influenced all times by the sentiment of brotherhood which unites man to man, we have of late been drawn nearer to the people of Persia by the sympathy which the recent famine in the country aroused amongst us;¹⁹ and we remember with satisfaction that the impulse to aid the sufferers proceeded in the first instance from our venerable and philanthropic coreligionist Sir MOSES MONTEFIORE, who effectually pleaded and provided for the relief, not of our brethren alone, but also for those not belonging to our faith, on whom the common calamity had fallen.

When we consider the benevolent orders issued at various times by your Majesty for the purpose of securing an equal measure of justice to all your Majesty's subjects,²⁰ we are convinced that your Majesty will graciously listen to a statement of grievances from which the Jews of Persia are suffering, and which involve them in unspeakable wretchedness and misery.

1. That an entire community of Jews may be held responsible for crimes or misdemeanours committed by its individual members.
2. That the oath of a Jew is not received in courts of justice.

¹⁹ This is a reference to the Great Famine of 1871–2. Regarding this catastrophe and its diverse consequences, see source no. 38 in our book.

²⁰ Such royal decrees pledging equality, justice and protection to Iran's religious minorities were periodically issued and publicized by Nasir al-Din Shah. For the English text of such an order, which was issued relatively early in the year 1857 and was given publicity in the press of Western Europe, see in *The Jewish Chronicle*, vol. XIV, September 11, 1857, p. 1141. According to the latter royal order: "The Shah proclaims absolute equality of condition among all the subjects of his territories, Mussulman, Christian or Jew. All persons, without distinction of race or religion, are declared capable of filling the civil and military offices of the state." For the text of a similar declaration by the Shah, promising equal rights, protection and welfare for Iran's Zoroastrian subjects, see J. Piggot, *Persia, Ancient & Modern*, London 1874, p. 133. The latter royal decree was also issued in the course of Nasir al-Din Shah's 1873 visit to London, and it was announced in response to grievances with respect to the diverse plights and hardships of Iran's Zoroastrian subjects. The latter complaints were presented to the Shah by the Zoroastrian (Parsee) inhabitants of Bombay and London. The latter official decree, similar in many respects to the one that was addressed to Sir M. Montefiore with respect to the Shah's Jewish subjects, was also issued in the name of Nasir al-Din Shah by his Minister Plenipotentiary in London, Mirza Malkum Khan, at Buckingham Palace on July 5th, 1873. For the text of the latter announcement, see J. Piggot, *ibid.*, p. 161.

3. That a Jew converted to Mahommedan religion can claim to be the sole inheritor of family property to the exclusion of all relatives who have not changed their religion.
4. That at many times the Jew is prohibited from keeping a shop in the bazaars.
5. That the rights of conscience are violated by the exemption from legal pains and penalties, which is offered to the Jew on condition of his embracing the Mahommedan faith.
6. That, besides the legal taxes, the local authorities levy arbitrary exactions on the Jews.
7. That although the Jew has the nominal right of appeal to a superior court of justice, he cannot exercise such right, for he stands so much in fear of the vengeance of the inferior tribunal that he dares incur the risk of appealing.
8. That the life of a Jew is not sufficiently protected by the law, inasmuch as the murderer of a Jew can purchase immunity by payment of a fine.

We humbly submit that the redress of these grievances is worthy of a great, just, and enlightened sovereign, whose sympathies with the civilizing tendencies of the times have moved him to visit Europe, to examine for himself its leading institutions, with the view of promoting in his own extensive empire the important work of National Education.

Your Majesty, in passing through the leading States of Europe will not have failed to discover that the Jews, who formerly were subjected to exceptional laws similar to those under which their Persian brethren-in-faith still labour, are now emancipated from all disabilities, and are placed on a footing of equality with their compatriots; and your Majesty will have learned with satisfaction that they have proved themselves worthy of this humane and enlightened legislation by their industry, energy, and integrity, and, above all, by their loyal devotion to the sovereign and their country. There is scarcely a trade, profession, or art, in which they do not excel; and in the various spheres of intellectual distinction, the countries of Europe derive a considerable portion of their renown from the activity and perseverance of their Jewish citizens.

Your Majesty is undoubtedly aware that, during the middle ages, the current of prejudice had in some European countries set in so powerfully against the Jews, that they failed to obtain justice from ordinary tribunals. To remedy this great evil, the humane and benevolent rulers of the time instituted for their Jewish subjects special courts of justice.

As time ran on the public became habituated to these exceptional tribunals, and recognized in them the lesson intended to be conveyed, that the Jew is entitled to the same rights as other subjects; and as popular prejudice and intolerance waned, so these Special Courts ceased to exist, and were therefore abolished. Now we humbly pray that similar Special Courts may be instituted in Persia for your Majesty's Jewish subjects, until the great work of National Education shall have accomplished its aim, and shall have impressed the mass of the people with the sentiment of respect and forbearance for conscientious differences of religious belief.

Further, we most humbly submit that considerable relief would be afforded to your Majesty's Jewish subjects, whilst no loss would fall on the Imperial Revenue, if, in lieu of the present mode of collecting taxes from the Jews by the local authorities, each Jewish community were to be assessed, *en masse*, by your Majesty's direct Order, in proportion to its numbers, and the amount of such assessment were to be collected by the community from among its members, and remitted, by a Special Receiver, direct to the Imperial Treasury without the intervention of any Local Authority.

Lastly, we entreat your Majesty to make known your Royal Will and Pleasure to the Governors and their subordinates throughout the Persian dominions, that in future no distinction shall be made between the treatment of the Jews and that of other loyal subjects, and that they shall not be in any way impeded in the exercise of their industrial occupations.

Devoutly hoping that this our humble Petition may find favour and acceptance with your Gracious Majesty, and that to the many glorious deeds which shall lustre upon your Majesty's reign there may be added the noble one of raising the Jews of Persia from their present crushed and degraded state, and of placing them socially, morally, and politically on a level with all other denominations of the State—we will ever pray that the Supreme King of Kings who imparteth unto Princes a portion of His Glory, who giveth Power to the Mighty, and Wisdom to the Wise, may strengthen and confirm the sage rule of your Gracious Majesty, and that, whilst wielding the sceptre in justice and mercy, your Majesty may long be spared to witness the ever-increasing prosperity of Persia, and to exercise your magnanimous sway over that great and renowned Empire.

(signed).

The Shah of Persia and the Jews. Important Concessions.
*The Jewish Chronicle, August 1, 1873, p. 321*²¹

We have been favoured with a detailed account of the audience granted by the Shah to the President of the Central Committee of the Alliance²² on the 12th of last month,²³ at Paris. Some of the particulars have been communicated to us through a trustworthy source and the result is a remarkable instance in modern times of an exchange of ideas between Jews and an Eastern ruler. The Shah having a knowledge of the French language was enabled to enter into a direct communication of opinions with the gentlemen who came to plead for the protection of the Persian Jews and for the award of public justice of which many of His Majesty's subjects are so sadly in need. The spokesman on the occasion was M. Crémieux.²⁴ The commanding and fascinating oratory of that gentleman appeared to be well known to the Shah, who expressed a wish to listen to M. Crémieux, without the medium of an interpreter.

The deputation was introduced by Mirza Malcom Khan,²⁵ the Shah being, moreover, attended by his Grand Vizier, Houssein Khan.²⁶ The Shah having seen M. Crémieux on the previous day,²⁷ recognized him at once and shook hands with him.²⁸ The latter spoke to the Shah as follows:

"Sire, the Alliance Israelite Universelle, represented by its central Committee, is deeply impressed with the honour you have conferred on

²¹ For the original text of the following report, see *The Jewish Chronicle* [New Series], No. 227 (August 1, 1873), p. 321. A Hebrew version of the same report is found in *Mishloah Manot*, op. cit., pp. 12–17.

²² I.e., the Alliance Israélite Universelle of Paris.

²³ I.e., July 1873.

²⁴ I.e., Isaac Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880), who was at this time the President of the Alliance.

²⁵ At this time Iran's minister plenipotentiary in London. See above, introduction.

²⁶ I.e., Mirza Husain Khan Sipahsalar. See above, introduction.

²⁷ I.e., on Friday, July 11th, 1873, on which day Nasir al-Din Shah and his attendants arrived in Paris (from England) through the French port city of Cherbourg.

²⁸ Nasir al-Din Shah, so it appears, was indeed impressed by A. Crémieux's charisma and oratorical talent. Following his meeting with the leaders of French Jewry he wrote down in his journal on Monday, July 14th, 1873: "Monsieur Crémieux, who is a Jewish member of the French Parliament and has always been against Napoleon the Third, attended an audience (with me). He is an exceptional orator (*natiq-i gharibist*). An old and very short man, now, too, he speaks in the French Parliament and continues to be against the heads (of the government)." See Nasir al-Din Shah, *Safarnama*, op. cit., p. 141.

it by admitting it to this highly prized audience. Sire, all the Jews, even the least enlightened, are acquainted with the history of their ancestors. We know, all the Persian Jews know, that among the nations with whose history that of the Jews is intermixed, the ancient Persian nation, full of generous sympathy, brought the Jews back to their dear Palestine, under the protection of that immortal Cyrus,²⁹ who ever showed himself as their faithful protector, after having been their liberator.”

His Excellency Malcom Khan translated this passage into Persian. The king smiled, and inclined his head. Malcom Khan said, “I will faithfully render into Persian all you say so that his Majesty shall not lose a word. Please to continue.”

M. Crémieux resumed: “They all know that in their prophetic writings, Cyrus, the only one amongst all the kings of the earth is called by the name of Messiah,³⁰ that on one of the portals at the Holy Temple at Jerusalem is a drawing representing a city in its grandeur, and that city was Susa,³¹ then the capital of Persia.”

The Shah listened with marked attention, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, being spoken to by the Shah, said: “His Majesty declares that he is much moved by the historical recollections you are recalling in such touching language.”

“Sire,” continued the speaker, “forty thousand Persian Jews live under your Imperial sceptre. Allow me to say that they join with the name of Cyrus that of Nasser-ed-Deen. Allow me to tell you this religious sentiment is the surest pledge of the absolute devotion which the Persian Jews entertain towards their ruler.”

The Shah said something to Malcom Khan, which he rendered by saying “His Majesty highly appreciates all you have stated.”

“Yet Sire,” continued M. Crémieux, “we receive from the empire of Persia mournful tidings of oppression which weigh upon the Jews in your states.” (No! no! exclaimed the Shah.) “Sire, we were not willing to believe the reports. We also heard with great joy the echo of your words ringing along the countries through which you have passed and

²⁹ I.e., Cyrus the First, known as “Cyrus the Great” (r. 559–529 B.C.E.), the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty (r. 559–330 B.C.E.).

³⁰ Cyrus is depicted in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 45:1–6) as the Messiah on account of his liberating the Jewish exiles from their Babylonian captivity and allowing them to return to Zion and rebuild their temple.

³¹ The administrative capital of the Achaemenid Empire, located in the present-day province of Khuzistan, in southwestern Iran.

repeating the noble energetic words with which your Majesty met these statements and declared them to be false.”

The Shah spoke with much animation to the Minister³² who thus rendered his reply: “These accusations are false. I protect all my subjects alike. I might say that I show even more attention to those who are not of the Moslem faith. The Jews are just as well treated as all my other subjects. All you have been told is false. I once more declare such to be the case.”

“Sire,” replied the speaker, “your royal words go to the depth of our hearts. Yes, you are the protector of forty thousands Persian Israelites as of the millions of other religious bodies, by whom your empire is peopled. It affords us the utmost delight to hear you saying so. It will be for them an extreme delight to hear of it through this solemn declaration of their king.”

The Shah, pointing to the Grand Vizier, said in French: “Here is the Grand Vizier, who makes the protection of the Jews his personal business.³³ He is such a friend of the Jews as to make the Mussulmans envy them.”

The Grand Vizier bowed and smiled. The Shah then inquired how many Jews there are in France, in England, and in the rest of the European States. He was thereupon informed that in France there are from 100,000 to 120,000, in England rather less.

Information on the last question was given by M. Albert Cohn,³⁴ one of the members of the Central Committee, who stated that there are 500,000 Jews in Germany, 1,200,000 in the Austrian dominions, and 2,400,000 in Russia. He added, “Sire, here is the Grand Rabbi of the Central Consistory,³⁵ and here is the Grand Rabbi of the Consistory

³² I.e., to Mirza Malkum Khan.

³³ Regarding the prime minister Mirza Husain Khan and his supportive attitude toward Iranian Jews, see in our book, source no. 31, note 7.

³⁴ This is the French scholar and philanthropist Albert Cohn (1814–1877), who studied philosophy and oriental languages at Vienna University. In 1836 he settled in Paris, where he became closely associated with the affluent and influential French financier and entrepreneur James Mayer de Rothschild (1792–1868). He was put in charge of the latter’s philanthropic works and in that capacity traveled frequently to Morocco, Algeria and Ottoman Palestine, for the purpose of improving the condition of the Jewish communities in those countries. A member of the Central Committee of the Alliance, he also taught (1860–1876) at the rabbinical seminary in Paris.

³⁵ This is a reference to Rabbi Lazare Isidor (1814–1888), the Chief Rabbi of French Jewry. Born in Lixheim (in Lorraine), he became Chief Rabbi of Paris in 1847 and

of Paris.”³⁶ The two Rabbis, who were attired in their official robes, bowed, and the former said, “Sire, we pray unto God that He may grant to your Majesty long and happy years, and that He may, according to the language of the Holy Writ, make your kingdom as brilliant as the sun.”

A few words spoken by the Shah were rendered by Malcom Khan, as conveying the thanks of his Majesty to the address of the speakers. M. Crémieux in continuation said, “Will your Majesty now permit me to submit a question? A favourable reply would be received by us with happiness.” The monarch nodded assent, and said a word to the minister, who told M. Crémieux to speak, and that his Majesty would listen.

“Sire,” resumed M. Crémieux, “the Alliance Israelite wishes that your Jewish subjects should well understand the duties and obligations they owe to their country and their King. It is necessary to diffuse among them, from childhood upwards, the blessings of instruction. We would undertake to establish schools, to be directed by teachers of our choice, in various parts of your empire, as we have done in a large number of important cities in the East. Would this idea meet with your approval?”

“Yes,” replied the Shah in French, “I will protect your schools. M. Crémieux, come to an understanding (*entendez vous*) with the Grand Vizier, I give my approval.”

“Sire,” said M. Crémieux, “these words will re-echo in the bosoms of all Jewish populations, and will be received with a lively feeling of sympathy throughout the civilized world.” M. Crémieux then bowed, and was on the point of retiring. The Shah said in Persian, the following words, as interpreted by his minister, “I am pleased with your

Chief Rabbi of France in 1867. At the time of the meeting with Nasir al-Din Shah he was the head of the Central Committee of the Alliance.

³⁶ This is Zadoc (Zadig) Kahn (1839–1905), who at this time was the Chief Rabbi of Paris. Born in Mommenheim (in Alsace), he completed his rabbinical studies at the *Seminaire Israélite* of Paris. In 1867 he was appointed assistant to the Chief Rabbi L. Isidor of Paris (see note 35 above), whom he succeeded in 1868, before reaching the age of thirty. Upon the death of Rabbi Isidor in 1888, Kahn was unanimously elected Chief Rabbi of France. Among the prominent figures of French Jewry and an outstanding leader in international Jewish affairs, Rabbi Kahn was an active philanthropist as well as a gifted orator and author of numerous works and essays. In recognition of his long years of dedicated service to the activities of the Alliance, he was elected honorary president of the latter organization.

visit. You may be at ease as to the lot of your Persian brethren in-faith. Indeed, they themselves shall write to you that they have no cause of complaint." Then, turning to M. Crémieux, the Shah said in French, "Arrange with my Grand Vizier about your schools."

Thus ended this memorable audience. The members of the Central Committee who attended this audience, desiring to perpetuate the memorial of the meeting, determined that these minutes, for the correctness of which they vouch, shall be transcribed into the annals of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and their signatures shall be attached. Through the care of the several committees, both in France and elsewhere, the document containing a copy of the minutes is to be made known amongst the several Jewish populations. The minutes, drawn up on the 13th day of July, were signed by the president of the Alliance, and by fourteen members of the Central Committee. The minutes are counter-signed, "after having taken cognizance of them," by Houssein Khan.³⁷

Two days after this audience, the President of the Alliance reminded the Grand Vizier, by letter, of the wishes that the Central Committee had expressed respecting the measures to be adopted in Persia. These wishes were embodied in the following proposals:

1. His Highness should make known throughout the Empire the royal promise of protecting the establishment of schools.
2. A school should be established at Teheran, and the head-master of it should be sent by the Committee of the Alliance.
3. The school premises should be given by the Government of his Majesty. To this school is to be attached a professor of the Persian language, who shall be salaried through the bounty of the Shah. By thus granting to this first institution a habitat as well as a teacher, a striking proof would be afforded of the royal patronage enjoyed by the Jewish schools.
4. Orders should be given to select three Jewish youths, from thirteen to fifteen years old, who are to be sent to the President at Paris. These shall remain there sufficiently long to acquire a necessary knowledge for enabling them to take the management of schools in their native country. Those youths would be educated at the expense of the Committee.

³⁷ I.e., the Grand Vizier.

The Central Committee would, at the onset, bear the expenses to be incurred in Teheran; as also subsequently, when in common with the government it shall deem fit to establish additional schools either at Teheran or in some other cities.

On the 18th July, the President of the Alliance received a letter from the Grand Vizier, which probably will in future times be referred to as one of the most valuable state-papers affecting the educational prospects of the Persian Jews. It is worded as follows:

“I receive with satisfaction the proposal you made me on behalf of the Society of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Government of my august master, His Majesty the Shah, will readily accord its kind patronage to the schools which that society will establish and sustain in Persia for the moral development of the Jewish population.

“To facilitate the realisation of this project, the government will place at the disposal of the head-master, whom the Alliance Israelite will send to Teheran, a locality suited for an establishment of this nature. Desiring, moreover, to contribute to the further success of it, the government will connect with it for instructing in the Persian language, a competent professor, an Israelite if one can be had, or in case of need, a Mussulman. The appointments to this post shall fall to the charge of the state.

“You, Monsieur le President, will please to recognize in these acts of our government, an effect of the generous sentiments with which His Majesty, our August Sovereign, is animated in regard to his Jewish subjects and the expression of which you have received from the lips of His Majesty himself. I have, moreover, the honour of informing you, that I approve of your scheme to train at Paris, and at the expense of your society, teachers for the members of your faith in Persia. For this purpose I will take care, that according to your request, and as soon as practicable, three or four Jewish youths of acknowledged ability, be sent to Paris, this brilliant centre of civilization, to be there prepared for the pursuits of tuition.

(Signed) HOUSSEIN.”

SITUATION OF THE JEWS IN HAMADAN, IN OCTOBER
1892, AS REPORTED BY AJA, 22 (1892–1893), PP. 55–63*Introduction*

In the various sources and discussions in our book dealing with the Jewish community of Hamadan in the course of the nineteenth century and earlier, we referred to some of the main historical, communal and local characteristics of this old and important Jewish colony. While examining some of the major conditions and factors that affected and shaped the lives of the Jews in Hamadan ever since the mid-eighteenth century, we referred particularly to the testimonies of the heads of the Jewish community of Hamadan in the 1840s with respect to diverse plights and hardships that the community had experienced during the second half of the 18th century. The latter difficulties, so we learn from the testimonies of the heads of the community as well as from other oral and written sources of information dating from the first decades of the 19th century, had caused considerable decline in the overall demographic size, communal strength and general welfare of the Jews of Hamadan during the 1740s–1840s. Among other sources of information that throw light on the general history of the Jewish community of Hamadan during the period under discussion, we cited the testimony of the Chief Rabbi of Hamadan (i.e., the learned Hakham Eliyahu son of El'azar Eliyahu), given to the Christian missionary Rev. Henry A. Stern. In a conversation between the latter two, which took place on May 15, 1845 in Hamadan, Rabbi Eliyahu described in detail the community's existing hardships and pressures, among them high and disproportionate taxes and charges imposed on the community; diverse forms of legal discrimination and restrictions; numerous extortions; and continuous physical violence and psychological terror perpetrated against all the Jews in the city by local officials as well as by various groups and individuals belonging to the Shi'ite population in the city. When asked by Rev. Stern "Has your community (i.e., in Hamadan) always remained as it is now?" the Chief Rabbi replied, saying: "No. A hundred years since (i.e., ca. the 1740s), there were thirteen synagogues

in this place, but the Ishmaelites (i.e., the Muslims) have only left us three, and one which was erected a few years since, they destroyed before it was completed.” For the full text of the latter testimony, which contains much relevant information about the living conditions and hardships of the Jews of Hamadan during the 1840s and earlier, see the report of H.A. Stern, in *JL*, December 1845, pp. 412–415. For a historical outline on the Jewish community of Hamadan, with particular attention to the general condition and characteristics of the community in the course of the 19th century, see particularly source no. 33 in our book, entitled “On the Condition of the Jewish Community of Hamadan in the Year 1864.”

From the rather large body of primary and secondary sources at our disposal we learn that some of the major vulnerabilities and distresses of the Jewish community of Hamadan persisted through the last decades of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. The same sources further indicate that some of the main hardships and pressures to which the community and its members were subjected resulted directly from the distinct demographic, administrative and local-urban characteristics of Hamadan in the course of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Among the latter characteristics and conditions in the city, which accounted for ongoing hardships and recurrent patterns and incidents of ill-treatment and violence against individual Jews as well as the community at large, we referred particularly to the existence of a demographic anomaly in Hamadan which negatively affected the lives of the Jews in the city throughout this period. Forming a disproportionately large percentage of Hamadan’s total population (similar to the situation that existed throughout the 19th century also in the cities of Isfahan and Shiraz), the Jews of Hamadan numbered some 200 families, or some 1,200 souls, in a city of 4–5 thousand inhabitants during the 1810s–1840s. See J. Morier, *Second Journey Through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor*, p. 26, and E. Flandin, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. 1, p. 383. According to the latter mentioned sources, and on the basis of figures and estimates provided by other European travelers and missionaries during the 1830s–1840s (see, e.g., the report of the missionary Rev. P.H. Sternschuss who found some 350 Jewish families in Hamadan in May 1845, in *JL*, December 1845, p. 415), the Jews constituted about 15 to 20 percent of Hamadan’s total population during the first half of the 19th century. As such the Jews in the city formed a substantial and by far the largest group of non-Muslims living in the midst of a predominantly Shi’ite populace. From numerous sources pertaining to the size of the Jewish population

in Hamadan during the second half of the 19th century, we know that the latter demographic condition continued with little change during the second half of the 19th century as well. By the year 1875 (following the Great Famine of 1871–2), the Jews in the city comprised some 450 families, or roughly 2,250 souls [see in AJA, 6 (1876–1877), p. 92], and in the year 1882 they numbered an estimated 3,000 souls, or approximately 20 percent of the city of Hamadan's estimated total population of some 16,000 people [see the report of the missionary J. Lotka, in JMI, April 1889, p. 52]. As to the considerable volume of the community during the last decade of the 19th century, we learn from various independent sources (mainly Christian missionaries who were engaged in evangelical activity among the Jews of Hamadan as well as Western visitors and Jewish European publications) that by the year 1892 the community numbered 3,500 souls. (See JMI, May 1895, p. 78.) In the words of the American Presbyterian missionary Rev. Samuel G. Wilson, recorded during his missionary work in Hamadan in 1892: "Hamadan has now about forty thousand inhabitants, a few of them Armenians, four thousand Jews, and the remainder Mohammedans." Cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 156. According to the latter estimate, during the last decade of the 19th century the Jews of Hamadan continued to form more than 10 percent of the city's total population. Moreover, according to the detailed and highly reliable report of the Iranian Jew-turned-Christian missionary Mirza Nurullah Hakim, who resided in Hamadan during the months of May 1893 to March 1894 and conducted extensive missionary work among the various groups and families in the Jewish community in the city: "The town of Hamadan is inhabited by 30,000 persons, including about 3,500 Jews and 60 families of Armenian Christians." See his report on his missionary work among the Jews of Hamadan, in JMI, May 1895, p. 78.

In addition to the fact that the Jews in the city constituted a substantial group of non-Muslims living and working in the midst or by the side of the city's predominantly Shi'ite population, we know from several sources that they equally formed the city's largest religious minority. In terms of their sheer numbers, the Jews, who dwelled in a quarter of their own situated in the southern part of the city, were many times as many as the total number of all the Christian and other non-Muslim residents of the city combined. The presence of a large and conspicuous Jewish minority in the midst of the city's Shi'ite majority population served as a continuous source of religious tension and physical friction and conflict throughout the 19th century. The incessant tensions

between the Muslim population and the Jews both inside the city and in its environs were further intensified by well established and deeply rooted Shi'ite practices, traditions and institutions, that provided the Shi'ite population in the city with a high degree of religious identity and cohesion. Similar to many of Iran's other larger towns and urban centers in the course of the 19th century, Hamadan possessed numerous Shi'ite institutions, among them large mosques, charitable trusts and endowments (known as *awqaf*), tombs and shrines of descendants of Shi'ite Imams (known as *Imamzadahs*) and other Islamic-communal bodies and functions that preserved and strengthened the beliefs and fervor of the Shi'ite tradition among the local populace. See A.V. Williams Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, pp. 170–174. Moreover, hand in hand with factional and sectarian rifts among the Muslim population in the city, a socio-religious feature that characterized most of Iran's larger cities in the course of the 19th century (see, e.g., E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 17–18, and H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*, pp. 39–40), the city had a relatively large number of Shi'ite clerical families and individuals who enjoyed considerable influence and following, particularly among the Shi'ite masses in the city. In the words of the British traveler Isabella L. Bird, who visited the city in September 1890: "Seyyids (i.e., those believed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and mollahs form a considerable portion of Hamadan's estimated population of some 25,000 people." See her *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 156.

The demographic and urban characteristics of Hamadan referred to above (i.e., a substantially large group of Jews and proportionately small number of other non-Shi'ites and Christians in the city, most of whom enjoyed the protection of Christian and Western governments and missionary establishments) exposed the Jews in the city to continuous forms of ill-treatment, abuse and violence by various segments of the Shi'ite population in the city throughout the 19th century. In the words of the heads of the Jewish community, who described their hardships in the 1860s and appealed for protection and assistance to the leaders of British and French Jewries: "They (i.e., the Shi'ite masses in Hamadan) beat and torment us. They beat the adults and the children and the elderly and the youth, so that fathers and sons in our community are being killed in the market-places and in the streets, without anyone there to take pity on us and show us compassion." For the complete text of the latter petition, see the letter by the heads of

the community, published in *Hamagid*, year 9, No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and No. 4 (January 25), p. 28.

The generally insecure and vulnerable condition of the community in the course of the 19th century was, according to all indications, further exacerbated by economic rivalry between Jews, Muslims and Armenians in the city. We know that the vast majority of the Jews in the city belonged to the lower and middle strata of the economic and occupational activity in the city. Most of the Jewish families in Hamadan, so we know from the sources pertaining to the mid-19th century, made a living by various occupations and trades, some of which were typically shunned by the Shi'ite population in the city. The bulk of the Jews in the city earned their living by all kinds of gold-and-silver work; by glass cutting, silk-weaving, dealing in old clothes and skins. Many of them were masons, blacksmiths, tailors and shoemakers, while some made wine and liquor and others were occupied in the production of coins and in the polishing of precious stones. Like most of the other Jewish communities across Iran in the course of the 19th century and earlier, some in the community were traditional medical practitioners and druggists. See E.J. Polak's article on the Jewish community of Hamadan in the 1860s, in *Hamagid*, year 9, No. 20 (May 20, 1865), pp. 154–155.

However, while according to all the evidence most of the Jews in the city were economically and materially hard pressed, the community had a rather large layer of wealthy merchants, traders and businessmen, particularly during the second half of the 19th century and onward. Serving as a thriving commercial center situated on the southern side of a fertile and populous plain, Hamadan enjoyed an advantageous position as a city that connected the main routes and commercial arteries of western and central Iran. (See K.E. Abbott, *Cities and Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran, 1847–1866*, pp. 94–95.) As such the city had attracted several Jewish merchants and families from Ottoman Iraq, mainly from Baghdad, who had established a commercial colony inside Hamadan. These Arabic-speaking Jewish merchants of Hamadan (and Kirmanshah), who held Ottoman citizenship and enjoyed the legal and consular protection of the Ottoman authorities inside Iran, were engaged in various commercial partnerships with native Jewish merchants of Hamadan, and together they formed a rather opulent and well-connected class of Jewish merchants both in and outside of Hamadan. The presence of these Jewish merchants and traders, who

were engaged in the purchase, sale and distribution of a variety of agricultural products, raw materials and manufactured commodities (some of the latter imported from Europe) was strongly felt in the lively commercial traffic between Ottoman Iraq and western Iran during the 1880s. See H. Binder, *Au Kurdistan, en Mésopotamie et en Perse*, Paris 1887, pp. 323–324. From available archival sources, among them business letters and notes in Judeo-Persian connected to commercial transactions among these Jewish merchants and businessmen of Hamadan during the years 1893–4 (see, e.g., commercial documents in JNUL, Arc. 4° 1271, envelope 634), we learn of the large amounts of merchandise and capital, in thousands of tumans, that were possessed by some of the latter merchants. In the words of the well-informed and observant Christian missionary Mirza Nurullah Hakim, who among other matters provides us with valuable information with regard to the social and economic condition of the Jewish community of Hamadan during the years 1894–5: “The streets of Hamadan are dirty, but some of the bazaars and carawanserais (sic) are striking. The Jews occupy shops and carawanserais in the center of the town, where they do good trade. I made acquaintance of many rich and influential Jews whom I had not known during my previous visit.” Cf. JMI, May 1895, pp. 79–80.

The existence of the latter group of well-to-do and enterprising Jewish merchants of Hamadan during the last quarter of the 19th century and earlier exposed them to competition and rivalry with the Muslim, Armenian and Turkish merchants and traders in the city. Moreover, as it was pointed out and discussed previously in our book (see particularly in source 33, introduction), the wealth and the relative material strength of the latter layer and families of Jewish merchants of Hamadan exposed them and the community at large to diverse extortions and recurrent forms of blackmail and embezzlement by various groups and individuals in the city, among them governors, local officials and judges as well as some Muslim merchants and shopkeepers, local strongmen and some members of the Shi‘ite religious establishment. Again, in the words of the heads of the Jewish community of Hamadan written on September 14, 1864, and addressed to the leaders of British and French Jewries: “We wish to inform you that, first, on account of the many taxes and charges that are laid upon us, we find ourselves utterly helpless and distressed, so much so that no one among us knows what to do any longer. Indeed, all that we hear are the words: ‘Bring us money and gold.’ Thus the fruits of our labour and everything that is dear and of value to us belongs to them, to the effect that we are exceedingly

impoverished. They embezzle our money and possessions and leave us the scraps...; our sovereign, His Majesty the King of Persia, is a man of faith and a merciful king. Despite all the king's benevolent intentions, however, the troubles ensue from the chiefs and officials in the kingdom as well as from those who are charged with authority in managing the affairs of the kingdom, among them an assortment of princes, counselors and notables. Indeed, many misdeeds, wrongdoings and disturbances are routinely committed by the latter named. They serve in various capacities as guides and mentors, officers of law and judges, who rule over the common people and they are the ones who guide and direct the common people to wreak havoc and destruction." See *Hamagid*, year 9, No. 3 (January 18, 1865), p. 20, and No. 4 (January 25), p. 28.

The insecurities and distresses of the community, that resulted from Hamadan's particular economic, administrative and religious conditions, were further compounded by local power struggles between the central government and local interest groups and individuals as well as shifting alliances among the city's diverse groups of notables, officials and clerics. The rivalries and tensions among the latter groups and individuals in Hamadan at times erupted in the form of anti-Jewish incidents and violence directed at individual Jews as well as the entire community. Among the factors that further aggravated the existing vulnerabilities of the Jews of Hamadan during the last quarter of the 19th century were, paradoxically, the partial improvements and greater measures of governmental protection and intervention on behalf of the Jews in the city. As it was discussed previously, the latter governmental actions and decrees on behalf of Iran's Jewish minority, undertaken and issued by Nasir al-Din Shah and his high-ranking officials, increased significantly in the wake of the Great Famine of 1871–2 and following Nasir al-Din Shah's three journeys to Europe and his meetings with the influential leaders and representatives of European Jewry (see particularly sources no. 38 and 39 in our book). The latter protectionist steps and measures, which were imposed by the Shah and the central government largely as a result of European and chiefly British intervention and pressure, ran diametrically against old established Shi'ite laws and practices which defined and treated Jews and the members of Iran's other religious minorities as categorically unequal and inferior subjects. The combined effects and confluence of superimposed measures in favor of Iran's Jewish subjects (pressed by European Powers and enforced by the Iranian central government during the years 1873–1892), local conditions and

characteristics of the Jewish community of Hamadan referred to above, and increasing rifts and tensions in Iran's socio-political and economic lives during the latter years of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign served as a backdrop for the outbreak of a fierce and prolonged wave of popular outrage and persecution against the Jewish community of Hamadan during the years 1892–1896.

The document before us (i.e., a report written by the communal official and educator Morris Cohen of Baghdad on October 20, 1892, and addressed to the Chief Rabbi of Britain and to the heads of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews) contains one version of the events in the community of Hamadan during the months of September–October 1892. Consisting of various statements and observations on the state of the Iranian Jews in general and on the precarious condition of the Jews of Hamadan during the year 1892, the document provides a chronological description and analysis of the violent events in Hamadan during the initial stage of the anti-Jewish riots in the city during the months of September–October 1892. In retrospect, however, we know that the latter incidents, which began during the fall of 1892, were to preoccupy the Jews of Hamadan in the course of the next four years. Although both the outbreak of the violence as well as the subsequent incidents and developments in the city have been subjected to diverse and at times conflicting reports and explanations, the available sources of information as well as recent studies on the topic largely agree on the basic facts and the sequence of the events as presented by Morris Cohen in the report before us.

According to various accounts, the immediate trigger which set in motion the chain of violent events against the Jews of Hamadan in the month of September 1892 was the forcible conversion to Islam of a young Jewish girl in the city. Having been sent by her parents on an errand to Jewish neighbors, the girl, we are told, was seized in the street by a Muslim and carried off to a Muslim house, where she was compelled to embrace Islam under violent threats. The girl's parents, learning of this matter, laid their complaint before the Governor of Hamadan. Brought subsequently before the Governor, the girl publicly declared that she did not wish to become a Muslim, and that she had been carried away forcibly and compelled to embrace Islam under threat of outrage and death. Notwithstanding the latter statement, Mullah Abdullah of Burujird, at the time an influential and popular Shi'ite cleric residing in Hamadan (see below, note 5), had sufficient influence over the Governor to have the girl taken away at his orders,

and, in addition, the girl was given by him in marriage to a Muslim. The Governor of Hamadan, faced with his own weakness, apologized to the Jews, a fact which, according to some sources, further aroused the rage of Mullah Abdullah. [See H. Levi, *Tarikh-i Yahud-i Iran*, vol. 3, p. 757.]

Some days thereafter, in the course of the last week of the Hebrew year of 5652 (September 15–21, 1892), and on the eve of the Jewish New Year of 5653 (which fell on Thursday, September 22, 1892), Mullah Abdullah sent for a number of the heads of the Jewish community of Hamadan and in the presence of a large assembly of his adherents he informed the Jews that their appearance did not distinguish them sufficiently from the Muslims. He furthermore claimed that the Jews in the city were enjoying too much liberty, and, therefore, presented a number of conditions and prohibitions which would thereafter govern the lives of the Jews in the city. Mullah Abdullah warned the heads of the Jewish community that if they did not accept those conditions their lives and property as well as those of the Jews in Hamadan would be at the mercy of the Muslims, and that he would authorize the Muslims to massacre the Jews in the city and do anything else they might please. The heads of the community, who were afraid for their lives, submitted to the conditions. They were then allowed to leave the place, whereupon they went to the telegraph office to inform the Shah and the heads of the Jewish community of Baghdad of their alarming condition. Meanwhile, the news had spread that the Mullah Abdullah had ordered the massacre and pillage of the Jews, so that large groups of incited Muslims paraded through the streets of Hamadan, armed with swords, sticks and various objects capable of inflicting injury. Facing an impending assault, the Jews locked themselves up in their houses. The rioters, however, attacked a number of Jews who were found in the telegraph office and led them to the presence of Mullah Abdullah, where they declared their conversion to Islam. Mullah Abdullah, meanwhile, ordered that no food should be sold to the Jews, so that for three days (coinciding with the first three days of the Jewish New Year) the Jews had hardly any food or provisions. [Cf. *Habazeleth*, year 23, No. 10 (December 16, 1892), pp. 75–76.]

Following the latter events, in two telegrams addressed to the Governor and to the chief of the police of Hamadan, the Shah ordered the two officials to arrest and deport Mullah Abdullah to Tehran and imprison all the other persons concerned. The Governor and the chief of the police, however, entered into a league with Mullah Abdullah

and it was arranged that the latter should pretend to leave the town, so that their responsibility should be covered. Followed by some thousands of excited Muslim attendants and supporters, many of whom were armed, the Mullah was brought back triumphantly to his home in town. The Governor (named Sayf al-Dawla, see below, note 12) and the chief of the military (Sa'd Saltana), together with Mullah Abdullah, many other clergymen, merchants and a large number of local Muslims then sent for the heads of the Jewish community to be brought before them. Upon arrival the heads of the community were told by the Governor himself that they would have to sign their assent to a number of conditions under which the Jews in the city would be permitted to live. They were warned again that in case of refusal they would be subjected to outrage and violence.

Mullah Abdullah's conditions and restrictions, which consisted of more than twenty points and clauses, were liable to have an adverse and threatening effect on the main aspects of communal and individual lives among the Jews of Hamadan. Aiming to humiliate the Jews and target them as a subordinate religious minority in the midst of the city's dominant Shi'ite population, the edicts derived their antecedents as well as their actual language and contents from the traditional sources of Shi'ite Imami law and jurisprudence. Thus, the conditions and restrictions spelled out by Mullah Abdullah related to some of the most essential areas and aspects of public and private lives of the Jews in the city, including their dress and outward appearance; their housing and living conditions; their modes of traffic and movement; their proper manners of approaching and treating their Muslim neighbors; their consumption of food and beverages as well as their professional and economic activity in the city, and more. Both on a symbolic level as well as in practical terms, the most debilitating and humiliating condition assigned by Mullah Abdullah was for the Jews to be identified and distinguished from the rest of Hamadan's Muslim and Christian population by means of an identifying badge in the form of a large piece of red fabric to be sewn over their clothes as a patch, on the breast, and in a very conspicuous manner. (Cf. D. Littman, "Jews Under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia," *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, 1979, vol. XXXII, new series nos. 49/50, pp. 7–8.)

On Saturday, September 24, 1892 (i.e., following the first two days of the Jewish New Year holiday, during which time the Jews of Hamadan had locked themselves in their houses), the heads of the community telegraphed Morris Cohen, an Alliance Israélite teacher and a community

official in the Jewish community of Baghdad. In their telegram, the Jews of Hamadan informed Morris Cohen and the heads of the community of Baghdad about the grim persecution which had afflicted them. Upon receipt, the latter information was urgently wired from Baghdad to the Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite in Paris, which forwarded it to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. The French officials in turn contacted their representative in Tehran and advised him to act on behalf of the Jews of Hamadan. See D. Tsadik, *Foreign Intervention, Majority, and Minority*, pp. 296–297.

Hand in hand with informing the Central Committee of the Alliance in Paris, Morris Cohen communicated to the Chief Rabbi of Britain, Dr. Hermann Adler, the news on the alarming condition of the Jews in Hamadan. Upon receiving the telegram from Baghdad on Saturday evening, September 24, 1892, Rabbi Adler communicated it at once to the Anglo-Jewish Association and to the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In his words: “The Mohammedan Spiritual Chief of Hamadan has ordered a pillage and massacre of the Jews, who are compelled to remain hidden. Immediate intervention is implored.” See AJA, 22 (1892–1893), p. 19.

The news concerning the precarious condition of the Jews in Hamadan led to the urgent intervention of Jewish leaders and organizations in Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire. Enlisting the foreign ministries as well as high-ranking officials and influential figures in their respective countries, the latter Jewish leaders and organizations (chief among them those in Britain) took immediate steps in order to press the Shah and his government to ensure the physical safety of the Jews in the city and to alleviate their distress. Already on the morning following the arrival of the telegram from Baghdad to the Chief Rabbi of Britain (i.e., on Sunday, September 25, 1892), the Vice-President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Mr. Leopold Schloss, and the Solicitor and Secretary of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Mr. Lewis Emanuel, called at the British Foreign Office, where they had an interview with a senior Foreign Office official. The latter soon informed the British Foreign Minister, the Earl of Rosebery, who, in the words of the Anglo-Jewish Association, was in the country. Shortly before midnight of the same day, Mr. Lewis Emanuel, Secretary of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, received the following telegram from the British Foreign Office: “Her Majesty’s Minister at Tehran has been instructed by telegraph to take what action he considers most suitable to avert threatened outrage at Hamadan.” [See AJA, 22 (1892–1893), p. 20.] Moreover, in a separate

letter addressed to Lord Nathaniel Mayer Rothschild, Vice-President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, who had solicited in person the good offices of the British Foreign Minister; the latter responded on September 27th, by writing: "My dear Rothschild; on hearing of the threatened persecution of the Jews at Hamadan, I at once telegraphed to Tehran. The British Minister at Tehran Sir F. Lascelles' answer arrived this morning. He reports that he had already spoken to the Persian Prime Minister Amine s-Sultan with regard to the complaints of the Jews at Hamadan, but that on receiving my telegram he had made a further representation. The Amine s-Sultan said that a counter complaint had been made by the Mussulmans of the town, but that the Shah had sent stringent orders to the Mollah Abdullah to cease from persecuting the Jews, and had threatened him if he did not comply. I will let you know if I hear anything further." See *ibid.*, p. 20.

On the following day, Lord Rosebery further notified Lord Rothschild, writing: "A telegram has been received from Sir F. Lascelles, reporting that half a battalion of troops have been ordered into Hamadan to secure the maintenance of order." *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Despite the sustained intercession and activity of the Jewish leaders and organizations of Britain, France and Ottoman Iraq on behalf of the Jewish community of Hamadan, and despite repeated assurances given by the Shah and his officials to provide security and orderly life for the Jews in the city, there was little change in the general condition of the community during the fall and early winter of 1892. Referring to the insecure and threatened lives of the Jews in the city during the winter of 1892, Rev. S.G. Wilson of the American Presbyterian Board, who resided and conducted missionary work in Hamadan during the years 1892–3, noted: "When I was in Hamadan in November, 1892, there was a reign of terror for the Jews. A mullah (*sic*), who desired by some means to gain a reputation, as some had done by opposing the tobacco monopoly, instigated the attack. Several Jews were seized and beaten. The mullah, in order to disgrace them and restrict their liberty, commanded that the Jew should wear a cloak of two colors; should have a badge of red on his coat to indicate his race; should not come out on a rainy day; if while riding he met a Mussulman, he should dismount until the latter passed; that the Jewish women should wear black veils; that the houses of the Jews should not be higher than those of their Mussulman neighbors; that Mussulmans should not barter with Jews nor call their doctors. Some of the Jews in fear took refuge with powerful Mohammedan friends, others fled to the

telegraph office and appealed to the Shah and the English legation. A crowd of Mussulmans collected and paraded the streets, shouting "Ya Ali! Ya Ali!" They surrounded the refugees in the telegraph office and frightened them so that a dozen accepted Islam. The Jews in Bagdad, hearing of the disturbances, appealed to their friends in England. Lord Rosebery, secretary of foreign affairs, inquired of the Shah concerning it. The governor had been out of town on account of the cholera and had done nothing. He returned, and was about to send the mullah to Teheran, when the mob interfered and prevented it, guarding his house day and night. The governor was not averse to settling the disturbance by persuading the frightened Jews to become Mussulmans...; A month passed in the confusion, and the Jews continued in distress. The governor was removed and a stronger one arrived. After a few days he sent word to the mullah that the Shah called him to Teheran. He said "All right; I will go," and started, stopping at the nearest village. The next day some Sayids, or descendants of the prophet, went about, closed the bazaars, and called the people to go and bring him back. Soon the hill overlooking the city was black with people. In the rain and mud the crowd went out, and toward afternoon they returned, pouring through the streets with clubs and drawn swords in hand, carrying the black flag and crying out, "Ya Ali! Ya Ali! Shah Husain! Shah Husain!," so that they could be heard all over the city. Soon we saw the mullah, a weak old man, mounted on a horse led through the streets amid the hosannas of the multitude and taken to the mosque. Then some of the crowd went to the governor's and demanded pardon for the offenders. This was the priest's second triumph. A month passed, and one night mounted soldiers seized the mullah and started off with him, having a larger force waiting for them outside the city. Alarm was given and they were pursued. They threw the old man over a wall into a garden, where he was found and brought back. The crowd, now frenzied, attacked the governor. He fled from the city, but his house was looted, his cook killed, and several officers narrowly escaped. The mob also made for the Jewish quarter, crying "Kill the Jews!" But the door of their quarter was closed, and before they could get around it they were dissuaded. There were rumors that an army would be sent to bring the mullah to the capital for punishment. Many of the soldiers cannot be relied on to fight against the mullahs. Finally it was arranged that the mujtehid of Teheran should invite the mullah to come to the capital as his guest. Thus he arrived at the foot of the throne and the affair was settled." Cf. S.G. Wilson, *Persia: Western Mission*, pp. 239-242.

Growing pressure on the Shah and his government by European Powers on the one hand and the immediate challenge to the authority of the Shah and fear of further deterioration in public order in Hamadan on the other hand motivated the Shah to exert his power in order to expel the Mullah Abdullah from Hamadan. (See I. Safa'i, *Panjah Nama-yi Tarikhi-yi Dawran-i Qajariya*, Tehran 2535 Sh./1976, pp. 81–82.)

Upon hearing of the Shah's determination to dispatch an army of 6,000 troops to Hamadan for the purpose of quelling the rebellion and arresting the Mullah Abdullah, the latter submitted to the demands of the central government. Pressured and persuaded by senior Shi'ite clerics both in Tehran and in Ottoman Iraq, Mullah Abdullah agreed to leave Hamadan. He departed from the city in early January of 1893 and arrived soon in Tehran, where he remained until February 1894. However, the departure of Mullah Abdullah from Hamadan did not put an end to the threats and harassments to which the Jews had been subjected. In the absence of Mullah Abdullah from the city, already in early January of 1893, a new wave of persecutions and physical violence against the Jews in the city was led by another influential Shi'ite cleric in the city by the name of Sayyid Abd al-Majid. The latter cleric, about whose background and biography we do not know much, is said to have enjoyed the following of large groups of the local Muslim population, among them clerics and merchants as well as numerous ordinary residents and roughs in the city. Inciting his followers, Sayyid Abd al-Majid demanded that the Jews comply with the conditions and prohibitions which had been specified by Mullah Abdullah. Among his other actions, he placed overseers in the city's quarters and streets in order to ensure that the Jews fulfilled the said conditions. Those who violated the requirements were ordered to be brought before him in person. In the general atmosphere of fear and intimidation that prevailed now in the city, Muslims harassed and beat the Jews even if they did abide by all of the conditions. Jewish women walking in the streets were not only forced to remove their veils from their faces (an act designed to expose their faces in public and thus violate their honor), but they were beaten and sexually harassed. See D. Tsadik, *Foreign Intervention, Majority, and Minority*, op. cit., p. 310.

On Sunday, January 9, 1893, the Chief Rabbi of Hamadan, named Abraham Jacob (Avraham Ya'qub), was seized in the street and taken by a group of Muslims to Sayyid Abd al-Majid. Before they reached the Sayyid, the rabbi's patch was torn off and he was accused of not having worn the required identifying red patch. Despite the fact that

the rabbi and several eyewitnesses declared repeatedly that he had been wearing the patch in a very visible manner at the time he was arrested, the Sayyid had the rabbi bastinadoed severely. Reduced to a mass of blood and wounds, the rabbi, aged 60, was carried away to his home dying. Moreover, Sayyid Abd al-Majid publicly declared it to be virtuous to kill Jews who did not adhere to the stipulations imposed on them by reason of their being a class of protected (Ar. *Dhimmi*) subjects under Shi'ite law. Many Jews were thus subjected to mistreatment and physical violence, while others are reported to have evaded brutal treatment by paying as ransom to their assailants sums of money or objects of value which they happened to carry with them at the time they were attacked. See in the long report from Baghdad to the Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite, dated February 2, 1893, in BAIU, No. 17, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres 1892, pp. 48–53; *Archives Israélites*, 54 (1893), pp. 82–83, and particularly D. Tsadik, *ibid.*, pp. 309–310.

Despite the coordinated efforts of the major Jewish philanthropic organizations and leaders of Britain and France on behalf of the Jews of Hamadan, and despite the sustained pressure of the British and French representatives in Tehran on the Shah and his senior officials, the condition of the Jews of Hamadan had changed but little during the winter and early summer of 1893. By June 5th, 1893, more than three weeks after the arrival of a new governor (the third to be appointed to that position in less than two years), no tangible improvement in the precarious condition of the Jews in Hamadan was discernible. The Jews in the city still complained to the Jewish leaders of Britain and France of the need to wear distinctive dress, noting that such a distinctive garb diminished society's regard towards them and tagged them as easy targets for attack and abuse. (See Tsadik, *ibid.*, p. 315.) As late as October 1893, i.e., a little more than a year after the outbreak of the persecutions in the city, the Jews were still pleading with their coreligionists in Western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire to act on their behalf. However, despite the continuation of intimidations and acts of violence directed at the Jews in the city during this time, a compromise was being reached between the Iranian government and the prominent Shi'ite leaders (*Ulama*) of Tehran. According to the latter agreement the Mullah Abdullah would be allowed to return to Hamadan in return for assurances by major Shi'ite figures in Tehran that once in Hamadan he would desist from activities against the local Jews. In the words of the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association, which was closely following the condition of the Hamadan Jewish community and continued

to enlist the assistance of the British Foreign Office in the matter: "In consequence of a protest recently made to Her Majesty's Legation by Jews residing in Hamadan against the reported return of Mollah Abdullah, Mr. Greene, Her Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires in Tehran, communicated with the Sadr Azam, the Grand Vizier, on the subject. His Highness stated that Mollah Abdullah was to be permitted to go back to Hamadan, but that the Shah had caused the Imam Juma, the chief priest of Teheran, to take a bond from the Mollah as surety of his future good behaviour, and has, moreover, taken a bond from the Imam Juma himself, as additional security that Mollah Abdullah would abide by his promises." See AJA, 23 (1893–1894), p. 18.

By February 24, 1894, Mullah Abdullah had returned to Hamadan. However, despite the bond and the assurances which had been provided by him to senior Shi'ite clerics as well as to government officials in Tehran, soon after his return to Hamadan he renewed his activities and incitements against the Jews in the city. Again, according to the report of the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association, which continued to receive news of the continued hardships of the Jews of Hamadan following Mullah Abdullah's return to the city: "Unfortunately, it is evident from a communication which reached the Association in April last (i.e., 1894), that Mollah Abdullah had violated his pledges, and in particular insisted on the Jews continuing to wear a distinctive badge, a practice against which the Conjoint Committee of the Association and the Board of Deputies protested in 1893 as making the Jews an easy target for abuse and even bodily outrage. According to the most recent statements furnished to the Association, the effect of this order, and of other vexatious measures, has been so unbearable as to cause several prominent Jews to abandon their faith for Mohammedanism, as the only means of escaping further persecutions. Jews, especially the aged, scarcely dare leave their homes for fear of being ill-treated by Mohammedans, who are permitted to revile Jews and their religion and to assault them with impunity." See AJA, 24 (1894–1895), pp. 13–14.

By consequence of Mullah Abdullah's renewed activities in Hamadan, the Conjoint Committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews convened in the month of May 1894 and resolved to bring the information at their disposal to the notice of the British Government. The object of the latter motion was to persuade the Government of the Shah to act forcefully against the Mullah Abdullah and punish him as a result of his having broken his bond. Shortly afterwards, in response to the memorandum submitted

by the Conjoint Committee, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs directed its Minister in Tehran, Sir Frank C. Lascelles, to make a representation to the Shah's Government. Thus, once again, following the presentation of the British Minister at Tehran, strict orders were issued to the Governor of Hamadan to protect the Jews in the city and ensure their rights and general welfare. See *AJA*, 25 (1895–1896), pp. 23–24.

However, as the Governor of Hamadan failed to respond to the complaints of the Jews in the city, they continued to inform the Anglo-Jewish Association. Furthermore, they petitioned directly the British representatives in Tehran and wrote to the Iranian Prime Minister (Sadr-i A'zam). In response to the protestation of the British officials in Tehran concerning the continued molestation of the Jews of Hamadan ever since Mullah Abdullah's return to the city, the Iranian Prime Minister informed the British envoy to Tehran that the Shah had given instructions to eliminate the Jews' anguish. See FO 60/558, no. 145, dated June 21, 1894, from Greene to FO, cited in D. Tsadik, *ibid.*, p. 319.

The Shah's instructions notwithstanding, the molestation of the Jews of Hamadan as well as the harassment of Jewish converts to Christianity at the hand of Mullah Abdullah and his local followers and allies continued throughout the summer of 1894. The latter acts against Jews and Jewish converts, however, threatened to spread and affect also the lives of the other religious minorities in the city, chief among them the Armenians, many of whom enjoyed the sympathy and protection of the American Protestant mission in the city. The intervention of American diplomatic representatives in Tehran on behalf of their Christian missionaries in Hamadan increased the pressure on the Shah to issue further instructions to ensure the safety of all religious minorities in the city. Thus, sometime before August 24, 1894, the Shah reportedly ordered the Governor of Hamadan "to maintain order, ensure that both Jews and Armenians would not be ill-treated and that the missionaries be safeguarded." See Tsadik, *ibid.*, p. 322. However, much like the weeks and the months ever since the outset of the anti-jewish events in the city in September 1892, whatever protection the Jews received during the summer and fall of 1894 was short-lived. In the month of January 1895, several months after the latest royal instructions had been conveyed to the Governor of Hamadan, the Jews in the city appealed again to the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish Association. In the latter petition they described the events of the past three years which had severely damaged and disrupted their individual and communal

lives. Among the decrees which had been enacted by Mullah Abdullah ever since the fall of 1892, the Jews of Hamadan referred to the ban on wearing new clothing, the prohibition against holding weddings in the open and the obligation to wear a distinctive patch, so that “any Mohammedan seeing the patch might fearlessly treat the wearer of it with any degree of severity.” See *ibid.*, p. 323.

In addition to the decrees specified in the document presented in our book (see below, source no. 40), Mullah Abdullah enacted other aspects of the Shi'ite Imami law, chief among them the law of inheritance, which entitled a Jewish convert to Shi'ite Islam to inherit the possessions of his deceased Jewish relatives. In view of the latter laws and decrees, the Jews of Hamadan begged the heads of the Anglo-Jewish Association to influence the Shah to abolish the patch and the other decrees, warning their coreligionists abroad that in the absence of effective measures a great many members of their community were liable to relinquish their ancestral religion and convert to Islam. As late as May 1895, however, despite the dedicated activity of the Jewish organizations of Britain and France and the continuous presentations of British, French, American and Ottoman representatives in Tehran, the tribulations of the Jews of Hamadan persisted. Direct information arriving from the city continued to describe in detail the plights of the Jews in the city. As before, the latter hardships resulted from the mistreatment of the Jews at the hands of Mullah Abdullah and his supporters and from the weakness of the central government and its appointed officials to provide adequate protection to Hamadan's Jewish minority. During the summer of 1895, the Jews in the city and officeholders in the Jewish community of Baghdad continued to beg the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Conjoint Foreign Committee of the latter organization and the Board of Deputies of British Jews to enlist the assistance of the British Foreign Office. The reports from Hamadan informed the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Alliance Israélite Organization in France that the ongoing hardships in the city had caused some additional members of the community to convert to Islam, while others continued to live in fear and were afraid to leave their houses. In response to the appeal of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Conjoint Foreign Committee, the British Foreign Office, on June 6, 1895, once again directed its representative in Tehran to meet with the Iranian authorities and address the continued repression of the Jews in Hamadan. Accordingly, once again, following the instruction of the British Foreign Office, the British envoy to Tehran, Sir Mortimer

M. Durand, communicated to the Iranian Prime Minister the grievances of the Jewish organizations of Britain with regard to the continuation of the persecutions in Hamadan. The Prime Minister responded by informing the British Foreign Office that, "needful orders which are of strict nature have been given to Hamadan authorities." He further added that he had no doubt in his mind that the local authorities in the city would "do their duty in removing all difficulties to secure a peaceful life for the Jews." *Ibid.*, p. 325.

The assurances of the Iranian Prime Minister, notwithstanding, the lawlessness in which the Jews of Hamadan lived continued as before. By September 1896, that is four years since the beginning of the events and the persecutions in the city, Jews and even some Jewish converts to Islam were little protected and occasionally molested by the incited Muslim populace. Moreover, even though Mullah Abdullah and his allies were now occasionally protecting Jews and Jewish converts from the rage of excited Muslims in the city, the primary conditions which had harshly affected the lives of Hamadan's Jewish community were little changed. Jews complained that due to the general lawlessness and weakness or disinterest of the local officials to protect them they were harassed by some of the local residents who sought to lay their hands on their property. See Tsadik, *ibid.*, p. 325.

Following Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination on May 1, 1896, the Jewish leaders and organizations of Western Europe continued their solicitation on behalf of the Jews in Hamadan and in other parts of Iran. In an official address forwarded to the new monarch Muzaffar al-Din Shah upon the latter's succession to the throne, the Conjoint London Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association congratulated him. Yet, hand in hand with expressions of sorrow and sympathy on the death of the late monarch, the leaders of British Jewry (among them Lord Rothschild and Sir Albert Sassoon, Vice-Presidents of the Anglo-Jewish Association, and Joseph Sebag Montefiore, President of the Board of Deputies) begged Muzaffar al-Din Shah to extend his protection and favor to his Jewish subjects across Iran. See *AJA*, 25 (1895-1896), pp. 24-25.

As far as the Jews of Hamadan are concerned, however, the precarious conditions under which they lived continued until the death of Mullah Abdullah in October 1896. With the departure of the latter influential and revered Shi'ite cleric, the diverse Muslim groups and individuals who had acted to molest and restrict the Jews in the city lost their main leader and animating figure. Nonetheless, despite

Mullah Abdullah's disappearance, the old historical conditions and socio-religious factors that stood at the basis of the vulnerabilities and inequalities of Hamadan's Jewish residents persisted much through the first decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, Hamadan was not the only city in which Shi'ite clerics demanded to impose on the Jews various conditions and restrictions deriving from the *dhimmi* (i.e. protected) position of the Jews within the centuries-long Shi'ite-Islamic law. Sources related to the larger Jewish communities of Isfahan, Shiraz and Tehran during the last two decades of the nineteenth century also attest to the efforts of some of the local Shi'ite leaders to impose old restrictions and conditions on the rights and activities of the Jews in the latter cities. In the city of Isfahan, during the months of September–October 1889, the chief Shi'ite leader in the city promulgated thirteen restrictions to be imposed on the Jews in the city. The latter conditions, which were fundamentally similar to or identical with those set by the Mullah Abdallah in Hamadan, stated, among other matters, that: (1) No Jew would be allowed to wear the customary coat or cloak (Per. *'abā*); (2) that Jews should not come out of their houses on a wet day; (3) that no Jew be allowed to ride any animal through the city; (4) that when a Jew dies, any relative who has become a convert to Islam may possess all his property; (5) that when a Jew buys anything from a Muslim, he should pay *'khums*' (i.e., one fifth) to Shi'ite clergymen; (6) that every Jew should wear a mark on his clothes, so that he might be distinguished from a Muslim; (7) that Muslim merchants should not sell any goods to Jewish peddlers and merchants, and more. For the complete list of the latter conditions, which were ultimately averted due to the direct intervention of Nasir al-Din Shah's elder son, Prince Zil al-Sultan (at the time Governor of Isfahan), see in JI, November 1889, pp. 166–167, and R.E. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, pp. 117–118. As to the generally strained relations between the Jews and Muslims in Isfahan, and the specifics of a violent clash between the two denominations that precipitated the promulgation of the latter restrictions against the Jews of Isfahan in the fall of 1889, see, e.g., in BAIU, No. 14, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres 1890, pp. 32–33. Some ten years after the above mentioned restrictions were issued in Isfahan, i.e., in 1898, a group of influential Shi'ite clerics in the city, chief among them the powerful figure Aqa Najafi, sought once again to impose severe limitations on the livelihood and economic activities of the Jews in Isfahan and in its surroundings. Among other restrictions, that constituted an economic boycott against Isfahan's Jewish community, the latter Shi'ite religious

figures demanded that, (1) the Muslim residents should not carry out any business transactions with the Jews, nor should they buy any merchandise from them; (2) that the Jewish peddlers and petty merchants of Isfahan (who made up the bulk of the breadwinners in the community) should not be allowed to peddle in the different quarters and villages of Isfahan, and, (3) that Muslims should not sell any food products to Jews. For the names of the latter Shi'ite clerics and the exact list of the restrictions and bans that they sought to impose on the Jews in the city, see in *Archives Israélites*, 59 (1898), p. 316.

In the city of Shiraz during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Jews were subjected to frequent maltreatment and molestation inspired and led by some of the members of the Shi'ite clerical establishment in the city. The more active figure among the latter clergymen in Shiraz was a certain Aqa Sayyid 'Ali Akbar, known as Fal Asiri (d. August 16, 1901). The latter named, whose religious zeal and devotion to the various tenets of Shi'ite dogma and practice were not restricted to the Jews alone, sought to curtail even more the rather limited rights and freedoms that the Jews in the city enjoyed. During the years 1880–1901, so we are informed, Sayyid 'Ali Akbar acted forcefully in order to impose on the Jews a number of conditions and restrictions that drew their justification from the traditional sources of Shi'ite Imami law. Among other matters, he warned and threatened the Jews in the city that (1) they should desist from the production and sale of wine and alcoholic beverages; (2) that they should no longer make a living as musicians, dancers and entertainers; (3) that they should not be allowed to wear fine clothes; and (4) that Jewish men should shave their hair and locks, so that they would be differentiated from Muslim men. See Sa'idi-Sirjani, *Waqayi'-i Ittifaqiyya*, pp. 139–140. For further information on the continuous and at times violent actions of Sayyid 'Ali Akbar and his followers for the purpose of enforcing the latter restriction on the Jews of Shiraz during the years 1880–1898, see *ibid.*, pp. 160, 340, 409 and 559. Finally, in Tehran, as late as the spring of 1897 (i.e., a year after the enthronement of Muzaffar al-Din Shah), a Shi'ite clergyman by the name of Sayyid Rayhan Ullah led his incited followers to besiege the Jewish quarter in the capital city. Claiming that the appearance of the Jews (including the hair style of their men) did not distinguish them sufficiently from the Muslim residents of the capital city, he demanded that the Jews wear an identifying badge and that Jewish men shave their hair altogether. Moreover, with a view to emphasize and expose the unequal and inferior position of Jews

according to Shi'ite law, he required that Jews in Tehran should not be allowed to wear socks; that they should not leave their house on rainy days; that Jewish women should wear trousers made of various colors, and that the houses of the Jews be lower than those of their Muslim neighbors. As in the case of the conditions and restrictions that had been issued in relation to the Jews of Hamadan, Isfahan and Shiraz during the 1880–1890s, however, Sayyid Rayhan Ullah's conditions, too, were ultimately circumvented. Following the presentations of the British and French representatives in Tehran, and owing to the intervention of the central government in favor of Tehran's Jewish minority, a compromise was subsequently reached between the Shi'ite clergyman and the Jews of Tehran. According to the latter agreement, instead of a yellow or red identifying cloth, Jews were required to wear a piece of silver on which the word "Jew" was to be engraved. See H. Nategh, *Karnama-yi Farhangi-yi Farangi dar Iran*, pp. 126–128, and, particularly, BAIU, No. 22, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres 1897, pp. 75–77, and A. Confino, *L'Action de l'Alliance Israélite en Perse*, pp. 49–52.

The Jews of Hamadan in 1892, as Reported by
AJA, 22 (1892–3), pp. 55–63

For the better comprehension of the recent events which so greatly alarmed the Jewish community of Hamadan, some remarks derived from a correspondent on the spot may be necessary, as bearing upon the condition of the Jews in Persia in ordinary times, when no particular outburst of fanaticism brings into prominent notice the petty persecution and misery they are subjected to.

The Moslems of Persia belong to that sect known as Shiah, and they hold the Jews in special abhorrence. A Jew, in their eyes, is a kind of impure, defiled, and abhorrent creature,¹ whom it is at all times a particular merit to injure and annoy in every possible manner, and it may easily be understood that hundreds of opportunities occur daily for the exercise of such persecution as falls short of downright murder. Without making a grievance of mere social restrictions, the continual persecution which takes the form of physical ill-treatment is the chief

¹ On the ritual impurity (Per. *najasa*) of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians in Shi'ite Imami law, see, e.g., in our book, source no. 1 (section A) and source no. 7.

characteristic of the attitude of the Persian Moslems towards the Jews. As the latter cannot possibly obtain any redress from the local authorities, they are of hard necessity compelled to submit to every species of ill-treatment, insult, and contumely, without daring to utter a single word of complaint. This condition of powerlessness against their persecutors begets a fear of them which can readily be imagined, and explains the timidity with which they are wont to regard them. From their very infancy they hear the Persian Moslem spoken of in fear and dread, and they soon learn to stand in awe during the rest of their unhappy lives. The Moslems, on the other hand, seeing that their violence and insults do not entail any punishment, nor even any reproof, are naturally encouraged, and they too, from their infancy, look upon the Jew as an animal who can be reviled and ill-treated with perfect impunity. The consequence is that even little children, running about the streets, annoy Jewish passers-by in any manner they think fit. To pull a Jew's beard, spit right into his face, throw mud or stones at him, curse him and all his relatives, push and pull him about, trip him up, and in general tease and annoy him in a hundred ways are the common forms of persecution which are of daily occurrence. It would be too long to enter into the numerous opportunities of annoyance and injury in matters of business and property. Suffice it to say that, if matters come to the law courts, the Jew is condemned beforehand to lose his case, and his expenses into the bargain. No Moslem would ever think of giving testimony in favour of a Jew, more especially when his adversary is a Moslem. Justice naturally breaks down, and violence, insult, plunder, and wrong-doing of every sort prevail. There are many towns and villages in Persia where a Jew would not even dare to show himself for fear of being killed outright; and who would think of seeking redress for the crime? It would not even be heard of, and prowling dogs would most probably feast upon the carcase, to the delight of the children and other passers-by.

The very mention of the word "Jew" by a Moslem is considered to be an insult to the listener, and the person employing the word "Jew" in his conversation always adds some such expression as "Saving your presence," "Excuse the term," "Excuse me for using the word"; this shows the degree of reproach and contempt in which the Jew is held.

As the touch of the Jew is held by the Shiah Moslems to defile eatables, Jews are not allowed to drink or eat out of any vessels employed by them. In consistency with this idea, Jews are never permitted to enter coffee houses and drink coffee or tea there, as the glasses or cups used

by them would be considered defiled, and would have to be broken, or else go through a certain purifying process. Jews are never allowed to touch any eatables of any kind exposed for sale, as whatever they touch would be considered defiled, and the Jew touching the article would most probably be compelled to purchase it at any price the vendor might choose to extort. Any kind of opposition on the part of the Jew would of course be visited with violent ill-treatment, in which the passers-by would eagerly join. Consequently, whenever a Jew wishes to purchase fruit, vegetables, bread or any other eatable, he has to be particularly careful not to handle any of the articles in question.²

Bearing this preface in mind, the fanatical attitude of the spiritual chiefs and their adherents can be more easily understood. The Mussulman priests and religious administrators are generally called “Mollah.”

So long as the more fanatical portion of the Mussulmans of Hamadan had some serious reason to fear the interference of the local civil authorities, or of the Shah himself, there was no special act of tyranny exercised towards the Jews of that town beyond what I³ have referred to in the prefatory remarks, and although extraordinary acts of fanaticism might be perpetrated on some occasions, these were rare.

The successful opposition of the Mollahs to the establishment of the Régie tobacco monopoly⁴ seems to have given the Mollahs a very favourable opinion of their own power as a body, and the revival of this influence over the masses, together with the so-called defeat of the

² Regarding the actual and day-to-day Jewish disabilities resulting from the perceived impurity of the Jews in the course of the nineteenth century, see above in our book, particularly sources no. 2, 3, 6, 8 and 9.

³ I.e., Morris Cohen, educator at the Alliance school in Baghdad and communal officeholder in the Jewish community in the latter city during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Regarding him and his activity on behalf of the Jewish communities of Iran, see above in our book, source no. 6.

⁴ The French term “régie,” meaning “authority” and “administration,” is used here in reference to the commercial authority which was set up to implement the terms of the well-known tobacco concession granted by the Iranian monarch to a British subject named Major Talbot. According to an agreement signed on March 20, 1890, in return for a personal gift of £25,000 to the Shah, an annual rent of £15,000 to the state, and a 25 percent share of the profits, Talbot acquired a fifty-year monopoly over the production, distribution and export of all Iranian tobacco. The monopoly, which soon aroused widespread discontent and protest among diverse segments of Iranian society, was ultimately revoked in early 1892. In the events and protests that led to the cancellation of the tobacco concession a major role was played by the heads of the Shi’ite religious establishment in Iran and Ottoman Iraq. Cf. E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, op. cit., pp. 73–74, and N.R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, New Haven and London 1981, pp. 66–67.

Government, seems to have encouraged Mollah Abdullah⁵ of Hamadan, and to have decided him upon compelling the Jews to become Moslem converts, or to suffer such annoyance and humiliation as would render their lives a perfect burden of the deepest misery.

A Jewish girl, having been sent by her parents on an errand to a Jewish neighbour, was one day suddenly seized in the street by a Moslem and forcibly carried off to a Moslem house and compelled to embrace Islam under threats of the most violent nature.⁶ Her parents and others, hearing of this, laid their complaint before the local Governor of the town and province. The girl, on being brought before the Governor,⁷ publicly declared that she did not wish to become a Moslem, and that she had been carried away forcibly and compelled to embrace Islamism under threats of outrage and death.

Notwithstanding this statement, the Mollah Abdullah had sufficient influence over the Governor to have the girl taken away by a Moslem at his orders, and, in addition, the Jewish girl was given by him in marriage to a Moslem.

Some days after, Mollah Abdullah sent for a number of the chief Jews of the town, and, in the presence of an enormous assembly of his adherents, told the Jews that he did not consider their appearance distinguished them sufficiently from the Moslems, and that they were having too much liberty, dressing in good clothes, etc. He therefore recited a number of conditions of the most humiliating kind, calculated to render their lives one long misery. He added that if they did not accept these conditions, their lives and property as well as those of all

⁵ Not much is known about the early life and activities of this popular Shi'ite leader. Commonly referred to as "Akhund (i.e., 'clergyman' and 'preacher') Mullah Abdullah," he is said to have been born in the town of Burujird, and died on October 16, 1896. Cf. D. Tsadik, *Foreign Intervention, Majority, and Minority*, op. cit., p. 297. According to some sources, he was known for his religious devotion, personal charisma and power of persuasion. The latter qualities, among other factors, earned him considerable influence and following among diverse Shi'ite groups and individuals. See I. Safa'i, *Panjah Nama-yi Tarikhi*, op. cit., p. 82. Nasir al-Din Shah's learned confidant and minister of publications, Muhammad Hasan Khan I'timad al-Saltana, who met him in Tehran in mid-February 1893, noted in his diary: "Mulla Abdullah of Hamadan that so much was spoken about him recently came for an audience (with the Shah). He is a very old, holy man." Cf. I'timad al-Saltana, *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, op. cit., p. 852.

⁶ Morris Cohen describes here the specific incident which, according to the account given by the Jews of Hamadan, precipitated the outbreak of the persecutions in the city.

⁷ I.e., the Qajar prince Sultan Muhammad Mirza, known by his honorary title as Sayf al-Dawla, or "the Sword of the State." He had been appointed as governor of Hamadan a year earlier, i.e., in 1309 Q/1891. Regarding him, see note 12 below.

the Jews in Hamadan would be at the mercy of the Moslems, and that as it would be a deed of great merit, he would authorize the Moslems to massacre them and do anything else they might please.

The unfortunate Jews, surrounded by thousands of Moslems drinking in every word of their spiritual chief as so much inspiration, were naturally left but one choice, namely, to submit. They were then allowed to leave the place, and went in a mass to the telegraph office to wire the misery of their situation to the Shah and others.⁸

Meanwhile, the news spread that the Mollah Abdullah had ordered the massacre and pillage of the Jews, and thousands of roughs paraded the streets armed with swords, sticks, and various objects capable of inflicting injury. The Jews fled in all directions at the first alarm and locked themselves up in their houses, waiting with heavy hearts for the inevitable death which they expected at the hands of the mad and fanatical mob.

A portion of the mob, ascertaining that there were a number of Jews at the telegraph office, immediately went to the place and surrounded it, shouting “Ya Ali, Ya Ali”⁹ in that wild manner which is known to mean that they intend mischief and invoking aid from Ali, whom they revere as much as Mohammed¹⁰ himself. Meanwhile, the chief of the police, or someone responsible for the peace of the town, hearing of the situation of the Jews in the telegraph office, sent some of his soldiers to rescue two or three who were, so to say, friends of his, and these two or three were surrounded by the soldiers and removed in safety. The Moslem mob finally succeeded in forcing an entrance into the house, and the Jews, all crowded in one room, knew that their hour had arrived, and that they would fall a prey to the fanatical passion of the excited thousands if they did not find some way out of their situation. They accordingly determined to save their lives by becoming Moslems, and as soon as they saw their oppressors coming violently towards them, they all cried out the Moslem formula of faith “There is no God but

⁸ The Jews of Hamadan sent a telegram also to the heads of the Jewish community of Baghdad, in which they informed them of their distress and asked for their urgent assistance. See AJA, 22 (1892–1893), p. 19, and *Habazeleth*, year 23, No. 6 (November 18, 1892), pp. 44–45.

⁹ I.e., “O Ali, O Ali.” The fourth Caliph, ‘Ali, a cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, is the founder of the Shi’ite tradition. For similar invocation of ‘Ali in the course of attacks on the Jews of Hamadan in the 1860s, see above in our book, source no. 33, note 7.

¹⁰ I.e., the Prophet Muhammad.

God, and Mohammed is his prophet.”¹¹ They were saved from a cruel death, and they were thenceforth Moslems. The mob conveyed them at once to Mollah Abdullah, and they were again called up to repeat the formula and to declare that they had become Moslems.

Meanwhile Mollah Abdullah ordered that no food should be sold to the Jews, and for three days they had hardly anything to eat or drink.

As there are some Jews in Hamadan who are Turkish subjects, they laid their case before the Turkish Vice-Consul, who advised them not to complain to the authorities, and that he would procure them food. He then went to Mollah Abdullah, and entreated him to allow food to be sold to the Jews, and the order was consequently given to sell them food. It is said, however, that the Vice-Consul, who is a Shiah Moslem, is in league with Mollah Abdullah against the Jews, as he is a merchant and is jealous of the Jewish merchants in Hamadan, and only too glad to be able to injure them.

A party of roughs went to the house of the chief of the police and attacked the place, and the chief himself was compelled to go to the Mollah and beg his pardon for not helping him against the Jews and for having rescued some of them. He then kissed the feet of the Mollah by way of asking for pardon, and to show his respect and submission.

Later on a telegram was received by the Governor from the Shah, in which he was severely scolded and reprimanded for what had taken place, and a second telegram was received by the chief of the police ordering him to send Mollah Abdullah to Teheran at once, and to imprison all the other persons concerned. The Governor and the chief of the police, however, entered into a league with Mollah Abdullah, and it was arranged that Mollah Abdullah should pretend to leave the town so that their responsibility should be covered. Accordingly, in the afternoon, Mollah Abdullah was seen publicly leaving the town, but when he got outside he was followed by about twenty thousand Moslems, who had divested themselves of their usual clothes, and only enveloped a portion of their body in a long piece of thin white calico, as they do when they enter Mecca on a pilgrimage. Most of them were

¹¹ This is a reference to the customary formula in Arabic, the recitation of which in the presence of Muslim witnesses is required of non-Muslims converting to Islam. The complete formula, which is part of the daily Muslim prayer, literally reads: “I bear testimony (Ar. *ashhadu*) that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”

armed with small double-edged swords, sticks, etc., and went after Mollah Abdullah crying out “Ali, Ya Ali” in their furious and excited way. They would not allow Mollah Abdullah to go any further, and expressed their readiness to die in his defence. He was borne back again to his house on their arms and shoulders with expressions of great triumph. The excitement on following him was so great that most of them beat their own heads and breasts as they are accustomed to do when they celebrate the murder of Ali’s sons once a year, and some of them are said to have died from their self-inflicted wounds.

The Governor, Shah Zada Sef Dowlah,¹² and the chief of the military, Saad Sultana,¹³ then went to the Mollah, and pretended to be assured that the opposition of the inhabitants was too great to permit them to compel Mollah Abdullah to repair to Teheran, and they accordingly completed their treaty with him, in consideration of which they are said to have received valuable money presents.

These two functionaries, together with Mollah Abdullah, many other Mollahs, merchants, and a vast concourse of Moslems then sent for the chief Jews to be brought before them by force if necessary. When the Jews arrived they were told by the Governor himself, in the presence of the great assembly, that they would have to sign their assent to a number of conditions under which they would be permitted to live, but

¹² This is the Prince (Per. Shah-Zadah) Sayf al-Dawla, who was one among the numerous grandchildren of the Qajar monarch Fath Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834). He occupied key political, administrative and military positions during Nasir al-Din Shah’s reign. Among his many other appointments prior to the governorship of Hamadan, he had served as Nasir al-Din Shah’s especial military adjutant (in 1298 Q./1880–1), Governor of Tabriz (in 1301 Q./1883–4), and Governor of Malayer, Tuyserkan and Nahavand (in 1305 Q./1887–8). In 1309 Q./1891–2, he was appointed as Governor of Hamadan. However, his mishandling of the affairs in the city in the course of the riots inspired by the Mullah Abdullah cost him his position. He was dismissed from office by Nasir al-Din Shah shortly after the events described in the report before us. He died in 1339 Q./1920–1, and was buried in Malayer. Regarding him and the assertion that he was “tyrannical and oppressive” (*ẓalīm va mūlaʿaddī*) in his character and conduct, see M.H. ʿIṭimād al-Saltāna, *Chihil Sal Tarikh-i Iran, Al-Maʿathir waʾl-Athar*, ed. I. Afshar, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 350, and vol. 2, pp. 610–611. Idem, *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, pp. 667 and 732.

¹³ This is Saʿd al-Saltāna, the commander of the army located in Hamadan and its surrounding districts. One of the influential Khans (or tribal chiefs) of Hamadan, he was closely involved in the local power struggles and shifting alliances among Hamadan’s various interest groups and personalities. No other details about him are available. Regarding his involvement in the early stages of Mullah Abdullah’s affair in the months of September–December 1892, and the suggestion that in his desire to undermine the Governor of Hamadan he openly and covertly instigated the uproar in the city, see D. Tsadik, *Foreign Intervention, Majority, and Minority*, op. cit., pp. 302 and 305.

that if they refused they would merit mutilation, outrage, and death, and that he himself¹⁴ would help Mollah Abdullah to compel the Jews to accept these conditions. As will be seen from the conditions mentioned below, and the remarks added in brackets, their tendency is to humiliate the Jews to an unbearable degree, and at the same time to render them perfectly recognizable by conspicuous and special signs, so that wherever they go these signs may strike the eyes of the Moslems and remind them continually of the presence of the Jew, and at the same time of the abject condition in which he was at all times to live.

The Jews, finding themselves compelled by circumstances of too powerful a nature to be resisted, signed the paper bearing the following conditions:

1. The Jews are no longer allowed to wear good clothing, and in future their clothes are to be made exclusively out of unbleached calico (Mexican cloth),¹⁵ dyed indigo blue. (Up till the present this cloth was the clothing of the poor classes only.)
2. A large piece of red stuff (Turkey red) is to be sewn over the clothes as a patch, on the breast, and in a very conspicuous manner. (This red patch would naturally be very conspicuous on a ground of indigo, and would constantly attract the eye to the religion, condition, and difference of the Jew.)
3. The shoes are to be odd, that is, a shoe on one foot and a slipper on the other, or one shoe of one colour and the other of a different colour. (This is another measure of humiliation and distinction.)
4. They are not to wear the usual cloaks, but to carry them folded up under the arm. (And they are not to omit having them at all, but must actually buy or possess such a cloak or cape merely for the purpose of carrying it under the arm.)
5. They are not allowed to cut or trim their beard in any manner whatever. (This will of course give them an additionally untidy appearance, which is in turn employed as an insult against them.)
6. They are forbidden to have fine houses, and any house of theirs having a good appearance is to be demolished. (As tastes in architecture

¹⁴ I.e., the Governor of Hamadan.

¹⁵ This and all the following remarks and explanations given in round brackets appear in the original text.

differ, it is very easy to call any kind of building nice and comfortable, even if it be quite ordinary and even mean looking. Consequently this condition will give ample scope for demolishing any building which is not exactly a pig-sty, and then the Jews will afterwards be taunted with living in mean houses and being dirty, etc.)

7. The walls of a Jewish house are not to be higher than those of a Moslem house.
8. The street-door is to be very low, that is, so low as to compel a person entering to stoop very much. (This will at once distinguish their houses from those of the Moslems, and in case of attack and pillage there would be no mistaking a Jew's house.)
9. During rainy weather they are to remain indoors, and are not to be seen in the streets under any circumstances.¹⁶ (How are they to obtain food or any other article of daily necessity? How are they to attend to their trades or business, post or receive letters? How are they to go to Synagogue? Suppose it rains a whole week, or even longer, are they to die of starvation? The vexation, annoyance, and loss caused by such a condition are obvious.)
10. If they meet a Moslem in the streets they must cease walking, and stand on one side against the wall, to allow the Moslem to pass. (Good opportunity for blows and insult.)
11. If they find a Moslem walking along in front of them, they are to maintain a distance of five yards behind him; and if another Moslem overtakes them, they are to keep five yards behind the second Moslem, and so on. (It is evident that there is plenty of room for quarrelling with the Jews about the exact distance to be maintained. The Jew will, out of fear, keep about ten yards off, while the Moslem will attack him, curse and revile him, and give him a good thrashing for being too near. Other Moslems coming up, he will be roughly handled and thrust from one side to another under pretence of teaching him to observe the

¹⁶ So as not to pollute the rain water which might come into contact with and defile the bodies of Shi'ite believers. As to the actual implementation of this decree in some of the larger cities of Iran in the course of the nineteenth century, see above in our book, source no. 2, note 6.

proper distance, so that it might actually become a matter of impossibility to go from one particular place to another.)

12. When speaking to a Moslem, the Jew must assume an attitude of deep humility and deference. (This means that, in accordance with the Persian idea of Jewish humility, the Jew must fold his hands over his breast; the body must be stooped in fear, awe, and trembling, and the eyes must be half averted and cast down as if in shame. Any omission would of course be attributed to the Jew's arrogance and fearlessness, and he would naturally come in for his share of insult, curses, blows, kicks, and what not.)
13. In speaking to a Moslem the Jew must never raise his voice, but speak in a soft, low and submissive tone.
14. If a Moslem should, perchance, happen to curse, insult, or revile a Jew, the Jew must bow his head in utter silence. (As the opportunities for insulting the Jew are rather numerous, and as a matter of fact occur every moment, it can be imagined how much of such language the Jew will have to bear in silence, in humility, in a deferential and submissive attitude, at the same time observing all the different conditions of distance, attitude, etc., etc.)
15. The Jews are forbidden to leave the town and walk about in the country beyond the walls of the town.
16. Jewish doctors are forbidden to ride as they have been accustomed to do hitherto.
17. They are forbidden to purchase good fruits. (As every kind of ripe fruit is rather good, it is evident that they will have to eat only rotten fruit, or do without fruit altogether.)
18. Jewish women are to have their veils made in two colours instead of one colour as hitherto. (Moslem women all wear a species of black veil or cloak entirely enveloping the whole body from head to foot. This covering in the case of Jewesses will have to be of two colours, say the top half white and the bottom half black, or any other combination. In case of outrage and attack on the Jews, there will be no mistake in attacking women in the streets, and Jewesses will be easily recognizable.)
19. Any Jew found walking about after having drunk any wine or spirits may be killed on the spot. (This kind of pretext will naturally be advanced in any case of murdering a Jew, and the crime will thus become a deed of merit.)

There are many other conditions, details of which have not been furnished.¹⁷

The acceptance of such conditions as those enumerated above will, of course, produce their degrading effect in time, and in after years, when their observance will have become a well understood custom, it will often be wondered why the Jew is so mean and dirty looking, why he does not wear fine clothes like his neighbors, why he lives in mean, miserable looking houses, and why he cringes before the Moslem as if he were afraid for his very life. Jewish mothers will naturally speak to the infants of the violent, unjust and fanatical Moslem, and prepare the narrow groove in which the unfortunate Persian Jew is to drag on his wretched life. The continual fear of the Jew for his Persian oppressor will compel him to regulate his conduct accordingly, so that all development of independence, moral courage, etc., will be totally prevented. Thus does the Jew become what his oppressors compel him to be.

¹⁷ In several reports and letters that were dispatched from Hamadan and Baghdad to the Jewish organizations of Britain and France, the list of the conditions and prohibitions specified by the Mullah Abdullah included some additional points. According to the latter communications, in addition to the nineteen decrees enumerated by Morris Cohen in the report before us (i.e., source 40 in our book), the list of Mullah Abdullah's conditions included also the following: (1) Jews shall no longer be allowed to paint and whitewash their rooms with lime (see BAIU, No. 17, 1^{er} et 2^e semestres, 1892, p. 50); (2) they shall not be allowed to open stores that sell different kinds of food and edibles; (3) they shall not be allowed to sell wine and other alcoholic beverages [see *Habazeleth*, year 23, No. 16 (January 16, 1892), p. 75]; (4) Jewish marriage ceremonies shall include no music, chanting or noisy rejoicing (see in the letter of M. Cohen, dated October 20, 1892, to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, London, cited in D. Tsadik, *ibid.*, p. 303). For the more complete list of the conditions, according to a report that was sent on October 17, 1892 from Baghdad, by S. Somekh, to the Central Committee of the Alliance Israélite, Paris, see in BAIU, No. 17, 1892, pp. 49–50. For the English text of the latter report and the list of the twenty-two conditions imposed on the Jews of Hamadan, see D. Littman, "Jews Under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia," *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

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