



JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES V. QAJAR PERIOD (1)

JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES OF IRAN

v. QAJAR PERIOD (1786-1925)

This entry will be divided into two separate sections:

(1) *Communities*. (2) *Conversion*.

(1) COMMUNITIES

The socio-economic and legal status of the Jews of Iran in early Qajar times was, to an extent, a continuation of the legacy of Safavid times. With the passage of time, however, and largely due to the increasing intervention of the great powers and foreign Jews, certain changes started to be seen. The following topics will be addressed in this entry: the size and dispersion of the Jewish population, its changing occupational basis and legal status, as well as religious disputations between Shi'ites and Jews, the Jews' real life situation, and finally, early Zionist activity during this period.



Population size and dispersion. Although various sources provide population estimates it is difficult to rely upon them since they were not systematically retrieved by the various observers, and they are sometimes contradictory. Numbers provided by the Jews themselves are problematic: “the Jews in Persia, being taxed according to their number, have an interest in concealing it” (Samuel, p. 31); the Jews “underrate their population, lest, by appearing numerous and powerful, they should increase the oppressions under which they groan” (Southgate, II, pp. 102-3); they would offer inexact numbers also because tallying people was believed to inflict untimely death on those counted (e.g., I Chronicles 21). In addition, numbers are lacking with regard to various localities. Consequently, verifiable assessments are missing. Still, a rough estimate of the Jews’ number at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries can be reached. Some archival material, mainly that of the [Alliance Israélite Universelle](#), which by 1904 had already established schools in Tehran, Isfahan, Hamadān, Shiraz, Sanandaj (Seneh), and Kermānšāh (Bāktarān), (Alliance Israélite Universelle, Bulletin Annuel, 66, 1904, pp. 168-69), leads to the conclusion that there were at least 40,000 Jews out of a population of about 10 million, representing the Jews as at least 0.4 percent of larger society (Tsadik, 2005b, pp. 275-76). Though numerically a negligible minority on the national level, their percentage in some of the major cities was sometimes higher than in Iran as a whole and they were a visible component of the large cities. The census in 1882 Isfahan found either 5,306 Jews out of 73,785 souls (7.1 percent) or 6,462 out of 73,526 (8.7 percent; Houtum-Schindler, p. 120; Tsadik, 2007, p. 8).

The biggest Jewish communities in 1903/4, according to the aforementioned account of Alliance Israélite Universelle, were those of Shiraz and its surroundings (7,080 souls), Isfahan (6,000), Hamadan and its surroundings (5,900), Tehran (5,100), Kermanshah and its surroundings (3,800), Yazd (2,500), Urmia (2,200), Kerman (2,000), Kashan (1,800), and Sanandaj (1,800). Although they lived throughout Iran, by the late 19th century Jews seem to have been concentrated in the Central and Western regions of the country. The majority of the Jewish communities appear to have been urban-based, even if many Jews frequently traveled to or resided in rural areas. Jewish emigration, due to social, economic, or religious reasons, was to Palestine (Klein), Russia, Ottoman Iraq, or within Iran to Tehran (Adler, pp. 187-88, 193; Eshāq-iān, p. 41).

Jewish quarters (maḥallas). In some Iranian locales Jews lived among the



Muslim population, while in other places—similar to some Jews in other Muslim countries—the Jews of Iran resided in their own separated streets, neighborhoods, or quarters (e.g., Benjamin II, p. 211, article 3; Tsadik, 2007, p. 219). The Jewish area was sometimes called *mahalla* (quarter) or *mahalla-ye Yahud* (the Jewish quarter). References point at the existence of a Jewish area in Isfahan (Tsadik, 2007, pp. 13, 146, 251, 253; a Jewish neighborhood existed in the Jubara quarter [see ISFAHAN xviii]), Shiraz (Tsadik, 2007, pp. 37, 130, 218) Barforush (Tsadik, 2007, pp. 62-65, 67-69, 71-72), Urmia (Tsadik, 2007, p. 236), and even in Mashad for its crypto-Jewish community (Newmark, p. 89). The one in Tehran (Tsadik, 2007, pp. 36, 80, 121) was known as *Sar-e čāl* (on the top of the pit), due to the garbage pit located in its midst (see [Figure 1](#)). The Tehran quarter was depicted in 1904 as “a city of mud. Forming a tangled maze, the sometimes covered, sometimes open streets are so narrow that you instinctively expect each one to come to a dead end when walking through them. These twisting corridors border homes made of stones and brick or of clay baked in the sun; they have never seen plaster. These homes appear to have become resigned to having the rain wash away their walls little by little and to letting them fall in clumps on the heads of the passerby. The negligence of the property owners finally destroys the rest. ... The rooms are built around a narrow courtyard, which is hardly as wide as a handkerchief, and they are stacked one upon the other, without openings, dark and bare.” (Rodrigue, 177; for another description, see: Levi, III, 1960, 676 ff.).

Reasons for the existence of a Jewish area varied. The Jews themselves preferred to reside in their own demarcated zones as these would include central Jewish institutions such as synagogues as well as public and or ritual baths; living with other Jews at the same place could guarantee the cohesiveness and identity of the Jewish community; and in times of anti-Jewish persecution it would be easier to close and protect such an area. As for greater society, existence of Jews in one locale would allow for a more efficient government rule over a specific group, thereby, for instance, expediting the collection of taxes; Muslim society sought to distinguish itself from non-Muslims so as to secure its own identity and difference; and in Shi'i Iran, the alleged “impurity” of the Jews was another impetus for their segregation to one area.

Occupational status. The Jewish community was part and parcel of Iran's economy and society. Given their low status, Jews were afforded socially despised and immoral vocations, which the Muslims shunned. “When



anything very filthy is to be done a Jew is sent for” (Wills, p. 74). Examples include dyeing materials that involved strong odors, scavenger work, and cleaning excrement pits. Some Jews were also singers, musicians, and dancers—all activities regarded as those of dissolute persons. Performing these necessary, yet socially detested jobs, the Jews constituted, for the Muslim greater society, a vital economic element (Loeb, pp. 93-97). Evidently, some of these professions helped the Jews interact with the Muslim majority.

Many Jews were peddlers and merchants (Figure 2). Jewish trade and peddling appear to have been small in size and marginal in the national economy, but in certain areas, such as the Persian Gulf in general, and Bushehr in particular, the commercial activity of the Jews made up a significant portion of the general trade. In other places, Jewish merchants virtually controlled the passage of goods (e.g., Issawi, p. 62). Jewish female peddlers brought their merchandise—jewelry, fabrics, and medicine—to the houses of wealthy Muslim women.

Jews became peddlers and merchants for various reasons. These vocations did not require large sums of money or property. Often, but not always, Muslims prohibited the Jews from opening shops in the bazaars, which pushed them into becoming peddlers and traders. This prohibition was occasionally explained by noting the Jews’ “impurity,” but at the root of this religious precept there was possibly also the Muslims’ apprehension of having to compete with the Jews in the urban markets.

Shi’ite purity concerns were partly responsible for directing some of the Jews toward peddling and trade. Islamic culture and customs encouraged some Jews to opt for other professions as well. Non-Muslims thus occasionally worked as goldsmiths, silversmiths, and in related professions as the recompense for such works was viewed as usury, which is forbidden in Islam. Also, Islam prohibits Muslims from preparing and consuming wine and other alcoholic beverages; wine production was consequently left for Jews and other non-Muslims.

Some Jews owned small businesses or were dealers in old clothing. Others served as tailors, moneychangers, polishers of glass, producers of salt and ammoniac, builders, writers of talismans, fortune-tellers, or exorcists. There were also Jews who owned fields. Jewish women would sometimes work in sorting of tobacco, or as embroiderers, dressmakers, or midwives (Cohen, 1992, pp. 12-13). A socially respected profession held by some Jews was



medicine. Often local rabbis, Jewish doctors provided treatment to Jews and Muslims. Some Jews were court physicians, including Nehorāy Nur Maḥamud, Ḥaqq Na-ẓar and his brother Musā, Ḥakim Yehezqel, and Ḥakim Eliyahu (Levi, 2002, pp. 12, 203; [Figure 3](#)).

Some Jews reportedly reached the highest positions. Nāṣer-al-Din Shah viewed Ḥāji Ebrāhim Kalāntar, the first prime minister of the Qajar dynasty, as a Jew. However, it is not clear whether Ebrāhim was indeed of Jewish origins (Amana, p. 67). Yequtieli, a Jewish dancer who attracted Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah’s attention, was summoned to the court; as of 1846 he had “great influence” (*Jewish Intelligence, and Monthly Account of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews*, August 1846, p. 298). Such cases, nevertheless, appear to have been rare.

In addition to the above, some Jews in the 19th century embarked upon vocations that were increasingly needed due to the growing contact with Europe. Jews, like other Iranians, were part of Iran’s silk mania; they were involved in weaving, spinning, and twisting of silk. Other Jews were engaged in the opium industry and trade. Iran’s contact with Europe influenced and altered the economic basis of many Iranians, including some Jews (Tsadik, 2005b, pp. 276-79).

The Jews’ socio-economic status was also transformed due to the exposure of some of them to modern education. Founded in 1860 in Paris, the Alliance Israélite Universelle not only furnished Jews with financial aid, but also intervened on behalf of the Jews in political, social, and economic issues. Furthermore, the Alliance started establishing schools from 1898 on ([Figure 4](#)), providing the Jews with modern education, which ultimately helped to change some of the Jews’ professions in the early 20th century: a minority among the Jews worked for foreign companies, or became part of the banking system, the administration, the customs department, and the gendarmerie (e.g., ‘Ezri, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 17-18; ‘Ezri, 2005, pp. 28-43); others used the Alliance’s education to engage in international trade. Schools for girls were established, which opened new economic horizons for them. Most graduates of the Alliance—those whose lives continued along traditional lines—also enjoyed the fruits of the Alliance knowledge: reading and writing in Persian as well as knowledge of basic mathematics were a significant asset in daily life. Some Jews gained modern education in missionary (e.g., *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, 1902, p. 23) or other foreign schools. Solaymān Ḥaim (q.v.), who became an eminent lexicographer of bilingual English-Persian and Persian-



English dictionaries, studied at the American College from 1906 onward and became an English teacher there in 1915. A fraction of the Jews continued their studies abroad, for instance in Paris (Levi, 2002, pp. 11, 26, 32).

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 allowed the Jews to participate in the political and economic life of the country, and their role in trade gradually developed. Still, growing financial problems loomed large, which were exacerbated by the ill effects of WWI on the economy: the country was a battle field for various fighting groups; agricultural lands were spoiled and irrigation systems were ruined, and at the end of the war inflation was soaring and foodstuff was lacking. A major famine in 1918-19 killed many. The central government found it hard to impose its rule, and various dissident groups emerged, mainly in Gilān and Azarbaijan. Under such circumstances, it is doubtful whether the Jews profited economically from the fruits of the limited improvements they gained during the Constitutional period. Most probably, they, like many other Iranians, attempted to merely survive in those economically difficult times.

Legal status of the Jews in Imami Shi'ite eyes. The legal status of the Jews often reflected and influenced the attitude of the Muslim majority toward them. The legal status of the Jews in Imami Shi'ite eyes was primarily that of *demmis*, i.e., the people of the Book—Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews—who live under Islam. As *demmis* they were granted protection of their life and property so long they recognized the superiority of Muslim authority and performed certain duties. These obligations included: (1) To pay the *jezya* (q.v.) tax on an annual basis. (2) Not to contradict the protection articles. (3) Not to harm Muslims. (4) Not to display objects objectionable to Muslims. (5) Not to build houses of worship, not to play bells, and not to establish tall buildings or buildings taller than that of Muslims. (6) To accept the regulations imposed on them by the Muslims (Tsadik, 2003, pp. 396-403).

Among other Imami Shi'ite legal concepts pertaining to the Jews and other people of the Book were the following: (1) Impurity: Their touch defiles the Shi'ite. (2) Food: Only dry lentils, grains, herbs, wheat and similar commodities of the people of the Book are permissible for Shi'ites to consume. (3) Marriage: Shi'ite men can marry women from the people of the Book through a temporary marriage (*mot'a*), which is viewed as an inferior form of marriage. (4) Inheritance: An infidel cannot inherit from a Muslim, whereas a Muslim can inherit from an infidel. When Muslims and infidels are heirs of a person, the Muslims inherit the entire inheritance. (5) Punishment: When a *demmi*



intentionally kills a Muslim he and his property will be given to the kinsmen of the killed Muslim; these relatives may either enslave or kill the *demmi*. On the other hand, a Muslim who kills a *demmi* will not be killed if the Muslim is not a habitual killer of infidels; the Muslim will be punished according to the judge's discretion and will pay blood money.

Even though diverse and sometimes contradictory attitudes regarding the Jews are found in the Imami Shi'ite legal material, it is clear that the laws of the *demma* and the other legal concepts pertaining to the Jews usually mirror inequality between Shi'ite and Jew, and, in general, between the Shi'ite majority and the religious minorities (Tsadik, 2003, pp. 381-96).

Legal status of the Jews in the Constitutional Revolution. Even if some Qajars—notably NāsÂer-al-Din Shah in his 1873 European tour—occasionally viewed non-Muslims and Muslims as equal, these declarations were, many times, made under foreign pressure, reflecting, at most, the Shah's personal views and that of some members of his administration. In the Constitutional period, however, some equality-oriented enactments were suggested by local groups—even if probably under foreign inspiration. For instance, the parliament was to represent the “whole of the people” of Iran (Article 2; Browne, p. 363), securing representation for Armenians, Nestorians, Zoroastrians, and Jews. In issues of taxation, there was to be “no distinction or difference” among the people of Iran (Article 97; Browne, p. 383), thereby effectively abandoning the practice of *jezya*. Finally, “the people” of Iran were to enjoy “equal rights before the Law” (Article 8; Browne, p. 374). On the other hand, other articles from the Constitutional era represent those groups who called for preservation of the Muslim *demma* approach towards religious minorities. For instance, “no one can attain the rank of Minister unless he be a Musulman by religion” (Article 58; Browne, p. 379). Indeed, the legal status of some religious minorities—Jews included—in the Constitutional period improved compared to their legal status under Shi'ite law, but it is difficult to view their status in the Constitutional times as equal (Tsadik, 2003, pp. 405-8).

Polemics between Shi'ites and Jews. Polemics between Shi'ite scholars and Jews were one channel through which contact and conversation—of a certain kind and at a certain level—existed between the communities (on Shi'ite collaboration with Jews in order to refute Christianity, see Tsadik, 2004, pp. 5-15). Still, the polemics signaled and contributed to the heavy social and cultural pressures imposed upon the Jews by segments of Muslim society.



Among the most prevailing anti-Jewish contentions were the following: (1) The Jewish oral law is nothing but innovations— additions to or omissions from the Torah—which caused the Jews to stray from God’s way. (2) The Torah predicts Muslim—including Shi’ite—history and beliefs (Qazvini Yazdi, pp. 23-24: the twelve sons of Ishmael [Genesis 17:20; 25:12-16] are viewed as the twelve Shi’ite Imams), and foretells Islam’s superiority. (3) At a certain time the Torah was repealed (*naskò*) by later revelations; the Torah is thus not eternal. One nuance of this concept is that the Torah cannot be implemented outside the land of Israel after the destruction of the Temple. (4) The Torah revered by the Jews is not the one originally revealed. Some parts were added to or omitted from the original Torah in different times, including during the days of ‘Ozayr. The Torah had been altered (*tağyir*) as shown from discrepancies found in it as well as irrational themes (e.g., anthropomorphic depictions of God) and stories (e.g., stories ascribing sins to prophets) in the Torah. *Tağyir* happened also through the wrong teachings and commentaries of the rabbis (Režā’i, p. 24). (5) Even if the Jews had been God’s Chosen People this status ended long ago. (6) The Jews hold erroneous practices and tenets (Tsadik, 2005c, pp. 95-134).

Written in a Muslim environment, Jewish anti-Muslim arguments were only rarely explicit. Rabbi Siman-Tov Melammed (d. 1800?) contends for the superiority of Moses above all prophets, possibly alludes at Moḥammad’s deficiency, and, while using the Qur’an (7:144) emphasizes that the contemporary Torah is the Torah that was given from heaven; it cannot and will not be changed for the sake of another one; it is eternal (Melammed, 81b-82b, 117b-126b; Netzer, 1999, pp. 83-84, 87-88). Shi’ites of the time responded to Melammed’s arguments in a literal form (Qazvini Yazdi, pp. 142-43, 188) and possibly also in live disputations (Patai, pp. 168-70; Fischel, 1971, p. 1275).

The Tehran Rabbi Hayim Moreh discusses, in 1921, the prophet that is promised in the Torah to come after Moses; probably looking to refute the Muslim belief that this prophet is Moḥammad, Moreh emphasizes that the prophet is to be from the offspring of Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15-17) and is Joshua b. Nun. He explicitly maintains that some persons hold that Deuteronomy 33:2 speaks of different divine “manifestations” (*mažāher*; prophets) who were manifested for people in different periods, alluding to a common Muslim reading of the verse, and contends that the verse actually deals with revelations to the Israelites while in different locations in the



desert. He rejects the possibility that the Torah went through falsification (*taġyir*; *tahrif*; Moreh, TaR'aT, pp. 67-70, 194-98, 200). Implicitly alluding to Qur'an 9:30, he asserts that "we do not view 'Ezrā as the son of God," and declares again that the Torah was not falsified (Moreh, TaRPaD [1924], pp. 354, 359, 430). Dealing mainly with Christian criticism, Moreh still addresses the question common in Muslim polemics of how could the Biblical Jacob marry two sisters (Moreh, TaRPaZ [1927], p. 278).

Real life situation of the Jews. During 1786-1848. Various accounts attest to Jewish ordeals. These consisted of occasional persecutions and regular abuse at the hand of the Jews' neighbors, in addition to blood libel accusations as well as forced conversions to Islam—the most famous of which occurred in 1839 Mashhad. The reasons for the anti-Jewish assaults were socio-economic and religious, as well as political: campaigns against the Jews were sometimes regarded as attacks against the government. Occasionally, Muslims would hurt Jews since some Jews—apparently a minority of them—represented or were regarded as connected with foreign interests (Tsadik, 2007, pp. 33-38).

During 1848-96. During Nas'Âer-al-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896), foreign Jewish and non-Jewish intervention on behalf of the Jews was witnessed more clearly than in the previous period. The foreign intervening Jews, Ottoman and primarily European, included figures such as Moses Montefiore and Baron Maurice de Hirsch, families—such as the Rothschilds and the Sassoons, and organizations such as the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the Anglo-Jewish Association, and the Conjoint Foreign Committee. The foreign interfering non-Jews were mostly powers, such as France and mostly Britain that intervened when pressured by their indigenous Jews and organizations, or at the powers' own initiative. Foreign intervention attempted to address recurring themes, e.g. cases when the Shi'ite inheritance law was applied or when major anti-Jewish outbreaks erupted—calling on the Iranian government to extend protection to the harmed Jews. Major Jewish European appeal on behalf of Iran's Jews occurred during Nas'Âer-al-Din Shah's first tour to Europe in 1873. The Anglo-Jewish Association then pointed at eight Jewish disadvantages and hoped that the Shah would uplift the Jews from their "crushed and degraded state" and place them "socially, morally, and politically on a level with all other denominations." Responding, the Shah declared that he desired that all his subjects would equally enjoy "religious freedom and civil rights" (Tsadik, 2007, p. 91). These and similar pronouncements were important, as from this time



onwards, Iranian Jews were officially on an equal footing at the political level with the rest of the Shah's subjects—a major break with the Muslim *demma* worldview. However, foreign intervention on behalf of the Jews sometimes only induced anti-alien local Muslim elements to persecute the Jews further.

In following years the Shah and some of his officials took measures to ameliorate the condition of the Jews, including attempts at abolishing the Shi'ite inheritance law. But, problems, including the following ones, did not vanish: fearing social agitation, the authorities sometimes refrained from full exercise of the Shah's avowed intentions regarding the Jews; for various social, economic, religious, and political reasons, some sectors of society, including some government officials, some Shi'ite ulama, some *luṭīs*, and some other indigenous groups, generally continued to ill-treat and occasionally heavily persecute the Jews (Tsadik, 2007, Chapters 4-5). The Shah's declarations viewing the Jews as equal to the rest of his subjects appear to have been more pronouncements of noble sentiments than actual policy commitments. Even if some change was seen, it was erratic and indecisive. On the political level the status of the Jews improved to some extent, but their social and religious position usually remained the same.

The condition of the Jews was determined by their official political status, the Shi'ite approach, society's attitude, and foreign pressure, but also by other factors: epidemics, famine, political instability in certain places, and occasional misgovernment. Jews were only one of the various groups that endured these factors.

During 1896-1925. Under Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1906) there were Jews who had good relations with their Muslim neighbors. For instance, the Jewish community of Zarqān (Alliance Israélite Universelle, *Bulletin Mensuel* 31, 1903, p. 102) or that of Nehāvand (Alliance Israélite Universelle, *Bulletin Mensuel* 34, 1906, pp. 162-63), and there were certain *ulama* who would assist the Jews. Such cases, however, seem to have been the exception rather than the rule. Jews usually suffered from regular mistreatment and occasional persecution. In Tehran in 1896-97 a certain Sayyed Reyḥān-Allāh attempted to force the Jews to wear a distinctive patch and to cut their hair in a certain manner. Answering to foreign pressure to ameliorate the plight of the Jews, the Shah then ordered the cessation of the "persecutions of the Jews" (Confino, 1999, pp. 93-96; *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, 1897, pp. 158, 192; Levi, III, 1960, pp. 773-76; Sahim, pp. 302-3). In Isfahan, Āqā Najafī (q.v.) harmed some Jews in 1897, using among other tools, economic boycott (Schwarzfuchs; Walcher, pp.



397-407), whereas when visiting Tehran in 1903 he reproached the Jews for not wearing a patch (Sepehr, p. 41). Among the other Jewish communities that suffered during this time were those of Kazarun (Alliance Israélite Universelle: Iran, I.B.4, Cazran, 12 of Tishrey, TaRNaH [=October 8, 1897], Kazarun community to Baghdad.), Kashan (Alliance Israélite Universelle: Iran. I.C.3 bis, Kachan, Adar I, TaRSaB [=February or March 1902], Kashan community to Alliance Israélite Universelle), Urmia (AIU: Iran.I.B.7, Erivan, 1905/1906, Erivan community to Alliance Israélite Universelle; Alliance Israélite Universelle: Iran. I.B.18, Ourmiah, month of Av, TaRSaH, received on September 19, 1905, Urmiya to Alliance Israélite Universelle), and Gulpaygan (Alliance Israélite Universelle: Iran.I.C.3, Ispahan, June 25, 1905, Lahana to Alliance Israélite Universelle). Shaikh Hādi of Kirmanshah was reported in 1904 to instigate attacks on the Jews of the city (Alliance Israélite Universelle: Iran, II.C.4, Kermanschah, July 18, 1904, Masidy to Alliance Israélite Universelle; Kermanshachi, pp. 334, 336, 338, 340). In 1905 Shiraz, attacks on the Jews were at least to some extent only “nominally directed against the Jews” (FO 60/700, no. 254, December 3, 1905, Grant Duff to FO) and were merely “pseudo-anti-Jewish” (ibid, enclosure: November 18, 1905, Shiraz News), while really aiming the government (Tsadik, “Shiraz Incident,” forthcoming).

In the years leading up to the Constitutional Revolution the position of Iranian Jews was determined by diverse factors, including the Islamic worldview, viewing the Jews as a *demma* community, the Jews’ administrative position placing them under the jurisdiction of the Iranian foreign office, the government’s treatment (for some officials’ attempts to protect Jews, see *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, 1903, p. 155; idem, 1904, pp. 36, 38), and the Jews’ economic basis, which often relegated them to detested vocations. Additionally, Jewish foreign organizations and foreign powers intervened on behalf of the Jews, introducing foreign perceptions of protection that had a growing influence on the lives of the Jews.

During the Constitutional era (1906-11), along with the traditional Muslim view of the Jews and other religious minorities, an egalitarian approach toward non-Muslims can be discerned. The bylaws of the Secret Society (Anjoman-e Makfi) “insisted that members of all four religions” “should be admitted into the association” (Afary, p. 160). Furthermore, the constitutionalist camp virtually forced the Shah into declaring in August 1906 that a National—rather than Islamic—Consultative Majles would be established, thereby paving the way for the inclusion of non-Muslims into the



new political body of the Majles. However, resentment of some led to ‘Aziz-Allāh Simāni’s resignation as the Jewish representative in the Majles following its opening on October 7, 1906, and, consequently, Sayyed ‘Abd-Allāh Behbehāni, the leading constitutionalist cleric, was placed in his stead (Levi, III, 1960, pp. 847-48). The Revolution brought about the formation of local councils (*anjomans*), some putting restrictions on the Jews (e.g., in Isfahan), others in the north welcoming Jews as well as some other religious minorities. In 1906-1907 fierce disputes erupted in the Majles over the issue of civil freedoms, including the question of equal rights for all (male) Iranians—with some supporting it, and others attacking it mainly as being un-Islamic. Ultimately, the Supplementary Fundamental Law of October 1907 declared that the people of Iran “are to enjoy equal rights before the Law” (Article 8; Browne, p. 374,) but also granted a committee of ulama the powers to reject laws suggested by the Majles, and which were “at variance with the Sacred Laws of Islam” (Article 2, Browne, p. 373).

In fighting against the royalist takeover of June 1908, the constitutional camp enjoyed the assistance of Jews in Tabriz and Tehran. This, nonetheless, did not necessarily entail the invariable constitutionalists’ protection, as the Bakhtiāris who rushed to Tehran to restore the constitutional regime looted the Jews of Isfahan. Following the restoration of the constitution in the summer of 1909, Jewish youngsters founded again their Jewish *anjoman* with the succor of the Democrat party. The party line “called for a new concept of nationalism, one that superseded religious affiliations” (Afary, p. 173), and its organ, *Irān-e now*, criticized cases of anti-Semitism.

Even if the Constitutional Revolution, to an extent, changed the legal status of the Jews, and some cases of fair treatment toward them are known (e.g., Netzer, 1997b, pp. 265-66), still, due to socio-economic, religious, and political reasons anti-Jewish attacks did not cease (Levi, 1960, III, pp. 830-31, 850). One observer from 1909 maintains that “the Jews of Persia are a miserably poor, degraded class of people. Their lot is a very hard one; despised and oppressed by the Moslems, hated and cursed by all, their life is not enviable” (Hume-Griffith, 1909, 29). And indeed, in the same year in Kermansah the Jewish community was looted and some of its members killed and wounded (Cohen, 1992, pp. 8-21). A major onslaught was directed at the Jews of Shiraz in 1910 (‘Aqeli, 77; Netzer, 1997b, pp. 259-80; Farivar, p. 102). Traditional perceptions, such as the impurity concept, were still common (e.g., in 1918 Kashan, see Shofet, 75).



Early Zionist Activity. The arriving news of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, constituted a major impetus for the establishment in 1918 of *Anjoman-e farhangi-e javānān-e yahud-e Tehran* (A cultural association for young Jews of Tehran), which focused at first on teaching Hebrew. This association elected persons to one of its organs, *Anjoman-e taqwiyat-e zabān-e 'ebri* (Association for strengthening the Hebrew language), headed by Shlomoh Kohen Sedeq, who in 1918 edited a Hebrew grammar book, *Sefer Hizuqey Sfat Ever* (A book for strengthening the Hebrew Language). Early Zionist activists were usually young and educated, including the above Kohen Sedeq, Solaymān Haim, Dr. Ḥabib Levi, and 'Aziz-Allāh Na'im (see [Figure 5](#)). In 1919 the name of the Association for strengthening the Hebrew language was changed to *Anjoman-e Markazi-e Taškilāt-e Siunit-e Iran* (The central association of the Zionist organization of Iran). This association's main mission was to connect the Jews of Iran with the world Zionist organization, to function as a central body for all provincial Jewish communities, to address the persecution of Jews, to assist Jews who envisioned immigration to Palestine, and to improve education in Jewish schools. Four committees were consequently founded to address the following spheres: education, publication, immigration, and finance. Apparently for the first time ever, a central body for the Jews of Iran was thus established; Iranian Jews could now appeal this body, seeking its assistance. The message of the Tehran based central association of the Zionist organization of Iran was introduced to Jews throughout Iran via *Ha-Ge'ulah* (q.v.; The Redemption) newspaper. The San Remo international conference of April 1920 paved the way for a British mandate over Palestine, the tidings of which precipitated Zionist activity; money was thus raised by Iranian Jews for the Redemption Fund (*Qeren ha-Ge'ulah*). In 1921 the annual World Zionist Congress convened with one seat reserved for an Iranian Jewish representative, who, nevertheless, was unable to arrive due to transportation problems; the Jews of Iran were consequently represented by a different figure. Subsequent to the approval of the Iranian authorities, Zionist branches were opened in different locales; by September 1922 there were 27 such branches throughout Iran.

Nevertheless, Zionist activity in Iran seems to have started to slow down already in the 1920's. Precisely when incidents of anti-Jewish persecution, economic problems, political instability in some places (including Azarbaijan and Kurdistan), Zionist ideology, and the tidings of the Balfour Declaration and of the forthcoming British mandate over Palestine caused some Jews to desire to immigrate, the growing tensions and bloody events in Palestine between



Jews and Arabs in 1921 pushed the Iranian government in 1922 to ban immigration to Palestine. Following the 1921 occurrences in Palestine, the government in Palestine stopped issuing immigration certificates for sometime, later to allow it only with certain restrictive prerequisites. But, immigration did not completely cease. Among other reasons for the Iranian government's rejection of immigration was the argument viewing Iran as a large country that already suffered from having scanty population, as well as the authorities' attempt to prevent Jews from evading army service by immigrating. From another corner, Iranian Jewish application for immigration certificates to Palestine were occasionally declined by the London based Zionist organization on grounds of unemployment in Palestine. Additionally, the resigning of the heads of the central association of the Zionist organization of Iran, Kohen Sedeq and Na'im, in 1923 proved a setback to Zionist activity. Furthermore, the conflict between the supporters of Dr. Nehorāy Loqmān (the Jewish representative in the Majles between November 1909 and July 1923) and those of Shmuel Haim (the Jewish representative in the Majles between July 1923 and June 1926) complicated matters. Haim who was elected in 1924 to head the central association of the Zionist organization of Iran changed its name to *Taškilāt-e Siyunist-e Iran* (Zionist association of Iran), signifying his detachment from the previous association, which Haim used to heavily criticize. The end result of these tensions could not do good to Zionist activity. Finally, the rise of the ever-nationalist Reza Khan in 1921, and mostly his assumption of the throne in 1925, sealed the fate of Zionism in Iran for years. (See "Bibliography," works by A. Netzer and M. Sasson).

Around the time of Rezā Khan's rise in 1921 the situation of the Jews was still usually gloomy. This is seen in the Jewish Persian newspapers, *Ha-Geulah* and *Ha-Hayim* of the early 1920's (Netzer 2005, p. 145; Netzer 2002, pp. 366-67) or other Iranian Jewish writings of the time (e.g., Pozaylov, pp. 141-44). The prevailing cases were those of mistreatment of the Jews: for instance, in 1922 Tehran Jews and the school of the Alliance were attacked (Netzer, 1997a, pp. 125-32). Ensuing years, under Rezā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41), witnessed the slow improvement of some of the Jews' social and economic status (see vi, below).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- E. Adler, *Jews in Many Lands*, Philadelphia, 1905.
- J. Afary, "From Outcastes to Citizens; Jews in Qajar Iran," in *Esther's Children*, ed. H. Sarshar, Beverly Hills, Cal., pp. 139-74.
- A. Amanat, "Ebrahim Kalantar Shirazi," *EIr*, VIII, 1998, p. 67.
- B. 'Āqeli, *Ruz šemār-e tāriq-e Irān az Mašruṭa tā enqelāb-e eslāmi*, I, Tehran, 1993.
- J. J. Benjamin II, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa from 1846 to 1855*, 1859.
- E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*, repr., Washington, DC, 1995.
- A. Cohen, *Ha-Qehilah ha-Yehudit be-Kermanshah (Iran) ba-Meot ha-19 ve-ha-20 'ad le-Milhemet ha-'Olam ha-Shniyah*, Jersusalem, 1992.
- Idem, "Iranian Jewry and the Educational Endeavors of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," *Jewish Social Studies* 48, 1986, pp. 15-44.
- Idem, "KIH ve-ha-Tnu'ah ha-Sionit be-Iran," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, LXII, 1991, PP. 1-27.
- A. Confino, *L'Action de L'Alliance Israélite en Perse*, Charras, Alger, n.d (imp.).
Idem, "Establishment of the Alliance School in Teheran." In *Padyavand III*, ed. A. Netzer, Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 93-108.
- E. Eshāqiān with G. Cohen, *Hamrāh ba farhang*, Los Angeles, 2008.
- A. Davidi, "Zionist Activities in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *Esther's Children*, ed. H. Sarshar, Beverly Hills, Cal., pp. 239-258.
- M. 'Ezri, *Kist az šomā az Tamāmi-e qawm-e U*, Jerusalem, 2000.
- Idem, *Zendagi-nāma-ye Siyun 'Ezri, 1892-1965*, Israel, 2005.
- M. Farivar, *Ḥadiṭ-e yak Farhang*, Los Angeles, 2007, ed., G. Cohen. W. J. Fischel, "The Jews of Persia, 1795-1940," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, 1950, pp. 119-60.



- Idem, "Melamed, Siman Tov," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XI, 1971, p. 1275.
- J. L. Garland, *The Jews of Persia: Their Past History and Present Condition*, London, 1909.
- A. Houtum-Schindler, *Eastern Persian Irak*, London, 1896.
- M. E. Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia*, London, 1909.
- C. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*, Chicago, 1971.
- H. Kermānshāxi, *Tahawwolāt-e ejtemā'ī-e Yahudiān-e Iran dar qarn-e bistom*, Los Angeles, 2007.
- D. Klein, "'Aliyot Yehudey Paras le-Eres Israel beyn ha-Shanim 1884 ve-'ad Haseharat Balfour be-1917," an unpublished M. A. thesis, Haifa University, 1997.
- 'A. Levi, "Yehudey 'Paras ba-Meah ha-19," *Kivunim* 8, 1980, pp. 71-91.
- Ḥ. Levi, *Kāterāt-e man*, Beverly Hills, Cal., 2002.
- Idem, *Tāriḳ-e Yahud-e Irān*, III. Tehran, 1960.
- D. Littman, "Jews under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia," *The Wiener Library Bulletin, New Series* 49-50/32, 1979, pp. 2-15.
- Idem, "Les Juifs en Perse avant les Pahlevi," *Les Temps Modernes* 395, 1979, pp. 1910-35.
- L. Loeb, "Demmi Status and Jewish Roles in Iranian Society," *Ethnic Groups* 1, 1976, pp. 89-105.
- Idem, *Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran*, New York, 1977.
- S. Melammed, *Hayat al-Ruh*, Jerusalem, TaRNaH (1898).
- H. Moreh, *Derekh ha-Hayim*, Tehran, TaR'aT (1919).
- Idem, *Gedulat Mordechai*, Tehran, TaRPaD (1924).
- Idem, *Yedey Eliyahu*, Tehran, TaRPaZ (1927).



- H. Nateq, "Tāriḫa-ye Āliāns-e Esrāīli dar Irān," in *Yahudiān-e Irāni dar tāriḫ-e mo'āsĀer*, II, ed. H. Sarshar, Beverly Hills, Cal. (Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History), 1997, pp. 55-130.
- A. Netzer, "Godlah shel ha-Ukhlusiyah ha-Yehudit be-Paras ba-Meah ha-19," in *Divrey ha-Congress ha-'Olami ha-Shishi le-Mad'ey ha-Yahadut*, ed. A. Shinan, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 127-33.
- Idem, "Ha-Pe'ilut ha-Sionit be-Iran me-Haseharat Balfour 'ad Hozeh San Remo," *Pe'amim*, 1, 1979, PP. 23-31.
- Idem, "Tqufot u-Shlavim be-Masav ha-Yehudim u-va-Pe'ilut ha-Sionit be-Iran," *Yahadut Zmanenu*, 1, 1984, PP.139-162.
- Idem, "Ha-Pe'ilut ha-Sionit be-Paras ba-Shanim 1920-1926," *Mi-Qedem u-Mi-Yam* 2, 1986, PP. 237-50.
- Idem, "Anti-Jewish Disturbances in Teheran, 1922," In *Padyavand*, II, ed. A. Netzer, Costa Mesa, Cal., 1997a, pp. 125-32.
- Idem, "Yahudiān-e Širāz dar Sāl-e 1910," in *Padyavand* II, ed. A. Netzer, Los Angeles: Mazda Publishers, 1997b, pp. 259-80.
- Idem, "Siman-Tov Melammed," *Pe'amim* 79, 1999, pp. 56-95.
- Idem. "Aliyat Yehudey Iran le-Eres Israel ba-Shanim 1922-1948," *Sion ve-Sionut be-Qerev Yehudey Sefarad ve-ha-Mizrah*, Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 365-379.
- Idem. "Ha-'Itonut ha-Yehudit," e.d., H. Saadoun, *Qehilot Israel ba-Mizrah ba-Meot ha-Tesha' 'Esreh ve-ha-'Esrin*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 139-156.
- E. Newmark, *Masaδ be-Eres ha-Qedem*, ed. A. Ya'ri, Jerusalem, 1947.
- R. Patai, *Jadid al-Islam*, Detroit, Mich, 1997. G. Pozaylov, *Hakhmeyhem shel Yehudey Paras ve-Afganistan*, Jerusalem, 1995.
- H. Qazvini Yazdi, *Mahzar al-šohud fi radd al-Yahud*, Najaf, n.d. M. Režā' et al. *Eqāmat al-šohud fi radd al-Yahud fi manqul al-Režā'*, n.p., 1292.
- A. Rodrigue, *Images of Sepharadi and Eastern Jewries in Transition*, Seattle and London, 1993.



J. Samuel, *An Appeal on Behalf of the Jews Scattered in India, Persia, and Arabia*, London, 1840.

H. Sahim, "Jews of Iran in the Qajar Period; Persecution and Perseverance," in ed. R. Gleave, *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, London and New York, 2005, pp. 293-310.

M. Sasson, "Ha-Va'ad ha-Merkazi shel ha-Histadrut ha-Sionit be-Tehran," *Pe'amim* 89, 2001, PP. 107-51.

Idem, "Ha-Sionut ve-ha-'Aliyah," e.d., H. Saadoun, *Qehilot Israel ba-Mizrah ba-Meot ha-Tesha' 'Esreh ve-ha-'Esrin*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 157-72.

S. Schwarzfuchs, "Qehilat Isfahan Meshava't le-'Ezrah mi-KIH," *Pe'amim* 6, 1980, pp. 74-78.

'A.-H. Sepehr, *Yāddāsthā-ye Malek-al-Mowarrekin*, ed. 'A.-H. Navā'i. Tehran, 1989.

S. Soroudi, "Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and the Jewish Question," in eds. R. Nettler and S. Taji-Farouki, *Muslim-Jewish Encounters, Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 149-70.

Idem, "The Concept of Jewish Impurity and its Reflection in Persian and Judeo-Persian Traditions," in eds. S. Shaked and A. Netzer, *Irano-Judacia III*, Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 142-70.

H. Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia*, London, 1840. Y. Shofet, *Ḳāṭerāt-e Hāḳām Yedidyā Šofet*, Los Angeles, 2000.

D. Tsadik, "The Legal Status of Religious Minorities: Imami Shi'i Law and Iran's Constitutional Revolution," *Islamic Law and Society* 10/3, 2003, pp. 376-408.

Idem, "Nineteenth Century Shi'i Anti-Christian Polemics and the Jewish Aramaic Nevuat ha-Yeled [The Prophecy of the Child]," *Iranian Studies* 37/1, 2004, pp. 5-15.

Idem, "Ha-Yehudim be-Kalkalat ha-Medinah," in *Qehilot Israel ba-Mizrah ba-Meot ha-Tesha' 'Esreh ve-ha-'Esrin; Iran*, Jerusalem, 2005a, pp. 41-54.

Idem, "Nineteenth century Iranian Jewry: Statistics, Geographical Setting, and



Economic Basis,” *Iran* 43, 2005b, pp. 275-82.

Idem, “Religious Disputations of Imami Shi’is against Judaism in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Studia Iranica*, 34, 2005c, pp. 95-134.

Idem, *Between Foreigners and Shi’is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and its Jewish Minority*, Stanford, Cal., 2007.

Idem, “Jews in the Pre-Constitutional Years: The Shiraz Incident of 1905,” *Iranian Studies*, forthcoming. H. Vahuman, (Corrector), *Johud košān*, Stockholm, 1383/2005.

H. A. Walcher, “In the Shadow of the King: Politics and Society in Qajar Isfahan, 1874-1907,” an unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1999.

C. J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun or Modern Persia*, London, 1883.

D. Yeroushalmi, “Yehudey ha-Imperyah ha-’Othmanit ve-ha-Qehilot ha-Yehudiyot be-Iran ba-Meah ha-Tsha’ ‘Esreh: Reqa’ u-Megamot,” *Sefunot* 23, 2003, New Series, 8, pp. 239-76.