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HAMADĀN VIII. JEWISH COMMUNITY

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The earliest reference to the Jews in Hamadān is in The Old Testament, according to which a group of Israelites were brought to the Persian plateau by King Shalmaneser of Assyria in around 722 B.C.E. (2 Kings 18.11) and "settled there in the cities of the Medes." Based on Hamadān's size and importance as the royal city or the capital of the Medes (Dandamaev and Lukonin, p. 48), it is reasonable to assume that many of these Jews settled there, making Hamadān's Jewish community the oldest outside Israel. According to Habib Levy "the Jews of Hamadān believe they are of the tribe of Simeon [one of the twelve Tribes of Israel], most of them having chosen the name 'Simeon' for their male children in generations past" (Levy, p. 28).

The only specific documentation we have regarding any individual Jew in Hamadān during the earlier parts of Persian history pertains to individual historical figures. The oldest of these is the Jewish Sasanian queen Šušandoḵt (daughter of the *reš galutha* or exilarch (q.v.) of Persia, wife of the Sasanian king Yazdegerd I (r. 399-420), and mother of Bahrām Gōr (q.v.), to whom an ancient Pahlavi source ascribes the founding of Hamadān (*The JewishEncyclopedia* VII, p. 1219). Next is Yudḡān, or Yehuda Hamadāni, who

flourished in the middle of the 8th century during the rise to power of the ʿAbbasid caliphate. He claimed to be a prophet and led a Jewish sect known as the Yudḡdāniya, a messianic sectarian movement originated by Abu ʿIsā Eṣfahāni (q.v.). His followers believed him to be the Messiah (*The JewishEncyclopedia* XVI, p. 867).

The relative religious freedom that existed in Persia at Yudḡān's time had widespread effects on the Jewish communities throughout the land, but in Hamadān in particular. It was during this same period that religious authorities (*rabbanim*) of the two Talmudic schools in Iraq were able to increase their influence over the Jewish communities of Persia, opening yeshivas, or Jewish religious schools, in Hamadān, and dispatching eminent instructors there to educate people and answer their religious questions (Levy, p. 186). As a result, Hamadān became an important center for Jewish culture and religious education in Persia until the late 18th century.

Another significant historical figure is Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh Hamadāni (648–718/1250–1318), the statesman, physician, and author of the celebrated history of the Mongols, *Jāmeʿ al-tawāriḵ*. Rašid-al-Din was born in Hamadān into a Jewish family with a tradition in the medical profession. His father, ʿEmād-al-Dawla Abu'l-Ḵayr, was a pharmacist. Rašid-al-Din is said to have converted to Islam at the age of thirty. Some scholars have questioned, however, his Jewish origin (Netzer, pp. 118-25). Rašid-al-Din entered the services of the Il- Khan Abaqa (q.v.) as a physician, and in 1298 he was appointed the associate vizier by Ḡāzān Khan and remained in office under Ḡāzān's successors Moḥammad Ḵodā-banda Öljeitü and Abu Saʿid Bahādor Khan. Subsequent to Öljeitü's death, Rašid-al-Din finally succumbed to the tireless intrigues of his rivals and, after a temporary disgrace and retirement, was tried for having allegedly poisoned Öljeitü, and was put to death in Tabriz in July 1318, Jomāda I 718 (See ABU SAʿID BAHĀDOR KHAN).

SAFAVID PERIOD

Apart from the biographical facts we have about the individuals mentioned above, little is known about the lives of Jews in Hamadān until the middle of the 19th century. The only exception is a mention in the *Ketāb-e anusi* by Bābāʾi ben Loṭf (q.v.) of the persecution of Jews by the khan of Hamadān during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās II (1642–66; Levy pp. 326-28). While the harassing and forced conversion of Jews was a common affair from the beginning of the Safavid dynasty onward, under Shah ʿAbbās's grand vizier,

Moḥammad Beg, Persian Jews lived through an exceptionally difficult and extended period of persecution (Moreen, 2002, p. 65). According to Bābāʾi ben Loṭf's verse chronicles, they were forced by the khan to convert to Islam and close their synagogues. Shortly thereafter, the khan is reported to have extorted money from the new-converts to allow them to return to their Jewish faith and reopen the synagogues. Hearing of the events, Moḥammad Beg sent an angry letter to the khan, who consequently imprisoned all the Jews and demanded a large ransom for their release. The women were released to raise the funds, which took nearly two months. Upon the release of the rest of the community, they were all forced once again to convert to Islam (Moreen, 1987, pp. 101-2). While Bābāʾi does indeed dedicate a section of the *Ketāb-e anusi* to Hamadān, exact details about the town's community are scarce as the book concentrates predominantly on the communities of Kāšān and Isfahan. Moreover, poetic license and the need to abide by restrictions of meter and rhyme make the text a relatively unreliable source in terms of accuracy of data. Nevertheless, the events themselves are confirmed by other sources such as the *ʿAbbās-nāma* of Waḥid Qazvini and the history of the Iranian Armenians by the Armenian priest Ārākel of Tabriz (See BABAʾI BEN LOṬF, p. 298). From then on, we have little documentation about the lives of Jews in Hamadān up until the middle of the 19th century.

NINETEENTH CENTURY

Population. Louis Dubeux (p. 26) writes that there were approximately 600 Jewish households in Hamadān in 1818. About thirty years later Benjamin II (p. 204) estimates that the Jewish community in Hamadān at the time of his visit (ca. 1850) consisted of about 500 families. They had three synagogues and three *mollā*s (rabbis).

Jacob Eduard Polak, the Jewish Austrian physician who served in Persia in the years 1855-61, wrote of the Jews of Hamadān: "The Jews earn their living by all kinds of gold- and silver-work, in which they are as clever as the Caucasians; by glass-cutting, silk-weaving, dealing in old clothes and skins. Many of them are masons, blacksmiths, tailors, and shoemakers; some practice medicine . . . . They live under great difficulties, because they are considered as outcasts; they are constantly exposed to the caprices of the governor, who uses every pretext to plunder them" (Polak, p. 440 as quoted in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* VI, p. 188). Hayyim Cohen, on the other hand, states that the economic conditions of Jews in Hamadān was "generally good" in the 19th century. "As far back as the early 1870s, they were permitted to maintain shops in the

market, in contrast to the restriction in the other Iranian cities. Hamadān in the nineteenth century was a commercial center through which merchandise sent from Iraq to Tehran passed, and Jews from Iraq as well came to settle there" (Cohen, p. 95). Cohen's account is corroborated by Charles Issawi, according to whom, at the end of the century, "Jews were prominent in the import of cotton textiles from Manchester through Baghdad" and close to 80 percent of the [Kermānšāh and Hamadān] trade was in the hands of Jewish traders (Issawi, p. 62). In his report dated 20 April, 1868, Thomson states that there were 2,000 Jews living in Hamadān, which, according to his figures, was the largest Jewish community in Persia at that time. He also writes that while the collective tax burden of Hama-dān's Jewish community to the crown was 600 tomans, "double the amount is extracted" from them (Issawi, p. 32). According to Ephraim Neumark, who traveled through Hamadān around 1885, there were about 800 Jewish families (approximately 5,000 individuals) living there at the time. He also mentions three synagogues in Hamadān, and names Ḥāji Meir Elʿazar and Ḥakim Abraham Shofet as two of the leaders in the Jewish community (Neumark, pp. 79-81). A. V. William Jackson, who was in Hamadān in 1903, estimated the number of Jews at 5,000 souls. He also referred to the Jewish quarter in the southern section of the city (Jackson, p. 148).

Persecution. In 1866 the Alliance Israélite Universelle received a telegraph from Baghdad with news that the leader of Hamadān's Jewish community was on the verge of being executed in Tehran. When the news reached London, Sir Moses Montefiore wanted to travel to Persia to intervene but was advised by the British foreign ministry that the journey could be dangerous for his health due to his advanced age (Levy, p. 454). According to Levy, in 1875 an anti-Semitic riot led to the brutal death of at least one of the town's Jewish citizens, named Yehuda Bābā Samāh. Accused of heresy, Bābā Samāh was dragged before the *mojtahed* Ḥāji Mirzā Hādi, who ordered his execution and incited the angry mob against the entire Jewish community. Yehuda Bābā Samah was stabbed to death in Mirzā Hādi's presence and his corpse was dragged to the Jewish cemetery, where it was burned by the mob. Riots ensued and the massacre of the Jews continued for several days (Levy, p. 461). Homā Nāṭeq records another incident that apparently took place during the very same period. On 17 August 1875, a jeweler by the name of Ḥayim Jawāherforuš went to claim money he was owed from one of the city's tradesmen. Looking for a way not to reimburse his debt, the unidentified tradesman rallied the mob against the Jewish jeweler, who fled to the home of one of the town's

*mojtahed*s for shelter. The latter tried to resolve the situation, but was unable to hold back the rioting mob. Ḥayim was dragged out of the *mojtahed*'s house, at which point the mob poured gunpowder in his mouth and set it ablaze. The jeweler's corpse was subsequently dragged through town and dumped in the city center. It is reported that the *mojtahed*'s house was also looted in retribution for his attempt to protect the Jew (Nāṭeq, pp. 98-99).

In 1892, social conditions once again became very difficult for the Jews of Hamadān. This time, the riots were incited by Hamadān's chief clergymen Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh. The event marked the beginning of what arguably constituted the darkest documented chapter in the life of Hamadān's Jewish community since the rise of the Qajar dynasty. When a concession for the production of tobacco in Persia was given to the British in September of 1892, the clergy led the opposition movement and organized strikes until they succeeded in abolishing the concession. Their success increased their influence on the masses, leading many clergymen throughout Persia to exploit their newly found power and impose their will in various ways. Earlier that year, Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh had forced a Jewish girl in Hamadān to convert to Islam and subsequently married her to a Muslim man (Levy, p. 443). As the general unrest increased over the tobacco concessions, Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh took advantage of the opportunity to further molest Hamadān's Jewish community. He summoned a delegation of the community's leaders and decreed to them a *fatwā* to the effect that the Jews were to start abiding by twenty-two restrictions, many of which dated back to the beginning of the Safavid dynasty (for a complete list of these restrictions, see Nāṭeq, pp. 102-3; Cohen, pp. 56-57). According to the *fatwā*, it was prohibited for any Muslim to sell foodstuff to Jews, and Jews were not allowed to leave their home on rainy days. In addition, Jews were forced to sow a red "Jewish" patch (*waṣla-ye judi*) on their clothes, and "were ordered not to wear socks and to wear torn clothing, outerwear of special color, or no *ʿabā*s (q.v.). Jewish men were also forced to shave the front of their hair" and the women had to wear a black veil (*ruband*) as opposed to the white one worn by Muslim women (Sahim, 2002, p. 189). "Only after several Jews succeeded in telegraphing the Shah about their situation, did an order reach the district governor to send Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh to Tehran. But this command was not obeyed and the mollā again summoned a Jewish delegation, making its members affix their signatures to the terms on which they would live in the city" (Cohen, p. 55). Subsequently, Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh rallied an anti-Semitic mob to storm the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur, Friday 30 September 1892, in retaliation for the action the Jewish

community had taken against him by complaining to the authorities (Levy, p. 443). While many of the members of the congregation were able to run away in time and find their way home, all of those trapped by the mob were forced to convert to Islam under the threat of death. This time the central government tried to intervene by sending security forces to Hamadān to pacify the city and deliver Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh to Tehran, but the *mollā*'s supporters rioted against them and successfully thwarted their efforts. The central government was consequently forced to relent, telling the Jews that they were obliged to accept the restrictions (Levy, p. 444). According to the *Bulletin of the Alliance Israélite Universelle* "many of the Jews had come under house arrest and life had become virtually intolerable. Nursing babies died of starvation in their mother's arms as their mother's milk had dried up" (*Bulletin of the Alliance Israélite Universelle* 18, 1892, p. 48). While the *fatwā* restricting the sale of foodstuffs was eventually rescinded through the intercession of the Ottoman consul, the rest of the restrictions remained in place (Levy, p. 444). They were so strictly enforced that on a number of occasions some of the town's Jewish citizens were subjected to severe corporal punishment for not abiding by them. On 9 January 1893, for instance, one of the leaders of the Jewish community by the name of Ebrāhim Yaʿqub was arrested on the street for failing to wear the Jewish patch and taken to the home of Sayyed ʿAbd-al-Majid, one of the town's clergymen, where he was beaten with a stick to near death (Nāṭeq, pp. 104-5). Though Mollā ʿAbd-Allāh was eventually brought to Tehran due to pressure from the British government, he was soon released and returned to Hamadān at the beginning of 1894. "The prime minister of Tehran explained this step to the British ambassador by stating that the mulla who succeeded Abdollah was worse than him. Despite the fact that the Mulla Abdollah had obtained his release by promising to prevent harm being done to the Jews, on his return to Hamadān he renewed the brutal treatment" (Cohen, p. 57). According to Levy (p. 444), the pressure on the Jews of Hamadān continued until the beginning of 1900. During this period, many converted to Islam, Christianity, and especially the Babi/Bahai religion (see below). Many others emigrated to Tehran (for a more detailed account of the Hamadān incident, see Sahim, 2003; see also *Anglo-Jewish Association Report*, 1892/93, pp. 19-24, 55-63; 1893/94, p. 18; 1894/95, pp. 13-14; 1895/96, pp. 23-24).

Conversion. Hamadān's Jewish community was also faced with the constant threat of voluntary conversion (see CONVERSION iv and v), especially during the second half of the 18th century. In this period, conversions in Hamadān

were common enough that on occasion one would even see Jews, Babi/Bahais, and Christians all belonging the same immediate family (Sarshar, p. 201). Conversion to Christianity was mainly due to the European and American missionary activities in Hamadān. Those who converted to Christianity were, for the most part, young men who received their education in the school of the American Mission. According to George Curzon, there were about a hundred Jews in that school in the early 1890s (Curzon, *Persian Question* I, p. 510). Besides, many Jewish physicians in Hamadān who received their medical training in the American Hospital would also convert to the Christian faith. According to Cohen, "not many Jews adopted Christianity and those who did so were enticed by the money which the missionaries distributed, or wished to escape from their life of humiliation, and hoped that the diplomatic representatives in Persia would protect them as Christians" (Cohen, p. 162). The greater majority of Jewish-born converts, however, converted to the Babi/Bahai faith. According to Susan Stiles Maneck, the first Jew to convert to the Bahai faith in Hamadān was a physician by the name of Ḥakim Āqā Jān who, in 1877, "was called upon to treat the malaria stricken wife of Muhammad Bāqer," a prominent Bahai in town (Maneck, p. 37). As she nearly died, Āqā Jān feared violent repercussions not only towards himself but the entire Jewish community. When Moḥammad-Bāqer assured Āqā Jān that he would not hold him responsible, Āqā Jān, judging by his reaction, assumed that Moḥammad-Bāqer could not be a Muslim and hence inquired about his religion. When Āqā Jān found out that Moḥammad-Bāqer was a Bahai, he became curious about the faith and eventually "embraced it along with some forty friends and family members, including his father, a leading rabbi of the town" (Maneck, p. 38; for more on the conversion of Jews to the Bahai faith, see Fischel). Reports suggest that by 1884, 150 of the 800 Jewish families in Hamadān had converted to Bahaism (Levy, p. 423).

While there was no doubt a range of reasons why the Jews of Hamadān were converting to Bahaism or Christianity at such a high rate during these years, one of the irrefutable causes was the atmosphere of extreme anti-Semitism, hostility, and oppression in which the Jews lived. The notion of ritual impurity(*nejāsat*) was one of the central issues generating this general atmosphere of intolerance and oppression. Though in essence aimed at all non-Shiʿites, for reasons still debated the notion of impurity was most vehemently associated with Jews. Perpetuating this discriminatory practice, religious authorities like Mollah ʿAbd-Allāh in 1892 issued random decrees prohibiting Jews from coming into contact with Muslims, touching food in

Muslim shops, or selling edibles to Muslims. These decrees further prohibited Jews from using Muslim public baths, drinking from public wells, or walking in the streets on rainy days lest they transmit their alleged impurity to Shiʿite citizens through water. Since restrictions based on impurity were not imposed on Christians and Bahais, many Jews proselytized in order to evade the humiliating discrimination, marginalization, confinement, and disenfranchisement that ensued from issues of impurity With this said, it is worth examining why the Bahai faith in particular was able to attract the Jews more than Christianity, especially given that the Bahais were also subject to persecution by the Muslim majority. One possible hypothesis for this dynamic could be the fact that Bahaism offered itself as a sort of ideological melting-pot indigenous to Persia. That is to say, since Bahaism had originated in Persia and furthermore defined itself as a non-exclusionary faith and the culmination of all other religions, it potentially provided all Persian citizens with an ideological meeting ground that maintained many of the essential characteristics of a cultural, social, and national identity (in all senses of the word) without the majority of the ethnic, tribal, or religious differentials. A Jewish convert could thus fit into this new religion by 'melting' into a more inclusive and comprehensive religious ideology without having to give up his/her identity as a Persian. Bahaism thus offered the hope of assimilation to a severely marginalized subculture, without threatening to strip the converts of their more primary socio-cultural identity and ideological heritage. Christianity and Zoroastrianism could not offer the same hope. As a Western ideology, the former threatened the convert's socio-cultural identity; as a non-Abrahamic faith, the latter was essentially incongruent with the Jews' religious heritage.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1900 the first Alliance Israélite Universelle school opened in Hamadān. This event marked the beginning of a gradual but momentous sequence of improvements in the lives and social conditions of the town's Jewish community. The school's first directors were Monsieur and Madame Bassan, who arrived in Hamadān in June 1900. In its first year, the school registered 215 girls and 346 boys ranging in age from seven to twenty-two (Cohen, p. 144). It was the first Alliance school in Persia to have a school for girls. All students had to wear a school uniform based on European clothing. What is more, in the year of its inauguration the Alliance school succeeded in abolishing once and for all the mandate for the Jewish patch in Hamadān and

substituting it with a metal pin bearing the school's emblem (Sahim, 2002, p. 189). While the boys followed a more classical French curriculum, the girls' education consisted predominantly of home economics. All girls graduated from the Alliance school by the age fourteen, which was the average marriage age in Persia at that time (Nāṭeq, pp. 118-19). In its first year, Hamadān's Alliance school also enrolled thirty Muslim students, an event that would later prove invaluable in the gradual assimilation of the Jews into the larger Muslim majority, a dynamic that was not restricted to Hama-dān. The Alliance school remained fully operational until the revolution of 1978-79, at which time the school had over 1,000 students, only 100 of which were Jewish (interview conducted by author with Parvin Moʿtamed, January 2003).

The activities of various Jewish organizations that started in Hamadān as early as 1910 suggest that the Alliance Israélite Universelle's education campaign was quick to bear fruit. According to Avi Davidi, the first Zionist organization in Persia was established by a group of young Jews in Hamadān in 1910. "This group organized the first Hebrew study group and, between 1915 and 1916, published the first Zionist newspaper, *Šalom*, in Judeo-Persian under Mordechai Šalom's editorship" (Davidi, p. 240). It was also in Hamadān that the first association of the Jewish women of Persia, known as Women's Assembly (Majles-e zanhā) and also as The Association of Jewish Women (Anjoman-e neswān-e yahudi), was established. It was founded by ʿArus Ḵānom in the very early 1920s and focused on educating Jewish women on various issues of religion, home-care, and health-care. The society also taught courses in Torah studies and held reading groups for the magazine *ʿĀlam-e neswān* (q.v.), published in Tehran since 1920 (Sarshar, p. 242). Hamadān's Association of Jewish Women later became a chapter of Sāzemān-e bānovān-e yahud-e Irān (Jewish Iranian Women's Organization). One of the many activities of the Jewish Women's Association in Hamadān was to establish the Benevolent Orphanage, founded under the directorship of Farida Šafāhi (Moʿtamed, 2003).

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

By 1950s Hamadān had five synagogues. The oldest was a small prayer room located in the shrine of Esther and Mordechai (q.v.) which housed numerous old Torahs, many of which are no longer there today (Gabbay, p. 23). It had a capacity of 20 to 30 people. The largest synagogue in Hamadān, Kenisa-ye Bozorg (lit. the Big Synagogue) was located on Bābā Ṭāher Avenue and had the total capacity of 350 people. The sanctuary was split into two levels. The

second level or the balcony held 120 people and was allocated to women. The synagogue also had a small annex named after its patron Ḥāji Hay, which held an additional 150, and a small living quarter, referred to as *ḡarib-ḵāna*, where travelers, immigrants, and those in need were temporarily housed. It possessed ten Torah scrolls. The second largest synagogue was Kenisa-ye Mollā Rebi (or Rabiʿ), also known as Kenisa-ye Yaʿqub Yāri after the patron who funded its renovation between the two World Wars. Located near Darb-e Ḥakim-ḵāna on Kuča-ye Sayyedhā, Kenisa-ye Mollā Rebi was the second oldest synagogue in Hamadān. Its earliest known rabbi was Ḥāji Mollā Yudā (Yehudā, fl. 1840-1930), who was one of the leading rabbis of his time in Hamadān and lead the congregation from about 1870 until well into the 20th century (Sarshar, 2002, p. 184). In the 1950s, Kenisa-ye Mollā Rebi had about eight Torahs and could accommodate approximately 250 people. Around the time of World War II the congregation was headed by Mollā Dāwud Sasun and Mollā Menehem (Rabbi Menahem ha-Levi, d. 1940), both of whom were considered by the community as religious leaders. The fourth synagogue was Kenisa-ye Mollā Abram located in Pir-e Gorg. It had four or five Torahs and a capacity of 150 people. The congregation was led by Mollā Abram himself and his son Mollā Šimun (Šamʿun). The last and smallest synagogue in Hamadān was the Alliance Israélite Universelle (also known as Etteḥād) school synagogue that could hold 100 people.

Plate I. Mausoleum of Esther and Mordechai.

Plate II. Torah from Mausoleum of Esther and Mordechai.

The Jews of Hamadān had two bathhouses(*ḥammām*), one for men and one for women, with granite floors and elaborate tile work. The adjacent structures were located at the end of Kuča-ye Sayyedhā and were maintained by Ḥayim Ḥamumi. The woman's bathhouse had a ritual bath(*miqva*). Hamadān had about five kosher butcher shops, all of which were clustered close to each other in the vicinity of the *ḥammām*s. The Jews of Hamadān had one cemetery located approximately two miles west of town on the road to Kermānšāh. Its oldest tombstones date back to the middle of the 19th century. The previous cemetery was overtaken and built upon by the Muslim clergy in the mid-19th century (interview conducted by author with Iraj Lālazāri, January 2003).

In many ways, Hamadān's Jewish community was like other major Jewish communities in Persia. The most significant feature that distinguishes it from other communities, however, is the fact that the Jews of Hamadān did not

have a *maḥalla*, or Jewish quarter (Sarshar, 2002, p. 104; Mošfeq Hamadāni, p. 20). So while overwhelming socio-economic restrictions placed on the Jews by the Shiʿite clergy since the rise of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 gradually drove Jewish communities in other ma-jor cities to converge together in particular streets and neighborhoods for shelter and protection from the ensuing consequences of any accidental infraction, the Jews of Hamadān always lived freely, dispersed among the Muslims. A survey of the map of Hamadān city helps confirm this fact. Reference to two streets in the older section of Hamadān specifically named Jewish Streets (*kuča-ye yahudihā* in the north-central part of town, and *ḵiābān-e kalimihā* in the north-east-central part of town), together with the location of the *qāšoq-tarāšān* area in the western part town (qāšoq-tarāšān is the area where most of the above mentioned synagogues, the bathhouse, and all the kosher butcher shops are located), and the location of the shrine of Esther and Mordechai in the southeastern part of the city clearly demonstrates that there were no specific locales of Jewish concentration in Hamadān as early as the time when these streets were named and the neighborhood of qāšoq-tarāšān was inhabited by Jews (c. mid- to late-19th cent.). The distance between Esther and Mordechai's shrine and the two Jewish streets (nearly one quarter of the city's length) further confirms this fact. We also know that kuča-ye yahudihā ends in the Gonbad-e ʿAlawiān and that the Qāšoq-tarāšān Mosque is located in the qāšoq-tarāšān area at the end of a street by the same name (see Gitā-šenāsi, Map of Hamadān City, 1987). The location of these two mosques further suggests a degree of assimilation between the Jews and the Muslim community in Hamadān, which as a matter of course did not exist in locales known specifically as maḥallas or Jewish quarters elsewhere in the country (I am grateful to Haideh Sahim for clarifying these topographic issues for me). In spite of these facts, some Western scholars and travelers who visited Hama-dān at the end of the 19th century nevertheless refer to a Jewish quarter in that city, making it necessary to address the discrepancy between the city's topography and their respective reports. In doing so, the first issue to keep in mind is that the notion of a maḥalla bears various sociological nuances and implications that do not carry over into the English coinage of "Jewish quarter." So while a Westerner may see a cluster of neighboring Jewish homes and identify the area as a Jewish quarter, it doesn't necessarily mean that the area constituted a maḥalla in the Judeo-Persian sense of the word (for more on this, see Sarshar, ed., 2002, pp. 103-4). One of the major characteristics of maḥallas in Persia was that, even though Jews were never forced by law exclusively to live in a maḥalla, it was extremely difficult for anyone to move out of one. Financial limitations and

socio-cultural pressures were the most prominent hindrances to leaving the maḥalla. Furthermore, while some Jews occasionally left the maḥalla, Muslims would never move into one. With this in mind, it is possible to understand the account of Western scholars and travelers as one influenced by their orientalist perspective on Hama-dān's Jewish community. They came to Persia looking for analogous circumstances between Persian and European Jewry and subsequently identified a cluster of neighboring Jewish homes in Hamadān as the Jewish quarter. Their tendency in this respect was arguably heightened by their preceding visits to towns like Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tehran, all of which did in fact have maḥallas. Equally important factors in this examination are first-hand accounts by Hamadāni Jews themselves. In his autobiography, Rabiʿ Mošfeq Hamadāni (b. 1912) writes: "In Hamadān, unlike other Iranian cities, the Jews did not have a maḥalla where they had to live. Rather, they lived dispersed throughout the city and often they even lived in some of the best houses in town. Our own home was in the heart of the most religious part of town, as the ʿAlawiān Mosque, which was one of Hamadān's most famous mosques, was less than 100 steps from our house" (Mošfeq, p. 20). Every one of the nine oral interviews I have conducted with Hamadāni Jews of the same generation unanimously corroborates the absence of a maḥalla in Hamadān. Moreover, all reported that none of their parents ever knew of a maḥalla in Hamadān. Taking the generational lag into account, these reports thus unmistakably confirm the absence of a maḥalla in Hamadān from as early as the last quarter of the 19th century. Reports stating that the economic condition of Hamadāni Jews in the last half of that century was "generally good" further support this fact (see above), because they suggest that certain members of the community could afford to move to the more desirable sections of town. Their economic condition thus potentially resolved the need to live in a locale of requisite Jewish concentration; a resolution that did not come about for the remainder of the Jewish community elsewhere in the country until well after the rise of the Pahlavi monarchy. In addition, Hamadān's proximity to the border, its Jewish community's regular contact with Baghdad, and the ensuing degrees of outside influence could also have been considerable factors in that community's comparatively greater assimilation into Hamadān's dominant Muslim milieu.

While the true reason behind the absence of a maḥalla in Hamadān cannot be determined with certainty, some of its ethnographic impacts on the Jewish community can nevertheless be theorized. Though none of the maḥallas in Persia were ever walled-in like the European ghettos, their topographic

perimeters nevertheless provided the Jews with a sense of enclosure and insurmountable separateness from the Muslim, a sense that effectively precluded the possibility of their assimilation into the larger Muslim community. By extension, it is possible to imagine how the absence of a maḥalla would translate on a psychosocial level into a more general absence of boundary between self and other, and thus result in a relatively more fluid sense of a collective identity that does not definitively distinguish Jewish from gentile. From this perspective, the absence of a maḥalla in Hamadān may well have been a non-negligible factor in the disproportionate ratio of conversions to Christianity and Babi/Bahaism that nearly devastated Hamadān's Jewish community in the last half of the 19th century. From another perspective, the absence of a maḥalla may also have been a factor in the comparatively early decline of individuals who can call the Judeo-Persian dialect of Hamadān their mother tongue (Sahim, 2002, pp. 283-95; idem, 1994, pp. 171-81). While today virtually every member of the oldest generation of Isfahani or Shirazi Jews, for instance, can still speak the Judeo-Persian dialect of their respective town, the dialect of Hamadān is spoken only by a fraction of the members of that same generation and is thus that much closer to being lost.

Hamadān, as the home of the shrine of Esther and Mordechai (q.v.), is a place of great veneration for Jews throughout Persia. The shrine was a pilgrimage site visited by Jews generally every week but especially at Purim. Israel Benjamin writes that "at the commencement of each month, and at the Purim festival, pilgrimages are made to these tombs, and the book of Esther is read there. When, during the reading, certain passages occur in which these two personages in particular are mentioned, all those present knock loudly on the catafalques, as if to say 'here they rest, the preserves of our fathers; here they rest, and we read today their glorious history.' When any calamity threatens the town, or when the Jewish community fears any approaching danger, lambs are sacrificed before the door of this house, and their flesh divided among the poor" (Benjamin, pp. 204-5). The shrine was also a ritual place of prayer for supplicant pilgrims who came making wishes, asking for solutions to life's problems, or in extreme cases hoping for cures from diseases or deformities. On occasion, the shrine was even visited by Muslim pilgrims who would go there to tie *daḵil*s (q.v.; *The Jewish Encyclopedia* VII, p. 1220). Among the edifice's many architectural characteristics, perhaps the most significant are its stone door and iron padlock, the latter being one of the oldest known examples of padlocks in Persia (Tanāvoli, pp. 53-54). In 1971, the shrine underwent an extensive expansion and renovation under the supervision of

the architect Yāssi Gabbāy. As a result, the small prayer room was reconfigured into a larger synagogue and the main entrance to the monument was expanded, allowing access from the main street (Gabbay, 1994, p. 57; idem, 2002, p. 26).

While today the shrine of Esther and Mordechai, as well as the synagogues, bathhouses, and cemetery are all still intact in Hamadān, the gradual emigration of the city's Jewish community has severely impacted their function. With the onset of World War II, most of the Jews started to leave Hamadān for the capital Tehran, while a considerably smaller percentage headed for the Holy Land. According to Iraj Lalehzari, in the mid- to late-1950s at least twelve of the Torahs in Hamadān were taken to Tehran. By the time of the revolution of 1978-79, there were less than 400 Jews left in Hamadān; and while none of the synagogues were operating at their capacity, the oldest, Kenisa-ye Mollā Rebi, had permanently closed its doors (Lalehzari). Soon after the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran's regional government had planned to overtake the cemetery, exhume the graves and build an edifice on the grounds. At the last moment the project was deterred by Manṣur Nurāni, the then director of Hamadān's Jewish Association(Anjoman-e Kalimiān), who soon thereafter succeeded in bringing the territory under the stewardship of Hamadān's parks commission to preserve it as a historical site (Moʿtamed).

According to the latest reports, there are today only ten Jewish families left in Hamadān. Hamadān's Jewish Association is still active under the directorship of Mr. Rasad. Its chief activity is to maintain the cemetery, organize a Hebrew class, and tend to the synagogue at the shrine of Esther and Mordechai, which is the last remaining synagogue in Hamadān to hold services on Shabbat and on Jewish high holidays (Yeshaya). Of the other synagogues that were previously active in Hamadān, one was converted into a mosque by the local authorities.

PROMINENT JEWISH FIGURES

During the three decades preceding the 1978-79 Revolution in Persia, a number of Jewish natives of Hamadān rose to prominent positions in Persian society, culture, and academia, some even attaining world acclaim for their achievements in their respective fields. It is a testimony to the impact of the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools on Persian Jewry that all five of the following individuals graduated from the Alliance school in Hamadān. The first was Rabiʿ Mošfeq Hamadāni (b. 1912), the renowned journalist, writer,

and translator. Mošfeq began his career in journalism by writing for *Iran*, *Mehr*, and *Mehregān* magazines. In 1942, Mošfeq joined Moṣṭafā Meṣbāḥzāda and ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Farāmarzi in founding *Keyhān*, one of the leading daily newspapers in Persia, and became its first editor-in-chief. In 1949, Mošfeq began publishing *Kāviān*, a politically oriented magazine with a distinctly secular and nationalistic voice, and became one of Moḥammad Moṣaddeq's ardent supporters (Mošfeq Hamadāni, pp. 226-32, 259-61, 264).

Parvin Moʿtamed (b. 1928), a leading figure in the Jewish educational system of Persia, was the first Jewish woman to attend Hamadān's teachers college (*dāneš-sarā*) and eventually became the director of the ORT schools in Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan. In 1970 Moʿtamed became the general director of all ORT schools throughout Iran. With this appointment, she became the first and, to date, only woman general director worldwide in the ORT educational system (interview conducted by author with Parvin Moʿtamed in January 2003).

Šelemu (Shlomo) Rahbar (b. 1929) is a world renowned immunologist and hemoglobin molecular researcher, whose work has had global impacts in the field of diabetes medicine. In 1962, Rahbar founded the Abnormal Hemoglobin Research Unit (AHRU) in Tehran, and in 1963 he became the first Jewish professor at Tehran University's School of medicine. In the fifteen years of the AHRU's operation, Rahbar discovered eleven new variants of hemoglobin. Chief among his discoveries is the hemoglobin A1C, which is particular to diabetic patients and is now used worldwide as the single most reliable index of diabetic control. He received the Lifetime Outstanding Scientific Achievement Award by the American Diabetic Association in 1996 (interview conducted by author with Shlomo Rahbar in January 2003).

Mention must also be made of the two brothers Iraj and Parviz Lalehzari (Lālazāri). Iraj (b. 1930) is a renowned pharmacologist and organic chemist, whose research has lead to the publication of more than 150 journal articles and five textbooks. In 1974 he became the dean of the School of Pharmacology at the University of Tehran, and three years later he organized the first ever international congress of researchers in Persia. Chief among his research achievements was the discovery in 1968 of a wild poppy flower indigenous to Persia (interview conducted by author with Iraj Lalehzari in January 2003). Iraj's younger brother, Parviz (b. 1931), is a renowned immuno-hemotologist who has discovered several families of blood neutrophile antigens and is currently recognized as one of the leading researchers in diseases related to blood neutrophiles. Parviz Lalehzari is credited with the discovery

Autoimmune Neutropenia of Infancy, and Autoimmune Neutropenia of Adults. (interview conducted by author with Parviz Lalehzari in January 2003).

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