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# THE DECLINE AND COLLAPSE OF SYRIAN JEWRY

1918 TO THE PRESENT

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

CINCINNATI, OHIO

MAY, 1976

Thesis submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for Ordination

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NEWARK UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
CINCINNATI, OHIO  
MAY, 1948

To those who have great need for the Book of Rachel

A voice is heard in Ramah  
Lamentation, and bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
She refuseth to be comforted for  
her children,  
Because they are not.



DIGEST

This thesis is concerned with the decline and collapse of the Syrian Jewish community from the institution of the French Mandate to the present. This work examines Syrian Jewry centered mainly in three cities for hundreds of years as a remnant of the past. The difficulties incurred by the community over the past half-century are thoroughly described and documented. In addition the overall community is explored in its various aspects, so as to shed light upon the position of the Jews. This includes a detailed portrait of Syria's struggle as a client state and the development of radical Arab nationalism.

It is my contention that the Jews of Syria have suffered immensely due to Syria's struggles for independence and the pangs of development. However, the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish community have not always been due to anti-semitism. Though Jews were discriminated against by the Syrians during the initial parameter, that of the French Mandate, it was based mainly upon "anti-foreign" feeling. The Jews were closely associated with the French due to the following: the French-Jewish schools, Hebrew and French usage, religious and cultural patterns, (different than the indigenous Arabs) and economic interdependence. This is the symbiotic stage, which was followed by the pressures of the World War II era. The next parameter was one of acute disruption which followed in the wake of the War and the declaring of an independent Syrian nation through the birth of Israel (1943-1948). It was at that point that the exodus of the bulk of the community took place. In the last period from



the birth of Israel until the present, the situation of the small Syrian Jewish community has been extremely tense, as the small remnant seeks to survive in an era of persecution.

The thesis then gives a detailed overview of the Syrian Jewish community from the aspects of the political structure, demography, economics, and education. All of these aspects are seen to be intertwined.

The thesis also develops an analysis of modern Syria with a political history so as to make understandable the chaos of recent Syrian historical and political events. To give a background for the mindset and a rationale for what has occurred to Syrian Jewry, the traditional, yet influential aspects of Islam and the leadership structure are examined. In that violence and ideology have wreaked havoc upon the Jewish community there, these too are explored, not only for their effects but also for their causes. To show the unique position of the Jewish community in Syria, other communities are also briefly described.

In conclusion, the complex political configurations of the Middle East over the past fifty years have allowed, if not at times instigated, not only the decline, but the collapse of Syrian Jewry.



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## CHAPTER I

### A DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

#### A. POLITICAL OVERVIEW

##### INTRODUCTION:

From 1839 up to World War I the political situation of Jews in the Middle East, on the whole had been improving in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The Khatti-i-Sherif of the Gulhane of November 3, 1839 assured equal rights to all subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Jews no longer would be protected subjects without rights. With the removal of the jizya (poll tax) in 1855, protection was guaranteed not by payment, but by citizenship. While a subsequent tax was created for those not recruited to serve in the army (i.e. Jews), some Jews did volunteer for army service. Beginning in 1909 however they were required to do military service until the end of World War I.

Though local practices greatly varied, the law gave almost complete equality. Discrimination against Jews by the government seemed non-existent in the late 1800's and early 1900's except for an incident in 1910. An order had been issued, forbidding non-Ottoman Jews in Syria and Palestine to register non-movable property in order to prevent Zionist expansion.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Zionism as a movement never took hold among the Jews of Syria. Only a small group of "Palestinian Jews who were exiled in Damascus during the First World War stimulated a small Zionist movement in that city, which resulted in some Damascus Jews settling in kibbutzim in Israel."<sup>2</sup>

With the conclusion of the First World War, the Ottoman



Empire disappeared. Iraq came under a British Mandate (1920-1932), Syria and Lebanon under a French Mandate (1921-1945), and Egypt became independent, and fully without British military protection in 1936.

Anti-Jewish propaganda spread in the 1920's and became more prominent in the 1940's. With the growth of Arab nationalism, Jews were beginning to be regarded as a national-Jewish minority and not a weak religious minority. To be a Zionist meant to be a traitor to "those Zionist ideals." It is no secret to the historical eye that in a general sense, Arabs have never fully tolerated national minorities among themselves. (This issue will be fully discussed in Chapter II) Armenians, Assyrians and more recently Kurds have all been subject to maltreatment and massacres. Though the Arab press and governments frequently claim to distinguish between Jew and Zionist, this is belied in practice. Indeed, historian Hayyim Cohen, has affirmed that: Every Jew is considered a Zionist, or a potential Zionist, and for this reason there is no room for Jews in Arab countries. This is borne out in an Italian article which pointed out, the situation has become so difficult that "pogroms have become a matter of administrative policy, so that the Jews of the Middle East have practically become outlaws."<sup>3</sup>

As to the actual Jewish participation in the political process, it has been practically non-existent. During the Mandate period in Syria, most political parties were not only extremely fanatic, but anti-French. Since the Jewish community looked upon the French as their protectors, they looked upon these



political parties as dangerous to their interests. For a few, Communism seemed appealing, and for some others Zionism. In coming to realize their position as a vulnerable minority, they were averse to any political activities which might raise their profile.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Jews were one of dozens of minorities, yet it was only one group that actively became competitive with them - recently settled Christians. These new Christian immigrants, many Armenians and Greeks, settled in the cities and were in a position to compete with the other city-dwelling minority, the Jews. This tension found expression in the infamous Damascus affair (1840) when Jews were charged with having murdered Christian children. This action followed some Christians' attempt to grasp at important positions by creating an enemy common to them and the Moslem majority. To that end and at that time, the Christians had French support, for the French were seeking to gain a foothold in this region. By contrast, the Moslems of the cities did not share the hatred or concerns of the Christians, and they refused to be party to the libels. Nor did Great Britain side with the French on this issue. Indeed, she was instrumental in arousing world opinion against this infamy.

It is also of interest to begin to take note of the two distinct cultures that were in existence in the main centers of Syrian Jewry, in Aleppo and in Damascus. Prior to and at the time of World War I the Jews of Aleppo mainly spoke Arabic, while teaching their children foreign languages, while the



Damascus Jews were even more Arabized as to their customs, names, and behaviours.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Aleppo had the more stable Jewish community. After the Young Turks' revolution in 1909, Damascus Jews were the only Jews of the Arab countries to establish an organization for the study of Arabic.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1918-1945 - POST WORLD WAR I

The British occupation of Syria was short-lived, though the inhabitants would have definitely preferred the British to the French 'intruders.' (See Chapter II for a further discussion on this matter) The occupation lasted a year and one-half, October, 1918 to March, 1920. Neither during this period nor during twenty five years of the French Mandate which followed, did Jews suffer from legal discrimination. The only exception was an act prohibiting Zionist activity. Thus on June 25, 1921, authorities declined to issue permits to Jews who wished to leave Syria. However, this did not hinder those who were really interested from fleeing to British-occupied Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

As to participation in government, the Jewish communities of Aleppo, Damascus, and Qamishli were given representation in the municipal and district towns.<sup>7</sup> In 1923 when a parliament was created in Aleppo, the local Jews demanded and received representation. When the first all-Syria parliament met in December, 1936, it included one Jewish deputy. With only 9,000 of the 35,000 Jews of some ten years before left, representation was suspended by the new Syrian constitution of 1949.

While governmental-Jewish relations may have been satisfactory,



such was not the case between the Jews and the rest of the populace. "It seems that Jewish-Christian friendships grew in some ways during the French Mandate, while Jewish-Muslim relations deteriorated."<sup>8</sup> This was generally true after 1935. Previously, in October, 1925 the Druze revolted against the French since Jews were looked upon as pro-French. The Druze attacked the Jewish Quarter in Damascus. Many were killed and houses and shops looted and set on fire. Some Jews were kidnapped and the rebels demanded huge ransom fees. Hundreds of Jews fled to Lebanon while many of those who stayed lost their source of livelihood.<sup>9</sup> With this major exception, the Syrian Jewish community lived on without other incidents of terror or widespread murder being common until 1935. However, blood libels continued until 1931, mostly spread by local Christians.

The year 1935 ushered in a negative phase. Because of deteriorating conditions, burgeoning nationalism, and growing anti-French feelings combined into a fear of a Zionist dominated Palestine next-door, the Syrian Jewish community felt the first tremors of the troubles to come. In 1935 Jews were accused of being Zionists. In February, 1936, anti-French disturbances in which more than ten people were killed and some three hundred arrested, seriously affected the Jews of Damascus. The situation portrays the Jews as being caught in the middle, with each side perceiving them as associated with the other. The Jewish merchants and craftsmen were forced to close their shops and join the general strike when Arab nationalists threatened to burn their shops if they refused. A special committee formed by local



Jews to provide relief for Jewish families facing starvation, was able to do very little because of lack of funds. They issued an appeal for aid to Jews in other lands. Then, despite the Arab threats, the Jews were forced by the French to open their places of business so as to halt the economic damage perpetrated by the nationalists.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the indigenous sources of Jewish suffering, the rise of Nazism in the late 1930's inflamed even further anti-Semitic feelings. Yet despite these attitudes and the actions which accompanied them, on November 15, 1937 the Syrian government announced with appreciation that the Jewish Agency for Palestine had donated two thousand Syrian pounds for the aid of flood victims. Immediately thereafter, in addressing the opening of the Syrian Parliament on November 19, it was actually necessary for the Premier to deny allegations that Syria was aiding the Zionists in Palestine. Throughout this period there was one Jewish representative in the Chamber of Deputies. The premier's statement of November 19 may have been a necessary political statement, for shortly thereafter, Baldur von Schirach, head of the Hitler youth organization of Germany visited Damascus. On December 5, it was announced that the armed extremist Arab National Youth Organization had threatened a boycott of all Arab merchants who bought 'Zionist goods from Palestine'. Von Schirach with fifteen Nazi agents conferred with Nazi representatives in the Near East and decided to establish close contact with Arab youth movements.<sup>11</sup>

In 1938 the Palestine issue came to the forefront and the



Syrian Jewish community, though not necessarily committed to Zionism, was branded as pro-Zionist nevertheless. Zionism had never really had a strong ideological or political foothold in Syria. While during World War I numerous Jews were expelled from Palestine to Syria by the Turks, what they brought to Syrian Jewry was to be short-lived. Under the guise of cultural activities, Zionism permeated the Damascus community and to a lesser extent the Aleppo community. Yet by 1923 most of the Hebrew schools had to close simply because of a lack of financial support from the local Jewish communities.<sup>12</sup>

Anti-Jewish demonstrations, a strike, and the official campaign to boycott Palestine-Jewish products were reported on April 28, 1938, coinciding with the opening of the inquiry of the Woodhead Palestine Partition Commission.<sup>13</sup> Throughout that year and until the conclusion of the Mandate, the weekly Jewish newspaper of Beirut, written in Arabic, al-'Ālam al-Isrā'īlī (The Jewish World) continually reported tragedies in the Syrian Jewish community. A number of Jews were stabbed, several to death by Moslems. Various statements were issued for a boycott against all Syrian Jews. The paper also reports in January, 1944, and again in May, 1945, that the Jewish Quarter of Damascus was attacked and then the following month, June, 1945, Jacques Franco, director of the Alliance Israelite Universelle school of Damascus was murdered in broad daylight. It was then reported in March, 1946, that at the time Damascus revolted against French rule, the Moslems attacked the Jews. A teacher and two others were killed. The irony to follow was that several Arab leaders, fearing that



a pogrom might be disastrous to their cause, saved the Jewish Quarter.<sup>14</sup> Also at this time Rabbi Moshe Nahum of Jezriah was forced to make a statement against Jewish immigration to Palestine. A truly humiliating scene was that of the heads of the three main Jewish communities who were compelled in November, 1945, to demonstrate against the Balfour Declaration and Jewish shopkeepers being ordered to keep their shops closed as a sign of solidarity with Moslems.<sup>15</sup>

Coinciding with these physical attacks, Jews in Syria and in Lebanon, some even government officials, were dismissed from their posts, from the press and from the railroads. Many of the people affected belonged to families which had lived in the area for hundreds of years, and had become almost completely culturally assimilated among the local Arabs. The Mufti of Beirut and Monsignor Arida, the Maronite Patriarch, submitted a memorandum of protest to the French authorities against the discharge of 'nos collaborateurs Juifs'. Many Moslem and Christian colleagues of those dismissed expressed resentment over the dismissal.<sup>16</sup> The situation was extremely debilitating for visitors: "When the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on the Palestine issue visited Syria, its members were struck by the cowed and intimidated manner of the heads of the Jewish community. One member of the committee, Mr. Bartley Crum, in his book "Behind the Silken Curtain" (p. 239), gives the following description of the scene when three representatives of the Jewish community arrived to give evidence:



The committee of three chosen Jews appeared. Only one spoke. There had been testimony in Jerusalem before us by Oriental Jews charging that Jews in the Oriental countries were given only second-class citizenship. Our sub-committee expected the Jewish spokesman they now heard on the scene to need far more than 20 minutes to tell his story. Instead, he used 45 seconds of his allotted time. He raced through a one-sentence written statement in which he said that the Jews of Syria were happy and not discriminated against; that their situation was excellent under the present Syrian Government; and that they had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Zionism. The three presented a picture of terrified men..." 17

#### 1945 TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

In the period immediately following World War II the entire Middle East was overtaken by vast political changes. Syria and Lebanon were affected as much as any country, as they attained their independence after a quarter-century French Mandate. With the establishment of the Arab League on March 22, 1945, the attitude of the Arab states to their Jewish minorities was then determined by the situation of Palestine. The international community was made aware of the attitudes and intentions of the Syrian peoples towards its Jewish minority in the autumn of 1945. A meeting of Moslem leaders took place in Damascus and they sent a telegram to the Allied Governments, warning that holy war would be declared if Jews were to be allowed continued, even though limited, immigration to Palestine. A leader of the Young Moslems declared: "If the Palestine problem is not solved in favor of the Arabs, the Arabs will know how to deal with the Jews living in their countries." Then on November 18, a mob broke into the Great Synagogue in Aleppo, vandalizing it, beating up several elderly Jews, and burning prayerbooks in the street.<sup>18</sup>



To then make a boycott of 'Zionist' products of January 1, 1946, totally effective the Arab countries in general and Syria in particular, meted out heavy punishments upon all merchants who traded in goods produced or distributed by Jews. Informers were offered half the price of any goods confiscated. Another manifestation of 'anti-Zionist' policy was the refusal to grant exit visas to Palestine, even for travel. A few well-to-do Jews, with influential friends in the government succeeded in obtaining visas after giving cash guarantees of two hundred to three hundred pounds.<sup>19</sup>

This deteriorating situation spurred a rise in unauthorized Jewish emigration. Although some of those caught fleeing were sentenced to various terms in prison, others were murdered by those who were to smuggle them out; Jews continued to flee. At first the authorities refused passports only to Jews who sought to emigrate to Palestine in 1945, but as anti-Jewish feeling mounted throughout the Middle East in the late 1940s, passports were denied to any destination. When illegal emigration reached epidemic proportions, instructions were given to shoot anyone crossing the frontier without permission.<sup>20</sup> (See Demography section for details.) This Syrian fanaticism took the form of a Bill on March 23, 1947, which applied the death penalty to any Jew crossing into Palestine illegally or for anyone aiding such a person, whether or not that person was a Jew. The penalty was later changed to imprisonment with hard labor. So determined were the authorities to halt illegal emigration, it came to the point of during searches, if a family member was missing from the



home, those present were put under arrest. It was assumed that they had helped assist the missing individual to flee Syria. Several found guilty of this charge were jailed.<sup>21</sup>

Jews were not the only people in Syria seeking to leave. Christians fled to Lebanon in 1945 to 1946, in large numbers. Their fleeing was mainly due to their being suspected of being sympathetic to the French government. Now that Syria was an independent country, like many middle and upper class Jews, they feared the Syrian nationalists would take revenge on them.<sup>22</sup>

Censorship went so far as to include the prohibition of AI, al-'Ālam al-Isrā'īlī, the Beirut Jewish paper in all of Syria as reported in that paper on May 21, 1946.

For those who did not seek to flee, the situation was no better. Once Syria achieved independence, it became even more intensely involved in the Palestine issue as anti-Zionism became a state policy. The government demanded that the Jewish communities declare their official opposition to Zionism. Such statements were pointless, however, since more pamphlets for an economic boycott of Syrian Jews were published.<sup>23</sup> September through December of 1947 saw tension building, with Jewish employees being dismissed from many positions, Jewish goods being boycotted, and Syrian deputies frequently introducing anti-Jewish measures in Parliament. Specifically in terms of job losses at this time, the telephone exchange in Aleppo and Damascus dismissed fifteen Jewish girls. The Chief Engineer of Damascus who had held his position for twelve years, likewise was fired along with five Jewish school teachers.<sup>24</sup>



Following the United Nations partition plan decision, explosions began to occur. First a devastating pogrom in Aleppo. The notorious Moslem Brotherhood was the initial instigator. With the Jewish Quarter attacked, 150 homes, sixty shops, and five Jewish schools were attacked and set on fire. The local French school was also attacked. Four large synagogues plus fourteen smaller ones, their books and interiors, were destroyed. Among them was the Mustaribah, the famous ancient synagogue. After the pogrom 2,000 Aleppo Jews fled to Lebanon for safety and shelter. Shortly after the pogrom, the President of Syria told a Jewish delegation that such incidents occur even in advanced countries. While promising to study the matter and expressing the hope that there would not be another outbreak, he strongly suggested that the Jewish leader must halt the Jewish exodus! The Minister of Finance ignored a request for financial assistance to restore at least one synagogue for a house of worship for the local Jewish inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

During the late 1940's the Damascus community was in a quieter situation, but unfortunately not permanently. February, 1948, saw several bombs placed in the Jewish Quarter. Then following the declaration of a Jewish State on May 15, one Jew was killed by a 'student' mob, and the U.S. legation was attacked.

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL TO PRESENT

The situation appeared promising after the coup d'etat of Colonel Husne el Zayim on March 30, 1949. Under his short-lived regime, many previous restrictions were relaxed. Jews were again



permitted to circulate freely and there was limited emigration, with some leaving for Lebanon. The coup which followed and its aftermath however were not so favorable. In August, 1949, the Jewish Quarter was again attacked, this time leaving scores of Damascus Jews killed and wounded. A vicious anti-Jewish attack by the press was climaxed by the bombing on August 6 of the main synagogue of Damascus. The American Jewish Committee intervened with the government of Syria and the B'nai B'rith intervened with the United States government to have those responsible for the bombing punished. Though six suspects were arrested, it cannot be ascertained whether they were ever brought to trial because of the political confusion which followed in the wake of Husni Zayim's murder. Following this outburst of violence, the new government demanded that a committee from the Jewish community make a statement that such incidents such as the August 6 attack were "ordinary" and that the Jews had received assistance from local authorities. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Dr. Fadhil el-Jamali aptly described the plight of the Jews in Arab countries when in 1946 he officially announced that Jews in Arab countries have become "hostages". (See Chapter II, "Political History")

After the execution of General Zayim on August 5, 1949, a civilian cabinet took office. The power behind this government was Brigadier General Hinnawi, head of the Syrian army. (This "coup-phenomena" is discussed in detail in Chapter II.)

When the new National Assembly met on November 15, 1949, it was dominated by those in opposition to the proposed merger of Syria and Iraq. Then on December 19, 1949, General Hinnawi and



his associates were arrested by another group of army officers. They installed former Premier Khalid el Azem as the government's head. This was the third coup d'etat within the single year of 1949. On December 24, 1949, Nazim el-Kudsi, former Foreign Minister, formed a government which lasted less than two weeks. To further complicate matters, on March 14, 1950, Syria separated totally from Lebanon by severing all economic links. May 29, 1950, saw Prime Minister el-Azim resign followed by el-Kudsi's transitional cabinet. With the army retaining the real power behind the government, cabinets were continually being reshuffled. Thus unrest and instability was thriving until the November, 1951 coup of Colonel Shishakly who actually became a military dictator. During this period of unrest, from the time of the establishment of the State of Israel until Shishakly gained power, many Syrian Jews attempted to emigrate to Israel. Frequent arrests of Jews trying to leave were publicized. Yet, during the first week of November, 1949, the Damascus daily, Al Ayam, reported that between August and November, 1949, about three hundred Jewish families had left Syria for Israel and that they had succeeded in taking their possessions and money along with them. The newspapers of the time also noted that at the end of December, 1949, Syrian police announced they had arrested two hundred Syrian Jews and had seized nine motorboats after discovering a 'Levantine-Jewish band smuggling Syrian and Lebanese Jews into Israel'. That same week the Jordanian daily, A-Nahda, published additional reports of organizations based in Damascus and Beirut, for the smuggling of Jews into Israel. Overall Jews were not allowed after 1947 to



leave Syria legally, except for short periods: in 1954 by Hashim al-Atasi, and in 1958, under Egyptian influence after the formation of the United Arab Republic. It must also be noted that while all Syrian residents must carry identity cards, other religions are not mentioned on the ID cards. Syrian Jews' identification cards are stamped 'Mousawi' - of Moses, a Jew.

Some optimism for Syrians and the minorities was to be found in the constitution re-formulated during this period. The basic features of the French inspired constitution of 1930 with regard to the structure of government, was retained. The text was adopted on September 5, 1951. However, between the constitution and its application, lay the army and the wealthy landlords who still controlled much of the Syrian economy. Although both the constitutions of 1930 and 1950 guaranteed religious freedom and equality, it has remained little more than a dead letter. Religious 'equality' has never been a concept to be reckoned with in the Moslem world, and the acceptance of the Jew seems to have disappeared with the growth of Arab nationalism.

Following the Iraqi disclosures of espionage rings, the Jews of Syria, according to the Arab press were put under 'close supervision'. In December, 1951, the Arab News Agency reported that the Syrian Ministry of Justice had ordered legislation for the freezing of all Jewish property, as Iraq had already done.<sup>26</sup> The Zilkha Bank of Damascus in January, 1952, the only remaining major Syrian-Jewish owned business was closed by the government, and forced to wind up its business and liquidate by April, 1, 1952.<sup>27</sup>

In an attempt to justify his regime the following few years



saw Shishakli issue several decrees to implement land reform that had been promised long ago and which was long overdue. In contrast to the radical program of Egypt, his reforms were moderated and cautious, concentrating mainly on land owned by the state. With several purges and then an election to give some semblance of a democratic process which was boycotted by leaders, Shishakli held on precariously to his dictatorship. It is not surprising, in view of the prevailing unrest that the situation for the Jews was distressing. Under Shishakli's dictatorial regime, attacks against Jews had become common-place in streets, markets and public places. Numerous cases of stoning of synagogues were reported. Many Jews were periodically arrested, charged with espionage, Zionist activities, etc. released and then rearrested. A very small number were able to escape to Lebanon, but the Lebanese government was under pressure to extradite them. During this period the Syrian Jewish community lived under a regime of terror, mitigated only by inefficiency and corruption. The regime made sure to carry out the numerous legal restrictions under Syrian law: the 1948 ban on Jews' selling property; the 1953 freezing of all Jewish bank accounts and the restriction of Syrian citizenship to Arabs; the distribution of Jewish property including synagogues among Arab refugees and Syrian citizens; and the restriction of movement of Syrian Jews. Shishakli had even tried to extend his anti-Jewish legislation to citizens of European countries and the United States. Other victims were the smaller numbers of Jews in the northern provinces, some of them Iraqi citizens and Jewish peasants whose land, crops



and tools were actually seized by the government.

Shishakli was attempting a definitive 'Arabization' of all Syrians, and though it was directed at all minorities, it fell especially heavily upon the Jews. With the law of April, 1953, non-Arab names were forbidden and the use of any language other than Arabic was banned from public meetings. The executive of any public association had to include at least one-half Moslems - impossible for the Christian and Jewish communities! In addition, school teachers had to be Syrian Arabs who would be appointed by the state. Yet for international consumption the Syrian government still went out of their way to give the impression that Jews were not being discriminated against. Part of the 1953 Yom Kippur service from the Damascus synagogue was broadcast in Hebrew by the Syrian radio station!

Throughout this period, there was no official government institution to deal with the 'Jewish issue'. The two primary officials were the local police officer in charge of the Jewish Quarter and the administrator of the Jewish property. One of the leaders of the Damascus community, Zabri Laniado, is said to have publicly asked the government to limit emigration. He argued for total emigration of the entire community over partial emigration! After all, he claimed, a 'youth drain' would destroy in time the community internally. The Syrian government chose not to listen.

After the downfall of Shishakli, a group of Jewish leaders primarily from Aleppo visited Sabri al Assali, the new Prime Minister. Their requests and his reply were made public on



Radio Beirut, May 20, 1954, and by the Arab News Agency, May 23, 1954. The group asked Assali for equal status with Syrian Moslems, for they "denounced the existence of a Jewish home in Palestine and a Jewish state in Israel." Basically they requested the abolition of all anti-Jewish restrictions and laws. The Syrian Prime Minister promised all complaints would be examined and solved on an individual basis. The situation did not fundamentally improve under this or any of the future regimes or even superficially for any length of time.

For a short time, beginning in November, 1954, when Hashem al-Attasi came to power, Jews were again allowed to leave, though they were forbidden to sell any property. A first entourage of Syrian emigrants reached the Turkish city of Alexandretta in November, 1954, reportedly on their way to Israel.<sup>28</sup> After the first group reached Turkey, however....the police forbade others to leave.<sup>29</sup> Many of those who left after 1948, went either to Lebanon, South American countries, France or Italy. In the 1950's some also fled to North Africa. Their relative numbers were small compared to those who fled other Arab countries. Immediately prior to this limited emigration a bulletin was issued by the Syrian government to all its embassies not to grant entrance visas to any technical experts (i.e. United Nations) of Jewish origin. Meanwhile internal harassment continued. An official of the agricultural department was dismissed in September, 1954, when it was found that he was a Jew acting on behalf of the Jewish commercial establishments.<sup>30</sup> That month saw the first of what was to become frequent in allegations of



"Jewish spy rings."

The Sinai Campaign of 1956 did nothing to improve the precarious situation of the Syrian Jewish minority. If anything it not only increased the general hostility towards Jews as friends of Israel, but the French association with the Campaign aroused another latent hostility. Jews after the Mandate had been and were again associated with the foreigners - the French, and therefore as a group in opposition to Arab Nationalism. Yet despite the hostile feelings, the insecure Jewish community attempted to identify nationalistically. This was accentuated when in December, 1955, Syria "launched a fund for arms to which Jews contributed. According to Radio Damascus, the leaders of the Jewish community contributed 950 Syrian pounds (\$285), and some other members gave 1,000 pounds (\$300) each. By the end of December it was reported that the Jewish community had contributed a total of 8,730 Syrian pounds (\$2,619)."<sup>31</sup>

While their money was welcomed the thought of their emigrating anywhere, was not. One-week passes to Lebanon were abolished. Then in the spring of 1956, Jordan and Syria instituted border-crossing without visas, except for Jews. The war period left the Syrian Jewish community demoralized and insecure and reinforced the lack of cultural integration and non-acceptance. The positive status of 19th and early 20th century Syrian Jewry was now merely past history. In 1958, "after the fusion of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic, some of the restrictions on Syrian Jews were eased, and the attitude of the Egyptian officials who came to the country was a considerable improvement over that of the



Syrian security authorities. Leaders of the Jewish community were assured by the Egyptians that they would be treated fairly and that the new political status of Syria would bring them no discomfort. Shortly after the union, restrictions on Jewish departures from the country were supposedly lifted, although those who desired to leave were required to turn over all immovable property to the government. Blocked accounts of Jewish citizens were unfrozen. It seemed that an attempt was being made to adjust regulations affecting Syrian Jews to conform with those affecting Jews in Egypt. Despite the easing of emigration requirements, few Jews left Syria during 1958, presumably because of unsettled conditions throughout the Middle East."<sup>32</sup>

However shortly afterward the frontiers were again totally closed to them, and in 1959 trials of those accused of helping Jews to leave Syria began. Attempts to leave were considered to be a military crime. In October and November, 1959, several Syrian Jews were taken before a military tribunal for attempting to emigrate. One defendant, Marco Moghrabi, supposedly directed underground emigration from the Jewish Club of Damascus. The death sentence was demanded by the prosecutor for seven Jews and one Palestinian Arab. At the conclusion of the trials two received twelve year sentences at hard labor, three (including the Arab) six years at hard labor, and three acquitted.<sup>33</sup> By the following spring another arrest took place of several Aleppan Jews on similar charges.

Such trials and added persecutions were but an added dimension of the unrest in the northern region of the U.A.R. Disruptive



agricultural reforms and a two-year drought produced an overall agricultural depression, which heavily affected the entire economy. Though political parties were illegal, they thrived on this discontent. This then in turn brought about active Egyptian repression of the Communist party and the Ba'ath party. The later-to-be-powerful Ba'aths were based on a platform of Arab unity and a vague pattern of socialism at this time. With such repression, internal tension grew until September, 1961, with Syria's secession from the U.A.R. Nazem al-Kudsi was elected President and the parliament was restored.

Some six months later the Syrian army dissolved the government. They promised to restore 'construction socialism,' remain non-aligned and to attempt good relations with 'dear Egypt and sister Iraq.' Then a year later, on March 8, 1963, another coup brought to the forefront a coalition of Ba-athist and Nasserite elements. Then in June the Ba-athists assumed total control as they overcame the Nasserites with a great deal of bloodshed. The following year saw deeper economic crisis strike Syria and several cabinet changes. By the end of 1965 the Ba-ath party was in firm control with the moderate Salah al-Bitar as Prime Minister and General Amin al-Hafez as President. It was during this period, in March, 1964, that the infamous travel restrictions were enacted. Since that time Jews have been restricted from traveling more than three miles beyond the limits of their homes. The very few who obtained permission to emigrate could take no more than \$100 with them, having to abandon all other property and belongings to the state.

Widespread attacks of violence occurred when Eli Cohen, alias



Kamal Amin Taabet, an Israeli intelligence agent was arrested in Syria in January, 1965. He was convicted on a charge of espionage, sentenced to death, and hanged at the Damascus city square.

(See The Shattered Silence) When his arrest became public knowledge in the light of the trial and at the time of the hanging, Jews throughout Syria were continually assaulted. Then came the Six-Day War (1967) and they suffered even more during and afterward. Many were arrested and others assaulted by Moslems. Though no exact numbers or details are known due to the strict censorship, numerous Jews were murdered in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli. Immediately following the War soldiers surrounded the Jewish Quarter of Aleppo and Damascus. They instituted a rigid curfew, allowing Jews only to leave several hours per day for shopping. A few weeks later when the troops were removed the area was put under even greater danger from local extremist elements. (See Appendix, page 184)

Since the early 1950's houses and apartments left vacant by Jewish emigrants had been filled systematically by the government with Palestinian refugees. While previously this had kept the areas tense, now it left an explosive situation. In addition, "soldiers and other civil servants were forbidden to trade in Jewish shops."<sup>34</sup> (See appendix for black list document and further elaboration of its effects in Economic Overview.) Despite the aforementioned violence, the local Jews in each community pay the police who "guard" their Quarter, as well as pay bribes to many of their new neighbors, Palestinian Arabs.

The situation continually worsened.

"A document of November, 1967, signed by a 'group of Syrian



Jews' indicated that:

1. Jews were prohibited to move further than four kilometers outside their homes.
2. All Jews were prohibited to leave the country, even those of foreign nationality.
3. Jews could not become State officials, not even in the nationalized sectors of the economy, (which led to the dismissal of several Jewish officials after nationalization).
4. Jews could not sell their real estate.

The Syrian government has always denied persecution. On December 13, 1967, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Syria, Mr. Ibrahim Makhos, gave an interview to the French daily newspaper L'HUMANITE saying that the accusations were 'inventions of Zionist propaganda'.

As the newspaper LE MONDE of December 27, 1967 reported again about anti-Jewish persecutions in Syria, the Syrian Embassy in Paris answered (LE MONDE, January 3, 1968) that they '....denied all these allegations...which are pure fantasy...'

However, on February 2, 1968, Mr. Pierre Mertens of the Belgian League for Human Rights published a report concerning the Jews in Syria, stating that:

1. The Syrian Jews could not leave the country. If they did so all their property would be confiscated.
2. They could not travel beyond five kilometers from their residence.
3. They could not sell their real estate.
4. They could not be civil servants.
5. If they had a trade, they were boycotted.
6. Syrian notaries and Syrian embassies abroad could not accept a document presented by a Jew.



Furthermore, the identity cards of the Jews were stamped in red with the word "Jew"...(See appendix for copies of such cards)

In May, 1969, the Consultative Committee of International Organizations for Christian-Jewish Co-operation sent an appeal to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees asking for his intervention in favor of the Jews in Syria and Iraq. In January, 1970, an International Committee for the Deliverance of Jews in the Middle East was created, with Mr. Alain Poher, President of the French Senate, as its President.

On January 27, 1970, at the International Conference for the Deliverance of the Jews in the Middle East, held in Paris, two Syrian Jews who had just escaped from Syria confirmed all the previous reports of persecution. The position was also confirmed in a statement issued on January 27, 1971, by the Committee of Concern for the Jews in the Arab countries, operating in the U.S.A. under the chairmanship of General Lucius Clay. (Documents from these two groups are copied in the Appendix)

"The matter was raised again on March 12, 1971 at the United Nations by the World Jewish Congress, through an urgent appeal addressed to the Chairman of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights meeting in Geneva".<sup>36</sup>

Another press report in April, 1973, filed in Copenhagen told of horrors. Two Jews, a boy and a girl had escaped and given a grim report.

All of the issues had been clearly delineated at the Conference in Paris of 1970. The Conference issued the following text dealing with the principles of International Law:



THE PLIGHT OF JEWS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE PRINCIPLES  
OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

The situation of the Jewish minorities in the Middle East, in fact and by law, the chief characteristics of which have been described above, constitute not merely a violation of the Common Law of the countries under review but a violation by these States of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as adopted at the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December, 1948, and to which the aforesaid States have subscribed.

This text, which solemnly recognizes the inherent dignity of all members of the human family "guarantees to them equal and inalienable rights". Each one of the Member States of the Organization has undertaken to "ensure the universal and effective observance of human rights and fundamental liberties".

Among these rights feature:

- The right to liberty, equality and dignity (Article 1);
  - and this without distinction as to "religion, political situation" (Article 2);
  - the right to life and liberty, and to security of person. (Article 3);
  - the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law (Article 6);
  - the right to equality before the law, to the protection of the law against any discrimination (Article 7);
  - the right to an effective remedy (Article 8);
  - a guarantee against arrest or arbitrary detention (Article 9);
  - everyone charged is presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence. (Article 11);
  - it is forbidden to deprive an individual arbitrarily of his nationality (Article 15);
  - it prohibits arbitrary deprivation of property (Article 17);
  - it guarantees the right to freedom of thought and freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 18, 19 and 20);
  - it asserts the right, without discrimination, to employment and to equitable remuneration (Article 23).
- etc....

Thus we must recognize that the Jewish minorities in the Middle East have practically been deprived of each and every one of the fundamental rights mentioned above.

Unfortunately it seems impossible to enforce these rights.

Consequently, the Committee was forced to conclude that



it was appropriate at this time to ask for and to obtain for Jewish minorities the right to emigrate.

This right, which is linked to natural law, is one that civilized societies have admitted since time immemorial. Socrates, in Crito, considered it an attribute of individual freedom:

"... we proclaim this principle: that any Athenian, on attaining to manhood and seeing for himself the political organization of the state and... its Laws, is permitted, if he is not satisfied with us, to... go away wherever he likes. ... not one of us hinders or prevents him from going away wherever he likes..."

In recent history, a law passed by the United States Congress in 1968 states:

"... the right to expatriation is a natural right guaranteed to everyone..."

The French Constitution of 1791 assured the "freedom for every man to go, remain, leave, without being stopped or detained."

And finally, Articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, already mentioned above, specify that:

"... everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own..." (Article 13)

and that

"... when faced with persecution everyone has the right to seek asylum and to receive asylum from other countries." (Article 14).

It is on the basis of these principles, admitted from time immemorial by civilized nations and proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man to which are subscribed IRAQ, EGYPT and SYRIA, that we demand that the Jewish minorities be permitted to emigrate.

#### CONCLUSION:

Human rights problems are in no way an exclusive domain of the competence of States.

It is fitting that the United Nations - to whose principles these States in the Middle East have subscribed -



should intercede at the very least in order to ensure respect of Articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We are happy to create an assembly of such size and quality in a country which, since 1789, has proclaimed the equality, the liberty and the dignity of men and which, since that date, has always welcomed those who are outlawed and persecuted. We invite you jointly to seek with us means of action in order that the United Nations, Governments, and international public opinion at last be able to ensure justice for these thousands of persons who, in the Middle East seem to have been forsaken by the entire world.

Acting in such fashion, we make OURS the maxim of President John F. Kennedy:

"WHEN THE RIGHTS OF A SINGLE MAN ARE VIOLATED, IT IS THE CONCERN OF ALL MEN". 37

Throughout this period and to the present, emigration of Jews has been forbidden. During 1967, the situation particularly worsened in Qamishli. In that it is adjacent to the Turkish border, Jews had been under the strictest of controls. Following an incident on September 1, the whole community was under 24 hour house arrest. Unfortunately to most hostile activities the Syrians like other Middle East governments, still continually "close their eyes to mob attacks made against the Jews." Other times "the governments launch violent anti-Jewish attacks in the press, in radio and television which are under state control. During the Islamic Congress held in Amman, September, 1967, it was decided 'Jews living in Muslim countries' about whom it has been demonstrated that they have any alleged contacts with Zionism or Israel would be considered the enemies of Islam...all the Muslim people must boycott the Jews and consider them as their sworn enemies."<sup>38</sup> By the beginning of 1968 the situation had eased, but only a bit. These people are said to be still too afraid to



even try to apply to foreign consulates for exit visas.

At the time of the Qamishli-incident a group from the Bertrand Russell Tribunal Commission traveled about Syria and met with Jews in the presence of government officials. Following the encounter a Syrian Jew wrote to the world press: "You can imagine that if a single Jew had dared tell the truth it would have cost him his life."<sup>39</sup>

At the end of 1967, conflicting letters appeared in the Paris Le Monde: "An anonymous letter published.....(December 27) describing the plight of the Syrian Jews brought a response in the same paper (January 3, 1968) in which the Syrian embassy in Paris - in sharp variance with reports reaching Jewish organizations - denounced the letter as a 'pure fantasy.' It denied that there had been manifestations against Jews in Qamishli or elsewhere in Syria or incidents between the Palestinian refugees and their Jewish neighbors, or that there had been a curfew. It also asserted that Jews were not excluded from public life, pointing to the employment of 40 Jewish teachers at the beginning of the 1967-68 school year. The letter further stated that an International Red Cross representative in Damascus had found, on the eve of the Arab-Israel war, that the Jews enjoyed full rights."<sup>40</sup>

With the plight of Syrian Jewry unchanged then - United Nations Secretary-General U Thant finally publicly expressed concern over the issue. On September 29, 1970, he told the General Assembly:

Although I have no direct means of knowing exactly the conditions of life of the small Jewish minorities in certain Arab states, it is clear that, in some cases at least, these minorities would be better off...I hope very much, therefore, that it may soon be possible to find



sensible ways of solving this largely humanitarian problem.<sup>41</sup>

The following passage from an article in the French L'Arche, November-December, 1971, by Victor Malka (p.19), translated by Dr. Isaac Jerusalmi, HUC-JIR, vividly describes the recent plight of Syrian Jews and more than gives support to U Thant's view:

This last November 5, President Alain Poher (President of the National Assembly-I.J.) raised the matter of the fate of the Jewish community of Syria during a press conference, in the presence of Rev. Father Riquet (preacher at Notre Dame-I.J.) and deputy Jacques Mercier.

Two witnesses who escaped from Syria - a 17 year old young man and a 26 year old young woman - related during this press conference the fact that life in Syria has become a hell for the 4500 Jews of Syria of which 3,500 live in Damascus.

Entire families disappear, fathers compelled to ("sodomize"-I.J.) have sexual relations with their children, Jews must remain within a five kilometer radius of their residences, identity cards with the mention "Jew" entered in red ink; any Jew who has a brother overseas is denied the right to take care of his brother's affairs; kidnappings, tortures, insults; the authorities in Damascus have fallen into the most racist and heartbreaking Medieval practices. This is their way of winning the war by attacking defenseless poor people. In so doing, they are also being encouraged by a number of French figures who unashamedly continue to describe the life of the Jews in Syria as being that of Allah's paradise on earth!

All these are very serious testimonies against the bloodthirsty dictators of Damascus and against all those who, through their silence, act as their accomplices.

Yet despite numerous such reports in the world press, the National Geographic of April, 1974 ran an issue on Syria. The journalist Robert Azzi told of freedom of worship and freedom of opportunities for Syrian Jews. Seven months later, after much criticism and for the first time in the journal's 86 year history, the National Geographic retracted a major article.

Another contradictory article appeared on January 5, 1975, in the New York Times by Seymour Topping. The article paints a



placid portrait of an old Jewish community and concludes with a blatant stereotype. He describes a Jew who is the owner of a popular men's clothing store. The writer was then informed after publishing the article that he had visited with and spoken to only the 'court-Jews' - such as Selim Totah, President of the Jewish Council of Damascus, a government appointee! Then followed the even more publicized and controversial CBS television program by Mike Wallace portraying a much improved lot over the past five years for Syrian Jewry, that is under the present Hafez al Assad regime. By Wallace's own admission, he and his group from CBS were accompanied by three Syrian security agents. Wallace has since conditionally retracted his story and has been making plans to return to Syria for another attempt at a clear portrait of Syrian Jewry.

Shortly after the retraction by National Geographic, an article appeared in the prestigious Politiken of Copenhagen. With difficulty in entering the Damascus ghetto, the reporter, Ole Roessel wrote that "It is here, in the ghetto, in the narrow streets of one-room, mud-brick homes and medieval sanitation that most of Syria's Jews live. Their cramped quarters open onto an interior courtyard where Palestinian terrorists and secret police keep them under 24-hour surveillance. Members of al-Fatah and/or Saiqa, Palestinian liberation squads who operated offices in the heart of the Jewish quarter, strut through the cobbled streets fully armed, and even live with Jewish families much the same as an occupation army."<sup>42</sup> (See Appendix for photographs of this area and the people!!)



These are the reactions in the press, both accurate and distorted, yet the facts of the 1970's speak for themselves:

a) During the summer of 1971 a young Jewish girl in Damascus was arrested, raped repeatedly, and then dumped naked into the streets of the ghetto.

b) In March, following several air battles between Syria and Israel, minor pogroms occurred in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli.

c) In the fall of 1971, twelve Jews, beginning at the age of four, were held for five months for planning to flee. Two of the men, Joseph Swed and Nissim Katri were detained in jail until September 1974 - three years later! The November 27, 1974, Bulletin of Toronto's Beth Tzedec Congregation reported that upon his release, Swed was crippled, lacking all his teeth, and permanently insane. (Other information from these bulletins is copied in the Appendix.)

d) In March 2, 1974, the bodies of four Jewish women, Farah, Lora and Tony Zeibak and their cousin Eva Saad were discovered by the Syrian police in a cave at Asfura in the Zadani Mountains northwest of Damascus. Most probably the girls had planned to have had the aid of a group of smugglers who had instead brutally raped and murdered the four women. Only one of the charred remains could be positively identified. In an adjacent area the police found the bodies of two Jewish boys Kassam Abadi, 20 years old, and Natan Shaya, 18 years old, both mutilated. The Syrian authorities then deposited the bodies in six sacks before the parents' homes in the Damascus ghetto.<sup>43</sup>

"Within two weeks, Minister of Interior Ali Zaza, prodded by



a freakish riot among Damascus Jews and Arabs which was misconstrued by the western press as a gesture of solidarity on behalf of the Zeibaks, announced that the state security forces had captured 'a band of four assassins, robbers and smugglers.' Syrian Jewish emigres around the world were aghast to learn that the accused included Yussef Shalouh, a prominent textile trader, and Azur Zalta, a school teacher. Both men were regarded as outstanding members of the Jewish community, Jews noted for their devotion to the welfare of their harassed brethren. What made the charges even more incredible was the fact that Shalouh was the brother-in-law of Eva Saad. In reaction to these arrests and the show trial that was about to take place, the U.S. National District Attorneys' Association wrote a powerful letter offering counsel or merely to sit at the trial as witnesses. A copy of this letter can be found in the attached Appendix. World public opinion at first caused the Syrians to change their accusations to 'aiding illegal emigration', and then in September, 1974, the two men were released and the matter was dropped.

e) During the summer of 1974, eleven Jewish women from Aleppo were held and tortured in a Damascus jail. One of the escapees told a grizzly story of one of the women. She "was tied hand and foot with wire, strapped inside a big lorry tire with her head downwards; electric shocks were applied, every five or ten minutes. Gradually the intervals increased, but so did the charge. After 36 hours the woman confessed and was permitted to return home. She awakes shrieking in the night."<sup>44</sup>

Certainly in both cases these women realized that should they



be caught they would be tortured if not killed. If anything, their attempts to flee point out the unbearable frustration, the traumatic desperation that Syrian Jews are today faced with. To further document this nightmare, I have included in the Appendix the following materials:

1. "Syrian Brutality Repeats Itself"
2. "The Plight of Syria's Jewish Community"
3. "Drama in the Ghetto" (from Italian Epoca, April 28, 1974)
4. "Committee of Concern Fearful"
5. "A Troubled Minortiy" - Newsweek
6. "Encounter: A Synagogue in Damascus" - New York Times, November 9, 1975
7. Recent articles on a trip to Syria by reported for the the Canadian Jewish News, Sheldon Kirshner
8. Notes from Judy Feld - Beth Tzedec Bulletin
9. Photographs - pictures do not lie.....

While examining this material, it should be remembered that the Arab governments have for the most part, systematically forbidden representatives of the United Nations from investigating the Jewish question - as did the Nazis in their time. They claim that the plight of and treatment of Jews is purely an internal matter. If they would but treat the Jews with full rights then it would not be a "question" or "matter" at all.



A. POLITICAL OVERVIEW - FOOTNOTES

1. AJYB, 1911-1912, p.187.
2. Zenner, p.106.
3. Gli Ebrei, p.7.
4. Elmaleh, p.45-46.
5. Ibid, p.42-43.
6. AJYB, 1921-1922, p.213.
7. Farhi, J. "Apercu".
8. Zenner, p.106.
9. Cohen, p.45.
10. AJYB, 1936-37, p.265-6.
11. AJYB, 1938-39, p.334-5.
12. Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel, p.1086.
13. Ibid.
14. Jewish Frontier, March 3, 1946, p.42-43.
15. Landshut, p.58.
16. AJYB, 1941-42.
17. Landshut, p.59.
18. Alon, p.61.
19. AJYB, 1947-48, p.468.
20. AI, 10/26 & 11/9/45.
21. Salam, 1/16 & 2/6/48.
22. Schectman, pp.22, 154-8, 164-5.
23. AI, 10/26/45 & 3/25/46.
24. Landshut, p.60.
25. Salam, 1/16/48, p.6, 9.



26. AJYB, 1953, p.471.
  27. Ibid.
  28. Jewish Chronicle, (London) November, 1954.
  29. Encyclopedia Judaica, V.15, p.646.
  30. Sawt el Arab, Cairo, September 9, 1945.
  31. AJYB, 1957, p.404.
  32. AJYB, 1959, p.225.
  33. AJYB, 1961, p.338.
  34. AJYB, 1962, p.422.
  35. Alon, p.62.
  36. Jabes, p.15-16.
  37. International Conference for the Deliverance of Jews in the Middle East, p.73-74.
  38. Gli Ebrei, p.9, 28.
  39. AJYB, 1968, p.141-42.
  40. Ibid.
  41. AJYB, 1971, p.446.
  42. American Jewish Committee of Roessel.
  43. Friedman, p.17.
  44. Ibid.
- |       | 1917    | 1947    | 1958    | 1972    |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total | 430,000 | 480,000 | 115,000 | 104,000 |

It is important to note that Syria is one of the few countries to have substantial Jewish communities since 1947-1948. The fact that the Jewish community in Syria was not destroyed during the 1947-1948 period is a significant achievement. The Jewish community in Syria was not destroyed during the 1947-1948 period is a significant achievement. The Jewish community in Syria was not destroyed during the 1947-1948 period is a significant achievement.



## B. DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION

Until the last few decades, with the exception of Egypt, there is no reliable material on Jewish demography of the Middle East. Our data comes from tourists, travelers and businessmen, and deals mainly with the numbers of people in large cities and some townships. When comparing these reports, one is often struck by the radical differences in these estimates. Furthermore, we are given very little information as to reasons for changes in the population figures from one period to another. Data on mobility, whether domestic or international, is either missing or is little more than guesswork. Yet, we can generally state that large-scale immigration took place from Syria and Turkey to Egypt, Europe, and North America, and from throughout the Middle East to Palestine/Israel.

"Jews in the Middle East Countries, 1917 - 1972" <sup>1</sup>

	1917	1947	1968	1972
Iraq	85,000	125,000	3,000	400
Egypt	60,000	66,000	2,500	300
Syria and Lebanon	35,000	35,000	6,000	5,000
Yemen and Aden	45,000	54,000	500	300
Iran	75,000	100,000	65,000	62,000
Turkey	100,000	80,000	38,000	36,000
Total	400,000	460,000	115,000	104,000

What is important to note is that Syria is one of the few countries to have substantial emigration as early as the 1917-1947 period. The fact that the figure remained at 35,000 (1917-1947) actually shows that a considerable exodus took place when acknowledging the relatively high birth-rate of Oriental Jews. It should also be noted that immediately following World War I



a fair number of Sephardic Jews emigrated from Turkey to Qamishli, Damascus, and Aleppo mainly attracted by the more enlightened policies of the French Mandate.<sup>2</sup>

Though we have no precise date during the early period, it is evident that urbanization caused much internal migration. "In the past generation all Jews had to leave hundreds of small villages where their ancestors lived for the last two-thousand years. When I visited Syria twenty years ago, I did not see any Jews in the small centers and villages. A few small Jewish communities still existed in the north."<sup>3</sup> Certainly growing local anti-semitism, often instigated by expanding Arab nationalism (discussed in Section II) helped accelerate urbanization for Syrian Jewry. Likewise, with French government offices in city-areas, this drew the Jews in towards the cities. Living in urban areas greatly influenced all aspects of the Jews' lives, including their relations with other city-dwellers. It has already been noted that tension between the other city-dwelling minority, Christians, accentuated anti-semitism primarily on economic grounds. These main centers of Jewish living had the characteristics of corporate ethnic groups even during the Ottoman rule, when such groups served as one taxable unit. Now, with two competing groups, the corporate nature of these two religious communities allowed for outright rivalry for economic position. The means was the government approved monopolies, i.e. monopolies entrusted to a specific group such as the Kashaaf - the customs officials or the saraaf, the bankers to the Pasha, or even the button-makers monopoly.<sup>4</sup> Another aspect allowed for changes. "As a result of



the development of educational institutions, which from now on also embraced a not inconsiderable proportion of the women, and as a result of the rise in the average economic level, the average marriage age also became higher."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the period in question, while the Jewish population decreased in Damascus, Aleppo, and Sidon, it steadily increased in neighboring Beirut. Emigration began in the 1880's from Syria, initially to Egypt, then to South America, the United States, England, Lebanon, and Palestine.<sup>6</sup> The numerical decline is especially evident following on the opening of the Suez Canal. It spun off the decline of Aleppo and Damascus as centers on the overland trade routes. Shortly thereafter, after World War I, the instability of the local political arena began to influence many to leave.

With the Druze revolt of October, 1925, and the assaults on Jews in Damascus, some 3,000 Jews fled the city within a matter of days.<sup>7</sup> Massive emigration resumed when Muslims in Damascus and Aleppo began hostilities, especially after the elsewhere mentioned 1947 riots in Aleppo. Jewry of Aleppo and Damascus of 1904 each numbered approximately 10,000 and just prior to World War I at 12,000.<sup>8</sup> There are no "accurate estimates" of the community of Qamishli and the outlying communities. One writer does mention that in 1926 hundreds of Jews moved to Qamishli from Nusaybin in southern Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

After World War I, many Sephardic Jews came to Qamishli, Damascus and Aleppo from Turkey attracted by the fairly enlightened policies of the French Mandatory regime. In Damascus



most Jews lived in the Jewish Quarter. However, in Aleppo many Jews lived in areas which were both Jewish and Muslim, though never Christian.<sup>10</sup> This idea of living in a specifically Jewish quarter was not the same (prior to the modern Republic) as the objectionable European ghettoization. Here it enabled every Jew to live in accordance with Jewish law. Separate residential areas allowed for actively following the decrees of the Talmud, Sanhedrin 17b. ("A Torah student must not live in a city which does not have a court empowered to implement its decisions: a charity chest administered in accordance with the Law; a synagogue; a bath; a scribe and a teacher for children.") Therefore until most modern times, the idea of a separate residential area did not involve any degradation associated with "the ghetto", but rather for the inhabitants it was a citadel of their independence.<sup>11</sup>

A census of 1932 claims the Jewish population to be 26,250 and in 1943, 29,770.<sup>12</sup> Overall, whether during the even earlier Young Turk period, or the French Mandate in Syria, the Jewish community appears to have maintained its cohesion.<sup>13</sup>

Too often a Jew with a valid Syrian passport who succeeded in obtaining one of the few, much-sought-after British entry visas to Palestine, would find himself denied a Syrian exit visa.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, following this second census until 1947, many Jews were part of a mass illegal immigration to their next-door neighbor, Palestine. This is despite the fact, that there were quite a few among them who were not Zionists. Many of those who fled to Palestine, then migrated further. Illegal immigration



was more than difficult. Syrian frontier guards had been instructed to fire upon Jews attempting to flee Syria. Jews caught, were oftened fined and imprisoned. Many of those Jews who remained in Syria were interrogated and/or arrested for helping illegal immigrants. Some Arab officials took advantage of this tenuous situation to blackmail Jews, threatening to implicate them in emmigration plots. In May of 1947, a law was enacted establishing a three year sentence for aiding an emigrant. Then in January, the doors to all countries were closed upon Syrian Jews in the wake of the restrictions on Jewish emigration.<sup>15</sup>

These restrictions account for the present-day community of between 3,000 and 5,000. As stated in the Italian press, "There is an absolute prohibition for Jews to emigrate."<sup>16</sup> "No Western source, not Amnesty International, the International League for the Rights of Man, the American Jewish Committee, or even the Canadian Committee for the Rescue of Jews in Arab Lands (a small cadre of dedicated humanitarians in Toronto which has enjoyed singular communication with the Jews of Syria over the past four years), has been able to make an exact assessment of how many there are. Even Danish and Italian reporters have made note of difficulties thrown before them in trying to reach the inhabitants of what they call 'the street with no name'.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to other Middle East countries, as noted in the previous chart, the Jewish population of the area in question never became very large. The 35,000 people mentioned were never enough, dispersed particularly in Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus to create and develop a vibrant, expansive Jewish communal



structure. As Hayim Cohen points out: "Obviously the small size of the communities in the Levant countries was the reason for the lack of Jewish institutions such as hospitals and secondary schools, which were to be found in bigger Oriental countries."<sup>18</sup>

1. Cohen, p. 100.
2. Cohen, p. 70.
3. Farkh, "Majma", p. 225-226.
4. Farkh, October, 1926, p. 273.
5. Haaretz, 1901, p. 107; 1913, pp. 125, 126.
6. Silver, p. 10.
7. Cohen, p. 106.
8. Cohen, p. 106.
9. Cohen, p. 106.
10. Cohen, p. 106.
11. Cohen, p. 106.
12. Cohen, p. 106.
13. Cohen, p. 106.
14. Cohen, p. 106.
15. Cohen, p. 106.
16. Cohen, p. 106.
17. Cohen, p. 106.
18. Cohen, p. 106.



B. DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION - FOOTNOTES

1. Cohen, p.69.
2. Friedman, p.14.
3. Jewish Frontier, March, 1946.
4. Zenner, p.103.
5. Cohen, p. 70.
6. Farhi, "Apercu", p.225-226.
7. Hamenora, October, 1926, p.275.
8. Bulletin de l'Alliance Israelite Universelle, 1904, p.167; 1913, pp.129, 139.
9. Silver, p.10.
10. Zenner, p.106.
11. Hirschberg, p.406.
12. Hourani, p.121.
13. Zenner, p.104.
14. Alon, p.60.
15. Schectman, p.11.
16. Gli Ebrei, p.11.
17. Friedman, p.14.
18. Cohen, p.80.



### C. ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

In so far as no research has yet been carried out on the economic position of Jews in the Middle Eastern countries (exclusive of Israel), past or present, this chapter relies heavily upon Hayim Cohen's general statements on the economic transformation in the Middle East as presented in his The Jews of the Middle East. Once again we note that much of the available material is based on impressions of travellers and tourists who merely described their encounters with Jews who happened to be either rich or middle class, or even poor. Occasionally the writer inserts a few details as to the occupations of the local peoples. Unfortunately this unscientific method for gathering data and analyzing a community leaves us with numerous contradictions and lacunae. While official figures are available due to government censuses in Egypt and Turkey nothing similar is available in dealing with Syria.

"Nevertheless, it may be said that the middle of the 19th century the majority of the Middle Eastern Jews were poor, although even then there were differences between the Jews of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, among whom were some merchants and very wealthy individuals and those of Iran and the Yemen where poverty was more prevalent."<sup>1</sup> The Suez Canal, as has been mentioned, while improving conditions for the Jews of Egypt, disrupted much of the economic life of Syrian Jews in the last century.

In particular the difference between the Jewish communities of Damascus and Aleppo were radical, especially in the economic



sphere. It may also be deemed that because of these economic differences, these two communities developed dissimilarly in most aspects. One can trace this economic dissimilarity back to the sixteenth century!

Prior to and during the sixteenth century, Aleppo was an important transit city on the European-Far East overland trade route. Then in the seventeenth century it began to lose its vital economic role when the British opted to trade with Iran through Basra and the Persian Gulf, rather than through Aleppo. Cutting further into the economic life of the city, following the French Revolution, all French international trade declined. The active ruler of Egypt in the first half of the 1800's, Muhammad Ali, attempted to develop the continent's trade through Egypt and this further cut into the Aleppo economy. The noose was tightened with the opening of the Suez Canal which then made overland trade outdated. Yet, travelers through Syria in the 1880's wrote of wealthy Jews, though there were fewer now.<sup>3</sup> The economic decline continued and the number of emigrants likewise grew. The local Jewish journal reported in 1942 that most of those remaining were poor and the number needing assistance was continually increasing, having reached 40-65%.<sup>4</sup> Then came the terrible riots at the end of 1947, after which the remaining Jews of any wealth fled. The exodus of these well-to-do and many others was the culmination of many years of material decline, intimidation, and moral isolation. The Aleppo community had been prosperous and had been an active element of the city's once flourishing commerce. With the



wealthy Jews fleeing, those remaining were impoverished even more swiftly.<sup>5</sup> To complicate matters, when a Jewish male dies, his property is now transferred to a government authority for Palestinian Affairs. His family must then pay rent for the continued use of the house or business property or move elsewhere and rent.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past decade, whether in Aleppo, Damascus, or even Qamishli, one of the only sources of livelihood remaining has been shopkeeping. However, the official boycott of 1967 even strangled this sector. The following is a translation of an Army circular dated February 8, 1967. (Please see copy of full document in Appendix):

"The Syrian Arab Republic...Ministry of Defence...Armed Forces General Headquarters...Administration Branch...  
Department of Military Administration-Military Police  
Section-No.26/27/2-Circular No.4 - 8 February 1967.  
The following is a partial list of names of Jewish merchants and their businesses in Damascus. For security reasons, all Army personnel are forbidden to deal with them. Anyone who violates these instructions is liable to severest penalties."

The list, as can be seen, gives 47 Jewish stores with their addresses and description.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, while during the sixteenth century Aleppan Jews were involved in trade, those of Damascus were craftsmen; many were cobblers, goldsmiths, and matmakers. While many others were wandering village peddlars, a few became rich by trading with Palestine, Egypt, and Venice.<sup>8</sup> In the nineteenth century, several wealthy Jews were found in this city. Traveling to Damascus in 1848, Moses Margoliuth reported in detail of the wealth of some of the Jews of Damascus. Their houses were



overlaid with marble and they often had large, beautiful pools in the courtyards. He also made note that these elegant homes were surrounded by mud walls and the doors were simple, so as not to appear ostentatious and attract unnecessary attention.<sup>9</sup> Some time later, in 1884, Ephraim Neumark wrote that he found distinguished, wealthy men among the Jews in Damascus, but added that their economic stability had been shaken in the 1870's by the decline of Damascus as a center of international trade. 'Damascus has fallen from the stage, is sitting on the chair, but not on the ground.' He stated that most of the Jews there were earning their livelihood from crafts: goldsmiths, silversmiths, tailors, shoemakers, and watch repairers, while some were employees in workshops. Most of the silk, wool and cloth-dyeing industries were concentrated in the hands of the Jews.<sup>10</sup> Due to the fact that so much of a segment of Damascus Jewry were artisans and laborers, the opening of the Suez Canal did not drastically affect the local Jewish population, as it had done in Aleppo. Nevertheless, it took its toll in some emigration to Egypt and America.

A report shortly before World War I indicates that Jews were still involved in gold and silver work, and also weaving, dyeing, spinning and woodwork. However, their share of foreign trade had declined and their influence on the Damascus economy was rather minor.<sup>11</sup> "The few wealthy merchants remaining in Aleppo in the period following World War I had already adopted the practice of entering into partnership with Moslems, an uncertain safeguard at best and one that provided them little



protection during the Palestine war."<sup>12</sup> During this period nearly all professorships at the prestigious University of Damascus were held by European Jews! Surely a contradiction in light of what was to come. (See "A Troubled Minority" from Newsweek in Appendix) The events occurring in October, 1925 with the Druze revolt and the serious attacks on the Jewish Quarter (as described in A. Political Overview) led to high unemployment in the Jewish community. In reaction to the attacks, killings, and lootings, many fled the city. Many of those remaining became dependent upon funds collected from the Syrian Jewish community in New York.

Shortly thereafter, in April, 1926, the Bene Berith Lodge (B'nai B'rith) of Damascus collected the following information: Among the 6,635 Jews of Damascus, 2,275 were breadwinners, that is one breadwinner to every three people; 32% were artisans (including copper workers, weavers, tailors, shoemakers, and laborers), 17% were clerks, 4% worked as maids and servants, 14% were peddlars, 9% were merchants and goldsmiths or silver-smiths, 1% were rabbis, and the remaining 23% were engaged in various occupations, the majority apparently in the services.<sup>14</sup> Another visitor several years later, in late 1929, Yomtov Semach, also wrote that most of Damascus Jews were artisans.<sup>15</sup>

Since these reports, the situation has continued to decline. Aside from the political and social disabilities which in turn have affected the community economically, the demand for artisan type products, handiwork, has decreased. Along with this growing poorer class was added those Jews dismissed from the



civil service, from the press, from the railways, and from companies in 1942 and in 1947.<sup>16</sup>

By the time of the birth of the State of Israel on its borders, some 55% of all Syrian Jewry lived in abject poverty. They existed on charity from overseas and gifts from relatives. "They work at odd jobs but even their earnings are more in the nature of charity than merited remuneration."<sup>17</sup> At this time there still was a very small minority of professionals, teachers, lawyers, journalists, pharmacists, and doctors. The even fewer remaining upper class Jews were bankers and merchants. Yet it mattered not how wealthy one was when, as was becoming common place, the local Moslems were incited against this small group who they believed to be associated with the Zionists of Palestine. By the early 1950's, the better part of the well-to-do minority emigrated to neighboring Lebanon and to Israel, as well as other parts of the world (particularly in the United States to New York and New Jersey). Only representatives of the lower and middle class Jewish population still lived in Syria. "On the whole, the Damascus community, headed by Sabri Laniado, was impoverished, and approximately 2,500 individuals, or more than 50 percent of the community, were in need of the relief furnished by American and Beirut Jewry. The Aleppan Jewish community under the guidance of Chief Rabbi Moshe Taweel was languishing in similar straits."<sup>18</sup>

As above mentioned, the early 1950's saw the disappearance of any upper class of Syrian Jewry. To complicate matters, the Syrian Ministry of Justice froze all Jewish property. Then



"in January, 1952 the Zilkha Bank of Damascus, the only remaining Jewish-owned business establishment of importance in Syria, was closed by the authorities and forced to wind up its business and liquidate by April 1, 1952."<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-1950's, Syrian Jewry was undoubtedly the poorest and least educated of all the Jewish communities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Estimates went as high as 90% of Damascus Jewry as having no income, living on assistance from the American Joint Distribution Committee.<sup>20</sup>

It appears that integration in Syria was difficult for many of the same reasons as in Egypt. One stigma was the identification with the West, and in particular with French culture in the face of continually growing Arab nationalism. The second stigma since the late 1940's was the close association of all Jews with Israel, the enemy in this case. After the first war in 1948-49, Jews were not welcome in political parties. During the Sinai Campaign, Jews were not employed in public posts, nor by large corporations. Only in Aleppo did a very small part of Syrian Jewry prosper. There a few doctors and a few businessmen continued to do well, until the next war.

With the continued political turmoil the community was isolated from contact with foreigners by the early sixties. Throughout this period to the present, the following economic restrictions have been enforced (see concluding pages of Political Overview): prohibition of employment as officials in government offices; public companies and banks; dismissal without compensation and revocation of licenses; denial of



permission to obtain licenses for export and import businesses; orders to Army personnel and government employees not to buy in Jewish owned stores (see document in Appendix); a ban on the sale by Jews of their houses or other real estate; government seizure of the property of Jews who die and have relatives abroad.

In 1972, Jewish refugees recently arrived from Damascus gave a detailed account of the economic life there. They told of a 'white list', a government approved list of a small group of Jews allowed to operate stores outside the Jewish Quarter. (See Sheldon Kirshner's Canadian Jewish News articles in Appendix) Several of those on the list were reported to have even received money from the Syrian government to build up and improve their establishments. The emigrants told that when foreign visitors come to inquire after the plight of Syrian Jews, they are brought by government officials to this area to these show pieces.

Some seventy-five other families have members who have managed to retain jobs, usually because they are experienced workers or craftsmen. Yet, they are paid one-fifth to one-tenth the salary of what a Moslem with similar qualifications would earn. Some are able to stay in business by arrangement with a Moslem who officially does the exporting and importing (Jews are forbidden to do so), and demands a sizable cut of the profits for his services. There are also five or six Jewish doctors who are allowed to practice, but only in the Jewish Quarter. They are not allowed a full practice in that they are denied use of hospital facilities. They may not use an electro-



cardiogram even under the most dire of circumstances. However, the few Jewish lawyers are not even this well off. They cannot obtain clients at all, for they are at a decided disadvantage in the courts, and therefore most of the lawyers survive by working at menial tasks. This situation was shown true to the world in the 1974 trumped up trial of Yussef Shalouh and Azur Zalta for the murder of four girls and two boys from Damascus supposedly attempting to escape Syria. This incident is dealt with in detail in the 'Political Overview' and in the Appendix. In that the accused were denied local attorneys, including Jewish volunteer-lawyers in Syria, the U.S. National District Attorneys' Association volunteered counsel or even to merely attend the trial as representatives of the global community. (See letter from Attorney's Association in Appendix) (See Appendix "Rescue" reprints for tragic story of Shimon Khabas, a young Syrian Jew who desperately needed serious medical attention.)

The remainder of the Damascus community includes some two-hundred beggars, dependent upon charity. The Jewish community provides some charity, but this is but only enough to support each person for several days of each month. Some charity is received from funds like Keren Yitzhak Shalom, named for a late Syrian-born American philanthropist. These funds are capable of giving less than \$4.00 per person per month.<sup>21</sup> In between this group and the above mentioned employed, are those who do small-time peddling and selling of rags and old clothes in the streets.



This ugly picture is but a mirror image of the Aleppo community. Yet, both are still somewhat better off than the isolated community in Qamishli. There, the five kilometer traveling restriction is felt the hardest, as many of the Jews there had been peddlars and regional traders in the surrounding villages.<sup>22</sup>

1. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
2. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
3. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
4. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
5. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
6. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
7. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
8. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
9. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
10. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
11. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
12. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
13. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
14. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
15. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
16. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
17. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
18. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
19. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
20. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
21. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.
22. *Journal of the American Jewish Archives*, 1971, p. 2.



C. ECONOMIC OVERVIEW - FOOTNOTES

1. Cohen, p.85.
2. Neumark, p.66, Schur p.9.
3. Zenner, p.104.
4. AI, 11/20/42, p.10.
5. Landshut, p.58.
6. Committee of Concern, October 7, 1971, p.2.
7. Plight of Syrian Jewry, p.14-17.
8. Rivlin, p.8-11.
9. Margoiuth, II, p.243-247.
10. Neumark, pp.50-52, 66.
11. Elmaleh, pp.21-22.
12. AJYB, 1952, p.370.
13. Newsweek, June 17, 1974.
14. Hamenora, October, 1926, p.275.
15. Semach, December, 1930, p.11.
16. AJYB, 1941-1942, and Shectman, pp.161-162.
17. AJYB, 1947-1948, p.471.
18. AJYB, 1951, p.420.
19. AJYB, 1953, p.471.
20. AJYB, 1956, p.519.
21. Friedman, p.19.
22. Committee of Concern, November 2, 1972.



#### D. EDUCATION OVERVIEW

In the field of education one of the greatest transformations took place for Middle East Jewry. Illiteracy, common a hundred years ago was gradually eliminated. Graduates of secondary and higher education increased, along with the number of women in attendance. Simultaneously, there was a decline in the number of religious schools and their students.

Among the Jews of Syria there is no accurate census of illiteracy. Yet the following table from Israel (1961) gives a glimpse of not only the contrast between the countries of origin, but points out the progress made over the past century. (See p.55)<sup>1</sup>

The most powerful force in the education of Jews in the Middle East was the school system of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, as well as other foreign schools.<sup>2</sup> Over the past one hundred years the majority of Jewish children of not only Syria and Lebanon, but also Egypt studied in such schools. In the sparsely educated Middle East, they became relatively well-educated. They were taught under foreign curricula which too often left them with the scar of not mastering Arabic, especially if there was a local dialect. Being placed in the position of learning foreign languages drew the younger people closer to European countries in terms of political aspirations and cultural values. It thereby transformed them into a foreign group in their own society. One can vividly see the problems that arose from this French-oriented education at the



PERCENTAGES OF LITERATE PERSONS AMONG MIDDLE EAST-BORN JEWS IN ISRAEL (AGED 14 AND OVER), BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH, SEX AND AGE AT IMMIGRATION, AND MEDIAN YEARS OF STUDY(1)

Country of birth	Age at time of immigration			Median years 60+ of study
	15-29	30-44	45-59	
Egypt and the Sudan	94.7	90.2	75.6	62.1
Turkey	84.1	68.3	54.7	34.3
<u>Syria and Lebanon</u>	76.0	58.3	46.9	48.8
Iraq	69.5	52.9	39.2	27.8
Iran	63.7	47.2	31.5	23.0
Yemen and Aden	45.0	35.5	28.6	30.8

Men

Egypt and the Sudan	95.6	92.2	83.4	78.9	9.3
Turkey	89.4	79.4	71.3	56.6	6.6
<u>Syria and Lebanon</u>	87.2	83.4	68.8	71.7	-
Iraq	82.7	75.7	62.2	51.3	7.4
Iran	81.3	70.5	52.3	38.2	6.4
Yemen and Aden	74.5	64.5	56.5	57.1	6.0

Women

Egypt and the Sudan	93.9				
Turkey	78.4	58.1	42.1	22.5	5.3
<u>Syrian and Lebanon</u>	65.0	37.4	30.1	22.5	
Iraq	56.1	28.5	14.2	6.8	2.9
Iran	46.5	21.5	8.4	(3.2)	1.0
Yemen and Aden	18.1	4.9	2.5	(1.8)	0.8



Alliance schools in light of the French Mandate in Syria and the period since then. While this school system set them in good stead with the French intruders with whom they could easily communicate, they had thereby placed themselves in opposition to the majority, their Moslem, mainly anti-French neighbors. (See Section II "Political History")

Another fascinating aspect of this international education is that it even taught the children to be radically different from their parents. Yet it did not cause a break or even a tremendous gap in the nuclear family. While it did alienate many from traditional religiosity, it did not lead to assimilation or conversion.

Language training was not only stressed in the Alliance and foreign schools, but also in schools of the local communities. The children were taught two or three languages from the age of six or seven. Since in the earlier part of the period under discussion children remained in school for only four or five years, students often were fluent in several languages, but literate in none of them. As time progressed, the length of a student's education lengthened and students developed literacy in several languages. This competency allowed some students to continue in European schools of higher learning or to receive positions as officials in the civil service, particularly during the Mandate, in banks and businesses where individuals with several languages were valued.

Originally children of Middle Eastern countries began 'heder' at the advanced age of three or four. Kindergartens



were different than in the modern American sense, in that children actually began to read and write there. This then meant that for a young child, much more time was spent studying than given to playtime. The methodology for all teaching was traditional - it was entirely by rote. Discussions and analyzing problems were absent from all Middle Eastern education.

Meanwhile, the nineteenth century saw numerous publications of a religious nature in these communities. However, in the twentieth century few religious documents were published by their rabbis, and most of those that were, were published in Palestine. The Jews of Syria in the twentieth century published very little; even their communal periodical was based in and published in Beirut. In that the overall Jewish population of the Middle East spoke numerous languages, (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, European languages etc.) and had no common language, very little literature was widespread. It should be noted that Arabic, though widely spoken, was not a widespread literary language. Likewise, there was practically no Jewish theater in the entire Middle East. Music, not exclusively depending on lengthy written pieces was the one form of art that fully developed in this region. Music was developed both religiously and secularly.

The demographic and economic differences between Damascus and Aleppo, already mentioned, were mirrored and evident in the educational framework. Due to internal immigration and emmigration too, it is not always possible to show the



differences statistically between the two cities. In a general sense, traditional education was widespread in Aleppo, though later declining, while both traditional and secular education was less advanced in Damascus.<sup>3</sup> In either type school, "even in the Mandatory period, most Jewish boys went to some sort of Jewish school whether the Jewish version of the Kuttab, (the traditional elementary) or the schools of the Alliance Israelite Universelle."<sup>4</sup>

Yeshivot had existed in Aleppo in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and were revitalized with the arrival of the Spanish exiles in the 1500's, and then continued to serve the community until the end of the nineteenth century. However, the Damascus yeshivot existed primarily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yehiel Fischel Kastleman, a traveler of the past century, visited both cities in 1859 and wrote that there were many yeshivot in Aleppo with many rabbis, while he found only one yeshiva in Damascus.<sup>5</sup> Another traveler, Wolff Schur, several years later in 1875 wrote of a large yeshiva in Aleppo with many studying Talmud and the legal aspects of the tradition. Only in Aleppo and Baghdad, he claimed, could "people be found who were erudite in Talmud and who could reach down to its depths and bring up its most precious pearls."<sup>6</sup> Visiting Aleppo, Ephraim Neumark took note of numerous yeshivot, better even than those of Baghdad, because they were kept up by rich Jews who actually participated in all aspects of study there and as well, they supported poor yeshivot students. However, in Damascus he found but one yeshiva with about ten 'chachamim' studying but a



few hours per day.<sup>7</sup>

While the religiosity of the students of these pre-World War I yeshivot lived on through their children and grandchildren, the institutions themselves began to decline prior to the War. The 'Reshit Hochma Yeshiva' was established prior to the War for Talmud studies and foreign languages. However, it closed with the advent of the War. Another school, The Institute for the Teaching of Talmud was established after the War, mostly attended by destitute students (20 in 1925 and 30 in 1930), who received communal financial support. Along with traditional studies, they learned some French and Arabic.<sup>8</sup> By the close of World War II no yeshivot remained in Aleppo, although the community continued to train rabbis.

In the realm of other religious schools, Aleppo Jewry was somewhat more successful. In 1911, the traveler Abraham Elmaleh had much to report from Damascus. He wrote that some five hundred children, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the city's Jewish children, attended the hederim which were not very well off. His depressing description showed a dark, damp building where children sat crowded on worn-out mats in front of their old, miserable Rabbi. This teacher would read chapters of Tanach, Zohar, and Ein Yaakov without their comprehending any of it. The students were thin, weak and dirty.<sup>9</sup> In 1895 the Jewish community transferred its Talmud Torah to the auspices of the Alliance. Within a short period, they in turn introduced many modern, secular subjects into the school. Seven hundred and sixty eight students attended the school in 1910. When the Jewish community



ceased subsidizing the school in 1911, the Alliance then withdrew from this joint endeavor.<sup>10</sup>

When some of the four hundred and fifty students of the two Talmud Torahs transferred to Alliance schools in 1924, the Talmud Torahs closed. Several years later a new Talmud Torah opened having some three hundred students in 1938. However, due to monetary difficulties in 1939, it too closed. It later reopened in 1941 and was placed under the direction of the Alliance.<sup>11</sup> This school lasted only until 1945 when all Alliance schools, as well as all foreign schools, were shut down by the new, independent government. "Following the liberation... from French Mandatory rule, they were closed because they were deemed French schools with Paris headquarters. To meet new requirements they were ordered to effect basic changes in their curricula. Arabic was to become the principle language of instruction. Importance was to be attached to the study of Arab history and subjects fostering the development of Arab national sentiment; local directors were to be appointed."<sup>12</sup> Schools were forbidden to use Palestinian textbooks for the study of Hebrew. As well, all teachers subjected of harboring Zionist ideas were dismissed. Even every lecture delivered to a Jewish group had to be first cleared with the political police.<sup>13</sup> To circumvent the law closing foreign schools, a supposedly new school, mainly incorporating the students and previous Alliance faculty, the Talmud Torah Ben-Maymon was opened. It followed the new government's school curriculum and in July, 1947 the first three pupils passed the government elementary examinations.<sup>14</sup> This



school was, however, closed in 1947 when the government allowed the Alliance to again serve the Syrian Jewish communities.

The justification of closing foreign schools and of introducing Arab culture, history, and even propaganda is understandable. However, several other decrees were much less so. The Ministry of Education restricted the study of Hebrew and then banned it altogether. While other national minorities were allowed to teach their languages, Hebrew, the Jewish language was not.<sup>15</sup> In 1950 the building of the Alliance school in Aleppo was seized by the government. However, when they took over the building in Damascus of the Alliance, it should be mentioned that classes were held in private houses and apartments.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, "it can be seen that the traditional schools in Damascus were most unstable ceasing to exist in 1941. It was revived in 1950, when the Ozar Hatorah Society of New York succeeded in establishing a religious school which in 1959 was attended by three hundred and forty pupils. On the other hand the heders in Aleppo fared better."<sup>17</sup>

Only one established Talmud Torah existed there in 1926 with two hundred and forty five pupils enrolled there.<sup>18</sup> However, with a large demand for more religious education, the previous year a new Talmud Torah was formed with some five hundred prospective students.<sup>19</sup> While formal Jewish education had practically disappeared in Damascus, in Aleppo figures show that there was stability in these two Talmud Torahs. In 1942, the older school had an enrollment of two hundred and fifty,



and the newer, larger school had some six hundred students.<sup>20</sup> While up to 1939 all Jewish schools had taught primarily Jewish subjects, it was in late 1939 that the first government curriculum was instituted. Then with the large scale emigration of the 1940's and the establishment of the State of Israel, religious education declined. The remaining Talmud Torah was then transferred to the Ozar Hatorah Society, which then supported a second school. In 1959, four hundred and twenty six children were studying in these two schools.<sup>21</sup> The numbers shown for the 1930's and 1940's certainly do not include all the children of these communities. Many poorer families gave their children only a meager education - usually basic religious education. "Despite the fact that elementary education is free in the Government schools, these are seldom attended by the poorer Jewish children, because of distance from Jewish quarters and because parents or those responsible are anxious to give the children the essentials of Jewish religion and observances in Jewish community schools."<sup>22</sup>

Another prominent form of education was the Christian schools. In Damascus in 1924, one hundred and fifty students were enrolled and in 1929 about three hundred;<sup>23</sup> and in 1950 some one hundred and fifty at other similar type schools.<sup>24</sup> It can be assumed that children were sent to such schools because of their high academic standards. Likewise in Aleppo, some wealthier Jews sent their sons to Mission Schools. Also in view of the greater traditionalism prevalent in the Aleppo community, it can be assumed that the number was smaller than



in Damascus. At one of these missionary schools a local rabbi was employed to teach Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> Jewish students were in attendance in both cities in Christian schools through the 1940's.

However, as previously mentioned, the greatest influence in the education of all of Middle Eastern Jewry was the schools of the Alliance. Its first Syrian school was founded in 1864. In 1910 there were 1,129 students in their schools in Damascus, in 1939, 1,073 and in 1962, 458.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile in Aleppo the first effects of the Alliance were felt in 1869 when they sent a teacher to the new modern school there. Its beginnings were difficult in that many parents objected to the secular subjects and the very wealthy were not interested as their children were already at a Christian school. Finally, just prior to World War I, conditions began to appear more favorable and two more Alliance schools were established.

To elaborate on a point already mentioned, in 1945 along with Syrian independence came the closing of all foreign based schools. For Damascus Jewry the Ben-Maymon Talmud Torah was opened for at least some of the Jewish students. However, in Aleppo the government opened a special Jewish school, which just happened to have a Muslim principal. Until the government acquiesced and replaced him with a Jewish principal most Jews boycotted the school. Then in December, 1946, under the agreement that the Alliance would call their school 'al-Ittihad Al-Israili' (Jewish Unity) the government gave permission to reopen the Alliance schools.<sup>27</sup>



Once the massive immigration of the late forties began, the Alliance closed down many of its schools, leaving only the one in Damascus. From an enrollment of 2,084 in 1939 the number declined to 458 in 1962 with about 25 teachers.<sup>28</sup> Since there has been no emigration since then, the number hovers about four hundred and seventy five at present. The actual school building already mentioned as having been taken over by the government in the early fifties "had been taken over by the Syrian Government's Palestinian Arab Refugee Institution.... for the education of Arab refugees."<sup>29</sup> As of July, 1971, the World Jewish Congress reported: "There is a Jewish school in Aleppo with about two hundred and fifty to two hundred and eighty pupils and a clinic. In Damascus a Jewish school with about three hundred and eighty pupils operates. The children of Qamishli live in Aleppo and attend the Jewish school of Aleppo."<sup>30</sup> In 1968, several American visitors to Damascus were shown a Jewish school with a small group of students: "silent children at their desks; the two teachers, with tears in their eyes, begged the visitors to go away: 'You cannot help us. You can only do us harm.'"<sup>31</sup>

In a recent article, it was noted that Arab headmasters have been placed over all the schools. The overcrowded Jewish schools teach first graders that - "The Jews are criminals and ought to be wiped out." The Syrians seem quite proud of such statements, as can be seen on the following page. However, while religious education is legally limited to four hours per week, bribes are often taken to extend this.<sup>32</sup>



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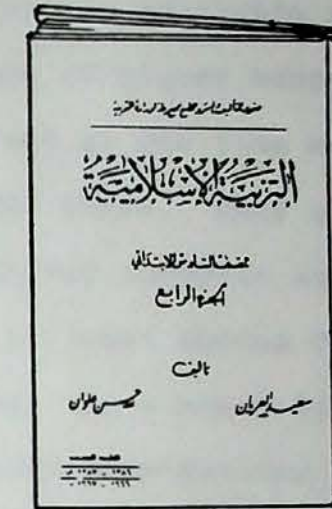
ISLAMIC TEACHING

for sixth-year elementary school

Part Four

(Names of two authors)  
1966—1967

(Syrian State Seal on back cover)



وكان اليهود في المدينة يوقمون دائما بين الأوس والخزرج ، يعيش بعضهم  
بدون بعض ، فيسود اليهود ويتغلبوا .

ويهود في كل مكان ، وفي كل زمان ، لا يحبون أن يعيش الناس في  
سلام ، لأنهم لا يسودون ولا يتغلبون إلا حين تكون الفوضى ، وتكون الفرقة ،  
ويكون الخصام ...

فلما جاء النبي عليه السلام بالسلام وأصحاه إلى المدينة ، وشرع فيها  
الإسلام ، صار العرب يدا واحدة ، لا عداوة بينهم ، ولا فرقة ، ولا خصام ...

'THEY DISLIKE PEOPLE LIVING IN PEACE'

The Jews always and everywhere dislike people living in peace, since their rule and domination over others depend on the existence of anarchy, division and contention. (p. 169)



While we do have various figures on religious and secondary education, no statistics are available as to Syrian Jews who enrolled in various forms of higher education. Though Damascus has a fine university, and at one time many Jewish professors, few Jews have attended there. Many of those who completed secondary education entered commerce and the minority who wished to go to university, at least during the Mandate, did so in Europe or the United States. As a means to discourage Jews from higher education, general examinations are given on Saturdays. The few Jews who are admitted to university are barred from studying 'sensitive' topics like electronics, as they might later defect to the enemy, Israel - the Jewish homeland.<sup>34</sup>

12. A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372.

13. A/12, p. 372.

14. A/1, 10/5/48, p. 372; A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372.

15. A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372.

16. A/12, 1948, p. 372.

17. A/12, p. 372.

18. A/1, 8/12/48, p. 372.

19. A/1, 8/20/48, p. 372.

20. A/1, 8/18/48, p. 372.

21. A/12, p. 372.

22. A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372.

23. A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372.

24. A/12, 1947-1948, p. 372; A/12, 1948, p. 372.

25. A/12, p. 372.



D. EDUCATION OVERVIEW - FOOTNOTES

1. Israel Census 1961, no.30, tables 2, 18.
2. Zenner, p.106.
3. Lestchinsky, p.9.
4. Zenner, p.105.
5. Kastleman, pp.13-14.
6. Schur, p.11.
7. Neumark, pp.52, 68-9.
8. AI, 8/20/25, p.2; 5/21/25, p.5; 9/19/30 p.2.
9. Elmaleh, pp.29, 36.
10. Bulletin, 1910, p.213; Elmaleh, p.35.
11. AI, 2/9/38, pp.21-22; 1/16/40, p.13; Farhi, 1925, p.54.
12. AJYB, 1947-1948, p.472.
13. Alon, p.60.
14. AI, 10/5/45, p.9; Salam, 7/28/47, p.10.
15. AJYB, 1947-1948, p.472.
16. AJYB, 1956, p.519.
17. Cohen, p.138.
18. AI, 8/12/26, p.2.
19. AI, 8/20/25, p.2.
20. AI, 8/18/42, p.9.
21. Cohen, p.139.
22. AJYB, 1947-1948, p.471.
23. Farhi, "Apercu", p.226.
24. AJYB, 1951, p.420; Semach, December, 1930, p.11.
25. Zenner, p.105.



26. Bulletin, 1910, p.213; Paix et Droit, March, 1939, p.12; Cahiers, July, 1962, p.50.
27. AI, 11/30/45, p.11; Salam, 12/17/46, p.8.
28. Paix et Droit, March, 1939; Cahiers, July, 1962, p.50.
29. AJYB, 1959, p.255.
30. World Jewish Congress, p.16.
31. Alon, p.62.
32. Friedman, pp.20-21.
33. Hatred is Sacred, p.13.
34. Friedman, p.21.



#### E. OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL CHANGES

While the political, economic, and educational arenas were declining over the past half century, numerous important social changes occurred. Here we will confine ourselves to the areas of misdemeanors and crimes, and to the changes which occurred in the sphere of religion.

Insofar as there are no official records dealing with crimes by individuals of specific religions other methods of analysis become necessary. As in other areas, with the aid of local and regional newspapers, as well as reports by travelers who wrote of what they saw and heard, we seem to be able to create a composite picture. It appears that Jews were guilty only of minor offences, until questionable, politically-instigated charges of the past twenty-five years.

Jewish thieves were involved in petty theft, rather than full scale burglary. Jews embezzling money was unheard of in Syria. Generally, Jewish clerks and business people were considered totally honest by Muslim merchants. This is of course accentuated by the fact that graft and 'shady-dealings' have been a way of life in the Middle East for centuries. In addition, cases of drunkenness and disturbing the peace were rare. Murder was also seldom committed, except for several incidents of people losing self-control in cases of family honor. It was common practice prior to World War II in the Middle Eastern countries where an individual committed murder, he received the death penalty. An unwritten law then obliged the ruler to reset the punishment to a specific number



of years.

As Hayyim Cohen pointed out: "The fact that only a few Jews were criminals may be accounted for by their having grown up with the fear of God, the head of the family, whose authority was strong, and fear of prison, since Muslim prisoners usually maltreated a Jewish prisoner."<sup>1</sup>

An offence that seemed unique to Syrian Jewry among Middle Eastern Jewry was widespread prostitution. It was centered in Damascus. This rise of a class of dancing girls and prostitutes was surely a sign of their abject poverty.<sup>2</sup> Prostitution must have been a recognizable and problematic issue in Damascus for some time in that the Chief Rabbi, Shlomo Alfandari (1826-1930), demanded that women not be allowed to sit in cafes with men and be restricted from playing musical instruments. The next Chief Rabbi, Jacob Damon (1910-1923), asked for a specific decree from the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul, Hayyim Nahum, ordering the prostitutes to leave the Jewish Quarter. While the decree was obtained, the Governor of Damascus had no plans to implement it. He realized the complexity of the issue as the prostitutes had much influence. When in Damascus in 1911, Abraham Elmaleh asked the local Governor to force the prostitutes from the Jewish Quarter, the reply received was to the effect that this would entail expelling all of the Jewish women!<sup>3</sup> From this time through the early Mandate, Rabbi Damon imposed a rigid ban on the prostitutes and their families too, as several fathers and brothers acted as procurers. The actions against them included forbidding the



girl's family from praying in the synagogues, prohibiting their burial in the Jewish cemetery, circumcision of their sons, and the sale of kosher meat to them and their families. Due to such efforts, prostitution quickly if not radically declined, but it seemed just for a very short time. An article in Ha'aretz, as recent as August 14, 1964 reported that prostitution still exists among Syrian Jews. In the early 1940's an organization was created to help wayward girls, and it supposedly aided nine girls in 1941.<sup>4</sup>

"Special research would be required to reveal the reasons for prostitution among Jewish women; the poverty, the ignorance of religious matters and the lack of young Jewish men in Damascus (as a result of continuous emigration) are not sufficient to explain it. It seems likely that its proportions have been inflated because it is so rare among the Jews of the Middle East."<sup>5</sup>

As to the more recently publicized 'criminal actions' since the creation of the Republic of Syria, these are discussed in some detail in section A, "Political Overview" as well as documented in certain cases in the Appendix.

In another area, with modernization and the advent of widespread secular education, and then the overwhelming contact with the French during the Mandate, changes had to be expected in the relation of younger people towards religion. This has already been alluded to in the section on education, and earlier when contrasting the Aleppo and Damascus communities. The 'shaking of the faith' occurred to a greater extent in Damascus



than Aleppo, as earlier explained Aleppo was more of a traditionally oriented community. In the early twentieth century there was considerable government propaganda emanating from Turkey supporting straying from traditional religions and their structuring. With all this it is fascinating that there was practically no conversion to Islam, or Christianity, especially with some Jewish children attending Christian schools and some Jews in business with Moslems, all as previously mentioned. As well, it is to be noted there has been no proselytizing of Jews by the government or local groups.

This thereby allowed for some religious creativity. "Among the Jews of Aleppo there were many famous Rabbis who wrote and published religious works, especially before the First World War. From that time, most of the Aleppo Jews' writings were published in Palestine. The Damascus Jews, on the other hand, produced few famous Rabbis writing religious books, because Damascus had no well-developed Hebrew printing press to publish such works, and mainly because there were no Yeshivas there worthy of the name."<sup>6</sup>

More recently in the realm of religion has been the constant harassment involved in the attempt to practice Judaism. Not only must licenses be purchased from the government to conduct services, but time limits are set. With a guard always present, they are timed and their actions are limited (i.e. a shofar cannot be blown). To grasp the full impact of this condition, see the New York Times article by Congressman Koch in the Appendix. Prayer books may not contain mention of Israel,



past or present, spiritual or concrete. As can also be seen in a photograph included in the Appendix, the ancient Jewish cemetery of Damascus has been destroyed with a road running over part of it to the airport. Also note should be taken of Rabbi Hamra's telegrams in the Appendix "Rescue" and his pleas for religious articles.

Meanwhile, "in Qamishli where 57 persons were murdered in pogroms following the Six-Day War, the Syrian Army has requisitioned four rooms of the synagogue for its own use as a warehouse and canteen, and there have been public burnings of phylacteries, prayer books and other religious articles, evoking scenes of Nazi bonfires in the 1930s. Qamishli has one 80 year-old man who serves as rabbi, mohel and shohet and when he is gone, there will be no one to replace him."<sup>7</sup>

The most recent contacts with the Syrian Jewish community through the Committee for the Rescue of Jews in Arab Lands chaired by Mrs. Judy Feld of Toronto have included direct communication through the mail with Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra. Through the Dr. Ronald Feld Foundation for Jews from Arab Lands, numerous parcels of Jewish books and religious articles have been sent and received by the Jews of Damascus. However, no parcels are known to have reached the Aleppo Jewish community, headed by Rabbi Yomtov Yadid. (Take note of various correspondence of the above Committee in the Appendix under the headings "Contact" and "Rescue" - it is the only present avenue of communication in the world with Syrian Jews!)

It must be taken into account that any positive notes



of social change that can be extrapolated from this area are in vain as long as those Jews remaining in Syria continue in their present, unlivable predicament.







## CHAPTER II - AN ANALYSIS OF SYRIA

### A. POLITICAL HISTORY - WORLD WAR I TO PRESENT

(This is a general modern political history of Syria based upon numerous historical works all found in the bibliography. Any specific historical viewpoint and quotations are footnoted, while general historical data is not.)

The area today known as Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 to the conclusion of the First World War. The better part of this region was divided into three vilayets: Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut. The cities were controlled directly, while towns and rural areas had local leaders. This remained balanced as long as the local leaders paid their taxes and maintained order.

As Western influence grew in the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire continued a steady decline. For centuries the Ottoman bureaucrats exploited the wealth of the provinces, without doing much of anything to increase the production of wealth. Consequently, as the wealth of the periphery was sucked to the center, areas like Syria became progressively impoverished. The Ottoman administration was wealth destroying, while the British and to a much lesser extent the French were wealth producing.<sup>1</sup>

Both the French and the British had been active in this area since the Crimean War against the Russians, 1854 to 1856. "France and Lebanon, after Russia's defeat, began to consolidate her economic, cultural, and strategic interests in the Middle East... France was able to push forward her claim as the champion



of Catholicism in the Levant.... Her influence was challenged by the British who supported a rival sect, the Druze. Exploitation of local animosities by the big powers gave rise then, as it does now, to communal warfare and ethnic conflicts... By 1914, nearly half the school children attended French institutions (in Lebanon). The Roman Catholic Church was becoming an instrument of French foreign policy, compensating for the failure of French merchants (French East India Company) to open up parts of the Levant for trade with France."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, France surely had the strongest interests in Syria due to ties with the Catholics and especially the Maronites, as well as the ever burgeoning commercial activities. Then with the dawn of the twentieth century came a regional cultural revival. This then matured into an Arab awakening - an Arab nationalist movement. (See "Ideology" section of this Chapter, as well as Antonius' The Arab Awakening) Organizing into semi-secret associations the nationalists began by demanding cultural autonomy and more participation by Arabs in the Ottoman government. However, these moderate concerns became more adamant demands when they encountered the rigid Young Turks, and then the fever for independence rose. However, these few hundred nationalists carried little weight prior to World War I. When the Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany and Austro-Hungary, the British contacted Sharif Hussein of Mecca. The Syrian nationalists had also been in touch with him and had established a dialogue with him on the concept of an Arab state from Saudi Arabia to Syria. However, in the master British plan



Syria was to serve another purpose. It would be used as a token of appeasement to the French. The inter-governmental communications and alliances throughout this period were not only extremely confusing but outright deceptive as the following illustrates:

"I have received following from my Chief Political Officer, General Clayton; Begins:

'I had interview with Feisal yesterday and today. He raised the question of his policy towards the French. He informed me that on the advice of Lawrence he had agreed verbally with Clemenceau to use his efforts with the people to secure a French mandate for Syria on the understanding that France recognised Syrian independence. Feisal stated frankly that he had never any intention of carrying out the arrangement and that Syria was bitterly opposed to French penetration in any form whatever. He said that Great Britain would be welcomed as mandatory Power but that he was unable to ask for a British mandate as he could not ascertain whether or not Great Britain would accept a mandate if offered. He had asked the Prime Minister the question but had received no direct reply. Feisal was obviously nervous as to the result of such an underhanded policy towards the French and asked for my advice. I told him that in my opinion a policy of intrigue and deception would only recoil upon himself and might easily endanger Franco-British relations and as a consequence relations between Great Britain and the the Arabs. (3)

An Arab insurrection began in 1916 in Hejaz, however, without the Syrian nationalists. With the end of the War in 1918 Syria was conquered by Allied troops, including some troops commanded by Amir Feisal, son of Sherif Hussein. Feisal entered Damascus in October, 1918, and with British urging took over the interior of the country. In accord with the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, Britain supported an Arab state in this region.<sup>4</sup> However, as Antonius and many others since have pointed out, deceptiveness existed to the largest degree possible. The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 between Britain, France,



and Russia gave Syria to France as an "area of influence."

The coastal areas were even to be directly administered by the French.

Overall, the French Mandate in Syria was an insignificant offset to the British hegemony in the area. The French ambitions were not to limit the hegemony, but to bedevil the political conditions under which the hegemony was exercised. The end result of these games of nations was that "the British rulers in Baghdad and Jerusalem, and the French in Beirut and Damascus, had to try and compound with resentful divided and defeated nationalists who regarded them as conquerers instead of cooperating with victorious, united and satisfied patriots who regarded them as liberators."<sup>5</sup>

As the French troops and government settled in the coastal areas in 1918 and early 1919, antagonisms grew between the nationalists and the French. "Nevertheless the French continued to maintain that their greatest source of trouble in the Near East did not lie in the Arabs but in the anti-French policy of the British. Although the British Government vehemently denied the French allegations, Mr. Balfour himself has admitted that "the British officers in Syria have not always played up to the British Ministers in Paris." M. Pichon summed up the French attitude towards England in the Near East when he wrote: "Elle l'Angleterre a voulu que le partage du Proch-Orient s'accomplisse à son seul bénéfice." (England wanted the division of the Middle East to be done to her advantage.) General Catroux writing at the end of the second World War brings



up the same point forcefully.

The French were determined to occupy Syria and they occupied it. It would not have mattered, even if they had realized it, that Syria, a preponderantly Muslim country, had no sympathy for them as had Maronite Lebanon. Consequently, one cannot help asking what good did the American (King-Crane) Commission achieve and what useful purpose did it serve?"<sup>6</sup>

In July, 1919, the General Syrian Congress declared Syria independent. Clashes then began between the French and Arabs. The following March the Congress made Feisal King of Syria. Britain and France basically ignored this action. At the San Remo Conference in April they created the French Mandate for Syria. After the French forces were able to break the back of the Arab forces at Maysalūn, they entered Damascus on July 25, 1920.<sup>7</sup> The League of Nations officially accepted the French Mandate in July, 1922.

It is extremely important to take note that the political institutions erected during this time were not indigenous to Syria or the Middle East. They did not spring from the social forces existing in those societies nor did they express the true desires of the peoples. Many Arab leaders initially were not discouraged from these experimentations, despite the limitations imposed on their independence. Many of the leaders believed that British and French influence would recede as the new institutions took root.<sup>8</sup>

Without doubt, the bulk of the Syrian populace hated the French rule which had been imposed upon them. In that the



majority of the country was Sunnite-Muslim, the French tried to weaken them and thereby based their government on the other ethnic and religious minorities. Obviously the one minority which could be heavily relied upon was the Christians. Thus the French created a state of "Greater Lebanon" which was the majority of the coastal area and heavily populated by Christians. They added to this area adjacent districts with Muslim majorities. With the creation of this division, which is today under such intense pressure, Syria lost its economic viability. The French continued their divide and rule procedures and created separate administrative regions, emphasizing minority interests. These regions linked in a federation were: a) Latakia, made up mainly of Alawites, Jebel Druze, and Alexandretta, with a large percentage of Turks; b) Aleppo; and c) Damascus. In spite of local councils, the ultimate authority was in the hands of the French High Commissioner, usually stationed in Beirut. The Syrians outrightly rejected the French administration and security as foreign domination. Throughout the 1920's there was violence against the French.

The French should have listened to President Wilson when in an address to the Senate on January 22, 1917, he said:

"No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property...

I am proposing that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into competitions of power, catch them in a net of intrigues and selfish rivalry, and disturb their own affairs with influence intruded from without...



I am proposing government by the consent of the governed..."<sup>9</sup>  
However, the French had deaf ears to such an outlook. Then in 1925, the local disturbances in Jebel Druze spread into a national uprising. When the rebels reached Damascus, the French were beyond mild irritation and subsequently shelled the city. By 1927, there no longer was a Druze or Syrian revolt. (See Chapter I "Political Overview" to see the bad effects this had on the Jews of Syria)

Finally appearing to take into account the Syrian nationalists, the French agreed to grant the Syrians independence in a similar fashion to the 1922 British-Iraqi agreement. This would allow for limited independence insofar as France would retain certain privileges, including the right to maintain troops in Syria. Thus in May, 1926, Lebanon became a republic. Being the Syrian nationalists' demands exceeded French interests there was no change in the status quo of Syrian-French relations. Finally in 1928, the French did away with their military regime and called elections for a constituent assembly. In April, a national coalition, unified by their desire to expel the French, won the election and their leader, al-Atassi became President of the Assembly.

The first major order of business the Assembly addressed itself to was drafting a constitution which called for the re-unification of all of Syria. This caused the dissolution of the Assembly by the French in May, 1930. A constitution was then proclaimed by the French High Commissioner. The constitution called for an elected Chamber of Deputies, yet all new issues,



were structured only with French approval. Though the nationalists firmly objected, the general public followed the French impositions. Once again France introduced the concept of a French-Syrian treaty which would guarantee French interests. When the Chamber voted down the proposals, the French closed down the Chamber in 1934. With tempers flaring, rioting broke out in the spring of 1936.

In an attempt to define a political solution, a Syrian delegation sought out the Socialist government of Leon Blum in Paris. In September, 1936 a Franco-Syrian treaty was finally signed. After an interim period of three years Syria would become independent. France was guaranteed special economic, educational-facility, and military status. With a re-established government led by the "National Bloc" and President al-Atassi, the Syrian Chamber ratified the treaty. However, the French at first postponed and then refused ratification.

Two decades of French rule had radically affected Syria's development. Modern areas were evident in Damascus and Aleppo; a network of roads had been laid; educational and health systems had been updated. French culture, French dress, and even speech were all evident throughout the country. Overall, the standard of living increased. In addition during the French Mandate, Syrian minorities felt protected, and persecuted minorities from nearby countries found refuge. Kurds and Armenians came throughout the 1920's and 1930's and Assyrians following the 1933 massacres in Iraq. Yet, when looking at the total picture of the last half-century in Syria, "Syria benefited very little from



the French mandate... Syria she gained no experience in self-rule...Nor were there any economic improvements, for both the French and the Syrians were more interested in politics than economics...they achieved very little in two decades of rule."<sup>10</sup> The economic scene remained unstable due to the lack of an official political detente with France. The "National Bloc" with its many factions had no unified plan on how to achieve the independence they desired.

French-Syrian relations suffered a severe blow when France under international pressure ceded Alexandretta, a northern city, to Turkey. The entire area was annexed by Turkey, July, 1939. Explosive riots then followed and President al-Atassi resigned. The Chamber was then dissolved by the French and they appointed a government. With the defeat of France in June, 1940, Syria came under the control of the Vichy government. The Italians and Germans under the guise of a supervising commission began building military bases and pro-Axis political groups. This intrusion by the Axis countries caused a British-Free French invasion of Syria and Lebanon. General Catroux, France's new Governor ended the Mandate and proclaimed Syria independent. However, the French were slow to follow this through. "The De Gaulle of 1941 was still a stubborn imperialist, no more eager than Winston Churchill to set subject peoples free."<sup>11</sup> The British and Americans forced them to hold elections in 1943 and "National Bloc" again won. This time Quwwatli was elected President. Slowly, power was transferred to this Syrian administration. Article 116 granting France special privileges



was annulled in January, 1944. However, trouble arose over the French refusal to transfer their special Syrian military units to the jurisdiction of the Syrian government. France tried to blackmail Syria by saying if the Syrians forced the issue, she would then call home her own defensive troops stationed in Syria.

Meanwhile the international community had begun to take note of Syria. In 1944, Russia and the United States recognized Syria, and England followed suit in 1945. As well, the new Arab League supported Syria. In a show of sovereignty in February, 1945, Syria declared war on the Axis forces and then became in April one of the founding members of the United Nations. In that the French still refused to withdraw all troops, anti-French riots broke out in May and as previously, the French shelled Damascus. Great Britain then demanded a cease fire, and by the end of the year the French and British under United Nations' pressure had agreed on withdrawing their troops from the area. With the removal of all French troops April 17 was declared "Withdrawal Day", and it still remains a national holiday.

It quickly became apparent that Syria had no strong leadership to guide her from the womb of independence. "Economic and social power were centered in the cities under merchant, banker and priest. Feudal landowners paid little heed to political affairs as long as their own perogatives remained undisturbed. Syrians who perceived a need for radical change concluded accurately, that change would be impossible until the grip of the mercantile-clerical coalition could be ended."<sup>12</sup> The previous



political force, the "National Bloc" disintegrated soon after its goal had been realized. Traditional leadership as described in Section B, "Tradition" of this Chapter, was no help. Aleppan leaders were based in the People's Party, in juxtaposition to Damascene leaders and their National Party. As elaborated in Section B, the minorities were loyal first, as in the past, to their communities, and the tribes and clans to their own leaders. The elections of 1947 exemplified the divisions with no strong party. The parliament was composed of numerous clan interests. This instability prompted consideration of union with neighbors Iraq and Jordan. Generally, the Aleppo leaders supported such union plans, while Damascene leaders and most Syrian governments opposed them together with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. With a combination of internal instability and plans calling for and against unions, Syria became an arena of power conflicts, leading to even further instability.

The little stability there was, then further undermined by the defeat of their army in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. Accusations of responsibility were readily hurled among political and military leaders. In a move towards stabilizing the country on March 30, 1949, the commander of the military forces, General Husni al-Zayim directed the first of numerous coup d'etats, and thereby deposed the President, Parliament, and government.

The United States was partially responsible for this first of so many coups. By the use of the coup they saw the possibility for insuring stability and creating conditions for democratic elections which would be won, of course, by intelligent and



cooperative leaders. However this was outside the realm of the average Syrian at that time. Syrians held the belief that government was an inconvenience imposed by foreigners to exercise their penchant for disruption and venality. The United States totally misread the situation. They were the only major government which did not give financial support to the candidates they supported. "Would-be pro-American candidates defected to the British, the French, and the Russians, all of whom were astute enough to circumvent the 'free-election' strictures..."<sup>13</sup> Due to these events, the American set up crash courses in Arabic for young diplomats so that they equaled the British in Arabists within the decade. Preceding Zayim taking full dictatorial power, cryptodiplomacy was the international game, but on a local level.<sup>14</sup> The "almost common" phenomena of the coup is discussed in depth in Section C, "Violence" of this Chapter.

Zayim's plans included the ending of wide-spread corruption, instituting progressive reforms, and encouraging development.<sup>15</sup> In June, 1949, he was elected President. Certainly, Zayim's one notable achievement was the abolition of religious courts. He set up a secular judicial system based on the Napoleonic code.<sup>16</sup> Then in August, Zayim was deposed in a coup by Sami al-Hinnawi in which Zayim and his Prime Minister were killed. Zayim "hadn't learned the modern theory of command - that is, that the commander's principle function is to maintain conditions in which subordinates have no alternative but to accept them."<sup>17</sup> The army men who had previously helped put Zayim in power resented what they perceived to be collaboration with Western powers. The new President



favorable union with Iraq. To lead towards this he restored parliament, which was led by Aleppo leadership favoring such a union under his protection. However, opponents of the union with Iraq incited army units to rebel and in December, 1949, Hinnawi was deposed by Colonel Shishakli.

Initially, Shishakli left the government intact and ruled from behind the scenes as head of the army. As the army gradually intervened in the government, the civilian leadership balked. With tension in the air due to the military intervention, in December, 1951, Shishakli directed a second coup and created a dictatorial regime. He established the only legal political party, the Arab Liberation Movement to support his regime. In July, 1953, a new constitution was approved giving the President total power, and of course Shishakli was elected President. This gave the numerous outlawed parties a flag to rally around - opposition to Shishakli. In February, 1954, a coup took place with military help and Shishakli fled. "The length of his rule is explained by the fact that Syrian agriculture prospered during this time and by the fact that he was able to unite the army behind him at least in the first two years of his rule... (Syrian) goals and aspirations have been greater than their economic and military capabilities. The resulting disappointment and frustration has fostered instability."<sup>18</sup> The previously dismissed Parliament of 1949 and President al-Atassi were restored. Still with no clear-cut leading faction, numerous coalition governments followed each other in what appeared to be an endless round of succession. Then in 1955 Quwwatli



replaced Atassi as President.

Within a decade after the founding of an independent Syria, leftist groups began to grow into viable positions of strength. Most noticeable were the "Arab Socialist Renaissance Party", the Ba'ath, and the Communists. In the inter-Arab realm of the mid-1950's, Syria was leaning towards Egypt, and October, 1955, they signed a defense treaty and a joint military command was created. In the international arena, a Syrian-Russian relationship was blooming which has led to tremendous economic aid and weaponry. The first such economic accord was arranged in February, 1956. Then the Sinai Campaign and the Suez War brought Syria and Egypt closer to Russia. During this War, Syria interrupted major oil pipelines passing through Syria from Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Obviously, tensions between these countries were exacerbated. The lines were repaired some five months later, but Syria's relations with her pro-Western (and especially pro-British) neighbors remained quite fragile. Syria and her leftist leaders feared outside intervention. Internally power was increasingly centered in the hands of the military with Ba'ath or communist sympathies. Though these two parties often collaborated, by late 1957, their relationship had fallen apart and appeared to be leading to a confrontation. The Ba'ath leaders feared a communist takeover internally, and pro-Western forces from the outside (from Iraq, Jordan, Turkey or even Israel - note that their first three are closely connected with Great Britain). Taking into account these concerns, Syria turned to Egypt and Nasser and the establishment of a union to



save their country.

The union occurred in February, 1958, with Nasser becoming President of the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.) and Syria as the "Syrian Region of the UAR". The centralized government handled foreign affairs, security, education, and industry, while the regional governments dealt with economic and financial affairs. As Syrian political parties were disbanded, the union became more complete. Then in October the authority of the central government was expanded. Due to this centralization process, there was some small change in the dismal outlook for the Syrian Jewish community, as discussed in the "Political Overview" in Chapter I.

As Egypt, the "bigger partner" slowly took over greater control of the Union, the UAR became more unpopular in Syria. Though the Ba'ath party had been the instigators of the union, now they felt put down by their limited representation (Syria 1/3 to Egypt 2/3). While the upper classes feared the UAR socialist reforms already begun in Egypt, the leftists were displeased with the slow movement towards meaningful socialist reforms in Syria. As well, Syrian military officers felt overwhelmed by the Egyptian military. Moves toward full merger were made in August, 1961 when the regional governments were abolished and major reforms and moves toward nationalization of industries were declared. This did not set well with the Syrian military, nor many Syrians.

A Syrian officers' junta led a coup in September, 1961, forcing Syria to drop out of the UAR and full independence was



re-established. A new Constituent Assembly was elected, but like earlier parliaments lacked political stability. Nazem al-Kudsi, a leader of the People's Party (Aleppo-based) was elected President of the Republic. This regime was more to the right and did away with many of the UAR reforms. These actions caused army officers in March, 1962, to carry out a counter coup to create a more leftist government. President al-Kudsi remained, though with a more leftist government, but if anything less stable. Meanwhile, Egypt still fuming over the break-up of the UAR instigated by Syria, boycotted the Arab League through part of 1962-63.

The Syrian Ba'ath party received great encouragement from the Iraqi Ba'ath coup of February, 1963. On March 8, 1963, the Syrian Ba'ath carried out another coup. Many of this group were members of Arab minority groups, particularly Druzes and Alawites. Several months of factional infighting followed. Then General Amin al-Hafez maintained the leadership by playing off rival factions. Al-Hafez slowly purged the army and government of pro-Nasserites. In retaliation a pro-Nasser group unsuccessfully attempted a coup in July, 1963. Needless to say, the purging and then the suppression of the coup did little for Syrian-Egyptian relations. Syrian-Egyptian relations were normalized again only prior to the Six-Day War.

Another aspect of the Ba'ath policies, though sometimes problematic was their call for neutralism in the international arena. The earlier writings of Michael Aflaq and Salah Bitar, the founders and theoreticians of the party, attested to an



awareness of this issue. However, except for inter-Arab alliances, Syria's official policy remained one which rejected alliances which might infringe upon their sovereignty. They shunned the cold war. "The governments which have succeeded the 1961 secession (from the UAR) have all held to a foreign policy of non-alignment, although they have also been more sympathetic to the East than to the West."<sup>19</sup>

Internally, the Ba'ath government created numerous socialist programs, including nationalizing banks and factories and redistributing land to the poor. From February to April, 1964, merchants and landowners held protest demonstrations, some leading to riots. All were brutally suppressed. Then in April, 1964, a new temporary constitution was announced, stating that Syria is a "democratic socialist republic, constituting an integral part of the Arab nation." Through all this the Ba'ath leaders were dividing into two camps. The first was based around the announced party leadership and was more moderate in implementing socialist policies. They also held out hope for total Arab unification beginning with alignment with Egypt. The second group was based among young party leaders, many of them Alawites and Druzes, who urged swift policies towards socialization. They saw Nasser as the enemy. In that this more radical group included many members from Arab minority groups, they had an affinity with the officers' corp which also contained a large percentage of minority members (excluding Jews). Many of the younger army officers were extremely radical. "Previously a career as a military officer had been a middle



class privilege, but now commerce offered these men greater opportunities and the commissioned ranks began to be filled with young men from the proletariat and the peasantry. Experiences with poverty and oppression had convinced them that only massive change could improve their people's lot. As they moved up the promotion ladder, their views became the view of the top command. Bankers, merchants....so recently able to rely upon the military for protection - lost their support."<sup>20</sup>

In late 1965, the more moderate group ousted the radicals from the government and began wide-scale purges. The extremists retaliated on February 23, 1966, with a full scale military coup against the "old leadership". Among those deposed and arrested were: Michel Aflaq, founder and ideologist of the Ba'ath; Salah al-Bitar, co-founder of the party and head of the government; General Amin al-Hafez, military head of the "past government".

Behind the coup were two powerful figures, an Alawite General Salah Jadid, supported by the regional Ba'ath leadership, and another Alawite General, Hafez Assad, Commander of the Air Force and Minister of Defense. These two quickly became rivals. Insofar as there no longer was a moderate group in the government and thereby a smaller public base to rely upon, the Ba'ath invited the Communists into the government for the first time in Syria's history. Throughout 1966, the government conducted far-reaching political purges and solidified its control by placing its local supporters in all vital posts in the army and central and local governments. It also gained control of all



major unions and public associations. The move towards nationalization was begun. By the following year the Ba'ath proclaimed that one-third of all cultivated land had been redistributed.

"Three elements have characterized Syria's international relations since World War II: her anti-Western inclination; her desire to achieve an Arab political unity; and her partnership with the Soviet Union - a partnership that has become a discomfort to the United States and her allies in Europe and the Middle East. It is important to remember that Syria did not become pro-Soviet until she was unable to resolve her differences with the West. And she did not become very closely identified with the Communist bloc until she began to feel frustrated and disappointed with the failure of her Arab unity policy."<sup>21</sup>

This new regime of the mid-sixties strengthened its ties with Russia and even tried to improve its relations with Egypt. It took an extreme hard line towards Israel which forced the Syrian-Israeli border to become dramatically tense. The military situation then compelled Syria to rely even more upon Soviet technicians and weaponry. All this then led to the Six-Day War and the Israeli takeover of the Golan Heights. With Israeli troops merely thirty-eight miles from Damascus, Syria agreed to a United Nations ceasefire, though she opposed a political settlement. In line with this attitude, Syria rejected the November, 1967, Security Council resolution and refused to cooperate with the U.N.'s peace envoy, Gunnar Jarring. In a further support of her radical position, Syria declared



full support to the fedayim organizations, the Palestinian guerilla factions. This stand was proven in 1968 by the Ba'ath's creation of Al'Saiqa. However, the guerillas were not free to set up an independent establishment within Syria, but rather were kept under strict supervision by the Syrian government.

The Six-Day War had done nothing to unify the government leadership. Until October, 1968, the dominant group was led by Jadid. However, his faction was isolated internally and in the Arab world. Then in October a more nationalistic group forced itself into the dominant role. Its goals were to reduce Syria's reliance upon the USSR, improve relations with the Arab world, and the renewal of the fight against Israel. The leader of this faction was General Assad, Minister of Defense.

By arresting many of the Communists in 1969, and by a May-government shake up, Assad strengthened his hand. Due to Syria's continued reliance on Soviet military and financial aid, as well as pressure from Egypt, the Assad regime was forced to continue to accept the leftist faction in an uncomfortable, competitive rivalry. Throughout 1969 and 1970 Syria continually supported the fedayim groups against the established governments of Lebanon and Jordan. Syria threatened to intervene several times and then in September, 1970, began a military engagement with the fedayim into Jordan. Embarrassingly they were repulsed.

General Assad took complete power in November, 1970. He removed the opposition faction from the government and had most of them arrested. A "People's Council" was then called which nominated Assad as President of the Republic in March, 1971.



In a plebiscite as the only candidate he received 99.2% of the vote. The following month the new President stepped down from the Premiership and appointed a loyal follower to the post.

This new regime quickly attempted to rectify Syria's poor standing with her Arab neighbors and the rest of the Arab world. It appeared as though Assad was willing to modify, as least slightly, the previous regimes ultra-extremism and even go so far as to align itself with Egypt, Libya, and Sudan as the Federation of Arab Republics. Syria even attempted to moderate the Jordanian fedayim fighting, though she was unsuccessful in these endeavors. More successful was the revival of the Eastern Command against Israel, which fought more effectively then ever before in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The Syrian economy suffered heavily during that war and this did little to instill calm towards the Jewish minority.

Russia was forced to accept Assad and his fait accompli though she had backed his political opponents. The Syrians' new policy of openness led to the restoration of relations with many countries including Britain in 1973. This then allowed for economic agreements with numerous European countries. Meanwhile, improved relations with the United States have proceeded at a relatively slow pace. Though queries have been passed by the United States government concerning the plight of the Jews of Syria, the inquiries have been answered with political rhetoric. (See Newsweek article and U.S. Attorneys' letter in Appendix)



A. POLITICAL HISTORY - FOOTNOTES

1. Yale, p.247.
2. Ismael, p.60-61.
3. Zeine, p.86-87.
4. Antonious, p.163-185.
5. Marlowe, p.25.
6. Zeine, p.218
7. Abboushi, p.305.
8. Khadduri, p.33.
9. Zeine, p.227.
10. Ibid., p.306.
11. Bassiouni, p.103.
12. Ibid., p.105-6.
13. Copeland, p.46-47.
14. Ibid., p.44-56.
15. Hitti, p.252.
16. Bassiouni, p.106.
17. Ibid., p.53.
18. Abboushi, p.307-8.
19. Ismael, p.212.
20. Bassiouni, p.113.
21. Abboushi, p.314.



## B. TRADITION - ISLAM AND LEADERSHIP

Politics are often intertwined with religion, and this has been undoubtedly true throughout the Middle East. It is no exaggeration to say that one cannot fully comprehend the complex political configurations without giving attention to the religious characteristics. However, while Islam pervades the geographical area, Muslims greatly differ in culture and orthodoxy. Especially in Syria can numerous religious varieties be found. For instance the Druze are a mystical, heretical sect of Islam. In northern Syria live the Alawites who are a mixture of Christianity, Islam, and pagan beliefs. As well as the small Jewish community, there are various Christian groups: Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Assyrian Christians, and Armenian Christians. (See chart of minorities in Section E, "Minorities" of this Chapter) However, whether in Syria or any other Middle Eastern country, exclusive of Israel, the majority of each country's population is Muslim. Overall there are some five hundred million adherents to Islam throughout the world.

Literally, Islam means the surrender of man to God - Allah. This primordial and ultimate religion<sup>1</sup> was revealed to Muhammed beginning in 610. One only needs to submit to a simple affirmation of faith to become a Muslim. One repeats the 'shadāda': There is no god, but The God and Muhammed is the messenger of The God. Theology as such is basically non-existent. Yet, "the perfection of Islam guaranteed the perfection of the Moslem community and through it justified a sense of individual perfection, not as an absolute of moral blamelessness but as a latent feeling of the



superiority that is conveyed by possession of the fullest measure of truth..."<sup>2</sup>

The message for Muslims in terms of revelation is embodied in the Quran. All truth is derived from its words, though history has seen various Caliphates use different interpretations of the Quran. Among the truths is the prescription for regulating the political and social affairs of mankind. Therefore, Islam makes no distinction between the state and the realm of believers. Until most recent times, there was no concept of a secular ruler in the Islamic world. "Democracy...met the opposition of religious and conservative elements who viewed it as incompatible with traditional patterns of authority. It failed to win the support of the lay public which forms the backbone of any democratic society, since the very class that identifies its interests with those of democracy was lacking."<sup>3</sup>

Other than the professing of one's faith, there is little that a Muslim is obligated to do. He should make a contribution to the poor; he should make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca; he should pray five times daily; and during the month of Ramadan he should fast during the daytime. However, there is really no distinction between religious and secular acts and obligations.

Overall, Muslims can be categorized into two main groups, the majority Sunnites (as in Syria), and the Shi'ites, largely found in Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Yemen.

As it is the purpose of this thesis to examine the Syrian Jewish community, it is necessary to be able to perceive the majority among whom they live and at times have fully interacted



with. Though we fully recognize these Muslims who reside in Syria as "considerably different" than the small Jewish communities, we still need to attempt to understand an integral part of their lives - religion.

Since the abolition of the caliphate in Turkey in 1924, there has been no central symbolic leadership to a Muslim. His obligations are to God and not to any church or to any individual who claims to speak for God. With little formal authority remaining in this period of modernization, most Muslims are today willing to surrender to the pressures of the times, yet they remain vulnerable to religious nostalgia and rhetoric. Due to this, political and social change must still accomodate itself to the lingering religious consciousness of the populous and to the vested interests of the small, but vocal cleric class.

Yet because Islam is so entwined with everyday life, any kind of social reform produces religious reform as well. In reaction to any type of social-religious reforms an Islamic puritanical movement was created. In 1927, an Egyptian school teacher founded the Muslim Brotherhood. Though it was centered in Egypt and later banned there (1954), it spread throughout the Arab world. They attempted to force governments to "mend their ways", and eventually their secret members resorted to violence, including assassination. "The neo-Islamic totalitarian movements are essentially fascist movements. They concentrate on mobilizing passion and violence to enlarge the power of their charismatic leader and the solidarity of the movement. They view material progress primarily as a means for accumulating



strength for political expansion, and entirely deny individual and social freedom. They champion the values and emotions of a heroic past, but repress all free critical analysis of either past or present problems."<sup>4</sup> Such groups cannot hold back the flood-gates of modernization. For the people of Syria after the Arab awakening to nationalism after World War I, there existed even deeper dissatisfaction with their existing political, social and economic system, and the French and their compatriots symbolized all of this. Unfortunately, with these ever burgeoning frustrations, anyone associated with the symbol as the Jews were to the French, also became the target for the outgrowths of frustration. Yet, much of what the Syrian people desired was merely an Arab version of what the French intruders had. Therefore, they were not really interested in reinforcing traditional Islam, just the message of Islam - a world of compassion, equality, and unity. What they sought was a nationalistic, industrialized entity which would in effect revolutionize their society. This would in turn cause religious patterns to change to the extent that religion has become a vehicle which the state has used for its own interests when it so desires.

While religion has been one underlying aspect of traditionalism in Syria, another of equal if not greater importance has been the traditional patrimonial leadership. The patriarchal system is at the base of all traditional societies and usually is confined to household groups. The authority binds the leader and family. The leader or household head "has no administrative



staff and no machinery to enforce his will...The members of the household stand in an entirely personal relation to him. They obey him and he commands them in the belief that his right and their duty are part of an inviolable order that has the sanctity of immoral tradition. Originally the efficacy of this belief depended on the fear of magical evils that would befall the innovator and the community that condoned a breach of custom."<sup>5</sup> This system in an expanded form is the patrimonial system. Bendix defines this society as "an extension of the ruler's household in which the relation between the ruler and his officials remains on the basis of paternal authority and filial dependence."<sup>6</sup> This patrimonial system continues to exist on the local and regional levels in Syria and has contributed to the instability of the central Syrian government through the present Assad regime. Due to the old elite excluding new aspirants, they engendered a counter-elite within its own social class. This has been indirectly discussed in the previous section, "Political History".

Another aspect of this continued instability was that the native elite did not exercise sustained authoritative power prior to 1946. "During the Mandate, uneasy cooperation between nationalist leaders and the French was regularly punctuated by open rebellion, passive resistance, boycotts on the Syrian side; martial law, constitutional suspension, and bombardment of civilians on the French side. Unable to loosen the French grip, the elite stood by impotently while parts of Muslim Syria were annexed to Lebanon, autonomous areas within the Syrian Mandate



were established, and Alexandretta was ceded to Turkey. Meanwhile, the French Parliament refused to ratify the 1936 treaty which granted self-rule within the context of an alliance. Only after the British wartime occupation could independence be asserted. Syria, then, had no effective native leadership on the international level until 1946....The Mandate strengthened their (the wealthys') power. Since the French relied upon the collaboration of the wealthy upper class, that is on landowners, (they) could make no fundamental reforms in the land system.... The wealth of the landlord-merchant elite was thus increased by Mandatory policy, while their aspirations for power were constantly thwarted. The French played the classic game of divisiveness. Every internal minority - linguistic, ethnic, regional, religious, or nomadic - was encouraged to develop its own case."<sup>7</sup>

The continual rivalry between Aleppo and Damascus clans, the failure of coalitions in the parliamentary system, the playing-off of groups by various Presidents over the past thirty years of independent Syria can all be traced back to what can be termed "institutionalized-patrimonial-rivalry." This is not unique to Syria. Unity has been and continues to be one of the most sought after and least achieved goals in Arab history. Assad and those who preceded and were moderately successful, have used political rivalry and conflict to buttress their own leadership positions. Unfortunately most of his predecessors had not been able to use what Manfred Halpern termed inherent to the Islamic world: "The ability to convert



tensions into balances" and the capacity to hold society together "through conflict no less than through collaboration."<sup>8</sup> In addition the Mandate and post-Mandate government leaders had "accepted democratic institutions without attempting to adapt them to existing conditions. The people were neither able nor seriously permitted to participate in the political processes, while intense rivalries divided leaders who were vying for power. Democracy failed to command either the respect or the allegiance of the common people in the way that God's law and the Islamic system had done in the past."<sup>9</sup>

Certainly what has more recently made Assad an effective leader and allowed him to maintain his position has been the military. This is analagous to any patrimonial leadership situation for the military must be at the disposal of the leader. So for Syrian and moreover Middle Eastern political leaders, military force has been a major factor in rising to and maintaining position and power. "The struggles for succession were mostly settled by civil war and by coup d'etat, with the outcome generally as closely related to the structure of the military command as to the prevailing political environment."<sup>10</sup> Certainly in Syria the military has had both a stabilizing effect as during the present Assad regime, or as a disruptive force as during the late 40's and early 50's. "There is bound to be a close relation between military upheaval and the turnover of political leaders. The proliferation of military coups that continues to mark Middles Eastern politics represents the failure of leaders and rulers to establish viable patrimonial patterns with and



within the military. The challenge to leadership has come not so much from the society at large as from within the military itself. When leadership rests so heavily upon the military itself, then it must be prepared to fall whenever that need either breaks or flies out of control."<sup>11</sup> While patrimonial leaders and Islam very slowly loosen their grasp on modern Syria, the reed has been broken numerous times by the military as Syria struggles with birth pangs and growth.

One other area of tradition has been the Arab language itself - Arabic. The Arabs had "lost their geographical sense, their racial and political and historical memories; but they cling more tightly to their language, and erected it almost into a fatherland."<sup>12</sup> "It was the Arabic language, rich in literature and legend, which provided the source for historical memories and a sense of pride, invoked to fire the imagination of young men who took the lead in arousing their people to achieve national goals."<sup>13</sup> The general rule is that anyone who identified with the Arab cultural heritage and claimed Arabic as a native language was and is regarded as an Arab. However, the reality is that this excludes totally Arabic-speaking Jews and to some extent other Arabic-speaking minorities.



B. TRADITION - FOOTNOTES

1. Nasr, Chapter 1.
2. Grunebaum, p.225.
3. Khadduri, p.49.
4. Halpern, p.135.
5. Bendix, p.330-1.
6. Ibid., p.360.
7. Landau, p.361-2.
8. Halpern, p.10, 18.
9. Khadduri, p.42.
10. Hurewitz, p.20.
11. Bill and Leiden, p.122.
12. Lawrence, p.45.
13. Khadduri, p.22.



### C. VIOLENCE

Throughout Chapter I various types of discrimination and violence have been mentioned. Violence is a term frequently associated with the lifestyle of the Middle East. While student riots and demonstrations have been a part of Middle Eastern lifestyle for sometime, individual criminal violence is considerably lower in cities of this area than in European or American cities. However, group demonstrations and violence grew and became well publicized in the attempt by Middle Eastern countries to loosen and then throw off the shackles of colonial France and Great Britain. Such specific acts are described in the "Political History" section of this Chapter, and their effects on the local Jews in Chapter I's "Political Overview".

"Political challenge in Syria come not from the deprived masses, but from the alliance between young army officers and the radical intelligentsia of the 'new middle class'. The interviews with young bureaucrats, lawyers, teachers, and students documented their disaffection and their groping for dangerous solutions. Claiming elite status by virtue of their education and modernity, but feeling cheated by the immobile traditional 'system', these men merge their personal frustrations with national grievances in ways that undermine stable government without producing durable changes. The existing tensions are aggravated by the governing elite's shortsighted communication strategy: pronouncements are made that raise expectations which cannot be met. The resulting turmoil of postwar politics has produced no less than six military coups d'etat. The growing



mobilization of intellectuals in the Communist movement, which up to now has not shown its strength openly, augurs a stormy future."<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the realm of demonstrations and mob violence, is the even more uncontrolled realm of terrorism which has become popular in the contemporary Middle East. Syria is integrally involved with terrorism in that Syria is the one country which has continually given sanctuary to the fedayim, Palestinian terrorist organizations. As was evidenced by the terrorist campaign mounted against Jordan from Syrian territory, terrorist campaigns cannot be easily dealt with even by modern, well-trained armies. Today, many associated with these organizations live in the Jewish ghettos of Damascus and Aleppo. The government has made a concerted effort to relocate Palestinians in these Jewish areas. To understand the fear the terrorists instill among the Jewish inhabitants, see the Appendix articles by Edward Koch and Sheldon Kirschner. Unfortunately, terrorism can instill a psychology of despair.

Another area of violence which sheds light to further understand the plight of the Syrian Jews is the role of the police and the military. The police of Syria are not highly trained. As elsewhere in the Middle East they do not act on their own in official business. They are relatively weak and not well equipped. Basically they are puppets to be manipulated by political officials and their officers. For instance, as previously mentioned, there are policemen in charge of the Jewish ghettos, a job which certainly has political overtones.



Corruption certainly can be found as evidenced by the stories of Simon Khabas in the Appendix, as well as the articles by Koch and Kirschner. In a positive vein, as noted in the "Political Overview", there have also been periods of time when the police protected the Jewish population from the Syrian people at large. However, the real power and thereby eventually the real threat to the minorities is the army.

Certainly the primary function of the armed forces is external defense. Yet, despite Syrian rhetoric about defense and the need for a strong armed forces for fending off Israel, the army serves several other functions. It is the one body which can effectively maintain internal control and stability. As well it serves as a symbol of independence, despite the dependence on Russian weapons and supplies. The Syrian armed forces have also heavily contributed to the modernization of their country particularly through the educated officers' corp.

The stress upon the military and ruling by power has a great deal of support outside the military. "A school teacher, twenty-six years old and an A.U.B. graduate, described Syria's main problem as 'a government that is not permanent'. As head of the government: "First I would only make strict laws and reduce the number of parties, renew the laws and last of all be a dictator." A Homs lawyer, who favored social reform, felt that 'the whole system of government' was wrong:

The only way I can do something is to become a dictator. A large enlightened minority must take hold of the situation by force...I will aim at the support of the army... break down unemployment by opening agricultural projects... or else we will stay another 100 years dragging.



The sense that a strong man is needed has diffused through other sects and classes. A retired army sergeant, an uneducated fellow of sixty, said that as head of government:

I would blow up all the government and have a new one that would respect the people and fear God. (How would you do that?) I would act as a dictator and educate the people to work for their good. I am not educated and so don't know what is good and what is not. Yet I respect laws and expect the government to respect me....

The longing for stability underlies the desire for dictatorship among the young effendis. Middle Easterners many centuries ago decided that tyrannical government is preferable to no government. ...There is strong historical tradition for the preference of despotism over instability."<sup>2</sup>

Going beyond the official rhetoric of large sums needed for military defense, one can easily see that much more money is allocated than is necessary for successful defense. It appears as though financing the military establishment is a payoff for support of the government and for performing other duties for the regime in power. It is of course easily recognized that the well-supplied even gaudy modern army gives the government additional status. Generally, conspicuous military consumption is extremely important to Third World political systems. Popular support of the military is evident as they represent the only pillar of stability. A teacher, "a twenty-sever year-old Damascene, declared himself to be frustrated by the dearth of opportunities in Syria. He was unhappy 'because I have wanted to get a better education but have not been able to do so.' But Syria's main problem, he said later, was to liberate Palestine from the Jews. He would be willing 'to fight in the Army -



either live or die.' If he were President, he would carry out a 'complete rearmament of our army on a very large scale - even if we have to buy the arms from the devil since America is not selling."<sup>3</sup>

Though the military held tremendous behind-the-scene power, it was only after the Yom Kippur War that the Syrian Armed Forces really lent any esteem to the Syrian government. "Until 1973, the Syrian army was of little military consequence against the Israeli army. Its record in the October War, however, was substantially different. Its soldiers fought not only bravely but with remarkable skill and coordination. Over the years the Syrian army has spawned many coups; its officer ranks are severely divided along communal and family lines. The Syrian army reflects the permanent instability of the Syrian political system."<sup>4</sup>

Certainly the following generalities of J.A. Bill find support in the military scene:

Middle Eastern armies are seldom homogeneous, but rather are often continually rent by internal cleavage and conflict. This has been particularly true of the Syrian and Iraqi armies. Military regimes can seldom maintain the loyalty of their armies for extended periods of time...The officer class in modernizing armies tends to display different characteristics from those of traditional armies. Even more marked are the characteristics of those portions of officer corps that are prone to coups. These modernizing officers are likely to be young, of middle-class origin, often with experience abroad, and usually extremely nationalistic.(5)

The fact that the Syrian government must depend on the military for support leaves tremendous potential for tension which generally is not good for any minorities, and due to Israel, especially for Syria's Jews. Often in the past thirty



years this potential for tension has been realized to tremendous proportions with a coup d'etat as the result. By now the coup has become a well-established part of the Middle Eastern political systems; though nowhere more predominant than in Syria. (See charts at end of this section which list the coups and assassinations) Though the coups have not always been violent, the threat of violence always exists. Few lives are usually lost in the coup itself. However in the aftermath, recriminatory trials may eliminate numerous people, directly or indirectly associated with the previous regime.

Usually the coup is carried out by military officers of field-grade rank. Generally they have been radically oriented and their rationale for the overthrow is in the name of modernization and innovation. Unfortunately, as was the case in the late 1940's and early 1950's in Syria, such overthrows usually produce weak governments. The initial task of the new regime is therefore to consolidate their power and this usually leads to neglect of the goals which had been a primary reason for the coup. This then instigates subsequent coups. In addition, when a regime has been unable to command loyalty or to legitimate its existence, it has not been able to seriously move towards modernization and any sort of political development. This chain is broken, as with the present Assad regime, when the leader or leaders are able to or are lucky enough to alter political conditions and legitimate their own supremacy. (For the way in which Assad was able to do this, see the concluding pages of the "Political History" section of this Chapter)



This is all possible because of the people's long desire for stability. "Middle Easterners many centuries ago decided that tyrannical government is preferable to no government. They followed caliphs, even those lacking the spiritual qualities required for a defender of the law, so long as they were strong."<sup>6</sup>

It should be taken into account that though there have been numerous coups in Syria, they have never been popular forms of violence. The coup has always been restricted to a few, often of the military, and has an essentially military nature. It has then brought to the political forefront a class of people who are not truly representative of the majority of the masses of Syria's inhabitants.

They tend to be imbued with notions of honor and prestige, and seem to be more apt to venture into foreign embroilments and adventures.

They are generally narrowly educated. This is, of course, not true in contrast with the great masses of people in the Middle East, nor is it strictly true with respect to technology. But a major who is quite competent in supervising the repair of a tank may botch things up as the newly appointed minister of finance, and indeed he often does.

They emphasize discipline and order above all things. Although they themselves were disloyal to their military oaths in overthrowing a previous regime, they now demand unquestioned obedience (and sometimes enthusiasm) from the population along any path of modernization they choose to follow.

They are willing to use repressive force to gain their ends domestically, and military force to achieve success in international affairs.

One coup, because it fractures the myth of legitimation, encourages future coups, although in fact none may follow immediately.... Sometimes a Middle Eastern army is split along so many sectarian and political lines that there is almost no way to eliminate constant conspiracy. No army illustrates this better than that of Syria, which often seems to be in a state of constant revolt. (7)



In discussing various forms of violence in the Middle East, one must take into account that an extreme act of violence stems from political turbulence - assassination. It has pervaded the entire political spectrum of the Middle East. From the Syrian governments alone Husni al-Zayim (1949), Adnan al-Makli (1955), and Adib al-Shishakli (in Brazil, 1964) have been assassinated, along with numerous other attempts on the heads of government. (See charts at conclusion of this section)

The entire period under discussion in this thesis, the past fifty years, has been a transitional one for Syria. As such it has been characterized by French intrusion and exploitation, the frenzied growth of nationalism, the expansion and confrontation of ideology, and most apparent, continual struggle for power. All of this has allowed for an atmosphere where assassination could be nurtured. "An assassination can have a high impact when (1) the system is highly centralized, (2) the political support of the victim is highly personal, (3) the 'replaceability' of the victim is low, (4) the system is in crisis, and/or in a period of rapid political and social changes, and (5) of the death of the victim involves the system in confrontation with other powers."<sup>8</sup> While #1 does not apply to Syria, the other four do to varying degrees. While as has been mentioned, assassinations have been numerous in the Middle East for the past-half century, there is little evidence to show that it has been effective for those who support the assassins.

"The Middle East has its modicum of violence. Street violence - the riot, demonstration - is indeed endemic and occurs



over trivial provocations. Middle Eastern students have been politically volatile and active for much longer than their Western counterparts. Middle Eastern governments have been more repressive against potentially violent movements than have Western governments. The Arab armies have been politically involved quite often. Most Middle Eastern countries have undergone coups; a few, major and prolonged revolution. Assassinations of public figures have occurred not infrequently.... The most obviously important systemic factor of political violence in the Middle East is the phenomenon of military intervention, resulting in the coup d'etat."<sup>9</sup>

Insofar as the entire Middle East has been in a state of ferment, the political processes of the area have obviously not matured.

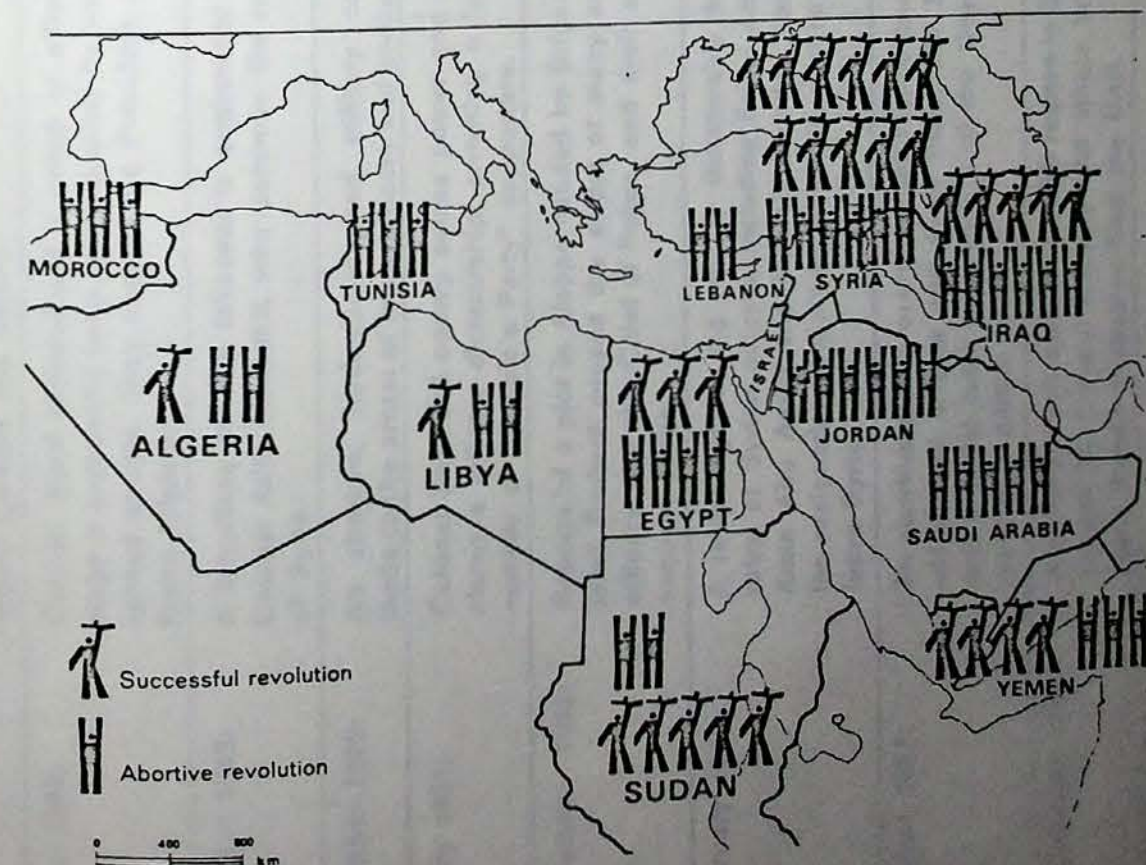


# Political Change by Force

Over the past quarter-century, revolution and military takeover have been the most prevalent means of reaching power throughout the Arab world. This is reflected in the fact that only one of the eighteen Arab States—Lebanon—can be considered a democracy. Virtually all the others have one-party systems usually dominated by the army.

Since 1948, there have been thirty successful revolutions in the Arab countries and at least forty-four unsuccessful ones. The number of failures is more difficult to determine, since unsuccessful coups d'état often go unreported.

With rare exceptions, revolutions have been carried out by army officers, and the turnover has been rapid. Other than Egypt's President Nasser, none of the revolutionary leaders has remained in power for more than six years; most of them have managed to retain control for only a short time. One, Iraq's Colonel Naef, was ousted after only thirteen days in power. Successful, and known unsuccessful, revolutions have been:





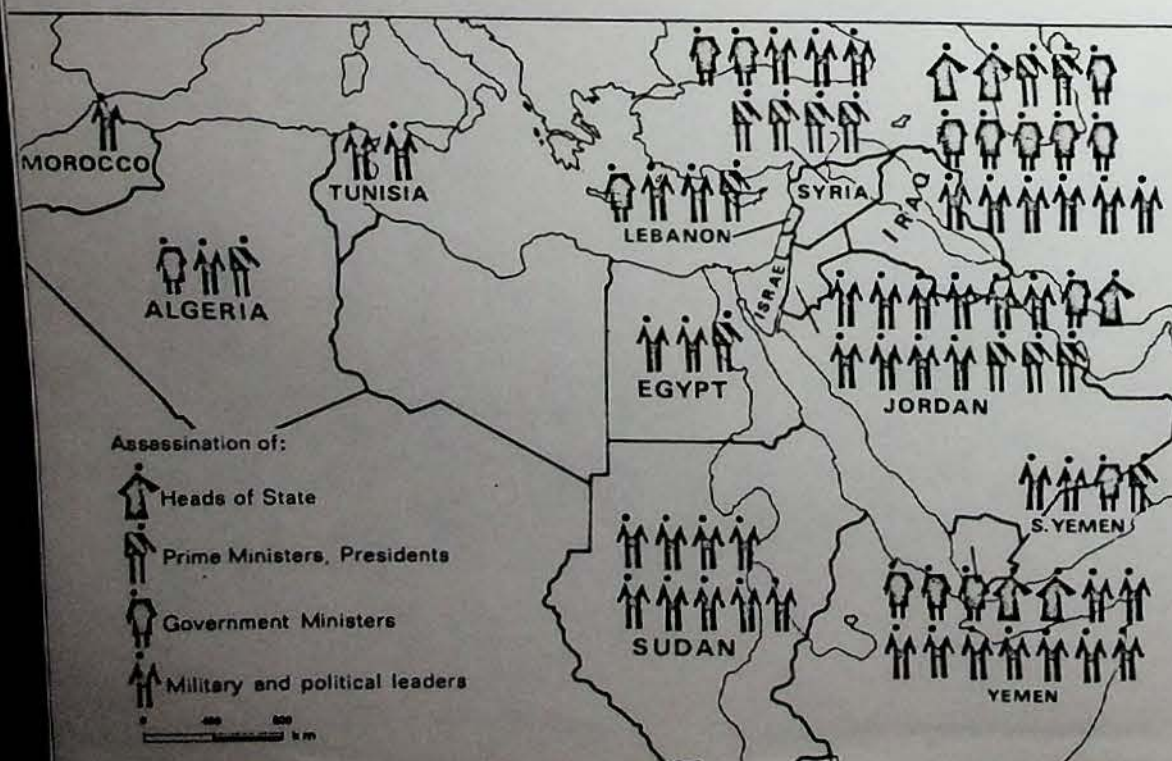
## SYRIA

30 March 1949:	Colonel Husni Zaim and the army High Command overthrow the Government and arrest President Quwatli and others.		
14 August 1949:	Colonel Sami Hinnawi and a group of officers stage a successful coup, accompanied by widespread arrests. They execute the President and Prime Minister.		
19 December 1949:	A bloodless military takeover is engineered by Colonel Adib Shishakli, who becomes the ruler of Syria.		
27 September 1950:	An abortive, Jordanian-inspired military coup leads to the arrest of many officers and civilians.		
17 January 1951:	Colonel Shishakli openly seizes power and declares a military dictatorship, arresting a large number of "People's Party" supporters.		
Early October 1952:	Reports of a plot in Aleppo headed by Brigadier Jamil Burhani caused the arrest of many army officers and the Chief of Police, and their subsequent purge.		
24 February 1954:	A revolt against the military dictatorship by a cabal of Syrian officers, including Faisal Attasi, Amin Abu Assaf and Mustafa Hamdun, forces the resignation of Colonel Shishakli, who has to leave Syria.		
13 August 1957:	An abortive plot to overthrow the regime causes widespread arrests and show trials. Afif Bizri and a leftist junta gain control of the Government in a partial coup.		
28 September 1961:	A military revolt against the UAR regime in Syria headed by Colonel Kuzbary and others brings about Syria's secession from the UAR.		
28 March 1962:	The Dawalibi Government is dissolved after a coup by pro-Nasser officers, accompanied by widespread arrests and trials.		
		31 March 1962:	Failure of a coup attempted by Colonel Jasim Alwan and a group of middle-level officers in Aleppo.
		8 March 1963:	A successful military coup by army officers and the Ba'ath Party.
		18 July 1963:	A second unsuccessful coup led by Colonel Jasim Alwan and his followers, aimed at overthrowing the Ba'athist regime.
		23 February 1966:	The moderate Ba'athist faction is overthrown in a military coup led by Colonel Salah Jedid and other extremist pro-Ba'athist officers.
		8 September 1966:	An abortive coup led by Colonel Salim Hatoum, aided by Colonel Talal Asali and Fahed Shaer. Hatoum fled to Jordan, returned to Syria on the eve of the Six-Day War, apparently believing that he had been pardoned, and was arrested and executed.
		February 1970:	After a "white revolution" General Hafez Assad gained power.
		13 November 1970:	Assad ousts Salah Jedid and his supporters and assumes full control of the Government.



# Murder as a Political Weapon

Assassination is an accepted means of political expression in most Arab countries. Since 1948, eighteen Heads of State and Prime Ministers have been murdered. There have been numerous unsuccessful attempts on the lives of Arab political leaders. Many other public figures, political leaders and army officers, have been eliminated. Altogether there have been more than eighty recorded political murders in the past twenty-five years.



## SYRIA

- 14 August 1949: President Husni Zaim and former Prime Minister Mushin Barazi executed.
- 31 July 1950: The Commander of the air force, Colonel Muhammed Hassan Nasser, murdered.
- 29 October 1950: General Sami Hinawi, former ruler of Syria, murdered in Beirut.
- 22 April 1955: Colonel Adnan el-Maliki, Syria's Deputy Chief of Staff, murdered.
- 27 September 1964: Former President Adib Shishakli murdered in exile in Brazil.
- 11 June 1966: Tama Oudah-Allah, a former Minister, murdered in exile in Cairo.
- 4 June 1970: Political leader Mustafa Samana murdered in Aleppo.
- 4 March 1972: Former Minister of Defence Muhammed Umran murdered in exile in Tripoli, Lebanon.
- 10 July 1973: President Hafez el-Assad wounded in an attack by a would-be assassin.



C. VIOLENCE - FOOTNOTES

1. Landau, p.357.
2. Ibid., p.370.
3. Ibid., p.371.
4. Bill and Leiden, p.203.
5. J.A. Bill, p.54-57.
6. Landau, p.383.
7. Bill and Leiden, p.213.
8. Kirkham, Levy and Crotty, p.551.
9. Bill and Leiden, p.218-9.
10. The Savage Kinship, p.4-6.
11. Ibid., p.12, 15.



D. IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a pattern of beliefs and concepts that rationalizes actions. It has always been important to politics. This is even more true today in Syria with the ability to impart large amounts of propaganda or ideology to the bulk of the populace via the mass media. Disseminating this becomes one of the primary forces for legitimation, and thereby one of the primary functions of the government. In one sense, "the role of Syria seems to be to produce, not leaders, but ideas."<sup>1</sup>

Despite Syria having one of the most radical governments in the Middle East, some of its ideological overtones are religious. They are "better" because they are Moslems is a constant undertone. Another is that Islam offers one of the best ways towards modernization and all that men can aspire to can be found in Islam.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned under the topic of "Tradition" in this chapter, though Islam is not as strong as it once was, it still plays an integral part in the lives of most Syrians. Certainly this is true among the poorer people, as well as a more covert and subconscious religiosity among the newer middle class. "The illusion of Muslim political grandeur, which circumstances allowed to continue long after its reality had ceased, was shattered during the 19th century, and nationalism, the dominant note of the contemporary West, came in as a reaction to defeat as a tool, as it were, to grow into the overruling passion of the region."<sup>3</sup>

There can be no question that the ideology of the Middle East is thoroughly nationalistic. "Nationalism is a product of



collective resentment and the sharing of discontent. There are few people in the Middle East who cannot concoct some sort of justification for being resentful against others, usually foreigners for the malaise of the times, for the chronic underdevelopment of the area, and for their legacy of political and social problems. Nationalistic energy is itself a pseudo-resolution of the problems facing a people, but diverting responsibility to others makes the unsolved difficulties more palatable. It is manifestly easier to share discontent when people share other things in common, a living space or a language, for example. One might, without doing too much harm to Ibn Khaldūn's original concept, refer to nationalism on the village and tribal dimension as 'asabiyya', that sense of togetherness of family and clan and the propinquity that solidified a people against its external environment."<sup>4</sup>

Nationalism is then the first stage in creating an ideology which is often based on rejection of the nonindigenous values. We saw how this affected the Jews in Chapter I. Prior to the establishment of Israel, they were discriminated against not mainly because they were Jews which would be termed anti-Semitism, but rather because they had been associated with the French. Much rhetoric has been poured out condemning the foreign influence and interference over the past fifty years, but particularly during and immediately following the French Mandate.

In Syria and throughout the Middle East the major source of ideology is the most current government and its propaganda facilities. Other organizations and bodies are usually allowed



to pursue only those ideologies which are compatible with the official ideology. This is reflected in Assad's takeover in the "Political History" section. Newspapers are often mimics of official government lines, and most applauded their own nationalization. What the Syrian government does not own, it controls tightly.

Yet, "in spite of many contradictory changes, there is a veneer of plausibility to official ideology. In some respects it is addressed to an audience that never exists: a collection of perfectly loyal and passive automatons. But rarely do the existing audiences talk back. What they accept or give lip service to, is a rationale for the status quo in both domestic and foreign political programs. Superficially it often makes sense. It partakes of the following notions: (1) A true way, perhaps Jordanian or Turkish or Egyptian, exists. (2) Those who have ruled in the past and those who interfere from without have suverted the true way. (3) Those who now rule or who are about to rule represent a return to the true way and will interpret its provisions in modern times....Ideology tends to be imbued with vagueness and ambiguity; after all, it must appeal to large numbers of divergent peoples. Middle Eastern ideology is no exception to this. Goals are phrased in such terms as the 'better life', 'justice for all', 'genuine equality', and the 'Islamic spirit'."<sup>5</sup>

The ideology which has become most predominant and the driving force of modern Syria has been nationalism. This nationalism has also been the greatest cause of anguish to the



minorities of Syria. First it was directed against the French who truly were a force in opposition to an independent, nationalistic Syrian state. As previously discussed, the Jews were caught in the crossfire in the early days of virulent nationalism when the French associated them with the locals and the Arabs saw them as extensions of the French. More recently the newer brand of Syrian nationalism has continued to work against the Jews who are regarded as an appendage of the enemy, Zionism. In either case, the first somewhat understandable and the second which inculcates the plague of anti-semitism, the core of this nationalism is a devout lococentricity.

Certainly the Syrians have special distinct qualities and values. Yet this 'distinct group' has not been able to solve their problems in their ideological eyes, due to outside forces and their influences. This is all the more understandable when we are cognizant that "until 1918 Arab nationalism was a child of rich landlords and middle-class intelligentsia, it was not a mass movement."<sup>6</sup> Quamiyya, Arab nationalism, as such, did not really develop until after World War I. (Only in Syria had there been Arab societies prior to World War I.) As previously discussed, Faisal's Arab troops had fought in Syria and liberated Damascus and thereby Syria from the Turks. It was only at the Battle of Maysalūn that Faisal was prevented by the French from becoming King. "During the decades following World War I. the Turkish Kemalist revolution, and the creation of the Soviet Union, new ideas of a radical and revolutionary nature spread among the younger generation in Syria. These new elements



in the Syrian social structure...soon began to challenge the power of the old social and political order....The fraud of the mandate system, the expanding imperialism of France and Great Britain in the Near East, and the implementation of the Balfour Declaration fostered the growth of Arab nationalism, of socialism and of communism."<sup>7</sup>

An example of this newer breed was Antun Sa'ada, a founder of the Syrian Nationalistic Party during the Mandate in 1932. Though his later writings took on more of a flare for Arab nationalism as the movement grew, he began strictly as a Syrian nationalist.

"The Syrian nation," he said, "represents the unity of the Syrian people with a long historical past stretching back to prehistoric times...(and there is a) psychological superiority of the Syrians, which is not the result of unconstrained mixture (of peoples) but of the superb quality of homogeneous mixing, perfectly in harmony with the type of environment..." The ambivalence in Sa'ada's thinking is reflected in what he wrote: "The aim of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party is to effect a Syrian national social renaissance capable of achieving its ideals and restoring to the Syrian nation its vitality and power. The party also aims to organize a movement that would lead to the complete independence of the Syrian nation, the consolidation of its sovereignty, the creation of a new system to safeguard its interests and raise its standard of life, and the formation of an Arab front...Syria is one of the nations of the Arab world and is fitted for the leadership thereof...Syrian nationalism is the only practical method and the basic prerequisite for Syrian regeneration and the consequent participation of Syria in Arab affairs."(8)

As time passed the theme of Arab nationalism overtook purely Syrian nationalism. Certainly one catalyst was the outgrowth from the development of a Zionist Palestine and then the State of Israel. It provided a unifying target against which to vent their relatively new-found nationalism. Numerous attempts at



actual cross-national Arab unity have been ineffective. Whether the U.A.R. which Syria and Egypt created in 1958 (discussed at length in the sections "Political Overview" and "Political History") or the 1971 Federation of Arab Republics, disunity still prevailed. Though frustrations for these failures have been often vented upon Syria's Jewish community, not even the continued existence of the enemy Israel has been enough to create and sustain any long term, durable Arab unity. Therefore what prevails is the reality of Syrian nationalism with the added consciousness of Arab nationalism. As Abdullah al-Ala'ili stated: "Arab nationalism is the consciousness of the Arabs of their complete social existence, a consciousness which is internal and not merely external objective knowledge, so that the image of the Arab community as a spiritual and living complex, is ever present in their conscience. Every Arab must feel with an instinctive compulsion the strong existing connections and ties, in such a way that the community is transferred for him from the externality of life to the internality of the soul."<sup>9</sup>

All of this portrays a nationalistic ideology which has had no good effects upon Syrian Jewry. In most cases one would recognize that a good part of any ideology is rhetoric and exaggerations. Unfortunately in the case of modern Syria most of the negative exaggerations effecting Syrian Jewry have been borne out.

Another aspect of Syrian and Middle Eastern ideology has been Arab Socialism. The Arabic word for socialism is "ishtirākiyya" and it carries moral overtones of sharing.



Socialists and even communists were active in the early stages of maturation of Syria in the 1920's.

"Arab socialism has its roots in (1) the educational experiences of the Arab intellectuals in the 1920's and 1930's and their imbibing of traditional socialist doctrine; (2) the ideological creations of such movements as the Ba'ath and such writers as Michel Aflaq and Salāma Mūsā; (3) the early experiences of Nasser at Bandung (1955) and with such figures as Tito, Nehru, Chou En-lai, and Nkrumah; and (4) the need for reform and the natural tendency to reject traditional political and economic values."<sup>10</sup>

Though some concrete reforms have been taken, particularly in the early 1950's and under the present Assad regime, ideology still remains in the forefront. "When the political hold of a ruling nationalistic group is unstable domestically, and the state insecure abroad among regional rivals and great powers, the local leaders are not likely to risk shattering a unity built only on nationalistic convictions by deliberately taking sides in the social revolution already upon them. The Syrian example indeed suggests a more compelling obstacle: none of the groups may have the strength to come to terms with the social changes around them."<sup>11</sup> The present day ideology is based on the premise that all situations can be remedied by the combination of Arab socialism and Arab nationalism.

Syrian if not Arab socialism is grounded in the founding and growth of the Ba'ath party which was founded in 1943 by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. "Its socialism differs



from the Marxist type in that it does not accept the theory of the class struggle and in that it is concerned with the Arab world only....Like Nasser, the Ba'ath party made Arab unity conditional upon the power structure prevalent in the Arab countries. It failed to give absolute priority to the principle of Arab unity."<sup>12</sup> For Aflaq, Arab socialism is a product of Arab history, not European, and it is an alternative method of attack on the problems of modern society, a middle way between capitalism and socialism.<sup>13</sup> Their brand of socialism is revealed in their Constitution.

It is only with article 26 that Arab socialism is revealed. Land reform (or redistribution) is called for (27); exploitation of labor is denounced (28). "Public utilities, enterprises based on great natural resources, large-scale industries, and means of transport are the property of the nation to be administered directly by the State. All (relevant) foreign companies and concessions are to be abolished." The owners of small industries are to be regulated, although their property is not necessarily to be confiscated (31)...."The workers will be associated with the administration of (their) factory, and the sum of their wages will be determined by the state, to the value of their work." Anyone can own buildings but cannot rent them to others (33)....No one can lend at interest any longer (except by implication state banks).(14)

Aflaq showed another aspect of the Ba'ath when he stated:

If the Arabs were free today from colonialism, foreign occupation, Zionist threat, and dismemberment and had to take a stand in the global struggle, a stand which would be closest to their ideals and national interest, they would take the side of the Western democracies rather than that of the Eastern dictatorships. They would choose this course because they so well know that freedom has been, is and will remain the very essence of their existence and the best guarantee for the development of their personality.

The present status of the Arab world, however, and the inimical policies of the West regarding Palestine and other Arab issues dictate that the Arabs' interest can in no way be served by alliance with the Western bloc or any of its members. (15)



Needless to say such provisos have little of a positive if not much of a negative effect on Syrian Jewry. This is true, especially taking into account their economic position, types of jobs, their earlier ties to the French, and their superficial tie to Israel by just being Jewish.

It is impossible to understand the plight of the Syrian Jewish community, past or present, without trying to understand the hold religion has had on the Syrian people, the all pervasive and corrosive influence of nationalism through their own brand of socialism, and as will yet be discussed, the manner in which other minorities have been treated.



D. IDEOLOGY - FOOTNOTES

1. Marlowe, p.219.
2. Khadduri, p.197.
3. Grunebaum, p.226.
4. Bill and Leiden, p.226-7.
5. Ibid., p.229.
6. Abboushi, p.304.
7. Yale, p.464.
8. Karpas, p.95-97.
9. Haim, p.120.
10. Bill and Leiden, p.242.
11. Halpern, p.212.
12. Abboushi, p.509.
13. Abu Jaber, p.99-100.
14. Bill and Leiden, p.244-5.
15. Khadduri, p.276.



#### E. MINORITIES

The one subject still to be discussed is that of Syria's minorities, who they are, where and how they exist. As has been documented in this work, one minority in particular, the Jews, have been the subject of outright discrimination. Such is not the case of the other minorities.

We must begin with defining a minority. It is "a human group that is different in language, religion, race, customs and social structure, national sentiment, consciousness of its separate existence, and any other collective feature from the human entity amidst which it lives, and in relation to which it is, feels - or is felt to be - inferior basically numerically, but sometimes also in social status, attention enjoyed, role played in public life, etc."<sup>1</sup>

The Middle East has included many minorities, some more tolerated than others. Generally until very recent times, the attitude of Islam helped preserve this diversity. "Islam recognizes three categories of human beings: first Moslems, secondly "Protected People" or "People of the Book"...and thirdly polytheists or pagans. With the third category there can be no compromise, but the second - those who believe in God, the Day of Judgement and the Prophets - are to be accorded toleration and protection in the Islamic State...they must pay a special tax and are not allowed to carry arms, to give evidence against Moslems in the courts of law or to marry Moslem women. But they are allowed to retain their own religious organization, personal status, places of worship and



religious trusts."<sup>2</sup>

In Syria the majority of the population have been Sunnite Moslems, though even among them there is a great degree of social diversity. The largest minorities, the Druzes and the Alawites are indigenous to the region and for the most part, are today compatible with the Sunnites. The Druze population is concentrated in the southeast corner of Syria in Jebel Druze. They have been known as a warlike people and have a long history of rebellion against any external authorities. As has been mentioned in Chapter I, "Political Overview" and in Chapter II, "Political History", the Druze revolted in 1925 against the French. Their local revolt turned into a national resistance of most Syrians. In 1954 they led the revolt against Shishakli and were severely punished by him. However, in 1964, a Druze seeking revenge for his people killed Shishakli in Brazil where he had fled several years before. Within this community the patrimonial leadership (previously discussed) still remains quite strong. The powerful Atrash family heads the community and represents it in national politics. Yet despite their independent spirit, they have not sought a separate sovereign existence.

The Alawites live as the majority in the Latakia area in northwestern Syria. During the Mandate the French established Latakia as a separate state. Yet the Alawites like the Druzes have been willing to remain as part of Syria and identify with Arab nationalism. This is most evident in the present leaders, particularly President Assad who is an Alawite. This people



with their distinct sub-culture, are Shi'ite Moslems. Latakia which is mountainous has allowed them to live in semi-isolation, and thereby allowed them to retain their identity.

There are as well, in Syria, various Christian sects and non-Arabic speaking groups. Generally today Arabic speaking Christians are fully assimilated into the Arab way of life. However, non-Arabic speaking peoples have not been so assimilated. For example, the Armenians who are located largely in the Aleppo area have maintained their distinct language, customs, and traditions. Some quarter-million Kurds live in the Jezria region. These Kurds have not been independent minded as have been their brethren in other Middle Eastern countries. However, in 1936, they insisted on political autonomy and improved representation. They then revolted in 1937, and were immediately put down by the French. Upon the departure of the French and Syrian independence, the Kurds became a vital aspect of the national political arena. This then developed into a regional power structure, rather than a purely ethnic demarcation.

In addition "the Christians were a minority, but many of the bourgeoisie adhered to one or another Christian sect and feared submergence in a Muslim dominated state. They willingly tolerated the French because of a religious tie with the west and as a group, they were naturally opposed to revolutionary change."<sup>3</sup> This is not unusual when taking into account that "as elsewhere, Syrian Christians are more urban, better educated, and of higher socio-economic status than the Sunni Muslim



majority."<sup>4</sup> Despite their outward conservatism, some Christians were committed to Arab nationalism. To avoid conflict between their background or religious affiliation and their ideology, Christian Arab thinkers who advocated nationalism tried to avoid identifying religion with nationalism. Rather they stressed the linguistic and cultural aspects of nationalism.

The Syrian Constitutions beginning with that of 1930 includes guarantees for the position of minorities. Article 6 asserts that all Syrians are equal before the law, enjoy the same political and civil rights and will not suffer prejudice based on religion, race, or language. Article 15 insures liberty of conscience and worship, and respect for the religious interest and personal status of all sects. Their educational and other rights are secured by Article 28. Article 26 pledges that all Syrians are eligible for public offices without distinction. As well, Article 37 established that minorities would be represented within the government structure.

However, insurances as those stated in the 1930 Constitution were based on the premise that a democratic government would unfold in Syria. Such was not to be the case.

In a complex social structure, torn between vertical (tribal v. town-dweller) and horizontal (rich v. poor) rivalries and without any middle class of consequence, democracy could scarcely be expected to flourish. It was an artificial creation by liberal groups, which hoped that its beneficiaries might eventually muster sufficient strength to support it. It is true that in predominantly agricultural countries, where feudalism (representing the dual influence of land-owners and tribal shaykhs) had survived for so long, the rapid rise of the middle class could not be expected. After World War II, when a small middle class began to develop in Syria and Iraq, the new generation was unable to participate in the political processes dominated by older politicians, and began to



view their futures in terms of gaining the support of workers and peasants. The appeal of these young men to the masses rather than to the emerging middle class was another blow to democracy. (5)

Thus in a non-democratic state the guarantees of the various Syrian Constitutions have become worthless.

This has been amply proven by the treatment of the Jewish minority in Syria. Certainly modern Syrian nationalism has only exacerbated the problem of minority status, as it has given support to what might be conceptualized as the "xenophobic Arab".

They exhibit extreme hostility and aggressiveness toward all foreigners. In the aftermath of the Palestinian defeat, this was focused on Israel, but included the Western powers as well. A farm account-keeper, as head of the government would "unite all the Arabs and endeavor to get Britain and its Jewish crooks out of all Arab lands because they are corrupting our lives. A woman, who named "war with the Jews" as Syria's biggest problem called for a war that would restore the national honor: "It is not difficult because with courage and patriotism nothing is difficult...(We can help by) encouraging people to enroll... to enlist in the Army...by showing them the beauty of a glorious death." Another woman would "hate (to live in America) as I hate hell...because they brought us the Jews here." A farmer asked where he would live if he had to leave Syria, answered: "A million curses on these and their country, these Jews, these low, uncivilized people. To live there would be hell for any Arab."

Such resentment against the West led to pro-Russian attitudes among nationalistic respondents aware of the bipolarity in world politics and determined to make it serve their ends. (6)

As mentioned elsewhere, large-scale anti-Jewish feelings in Syria are a relatively new phenomena. Traditional religious or cultural attitudes in the Middle East had never been complicated by the kind of doctrinaire refinements of modern European anti-semitism. Arab literary pieces give an ambiguous portrait of admiration and contempt, as well as attraction and repulsion. Throughout the nineteenth century anti-semitism was



advanced by the indigenous Christian communities who had been indoctrinated with European prejudices. (See "Political Overview" and "Economic Overview" of Chapter I for examples)

Since the Mandate period anti-Judaism and anti-semitism have fed upon each other and lent support for anti-Zionism. In no way is anti-semitism a "post-birth-of-Israel (1948) phenomena". During the century prior to 1948 anti-semitism was propagated from European and Western sources, frequently through native Christians who were often already predisposed to its acceptance by the anti-Judaism with which they were already acquainted.

An Arab writer, Khalil Sakakimi, based his anti-Judaism on religious grounds.

'It seems to me that you Jews,' he says to a Zionist, 'are most in need of divine scriptures, but I fear that the prophet among you today will suffer the fate of his predecessors whom you killed and burned....The prophets and Holy Scripture have come from you, but they are not for you...' ...'The Jews in their festivals lament and weep...Muslim festivals on the contrary, are rousing events...If the nation is to have festivals, let them be like the Muslim ones...let us have nothing but rousing songs and let us dance with swords.' (8)

In addition, Charles Crane, an American millionaire who was the patron of George Antonius, believed in the type of anti-semitism which pointed that the Jews were ruining the world. He became an admirer of Nazism. To spread this doctrine they attempted to preach to Arab notables of the Jewish menace. The arrival of Jews in Palestine was another ploy in an anti-God campaign started in Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly this doctrinaire anti-semitism does not reconcile well with traditional Islam. It "seems to have been introduced



to the Middle East mainly by eastern Christians who had easier access to western literature but not enough judgement to exercise critical and discriminating choice."<sup>10</sup> The history and plight of the Jews as a result of these attitudes has already been elaborated throughout this work. As to minorities in general, it must be added that today they no longer seem to threaten Syrian political unity. However, to some extent political centralization is still resisted, and modernization still comes in conflict with established customs and traditions. If the minorities did not live in separate geographical regions, as they do, they would not have even maintained that influence which they do and the potential for renewed divisiveness.



	Damascus	Aleppo	Homs	Hama	Hauran	Euphrates	Jazirah	Jebel Druze	Latakia	Total
Yazidis . . . . .	6	1,307	-	-	-	-	1,475	-	-	2,788
Druzes . . . . .	15,394	1,601	-	-	-	4	-	70,185	-	87,184
Armenian Catholics . . . . .	2,170	9,644	1,496	49	107	616	1,863	150	695	16,790
Armenian Orthodox . . . . .	16,852	67,598	1,523	615	24	1,679	7,925	354	5,177	101,747
Maronites . . . . .	1,075	3,659	554	38	3	71	56	106	7,787	13,349
Protestants . . . . .	1,589	3,053	1,746	529	27	27	453	389	3,374	11,187
Chaldaeans . . . . .	190	2,281	22	1	-	243	1,944	-	38	4,719
Syrian Catholics . . . . .	3,261	6,127	3,052	259	-	698	2,851	-	-	16,247
Syrian Orthodox . . . . .	1,014	5,492	14,309	682	59	763	17,793	16	7	40,135
Latins (i.e. Roman Catholics of the Latin rite) . . . . .	483	3,938	431	12	-	25	29	4	1,074	5,996
Jews . . . . .	13,673	14,066	-	-	10	72	1,938	10	1	29,770
Greek Catholics . . . . .	20,552	11,964	3,792	364	4,857	25	70	2,735	2,374	46,733
Greek Orthodox . . . . .	23,791	9,411	20,297	17,395	2,852	159	336	4,560	58,156	136,957
Alawis . . . . .	4,022	2,698	22,219	15,083	370	78	93	95	280,653	325,311
Isma'ilis . . . . .	18	31	13	20,541	-	12	8	-	7,904	28,527
Shi'is . . . . .	355	9,071	2,725	205	4	-	326	56	-	12,742
Sunnis . . . . .	499,444	718,198	140,245	101,685	104,529	220,552	99,665	1,468	85,267	1,971,053
Nestorians . . . . .	-	-	-	-	-	-	9,176	-	-	9,176
*Total . . . . .	603,889	870,139	212,424	157,458	112,842	225,023	146,001	80,128	452,507	2,860,411

\*The total figures do not include the Beduins, who are nominally Moslems and number perhaps 400,000







## CONCLUSION

Syria continues as the heart of the Arab national movement and embodies the ideals and weaknesses of that movement. It seems that she is always yearning towards the glorious past. Continually frustrated by the innumerable problems which have prevented her from attaining her goals, she remains relatively politically unstable. Even with the present, longer-lived Assad regime her politics are turbulent and her future unsure.

The dreams of Arab unity remain all pervasive. Like its environment of nationalism, it is partly a product of frustration fed by resentment toward any colonial power and especially toward Israel. Eventually, Arab unity might be able to promote cooperation among the Arab countries and thus maintain a greater degree of stability. Meanwhile, internal Arab arguing and fighting has been extremely unproductive. As well, it has promoted discord and eroded development. Internally in Syria and externally in the Arab world, unity could help aid the process of modernization and possibly stabilize the political arena.

Yet, the vicissitudes of Syria's problems seem overwhelming today, as they did ten or twenty years ago. Needless to say the situation does not bode well for the community of Syrian Jews. Syria remains preoccupied with the problems of Israel and of Arab unity. The attempt to realize either goal, has brought nightmares to the Jewish community. Syria has paid little attention to her own economic and social welfare. It is as though she is so anxious to achieve her goals, that she has forgotten herself. One could say that Syria has been and



continues to be sacrificing her own happiness to attain two main goals: the destruction of the Jewish state and the establishment of an Arab union. While to many in the West this attitude appears absurd, if not sick, to much of the Syrian people and the Arab world, this is truly an outstanding virtue. This is despite the reality of the side effects which have included the willingness to be subjected to several wars and tremendous dependency upon the Soviet Union.

Surely Syria's ever-tightening alliance with the Soviet Union has brought no alleviating of the tension or lessening of the discrimination towards Syrian Jews. The Russians are certainly not interested in interfering, despite the bad international publicity that has arisen due to Syria's outright discrimination. In retrospect Western countries have had an influence in other areas, primarily upon the basic social and political systems of Syria.

In the short run, it (the West) protected and promoted ongoing political patterns. The colonial powers superimposed their administrative control on traditional socio-power structures. Personalism and patrimonialism continued to reign supreme beneath the formal Western bureaucratic style....The other result of Western penetration was the accelerating process of modernization. Educational, technological, and industrial change progressed rapidly under foreign tutelage. The processes of modernization at work in the Middle East today received an important early impetus from this foreign influence. (1)

As mentioned in this thesis, the French influence and the anti-French reactions in Syria were far-reaching for some twenty years and the tremors of that time have continued to the present.

The tremors of anti-foreign feelings which affected the



Jewish community so badly were turned into shock waves of blatant anti-semitism. In the entire Middle East only the Syrian government continues to hold a large Jewish group hostage and simultaneously to violate their fundamental human rights. The conditions under which the over four thousand Jews live today constitute a permanent offense to human dignity, not to mention to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Appendix continues to verify much of what is mentioned in the text dealing with the present plight of the Syrian Jews.

The most overwhelming comment that can be brought to this point is a quote from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency report of November 19, 1971. It tells of another discriminated group, the Jews of Russia, pleading for intervention by their own government on behalf of their brethren in Syria. "For the first time since the Russian Revolution of 1917, Soviet Jews have petitioned their government to aid Jews in another country. Russian Jewish sources reported that a group of Muscovite Jews wrote to the Kremlin's Big Three - Communist Party Chief Leonid I. Brezhnev, Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin and President Nikolai V. Podgorny - to intervene with the Damascus government... on Syrian Jews."<sup>2</sup>

To add to the realism of the situation, the Jerusalem Post drew a dark picture. "As unbearable as their situation is, it might seem less tragic if the population were an aged remnant destined soon to die out. But they are young and prolific, with the boys and girls marrying between 15 and 17 and producing 10 children by the time they reach 30."<sup>3</sup>



As reported in the Appendix, one of the Rabbi Hamra's telegrams from Damascus tells it all. He pled for the Book of Rachel - a non-existent volume; perhaps it is a plea for help and courage as from Jeremiah of old.

Whether looking at the "anti-foreign" feelings which loosened the foundations of the Syrian Jewish community, or the anti-Zionist/anti-Jewish/anti-semitic acts which have been perpetrated, the peoples and governments of Syria have been and continue to be not only the antagonists, but the criminals who have caused the collapse of a once vibrant community of people - the Jews of Syria.



CONCLUSION - FOOTNOTES

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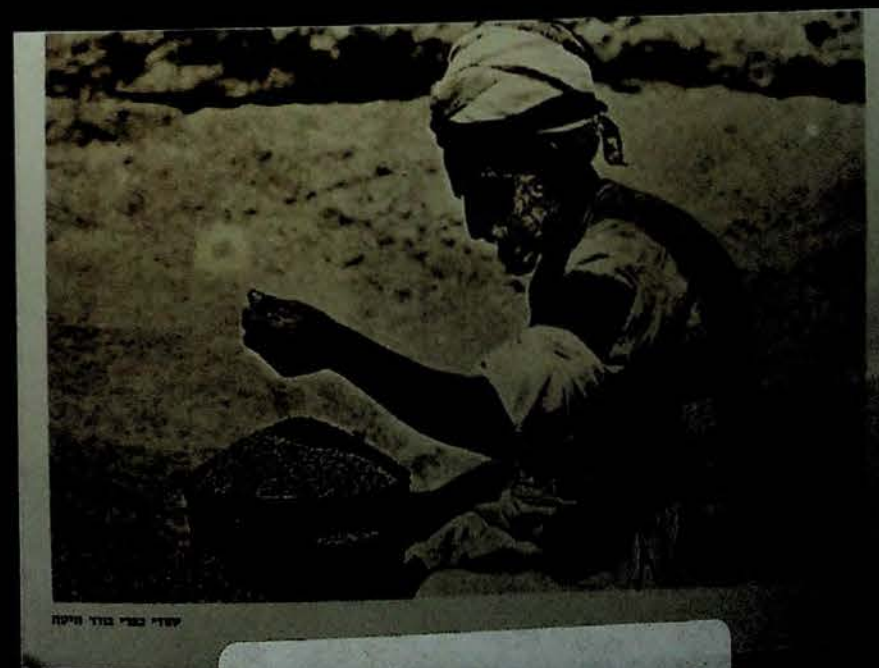


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Commemorative medal for  
Montefiore and Cremieux

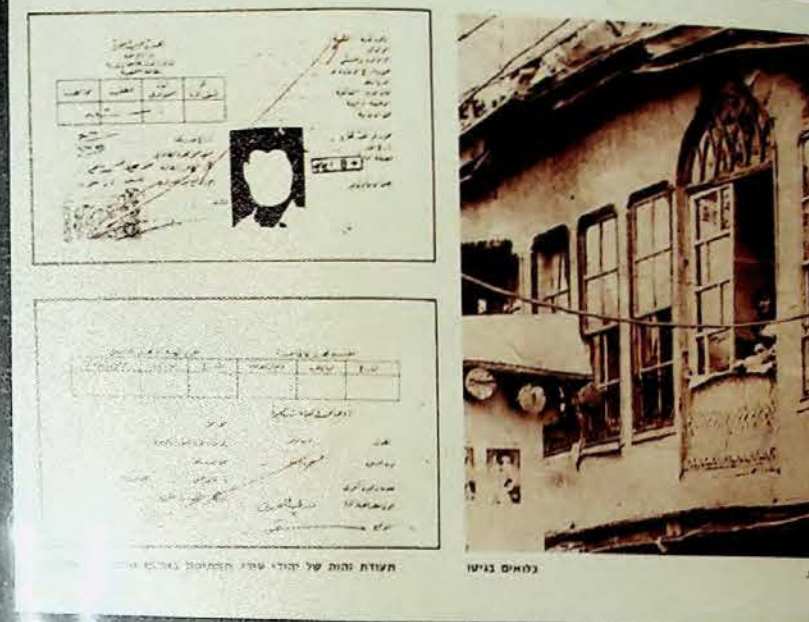
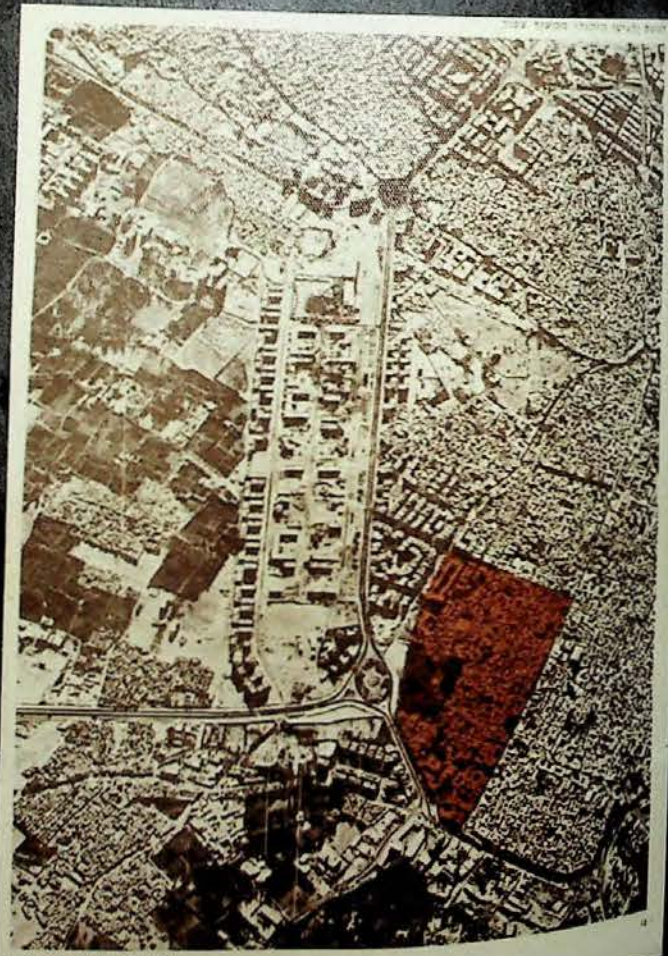


Syrian Jewish Farmer





The Jewish Ghetto of  
Damascus



Left: Identity Cards  
Right: Fear in the Ghetto



The desecrated Damascus  
Jewish Cemetery

Name of Inspector and signature : Illegible

Official stamp

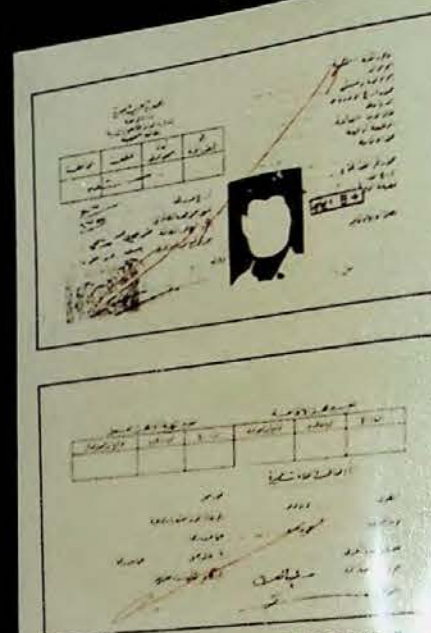




The Jewish Ghetto of  
Damascus



המחנה היהודי בדמשק



זהו תצלום של יהודי סורי החתום באחדים ממהות אישיותו



סוריה

Left: Identity Cards  
Right: Fear in the Ghetto



מצוקת יהודי סוריה

חילול בית הקברות היהודי בדמשק

The desecrated Damascus  
Jewish Cemetery



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החתמה למען, יהודה טוֹרֵי, ל.א. רב



Protest demonstrations  
in Jerusalem, New York  
and Rome.





IDENTITY CARDS ISSUED BY THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Administration of Registry Office - Ministry of the Interior

الجمهورية العربية السورية  
وزارة الداخلية  
الديرة العامة للأحوال المدنية

الرقم  
العام  
الرقم الخاص  
تم المدة

الاسم والنسبة :  
الأب :  
الأم :  
المادة العائلية :  
عمل القيد :  
عمل تاريخ الولادة :

NON JEWISH

Surname and  
Christian name:

Father's name:  
Mother's name:

Marital  
status:

Place  
of registry:

Place and date  
of birth:

Fingerprints  
Signature  
Official stamp

Registry office: illegible.

Date: May 21, 1968

Name of Inspector and signature: illegible

NON JEWISH

Size:  
average

Complexion:  
fair

Eyes:  
hazel

Hair:  
black

Distinguishing  
marks:  
none

Blood group:  
illegible



Profession:  
unemployed

Administration of Registry Office - Ministry of the Interior

الجمهورية العربية السورية  
وزارة الداخلية  
الديرة العامة للأحوال المدنية

الرقم  
العام  
الرقم الخاص  
تم المدة

الاسم والنسبة :  
الأب :  
الأم :  
المادة العائلية :  
عمل القيد :  
عمل تاريخ الولادة :

JEWISH

Surname and  
Christian name:

Father's name:

Mother's name:

Marital  
status:

Place  
of registry:

Place and date  
of birth:

Fingerprints  
Signature  
Official stamp

Registry office: illegible.

Date:

Name of Inspector and signature: illegible

JEWISH

Size:  
5 feet

Complexion:  
light

Eyes:  
brown

Hair:  
brown

Distinguishing  
marks:  
none

Blood group:  
illegible

Religion:  
Jewish

Profession:  
unemployed

Red  
Ink



Translated from Epoca (Italy), 28 April 1974  
'We spoke with the Jews who must live in Syria'

DRAMA IN THE GHETTO OF DAMASCUS

by

Livio Caputo

Our official visit to the ghetto of Damascus, where more than four thousand Jews have been living for more than twenty-five years in conditions of semi-segregation, is ending: after a short inspection of the main synagogue - they (the Syrians) contrived to show it to us almost empty - we got our escorts' permission by insisting a great deal, to walk through the district and to take some photographs. The walk is not very enlightening. In spite of the day of rest, the winding and gloomy alleys of the old district are almost deserted, and, when the two foreigners appear, shadowed by four 'gorillas' of the Secret Police, the few people who are out walking prefer to turn the corner. The only ones who allow themselves to be approached are the children - thin children with large black eyes who are probably unaware of the drama of their community that has become a hostage in the fight between Israel and the Arab States.

The limitations which the authorities have imposed on our entry into the ghetto are perfectly plain: 'No questions; no interviews.'

Suddenly, when we are drawing near the car, a girl comes out on the roof of one of the buildings and starts inveighing against our escorts in more and more excited tones. She must be twenty, has a very beautiful round face deeply marked by grief, her brown hair is coiled high, a black sweater makes her face even paler. Unfortunately, she speaks Arabic, and we cannot understand what she says. But when we shout out, asking her to speak English or French, she makes a gesture more eloquent than any words: still expostulating loudly, first she points at the policemen and then using her hand as a knife, rubs her throat over and over again to indicate that she and her unlucky co-religionists could be slaughtered.

Pandemonium breaks out. Two of the 'gorillas' grab my arms and try to drag me towards the car. The other two face Mauro Galligani to prevent him from snapping pictures. While I am wriggling, two women make their appearance near the girl in black - a girl student in a khaki uniform and a matron about sixty years old - who in their turn begin to hurl imprecations at the policemen and repeatedly make the unmistakable gesture with their hands. A fourth woman, in a corner of the terrace, grips her face between



her hands and worries about the consequences that the boldness of her three friends may have on the whole district.

I don't know who the women were; they were still yelling when our escorts succeeded in pulling us away. I can only suppose that the girl in mourning garb was a kinswoman of Sarah, Lora and Tony Zebah and of their cousin Eve Saad who, two months ago, were raped and killed when they tried to cross the Lebanese frontier clandestinely.

But three things are sure, in my opinion; first, they weren't 'poor madwomen' at all, as my escorts hastened to explain; second, their demonstration is the most categorical denial of the Syrian statements that the four thousand Jews of Damascus, the five hundred of Aleppo and the three hundred of Kamishli 'are perfectly happy and pleased with their condition and have nothing to fear from the authorities'; and, finally, that, as soon as we turned the corner, the three wretched Jewesses had to deal with the policemen who were escorting us. We hesitated a long time to publish the 'stolen' snapshot that records the incident. If, in the end, we decided to publish it, it was to make known to public opinion three innocent victims of the Middle East conflict who had the courage to denounce the duress they are forced to live under.

Till 1948, the Jews of Syria numbered forty thousand, and for two thousand years they had dwelt in peace with their Arab neighbors. Neither Damascus nor Aleppo had ever experienced the terrible pogroms of Central-Eastern Europe. But with the birth of the Israeli State, the policy of the Syrian Government towards the Israeli minority changed radically. The Jews, considered now a kind of enemy fifth column, have been subjected to worse and worse restrictions and vexations. Most of the members of the community succeeded in emigrating in the 'fifties, but the Ba'ath coup d'etat in 1963 closed the borders and the survivors are virtually prisoners in a country which they once considered their native land. Their situation has become agonizing, especially since the 1967 war, so much so that, in spite of the very strict controls, as many as a hundred and fifty have tried to escape.

Recently, a series of dramatic happenings has called attention to the endless suffering of these afflicted people. In the second part of 1971, twenty Jews, among them a number of women and a child four years old, were jailed without any reason and only released, in two different stages, by order of President Assad, after several months of detention. At the beginning of 1973, two young people whose names are still undivulged travelled through Europe and denounced the arbitrary imprisonments, the tortures and discriminations that their co-religionists systematically endure at the hands of the Secret Police. Syrians of Jewish origin - so said the two young Jews, who had fled from Damascus some months before - have the word Jew printed on their identity cards, as Jews had in Hitlerite Germany:



they cannot leave the town where they reside without a special permit, they are excluded from all Government appointments, from the army and from the universities, and are cut off from all contact with foreigners.

On March 7, we got the most horrifying news from Beirut: the bodies of four Jewish girls, the sisters Sara, Lora and Tony Zebah, and their cousin Eve Saad, had been discovered in a cave near Asfura, on the border between Syria and Lebanon, raped and torn to pieces. At first, it was thought to be a political crime. But the Syrian Government, considering the delicacy of the situation, took the unusual step of disclaiming any responsibility. 'The four young women', Interior Minister Ail Zaza said in a communique, 'were killed by a gang of murderers and smugglers, consisting of two Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith and two Moslems, who have already been arrested and will be prosecuted.' The mutilated corpses of the victims were returned to their families and so could be buried, with religious ceremonial, in what is left of the old Jewish cemetery, demolished the other day to open a super-highway. But the community probably didn't believe the version issued by the authorities: for the first time in the post-war period, they mustered the fortitude to stage a demonstration of protest that ended in a violent police charge.

It was at this point that we arrived in Damascus to make our inquiry, following two parallel lines: the official one through the Syrian authorities, and the underground, through personal contacts with members of the Jewish community. The Information Minister confirmed that the murder of the four girls had no political meaning and was a case of common crime. When we asked him if, in the context of the negotiations with Israel for a military disengagement, Syria was ready to accord freedom of expatriation to its Jewish citizens in exchange for an immediate return of the Arab refugees to their homes on Golan, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Al-Rifai, answered: 'Any negotiation on the circumstances of Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith would be an unlawful interference in the internal affairs of our country. The problems that concern them come entirely under our jurisdiction. Anyway, we have no intention of strengthening the Israeli State by allowing the Syrian Jews to move to Israel.'

From sources in touch with the Police, we got a very detailed account of the murder. The four culprits - the Moslems Hilam Izzedin and Mohammed Mustafa Leila, and the Jews Yussef Shalouh, a textile trader, and Azur Zalta, a schoolteacher - had formed a criminal gang responsible for profitable smuggling operations, and several armed robberies. Of late, the four men had specialized in the organization of the flight of rich Jews and, in that guise, had got in touch with the four girls. When they realized that the fugitives had plenty of money, first they robbed and then they killed them. On March 2, the bodies were discovered, and so the



Police could find the tracks of the gang. They were followed. The Police arrested Azur Zalta, who confessed to the crime. Now all four were awaiting trial. Izzedin, Leila and Shalouh will probably be hanged as the perpetrators of the crime. Zalta, charged only with complicity, will perhaps get off with a prison term.

At my insistence, the Syrian authorities allowed me to meet Selim Totha, president of the Jewish Council of Damascus, a distinguished gentleman about seventy years old, and Ibrahim Hamra, thirty-five years old, the new Chief Rabbi. The interview took place outside the ghetto, in the elegant shop of Joseph Jejati, the richest and most prominent man of Syria's Jewry. The talk would have been rather illuminating had not both evidently been intimidated by the presence of a Government official, who - never let them out of his sight.

'How', we asked, 'are the relations of the community with the authorities and with the Arab majority of the population?'

'They are neighborly relations. The measures which the authorities have taken have no other aim but to protect us. We Syrian Jews enjoy absolute freedom of worship - fourteen synagogues and six Rabbis. We have no passports, but we can travel everywhere in the country with a pass that is given you within twenty-four hours. In our district there are two schools, with four hundred pupils each, where the principal language is Arabic; but Hebrew is also taught, and there are even eighty pupils of other religions!'

'Then what are the discriminations applied to you? Is it true that you are excluded from military service? Is it true that you cannot inherit?'

'Yes, it is true, we are exempted from military service, but the Arabs of Israel are exempted, too. As far as inheritance rights go, only persons who are not in the country when their relatives die forfeit them.'

'How do the members of the community make a living?'

'Many of them in trade. Some of them have shops, out of the Jewish district as well. Many work at home in the garment industry. Finally, there are many copper engravers, a very profitable activity, of which the Jews have a virtual monopoly.'

'How many of you are actually in jail?'

'Only four, including those involved in the murder of the girls. As far as I know, by the way, they are implicated only as mediators.'

'But why did the girls run away if your situation is so good?'



'They were poor, uneducated girls - textile workers. Maybe they were afraid that they could not get married, for there are few young men in our community. One day they disappeared, leaving a note on the sewing machine saying that Azur Zalta, one of our teachers, knew about their departure. When no further tidings came from them, their parents confronted Azur and informed the Government, and the terrible truth came to light. It was a manifestation of grief and not of protest.'

'Is it possible to meet the girls' parents?'

'The old father of the Zebah girls is an untutored man and the mother is very sick. The only outcome would be that they would start crying again.'

'May we come and visit you in your district?'

'Do come, you will always be our guests.'

But when, a few days later, we tried to enter the ghetto, after we had taken a few steps we were approached by a boy about fifteen years old who asked us what we were looking for. And when we told him that we were looking for Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra, the boy pretended to escort us to his home but took us right to the Police station instead. The boy, I found out later, was one of the many Palestinian refugees infiltrated into the district to keep an eye on the Jews and the foreigners. When, finally, we were able to enter, we had, as we have mentioned, a heavy escort and were supposed not to talk to anybody.

In spite of all controls, we succeeded in arranging a meeting, out of reach of microphones and inquisitive ears, with a leader of the Jewish community. It was a strange talk, marked by long pauses when our interlocutor was obviously attracted by the idea of telling us the real truth and, at the same time, scared of the upshot. Notwithstanding some reticences, certain elements were disclosed that should be borned in mind in the future international negotiations. We have always maintained that it is necessary to recognize the lawful rights of the Palestine people; but neither must we forget the rights of the Syrian Jews (and those of the Iraqi Jews who are, if that is possible, treated even worse), because, being so few, they are exposed to the risk of being sacrificed.

1. The Syrian Government, in effect, has no direct responsibility in the affair of the four girls, but the Press has launched such a hate campaign against Israel that, to many Syrians, killing a Jew almost looks like a virtue. In addition to Tony, Sarah, Lora and Eve, two young men of the same age, Kassem Abbadi and Nathan Shaya, were killed a little while ago while endeavouring to cross the border.



2. Most Jews live in a state of constant terror: Police vigilance over them is merciless and, if a group of friends meet in the synagogue, that is enough to be suspected of plotting.

3. All kinds of arbitrary actions are taken against Jews, by private citizens, too, and the Jews have no possibility at all of defending themselves.

4. Whenever relations with Israel become exacerbated, a new turn of the screw is applied to the community. For instance, in the last few days, eighteen Jews are reported to have been arrested in Aleppo.

Unfortunately, the screw has almost reached the end of its thread, and, on the Golan Heights, shooting goes on.



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New York Times  
December 31, 1971

# An appeal to the conscience of mankind on behalf of Syrian Jewry

Excerpts from Statement on Jews in Syria, issued by Gen.  
Lucius D. Clay, U.S. Army (Ret.) Chairman, COMMITTEE  
OF CONCERN:

1. The Syrian authorities are holding in jail 12 young Syrian Jews, charged with having attempted to flee the country. Their names are: Isaac Hamra, his sister Charlotte Hamra, Misses Badia Dibbo, Fortuna Boukal, and Rosette Yachar; Messrs. Abdo Saadia, Nissim Bissou, Sabah Ariel, Eli Mougrabi and Azur Blanga. The last named is 27 years old and was arrested with his wife (24) and their four-year-old son. The others are all in their late teens or early twenties.
2. There are reports that they have been interrogated under torture, and held under strict solitary confinement. The Syrian security police have similarly interrogated the relatives of the 12 Jews and the relatives of others who have either succeeded in fleeing the country in the past or who were suspected of planning an escape.
3. The desperate attempts of Jews to flee the country are prompted by the cruel conditions to which the community has been subjected for years. Among the restrictions imposed upon the Jews of that country are:  
A total ban on Jewish emigration or even visits abroad.  
Even within Syria itself travel by Jews is restricted to three kilometers from one's home. Further movement requires a special permit which is generally not granted.  
Distinctive identity cards for Jews with their religion marked in red.  
A variety of economic restrictions in employment and a total ban on the sale by Jews of their houses or other real estate.

*We call on the Syrian authorities to cease their persecution of the Jewish minority, to free those unjustly imprisoned and to permit those Jews who wish to emigrate to do so.*

The Committee of Concern is a non-sectarian group of Americans from various walks of life, who are united in their humanitarian concern to alleviate the plight of minorities in Arab countries.

We, of the Syrian Jewish Community, are shocked by the conditions described in the Committee of Concern report.

We urge the leaders of the civilized world to endorse the Committee of Concern's call to the Syrian Government.

We declare our intention to hold public rallies and prayer vigils until the Jews in Syria are given their human rights.

**JOIN US AT THE FIRST PRAYER VIGIL FOR FREEDOM ON  
BEHALF OF THE JEWS IN SYRIA AT THE ISAIAH WALL OP-  
POSITE THE UNITED NATIONS AT 44TH STREET AND 1ST  
AVENUE AT 4:30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1971.**

*This Ad and Rally Sponsored by*

Committee for Rescue of Syrian Jewry  
1750 E. 4th St., Brooklyn, N. Y. 11223

The Syrian Jewish Communities of the United States



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1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004

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Jajati Waktash	El-Fardousse Street	clothes
Jajati Waktash	El-Abad Street	Haberdashery
Jajati Waktash	El-Salihia Street	Blouses and materials
Salim El-Faksh	Shuhada	materials
Mussa Sadia	Shuhada	materials
Ibrahim Kamahji	Shuhada	materials
Ibrahim Walli	Shuhada	second-hand clothes
Swed	Sabaki	ladies' tailor
Zaki Kenia	Shaaalan	materials
Halabi, known as	Shaaalan	materials
Hasbani and Haluf		
Bambaji and Kamhaji	Suk El-Hamidia	oriental materials
Mussa Dwer	Suk El-Hamidia	oriental materials
Yasuf Bahta	Suk El-Hayatln	materials
Mussa Loozia	Suk Midhat Pasha	clothes
Albert Mardab	Suk Midhat Pasha	clothes
Zaki Malah	Suk El-Suf	wool
Hezekiel Ajami Yazdi	Suk El-Sankaria	
Ajami Brothers		
(Known as Yazdi)	Huriya Street	







# SYRIA VIOLATES the...

## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Adopted By the United Nations General Assembly, December 10, 1948.

### Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

### Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

### Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

STATEMENT BY N.Y. ATTORNEY-GENERAL LOUIS J. LEFKOWITZ, APRIL 17, 1974

"We are here today because the civil liberties -- the human rights -- of one of Syria's oldest minorities have been grossly violated. I am referring to Syria's 4,500 Jews who live as less than second class citizens. (See over for article "Syrian Jews Suffering Under Harsh Curbs," New York Times, April 14, 1974.)

"In other words, Syria is not observing its own commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...Today, on this anniversary of Syria's Independence let us urge Syria to come of age and reject this archaic, despotic behavior by abrogating its discriminatory, Nazi-like laws against its own Jewish citizens and allow those who wish to leave the country to freely emigrate."



THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 1974

# Syrian Jews Suffering Under Harsh Curbs

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, April 13—About 1,000 Damascus Jews are reliably reported to have streamed out of the ghetto to which they are confined to demonstrate last month against the slaying of four young Jewish women attempting to cross into Lebanon. A similar number of other Syrians, most of them believed to be Christians, were reported to have joined the demonstration in the center of Damascus. The Jewish demonstrators shouted demands that they be allowed to leave Syria.

Since 1947 the Syrian Government has refused to allow Jews to emigrate and has subjected the country's Jews, who number between 4,000 and 5,000, to restrictions and mistreatment.

## A Release From Terror

The demonstration was only the second of its kind—the first in Damascus took place in August, 1972. In the view of sources familiar with the situation, it represented a kind of release from the terror that has affected the 2,000 or so Damascus Jews since the Mideast war last October.

Following the demonstration, which took place in the first week of March after the burial of the four women, Syrian authorities delivered to the Jewish community of Damascus the bodies of two young men missing for six months in a similar attempt to flee the country.

The two were identified as Natan Shaya, 18 years old, and Kassar Abadi, 20. The women, whose slaying has been announced by the Syrian authorities, were Eva Saad, 18, and three sisters, Toni-Zebah, 22, Laura, 23, and Farah, 24.

The Syrian announcement described the slaying of the women, whose bodies were delivered to their mothers in a sack, as the work of a band of

four "murderers and smugglers"—two Jews and two Moslems who were said to have confessed. The announcement was silent on the women's unsuccessful attempt to flee Syria and on the question of what Jews were doing near the Lebanese border. A Syrian regulation restricts Jews to a radius of about three miles from the Damascus ghetto.

One of the two Jews under arrest, Yusef Shalouah, is reliably reported to be a brother-in-law of one of the victims. A source who knows the two youths scoffs at the contention that they might be killers.

Reliable sources reported that the women had left Damascus by car with two Moslems who were supposed to guide them across the border. The men forced them into a cave in the mountainous border region, according to the account, and robbed, raped and killed them. A finger of one of the girls was chopped off, presumably to remove a ring.

Reporting on the atmosphere of fear, sources who were in Damascus during and after the October war said that Jews had remained in their houses during the 18 days of the war, rarely venturing to the edge of the ghetto to buy food.

After the fighting ended, Palestinian refugees who for years have been assaulting Jews on the street were fre-

quently joined by Syrians who claimed revenge against the Jews for Syrian casualties caused by Israel.

As a result, the Jews of Damascus walk the streets even more rarely than before the war, and many go to work only occasionally. The desire to leave the country, according to the source, has become the almost exclusive subject of conversation.

## Other Town Similar

Although communications between the three Jewish communities in Syria is meager because of the nearly total ban on internal travel, censorship of mail and a refusal to allow Jews to have telephones, the atmosphere in the communities in Aleppo and El Qamishliye, near the Turkish border, was said to be similarly fearful.

In Damascus, on each street leading out of the ghetto Moslem shopkeepers keep a watch on comings and goings. While outwardly on good terms with the Jews, who are their customers, they are believed to fulfill the role of police informers.

Surveillance is intensified with frequent summonses for Jews to appear before military

intelligence for long interrogations.

A 10 P.M. curfew for Jews is strictly enforced. In El Qamishliye 24-hour curfews have been imposed on occasions.

Jews are forbidden to work in the Government, in nationally owned enterprises or in banks. State employees and members of the military are reminded by notices displayed in many offices that they may not buy from Jews.

Jews live largely by manufacturing in family workshops silver and copper articles that are sold in the souvenir shops of the souk, or ancient covered market, where they are not allowed to own shops themselves.

Many of the teen-age boys and girls work in a Jewish-owned clothing factory that is reported to manufacture uniforms for the Syrian Army.

When the head of a Jewish family dies, his property is forfeited to the state and even members of his family may not remain in their house without paying rent to the state.

A handful of favored Jews have been allowed to live outside the Damascus ghetto and have been exempted from some of the restrictions.



FROM: NATIONAL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION

CONTACT: Richard Krieger 313-767-5922 FOR RELEASE AFTER 11 A.M.  
Natalie Flatow 212-751-400 WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 1974

NEW YORK, Aug. 21..... Thirty District Attorneys from major cities across the United States have sent a letter to the President of Syria, requesting that a delegation from the National District Attorneys Association be permitted to attend the forthcoming trial of four men accused of murdering, or involvement in the murder of, four young Jewish women who sought to escape from Syria last March. The trial, on which preliminary hearings were held in Damascus in May and June, resumes on August 25.

The letter, addressed to President Hafez al-Assad, was presented today to the Syrian Mission to the United Nations by Robert F. Leonard, District Attorney of Genesee County Mich., who is Vice President of the N.D.A.A.

At a news conference immediately following delivery of the letter to the Syrian Mission, Mr. Leonard declared that the district attorneys were concerned not only with the proper administration of justice in this case, but also with the political ramifications involved in "reported restrictions on the freedom and civil rights of the Jewish community of Syria." .....

Mr. Leonard was joined at the new conference by Brooklyn District Attorney Eugene Gold, one of the signators to the letter. Others who signed the letter were the District Attorneys of Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Columbus, St. Louis, St. Paul, Chicago, Wichita, White Plains, N.Y., and Norman, Okla. Preston Trimble, District Attorney of Norman, is President of the N.D.A.A.

The full text of the letter follows:

Dear President Assad:

As a Vice President of the National District Attorneys Association, I am writing this letter to you on my own behalf as well as on behalf of the under-designated members of the N.D.A.A., which is the foremost and largest professional group of prosecuting officials in the US. We are writing this letter to you in regard to a pending criminal trial which is now taking place in your country. We believe that the facts and circumstances of this case merit attention on the international level. I would like to now state to you the facts alleged in this case as they have been described to us from various sources.

The facts as alleged to us by neutral sources are as follows:



Early this year, the bodies of four Syrian women of the Jewish faith were discovered in your country in a cave near Asfura, on the border between Syria and Lebanon. These women were sisters. Their names were Sara, Lora, and Tony Zebah, and their cousin Eve Saad. They had been raped and brutally murdered.

In March of this year, your Interior Minister Ali Zaza said in a communique that these four young women had been killed by a gang of murderers and smugglers consisting of two Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith and two Moslems, who had been arrested. The Syrian Information Minister further confirmed and stated that that murder of their four women had no political meaning and was a case of common crime. Interior Minister Ali Zaza further charged that the two Syrian Jews were members of a gang of four "assassins, robbers and smugglers" who had "confessed" under interrogation to a series of crimes including the murder of the four young women.

Other sources have alleged these additional details; the four defendants -- including the Moslems Hiam Izzedin and Mohammed Mustafa Leila, and the Jews Yussef Shalouh, a textile trader, and Azur Zalta, a school teacher -- had formed a criminal gang responsible for profitable smuggling operations and several armed robberies. It has since been learned that the Syrian Jewish defendant Shalouh was a brother-in-law of one of the four murdered women. These four men allegedly had specialized also in the organization of the flight of Syrian Jews from your country and in that operation had contacted these four young women. When they realized that the women had ample sums of money, they allegedly robbed and murdered them. The bodies of the women were discovered on March 2, 1974, and the Syrian police found various tracks of the gang which were followed.

After a preliminary session held approximately one month ago, the formal trial of these four men resumed in Damascus on June 19, 1974. The trial is being held in the State Security Court.

As leading prosecuting attorneys in the United States, we are concerned with the Administration of Justice, not only in our own country, but in all countries throughout the world. We are concerned then, as prosecutors, and as individuals, with the concept of a fair trial and principles of international due process as they are practiced throughout the entire world. The present trial of the four above defendants certainly involves the international community as well as the consideration of concerned citizens throughout the world. The trial also certainly has serious and considerable political ramifications due to the fact that two of the defendants are members of the Jewish faith and that the four murdered victims were also members of the Jewish faith. This arises from the reported restrictions on the freedom and civil rights of the Jewish community of Syria.



Furthermore, if it is true that one of the charges laid against these four defendants is the attempted smuggling of Syrian nationals to a foreign country, such a charge would raise many serious questions to the international community regarding the free right to travel. In this context, the international commitment made by all nations, including Syria, to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own...", would become an extremely important issue at the trial of these four defendants.

Moreover, because of the basic humanitarian issues involved in this trial and the religion of two of the defendants and the four murdered women, it becomes extremely important to the world community that these four accused persons be assured of an open trial with the application of all international accepted standards of due process in such a trial.

The application of such international standards must insure that these four defendants have the following rights:

1. The right to a public and open trial:
2. The right to consult with and have the assistance of an impartial and effective attorney and attorneys:
3. The right to confront and cross-examine the witnesses against them:
4. The right to call and examine witnesses in their own behalf:
5. The right to freely testify themselves in their own behalf or not to so testify if that is their choice.

Viewing this trial, then, from the prospective of the sensitive international community which is concerned with the administration of justice in every part of the world, we strongly hope that you will ensure that the principles of international due process are met with during this trial and thereafter. In addition, we, as leading prosecutors in the United States, would respectfully request that you permit a delegation from our number to sit in attendance at this trial as representatives of the world community and also as possible counsel for these defendants as they so desire. We would also request that the Syrian government formally sanction the admission of the international press to observe and attend the trial. We sincerely believe that your permission for such a delegation, comprised of members of our organization to attend the trial, which I understand is to be resumed on the 25th of August, 1974, would serve the best interests of the basic principles of international justice as well as the best interests your government in the eyes of the onlooking community. We hope that you will concur in the approval of our requests and will respond favorably



to them. We anxiously await such a response on your part.

The letter was signed by the following district attorneys:

Robert F. Leonard, Genesee Co. Mich.  
Joseph P. Busch, Jr., Los Angeles  
D. Lowell Jensen, Oakland, Cal.  
Richard Gerstein, Miami  
F. Emmett Fitzpatrick, Philadelphia  
Jack Hoogasian, Waukeegan, Ill.  
Roger Rook, Oregon City, Ore.  
Carl A. Vergari, White Plains, N.Y.  
Preston Trimble, Norman, Okla. (Pres. N.D.A.A.)  
Cecil Hicks, Santa Anna, Cal.  
Arthur A. Marshall, Jr., Upper Marlboro, Md.  
Eugene Gold, Brooklyn, N.Y.  
George C. Smith, Columbus, O.  
Gary W. Flakne, Minneapolis  
Edwin L. Miller, Jr., San Diego  
Brendan Ryan, St. Louis  
E.J. Salcines, Jr., Tampa  
Wm. B. Randall, St. Paul  
Robert Bell Russel, Colorado Springs  
Patrick J. Leahy, Burlington, Vt.  
Donald C. Woolsey, Galesburg, Ill.  
Walter L. Sauer, Oelwein, Iowa  
Bernard Carey, Chicago  
Margaret W. Jordan, Olathe, Kansas  
Omer T. Shawler, Marshall, Ill.  
Thomas E. Delahanty, II, Auburn, Me.  
Martin G. Holleran, Exec. Dir., Commission on Investigations, Trenton, N.J.  
Louis T. Bergna, San Jose, Cal.  
Keith Sanborn, Wichita, Kansas



## Syrian Brutality Repeats Itself

While the United Nations allows itself to be a forum for vicious anti-Israel charges involving imagined misbehavior in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories, the small Jewish community of Syria, perhaps four thousand, is undergoing the most terrible suffering at the hands of barbarians. The well known and distinguished General Lucius D. Clay, chairman of the Committee of Concern, an ad hoc group of leading American citizens from all walks of life, has described how Syrian Jews have been victims of electrical torture, the ripping of fingernails and subjected to cigarette burns on various parts of their bodies. Numerous cases of Jewish girls being kidnapped, raped and thrown naked into the streets of the Jewish ghetto of Damascus and the burning of Jewish homes have also been received. All this for the sole crime of being Jews and, in instances of those who have been tortured for trying to get away from Syria. This is not the first time such brutality has occurred in

Syria. In the past Israeli military personnel and civilians captured near the border have been tortured to a point where some died and others lost their minds.

Syria is a member of the United Nations, the Arab League and a federal grouping with an allegedly moderate Egypt. But she is being permitted to treat her Jews with medieval savagery, with the fury of a coward venting his feelings on the weak. The Committee of Concern has called upon the Syrian Government to "cease the persecution of Jews, free those imprisoned and permit emigration." A statement by Hadassah has pointed out that this is not the first experience with Arab cruelty toward Jewish inhabitants and notes how in recent years aroused public opinion changed the fate of Jewish victims of inhuman treatment in Iraq. This is the time for the United Nations to react and for men of conscience everywhere to raise their voices to that end, or failing this, to urge pressure by peoples and nations that will put a stop to this Syrian outrage.

*Jewish Advocate (Boston) - 28/10/71*



## The Plight of Syria's Jewish Community

To the Editor:

The Syrian Jewish congregations of the U.S. with a total membership of over 25,000 people are deeply concerned about the plight of their families, relatives and friends in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli in Syria.

Distressing and increasingly alarming reports have been reaching us from Syria, of Jews being arbitrarily arrested, molested and tortured.

They have committed no crime or any violation of the Syrian constitution. Their only crime is being Jewish, in view of the fact that Moslem and Christian Syrians are readily able to leave the country without applying for

permits just by showing their identity cards at the border.

The 4,000 Jews in Syria are being subjected to various forms of harassment, discrimination and restriction. Even within Syria, they are forbidden to move beyond a radius of three miles of their place of residence without special permit. All their identity cards are marked in red ink on both sides with large letters "Jewish." Jews are under close surveillance by the secret police and often interrogated and their homes are searched. Letters are always censored. Jews are denied bank credit or collection of debts and may not sell or dispose of their property. The Syrian authorities have done nothing to curb vandalism of Jewish homes. Jewish cemeteries have been confiscated. Jews live in constant fear and are prevented from emigrating.

These discriminatory policies are in clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and contrary to the Syrian Government's 1967 assurances to U.N. representative Nils Gussing, on the treatment of freedom of movement of the Jewish minority.

The international community has a solemn duty to alleviate the plight of these unfortunate victims and to spare them additional sufferings.

(Rabbi) JOSEPH HARARI  
Committee for Rescue of Syrian Jewry  
Brooklyn, March 27, 1972

4/11/72  
NEW YORK TIMES



# 'Committee of Concern' Fearful Of Jewish Community in Syria

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NEW YORK — The Committee of Concern, a non-sectarian group seeking to alleviate the plight of minorities in Arab countries, expressed fear that the arrest of two Jewish activists in connection with the recent murder of four young Syrian Jewish women is an attempt to distract attention from Syrian persecution of Jews.

"We fear that these two Jewish young men, who were known to the Syrian authorities, are being utilized as scapegoats by the Syrians in order to divert world attention from the plight of the Jewish community," the committee stated.

The Committee of Concern, headed by Gen. Lucius D. Clay (U.S. Army Ret.), called on the Syrian authorities to grant Jews in that country full freedom, including the right to emigrate.

Persons who know Yusef Shaluh and Azur Zalta, the Jews alleged by the authorities to be part of a band of four assassins who had "confessed" to robbing and then killing the women, were incredulous at the charges, the committee stated.

## Found in Mountains

The bodies of the four young women, residents of Damascus, were reportedly found in the mountainous region near the Lebanese border. "The only reason Jewish women would undertake such a dangerous journey," the committee said, "was out of a deep sense of desperation as to their future in Syria, where the Syrian government has made life for Jews intolerable and barred any legal avenue for their emigration."

"People who know the young men well," the committee said, "noted that they are both outstanding members of the Jewish community, known for their devotion to the welfare of their harrassed brethren. For example, both Shaluh and Zalta regularly visited Jewish prisoners and brought them food. Shaluh, the alleged ringleader of this murderous band, also had intervened on various occasions with the Muhabarat, the Syrian secret police controlling Jewish affairs, on behalf of Jewish prisoners. It is thus highly inconceivable that these devoted members of the Jewish community would murder four of their fellow Jews."

"In view of the suspicious circumstances surrounding this incident and past evidence of 'confessions' extracted under torture," the committee stated, "we call upon the Syrian authorities to assure that the alleged criminals

be furnished with defense counsel of their choosing, and given a prompt and open trial."

Syria should allow Jews to leave, as other Arab countries have done, the committee stated. This, it said, "is a fundamental humanitarian question and should not be confused with political issues in the Middle East."

Jewish Times  
April 4, 1974



## SYRIA:

### A Troubled Minority

*The Syrians harass us in many ways—some violent, some subtle. I had an Arab friend once in a convent school I went to and we used to write each other occasionally. But our friendship broke off after the police warned her about her relationship with a Jew. Also, whenever there was any fighting on the border we became scapegoats. But the worst thing was that as Jewish neighborhoods became vacated through death or escape, Palestinians moved in. By now nearly 70 per cent of the Haret al Yahoud [Jewish quarter of Damascus] is Palestinian. They perform the task of spies and informers.*

—A Syrian Jew

Only 40 years ago, Syria was a hospitable home to nearly 30,000 Jews, many of them prosperous men who played influential roles in the country's flourishing cultural and economic life. One Egyptian Jew founded the Syrian-French daily *L'Orient*. And much of Syria's foreign trade and tourist industry were managed by Syrian Jews or largely sponsored and promoted on a foreign-investments basis by Jews living abroad. Similarly, nearly all of the professorships at the prestigious University of Damascus were held by European Jews.

Today, however, all that has changed. For in the years since Israel was founded as a separate state, Damascus and Jerusalem have become implacable enemies. And as a result of that fact, Syria has clearly become a most inhospitable place for Jews to live. The country's once large Jewish community has dwindled to only 4,500 people. And most of them have become frequent victims of official harassment and discrimination. As Jews they cannot travel farther than 2.5 miles from home without permission. Special inheritance laws provide that at death their property automatically reverts to the state. They cannot hold jobs in government or in banks and they cannot own telephones or buy T.V. sets or automobiles. In addition, Jews are barred from universities and it is only with great difficulty that they can acquire even an elementary education. More importantly, they live in constant fear of terror and violence. "No one is spared," said one

Syrian Jew who escaped and came to New York to live. "One 4-year-old child was imprisoned for a year with his mother and bribed by the police to inform on her."

Not surprisingly, reports like these have aroused the wrath of Jewish groups and civil libertarians the world over. Furthermore, after four young Jewish women were murdered last March trying to escape into Lebanon, even the besieged Jews of Damascus streamed bravely from their ghetto to demand permission to emigrate. And in the U.S., angry American Jews have begun to pressure their congressmen to intercede on behalf of Syrian Jews. Indeed, as a result of their intensive lobbying, a resolution was submitted to the Senate last week calling on President Nixon to discuss the plight of Syrian Jews during his visit this week to Damascus.

**Denial:** But the Syrians—who claim to see their Jewish residents as a security threat—are understandably reluctant to talk about the matter. And when pressed on such questions as immigration for Jews they often bury their discriminatory policies under the blanket of Syrian national security. "Syria has been at war with Israel," Deputy Foreign Minister Abdullah Khani declared in a recent interview. "We cannot let our citizens go to swell the ranks of the Israeli Army." Still other Syrian authorities blithely deny that the country discriminates against its Jewish citizens. Ambassador Haissam Kelani, Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, claims in fact that Syrian Jews live "as brothers to Syrian Christians and Syrian Muslims. They have equal rights just like other citizens."

For U.S. diplomats struggling to make a difficult peace between Syria and Israel, the discrepancies between the official Syrian line and the horror stories told by Jewish refugees are a touchy and highly emotional issue. Secretary of State Kissinger reportedly mentioned the status of Syrian Jews during his recent talks with Syrian President Assad but he clearly did not push it. "More pressure at this point," one Kissinger aide explained it, "would have been highly indiscreet." And with their destiny caught between Syria's apparent intransigence and Washington's diplomatic caution, it is highly unlikely that life will become much better for Syria's beleaguered Jews.

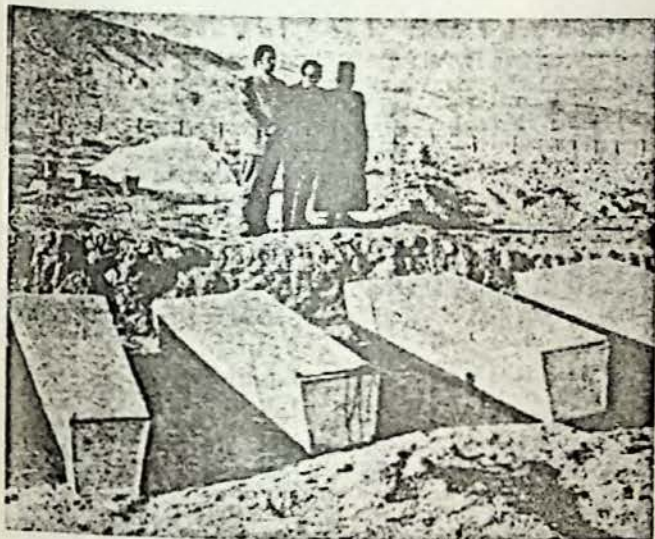
Newsweek, June 17, 1974

Reprinted with permission  
Newsweek International



# פדיון שבויים rescue

## Report on Jews in Arab Lands



### REPORT FROM COMMITTEE FOR RESCUE OF JEWS IN ARAB LANDS

#### Hostages pray for dead pilots

These photographs reprinted from a Syrian Military newspaper should be of particular interest to Beth Tzedec. The caption under the picture with the five coffins (translated from the Arabic) reads: "The burial of five Israeli pilots whose planes were shot down over Syrian territory. The service is conducted by Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra of Damascus." Shown in the picture from the left are Rabbi Hamra; an agent of the Deuxieme Bureau (Syrian Secret Police) with sun glasses; Rabbi Zaki Minfakh wearing a fez.

A careful analysis would question the area as a cemetery — the wire fence — no grave markers — the absence of freshly dug graves — the four pails; no minyan is present; the Rabbis hold no prayer books. What is the large dark mass in the foreground? Blood? Are the streaks on the second coffin also blood? What are the dark areas under the second and third coffins? Were indeed the Israeli pilots killed when their planes crashed? Perhaps Rabbi Hamra, a hostage in his native Syria, is forced to appear at a mock burial of murdered Israeli pilots.

Informed sources report the only Jewish cemetery, on the outskirts of

Damascus, is now covered by a highway to the airport.

#### The Rabbi of Damascus

Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra is the 34 year old Orthodox rabbi of Damascus, Syria who was first contacted in April, 1972 by the late Dr. Ronald Feld, and to whom all parcels of religious articles and cables are now sent by the Beth Tzedec Committee. It was Rabbi Hamra who send the cable to the late Dr. Feld — the last message from the Damascus Jewish Community — the day before the Yom Kippur war.

"Now smile; look friendly."...

The picture with the group shows: a Syrian soldier; Mr. Salim Totah (facing the camera — who is the head of the Damascus Jewish community, but lives outside the ghetto walls); an unknown man (back to camera); Rabbi Hamra (extreme right); the agent of the Deuxieme Bureau (in glasses and at the Rabbi's side in both pictures); Rabbi Minfakh (in fez with his back to the camera). The caption under this picture states the congeniality of the Syrian and Jewish communities.

#### Parcels

Although an uncertain situation exists in Syria two boxes for Chanukah were

sent to Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra in Damascus. Our Committee decided every effort should be tried so that the Damascus Jewish community knows someone has not forgotten. Items in the boxes (all texts are in the Sephardic tradition):

Prayer book (in Hebrew and French); Dreydels; Bibles (in French and Hebrew); Children's book of Hebrew alphabet; child's beginner book of Hebrew (French and Hebrew); Haggadah (Hebrew and French); children's tzitzis; Booklets-grace after meals (Spanish-Portuguese Tradition); Mini Sidurim; Miniature book of Psalms; Hebrew calendar.

The cost of \$100.00 for articles and postage of \$48.00 was supplied by donations to the Dr. Ronald Feld Foundation for Jews from Arab Lands.

#### A Cable

A month after the parcels were sent, the Beth Tzedec Committee cabled the following in French to Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra using the late Dr. Feld's name:

"Happy Chanukah. Have you received the religious books? Also the financial help for the impoverished? Good wishes. Please answer immediately."

An answer was prepaid.



rescue כד'יון שבויים

THE RESCUE COMMITTEE is a newly formed committee at Beth Tzedec for the purpose of assisting fellow Jews in political trouble anywhere in the world. The chairman is Judy Feld; vice chairman is Dr. Murray Freedman.

## JEW IN SYRIA

"... please send the complete set of the Mishna, Rabbi Hamra, Damascus, Syria." In response to the Rabbi's request in his last cable, the following items were sent in two Purim boxes to Syria:

- 1 set Mishnayot Tifereth Yisrael, 7  
volumes  
4 Mishnayot miniature complete, 1  
volume  
30 Megillat Esther, Hebrew only, 25  
books  
Whistle type Purim greggers for child-  
ren

Every box sent has contained a quotation from the Psalms Box 1: (translated from the French) "Happy Purim. Be strong, and let your heart take courage. All ye that wait for the Lord" (Psalm 31, verse 25.)

In Box 2 was the message: "The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble. The name of the God of Jacob set thee upon high." (Psalm 29, verse 2.)

The Dr. Ronald Feld Foundation for Jews from Arab Lands funded the \$49.00 for the books and postage of \$48.00. Non delivery and destruction by Syrian postal officials of many previous boxes sent from other parts of the world necessitates registered, first class, air mail.

During the Yom Kippur war, Israeli planes bombed military targets in Syria. One was situated in Damascus adjacent to a hospital and the ghetto walls. The bombs blasted a hole in a section of the wall which was used as an escape route to Beirut, Lebanon for about 50 trapped Syrian Jews. They were hidden by the Lebanese Jewish community; but, be-

We are appealing to your Excellency in the name of humanity, to use your good offices with the Lebanese Government to obtain exit permits on our behalf, while making it clear that you are prepared to grant us asylum in the United States, under the parole authority provisions.

With deep appreciation for your kind attention and humanitarian concern.

Respectfully,

Victor Guindé  
#7 Nadia  
Raymond  
Esther  
Celly Kassah  
Alliah  
Faraf  
Morse

Respectfully,  
Rafanire May Sherr

Rasheed Ahmed      Article Azam  
Firda Azam  
Jeen      ~~de~~ ~~so~~

طبعه طوبی  
ارالیشانه  
جیل ابراهیم  
میلان

کوفته و صفت مرادشاله  
ساحه و صفت  
کوفته و صفت  
کوفته و صفت

طبعه طوبی  
ارالیشانه  
جیل ابراهیم  
میلان

cause they had no passports, the escapees were unable to leave Lebanon. An appeal was sent to President Nixon. A copy of part of the document is reproduced with signatures in French and Arabic. Note what appears to be the signatures of families.

imprisoned outside Damascus. No further information is available.

Rabbi Hamra remains with those Jewish hostages still in Syria.

The Beth Tzedec Rescue Committee also received a plea for assistance and was awaiting a complete list of the escapees names when the following was reported:

The escapees were hidden in cargo boxes and loaded aboard a Pan Am cargo plane flying to Paris, France. Here, they received American visas and walked onto El Al planes bound for Israel. "My father's in Jerusalem" was the joyful cry of one young Syrian Jew now living in the U.S. Everyone is safe, except two teen age boys who were kidnapped while on the streets of Beirut; Isaac Gaddeh, 18 years old, and Albert Hasbani, 19 years old (the boys) are believed to be





# פדיון שבויים rescue

## Jewry in foreign lands

Report from the Committee for Jewry in Foreign Lands

SIMON KHABAS

(A Syrian Jewish Escapee living in Israel requiring heart surgery)

The Dr. Ronald Feld Foundation received \$1,383.00 raised by the students of the Beth Tzedec Congregational school during their two week "special" raffle in aid of Simon Khabas; \$37.00 was netted by the Congregational teen-agers at their "special" dance.

Dr. E. Kazzam (Simon's doctor in Israel) detailed Simon's escape from Syria:

For the last 8 years, the Khabas family have attempted without success, to get permission for Simon to travel from Syria to France for treatments. Simon himself, has repeatedly attempted to escape; each time the Syrian authorities caught and detained him. After his release, his brothers and sisters were arrested and beaten for several weeks. (Simon is the youngest of 6.)

After an interview with the Minister of the Interior, requesting Simon be allowed to go the Beirut, Lebanon, a deposit of \$3,000 was demanded; then, the brother was severely beaten for daring to talk to the minister!

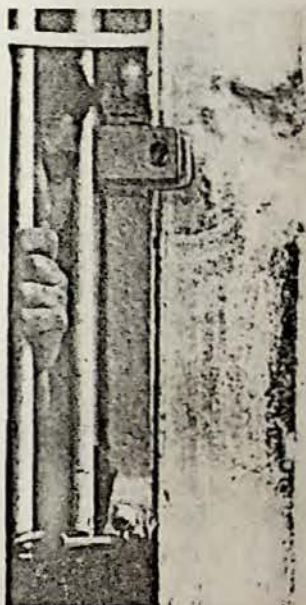
Some 14 months later, permission was granted for Simon to go to Beirut for one month only with a "security deposit" of \$400.00.

The Beirut Jewish community provided for Simon's care. Doctors suggested Simon go to Paris for further tests. In Damascus, the family applied for a Syrian passport to enable Simon to go to Paris. Syrian authorities insisted on Simon's immediate return as the month was up. The Khabas family was then subjected to further beatings by the Syrians.

No specifics are reported, but next Simon is in Israel being admitted to the Tel Hashamere Hospital for tests! These results are being translated into English and will be forwarded for evaluation by Toronto cardiologists.

### THE PALESTINIANS:

The English press reports much about the rights of the Palestinians and their losses. Frequently their acts of terrorism go without punishment by world governments. What about confiscation of Jewish property by Arab countries? In Syria, alone, by 1965 standards, the figure of



Jewish property seized is two billion dollars.

### EYE WITNESS REPORT: "WE SPOKE TO THE JEWS WHO MUST LIVE IN SYRIA"

The April 28, 1974 edition of "Epoca" (Italy) published a lengthy, detailed article by Mr. Livio Caputo who went to Syria with photographer, Mauro Galligani, to investigate the rape and mutilation of four Syrian Jewish girls: sisters, Tony, Lora, and Sarah Zeybalk, and Eva Saad, and the arrest of two Jews and two Arabs charged with the crime.

Since several years have passed since even a non-Jewish foreigner was permitted near the Jewish community in Syria, their account becomes of utmost importance.

Space limits printing the entire article. It does, however, confirm by eye witness, again all that has been previously printed in this bulletin with added details:

Their arrival in Syria, coincided with the Jewish protest of the girls' murder "that ended in a violent police charge." When a young girl tried to speak to them, but in Arabic which they could not understand, "gorillas" attempt to force the men into a car; the girl is seized by people in uniform. A struggle follows. "We hesitated a long time to publish the 'stolen' snapshot that records the incident. If, in the end we decided to publish it, it was to make known to

public opinion, 3 innocent victims of the Middle East conflict who had the courage to denounce the duress they are forced to live under."

The Syrian official statement of why can not these Jews leave: they are "perfectly happy and pleased with their condition and have nothing to fear from the authorities. Later statements, however, by another government official stated: "we have no intention of strengthening Israel by allowing the Syrian Jews to move to Israel."

Syrian authorities allowed Mr. Caputo to meet outside the ghetto with Selim Totha, 70, president of the Jewish Council of Damascus and Ibrahim Hamra, 35, the new chief Rabbi, in the shop of Joseph Jejati, a rich prominent Jew. "The talk would have been rather illuminating had not both evidently been intimidated by the presence of a Government official, who never let them out of his sight." When asked why the girls ran away if things were so good the Jewish answer was: "they were poor, uneducated girls ..." Earlier, the Syrian Police line had told the reporter: "... the men specialized in the organization of the flight of rich Jews ..." (To quote only parts of the article.)

"In spite of all controls, we succeeded in arranging a meeting, out of reach of microphones and inquisitive ears, with a leader of the Jewish Community."

The article continues: "... we must not forget the rights of the Syrian Jews ... being so few, they are exposed to the risk of being sacrificed."

1. Although the Syrian Government has no direct responsibility in the killing of the 4 girls, a Press hate campaign against Israel so vicious that: "killing a Jew looks like a virtue". Two young teen-age boys were also killed while attempting to cross the border.

2. Jews live in a constant state of terror: meeting even in a synagogue is suspect.

3. Jews have no possibility at all of defending themselves in any action against them."

4. During battles with Israel, "a new turn of the screw is applied to the community." As the recent arrest of 18 Aleppo Jews.

"Unfortunately, the screw has almost reached the end of its thread ..."



# פדיון שבויים rescue

## Report on Jewry in foreign lands

### "ONE JEW WILL HELP..."

"He's a Canadian doctor. He cares. I heard it on the radio." So began the chilling tale by Simon Khabas to Judy Feld as they sat in Jerusalem. The translation from Arabic into English was by Dr. Aaron Kazzam.

After the tall, slim, blond, handsome, 17 year old controlled his sobs upon learning that *the doctor* (the late Ronald Feld), who had given him hope and courage to escape was no longer alive, Simon continued:

"Because of this radio report of a doctor in Canada who wished to help me, my brothers and sisters were able to persuade my parents that I, the youngest of six and sickly, must escape from Damascus, Syria. A Jew on the outside cared about me! I would get help.

"My health problems were worst in 1967 when I fainted and turned blue. A Jewish specialist (who is denied hospital privileges because he is Jewish) wrote a medical document requesting the Syrian authorities permit me to travel to Beirut, Lebanon or France for medical treatment.

"Request refused.

"Finally I was allowed to travel beyond the 3 mile restriction for Jews to the Damascus hospital. Here a French and Czech doctor recommended I go to Beirut, Lebanon for treatment.

"Permission denied by Syrian authorities.

"I had no medical treatment from 1967 to 1973.

"After this news in 1972 that a Canadian doctor wanted to help, my brother was encouraged to go to the Minister of Interior in Damascus for a visa. Suddenly, yes, I could go to Lebanon. But moments before I was to leave came the notice: 'Permission denied; you are a Jew.'

"At the end of 1972, in desperation my brother posed as a Lebanese and obtained two travelling permits. We were discovered and sent back to Damascus by the Syrian Secret Police.

"In early 1973, my brother gave \$500 (collected by our poor Jewish Community) to a Syrian Arab to smuggle me to Lebanon. At the border he turned me over to the police. My five brothers and sisters were arrested and beaten.



SIMON KHABAS  
July, 1974, Israel

"Six months later in June 1973, a one month visa was granted after the Syrian police were paid \$400.00. My parents were imprisoned. Regardless of this payment, I think, someone must have said something for me! There must have been a reason they let me go."

From Canada at this particular time, the late Dr. Ronald Feld had been sending a series of weekly cables to Rabbi Hamra in Damascus inquiring about the health of Simon Khabas. No replies were ever received. Perhaps the messages were directed to the Syrian authorities instead.

Simon Khabas did go to Beirut, Lebanon.

Arriving alone, sick, without money, he found the Synagogue and introduced himself to the Rabbi. The Beirut Jewish community supplied medical care for four months: first in a small hospital - "Mar Alias", then the American University Hospital, next a convalescent hospital. When the Syrian authorities demanded Simon's return from Lebanon, the doctors protested stating further medical

treatment was required in Europe. But a passport was needed to leave Lebanon.

\$1,200.00 was given to the Syrian authorities in Damascus for a passport. None was ever sent. However, Simon fled Lebanon with a group of Syrian escapees for France, then to Israel.

Simon knows nothing about the safety of his family in Damascus. His always sad eyes show his loneliness and constant worry. A bluish tinge around his lips is the only sign of his illness. As yet he has not mastered Hebrew (in Syria he was denied an education).

His home in Israel is with an Egyptian Jewish family; but he has very little. Medical treatment is given at the Tel Hashomer Hospital. Schooling is being arranged.

He brightened and was very excited when Judy Feld gave him a book about Canada purchased with funds raised by our Congregational school.

A parcel of clothing - blue jeans - a radio - candies - from the "Dr. Ronald Feld Foundation" has been sent to Simon; necessities and a little hope, while his medical reports are studied in Toronto.

If only his parents could be told: Simon Khabas is alive!

### PARCELS

Syrian escapees reported that last year in Damascus they used Haggadas inscribed: "Happy Passover from Toronto, Canada".

Again this year for Rosh Hashanah boxes are being packed by the Committee for Jews in Foreign Lands for mailing to Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra in Damascus - "A healthy New Year from Toronto, Canada".

### COMPARISON...

"Between the Palestinians and the Jews forced to remain in Arab lands" is the topic of Professor Saul Friedman on the weekend of October 19. Saul Friedman, a professor of history at Youngstown State University in Ohio, is an expert on Middle East history. Complete details will be in the next bulletin.



# ש"ס כד' rescue

## REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR JEWRY IN FOREIGN LANDS

### COMMUNICATION ...

At 12:16 a.m. on August 28, 1974 Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra in Damascus, Syria was cabled in French from the Committee for Jewry in Foreign Lands: "The Jewish Community in Toronto, Canada wishes you, their Jewish brothers in Syria, best wishes for a good and healthy year. We beg you send news."

### CHANGE THE REPORT!

At 11:30 p.m. on September 4, 1974, Judy Feld received a cable (translated from the French): "Dr. Ronald Feld, A good year. I beg you send the series of the Gemorah with Commentary in Hebrew and other cultural objects and financial aid. Thank you. Best wishes. Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra, Damascus, Syria."

This is the first cable received anywhere in the world since our cable of Purim, March 3, 1974. "Committees for Jews from Arab Lands" located in Europe report their efforts to cable Rabbi Hamra in Damascus return marked "person non existent" or such remarks. Only cables with the signature of the late Dr. Ronald Feld arrive; for this reason the late Dr. Feld's name is still used by our Committee.

Two parcels from the DR. RONALD FELT FOUNDATION are already in the mail; if they arrive the Rabbi's requests will be immediately sent. Just what happened to the money sent some time ago is under investigation. The "Canadian Committee" will supply financial aid.

Escapees report that all Hebrew religious books from homes and synagogues were burnt in 1967 - reminiscent of another dark era. Simon Khabas tells he saw: "no books in the synagogue; services were conducted from memory or what we learn from our parents. The only religious books in Damascus now are those allowed in by the Syrian authorities from Canada."

We will continue ...

### PARCELS ...

In two boxes sent to Rabbi Hamra in Damascus were -

- 1 VELVET "KIPPA" for David Khabas, father of Simon.
- 8 CHILDREN'S ROSH HASHANAH COLOURING BOOKS - front pages Magen containing Rosh Hashanah card with Magen David torn out.
- 4 MACHZORIM FOR YOM KIPPUR - hard cover printed in France.

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CAMX HL SYDAE232  
DAMAS 32/30-28 1700

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TF 7824168 DOCTEUR RONALD FELD  
TORONTO CANADA

BONNE ANNEE PRIERE D'ENVOYER SERIE GUENARAH COMMENTEE EN  
HEBREU OUTRES OBJETS CULTES AIDE FINANCIERE MERCI SALUTATIONS  
RABBI IBRAHIM HAMRA

**CNCP**  
Telecommunications

COMMENTARY - hard cover.  
1 SHULCHAN ARUCH  
6 HOSEFER - first readers in Hebrew  
last page with "Hatikvah" torn out.  
20 BOOKS FOR SLICHT SERVICE

All books are in French and Hebrew.  
Each parcel contained the message in French:

"Happy New Year,  
Be strong and let your heart take courage  
All you that wait for the Lord."

Psalm 31

As usual the boxes were sent first class air mail; the entire cost of parcels and postage was paid by THE DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION of Beth Tzedec Congregation.

### "WE DIDN'T KNOW?"

The Syrian policy of deceiving the world: no one should know - but quietly the Jews of Syria must be destroyed. However, the group of 84, who escaped during the Yom Kippur war when a bomb blasted a hole in the ghetto wall, described the ghetto as one of misery to Judy Feld during her visit to Israel this summer. Harassment of Jews is commonplace. Since the Yom Kippur war Jews stay inside as much as possible terrified of attack from their neighbours. Young women never walk alone in the streets.

The mud homes have one room to a family - at night, for sleeping; in the daytime, the man's work place.

The streets are mud. Sanitation is deplorable. Electricity is cut off at nine o'clock.

Jews are permitted only manual work. Although there is no law barring Jews from other employment, only a subtle matter of delays, creating despair and wearing away human dignity.

"We lived like animals ... we did not feel like human beings." When the older

professionals die, none are trained to take their place.

It is surprising to learn there are many children in the ghetto. Girls marry as young as 15 and have large families.

### THE ELEVEN MOTHERS OF ALEPPO ...

Eleven Jewish women from Aleppo, Syria were recently taken to Damascus prison and tortured until they revealed who had smuggled their children out of Syria. An escapee who was related to one of the women and saw her on two occasions after the event told: "the woman was tied hand and foot with wire, strapped inside a big lorry tire with her head downwards. Electric shocks were applied. After 36 hours the woman confessed and was permitted to return home. She awakes shrieking in the night."

### "SYRIAN JEWS EXISTS" ...

The Beth Tzedec *Succah*, on Tuesday October 1 will be the scene of a mass "sleep-in" by our Beth Tzedec Youth (joined by some parents!) protesting the plight of the Jews forced to remain in Syria. More details on the "Youth Page". SPONSOR THEM! SUPPORT THEM! JOIN THEM!

### PROFESSOR SAUL FRIEDMAN ...

Will speak at Beth Tzedec in February instead of October. The weekend will include a Shabbat speech on Syrian Jews, a Syrian Kiddush, and an academic encounter with college students at lunch time; on Sunday, Professor Friedman will give an illustrated lecture to the Men's Club - everyone is welcome.

### SIMON KHABAS ...

As yet no report about Simon's condition has been received from the doctors in Toronto. Letters have been written to Simon by our Youth in an effort to keep up his spirits.



# rescue

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# rescue

## Report on Jewry in foreign lands

DR. RONALD FELD,  
TORONTO, CANADA.

ON THE EVE OF THE NEW YEAR ACCEPT MY BEST WISHES FOR HAPPINESS. TWO PACKAGES ARRIVED. I BEG YOU SEND THE BOOK OF RACHEL AND OTHER RELIGIOUS OBJECTS. THANK YOU. RABBI IBRAHIM HAMRA, DAMASCUS, SYRIA."

This cable, translated from the French, arrived on Thursday, September 19, 1974 at 8:30 p.m. It is a direct reply to the Beth Tzedec, Committee For Jewry in Foreign Lands' cable of Saturday, September 14, 1974, at 11:50 p.m.:

"A healthy year from the Jewish Community of Toronto. Have you received the New Year packages? Please send news immediately." Included was a prepaid answer of 30 words.

### THERE IS NO BOOK OF RACHEL!

Could "Rachel" refer to Rachel Khabas the mother of Simon? For in one of the two packages, the Rabbi says he received, was a velvet "kippa" marked "David Khabas". Only through a free Simon could we know the name of his mother. If this is the meaning, the remedy is easy! Inside the next parcel, containing the complete 60 volumes of the Gemorah (requested in the cable of September 4, 1974) is a challa cover with the notation, "pour Rachel Khabas".

### THE CODE IS TOO SIMPLE ...

Ibrahim Hamra is a Rabbi, a Jew, a complex man. Various people have been consulted - scholars, Rabbis, escapees who were friends of Rabbi Hamra in Syria, and all incline to the following interpretation:

On Rosh Hashanah the Torah portion (Jeremiah 31:2-20) "... Rachel weeping for her children. She refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are killed ..." is chanted by Jews all over the world, whether in the luxury of an air conditioned synagogue with the murmur of children's laughter or in the misery of a ghetto spied upon by secret police, where the sound of a shofar means certain death.

Is not Rabbi Hamra pleading with us: you who have freedom and comforts, say you have happiness too ... but weep for us as bitterly as Rachel wept for her children? According to legend, when Jewish exiles passed the grave

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IF 7824168 DOCTEUR RONALD FELD  
TORONTO CANADA

VILLE NOUVEL AN RECEVEZ MEILLEURS SOUHAITS BONHEUR DEUX  
PAQUETS ARRIVEES PRIERE ENVOYEZ LIVRE RACHEL AUTRES OBJETS  
CULTES MERCI

RABBI IBRAHIM HAMRA

of Rachel she cried so bitterly that his mother's tears deeply moved God Himself and He promised to lead the children of Israel back to their land.

Inserted in the parcel containing the Gemorah is also a quotation in reply from Joshua 1:6: "Be strong and courageous ..."

### REMEMBER ...

Last year on the eve of Yom Kippur our Committee received a disturbing cable from Rabbi Hamra in Damascus. It shook us with fear and gloom. The next day Syria attacked Israel.

### WEEP AS RACHEL ...

Our tears must also become continued deeds of action: sending the "Post Cards of Hope" to the President of Syria, the Prime Minister of Canada, telegrams, letters to members of government, cables, financial help, and parcels to Syria; as well as contributions to the Foundation named in memory of a man whose name is still the only link to the hostages trapped in the Damascus ghetto, the late

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Dr. Ronald Feld. During his lifetime, "Rubin" Feld tried to practice the teaching of the Talmud: "He who saves one life is as if he saved the world". We who are alive and free must attempt to do no less.

Donations in memory, or in honour of a loved one, or rejoicing in an occasion, or in aid of the Jews in Arab lands, can be made by contacting:

Mrs. Honey Milstein.....787-3589  
Mrs. Sarah Leve.....922-1548  
Mrs. Ricky Mason.....489-8376  
Mrs. Ruth Foster.....782-6525

Or by mailing funds and requests directly to:

DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION  
BETH TZEDEC SYNAGOGUE  
1700 BATHURST STREET  
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

High Holiday Prayer Book, Rabbi M. Silverman, page 112; note on Haftarah, page 111.



# פדיון שבויים rescue

## MY SONG TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

All men are brothers and each  
people is my own.  
My Jewish people though, of ancient  
stock and fame, of you I grew.  
A gleaming spark at first and  
unknown; but drawn to you,  
the spark rose and became a flame.  
When enemies their dusty storm  
against you rise,  
I set against it, turning to the sun,  
my Jewish face.  
When dark-grey clouds upon your  
head descended,  
I stay with you my people to the  
end.

This verse from the poem by LEIB OLITSKI, read by Dr. Saul Friedman at our "Shabbat of prayer for Jews in Arab Lands", is printed here because of several members' requests.

## SYRIA

THE ISRAEL PUBLIC COUNCIL FOR JEWS IN ARAB COUNTRIES, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Haim Cohn, stated in a recent letter: "... cannot tell you of developments as no news is reaching us - but the general feeling is that there is a hardening in the attitude of Syrian authorities regarding any possibility of emigration - even for the purpose of family reunions ..."

The Israelis are less than thirty miles from Damascus.

## SYRIAN HOSTAGES USED TO BIND SOVIET JEWS...

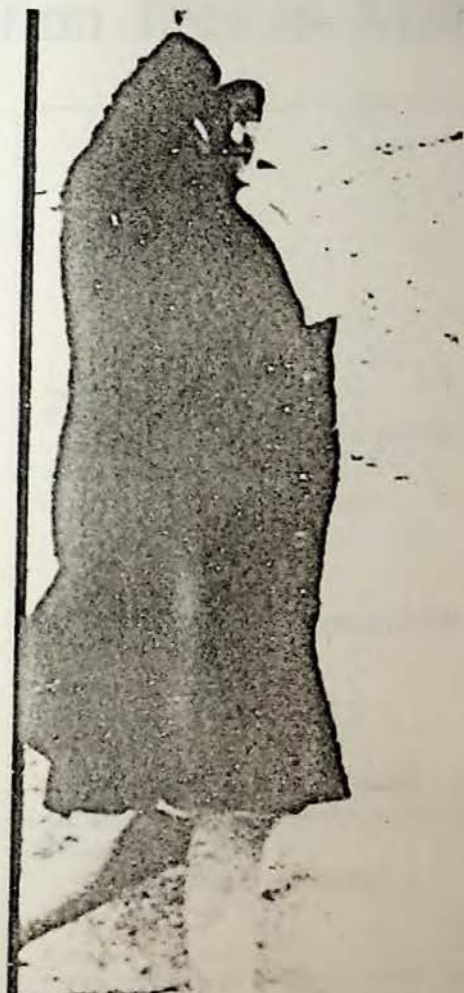
In February 1975 Syrian President Hafez el-Assad declared in an interview with representative Stephen J. Solarz (Democrat N.Y.), a member of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the first Jewish Congressman to be granted an interview:

"No member of the Jewish Community will be granted permission to leave Syria." He further explained that if Syria allowed emigration of her Jews, then Syria would be unable to pressure the Soviet Union not to permit the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

## CABLES...

On March 4, 1975 The Committee sent the following cables: "Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra, Damascus, Syria, Happy Pesach. Have you received the packages? Answer what you have received. More tefillin will arrive and we hope the Book of Rachel also. Best wishes."

Included was a prepaid reply of 35 words.



"Should the world hear the scream from the Damascus Jews locked up in a nameless street, it would be shocked." - Ole Roessel, December 21, 1974 in "Poliliken", Copenhagen.

An attempt was made to reach Rabbi Yomtov Yadid in Aleppo, Syria - "The Jewish Community of Toronto, Canada sends you wishes for a happy Pesach. We will be happy to send you books or other religious articles at your request. Answer immediately. Best wishes."

A prepaid answer was also supplied.

No answers have as yet been received.

## BOXES...

Students from the "Student Council for Oppressed Jewry of Toronto" assisted our Committee in parceling 3 boxes for

the Jewish Community in Damascus, Syria. The postage and contents of one box was supplied by these students. Their money is raised through the sale of buttons and bumper stickers both of which they designed. While vacationing in the U.S. the students had purchased a set of tefillin, books of bible stories for children in French, and several books of Psalms. Other items in the boxes included those requested by Rabbi Hamra - 16 sets of tefillin, and the Mishna with commentary by Eliezer Levi in 6 volumes.

THE DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION provided funds for the contents and postage of the other two boxes.

## JEWS FROM ARAB LANDS...

In Toronto, Jews who have come from Arab countries are of the Sephardic tradition with their culture, music, and prayers influenced by the Arabic way of life; half are Spanish speaking, half are French speaking. Lack of acceptance by the Jewish Community, the fast industrial pace in Toronto, and the difficulties of a middle class adjustment to a lower income and status are among the problems of these immigrants. Three of their concerns include youth, the aged, and the family.

Their youth feels unwanted and are uninvited by most youth groups in Ashkenazai synagogues.

Because housing is no longer large enough to include aged members, as was traditional, they must find separate accommodation. These elderly people are further hampered by language difficulties, which is not Yiddish, but Ladino, French/Spanish or Arabic. A special program is necessary for their unique needs.

The problems of a lessening of parental authority, a permissive society, and poverty, create additional strain on the closely-knit and proud Sephardic family.

These are some of the problems of the Sephardic Jews in Toronto outlined by Judy Feld at a recent Men's Club panel discussion, after she had interviewed leaders of the Toronto Sephardic Community. Judy concluded with a request for understanding and acceptance as an integral part of the Jewish Community in Toronto from Social Agencies, Synagogues and other Jews who are steeped in the Ashkenazai traditions for these immigrants following the Sephardic culture.

Kayla Armel

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ausubel, Nathan. A Treasury of Jewish Poetry, page 185.



# ש"ס כד' rescue

## Report on Jews in Arab lands

### SYRIA THE INCREDIBLE LINK...

On the evening of March 22, 1975 a cable from Damascus, Syria was received in Toronto, in translation it reads:

"DOCTOR RONALD FELD, TORONTO, CANADA.

HAPPY PESACH. I HAVE RECEIVED THE MISHNAH AND TEFILLINS. I BEG YOU TO SEND MEZUZAH'S AND BOOKS. I BEG YOU FOR TEFILLIN AND OTHER CULTURAL OBJECTS. THANK YOU. GOOD WISHES.

RABBI IBRAHIM HAMRA

### "MINI-POGROM"...

Eye-witnesses who returned to Europe reported gangs of young Syrians invaded the Jewish quarter of Damascus and ransacked Jewish homes. They said several people were injured and the contents of Jewish homes thrown into the street. Syrian police were present but did not intervene to protect the victims of what was called a "mini-pogrom".

The time of this Damascus "mini-pogrom" would coincide with the last cable requesting a non-existent "Book of Rachel". A code of Rabbi Hamra to Toronto Jewry signifying another unknown terror. As Rachel wept for the safety of her children in exile, the Rabbi pleads for the safety of his Jews from the brutal, Nazi-like conditions in Damascus, Syria. They ask our help.


### TEFILLIN FOR THE JEWS OF DAMASCUS...

One simple and immediate message of courage for these Jews is our sending tefillin. Do you have a spare set? Or can you contribute towards the cost of a pair? Please leave it at the Shul office for THE DOCTOR RONALD FELD FOUNDATION. Twenty-five more tefillin are needed to fulfil Rabbi Hamra's original request.

The difficult task of attempting a rescue continues. Details will be reported in later Bulletins.

### BOXES...

The latest box to Rabbi Hamra contained those things he requested in his cables: seven mezuzas, three books of the



OAB466  
 A3467(221532)  
 OTB481 VIA COTC VCA450 SYA972 6158  
 CATO HL SYDA 033  
 DAMAS 33/32 13/3 2230

TF DOCTEUR RONALD FELD  
 CANADA

JOYEUX PESACH STOP RECU SERIE MICHANAH TEFILLINS PRIERE ENVOYEZ  
 MEZOUZOLTES LIVRES PRIERES TELILLINS AUTRES OBJETS CULTES MERCI  
 SALUTATIONS  
 RABBI IBRAHIM HAMRA

*J. F.*  
*9:26/52*  
*N.B.*  
*DAK39/52*

haftorah portion of Jeremiah (containing the reference to Rachel weeping for her children), several sets of tefillin, an olive wood scroll for counting the Omer. Contents and postage were paid by contributions to DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION.

### TEMPLE YOUTH HEARS "THE SCREAM FROM THE STREET WITH NO NAME"...

THE EASTERN LAKES FEDERATION OF TEMPLE YOUTH, a Reform Jewish Youth Group composed of high school students from Southern Ontario, Western New York, Pennsylvania, and Eastern Ohio, raised \$800.00 which they donated to the DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION. They explained that each year they raise funds which are donated to a needy charity. Last year their board designated the Jews in Syria with the stipulation the money was to go directly in funds or goods. For a number of months they were unable to find any

one or organization with direct communication with Syria except the Foundation. All parcels sent through THE DR. RONALD FELD FOUNDATION have arrived in Damascus. The Foundation will make every effort to send the students' donation to the Jews of Damascus. What could be more gratifying than this example of these Temple youth who care? Students, you make us all proud!

### RE: HERSHEL SLOTKI...

Replies to the inquiries about the kidnapping of Mr. Slotki, a Canadian citizen, in Lebanon:

Mr. Mitchell Sharp on March 10, 1975 stated: "I will bring this matter to the immediate attention of Mr. MacEachen".

On March 24, 1975 a letter from Secretary of state for External Affairs Allan MacEachen informed of Mr. Slotki's release and safety in England.

Kayla Arme



# פדיון שבויים rescue

## Report on Jews in Arab lands

Test Letters sent by the Committee  
for Jews in Foreign Lands

May 20, 1975.

Mr. Allan J. MacEachen,  
Minister of External Affairs,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ont.

Dear Mr. MacEachen:

Again I am writing to you because of  
the silence of the Canadian government  
regarding the plight of the Jews forced to  
remain in Syria.

As you stated to me in your last letter,  
November 25, 1974, "the Canadian gov-  
ernment will continue to follow closely  
the situation of the Jewish communities  
in Syria, and take whatever steps may be  
practicable to show our concern". How-  
ever, the deterioration in their situation  
has now resulted in what has been termed  
by the London Daily Telegraph as a  
"mini-pogrom" in the Jewish ghetto of  
Damascus. March 26, 1975.

Even the application made in Septem-  
ber, 1972 to reunite the Sabbagh family  
of Aleppo, Syria, with their brother in  
Toronto has not materialized. We, as Jews  
find that in our history quiet diplomacy  
has been ineffectual.

According to the Jewish Telegraphic  
Agency (JTA) Press Release April 9,  
1975, Senator George McGovern (D.S.D.),  
Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Sub-  
committee on the Middle East, raised the  
possibility of the emigration of the Syrian  
Jews to the United States at his recent  
meeting with Syrian President Hafez al-  
Assad in Damascus. McGovern said that  
Assad told him that he could not allow  
the Syrian Jews to go to Israel and there-  
by strengthen a nation with which Syria  
is in a state of war. McGovern said he told  
the Syrian President that arrangements  
could be made to admit Syrian Jews to  
the U.S. Assad replied that he would per-  
mit such emigration on condition that the  
U.S. enacted a law forbidding these Jews  
from ever going to Israel.

The fact that Mr. Assad, for the first  
time is considering the possibility of emi-  
gration of his Jewish citizens, even with  
qualifications, is considered by this com-  
mittee to be a break through in the Syr-  
ian attitude.

We, therefore, request the External Af-  
airs Department of Canada to continue  
through its good offices, and through ap-



*"In the Damascus Ghetto, the children  
are never without fear".*

propriate diplomatic channels to make  
available the necessary visas for that Jew-  
ish community of approximately 4,500  
individuals, to emigrate to Canada, and  
therefore not to Israel.

The Canadian Jewish Community, as  
has been their policy in the past, will ab-  
sorb and care for these people without  
burden on the Canadian taxpayer.

Canada, with its history of concern for  
the protection of minorities, and in view  
of its good relations with the Arab Coun-  
tries, must help facilitate this emigration  
on humanitarian grounds.

The deprivation of the human rights of  
the Jews of Syria urgently requires Can-  
ada's humanitarian intercession before  
the Jews face a communal death in event  
of another Middle East conflict.

Respectfully yours,

Judy Feld, Mus.M., Mus. Bac.  
Chairman  
Committee for Jews in the  
Arab Lands

Copies to: Robert Kaplan, M.P., Barney  
Danson, M.P., John Roberts, M.P., Mitch-  
ell Sharp, M.P., Lincoln Alexander, M.P.,  
Herb Gray, M.P., Claude Wagner, M.P.,  
David Broadbent, M.P.

May 20, 1975

Mr. Ralph Hyman  
Editor, Canadian Jewish News  
22 Balliol Street #15  
TORONTO, Ontario M4S 1C1

Dear Editor:

Eleven Jewish mothers in Aleppo re-  
cently were brutally tortured until they  
revealed the names of those people who  
had assisted their children in escaping  
from Syria. The choice for a Jew in Syria  
is escape or live a life without hope.

In February, 1975, President Assad of  
Syria told a representative of the United  
States Congress that no member of the  
Jewish community would be granted per-  
mission to leave Syria because it would  
weaken Syria's position to put pressure  
on the Soviet Union not to permit the  
emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

Eye witnesses returning to Europe in  
March, 1975, reported a "minipogrom"  
in Damascus, Syria: young Syrians in-  
vaded the ghetto, injured several people,  
ransacked Jewish homes while the police  
stood by and watched giving no assistance  
to the victims. At this very time, a dis-  
tressing cable was received in Toronto  
from the Rabbi in Damascus requesting a  
"Book of Rachel". Since Judaism con-  
tains no such book, the interpretation  
was taken from Jeremiah 31: 2 - 20:  
Rachel weeping for her children in exile;  
or simply: "Help! Get us out!"

To our knowledge, these cables from  
the Jews in Damascus are the only ones  
received in the free world. This commu-  
nication link is as significant as one that  
might have existed with a ghetto in Nazi  
Germany on the eve of the Holocaust.

No mention of these events has been  
reported in the Canadian Jewish News.

Dare the Canadian Jewish News remain  
silent about so grave an issue as the lives  
of 5,000 Jews trapped in Syria? Why is  
their plight not Jewish news?

Yours very truly

Eleven Jewish Mothers in Toronto

Judy Feld, Malka Hayeems, Kayla Armel,  
Ricky Mason, Honey Milstein, Ruth Bau-  
mal, Anita Tyber, Marilyn Nefsky, Anne  
Salamon, Rhoda Kirshin, Olga Esses.

Members of the Committee for  
Jews in Arab Lands  
Canadian Jewish Congress  
Central Region

- Kayla Armel



## Officials angered by questions

# Syrian Jews are deprived of their basic rights

By SHELDON KIRSHNER  
CJN Staff Reporter

### DAMASCUS, Syria —

A diplomat at the British embassy warned me in no uncertain terms not to investigate the condition of Syrian Jewry. "The Jews aren't treated badly, but the Syrians are very touchy about the subject," he said, sipping tea. "Better stay clear."

For better or for worse, I decided to ignore his advice.

I had no intention of leaving Syria without attempting to verify the spate of published reports and persistent rumors concerning Syrian Jewry. Time limitations notwithstanding, I was determined to find out if the 4,000-strong community in Damascus was in fact shackled and crippled by an unjust set of harsh laws and arbitrary edicts. (I had no time to visit the communities in Aleppo and Qamishli.)

More specifically, I hoped to ascertain whether Jews were barred from emigrating or forbidden to leave the country for medical treatment; whether Jews were refused telephones and drivers licences, or forbidden to join unions; whether Jewish schools were controlled by the state; whether Jews could not engage in foreign trade or be employed by the civil service or public cor-

porations.

A day after my arrival in Damascus, I went to the Ministry of Information, which handles foreign journalists. I told an official there that I wished to go to the Jewish quarter and talk to a few Jews. I had no choice but to seek the ministry's approval because the government does not look kindly upon visitors who try to arrange things themselves.

My request angered him. "What do you think, the Jews are in a cage here?" he asked, angrily. "The Zionists spread these scare stories."

Nonplussed, I said I was interested in the truth and only the truth — a remark that seemed to mollify him for the moment. In any event, I added, if the government had nothing to hide, then surely the ministry would have no objection in complying with my simple request.

"We'll see..." he said vaguely as he ushered me out of the office.

During the remainder of my week's stay I continually reminded him of my request to visit the Jewish quarter and speak to the various personalities in the community, but he fobbed me off by asserting that the ministry was "trying to arrange something."

While the Syrians were helpful in arranging an interview with a Foreign Minis-

try official, tours of Kuneitra and refugee camps, they remained decidedly cool to my request regarding the Jews.

An Information Ministry official did consent to show me three Jewish-owned shops in Damascus, and went as far as translating the owners' remarks in two out of three instances. Yet, it is equally and damnably true that they refused to take me on a guided tour of the Jewish quarter, and rebuffed my efforts to meet with the chief rabbi, Ibrahim Hamra, and with Salim Totah, the leader of the Damascus community.

Although I was aware of the risks entailed in going to the Jewish quarter alone, without a government escort, I nevertheless threw caution to the wind and ventured into part of the neighborhood that has become a flashpoint of world-wide protests and demonstrations.

Admittedly, I was somewhat apprehensive as I turned off the Street Called Straight, — the oldest street in the world — toward the Jewish quarter. I had no idea if I was being followed, but the chances of that were probably remote because I had not bothered to notify the ministry that I intended to explore the quarter without their co-operation.

Nonetheless, I was plagued by a feeling

that a Syrian security man was no more than a few steps behind me at all times.

Walking nonchalantly, a camera slung around my shoulder, I strode into a sunless wargen of crumbling two and three-storey residential buildings and shops. Civilians with firearms were in evidence everywhere. I had no idea who they were, but perhaps they were Palestinians who lived in the Jewish quarter. Thanks to a Protestant minister who supplied me with directions and names (he is pro-Arab in his sympathies but is shocked by the treatment of Syrian Jews), I managed to find a Jewish merchant who must necessarily remain anonymous.

He was no more than 35 years old, swarthy with a shock of black hair and a pencil-thin moustache. His shop, no bigger than a fair-sized kitchen, was musty, filled with exquisite silver goblets, candelabras, miniature horses and camels and intricate Arabesque breast plates.

Introducing myself, I told him who had sent me and the reason for my visit. Speaking in heavily-accented English, he feigned ignorance, refusing to discuss the situation of his fellow Jews.

Cont'd on Page 16

(See Middle East Diary on Page 4)



## The Jews in Syria are deprived of their basic rights: reporter

Cont'd from Page 1

"We do not talk of these things," he explained curtly, his face blushing somewhat.

In an attempt to gain his confidence, I began to relate to him my experiences with Egyptian Jewry. He listened intently, hardly batting an eyelash. When I finished my story he offered me Turkish coffee, and led me into an airy sunlit chamber facing a lovely courtyard brimming over with rose bushes.

Excusing himself, the merchant said he would return in a few minutes with a friend, a doctor. The doctor was a stooped man in his '50s who spoke impeccable English with a French accent. He said he was willing to tell me whatever I wanted to know.

I asked him to confirm or deny the various accusations that Jewish and non-Jewish organizations have levelled against the Syrian government vis-a-vis the Jews.

"We are prisoners in Damascus," he said slowly with a shocking kind of finality, "since we cannot leave the city without permission."

Neither, he noted, is a Jew permitted to travel to a neighboring Arab country. "They claim it is for our protection but who believes them?" he said

scornfully. The doctor said he knew for a fact that Jews are not allowed to work in banks and government offices.

And the merchant, leaning forward on his wicker chair, said he must work through a Muslim when he imports or exports goods and materials.

With a touch of sadness, he said his membership in the silversmiths guild had been revoked many years ago. "They said it was just a formality, but who knows..."

The doctor said Jews are forbidden to sell their properties, and when there is no heir it falls automatically into the hands of the government. Public meetings cannot be held in synagogues (there are said to be about a dozen in Damascus) for fear of arousing the government's suspicion, and the directors of the two Jewish schools — Alliance and the Ben Maimon Centre — are government appointees and subject to close scrutiny.

Lighting a pipe, the doctor continued by informing

me that prominent members of the community are usually interrogated when a Jew tries to leave the country illegally. He said quite an uproar ensued after Simon Khabas, a 17-year-old Syrian Jew, went to Israel.

Denying some of the charges that foreign groups have levelled against the government, the doctor said Jews may own cars and have telephones. He also emphasized that curfews or nightly roll calls were not imposed.

Most important of all, he said, Jews are not harassed, provided they keep a low profile and eschew from engaging in "subversive" activities. He said the Jews who wanted to leave Syria were largely hopeful of reaching Europe and North America, and not necessarily Israel.

In keeping with their desire not to talk about "subversive" subjects, neither the doctor nor the merchant discussed Israel.

I asked them if they wanted to leave Syria. The

merchant shrugged his shoulder bemusedly and the doctor remained silent. Both changed the subject when I said I would like to meet their families.

As I bade them farewell, it was more than apparent that while they — and probably Syrian Jewry as a whole — do not fear actual physical violence or pogroms, they know in their heart of hearts that they have been deprived of many of their basic liberties — liberties taken for granted in a free, democratic society.



THE CANADIAN JEWISH NEWS, Friday, October 10, 1975

# Jews speak to reporter under watchful eye of official

By SHELDON KIRSHNER  
CJN Staff Reporter

DAMASCUS, Syria — To hear Eli Jajati, his brother Joseph and Simon Salaami tell it, the plight of Syrian Jewry is nothing more than a political smokescreen — a Zionist-inspired, anti-Syrian ploy designed to confuse the world.

Natives of Damascus, all three Jewish men are prosperous shopkeepers whose stores are festooned with black-and-white posters of President Hafez el-Assad. Married with children, they live in the crowded Jewish quarter of the city.

I met them through an official of the Ministry of Information, who seemed to know where all the Jewish-owned stores in Damascus were located.

I conversed with all three through interpreters because my Arabic was non-existent and my French mediocre. The man from the Ministry of Information

translated the remarks of Eli Jajati and Simon Salaami, while an English-speaking merchant translated the comments of Joseph Jajati.

The Jajati brothers and Salaami showed no reluctance in speaking to me, perhaps because they realized the truth could never emerge under the controlled circumstances. All three were fairly relaxed and in fine spirits. They appeared to be in good health and hardly conscious of the fact that they and their brethren — some 4,000 Jews scattered throughout Syria in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli — are the focus of countless demonstrations, fury speeches and voluminous articles in the non-Arab world.

Needless to say, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of their observations. For one thing, I have no idea whether the translations were correct. For another, it is obvious that Salaami and the Jajatis were under incredible pressure to whitewash the plight of Syrian Jewry. Who could have

expected them to state the truth under the watchful gaze of a government official or in the presence of a non-Jewish Syrian? It was highly unlikely that they would have described the various restrictions and disabilities which they are forced to live with day after day.

Eli Jajati, 34, the father of four children, manages a cramped apparel shop on July 29 Street, in the heart of downtown Damascus. He has an expressive face, with large wary eyes, a bulbous nose and dark blond hair.

"We are like any Syrians," he said, "but there are some travel restrictions." For example, he explained, a Jew may not leave the city without government permission.

Jajati considers himself "a son of Syria," and claims his only connection to Israeli Jewry is religion. Indeed, he is a religious person. Like most of the Jews here, he prays at the synagogue every Saturday and on the high holidays and is

scrupulous about fastening tefillin on his arm every morning.

When I told him that the majority of Canadian Jews are not pious in their beliefs, he remarked knowingly: "So we are better Jews than the Canadians!"

Jajati disclosed that his children attend the Ben Maimon Centre, one of two Jewish schools in Damascus. Both schools have enrolments of some 500 pupils, some of them Palestinians and Syrians.

Asked to explain why Jews choose to stay in the Jewish quarter, he replied: "We cannot live except together because we're a minority and because we feel at ease together."

Recalling the tense days of the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, he conceded that "some people tried to harm us, but the government protected us."

Simon Salaami's "Chabac" store is found on Salhiyah Street, a pretty and quaint tree-lined thoroughfare bursting with shops and tiny kiosks selling every-

thing from fashionable clothes to fresh orange and grapefruit juice.

The father of six, the 34-year-old Salaami is dark and handsome, though somewhat chunky, and could easily pass as a typical Syrian. He and a Moslem partner own the shop.

He had no qualms about confirming the fact that Jews generally cannot travel abroad or to the Arab countries. "This is a government concern. Sometimes one restriction can create a big fuss. Some suffer or are bothered by this. It complicates their lives," he explained.

Would he object if his son was conscripted into the Syrian army? "Why not? We have been here for hundreds of years." Why, then, did the authorities bar Jews from serving? The translator said that the restriction was linked to what he called "the necessities of security about which he — Salaami — knows nothing."

Cont'd on Page 14

(See Middle East Diary on Page 4)



Page 14 - The Canadian Jewish News, Friday, October 10, 1975

# Reporter talks to Syrians

Cont'd from Page 1

What was his opinion of Israel? Salaami smiled, throwing up his hands in distress and puzzlement. "He doesn't know how to answer this question," the translator said. Stated Salaami: "I'm not involved in these things."

Like Jajati, Salaami attends synagogue regularly and sends his children—all six of them—to the Ben Maimon Centre. They are enrolled at the age of seven and register at a government school when they are 15 or 16, he said.

Joseph Jajati's spacious and elegant men's and ladies' wear shop on Port Said Street is a testament to his prosperity. He is in partnership with Jacob Kattach, who is also a Jew. (According to some observers, Jajati is the government's unofficial spokesman of the Jewish community.)

In his opinion, Israeli propaganda is responsible for the horror stories about Syrian Jewry. "Israel

needs immigrants and she always seeks ways to encourage Jews to leave and thereby destroy Syria's reputation," he said.

Jajati, who says he normally travels to Europe several times a year to choose the latest fashions for his shop, told me a story about a Syrian Jew he met in Rome. It seems that this man had emigrated from Israel because he was so fed up with life there. "He was discriminated against because he was an Oriental Jew and he could never find a decent job," he declared. "He wanted very badly to return to Syria."

Initially, Jajati was evasive about discussing Israel. But then he remarked: "If my brother is aggressive, I don't consider him my brother. And I don't believe in pushing people out of their homeland."

Asked what he thought of Yasser Arafat's secular state plan, Jajati commented: "I'm not interested in politics, but once I

heard Arafat say that Oriental Jews and Arabs are equal... Arabs have been hospitable to us, and the Armenians, who were persecuted by the Turks."

As I was about to leave, Jajati introduced me to his 14-year-old son, saying he was proud that he had learned some Hebrew. After prodding from his father, the boy approached and grinned. "Shalom," he said brightly, scampering away shyly.

Not having had the chance to meet Chief Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra or Jewish community leader, Salim Totah, I asked Jajati to arrange an interview with both men the following day at his shop. He readily agreed.

When I appeared at the appointed hour, neither Totah, Jajati or the rabbi were there. I waited for a half-hour and, much to my surprise Jajati strode into the shop. He apologized profusely, but stressed without elaborating that Rabbi Hamra and Totah were unavailable for interviews.

I was disappointed and surprised. Disappointed because I had really hoped to meet with these representatives of the Jewish community, and surprised

because I had been given the impression that the Syrian government would not object to a foreign journalist interviewing Jews who had nothing harmful to say about the state.

I looked at Jajati and said I understood. There was no point raising a fuss here in Damascus. Jajati was in an awkward and embarrassing position. Elaboration was not necessary.

Jajati's silence, and his inability to set up an interview for me, was a stunning commentary in itself on the state of Syrian Jewry in 1975.



# An encounter at Martyr's Square turns into a chilling experience for reporter

By SHELDON KIRSHNER  
CJN Staff Reporter

## DAMASCUS, Syria —

Martyr's Square was a 10 minute's walk from my hotel. It is the place where Eli Cohen, the noted Israeli spy, was hanged some nine years ago.

Cohen was an Egyptian Jew who was recruited by the secret service a few years after his arrival in Israel. The Israelis devised such an ingenious cover for their man in Damascus that Cohen succeeded in his variegated tasks beyond their wildest expectations.

Passing himself off as a patriotic Syrian emigre merchant from Argentina, Cohen infiltrated into the highest reaches of Syrian society. He became the confidant of high army officers and of numerous senior government officials. And he knew the president on a first-name basis. As a trusted and reliable citizen, Cohen was taken to the military installations on the Golan Heights and shown the intricate network of fortifications whose guns regularly shelled the Hula Valley.

And like the brilliant spy he was, Cohen transmitted his easily-acquired knowledge to the Israelis — information which proved to be of invaluable assistance when the Israeli army overran the awesome Golan Heights in the Six Day War.

Eli Cohen was caught red-handed in his luxurious apartment almost three years to the day after entering Syria under the assumed name of Kamal Amin Taabes. Despite signed petitions and public appeals from Pope Paul VI, John Diefenbaker, Queen Elizabeth of Belgium and Cardinal Felcius of Buenos Aires, the angered and embarrassed Syrians tried him without the benefit of lawyers, and hanged him in Martyr's Square some months later.



This is Martyr's Square in the heart of Damascus, scene of Eli Cohen's hanging nine years ago. A master Israeli spy, Cohen succeeded in infiltrating into the highest reaches of Syrian society before he was caught. Staff reporter Sheldon Kirshner, on assignment in Syria, visited Martyr's Square, where he had a chilling encounter with a Syrian.

His body, swathed in a white robe, was left to dangle for a quarter of an hour. "Death to the Zionist spy!" shrieked the large crowd that had assembled to witness the gory spectacle in the early morning hours of May 19, 1965.

Israel requested the corpse, but the Syrians absolutely refused. Eli Cohen was buried somewhere in Damascus.

I walked to Martyr's Square with Ahmed, a solemn Syrian university student. I guess I was rather mesmerized by the sight of the black column in the centre of the square — the column where the scaffold to snuff out Eli Cohen's life had been built.

"I see a gleam in your eye," Ahmed said accusingly. "What are you

thinking of?"

In reality, I was straining to visualize the scene that morning nine years ago when a vengeful mob screamed for Cohen's blood. I told Ahmed I had achieved something of a journalistic ambition by having visited the spot of Cohen's demise.

He smirked in disbelief, launching a bitter harangue against Cohen and Zionists.

"What do you think of Cohen?" he sneered.

I had to do some fast thinking. "To the Israelis, he was a national hero; to the Syrians he was a spy," I said cautiously.

But Ahmed seemed dissatisfied with my answer. "As a Jew, what is your

opinion of him?"

I was hard pressed to reply. A truthful answer here in Damascus may have gotten me into a very sticky situation.

"It's difficult to say..." I temporized. I suppose I must have revealed my true colors then and there. Ahmed already had a triumphant expression in his eyes. "You see," he said, "there are Zionists everywhere, in every nook and cranny."

I excused myself, being emotionally drained by the unsettling experience. Mental images of Eli Cohen flashed through my mind. I hurried back to my hotel room, a little frightened and worried.

Much to my relief, there was not a midnight knock on the door.



Eli Cohen is a national hero to Israelis.

Next week: Syrian Jewry and Middle East Diary.



# Encounter: A Synagogue in Damascus

By EDWARD I. KOCH

IT is very dark in Damascus at 5 A.M.—dark and deserted. I was waiting in the lobby of our hotel last August along with another Congressman, Joseph Early, of Massachusetts. He had volunteered to join me on a visit to a synagogue—and I had accepted. Even though we would be escorted by a guide sent by the Syrian Foreign Ministry, even though I was sure there was no danger, one's irrational fears can reign at that hour, particularly when alone in an unfriendly country.

*This is one of a series of occasional articles describing uncommon moments in travel—those encounters with the unexpected that are, for better or worse, the most memorable adventure of any journey.*

So we were waiting, and at one point I turned to Joe. "Tomorrow," I said, "the headline in the papers will read, 'Two Members of Congress Found Dead in Jewish Quarter of Damascus with Passports Stuffed in Mouths.'" Joe, a Roman Catholic, shook his head with a grin. "No," he replied, "the headline will read, 'One Member of Congress Found Dead; the Other Returned Safely to His Hotel.'"

We were members of a three-man

EDWARD I. KOCH is the Congressman from New York's 18th District.

delegation from the House Appropriation Foreign Operations Subcommittee, on a 10-day fact-finding visit to Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Portugal. The subcommittee would soon be passing on the military and economic aid requests of these countries, and we wanted to talk directly with their officials. One matter I was concerned about was the treatment given the Jews of Syria.

The Foreign Ministry car arrived, and we took off into a confusing maze of alleys in the Old City, site of the Jewish quarter. The maze seemed too much for our guide, too, who finally announced: "We're lost. We don't know where the synagogue is." Just at that point we entered an alley too narrow for the car. There was no alternative but to get out and walk.

The four of us—the Syrian guide, the Syrian driver, Joe Early and I—set out, though we really didn't know where we were going. Reaching an open square, we saw a man in his fifties wearing a yarmulke and ran up to him, frightening this early morning worshiper. We explained who we were and what we were looking for. He led us to a small synagogue made of cinder block. When we entered, there were 12 men and adolescents praying.

They were startled to see us. I asked the Foreign Ministry representative to tell them that Joe and I were American Congressmen—I a Jew there to pray, he a Roman Catholic and a friend.

There was no special response, except to hand me a prayer book.

The congregants sat crosslegged on platforms covered with Oriental rugs and pillows. One member of the congregation brought me tefillin—the leather cubes and straps I had not used since my bar mitzvah some 37 years ago. I had forgotten how to place them on my arms and head, so I declined. But I pointed to a tallith—a prayer shawl—and they brought one to me.

At that point, I was startled by a voice next to me asking, in English, "What do you think?"

I hesitated to answer, for I had decided not to ask the synagogue's worshipers any questions because of the presence of the Syrians who had come with me and the possibility that anyone I talked with might later be subject to interrogation and possible punishment.

Finally I said, "Is it all right to talk?"

He said it was.

Then something made me ask, "Are you Jewish?"

He responded, "No, I am your driver and I am a refugee from Jerusalem." Since 1967, many Palestinians have settled in the Jewish quarter of Damascus.

Because of the darkness, I had not seen the man's face; he was wearing a yarmulke. I did not pursue the conversation.

The services ended, and our Syrian

guide said that this was a family synagogue and that he could now take us to a larger, public one. We were led there by one of the adolescents who had worshiped with us, a 14-year-old boy.

When we arrived, there was only one person inside, and he told us that services would not begin for another 20 minutes. Just then, in walked three grim-faced men in their thirties fingering prayer beads. I could feel their

Continued on Page 20



ORK TIMES, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1973

TRAVEL

## Encounter: Damascus

Continued From Page 1

hostility and knew immediately they were not Jewish.

Joe and I looked at each other, thinking, "Now what?"

The three Syrian Arabs spoke to our guide, who in turn said, "They want to know why you are here."

I asked who they were and was told that they were Palestinian refugees who lived in the quarter. The leader was the teacher in the quarter.

I said, "Tell them we are two American Congressmen, and we are here to see what we can see."

We stood there in an uncomfortable silence for five minutes, and then our guide said, "There is a third synagogue

thing I had never done before in my life.

When we reached the third synagogue, the service was already under way with about 35 congregants. At its conclusion, they gathered about Joe and me and I explained through the interpreter who we were. It was clear that they wanted to talk. I wanted to talk. But we were all inhibited, not only by my Syrian guide, but by the three Palestinians. So the discussion was limited to such questions as whether a cure for cancer had been found in the United States.

While we talked, some members of the congregation were brewing tea, and they asked us to share it with them. It was the most delicious tea I have ever tasted: aromatic, garnished with shredded coconut, with almonds floating on top. Yet as I think back, it was probably not so much the flavor of the tea that made it so marvelous; it was the moment. We could feel a bond with these people, feel their warmth. They knew now that there were people outside Syria worrying about them. They were not forgotten.

On the way back to the car, the leader of the three Palestinians indicated he wanted to ask a question. I urged him to do so, and he asked what the Jewish community in the United States thought of Israel. After I told him that American Jews were very supportive, he pointed to a small Arab boy nearby and said, "He is one of my students. He is a Palestine refugee."

I asked, "Do you teach only Arab children?"

He replied, "No, all children." Then he pointed to the Jewish boy who had accompanied us from the first synagogue: "He is one of my students, too."

As I got into the car and was about to leave the teacher, I said, "Take care of all the children."

"Do you teach only Arab children?" "No, all children," the Palestinian said. He pointed to a Jewish boy. "He is one of my students, too."

where they are now praying. Would you like to go there?"

I said yes, although I had qualms about intruding on a worshipping congregation now that our entourage included three Palestinians. Their presence was rather heavy and intimidating, but there was not much I could do about them.

Upon leaving the second synagogue I was struck by the urge to make a statement to our newly acquired escorts. As we crossed the threshold, I saw the mezuzah on the doorpost. I went up to it and kissed it, not with my hand, but with my lips—some-



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