

# Arab Treatment of Jewish Minorities

*Condensed from NEAR EAST REPORT*

Myth: "Arabs claim that they are only anti-Israel, not anti-Jewish."

Fact: It is true that Jews were sometimes treated better in some Arab countries than in Christian lands in Europe.

But medieval history tells us that Jews were no strangers to persecution by the Arabs.

Mohammed was intolerant of nonbelievers and expelled or exterminated those who refused to be converted.

Many Jews died at the hands of Moslems and many others were forced to pay exorbitant taxes or live in mellahs, Arab ghettos for Jews.

And it was the Caliph Haroun al Rashid who invented the yellow badge of shame which Jews were ordered to wear in 807 CE.

While the situation of Jews in Arab states has not been as catastrophic as that which shattered European Jewish communities, Jewish populations were harassed by Islamic restrictions which flared into violence. Riots which slew dozens occurred in Damascus in 1840 and 1948, in Iraq in 1941, in Libya in 1945, in Egypt in 1946 and 1948, and in Yemen in 1947 and 1948. Although Israel maintains a free emigration policy, very few, if any, Arab Jews have returned to their "native lands."

## *Libya*

1948 Jewish population: 40,000;  
1975: 40.

A savage pogrom on Nov. 5, 1945, killed 130. Jews were burned in their shops, hurled from rooftops

or balconies or beaten to death. Almost all Jewish synagogues were sacked. (Britain and Israel, September 1972.) In June 1948, Libyan rioters murdered another 14 Jews.

After the Six-Day War, the population of 4,500 was again subject to brutal pogroms in which 18 Jews were killed, sparking a near total exodus from the country.

In February 1970, the new government headed by Muammer Qaddafi confiscated all Jewish property and canceled all debts owed to Jews since June 5, 1967 (Libyan Law Number 14, Feb. 7, 1970); and Jewish claims for compensation totaling millions of dollars were cancelled (Libyan Law Number 57, May 9, 1970); homeless Jews were herded into special camps (Britain and Israel, September 1972). Libya's thousand-year-old Jewish community is all but obliterated.

### *Egypt*

1948 Jewish population: 75,000;  
1975: 1,000.

The government forced all its 2,500 Jews to register. When war broke out in 1967, homes and property were confiscated.

More than 600 heads of families were put in the Abouzabel prison near Cairo, while 200 were taken to the Al Barraga jail near Alexandria. The Grand Rabbi of Alexandria, Jacques Nefussi, and the Chief Rabbi of Cairo, Chaim Douek, were arrested. A few elderly

prisoners were released, but the rest were harshly treated. Some were tortured, most were beaten or crammed into stifling, crowded cells.

About 225 Jews of Italian and Greek nationality were allowed to leave but to take no more than 50 Egyptian pounds with them.

The intercession of Spain, France and Italy was responsible for the release of 110 Jews from Egyptian jails. These governments also secured exit permits for hundreds of Jews by furnishing travel documents. Spanish officials liberally interpret Spanish law, which allows a Jew whose ancestor was expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century to claim Spanish nationality and protection.

In 1971, the Association of Jewish Victims of Egyptian Persecutions claimed over one billion dollars for properties seized by Egyptian regimes. (Britain and Israel, September 1972.)

### *Iraq*

1948 Jewish population: 125,000;  
1975: 6007.

No Jewish community since Hitler has suffered the persecution of the 2,700-year-old Jewish community of Iraq.

The 1941 Mufti-inspired pro-Nazi coup of Rashid Ali sparked rioting and pogroms in which dozens died. Most Jews left for Israel after the vicious 1947 riots on Operation Ali Baba, in 1951.

In 1952, the Hashemite government ended the emigration rights of the Jews of Iraq and publicly hanged two Jews after falsely charging them with hurling bombs at the Baghdad USIA office. (Britain and Israel, September 1972.)

With the ascension of competing Ba'ath factions in 1963, the Jews entered a purgatory:

Synagogues and schools were sequestered, the sale of property was forbidden, freedom of movement was curbed, and all Jews were forced to carry yellow identity cards, even though their freedom of movement was severely limited. (Cojo Report, July 1971.)

After the Six-Day War there were more virulent measures:

Jewish property was expropriated, Jewish bank accounts were frozen; Jews were dismissed from public posts; businesses were shut; trading permits were canceled; telephones were disconnected. Jews were placed under house arrest for long periods or restricted in their movements to the cities or even quarters in which they lived. Departure was totally prohibited.

All these restrictions were contained in Iraq Law Number 10 of 1968 and Iraq Law Number 64 of 1967.

Formally, these laws were "rescinded" in June 1969; yet they are still in operation.

Prosecution was at its worst at the end of 1968. Scores were jailed on the "discovery" of a local "spy

ring." Nineteen were sentenced to death in staged trials and barbarously hanged in the public squares of Baghdad; others died of torture.

Baghdad Radio, Jan. 27, 1969, called upon Iraqis to "come and enjoy the feast." Some 500,000 men, women and children paraded and danced past the scaffolds where the grotesque bodies of the hanged Jews swung; the mob rhythmically chanted "Death to Israel" and "Death to all Traitors."

The barbaric display brought a world-wide public outcry which President Bakr dismissed as "the barking of dogs."

Another 18 Jews were hanged in secret between 1970 and 1972. Jews had to house Palestinians and raise money for Fatah and other guerrilla groups. (Cojo Report.)

The Ba'ath party apparatus grew in 1972 and Jews began disappearing, their possessions seized by rapacious officials who posted signs on their houses that the "Jewish occupants had fled the country."

Nazeim Kazzar, head of the secret police, ordered the murder of five members of the Reuven Kashkush family on Apr. 12, 1973, in retaliation for the Israeli assassination of Palestinian terrorist leaders in Beirut the day before. Kazzar's guilt was confirmed in late July 1972 by Bakr, who had executed Kazzar one month before for an unsuccessful coup. Bakr denounced Kazzar as a "psychopath . . . who murdered more than 2,000

people." (Beirut Daily Star, July 28, 1973.)

To date more than two dozen Iraqi Jews are still missing. Most of Iraq's remaining 600 Jews are either too old or too wealthy to leave; they are being pressured by the government to turn over title (without compensation) to over \$200 million of Jewish community property, apartments, schools, hospitals and fields. (New York Times, Feb. 18, 1973.)

### Syria

1948 Jewish population: 45,000;  
1975: 4,500.

Damascus was the site of the 1840 blood libel and pogrom which killed many Jews.

Even before the 1967 war, the 4,000 Jews in Syria were terrorized by night arrests, interrogation, imprisonment and torture. Jews were not permitted to leave the Damascus ghetto, where they came under attack. After the war their situation deteriorated.

An airport road was paved over the Jewish cemetery in Damascus; school examinations are scheduled on Saturdays to prevent Jewish participation; Jews who submit complaints against Moslems never win; Jews are singled out as (Musawi) on identity cards; Palestinian refugees are housed in the Jewish quarter to prey on residents.

Jews are not permitted to leave the country, to go more than four kilometers from their place of

business, to sell immovable property, to work for government and banks, to have telephones and driving licenses, to bequeath property to heirs. The state has confiscated the property of those who have escaped. Most Jews who have been working for Arab merchants were dismissed.

For two months a curfew was imposed on Jews in Kamishli; houses were marked in red and there were daily roll calls. A curfew is in effect in Aleppo.

A French Commission of Inquiry conducted in Paris in October 1971 heard the following testimony from an escaped Syrian Jew who was held for four days when, in accordance with regulations, he informed Syrian authorities of his brother's escape:

"(Four men) were imprisoned for four days. By the end of the four days (one of the men) had lost twenty kilos. The father was stripped and forced to assault his son."

A young woman testified:

"Of the three persons who fled and were caught, one came out deaf, another reduced to idiocy . . . They tried again to escape and this time succeeded, but their families were arrested, the sister of one of them was tortured . . . The other person was tortured with red-hot skewers, the traces were all over his back. They were thrown half dead into the street. Three Jewish doctors who happened to be present did not

dare approach since the security men were watching."

### *Lebanon*

1958 Jewish population: 20,000;  
1975: 2,000.

Despite occasional outbursts by the Palestinians in Lebanon, Lebanon's remaining Jews (who have always been free to emigrate) live quietly around Beirut and other major cities. (Since this was written most of the Jews have fled because of the Christian-Moslem civil war. —Ed.)

### *Yemen*

1948 Jewish population: 54,000;  
1975: 0.

All the Jews of Yemen's ancient Jewish community have emigrated, nearly all of them to Israel. Early in 1948, there was looting after six Jews were accused of the ritual murder of two Arab girls. The Imams of Yemen always treated their Jewish subjects as infidels: Jews could not ride horseback, carry arms, own property or build houses taller than those of Moslem landlords.

### *South Yemen*

1948 Jewish population: 7,000;  
1975: 0.

The ancient Jewish tribes of the Hadramaut are now in Israel. Mob violence during the Six-Day War killed several Jews; in Aden the British evacuated all the remaining 350 Jews on June 18, 1967.

### *Tunisia*

1948 Jewish population: 23,000;  
1975: 9,000.

Jews were attacked by rioting Arab mobs. Synagogues and shops were burned. The government denounced the outbreaks and President Habib Bourguiba apologized to the Chief Rabbi, promising compensation.

The government appealed to the 20,000 Tunisian Jews to remain but has not prevented anyone from leaving. Hundreds emigrated to France.

The military court sentenced two youths to 15 years for burning the Great Synagogue. Others were convicted of attacking the American and British embassies and looting Jewish property.

### *Morocco*

1948 Jewish population: 300,000;  
1975: 35,000.

There have been riots directed against Jews and one economic boycott initiated in 1967 by the Istiqlal Party. King Hassan has tried to protect the Jews but the Jewish middle-class has virtually disappeared. Younger Jews are eager to leave.

### *Algeria*

1948 Jewish population: 150,000;  
1975: 1,000.

The majority of the 150,000 Jews in Algeria left with the French in 1963. There have been no reports of

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persecution of those who remained.

A French organization tracing 6,000 Europeans, including 600 Algerian Jews who disappeared between 1953 and 1963, reported that the 600 Jews were living in inhuman conditions in mobile forced labor camps.

### Arab Treatment of Other Minorities

The Jews are not unique. Every minority has suffered discrimination and worse under Arab rule.

#### *Christians*

Christians have been emigrating from Arab countries. The four million Copts of Egypt are subject to repression.

In December 1972, Moslem fanatics burned churches, houses and shops owned by Copts in Alexandria, El Mansura, Dimanhour and El Hanka; Copts were attacked and beaten. (Moshe Ron in *Detroit Jewish News* Jan. 12, 1973.)

An Egyptian government investigating commission found 12 other incidents of arson, looting and robbery of Copts. (*London Times*, Jan. 9, 1973.)

Soon after Qaddafi's Revolutionary Command Council took control of Libya in September 1969, more than 4,000 Italians were ousted and forced to abandon property, money and belongings, according to a letter addressed by refugees to Premier Mariano Rumor.

The letter predicted that many

more of the 35,000 remaining Italian residents—the biggest non-Arab minority in Libya—would flee during the year, leaving an estimated \$300 million worth of property. Some 25,000 were later expelled.

The Libyan government proclaimed its "aim to avenge the past . . . The feeling of holy revenge runs in our veins."

The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Tripoli was converted into the Gamal Abdel Nasser Mosque on Nov. 26, 1970. (*Washington Post*, Nov. 27.)

#### *Kurds*

Kurdish minorities in Syria and Iraq have been victimized by exclusivist Arab nationalistic policies which cannot tolerate the fact that the Kurds think of themselves as Kurds first and Moslems second.

The Kurds have lived in what is now Syria for centuries; they number about 500,000, or 10 percent of the Syrian population.

When Syria split with Egypt in 1961, the new Syrian regime began a drive to destroy the Kurds as an ethnic group. It embarked upon a campaign of discrimination and repression.

In August 1962, Syria instituted the "Arab-Belt" plan, by which the Kurds were forcibly evacuated from the arable Jezrieh region and forced to emigrate to other countries or settle in desert areas. Half of Jezrieh's 300,000 Kurds were stripped of their citizenship.

The Arab-Belt plan, according to the Arab press, was formulated to "save Arabism in Jezrieh," although Arabs represented less than 20 percent of the Jezrieh population. It was later extended to the two other main Kurdish areas in northern Syria.

But whether they come from the "Belt" areas or not, all the Kurds in Syria suffer: They have no Kurdish schools or newspapers; their political party is considered illegal; they are permitted no expressions of Kurdish culture and all Kurdish books are forbidden; and they are denied military and civil service positions unless they declare that they are "Arabs."

Iraq began genocidal war against the Kurds, who constituted about 25 percent of the population of eight million, in 1961. This continued to be Iraq's reply to the Kurdish demand for equal treatment and autonomy.

According to a New York Times article on Mar. 15, 1965, the Iraqis have used bombs, rocket-type artillery and napalm against Kurdish positions and villages.

Yet with all this Iraq asked Kur-

dish Gen. Mustafa Barzani to commit his forces in the war against Israel in 1967. Barzani repeated his reply in an interview with Eric Rouleau of Le Monde News Service in January 1969:

"Three days before the outbreak of the war between Israel and the Arabs, the Baghdad government sent emissaries to me requesting that I place Kurdish army units at their disposal for the war against Israel. I replied, 'For six years you have been fighting us, trying to wipe out the Kurdish people, so how can you come now to ask for my help?'"

Despite a peace treaty between Barzani and the Ba'ath government in Baghdad guaranteeing Kurdish autonomy, Iraqi troops, fearing for the safety of the Kirkuk oil fields, attacked Kurdish villages in the summer of 1973. The Teheran Journal (June 27, 1973) reported that 10 Kurds were killed and 22 wounded by Iraqi government aircraft and artillery. (London Times, June 28, 1973). The promise of full autonomy by 1974 seems remote. 200 Kurds are still in Iraqi jails. (Beirut Daily Star, Apr. 8, 1973).

## How True . . .

Richard Yaffe, UN correspondent of *The Jewish Week*, reports that he saw a fellow correspondent, not hitherto known for having a Jewish spark, sporting an "I am a Zionist" button. Asked why he was wearing the button, he replied: "First, Hitler made me a Jew; and now these damned Arabs have made me a Zionist!"