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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

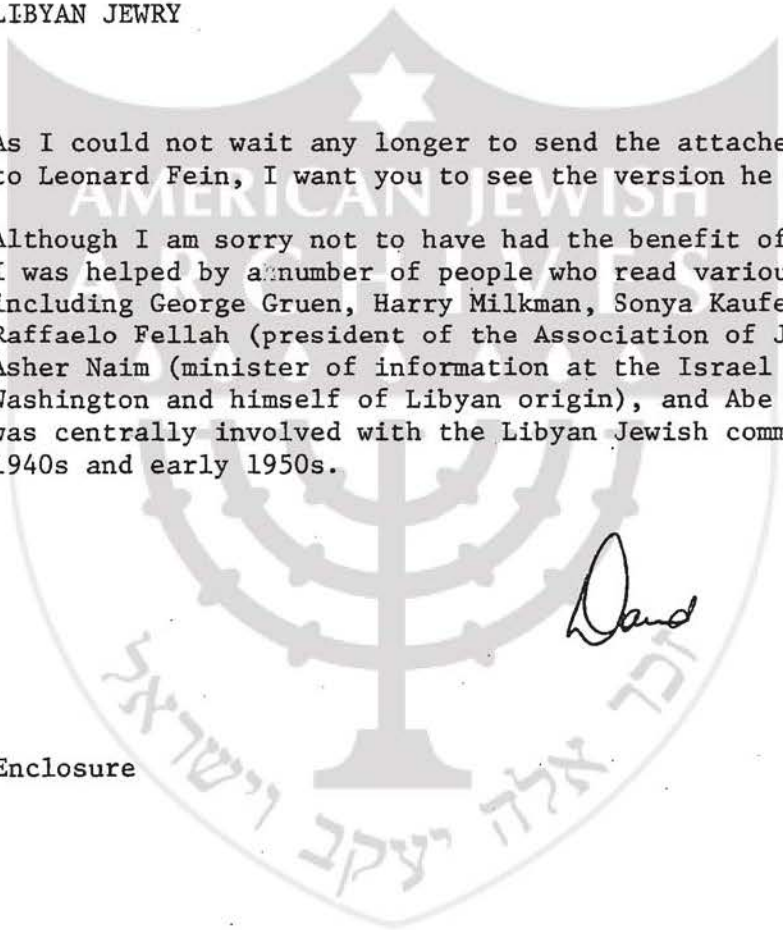
date January 28, 1987
to Marc Tanenbaum
from David Harris
subject LIBYAN JEWRY

As I could not wait any longer to send the attached article to Leonard Fein, I want you to see the version he was given.

Although I am sorry not to have had the benefit of your comments, I was helped by a number of people who read various drafts, including George Gruen, Harry Milkman, Sonya Kaufer, Bob Rosenbaum, Raffaello Fellah (president of the Association of Jews from Libya), Asher Naim (minister of information at the Israel Embassy in Washington and himself of Libyan origin), and Abe Karlikow who was centrally involved with the Libyan Jewish community in the late 1940s and early 1950s.



Enclosure



A FORGOTTEN ANNIVERSARY

by

David A. Harris

Deputy Director, International Relations Dept.

American Jewish Committee

The year 1987 marks the 20th anniversary of two distinct but intimately related events, one that has been the focus of considerable attention, the other virtually ignored. As the world followed the June 1967 war raging between Israel and her Arab neighbors, an ancient Jewish community was on the verge of disappearance. Having survived colonial occupiers from the Phoenicians and the Greeks to the Italians and the British, as well as 16 years of Libyan national independence, the remaining 4,000 Jews of Libya were forced to leave their country in the wake of a vicious pogrom -- the third since 1945 -- that caused death and destruction.

"American Jews often ask me the same questions when they hear where I am from," said Giulia. (She, like the other Libyan Jews interviewed, asked that her real name not be used.) In 1967, at the age of 16, she fled her native Libya. "Do you mean

Lebanon? Oh, Libya! Was there really a Jewish community in Libya? Do you speak Yiddish? And how was it to live under Qaddafi?' In other words, most American Jews have absolutely no idea that we ever existed, much less that we were once a thriving Jewish community... We were expelled from Libya before Qaddafi seized power in 1969. Yes, there was a pre-Qaddafi Libya! It was a sometimes wonderful and beautiful country that, notwithstanding the complexities of being a Jew in an Arab country, my family and I considered home. And it was a special place where we enjoyed the influence of Italian, British, French, American and local cultures, together with unshakable identity as Jews. But we were forced to leave and the experience has, of course, scarred us for life."

According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, Jews were first settled by the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy Lagos (323-282 b.c.e.) in Cyrene and other parts of present-day eastern Libya. With their numbers likely bolstered by Berbers converted to Judaism, later supplemented by Jews fleeing the Spanish and Portugese Inquisitions and, from the 17th century, by Jews from Leghorn and other Italian cities, Jews lived continuously in Libya for well over two millenia, predating the Muslim conquest

in 642 c.e. by centuries.

In 1911, 350 years of Ottoman rule ended and the Italian colonial period began. At the time, Libya's Jewish population numbered 20,000. The next quarter century was to prove a golden age for Libya's Jews. They enjoyed equal rights with the country's other residents, and benefited from increased employment and educational opportunities. By 1931, nearly 25,000 Jews lived in Libya, of whom all but 4,000 lived in Tripoli and a dozen towns and villages in Tripolitania province, the westernmost of the three provinces that comprise modern Libya. The remainder were centered in Cyrenaica province, to the east, largely in the coastal city of Benghazi. No Jews lived in the interior province of Fezzan.

The introduction of anti-Jewish legislation in Fascist Italy was extended to Libya in 1936. Under its provisions, on Shabbat, for example, Jewish shops were forced to remain open and Jewish schoolchildren required to attend school. Identity cards stamped "Race: Jewish" were issued to all Libyan Jews. By 1940 Libya became the scene of heavy fighting between the Axis and British armies. On orders from the German Military Commander,

the Axis forces, in 1942, plundered Jewish shops and deported 2,600 Benghazi Jews to Giado, a remote military outpost overlooking the Sahara Desert.

More than 200 Libyan Jews of British nationality were among those deported to Italy in 1942 by the Fascists. Rita, now a U.S. resident, was 11 years old at the time.

"The Fascists sent us to a camp in Abruzzi, the mountainous region east of Rome," she recalled. "We were well treated, even permitted kosher food and a synagogue. Italian Jews sent us matzoh for Passover and books. You must understand that the Italians were very different from the Germans. After nearly two and a half years in Abruzzi, we were deported by the Nazis to Bergen Belsen. In our group was a three-month-old boy who had been born in the Italian camp. He was circumcised in secret in Bergen Belsen. You see, we never gave up our beliefs. We never forgot who we were, even there. Fortunately, through a combination of luck, our British passports and Red Cross interest in the camps in Germany, we were transferred to a civilian prisoner-of-war camp after six months. In September 1945, I returned to Tripoli and, as far as I know, virtually all

the others deported from Libya survived as well."

By contrast, nearly 2,000 able-bodied Tripoli Jews were conscripted into forced labor. In January 1943, two weeks before these conscriptees were to be sent to Tunisia, the British army liberated Libya. Louis Rabinowitz, a senior Jewish chaplain with the victorious forces, recorded his impressions:

"...Under Axis orders, the conscripted Jews of Tripoli toiled from daybreak to nightfall throughout the long summer days, with one meal a day...But they only worked six days a week. Even the Axis knew that nothing would induce these pious...Jews to work on the Sabbath." And, referring to Giado, the camp for Benghazi Jews, Rabinowitz noted that "no one was exempt from this cruel edict...Were it not for the weekly loads of food which were sent to them by the Tripoli Jewish community, they would surely have starved to death...As it was, 215 of the internees were laid to rest. They had died from undernourishment and typhus."*

* "Chronicles: Liberation in North Africa," The Menorah Journal,

Vol. XXXIII, April-June 1945

Jewish soldiers of the British Eighth Army, recruited in Palestine, were the first to enter Tripoli in 1943. Under their influence Zionist activity among Libyan Jews, which had gained strength in the '20s and '30s but was curtailed by the Axis powers, was revived. The American Joint Distribution Committee (A.J.D.C.) provided cash relief to indigent Jews; the Jewish soldiers assisted in reestablishing the Jewish schools that had been closed by the Axis occupiers.

Pan-Islamic and anti-Jewish propaganda fueled by the Arab League, coupled with the rise of Libyan nationalism, led to Muslim rioting in 1945 in Tripolitania province. Not until the third day did the British even attempt to end the rioting.* In the end, the death toll was 130, with 450 injured and 4000 left homeless; nine synagogues were destroyed and countless Jewish-owned shops damaged.

*Many Libyan Jews are persuaded that the British were, in fact, at least partially responsible for the pogrom, citing the otherwise inexplicable British delay in responding to the violence. According to this view, the British were disturbed by Jewish calls for an independent Jewish State in Palestine. Also,

they were reportedly anxious to hold on to their colonies and manipulated Arab-Jewish relations in Libya to prove that the country was not ready for independence.

Three years later, provoked by Tunisian volunteers passing through Libya to the Palestine front and Libyan nationalists, mobs again attacked the Jewish quarters. But this time the Jews, aided by a self-defense organization created in the wake of the 1945 pogrom, and a quicker British response limited the damage. Even so, 15 Jews were killed and hundreds of families left homeless.

As a result of the two pogroms, decades of reasonably cordial relations with Muslims were shattered. Driven by fear for their safety and well-being, and drawn by the creation of the Jewish State, the vast majority of Libya's 39,000 Jews began to consider *aliyah*. In 1948, because of British restrictions, emigration to the fledgling Jewish State was carried out clandestinely via Tunisia, France and Italy. 2,500 Libyan Jews -- mainly young people eager to aid Israel's struggle for independence -- succeeded in reaching Israel by April 1949 when it became possible to conduct the transfer openly. The Jewish

Agency organized monthly trips by ship from Tripoli to Haifa. By 1952, the first year of Libyan independence, 33,000 Libyan Jews had emigrated to Israel. Abe Loskove, who was director of the A.J.D.C. Libyan operation during those tumultuous years of mass aliyah, recalled the period in a recent interview:

"There was a veritable clamor to get out of the country as a result of the 1948 pogrom and the excitement of the new Jewish State. Everyone was shouting 'aliyah.' We had to work fast as the handwriting was on the wall. Once Libya achieved independence, we knew aliyah would stop. But as much as people wanted to leave leave and Israel wanted them, we were presented with a formidable challenge. Many of the Libyan Jews, especially from the hara (ghetto) in Tripoli and the interior, suffered from trachoma, tinea, tuberculosis and malnutrition. Our primary goal was to address these urgent medical needs before people left...The Jews departed in such large numbers that the ships were often carrying twice as many passengers as they were built for. In all, this aliyah was very successful. Libyan Jews integrated quickly and beautifully in Israel."

In December 1951, Libya became an independent state ruled by

King Idris I who had been the leader of Cyrenaica province. The 6,000 Jews who remained did so either because of ties to the land and culture, age, infirmity, non-transferable business interests, quality of life, indecision, missed opportunities, faith in the country's leadership. The 1945 and 1948 pogroms had certainly left their mark but were still seen as aberrations from the true Libyan character of tolerance. After all, Arab-Jewish relations in Libya had been good. In the 1943-44 American Jewish Year Book, for instance, it was reported that the Libyan Jewish condition under Axis occupation "would have been far worse, had it not been for the friendly attitude of the Muslim population." Relations would undoubtedly remain cordial, the Jews felt, under the leadership of the King, who had been admired for his benevolent rule in Cyrenaica. And the Libyan Constitution, drafted under the supervision of a special United Nations Commission and adopted in 1951, contained important protection clauses. Jews and the other minorities (Italians, Maltese and Greeks) were accorded full rights. In fact, the document was regarded as a model for other Muslim countries with Jewish populations destined for decolonialization.

Abraham Karlikow, then assistant director of the American

Jewish Committee's Paris Office and later the AJC's director of foreign affairs, worked closely with Libyan Jewish leaders to achieve these guarantees. He described the community in a 1951 report, less than a year before Libyan independence:

"The Jewish community of Tripoli is extremely Orthodox, and this applies to the Westernized better off Jews as much as to the poor Jews of the hara, where half of Libya's remaining Jews continue to live. On the Sabbath the leading business street in Tripoli, the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, is virtually shut down...The community had 30 synagogues before the war; now there are seven...The interests of the men center around their business...There is hardly a Jewish professional in the country.* The women lead a very restricted life, though their position is, of course, far more advanced than that of the Arab women, who cannot show their face in public...

*(A study of more than 6,000 Libyan heads of households who arrived in Israel between 1948 and 1951 found that, among the respondents, 47% were artisans, 15% merchants, 7.5% clerks and administrators, 7% construction and transport workers, 6% farmers and 3% in the liberal professions.)

"The community was sharply divided on economic grounds. The financially better off Jews in Tripoli adopted Western dress and manners...and could double for middle-class businessmen in New York without any particular difficulty. The poor Jews lived much like the Arabs around them. On the surface, in dress, language and manner, they could hardly be distinguished from their Arab neighbors. Their living conditions were frightful...The leadership of the community is centered in the Jewish Community Board whose major responsibilities include the provision of cash relief to the disadvantaged, synagogue and cemetery upkeep, Jewish educational assistance (together with the A.J.D.C. and the Alliance Israelite Universelle) and contact with the authorities... Whereas 11 rabbinical academies existed in Tripoli in 1880, by 1950 there were none, and a Hebrew teachers' seminary that opened in 1947 was shut down a few years later because of the large-scale emigration."

Notwithstanding constitutional guarantees, restrictions on the Jewish community were gradually imposed. As early as 1952, Jews were forbidden to return home if they visited Israel, and access to Libyan passports became virtually impossible. Few Libyan Jews were granted citizenship in the new state, though

though most had lived in the country for generations. The next year, Libya joined the Arab League and increasingly echoed its anti-Israel rhetoric. All contact with Israel was proscribed. In 1958, the Tripolitania Jewish Community Board was forcibly dissolved and the authorities appointed a Muslim to administer the affairs of the community. Two years later, the Alliance Israelite Universelle school, which had functioned since 1870, was closed. In 1961, a law was promulgated permitting the seizure of all property belonging to Jews who emigrated to Israel.

Ten years after independence, Jews could not vote, hold public office, serve in the army, obtain Libyan passports, purchase new property, acquire majority ownership in any new business, or supervise their own communal affairs. Yet the Jews remained. Their daily lives were, to a substantial degree, largely unaffected by these prohibitions: access to the synagogues was unimpeded; businesses often prospered; for many, their British, French, Italian or Tunisian citizenship inspired a degree of confidence and security; and faith in the basic friendship of King Idris to the Jewish minority continued. An elderly Tripoli Jew whom I met in Israel in 1984 tried to explain his decision to

stay in Libya through the '50s and early '60s:

"It's quite natural to wonder why we remained in a country increasingly inhospitable to Jews and implacably opposed to Israel and Zionism. How could we live tranquilly when we constantly feared the uncovering of our contact with relatives who had left for Israel in 1948 and 1949? I guess the answer is really rather simple: Our roots in Libya were deep, our attachment to the country strong, and our daily lives as Jews, believe it or not, unhindered. We came to resign ourselves, almost to take for granted, our political powerlessness and physical vulnerability. Without specific provocation, it would have been difficult to just get up and leave for an uncertain future."

As late as January 1967, Tripoli's Jews felt sufficiently confident of their position to plan the construction of a new synagogue in the city center. But in the ensuing months, growing tension throughout the Middle East and North Africa was fueled by Egyptian President Nasser's provocative actions against the Jewish State and fiery anti-Israel rhetoric. Libya's Jews hoped they would somehow remain untouched by events

beyond their country's borders, but the outbreak of war in the Middle East in June dispelled any such hopes. A Libyan Jew who served as correspondent in Tripoli for an international Jewish organization recalled the impact of the Six-Day War on the Jewish community:

"At 10 o'clock on the morning of June 5th, the news that hostilities had started between Israel and the Arab states spread through the city like lightning. 'The Week for Palestine' (inspired by the pan-Arab pronouncements of Nasser) which had begun a few days earlier with controlled and pacific demonstrations...exploded into fanatic and destructive demonstrations against the peaceful Jewish population...The mob, drunk with fanaticism and constantly excited by false news (from the battlefield), hurled itself ferociously and violently upon Jewish stores, warehouses and homes, provoking fire, destruction and massacre. The sections most heavily attacked included the hara...The government had to proclaim a state of emergency and ordered a curfew from 7 p.m. until 6 a.m. For safety the Jews of the hara and the distant sections were taken to a barrack at Gurgi, about four kilometers from the city center, but those Jews living in other sections were asked not

to leave their homes since the police were unable to give them adequate protection...Several Arabs and Italians who tried to buy bread for their Jewish friends were blackmailed and threatened with serious measures if they did it again."

Corriere della Sera, a leading Italian newspaper, carried an interview on June 13 with a 14-year-old boy, one of six Jewish refugees who managed to flee Libya at the time. "From the day the war began, I did not go out of my house," he recalled. "For a while we used the food we had; then we began fasting. Once in a while, threatening phone calls came for us. We decided to escape from Tripoli when the eleventh call came and a man's voice said, 'Dirty Jew, we shall chop you in a thousand pieces.'"

Giulia, who was then a 16-year-old pupil in an Italian school in Tripoli, still remembers those traumatic events with obvious pain.

"Tension was building in the weeks prior to the outbreak of the war. Then the war began and we huddled at home -- my parents and eight children, ranging in age from 17 to three. The mob

and eight children, ranging in age from 17 to three. The mob came. It seemed there were a thousand wild-eyed, chanting men. Some had jars of gasoline which they began to empty in our house. One was about to strike a match when another Arab, whom we had known for years, called on the crowd to withdraw. He said that we were a decent family who had never harmed anyone. Amazingly, everyone complied. That act took unspeakable courage. "

Beda, Giulia's mother, had had warm relations with Muslims all her life. During the 1950s her family had been the only Jews in a town midway between Tripoli and Benghazi, where they remained observant, and the children attended a Catholic school (the alternative being an Arab/Muslim school) but were excused from prayers. And the family does not recall any anti-Semitic incidents either in that coastal town or later in Tripoli to which they moved in the early '60s. Thus, the ferocity of the Muslim outburst in June 1967 not only surprised them but also caused great anguish and soul-searching.

"Many Jews were murdered during the riots," Beda recalled tearfully. "I had known several of the victims well and it causes

me untold grief to this day to recall their fate. And the wanton destruction of the Jewish buildings, homes and stores, and our forced expulsion rip at my soul. The graves of all my relatives are there. The most difficult thing of all is that I have not been able to return to the gravesites of my family. And were I allowed to travel in Libya today, I would find that the Jewish cemeteries have been destroyed to make way for roads and hotels...

"Qaddafi ignored our appeals to exhume and transfer the bodies before construction began. And our synagogues have been desecrated, turned into mosques or cultural centers. Still, despite everything that happened in 1967, Libya was my country. Yes, many local Arabs came to kill us, and did viciously kill the others. But I cannot overlook the fact that other Arabs saved us at great personal risk. After the mob left our home that first day, we were afraid to stay there. Muslim friends broke the curfew to shepherd our family to the safety of their own home and kept us there for ten days until things quieted down. We owe them our lives."

By the time calm was restored, 18 Jews in Tripoli were dead.

Two families were killed by a Libyan official who said he was escorting them to shelter. An old woman and a young boy were murdered as they ventured out of their homes in search of food. A girl who tried to get to the *souk* (market) dressed in a *barracan* (Arab dress) and with covered face, was recognized and killed on the spot. And an old Maltese was mistaken for a Jew and fatally stabbed. Property damage was in the millions of dollars.

The 230 Jews in Benghazi fared somewhat better. Though shops were destroyed, the police controlled the situation much sooner than in Tripoli and transported the Jews in a camp near the city for their own protection.

The death toll might have been even higher were it not for the courageous intervention of Cesare Pasquinelli, Italy's ambassador to Libya, who personally extended protection to several Jews in danger and ordered all Italian diplomatic missions in the country to help in any way they could. Pasquinelli, who had acted similarly during World War II to rescue French Jews, died shortly afterwards. Libyan Jews in Israel honored him posthumously for his heroism.

Finally, faced with a complete breakdown of law and order, the Libyan Government urged the Jews to leave the country temporarily. Whereas, in the past, Jews had had considerable difficulty obtaining travel documents, Libyan officials were now visiting Jewish homes and issuing such documents on the spot. Escorts were provided to the airports. But departing Jews were only permitted one suitcase and the equivalent of \$50.

In June and July some 4,000 Jews travelled to Italy where they were assisted by the Jewish Agency, A.J.D.C., the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an ad hoc Emergency Committee of Jews from Libya, and the Italian Jewish community. About 1,300 of these refugees continued on to Israel, where they joined 33,000 Libyan Jews who had emigrated in the '40s and early '50s and were by then well established in such locales as Netanya and Bat Yam. Twenty-two hundred remained in Italy, primarily in Rome and Milan. Already fluent in Italian and heavily influenced by the dominant Italian culture in Libya, their adaptation was comparatively easy. A few hundred eventually resettled in the U.S. Today, only six elderly Jews remain in Tripoli.

The Association of Jews from Libya, whose current president is

Raffaello Fellah, was founded in 1970. Based in Rome, it has sought to pressure the Libyan Government to provide compensation for seized Jewish communal and personal assets. The Association also collaborates with the Cultural Center of the Jews of Libya in Israel and Beth Hatefutsoth, the Tel Aviv-based Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, to help preserve the cultural legacy of the community. A photographic exhibit was featured at the museum, and several booklets on Libyan Jewish history have been published.

Predictably, the so-called temporary exodus in 1967 became permanent. A few score of Jews remained in Libya, while others succeeded, in the two years prior to Qaddhafi's coup d'etat in September 1969, in returning briefly in an attempt to regain their possessions. While a few succeeded, others, who became trapped in Libya after Qaddhafi's accession to power, had great difficulty in getting out, and some were forcibly detained for several years.

In 1970, the Libyan Government announced a series of laws to confiscate the assets of Libya's Jews, issuing bonds providing for fair compensation payable within 15 years. But 1985 came

and went with no compensation ever paid, despite the efforts of the Association of Libyan Jews and others to gain the help of Western governments and international organizations. Qaddafi has excused his defaulting on the bonds by asserting that "the alignment of these Jews with Israel, the Arab nation's enemy, has forfeited their right to compensation."

And so, with only a few scattered international protests and scant press attention, another once-thriving Jewish community came to an end. Indeed, within two decades of Israel's founding, nearly one million Jews from Muslim countries emigrated or were forced to leave. Ancient communities in Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and other countries disappeared. Still, as Yusef, a 55-year-old Rishon le-Zion resident who arrived in Israel in the 1950s, explained:

"After more than 2,000 years, it has all come to an end for us. Or maybe not. Maybe it was all by way of preparation for the next 2,000 years, for our lives in the Jewish homeland. We are strong believers in God, you know, and in the fulfillment of His will.

January 1987

Libyan Jews Seek Promised Compensation

By YITZHAK RABI

NEW YORK (JTA) — The first international convention of Jews from Libya will be held in Manhattan June 6-7, it was announced here.

Raffaello Fella, founder and president of the Association of Jews from Libya, said in a press conference at the American Jewish Committee (AJC) that the convention is timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the forced departure of the Libyan Jewish community in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War. Almost the entire Libyan Jewish community of 4,500 was forced to leave, including Fella, a businessman who now resides in Italy.

During the conference, to be held at the Shearith Israel (Spanish-Portuguese) Synagogue on Central Park West, legal experts will seek ways to address Libyan Jewish personal and communal property claims against Libya.

Fella explained that in 1970, Col. Muammar Qaddafi's revolutionary regime nationalized the property of Jews who had left Libya indefinitely, promising indemnification in 15 years. In 1985, when payment because due, the Libyan leaders failed to fulfill his

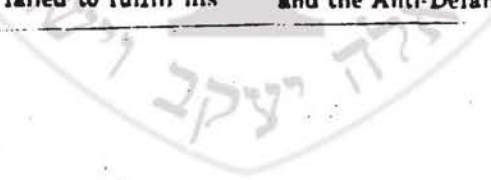
promise, Fella charged.

Noting that since the establishment of Israel in 1948 and following pogroms with the outbreak of any new Mideast war, about 40,000 Libyan Jews left, most of them to Israel, Fella estimated that the total claims of Libyan Jews against the Libyan government are "some billions of dollars."

Other events at the up-coming conference, Fella said, include the premiere of a documentary film on the Jews of Libya, an exhibition of photographs of Libyan Jewry and religious objects from the Beth El Synagogue in Tripoli and a history symposium relating to the Jews of Libya.

According to Fella, whose father was murdered in a 1945 pogrom in Tripoli, only "five-and-a-half Jews" are presently living in Libya. The half, he explained, is a result of a mixed marriage between an Arab and a Jew.

The convention, scheduled to be attended by hundreds of Libyan Jews from Israel, Italy and the United States, is jointly sponsored by the Association of Jews from Libya, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.



(NEW YORK) JEWISH WEEK - MAY 1, 1987

Libyan Jews to hold first world meeting

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nification in 15 years. In 1985, when payment became due, the Libyan leader failed to fulfill his promise, Fellah charged.

Since establishment of Israel in 1948, about 40,000 Jews have left Libya, Fellah said, with most going to Israel. Many of them left in waves as a result of the pogroms that accompanied each new Middle East war, he said, adding that Libyan Jews' claims against the Libyan government total "some billions of dollars."

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Jewish Telegraphic Agency

LIBYAN JEWS IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

by Brigadier General David HaGoel

As other immigrants from the many Diaspora communities in Israel, Jews from Libya are well integrated into Israeli society. One may come across the Libyan Jew and his descendants in various walks of Israeli life, such as education, the economy and, of course, in the army and security fields.

I would like to concentrate on the involvement of the Libyan Jews in the defense of Israel and security of the State including the period before the State of Israel was established. Jews from Libya participated in all of the underground organizations created to protect the Jewish community in Palestine before 1948. Some joined the Hagana, while others joined the Irgun and the Lechi. Undoubtedly at that time, their immigration to Palestine was due to their strong honest devotion to Zionism.

I joined the Hagana underground at the young age of 14 when I was in my last year of elementary school. At that time I was trained as a recruit and to be a fighter in one of the field units. After two years in the Hagana, at the age of 16, I joined the Squad Commanders Course that took place in Ben Shemen, one of the Hagana bases outside Jerusalem. The commander of the course was Yuval Ne'eman, who is today a professor at Tel Aviv University. Other Libyan youngsters joined and participated in the Irgun and Stern groups and took part in different activities all over Palestine.

Before the War of Independence, as a young commander of the Hagana, I met many people from the Libyan Jewish community in the Hagana and in the other underground organizations.

When we entered the War of Independence in April/May 1948, all of the young people of the Libyan Jewish community in Palestine were recruited into the new Israel Defense Forces (I.D.F.). Those who belonged to the various underground groups were able to make use of the military training they received before the war of 1948. All of us took part and participated in battles of the War of Independence.

I had the privilege of being one of the young commanders of a fighting unit of the I.D.F., and as such took part in the battles of Tel Aviv-Jaffa and in the hard heavy battles in Jerusalem and the suburbs.

In 1948, I strongly felt the responsibility and privilege of belonging to a fighting unit, commanding battles in defense of Jerusalem and taking part in the history of the establishment of the State of Israel.

Hundreds of Libyan Jewish youngsters were killed or injured during the battles which took place along the borders with the surrounding Arab

countries. Many of the new immigrants had arrived just before the war, while others came during the War of Independence. Those youngsters were given intensive training and joined fighting units after a short time. Names such as Pedahzur Zurets, Yosef Arbib, Berdda, Chesuba, Ganish, Maghnazy, Galily, Fadlon, Cahlon, Badash, and many, many others have been inscribed on special marble plaques on the walls of many synagogues of the Libyan Jewish communities all over Israel.

During the forty years of the existence of the State of Israel, more I.D.F. fighters and commanders from the Libyan Jewish community are to be found in different units and branches in proportionately higher numbers than from any other Jewish community in Israel.

Among them are Brig. Gen. Ramy Cahlon, Chief of the Maintenance Branch, and myself, Commander of the Jerusalem Brigade and later the Head of Planning and Organization Department of the General Staff of the I.D.F. I was also the Commander of Judea and Samaria from 1976-1978, and today practice law in Jerusalem.

Even now, forty years after the War of Independence, Libyan Jewish immigrants and many second and third generation Libyan Jews may be found taking part in all aspects of society in Israel and particularly in the Israel Defense Forces and other security organizations as soldiers in field units, in the Israeli Navy, and as pilots and navigators in the Air Force.

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THE JEWS OF LIBYA IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL 1949-1987

by Benzion Rubin

Former Israeli Vice-Minister of Social Affairs

ONLY ONCE DURING HUNDREDS OF YEARS DOES A MOVEMENT OF INHABITANTS IN A LARGE CIRCUIT CHANGE THE FACE OF COUNTRIES AND LANDS. THIS HAPPENED AS A RESULT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ALSO AS A RESULT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

JEWISH EXILE COMMUNITIES THAT SURVIVED FOR OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS WERE UPROOTED AND ABOLISHED, WITHIN A FEW YEARS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL. ACTUALLY, THIS WAS A MOVEMENT OF INHABITANTS AS ANY OTHER REFUGEE MOVEMENTS OF WARS AND NATURE DISASTERS, BUT IN HER NATURE - THIS IS A MOVEMENT OF SONS RETURNING HOME!

BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT THIS WAS NOT AN IMMIGRATION AS OTHER IMMIGRATIONS, BUT A RETURN HOME TO OUR HOMELAND, WE HAVE WITNESSED AMAZING FACTS. SHLICHIM (EMISSARIES) REACHED FARAWAY VILLAGES AND WHEN THEY WHISPERED TO THE LOCAL LEADER, RABBI OR CANTOR, THAT THEY HAVE COME TO BRING THE JEWS TO ISRAEL, THIS MESSAGE PASSED THROUGH LIKE A CURRENT OF ELECTRICITY AND THE WHOLE CONGREGATION TO THE LAST ONE PACKED THEIR BELONGINGS AND WERE READY TO MOVE EXACTLY LIKE "THE EXODUS OF EGYPT IN OUR NEW TIMES!"

IN LIBYA, TOO, THIS MESSAGE PASSED AS A CURRENT OF ELECTRICITY AMONGST YOUNGSTERS WHO ALREADY STARTED TO BURST OUT FROM ALL DIRECTIONS, SOME HOLDING FORGED CERTIFICATES AND SOME NONE AT ALL. SOME CROSSED THE DESERT TO EGYPT AND FROM THERE BY TRAIN, DISGUISED AS BRITISH SOLDIERS OR AS TOURISTS. OTHERS STOLE ACROSS THE BORDERS TO TUNISIA AND FINALLY TO FRANCE. MOST OF THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT WENT OUT THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN IN SMALL BOATS AND BATTERED SHIPS FROM FAR REACHING SHORES IN LIBYA TO DESERTED BAYS IN ITALY. THREE THOUSAND YOUNGSTERS CAME IN THIS INCONVENIENT WAY AND MAINTAINED AN IMPORTANT REINFORCEMENT FOR THE LAND OF ISRAEL AND FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HAGANA IN ITALY, WHO DEALT IN THE SURVIVAL OF THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS. ALL THIS HAPPENED WHEN THE GATES WERE CLOSED AND THE BRITISH MANDATE RULED THE COUNTRY. WHEN THE GATES WERE REOPENED, THOUSANDS JOINED THE YOUNGSTERS WHO LEFT EARLIER.

ON APRIL 4TH, 1949 THE FIRST SHIP ON A DIRECT ROUTE TO THE YOUNG SHORES OF ISRAEL LEFT, WHILE THOUSANDS STOOD ON THE DOCKS SINGING "SHIRAT HAYAM," JUST AS OUR BROTHERS SANG ON THE EXILE OF EGYPT. WITHIN TWO YEARS 36,000 OLIM CAME TO ISRAEL IN ONE WAVE. THUS OUT OF A COMMUNITY OF 42,000 ALMOST 90% OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY LEFT IN ONE TREMENDOUS WAVE! THE FEW THOUSANDS THAT DID NOT LEAVE LIBYA IN 1949 WERE UPROOTED FROM THERE IN 1967 AND MOST OF THEM CAME TO ISRAEL. TODAY WE ARE MARKING THE 20TH YEAR SINCE THEIR ARRIVAL. WE CAN STILL TALK ABOUT THE JEWISH CONGREGATION OF LIBYA THAT FULFILLED JEWISH COMMUNITY LIFE - INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION AND PRAYER UP TO 57 WE MAY SAY, THAT THE

CONGREGATION OF LIBYA THAT SURVIVED DURING TWO THOUSAND YEARS LATER RETURNED AND RENEWED HER LIFE IN THE LAND OF OUR FOREFATHERS.

THE RETURN OF SONS TO THEIR HOMETLAND IS ACTUALLY LIKE A REGULAR IMMIGRATION OF THOSE UPROOTED FROM THEIR HOMES TO A NEW COUNTRY. BUT THE RETURN OF SONS TO THEIR HOMETLAND IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT - THEIR EXPECTATIONS ARE LARGER AND THE DIFFICULTIES THAT CONFRONT THEM CAUSE THEM THE MOST DIFFICULT DISAPPOINTMENT. IN TACKLING THEIR OBSTACLES, IN THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SUFFER, LIES THE SECRET OF THEIR SUCCESS IN ABSORPTION. AND IF ONE OF THE TESTS IS THAT THE AMOUNT OF THE SETTLERS WHO HAVE LEFT OUR COUNTRY, WE MAY SAY THAT THE AMOUNT OF THOSE CALLED "YORDIM" AMONGST THE JEWS OF LIBYA WAS ZERO. TWO CRITERIA VERIFY THE SUCCESS OF IMMIGRATION OF LIBYAN JEWS: 1) MORE THAN 90% OF THE COMMUNITY CAME TO ISRAEL; 2) ALMOST ALL OF THEM WERE SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED.

WHY WAS THE ALIYA OF THE LIBYAN JEWS SO SUCCESSFUL? I THINK THAT ONE IMPORTANT REASON WAS THE FACT THAT THERE WAS A SPIRITUAL READINESS OF ALL THE COMMUNITY FOR ALIYA. YOUNG AND OLD SPOKE HEBREW AND LIVED AND BREATHED THE LAND OF ISRAEL WHEN THEY WERE STILL IN LIBYA. THIS IS NOT AN ALIYA AS A RESULT OF AN EXPULSION OR DISTRESS, BUT AN IMMIGRATION OUT OF A DREAM OF GENERATIONS THAT COME TO A REALITY, AND EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE HARDSHIPS IN THE REALIZATION OF THIS DREAM, THEIR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH HELPED THEM TO OVERCOME. THIS IS THE REASON THERE WAS NO EMIGRATION (YERIDA) WHILE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY SETTLED AND TACKLED THE DIFFICULTIES SETTLING IN A NEW REALITY IN AN ANCIENT LAND.

IN WHAT SECTORS DID THE LIBYAN JEWS BECOME ACTIVE?

IN THE PROFESSIONAL AND ECONOMICAL FIELDS WE CAN SEE THE BASE OF IDEALISTIC AND SOCIAL VALUES OF THE COMMUNITY - TO HELP AND TO BUILD OUR HOMETLAND. FOUR CENTRAL SUBJECTS:

1. IN EDUCATION - THE HEADMASTERS AND TEACHERS FROM THE BOARD OF HEBREW EDUCATION IN LIBYA WERE A TREMENDOUS MOTIVATION TO THOSE WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR TRAINING AND TEACHING THOUSANDS OF OLIM THAT ARRIVED DAILY. THIS WAS A NOTABLE CONTRIBUTION TO OUR YOUNG COUNTRY - FINDING AN EDUCATION PROGRAM READY FOR OUR OLIM.
2. IN THE ARMY AND IN THE POLICE - THE YOUNG GENERATION WHO WERE MEMBERS OF YOUTH MOVEMENTS AND THE PIONEER TRAINING IN LIBYA WERE ENTHUSIASTIC TO CONTRIBUTE ALL THEY COULD TO THE YOUNG STATE. THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF HEBREW WAS MOST USEFUL AND HELPFUL. YOUNG SOLDIERS WHO GREW UP DURING THE YEARS BECAME COLONELS AND HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS.
3. IN CONSTRUCTION - MANY WHO DIDN'T HAVE THE BACKGROUND AND SUITABLE EDUCATION DEMANDED FOR ARMY OR POLICE FORCES APPLIED TO STUDY THE PROFESSIONS WORKED IN THE CONSTRUCTION FIELD. DURING PERIODS OF ABSORPTION, THOUSANDS OF HOUSES FOR HUNDREDS

AND THOUSANDS OF OLIM ARE NEEDED. MERCHANTS, JEWELLERS, APPRENTICES, AND SMITHS LEARN TO BE GOOD BUILDERS AND MASONS WORKING WHOLEHEARTEDLY IN THE BUILDING OF THE LAND.

4. IN AGRICULTURE - THE COMMUNITIES OF THE VILLAGES OF TRIPOLI-TANIA AND CYRENAICA, WHO WERE CLOSE TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF RURAL AND AGRICULTURE, ESTABLISHED NEW SETTLEMENTS. FIFTEEN SETTLEMENTS WERE ESTABLISHED BY THE LIBYAN COMMUNITIES. THE DWELLERS OF THE CAVES OF TVGRANA BECAME CITRUS GROWERS AND SENT THE "JAFFA ORANGES." THE PEOPLE OF ZELITAN AND MISURATA BECAME FLOWER GROWERS WHO DISTRIBUTED THEM IN THE EUROPEAN MARKETS. AN INTERESTING FACT IS THAT NOT ONLY A NEW PROFESSION WAS ACQUIRED BUT A NEW MAN WAS BORN - A NEW WORKING MAN WHO IS AWARE OF THE MOST MODERN AND PROGRESSIVE AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WORLD.

IN A RECENT POPULATION CENSUS, SEVENTY-SEVEN THOUSAND LIBYANS WERE REGISTERED. TAKING IN CONSIDERATION THE CENSUS ONLY RELEASES THE FIRST AND SECOND GENERATIONS WE CAN ESTIMATE THAT ALMOST 100,000 LIBYAN JEWS ARE IN ISRAEL, INCLUDING THE THIRD GENERATION. THE QUESTION OF THE THIRD GENERATION IS NOT EASY BECAUSE IT IS DIFFICULT TO DEFINE WHO IS A LIBYAN.

IN CONCLUSION, WE HAVE SEEN THAT THE FIRST GENERATION OF OLIM FROM LIBYA WERE WELL ABSORBED IN THE COUNTRY AND ECONOMICALLY SPREAD IN MANY AREAS, ESPECIALLY IN EDUCATION, THE ARMY, THE POLICE, IN BUILDING AND AGRICULTURE.

IN THE SECOND GENERATION WE ARE AWARE OF CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND TO AN OUTBURST OF A HIGHER SOCIAL ECONOMIC STATUS, THE SONS OF TEACHERS REACHED UNIVERSITIES, SOME OF THEM CONTINUE TO STUDY FOR FURTHER DEGREES AND CONSEQUENTLY WE FIND DOCTORS AND LECTURERS IN THE FIELD OF ACADEMIC SCIENCE. A GROUP OF LAWYERS GROWS, ECONOMISTS, OTHERS DEAL IN TRADE. THE BUILDERS OF THE PREVIOUS GENERATION, OR THEIR SONS AND OTHERS, BECOME CONTRACTORS AND HEAD OF GROUPS WORKING IN STONE LAYING CEMENT AND BUILDING. THE AGRICULTURE CONTINUES TO INTEREST PART OF THE GENERATION AND THEY SET UP NEW SETTLEMENTS, BUT BECAUSE OF RISING PRODUCTION, THE AGRICULTURE CAN NOT SUPPLY WORK FOR THE MAJORITY AND SOME OF THE SETTLERS APPLY FOR WORK IN THE CITIES.

A NEW VICINITY INTERESTS A RISING NUMBER IN THE POLITICAL BOUNDARY AND THE LOCAL CENTRAL LEADERSHIP. FOUR MEMBERS OF THE LIBYAN COMMUNITY OFFICIATED UP TO NOW AS KNESSET MEMBERS LEAD BY THE OLD AND HONORABLE LEADER RABBI F. ZUARETZ. TWO MEMBERS OFFICIATED AS VICE MINISTERS, THE LATE BEN ZION HALFON AS VICE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND MYSELF AS DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS. MANY OTHERS SERVE AS HEADS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AS MAYORS AND VICES AND AS MEMBERS IN THE MUNICIPALITIES. WE KNOW THAT LOCAL AUTHORITY IS THE WAY TO LEADERSHIP. IT IS DIFFICULT TODAY TO IDENTIFY THE THIRD GENERATION, SINCE THEY MIXED AND MARRIED WITH LOTS OF OTHER COMMUNITIES AND SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS HAVE BEEN INTERWOVEN. TODAY YOU MAY FIND DESCENDANTS OF THE LIBYAN

EMIGRES WHEREVER YOU TURN: IN RESEARCH, IN TRADE, IN PUBLIC SERVICE, IN AGRICULTURE AND BUILDING. THE COMMON DENOMINATOR TO ALL TODAY IS NOT ONLY THE FACT THAT THEY ARE DESCENDANTS OF A FATHER OR GRANDFATHER THAT CAME FROM TRIPOLI AND THAT ALL ARE LOVERS OF LIBYA CUISINE - YOU WILL DEFINITELY FIND ANOTHER SIMILARITY. THE FEELING OF CONTENTMENT, THE FEELING OF SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL TO HER VALUES TO ALL THAT IS GOING ON HERE! AND THIS IS PERHAPS THE BEST TEST OF THE SUCCESS OF THE LIBYAN COMMUNITY IN ISRAEL. OUR PARENTS HAVE LEFT VALUABLE PROPERTY AND TRADITION OF TWO THOUSAND YEARS BUT WE HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO BUILD OUR HOMES HERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL.



Marc

See especially places marked.

George

THE FORGOTTEN VICTIMS OF ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT:

THE JEWS IN ARAB LANDS

by George E. Gruen, Ph.D.
Director, Middle East Affairs

Jews have lived in the Arab speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa for millennia. Indeed, in certain countries such as Iraq, Yemen and Morocco, Jewish communities can be traced back to the period of the first exile, following the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. If one includes the Muslim but non-Arab countries of Iran and Turkey, more than one million Jews lived in this region before 1948. Today only 75,000 remain.

If we exclude Turkey and Iran and concentrate on the Arab countries, the contrast is even sharper. As against some 880,000 Jews living in Arab countries on the eve of the creation of the State of Israel, today fewer than 25,000 remain in the Arab world. More than half of these are in one country -- Morocco. Their numbers continue to dwindle through gradual emigration. The second largest community of 4,000 to 5,000 is in Syria. The number remains relatively constant only because the Syrian authorities forbid all Jewish emigration. Even to visit relatives abroad, Syrian Jews must leave a large financial deposit and close family members behind as hostages for their return. Jews caught trying to flee the country are subject to brutal interrogation and imprisonment for six months or longer.

Why did the overwhelming majority of the Jews in the Arab world "vote with their feet" and leave their homes during the past 40 years? For some there was the positive attraction of taking part as pioneers in the rebuilding of an independent Jewish state in the land of Israel. For others, such as the Yemeni Jews who were flown to Israel in "Operation Magic Carpet," the return to Zion on "the wings of an eagle" appeared as the marvelous fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.

But in the great majority of cases it was not so much the positive attraction of Israel or Western Europe but a combination of negative forces in their countries of residence that impelled them to leave. Time permits me only to list these forces without much elaboration or detail.

1. The breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and traditional Islamic society. In the multiethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, Jews had enjoyed a large measure of autonomy in their communal and religious life. Sovereignty was reserved to Muslim rulers. Although Jews and Christians had a second class and inferior position in the Islamic scheme of things, they had a clearly defined status. Under benevolent

rulers Jews enjoyed affluence and even achieved positions of prominence. Under fanatical or arbitrary rulers Jews were at times severely restricted and discriminated against.

2. The domination by Western colonial powers and the rise of Arab nationalism. With the decay of Ottoman power, Britain, France and Italy took over large chunks of the Arab world. Jews played a disproportionately large role in the commercial, professional and administrative life of these countries. Their knowledge of Western languages and their contacts abroad facilitated ties between local Jews and the colonial powers. Local Arab nationalism developed as a reaction to foreign rule. Since Jews were visibly associated with the hated foreign rulers, it was easy for Arab nationalists to scapegoat the Jews as tools of the imperialists. Arab nationalists were also jealous of the wealth and position attained by some Jews and they looked for ways to supplant the Jews.

3. The readiness of various political groups and even ruling regimes to scapegoat the Jews for every misfortune befalling the population or for the failure of the government to relieve the economic suffering of their own people. As Victoria d'Asprea put it: "Of all non-Moslems the Jews are the safest targets. They are [considered to be] Europeans and as such any 'barefoot' Mohammedan is glad to shoot at them. They are not supported by a powerful empire and attacks upon them do not create diplomatic incidents. Moreover, they are 'infidels,' which makes them particularly attractive victims of the ore fanatical Mohammedans. They are Jews, which satisfies those who are more specifically anti-Semitic." ("Behind the Arab Veil," Palestine, vol. 5, no. 31.)

4. The development of Jewish nationalism and its political manifestation in the Zionist movement. With the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, the awarding of the Mandate over Palestine to Great Britain after World War I, and the increase in Jewish migration to Palestine after the rise of Nazi Germany, Zionist efforts increasingly clashed with Palestinian Arab nationalism. There were riots within Palestine in 1921, 1929, and throughout the period of 1936-39. Pro-Palestinian sympathy led to demonstrations which sometimes spilled over into attacks on local Jews.

All these factors combined to weaken the traditional position of the Jewish communities in Arab lands. A most notorious example was the Farhud, a two-day pogrom in Baghdad in June 1941, in which between 170 and 180 Jews were killed, more than 900 others were wounded and 14,500 Jews sustained material losses through the looting or destruction of their stores and homes.

What had triggered this outbreak of violence? In April Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani, an Arab nationalist with strong anti-British and pro-German sympathies, staged a coup with the help of nationalist elements in the army, forced the Reccent, Crown Prince Abdul Ilah, to flee and declared a state of war against the British. Rashid 'Ali's cabinet included pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic elements, including Yunis Sab'awi, the

Minister of Economics, who was planning a physical assault on the wealthy Jewish community to seize their property and remove them as a factor in Iraq's economy. Sab'awi had established armed "youth brigades," ostensibly for civil defense, but also to carry out anti-Jewish pogroms. Thirteen Jews were murdered in the north of the country. 'Ali and his supporters fled Baghdad on May 29 as the British were approaching.

That year Shavuoth fell on Sunday June 1 and Monday June 2. Feeling that the danger had passed, Jews dressed in their holiday finery ventured out on Sunday to view the festive return of the Regent. The impression left on the Iraqi masses was that the Jews were celebrating the country's defeat at the hands of the hated British. The pogrom started when demobilized Iraqi soldiers began attacking Jews in full view of the military police. They were joined by members of the security forces, mobs from the slum neighborhoods and then hordes of tribesmen from the outskirts. Efforts to restore order were begun only late on Monday, when the danger was felt that non-Jewish life and property might also begin to be threatened.

A hastily convened official inquiry blamed the pogrom on 1. Nazi propaganda disseminated by the German Legation; 2. the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who in the name of Islam and Arabism incited "against the Jews and the British"; 3. Palestinian and Syrian school teachers who "poisoned the minds of their students; 4. Nazi propaganda broadcasts in Arabic from Berlin; 5. Iraqi radio broadcasts which in April and May had spread reports of "non-existent misdeeds in Palestine" and contained "open and fierce incitement against the Jews;" and 6. the Youth Brigades, whose members systematically harassed the Jews. The commission also criticized the police for not doing their duty.

The report was strangely silent as to how this two-day pogrom could be carried out after the pro-Nazi regime of Rashid 'Ali had been toppled and the British forces were posed on the outskirts of Baghdad. One key British participant later expressed the opinion that the British had failed to act because their intervention would have been "lowering to the dignity of our ally, the Regent, if he were seen to be supported on arrival by British bayonets." (Cited by Nissim Rejwan, The Jews of Iraq (London, 1985), pp. 222-223.)

Although the British restored order, the general position of the Jewish community continued to deteriorate as anti-foreign sentiment mounted and Iraq and the states bordering Palestine -- Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon -- became increasingly involved in the Arab-Jewish struggle. The creation of the League of Arab States in Cairo in early 1945 gave a new organizational framework for anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish measures. Jews were squeezed out of government employment, limited in schools, and subjected to imprisonment and heavy fines and sequestration of their property on the flimsiest of charges of being connected to "Communism" or "Zionism." In Iraq the mere receipt of a letter from a Jew in Palestine was sufficient to bring about arrest and loss of property. In 1945, November 2, the anniversary of the Balfour

Declaration, became the occasion for widespread riots and destruction of synagogues and Jewish property in Aleppo, Syria; Cairo, Egypt; and Tripoli, Libya to name only the most terrible incidents. (As in Iraq, the British military authorities in Libya waited days before restoring order.)

The days before and after the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 1947 of a resolution recommending the partition of Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states, triggered more violent incidents. These were accompanied by threats by Arab delegates from the rostrum of the United Nations itself that any action favorable to the Zionists would, in the words of Egyptian Delegate Haykal Pasha, unleash "mob fury" beyond the capacity of the authorities to control. "Unconsciously," he warned, "you are on the verge of lighting a flame of anti-Semitism in the Middle East which would be more difficult to extinguish than it was in Germany . . ." (Statement on Nov. 24, 1947, cited in S. Landshut, Jewish Communities in the Muslim Countries of the Middle East. (London, 1950) p. 33.

Arrests of Jewish men, severe restrictions on travel, and sequestration or confiscation of Jewish property were imposed by Egypt, Syria and Iraq when they together with Jordan and Lebanon sent armed forces to prevent the establishment of the Jewish State on May 15, 1948.

The unexpected defeat of the Arab armies unleashed further mass outbreaks against the local Jews. Seeking to deflect the shame for their defeat at the hands of the Jews in Israel, the ruling regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq spread stories that local Jews aligned with the imperialist powers had helped to betray the country to the Zionists. The climate of fear impelled many Jews to leave and hundreds of thousands from Yemen to Iraq did so when the government briefly opened the gates. They had to leave their property behind.

The media of mass communication, especially the radio, continued to spread anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish propaganda to the Arab masses. After Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt, Sawt al-Arab min al Kahira (The Voice of the Arabs from Cairo) became a key vehicle for this campaign. It reached a fever pitch in the weeks preceding the June 1967 war. The massive defeat of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the Six-Day War unleashed further anti-Jewish measures. While in Morocco and Tunisia the government worked hard to protect the Jews from mob violence, in Egypt it was the government itself which arrested some four hundred Jewish men and held them for months in terrible conditions. They were told that they would be released only if they forfeited their citizenship and property and agreed to be expelled from Egypt.

On November 22, 1967 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242 which called for a comprehensive solution of the Arab-Israel conflict. This resolution affirms among the necessary elements of a just and lasting peace "achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem." Justice Arthur Goldberg, the American delegate who was instrumental in the drafting of the resolution, has pointed out that the adjective "Palestinian" or "Arab" was deliberately omitted before the

word refugee to indicate that the claims of the Jewish refugees from Arab lands needed also to be addressed. Accordingly, Nils-Goran Gussing, the special representative of UN Secretary-General U Thant, raised the situation of the Jewish prisoners with the Egyptian Government and also the restrictions placed on the Syrian Jews with the authorities in Damascus.

Although the Egyptian and Syrian authorities at the time were not cooperative, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty does provide for a joint commission to handle claims. These precedents are important as is today's conference which seeks to focus world attention on the communal and personal losses suffered by the Jewish communities in Libya. As we all strive for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East we must not allow the world to forget the Jews from Arab lands -- the innocent victims of Arab-Israeli conflict.



NOTES FOR PRESS BRIEFING ON LIBYAN JEWS
FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 1987

* The primary purpose of today's event is the premiere film screening of the first documentary film in any language on the rich and hitherto scarcely-known history of the 2000-year old Libyan Jewish community.

Israel - Arab attacks

* The timing of this event is not accidental. 20 years ago today, as the 6-Day War began, it also set into motion demonstrations and a pogrom in Libya against the 4,000-member Jewish community that led to the hurried exodus of the country's remaining Jews. And also, today marks the beginning of an exciting and unique first international assembly gathering of Jews from Libya. Hundreds of Jews of Libyan origin from Israel, Italy, Canada and United States are coming to New York for two days of meetings and other events to mark this occasion. The conference, which is being sponsored by the Association of Jews from Libya whose president, Raffaello Fellah, will address you in just a moment, and the American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League will look at the history and culture of the Libyan Jewish community, address the heretofore unresolved personal and communal claims issues, and enjoy authentic Libyan Jewish entertainment and foods. Ambassador Alan Keyes, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, will be the keynote speaker at Saturday evening's dinner.

* All of this would not have been possible without the extraordinary dedication over decades of one man in particular, a Libyan Jew whose father was killed in Libya in 1945, ^{AND WHO} was compelled to leave Libya, leave his family's roots and his business. He resettled in Rome where he currently lives. Raffaello Fellah is the co-founder and president of the Association of Jews from Libya and the Israel-based Cultural Center of Jews from Libya. He has been the driving force behind the effort to preserve Libyan Jewish culture, so effectively presented in a permanent photographic exhibit at the Museum of the

Diaspora in Tel Aviv, in a recent book on Libyan Jews published by the University of Texas Press, in the conceptualization and implementation of this weekend's conference, which, by the way, is open to the press, and in the film which we will see shortly. It is my great pleasure and honor to present to you Mr. Raffaell Fella who will introduce the film to you.

Prepared by David Harris

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

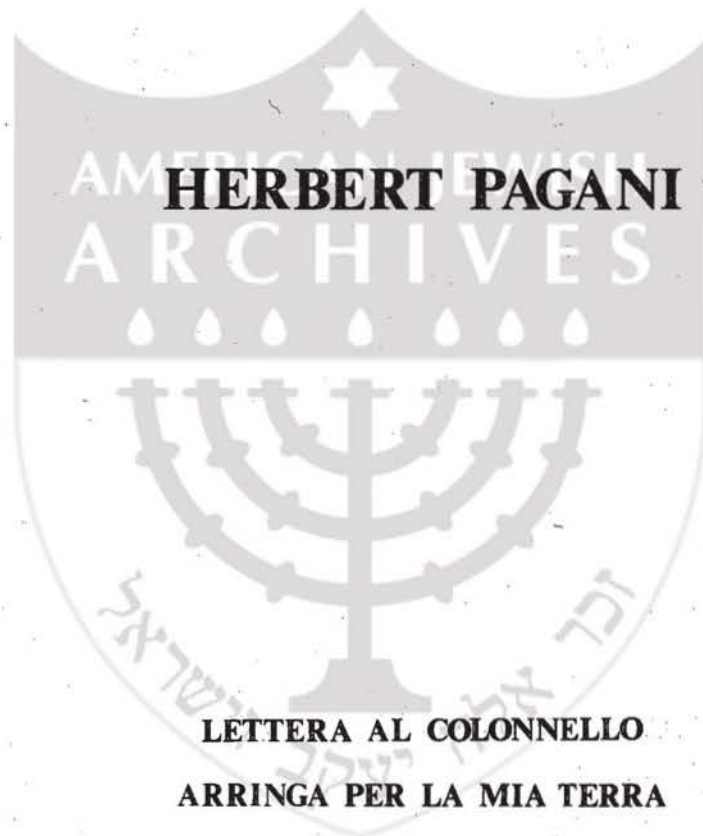
cc: Harry Milkman



A LETTER TO THE COLONEL

A PLEA FOR MY LAND

THE GOLDEN STAR



LETTERA AL COLONNELLO

ARRINGA PER LA MIA TERRA

LA STELLA D'ORO

[start]

Original documents
faded and/or illegible



A LETTER TO THE COLONEL

Certain countries are ill-loved by history. Burdened with a miserable present, they are not even able to offer their peoples the consolation of a glorious past. They're even unable to capitalize on their misfortunes, to transform outrages suffered into exportable legends.

Countries that, having no rivers to bless their lands, no heroes to defend them, no poets to sing their praises, are afflicted by a chronic anonymity.

The country I was born in is one of them. For 2,000 years, before its name was sent to the high heavens of the media by the joint whims of oil and a tyrant, this vast territory was no more than a sand-dune factory. A nothing: an absence; a bag of sand scattered over 679,000 square miles of the Creator's lack of inspiration; an immemorable waiting-room where no epic train has ever deigned to stop; a void, a suffocating and torrid punishment, separating Egypt from Tunisia.

Even though the influx of petrodollars has allowed it to move from obscurity to obscurantism, in the eyes of the world, this country is still today the antechamber of the Pyramids, the back-shop of the jasmin gardens. Culturally speaking, the poor relative of Islam.

The Colonel knows all this. In fact, he knows it so well that, after importing the best architects from the West to lay out audacious perspectives in that gigantic plate of couscous swept by the winds and after importing hundreds of craftsmen from the East to decorate its volumes with low reliefs, mosaics and stained-glass windows, he tried to grab a share of his neighbours' history, with pathetically insistent proposals of marriage that were generally refused, or followed by instant divorce.

Give in to the evidence, dear Colonel. Neither your handsome rogue's face, nor the panache of your wells, nor the trails of your "mirages" in skies that are not yours, nor even your seedbed of terrorists will hold the attention of our distracted world for very long. Some evil centrifugal force evaporates the profit you gain from your misdeeds, like the water from your "wadis" and prevents your periphery from becoming a centre. In spite of

your efforts, this country stays faceless like your cut-throats and voiceless, as in the past.

You dream: to be Nasser's heir, to add a new chapter, bearing your name, to the Great Book of Islam. But Allah is great, dear cousin and in the immensity of his wisdom, he must already have decided that it might be better to keep for your country which once was mine, the exalting rôle of flyleaf.

The only hitch is that all the peoples who have lived there throughout the centuries have experienced the same fate, have been "cancelled out", starting with the ethnic or religious minorities, the Berbers, Christians and the Jews, whom you would call "dhimmi", that is, "protected" citizens. A subtle euphemism for hostages awaiting conversion.

Being oppressed by the powerful often brings cultural advantages: gold chains, time to cry and so on. Being oppressed by the oppressed brings nothing. Jews in a lightless land, we were the dullest Jews of the Mediterranean sea, devoid of that acquired prestige that the servants of Great Princes usually enjoy and that all the other communities did enjoy at least once in the course of their exile.

Our history has been negated and buried for so many centuries that without the book by the historian Renzo De Felice entitled: "Jews in an Arab Country" a splendid book, willed with an almost mystical tenacity by Raffaello Fellah, one of our brothers, there would remain no trace of it today, nor memory of it tomorrow. Indeed, like all its sisters, after having tasted an exquisite menu of humiliations: massacre Roman-style, Moslem-style, Spanish-style, segregation Maltese-style, Ottoman-style, Nazi-Fascist race-laws and for dessert, post-war pogroms wrought by our Arab cousins under the nose of the long-awaited British liberators, my community was requested to leave the country the morning after the Six Days War. Everybody had to leave. Everybody but the dead, who were requested to contribute to the revolution with their bones and headstones which, duly crushed by bulldozers, were used for the foundations of a very important motorway urgently built to connect nothing with nothing and two gigantic hotels for tourists who haven't turned up yet.

Thus, I, a Jew without roots or memory, opened the book and I discovered:

- that we were in Libya more than 2,170 years ago; that is to say, not only

- before the Arab invasion, but before the Roman invasion, too;
- that, belligerent and faithful to our God, we rose against the Roman army as soon as we heard of the fall of the Temple of Jerusalem;
 - that that uprising meant thousands of victims on our side, but also a stone in Latin that tells of the deed and without which we would not have known we were such an ancient, courageous community.

And as I turned the pages, I said, "this is history, the history that lays the foundations of my legitimacy, yet it's not enough, I want something more, I..." I didn't know what I wanted, but I found it. On page 41.

A census of the Jewish population in Tripoli.

The first in our history. Carried out by Giuseppe Toledano, Head of the Community, in 1861, it had, by some miracle, escaped the Colonel's bonfires.

And in front of my eyes, duly numbered and accounted for, there paraded:

- 1 Chief Rabbi.
- 17 Rabbis
- 11 Students and then turners, grocers, innkeepers, navvys, tailors, butchers, clerks, fortune-tellers, midwives, porters, women and children, the sick and the beggars; in all, 4,500 inhabitants.

Our thanks to Professor De Felice for this document. In front of me, at last, I had the incontrovertible proof that people with my blood had actually existed, there, between the dunes and the sea, filling, generation after generation, the mythical chasm that separated our father Abraham from my grandfather, also named Abraham. Of course, these were not the poets, mathematicians, philosophers and doctors that embellished the gardens of Moslem Spain and cured the Enlightened Caliphs head-aches. But they were still my family, or at least, they belonged to the special perimeter within which my family, without any conceivable doubt, lived and worked.

So I settled down and copied the list by hand, sure that one of my relations would sooner or later touch the nib of my pen.

And this modest ritual was all I needed for the steam of memory to condense on my glasses and it began to rain, at a distance, on that strip of asphalt where my dead lay prisoners and it exploded and tree emerged, crowned with blossoms populated by birds.

My family tree, roughly.

Who now could tell us again about the smell of skins and of their shine, in the times when soap was called oil of almonds? The Indian thinnes of children, the coal of their glance, that very Arabic way of being Jewish that the Jews of Trablous had.

Prosperous women, or slender, wearing striped silk, colourful, their waists circled by silver squares, their heads wrapped in scarves that slipped down on their shoulders a hundred times a day, revealing hair as wavy as the sea seen from the balconies. The smell of cammun, felfel, attar and jasmin, flowers and fevers, spices and sweat; currents of fried or urine-laden air in the courtyards off that decayed maze of alleyways that was the Hara, our ghetto. And the whirls of flies buzzing around the eyes of the asses resigned to their fate; the dust of Loukhoun on the noses of the good children; and the kidgoats strung up on market-day beside mountains of violet onions, shining dates, peppers with flourescent colours; and chickens bought live and taken away by their claws like bunches of flowers, to be killed at home, according to the rules, at the bottom of miserable little gardens: two geraniums, a meagre branch of mint, an oleander whose acid sap stuck to your fingers every time you picked a flower.

Who now could tell us again about the strictness and charity of our bearded elders, wearing turban, fez, bertila, or arrakyia, depending on the times, doctors-in-law with gnarled hands, horny nails, their skin sapped by time, progenitors of Judaism, anchored here, despite themselves, in this land so much loved and all the more despairing because it looked so much like the lost homeland, just as a tear looks like a drop of rain?

Divine monotony of a blue sky; the same triumphant palm trees loaded with their golden ammunition; the same swift sunsets that stained with the blood of the dying sun the talleths of our fathers, gathered together for evening prayers on the balconies; the same star-spangled nights, stars so close that the song of the crickets seemed to be their voice; dewy nights, that swelled the water-melons by fits and stars, imitating the croaking of the frogs; mother-of-pearl dawns that awoke after our old people had already awoken, with their eyes turned towards Jerusalem, to give thanks to the Lord for this new

day that gave them hope for another and yet another, until the much awaited day of their return to the Promised Land, marrying, judging, blessing and dying while they waited, never completely, though, because of their children, brought into the world in prodigious numbers ("if I don't make it, they will; if there are lots of them, one will live; if one lives, he will have children and, in the end, eyes of my blood will light on the Wall.") And their children took over from them and took up the shawl and the Book and got down to living, praying, procreating and dying, while they too, in turn, awaited the departure. "So what are you complaining about?" the Colonel would say, in his tent.

"You wanted to leave and we let you leave."

Yes, of course, you even encouraged us to go, stripping the last of our fathers of their rights and properties. Don't worry, though, I'm not writing to you out of homesickness. I'm not one of those poor, unhappy persons who trip off to Tunis for their holidays to re-live the childhood they spent in Tripoli.

Because if there's one thing I refuse to accept, it's that catastrophic illusion of resemblance, that so small yet head-spinning distance that separates the tear from the drop of rain. Just as, when you're lost in a souk, you look for your mother, see her, shout her name, she turns round and it's not her. When I shout, she turns and it's always her: Jerusalem. And when I want to go there, I go.

If I'm writing to you at all, dear cousin, it's to tell you that this community of ours is very much alive. It's growing and prospering. It's made a new life for itself, "hamdullah", because after it lost everything, it had no choice but to press forward. We're like bees, Colonel. If the lord of the farm steals our honey in September, we make haste to make more, before winter sets in and if we go on stinging you with our claims for damages, it's more out of dignity than out of interest, to remind you of your debt, but above all, of your loss: we are producers of goods, material and moral and we always have been, you know that, because we're not afraid of work, because, for us, work has never been a punishment, but a blessing.

The proof: just a month in the Italian refugee camps in Latina and Capua and our people left the hovels and set off in search of work and Italy, who gave us shelter and citizenship, thought she was giving us charity, but soon realized

that she had made a good investment. But you, like all the governors of the new Arab world, wanted to wash the Jews out of your social fabric. So doing, you've ruined its fibres: trade, craft, farming, the professions, everything has come loose and has been swept away, like sand in the Ghibli and all the experience you purchase in the West will never replace the ancient experience that we had of you, we, the Jews, whose vocation has always been communication: among men, thoughts, races, states and civilizations. that same vocation contributed to the grandeur of Islam, of the Russian Empire, of the Ottoman Empire, to the cultural splendour of pre-Nazi Germany and you could have made it yours, if you'd only wanted to.

Just think, dear cousin. Even an artist was born on that slice of hell you rule. With the inexplicable, almost perverse love that Jews have for the stepmother-lands that adopt them, he could have made wings for your kings, for your heroes, for your saints and martyrs and sent them off to tell the world that your country exists. He could have sung the praises of that desert of yours, with words that would have made fall in petals that rose of sand you have in the place of a heart.

But Allah, who is great and sees far, desired to have us depart by your hand, so that I could go off and sing and paint other skies below other skies and so that your nation could go on, as in the past, with its exciting task: to fulfill its rôle as the blank flyleaf of the Great Book of Islam.

Shalom ve Salam

Herbert Avraham Haggiag Pagani

A PLEA FOR MY LAND

I was travelling on the underground the other day when I overheard two ladies chatting while reading the paper:

"These Jews again, always in the front page, encumbering with their troubles the United Nations. Pests, that's what they are!"

It's true. We are pests. We've been breaking the balls of the universe for centuries. What can we do about it? It's part of our nature.

Abraham, with his One God, Moses, with the Tablets of the Law, then Jesus, with the other cheek always turned ready for the next slap, then Freud, Marx and Einstein. They were all embarrassing, revolutionary, the enemies of order. Why? Because.

Because order, in whatever century, could not satisfy them: because, strange, isn't it? They were constantly excluded from any kind of order.

"Let's talk that over again, let's look into it a bit deeper, let's change the world to change our destiny": that was the destiny of my forefathers, that's why they've always been hated by all the paladins of pre-established order.

The conservative anti-Semite blames the Jews for bringing about the Bolshevik Revolution. That's true. There were lots of them. In 1917. The progressive anti-Semite blames the Jews for owning Manhattan, for being administrators of capitalism. That's true, too. There are a lot of Jewish capitalists.

It's easy to explain why: culture, religion, ideas and ideals on one side, and wallets, warrants and bonds on the other, have been the only movable values, the only homelands possible for those who had no homeland. Now that there is a homeland, anti-Semitism rises from its ashes or rather, from Our Ashes and calls itself anti-Zionism.

Early on, it was applied to individuals. Now, it's applied to an entire nation. Israel is a ghetto, Jerusalem is Warsaw. The Germans attack no longer, the Arabs do, and if their Crescent has sometimes been disguised as a Sickle, that was to fool the leftwingers of the whole world a little better.

I'm a progressive Jew in the Shimon Peres style and I don't give two hoots for the progressivism that wants to free all men at the expense of a minority, because, guess what! I belong to that minority.

If the progressists want to count me as one of theirs, they can't dodge my problem and my problem is that, after the mass deportations perpetrated by the Romans in the first century A.D., we have been banished, crushed, hated, deprived, chased and converted by force, everywhere.

Why? Because our religion, that is, our culture, was dangerous.

A few examples?

Judaism was the first to create the Shabbath, the Day of the Lord, that is, a compulsory week-end. You can imagine the joy of the Pharaohs, always one pyramid late.

Judaism prohibits slavery. You can imagine the sympathy of the Romans, the greatest importers of free labour in the Ancient World.

The Bible says that the earth belongs to God, not to man. And there's a law based on that: it's the law of the automatic extinction of rights of ownership every 49 years. You can imagine the reaction of the medieval Popes, and the empire-builders of the Renaissance.

"The people must not know about this."

So they began to forbid Bible reading and the Bible was devalued and became the "Old Testament".

Then came the backbiting. Walls of slander that became walls of stone: the ghettos.

Then came the Index, the Inquisition, and later, the Yellow Star.

But Auschwitz is no more than an example of industrial genocide.

There have been thousands of home-made genocides. It would take me three days to list all the pogroms carried out in Spain, Russia, Poland and North Africa. And by dint of flight, and migration, the Jew went everywhere.

And here we are, labelled as "nowhere people". In the midst of other peoples, we're like orphans handed over to the foundling hospital.

I don't want to be adopted any more. I don't want my life to depend on the whims of my landlord any more. I don't want to rent a citizenship any more.

I'm fed up to the teeth with knocking on the doors of history and waiting for them to say:

"Come in."

This time, I do go in, and I shout. I feel at home on Earth, and on the Earth I have my land. Why should the term "Promised Land" be valid for all peoples, except the one that invented it?

What is Zionism? A single, simple sentence: "Next year in Jerusalem."

No, that's no holiday-club slogan. It's written in the Bible, the world's best-selling and worst-read book.

And that prayer became a cry, a cry that's more than 2,000 years old. And the fathers of Christopher Columbus, of Kafka, of Proust, of Chagall, of Marx, of Einstein and of Mr. Kissinger, too, all cried that cry, at least once a year, during the Feast of the Passover. So does Zionism mean Racism?

Do me a favour! Are "New York, New York" and "I love Paris" racist battle-hymns?

Zionism is the name of a battle for freedom and like any other democratic movement, it has its right and left wings.

In the world, each has its Jews:

The French have Algerian workers; the Italians have emigrants; the Americans have Blacks and Puertoricans; men have women; society has jailbirds, homosexuals, the handicapped and the aged.

We are the Jews of everybody.

So when people ask me "what about the Palestinians?", I answer "I am a Palestinian of 2,000 years ago. I am the oldest oppressed person in the world. I'm willing to talk it over with them, but I'm not willing to surrender the land I worked, all the more because there's plenty of room for two peoples, two nations, out there."

We've got to fix the borders together.

For 30 years, the whole Zionist left-wing has been looking for Palestinians to talk to, but the PLO, boosted by Arab capital and the European Left, has closed itself around in an irredentism that's costing the life of an entire people, my brother people, yes, but a people that wants to forge its inde-

pendence on my ashes. The PLO charter says: "Only Jews who came before 1917 will be accepted in the New Palestine."

And the charter hasn't been changed yet.

At this point, I've got to be in solidarity with all my people.

When the Arabs acknowledge me, I'll fight our common oppressors with them.

But for today, Descartes' famous phrase "I think, therefore I am" has no value whatever. We Jews have been thinking for the past 5,000 years and we're still being denied the right to exist. I'm sorry, but today, I'm obliged to say: "I defend myself, therefore I am."



THE GOLDEN STAR

When God was God upon a time
the dad of a grand dad of mine
was farming with a stern insistence
a patch of green lost in the sand
that was the famous "promised land"
the only aim of his existence.
The laws of God he did abide
a flock of children at his side
working to hard for just a pittance
but felt protected from afar
by a golden star.

One day while he was picking prunes
he saw his neighbours on the dunes
approaching in a cloud of war.
He offered water with his hands
they laughed and said:

"We want your land!

Go with the God that you adore!"

The little peasant had no knife
but many children and a wife...

He took the Book and closed the door
and set his steps looking afar

at his golden star.

He travelled on and on and on
one day arrived and one day gone
across the darkness of the ages.

"Give me a swamp I have no fear
I'll make it flourish in one year!"

But they said no and turned the pages.

"You speak to strange, you're from nowhere
go selling junk and pay your fare,

or... you could be a money-lender
we know you're rich.. oh yes, you are

You have a golden star.

The farmer thought that he still had
a little field within his head
and switched to another kind of farming.

Raised stocks and shares and violins
brought up Rotschilds and Menuhins
and little Freuds and little Gerschwins

"You speak too loud, you've gone too far
but who the hell you think you are

you are a pest and we will stop it
we'll stitch a mark upon your pocket:

yes, your golden star.



And came the times of the big hunt
and for the hunters what a stunt
so many victims on the market
it was a party from the start
'cause with a star upon their hearts
the preys were such an easy target.
Our little peasant saved his life
but lost his children and his wife
and his despair he could not measure.
"I'm left with nothing but my treasure
yes, my golden star!"

He dived and swam and crossed the sea
"Without my land I can't be free
and without freedom I won't make it
please give me back my desert lot!"
"How many dollars have you got?"
"I'll give them all..." "Then you can take it."
He started ploughing in the sand
when from the dunes a shot of gun
hit him so hard he could not rise
and you could see, between his eyes

a golden star... a golden star.

LETTERA AL COLONNELLO

Ci sono paesi disamati dalla storia. Incapaci di offrire ai loro popoli, contro un misero presente, la consolazione di un glorioso passato. Incapaci perfino di trarre profitto dalle loro disgrazie, di trasformare gli oltraggi subiti in leggende esportabili. Paesi che, privi di un fiume per benedire le loro terre, di un eroe per difenderle, di un poeta per cantarle, sono affetti da anonimato cronico.

Il paese in cui son nato è fra questi. Prima che il suo nome fosse propulso nel cielo dei media, dai capricci congiunti del petrolio e di un tiranno, quest'immenso territorio non è stato, per 2.000 anni, che una fabbrica di dune. Uno zero, un'amnesia, un sacco di sabbia sventrato e disperso su 1.759.000. chilometri quadrati di mancanza di ispirazione del Creatore, una sala d'aspetto immemorabile dove non ha mai degnato fermarsi il treno di un'epopea, un vuoto, soffocante e torrido che separava, come una punizione, l'Egitto dalla Tunisia.

Oggi ancora, benchè l'afflusso di petrodollari gli abbia permesso di passare dall'oscurità all'oscurantismo, questo paese resta, agli occhi del mondo, l'anticamera delle Piramidi, il retrobottega dei gelsomini. Culturalmente parlando: il parente povero dell'Islam.

Il Colonello lo sa. Anzi ne è così conscio che dopo aver importato i migliori architetti d'Occidente per tracciare audaci prospettive in questo gigantesco piatto di cuscus spazzato dai venti, e centinaia di artigiani dall'Oriente per ornare i volumi ancora freschi di bassorilievi, rosoni, mosaici e vetrate - ha tentato di appropriarsi della storia dei suoi vicini, con proposte di matrimonio di un'insistenza patetica, generalmente rifiutate, o seguite da immediati divorzi.

Arrenditi all'evidenza, Colonello. Né la tua bella faccia da antagonista, né il pennacchio dei tuoi pozzi, né le scorribande dei tuoi "mirages" in

cieli non tuoi, né il tuo vivaio di terroristi riescono a trattenere a lungo l'attenzione del nostro mondo distratto. Una forza centrifuga fatale fa svaporare il beneficio dei tuoi misfatti, come l'acqua dei tuoi "Uadi", impedendo alla tua periferia di trasformarsi in centro.

Malgrado i tuoi sforzi, questo paese resta senza viso, come i tuoi sicari, e senza voce, come in passato. Il tuo sogno: essere l'emulo di Nasser, aggiungere un nuovo capitolo, a tuo nome nel Grande Libro dell'Islam. Ma Allah è grande, caro cugino, e nella sua immensa saggezza, deve aver deciso che era meglio riservare al tuo paese, che fu un tempo il mio, il ruolo esaltante di "antiporta", cioè la pagina bianca che precede titoli e testo, e che vuota resta, se una dedica non viene ad abitarla....

L'unico inconveniente è che tutte le popolazioni che vi hanno vissuto, nei secoli, hanno subito lo stesso destino di "cancellazione". Cominciando dalle minoranze etniche o religiose, berbere, cristiane ed ebraiche, che chiamaste "dhimmi", cioè cittadini "protetti". Delicato eufemismo per dire ostaggi in attesa di conversione.....

Essere l'oppresso di un potente offre a volte vantaggi culturali: catene d'oro, tempo per piangere, ecc... Essere l'oppresso di un oppresso, nessuno. Ebrei di un paese senza luce, fummo gli ebrei più spenti del Mediterraneo. Privi di quel prestigio di riflesso di cui godono, di solito, i domestici dei grandi Principi, e di cui godettero, almeno una volta durante il loro esilio, tutte le altre comunità.

La nostra storia fu così negata, sepolta, per tanti secoli, che senza il libro dello storico Renzo De Felice, Ebrei in un paese Arabo, - un libro splendido, voluto con tenacia quasi mistica da Raffaello Fellah, un fratello della nostra comunità, di questa non resterebbe più, oggi, traccia, né, domani, ricordo. Infatti, dopo aver assaggiato come tutte le consorelle un menù di umiliazioni di una varietà squisita: massacro alla romana, alla mussulmana, alla spagnola, segregazione alla maltese, all'ottomana, leggi razziali nazi-fasciste,.... per finire coi pogroms post-bellici, compiuti

dai nostri cugini arabi sotto l'occhio dei nostri tanto attesi liberatori britannici -, la mia comunità fu pregata di lasciare il paese l'indomani della guerra dei sei giorni -, meno i suoi morti, trattenuti per portare il loro contributo alla Rivoluzione, mediante ossa e lapidi le quali, debitamente frantumate dai bulldozer, sono servite da base a un'importantissima autestraada costruita d'urgenza per collegare il nulla al nulla, e a due giganteschi alberghi per un turismo tuttora inesistente.

Così, io, Ebreo senza più radici né memoria, ho aperto il libro, ed ho scoperto.....

- che la nostra presenza in Libia risaliva effettivamente a più di 2.170 anni;
- che precedeva cioè quella romana;
- che, bellicosi e fedeli al nostro Dio, contro l'esercito di Roma ci eravamo sollevati, appena avuta notizia della caduta del tempio di Gerusalemme;
- che quella sommossa ci era valsa migliaia di vittime, ma anche una lapide in latino che riferisce il fatto, e senza la quale non sapremmo che fummo una così antica e coraggiosa comunità.....

Ma questa è storia, dicevo girando le pagine, storia che fonda la mia legittimità, ma non basta, io voglio di più, io.... io non sapevo cosa volessi, ma lo trovai. A pagina 41.

Un censimento della popolazione ebraica di Tripoli.

Il primo della nostra storia. Effettuato da Giuseppe Toledano, capo della comunità, nel 1861, e miracolosamente scampato ai falò del Colonnello.

E cominciarono a sfilare sotto i miei occhi, debitamente numerati:

- 1 Rabbino capo
- 17 Rabbini
- 11 Studenti, e poi tornitori, droghieri, tavernieri, sterratori, sarti, macellai, scrivani, chiromanti, levatrici, facchini, donne e bambine, malati e mendicanti, in tutto: 4.500 abitanti.

Che il Professor De Felice sia ringraziato per questo documento. Avevo finalmente sotto gli occhi la prova, inconfutabile che gente del mio sangue era effettivamente vissuta, lì, fra le dune e il mare, colmando, di generazione in generazione, la mitica voragine che separava Abramo, Padre di tutti noi, da mio nonno, Abramo anche lui.

Certo non erano i poeti, matematici, filosofi e medici che fiorivano i giardini della Spagna mussulmana, e curavano i mal di testa dei califfi illuminati, ma era pur sempre la mia famiglia, o perlomeno il perimetro sociale entro il quale senza dubbio alcuno, si era mossa.

Mi misi dunque a trascrivere questa lista a mano, sicuro che uno dei miei sarebbe passato, presto o tardi, sotto la mia penna.

E questo modesto rito bastò a far sì che il vapore dei ricordi si condensasse dietro ai miei occhiali, che si mettesse a piovere, a distanza, su quella striscia di asfalto dove i miei morti giacevano prigionieri, che questa si spaccasse, che un albero ne uscisse, coronato di foglie, popolato di uccelli. Il mio albero genealogico, per approssimazione.

Chi potrà più dire l'odore delle pelli e la loro lucentezza, ai tempi in cui il sapone si chiamava olio di mandorle? E la magrezza indiana dei bambini, il carbone dei loro sguardi, quel modo così arabo di essere ebrei che avevano gli ebrei di Trablous, la mia città....

Donne troppo magre e troppo prosperose, vestite di sete rigate, cangianti, la vita cinta in quadroni d'argento, le teste avvolte in foulards che scivolando cento volte al giorno sulle loro spalle, scoprivano capigliature ondulate come il mare visto dai terrazzi.... Odore di camun, di felfel, di atar e gelsomino, fiori e febbri, spezie e sudori, correnti d'aria fritta o di orina nei cortiletti di quel dedalo scalcinato che era la Hara, il nostro ghetto.... E i turbini di mosche intorno agli occhi degli asini fatalisti, la polvere di Loukhoun sul naso dei bambini buoni, e i capretti appesi nei giorni di mercato, le montagne di cipolle viola, di datteri lucenti, di peperoni dai colori fluorescenti; e i polli che venivano

comprati vivi, e portati via tenuti dalle zampe, come mazzi di fiori, per essere uccisi in casa, secondo le regole, in fondo a giardinetti miseri, - due geranei, un ramoscello di menta, un oleandro, la cui acida linfa, ad ogni fiore colto, vi si attaccava alle dita....

Chi potrà più raccontare la severità, la misericordia dei nostri vecchi barbuti, in turbante, Fez, Bertila o Arrakyia, secondo l'epoca, dottori della legge dalle mani nude, dalle unghie di corno, dalla pelle scavata dal tempo, ceppi della fede giudaica ancorati, loro malgrado, in questa terra tanto più amata e tanto più esiliante che somigliava troppo alla patria perduta: come una lacrima a una goccia di pioggia....

Divina monotonia del cielo azzurro; stesse palme trionfali cariche di munizioni d'oro, stessi tramonti rapidi, che insanguinavano di sole morente i talleths dei nostri padri, riuniti a dieci per la preghiera della sera, sui balconi; stesse notti crivellate di stelle, stelle così vicine che il canto dei grilli sembrava la loro voce; notti di rugiada, che facevano gonfiare i cocomeri a scatti, imitando il gracidiare dei ranocchi; albe di madreperla che li vedevano già in piedi, i nostri vecchi, con gli occhi di uva passa, a volte di uva verde volti a Gerusalemme, per rendere grazia al Signore di questo nuovo giorno, che autorizzava loro a sperarne un altro e un altro ancora fino al giorno tanto atteso del ritorno alla terra promessa; sposando, giudicando, benedicendo e morendo in quell'attesa, - mai completamente però, perché i loro figli, messi al mondo in quantità prodigiose (se non sono io, saranno loro, se sono tanti, uno vivrà, se sopravvive avrà dei figli e dagli occhi di uno di essi finalmente, vedrò il muro.....) perché i loro figli, dicevo, messi al mondo in quantità prodigiose, davano loro il cambio, prendevano cioè lo scialle e il libro e si mettevano a vivere, pregare, procreare e morire a loro volta in attesa della partenza.

Ma di che cosa si lamenta? dirà il Colonnello sotto la sua tenda. Voleva partire, l'abbiamo lasciato partire.

Certo, ci ha perfino incoraggiati a farlo, spogliando quei pazzi dei nostri padri dei loro beni e dei loro diritti. Ma stai tranquillo, non è per nostal-

gia che ti scrivo. Non faccio parte di quei poveri infelici che per rivivere la loro infanzia tripolina vanno a passare le vacanze a Tunisi. Perché se c'è qualcosa che rifiuto di assumere, è proprio la catastrofica illusione della somiglianza, cioè quella distanza, infima eppur vertiginosa, che separa la lacrima dalla goccia di pioggia, esattamente come, quando, perduto in un souk, cerchi tua madre; la vedi, urli il suo nome, si gira e non è lei. Io, quando la chiamo, si gira ed è sempre lei: Gerusalemme, e quando voglio, ci vado.

Se ti scrivo, è per dirti che la nostra comunità è viva, che cresce e prospera, che si è rifatta, hamdullah, perché avendo perso tutto non aveva altra scelta se non avanzare. Noi siamo come le api, Colonnello, se il contadino ci ruba il miele a settembre, lo rifacciamo in fretta, prima dell'inverno, e se continuiamo a punzecchiarti con le nostre richieste di risarcimenti è meno per interesse che per dignità, per ricordarti il tuo debito ma soprattutto la tua perdita: siamo produttori di beni, materiali e morali, lo siamo sempre stati e tu lo sai, perché il lavoro non ci fa paura, perché il lavoro per noi non è mai stato punizione, bensì benedizione. La prova: dopo un mese nei campi-profughi di Latina e Capua, i nostri hanno abbandonato le baracche e son partiti in cerca di lavoro, e l'Italia, che dandoci rifugio e cittadinanza ha creduto di farci la carità, si è ben presto accorta di aver fatto un investimento. Tu invece, come tutti i governanti del nuovo mondo arabo, hai voluto lavar via gli ebrei dal tuo tessuto sociale. Ne hai corroso le fibre: commercio, artigianato, agricoltura, professioni liberali, tutto si è dissolto, è volato via come sabbia nel Ghibli e tutta l'esperienza che comprate all'Occidente non potrà sostituire l'esperienza antica che avevamo noi di voi, noi ebrei, la cui vocazione è stata, da sempre, la comunicazione: fra gli uomini, le idee, i popoli, i principi, gli stati, le civiltà. Vocazione che contribuì alla grandezza della civiltà islamica, dell'impero russo, di quello ottomano, allo splendore culturale della Germania pre-nazista, e che avrebbe contribuito alla grandezza del tuo Paese, se tu solo l'avessi voluto. Pensa, cugino, era nato anche un artista su questo pezzo d'inferno che governi.

Con l'amore inspiegabile, quasi perverso degli ebrei per le terre matrigne che li hanno adottati, avrebbe potuto fabbricare ali ai tuoi re, ai tuoi eroi, ai tuoi santi e martiri per mandarli a dire al mondo che il tuo paese esiste. Lo avrebbe cantato, il tuo deserto, con parole che avrebbero fatto cadere in petali questa rosa delle sabbie che hai al posto del cuore. Ma Allah, che è grande e vede lontano, ha veluto, per tua mano, farci partire, affinché io andassi a cantare e dipingere sotto altri cieli, e che la tua nazione potesse proseguire, come in passato, il suo esaltante compito: essere la pagina vuota del Grande Libro dell'Islam.



ARRINGA PER LA MIA TERRA

Era l'indomani dell'attentato in Ghetto.

Di passaggio a Fiumicino sento due turisti dire, sfogliando il giornale: "fra guerre e attentati non si parla che degli ebrei, che scocciatori!". E' vero. Siamo dei rompiscatole. Sono secoli che rompiano le balle all'universo. Che volete? Fa parte della nostra natura....

Ha cominciato Abramo col suo Dio unico, poi Mosè con le tavole della legge, poi Gesù con l'altra guancia sempre pronta per la seconda sberla, poi Freud, Marx, Einstein, tutti esseri imbarazzanti, rivoluzionari, nemici dell'ordine. Perché?

Perché l'ordine, quale fosse il secolo, non poteva soddisfarli, visto che era un ordine dal quale erano regolarmente esclusi. Rimettere in discussione, cambiare il mondo per cambiare il proprio destino, tale è stato il destino dei miei antenati; per questo sono sempre stati odiati da tutti i paladini dell'ordine prestabilito.

L'antisemita di destra rimprovera agli ebrei di aver fatto la rivoluzione bolscevica. E' vero. C'erano molti ebrei nel 1917.

L'antisemita di sinistra rimprovera agli ebrei di essere i proprietari di Manhattan, i gestori del capitalismo... E' vero. Ci sono molti capitalisti ebrei.

La ragione è semplice: la cultura, la religione, l'idea rivoluzionaria da una parte, i portafogli e le banche dall'altra sono stati gli unici valori mobili, le sole patrie possibili per quelli che non avevano una patria. Ora che di patria ne esiste una, l'antisemitismo rinasce dalle sue ceneri o meglio, scusate, dalle Nostre, e si chiama antisionismo.

Prima si applicava agli individui, adesso viene applicato a una nazione.

Israele è un ghetto. Gerusalemme è Varsavia, chi ci assedia non sono più i tedeschi ma gli arabi e se la loro mezza luna si è talvolta mascherata da falce era per meglio fregare le sinistre del mondo intero.

Io, ebreo di sinistra, me ne sbatto di una sinistra che vuole liberare tutti

gli uomini a spese di una minoranza, perché io faccio parte di quella minoranza.

Se la sinistra ci tiene a contarmi fra i suoi non può eludere il mio problema e il mio problema è che dopo le deportazioni in massa operate dai romani nel primo secolo d.C. noi siamo stati ovunque odiati, banditi, schiacciati, spogliati, inseguiti e convertiti a forza.

Perché? Perché la nostra religione, cioè la nostra cultura erano pericolose. Qualche esempio? Il giudaismo è stato il primo a creare il sabato, giorno del Signore, ovvero sia la giornata di riposo settimanale obbligatoria.

Immaginate la gioia dei faraoni, sempre in ritardo di una piramide...

Il giudaismo proibisce la schiavitù. Immaginate la simpatia dei romani, i più grossi fornitori di manodopera gratuita dell'antichità.

Nella Bibbia c'è scritto: "La terra non appartiene all'uomo, ma a Dio".

Da questa frase scaturisce una legge, quella della estinzione automatica dei diritti di proprietà ogni 49 anni.

Vi immaginate la reazione dei papi del Medio Evo e degli imperatori del Rinascimento?

Non bisognava che il popolo sapesse.

Si cominciò quindi col proibire la lettura del Vecchio Testamento. Poi ci fu la maldicenza. Muri di calunnie che diventarono muri di pietra: i ghetti.

Poi ci fu l'indice, l'inquisizione e più tardi le stelle gialle.

Ma Auschwitz non è che un esempio industriale di genocidio. Di genocidi artigianali ce ne sono stati a migliaia. Mi ci vorrebbero 10 giorni solo per far la lista di tutti i pogroms di Spagna, di Russia, di Polonia e dell'Africa del Nord. A forza di fuggire, di spostarsi, l'ebreo è andato dappertutto.

Si estrapola il significato ed eccoci giudicati "gente di nessun posto".

Noi siamo in mezzo agli altri popoli come gli orfani affidati al brefotrofio.

Io non voglio più essere adottato. Non voglio più che la mia vita dipenda dall'umore dei miei padroni di casa. Non voglio più affittare una cittadinanza. Ne ho abbastanza di bussare alle porte della storia e di aspettare che mi dicano: "Avanti".

Stavolta entro e grido; mi sento a casa mia sulla terra e sulla terra ho la mia terra. Perché l'espressione "terra promessa" deve valere per tutti i popoli

meno che per quello che l'ha inventata?

Che cos'è il Sionismo? Si riduce a una sola frase: l'anno prossimo a Gerusalemme.

No, non è lo slogan di qualche club di vacanza; è scritto nella Bibbia, il libro più venduto e peggio letto del mondo.

E questa preghiera è diventata un grido, un grido che ha più di 2.000 anni. E il padre di Cristoforo Colombo, di Kafka, di Proust, di Chagall, di Marx, di Einstein e anche quello del Sig. Kissinger hanno ripetuto questa frase almeno una volta l'anno: il giorno di Pasqua. Allora, il Sionismo è razzismo? Ma non fatemi ridere. Il Sionismo è il nome di una battaglia di liberazione e come ogni movimento democratico ha le sue destre e la sua sinistra di cui nessuno qui parla perché non ha i mezzi per farsi sentire e quindi non ha amici. Una sinistra alla quale io appartengo.

Nel mondo ciascuno ha i suoi ebrei.

I francesi hanno i corsi, i lavoratori algerini; gli italiani hanno i terroni e i terremotati; gli americani hanno i negri, i portoricani; gli uomini hanno le donne; la società ha i ladri, gli omosessuali, gli handicappati.

Noi, siamo gli ebrei di tutti.

A quelli che mi chiedono: "E i palestinesi?" rispondo "Io sono un palestinese di 2.000 anni fa, sono l'oppresso più vecchio del mondo, sono pronto a discutere con loro ma non a cedergli la terra che ho lavorato, tanto più che laggiù c'è posto per due popoli e per due nazioni."

Le frontiere le dobbiamo disegnare insieme.

Tutta la sinistra sionista cerca da 30 anni degli interlocutori palestinesi, ma l'OLP, incoraggiata dal capitale arabo e dalle sinistre europee, si è chiusa in un irredentismo che sta costando la vita a tutto un popolo, un popolo che mi è fratello, ma che vuole forgiare la sua indipendenza sulle mie ceneri. C'è scritto sulla carta dell'OLP: "Verranno accettati nella nuova Palestina solo gli ebrei venuti prima del '17."

E questa carta non è stata ancora modificata.

A questo punto devo essere solidale con la mia gente.

Quando gli arabi mi riconosceranno, mi batterò insieme a loro contro i nostri comuni oppressori.

Ma per oggi la famosa frase di Cartesio: "Penso, quindi sono" non ha nessun valore.

Noi ebrei sono 5000 anni che pensiamo e ci negano ancora il diritto di esistere.

Oggi, anche se mi fa orrore, sono costretto a dire: mi difendo, quindi sono.



LA STELLA D'ORO

Quando esisteva ancora un Dio
il nonno di un bisnonno mio
di professione contadino,
tirava avanti con fatica
un campicello da formica
tre zolle al fuoco del mattino.
Ed era un uomo calmo e pio
che divideva l'esistenza
fra la famiglia ed il suo Dio
e non aveva che un tesoro

una stella d'oro.

Un giorno che era lì a zappare
vide degli uomini arrivare
in una nuvola di guerra.
"Volete acqua?" domandò,
quelli risposero "Ma, no,
quel che vogliamo è la tua terra."
"Ma questa poca terra è mia"
quelli risposero "Va via!"
Lui prese il libro del Signore,
la moglie e i figli e il suo tesoro

la sua stella d'oro.

E camminando attraversò
 la notte dell'eternità
 chiedendo terra da zappare.
 "Datemi anche una palude ed io con
 queste mani nude ve la saprò bonificare".
 "Va via straniero, passi un guaio
 se vuoi restare, l'usuraio è tutto quello che
 che puoi fare,
 tanto sei ricco di un tesoro
 la tua stella d'oro."

Rimasto senza campicello
 si disse "Ho solo il mio cervello
 e quello devo coltivare..."
 Divenne scriba e poi dottore,
 poi violinista è professore
 ed Archimede nucleare.

"Ma quanti sono Santo Iddio,
 come ti volti c'è un giudio,
 come bollare questa peste?

Gli cuciremo sulla veste
 la sua stella d'oro."

E cominciò la grande caccia
e mille cani su ogni traccia
e fu la fiera del terrore.
Braccati in casa e per le strade
erano facili le prede
con quella stella sopra il cuore :
e il nostro vecchio contadino
perdette tutto in un mattino,
moglie, figli, cuore e testa
e disse adesso non mi resta che
la mia stella d'oro.

Allora corse verso il mare
l'attraversò per ritrovare
la terra che era stata sua,
"Signori, la vorrei comprare."
"Le dune qui costano care",
"Ma io la pago",
"Allora è tua".
Ficcò la vanga nel deserto
quando uno sparo all'orizzonte
attraversò lo spazio aperto,
lui cadde in terra e sulla fronte
una stella d'oro,
una stella d'oro.

[end]

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FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF JEWS FROM LIBYA

TENTATIVE PROGRAM

Saturday, June 6, 1987

Omni Park Hotel, 870 Seventh Avenue, New York

9:00 pm

WELCOME AND READING OF MESSAGES

Three Generations of Libyan Jews

The Experiences of two American-Libyan and Libyan-
American Jewish Families

DINNER

GUEST SPEAKERS: Amb. Alan Keyes, Assistant Secretary
of State
Sir Leon Tamman, President, World Organiza-
tion of Jews from Arab Countries

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

DRAMATIC PRESENTATION -

"Letter to the Colonel"
Herbert Pagani - Rome

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE - Zmira Chen - New York

Sunday, June 7, 1987

Cong. Shearith Israel, 70th St. & Central Park West, New York

9:30-10:15 am Registration, Coffee & Danish

10:15 am SYMPOSIUM CONVENES

PLENARY SESSION I: HISTORY

Anti-Jewish Riots in Libya: Their Origins and Consequences -
Professor Maurice Roumani, George Washington and Ben-
Gurion Universities

American Jewish Organizational Efforts on behalf of Libyan Jewry - Abraham Karlikow, former director, AJC Foreign Affairs Department, former director, AJC Paris office

- 11:00-11:15 am BREAK
- 11:15 am The Forgotten Victims of the Arab-Israel Conflict: Jews in Arab Lands - Dr. George E. Gruen, Director, Israel & Middle East Affairs Division, AJC
- Libyan Jews in Israel - The Hon. Ben-Zion Rubin, former member of Knesset and deputy minister of social affairs
- 12:30 pm BUFFET LUNCHEON - LIBYAN SPECIALTIES
PHOTO EXHIBIT OPENS
- The Folklore of Libyan Jewry - Prof. Yitzhak Sabban, Baruch College, CUNY
- (MEETING OF COMMISSION OF LEGAL EXPERTS CONVENES)
- 1:30 pm GUEST SPEAKER
- 2:00-3:00 pm FILM PREMIERE: THE JEWS OF LIBYA
- 3:15-3:45 pm PLENARY SESSION II: CULTURE
- Aspects of Oriental Jewish Culture - Prof. David Meghnagi, D'Annunzio University, Rome
- 4:00-5:00 pm PLENARY SESSION III: LEGAL CLAIMS
- Commission Recommendations on Strategy - Saul Kagan, Executive Director, Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany
- 5:00 pm Cocktails
- 5:30 pm ORIENTAL CONCERT - Zmira Chen, New York
Miriam Meghnagi, Rome

Association of Jews of Libya, Italy - U.S.A.	
Cultural Centre of Jews of Libya - Israel	
American Jewish Committee	Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith

in cooperation with:

Conference on Jewish Material Claims; World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries; W.Z.O. Jewish Agency, Congregation Shearith Israel; American Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth

cordially invite you to the



NEW YORK - JUNE 6-7, 1987

Opening ceremonies: June, 6 - 9:00 pm
Omni Park Central Hotel
7th Avenue at 56th St.
New York

Symposium convenes: June, 7 - 9:30 am
Cong. Shearith Israel
70th St. & Central Park West
- New York

R.S.V.P. to: AJC-165 East 56th St. N.Y - N.Y.10022
Att. Harry Milkman
phone 212-751-4000

1ST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
of



NEW YORK - JUNE 6-7, 1987

Libya

PROGRAM

9:00 pm **Cocktail Reception**
9:30 pm **Welcome and reading of messages:** *David Harris - Regina Bublil*

Three generations of Libyan Jews in USA:
Roberto Haggiag - Lillo Naim - Denise Raccach
The experience of American-Libyan Jewish Families:
Asher Naim
Scope of Event: *Raffaello Felah*

Guest speakers:

Ambassador Alan L. Keyes - Sir Leon J. Tamman

10:00 pm **Kosher dinner**

Presentation of awards to organizations and individuals
for their assistance to Libyan Jews by:
Nissim Gaon
Dramatic presentation: *Herbert Pagani*
"Letter to the Colonel" and the song "Plea for my land"
Libyan song with oriental band: *Zmira Chenn*

9:30 am **Registration, Coffee & Danish**

Symposium Convenes
in occasion of the English edition of "Jews in an Arab
Land 1805-1970" by *Renzo De Felice* Presided by:
Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum - Abraham Foxman

Plenary session I: History

Anti-Jewish Riots in Libya: Their origins and Consequences.
Maurice Roumani
American Jewish Organizational Efforts on behalf of
Libyan Jewry: *Abraham S. Karlikow*

Break

The Forgotten Victims of the Arab-Israel Conflict: Jews in Arab
Lands: *George Gruen*
Libyan Jewish in Israel: *Ben Zion Rubin - David Hagoel*
Photo exhibit opens: "Jews of Libya: an extinct community"
by The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora - Tel
Aviv

1:00 pm **Buffet Luncheon - Libyan specialties**

2:00 pm **Film premiere: "The Jews of Libya"**

Guest speaker

Plenary Session II: Legal Claims: *Saul Kagan - Joseph Habib*
Expert Recommendations

Plenary Session III: Culture

Aspect of oriental Jewish Culture: *David Meghnagi*
The Folklore of Libyan Jewry: *Itzhak Saban*

5:15 pm **Conclusion:** Cocktails and Oriental Concert by *Miryam Meghnagi*

Saturday, June 6 - 1987
Ornith Park Center, Hotel
7th Avenue at 56th Street
New York City



Sunday, June 7 - 1987
Cong. Shearith Israel
70th St.
& Central Park West
New York

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Attn: Mr. Harry Miller

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The American Jewish
Committee

Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56 Street
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July 15, 1987

Mr. Raffaello Fellah
Association of Jews from Libya
P.O. Box 7169
00162 Rome, Italy

Dear Raffaello,

First of all, let me congratulate you on the tremendous success of the First International Convention of Jews from Libya. We were greatly honored to cooperate with you as a partner in this endeavor.

As you know, our commitment to Libyan Jewry is long-standing and is not confined to this single event. The American Jewish Committee has sought to be of assistance to Libyan Jews for over four decades. In accordance with the resolutions adopted at the convention, the AJC has offered to serve as a center for the processing of the property claims of Libyan Jews. The compilation of this documentation is essential for the furtherance of Libyan Jews' legal, cultural and moral agendas.

Members of both our professional staff and lay leadership have indicated their willingness to assist in this regard. Harry Milkman of our AJC International Relations Department will continue to act as your primary professional liaison with the AJC, and Attorney James Greilsheimer, an AJC lay leader, has offered to provide pro bono legal assistance.

In addition, we look forward to participating in the future cultural and educational programs of the Association. We are proud to be a part of the renaissance of the Libyan Jewish community, as it reasserts itself as a unique but integral member of Klal Yisrael.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
Director
International Relations

MHT:RPR

bc: James Greilsheimer, Harry Milkman
Ted Ellenoff, Bert Gold, Leo Nevas, Miles Jaffe, David Harris

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF JEWS FROM LIBYA
NEW YORK CITY, JUNE 6-7, 1987

ארגון יהודי יוצאי לוב
Association of Jews of Libya, Italy
Cultural Center of Jews of Libya, Israel

P.O. BOX 7169 - 00162 ROME - ITALY - PHONE 0039 6 8388454 - TELEX 622474 ITALEX - FAX 6-8388454

NEW YORK, June 6...Twenty years ago, as a consequence of the Six-Day War, the Jewish community of Libya, faced with threats and actual violence by Libyan Arabs, was forced to flee the land it had inhabited for over 2,000 years. The community disintegrated, settling in Italy, Israel and the United States. Although physically separated, the Jews of Libya nevertheless retained their sense of community and unique cultural heritage.

Today, the Libyan Jewish community symbolically reunited in New York City at the First International Convention of Jews from Libya. The event was co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee -- which has aided and maintained contact with Libyan Jews since the late 1940s -- the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and the international Association of Jews from Libya. For those who attended, it was the realization of a twenty-year-old dream, and possibly a once-in-a-lifetime event. There were warm embraces and tears of joy shared between Jews who had not seen each other in many years.

After hearing messages from the U.S., Israeli (and Italian governments, the convention was addressed by Ambassador Alan L. Keyes, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, and Sir Leon Tamman, president of the World Association of Jews from Arab Countries. Both speakers emphasized the fact that the displaced Jewish communities from Arab countries are often overlooked in discussions of Middle East refugee problems.

The obscurity of the Libyan Jewish community is the very issue that the convention was aimed to address, according to leaders of the Association of Jews from Libya. "Not only non-Jews, but many Western Jews, are

not even aware that there had once been a thriving Jewish community in Libya," said Raffaello Fella, president of the association.

Jews left Libya in three mass exoduses: in the late 1940s, upon the establishment of the State of Israel; in the mid-1950s; and in 1967, when all but a handful of the remnant left the country. Libyan Jews, like Jews of other Arab countries, became the convenient target for the local Arab population to vent its wrath against the State of Israel. Libyan Jews did not need to be convinced of the Zionist premise that Jews could only be secure in a state of their own -- their beliefs were rooted in firsthand experience throughout their history. Libyan Jews and their descendants now number 100,000 in Israel. Over 2,000 live in Italy, and approximately 500 in the United States.

At their first international convention, Libyan Jews recalled and explained their history and culture to the American public for the first time. The convention featured the premiere of a specially-commissioned documentary film on the Jews of Libya; a photographic exhibition prepared by the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv; the issuing of the English edition of a book on the history of Libyan Jews by Italian historian Renzo de Felice; Libyan food and music; and presentations by American, Israeli and Italian scholars on the history and culture of Libyan Jews. Awards were presented to organizations and individuals who have aided Libyan Jews in times of distress over the past four decades.

The convention, therefore, was the first English-language presentation to the general public of the history of Libyan Jews and their significant social, cultural and economic contributions to Libya. The obscurity of the Jews of Libya can be attributed to the history of the colonization of North

Africa by European powers. Westerners are relatively more familiar with those North African countries that had been occupied by France (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) and England (Egypt); Libya, on the other hand, was occupied by Italy for only 30 years, following 400 years of Ottoman rule. While the Italian occupation was short, it has made a deep and lasting impression on the Jews of Libya, who consider Italy, after Israel, to be their preferred second home. In 1967, Libyan Jews holding citizenship from other states (France, England, Holland, Tunisia, Malta, etc.), and were therefore eligible for refugee aid from those countries, chose instead to settle in Italy, the country where their cultural affinities lay. Libyan Jews now account for close to 10% of the Jewish population of Italy, and even those Jews who have settled in Israel or the U.S. maintain personal and business ties with Italy.

The convention also addressed the issue of claims by Libyan Jews expected from the government of Libya. On July 21, 1970, the Libyan regime issued a law promising fair compensation to Libyan Jews whose property had been "nationalized," payable within 15 years. Having waited over 15 years in good faith, Libyan Jews are now seeking an acceptable solution to those claims before pursuing legal procedures. As recently as December 6, 1984, Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi has expressed his willingness to settle and honor the Libyan government's commitment.

The purpose of the First International Convention of Jews from Libya was to convey the message that while the Jews of Libya have left Libyan soil, they have not been extirpated from either Libyan history or Jewish history. Furthermore, by claiming their legal right to compensation from the Libyan government and people, they are asserting their dignity and not allowing themselves to be overcome by events. The convention also laid the groundwork for future gatherings of Libyan Jews, reinforced their sense of community and heritage, and commitment to their preservation. The convention concluded with the formation of the American Section of the Association of Jews from Libya.

THE RESURGENCE OF ISLAM
and
THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Edited by George E. Gruen

Introduction and Guide to Materials

The emergence of Islam as a political force in the contemporary world already has had--and doubtless will continue to have--significant effects for the United States, for Israel and for Jews still living in Muslim lands. With this development, for instance, has come the realization that much of the industrialized West's oil supplies are in the hands of Middle East regimes whose rulers are Muslims and whose attitudes toward the West may be influenced by Islamic as well as traditional economic and political factors. The replacement of a pro-Western, modernizing regime in Iran by a revolutionary leadership committed to the establishment of an Islamic republic governed in strict accordance with seventh century Quranic principles has given further impetus to Western attempts to understand this new phenomenon, so seemingly alien and anachronistic.

But, as Professor Bernard Lewis points out in his article, "The Return of Islam," political action has always been an intrinsic part of Islamic religion and ideology. What we are facing today is not the emergence of a new phenomenon but the resurgence of classical Islamic ideas, albeit in new guise and with new allies, such as Al-Fatah in the Palestine Liberation Organization. It should also be noted that while Americans tend to see militant Islam as a potential threat to United States interests, the ferment that it represents is even more a challenge to the existing regimes and societies in the Middle East. For example, the Grand Mosque in Mecca was seized in November 1979 by Muslim fundamentalists who charged that the Saudi ruling family had allowed corruption to spread and had betrayed Islamic principles in the drive toward modernization.

The Muslim world is by no means monolithic in its organization and is split among various sects. Moreover, political, social and personal differences have often been cloaked in religious terms. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini has charged that Saudi hereditary rule is contrary to Islamic democracy. The Saudi royal family is Sunni (mainline orthodox), while Iran is ruled by Shi'i Muslims. Shi'i-Sunni rivalries have also been factors in communal clashes within Turkey and between Iran and Iraq, where a Sunni Arab minority regime rules over a majority of Shi'i Arabs. The fanatical Sunni Muslim Brotherhood has harassed Coptic Christians and it was al-Jihad, another group of Islamic extremists opposed to Egypt's ties to the Christian

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West and to the peace treaty with the Jewish State of Israel, who assassinated President Sadat. The Brotherhood has also been implicated in assassination attempts to overthrow the regime of Syrian President Hafez Assad, who is an Alawite (the name given to the Syrian Shi'i minority), as are most of his close associates in the government and officer corps.

The focus of the present collection of materials is upon the impact of Islam on the Jewish communities in the Middle East. A brief introductory essay, "Foundations for Oppression" by Rabbi Martin Cohen, examines the place of Jews within Islamic theology and illustrates the varying practices of Muslim rulers toward their Jewish subjects ranging from benevolence to persecution. Professor Albert Memmi, in an excerpt from his essay "What is an Arab Jew?", refutes the myths about the allegedly idyllic position of Jews in Arab lands before the introduction of modern Zionism to the region. This is useful background information, for Arab spokesmen sometimes seek to justify the massive exodus of Jews from Muslim lands in the past three decades as the natural consequence of the creation of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948.

In 1945 there were about a million Jews living in Muslim lands stretching from Morocco on the Atlantic to Afghanistan. Today this Jewish population has diminished to but a shadow of itself. Whole Jewish communities, some in lands where Jews had dwelt since Biblical times, have virtually disappeared. Others have shrunk to a few thousands, or even hundreds. Iran, the largest remaining Jewish community still in the Muslim world, has been reduced to less than half its size before the overthrow of the Shah, as thousands left to escape the turmoil and pressures in that country following the emergence of the Khomeini regime. Many more would like to leave, but since the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war, the Iranian authorities have severely restricted all foreign travel.

While all the population figures are estimates at best, the trend that emerges from the following table (see page 3) is clear. The Jewish population remaining in the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa today is less than one-tenth of the number before 1948.

Treatment of Jews by Arab and Muslim governments and the conditions that have influenced Jewish departure have varied from country to country: Active persecution, like the hanging of Jews and tortures inflicted in Iraq; jailing of Jews in Egypt after the various Arab-Israel wars; Syrian policies forbidding emigration, and torture of those caught seeking to depart, or the families of those who succeeded; mob riot and murder, as occurred in Libya; psychological pressures and discomfort and fears as Arab populations in Tunisia and Morocco expressed their support of the Arab and Palestinian cause, even where the governments actively sought to protect the Jews.

Other kinds of factors, of course, were at work as well. The Biblical prophecy of returning to Zion on "the wings of an eagle" induced Yemenite and Turkish Jews to emigrate. In some Arab countries socialist economic measures hurt the Jewish middle class and professionals. Jews and other minorities were also hurt by nationalization measures that were xenophobically applied and treated minorities as "foreigners" rather than as native-born.

**ESTIMATED JEWISH POPULATION IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES
OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

	<u>pre-1948</u>	<u>1987</u>
Afghanistan	5,000	70
Algeria	130,000-140,000	300
Bahrein	400	10
Egypt	75,000	250-300
Iran	90,000-100,000	25,000-30,000
Iraq	125,000	250
Lebanon	5,000	80
Libya	38,000	6
Morocco	265,000-300,000	13,000
Sudan	400	40
Syria	30,000 (1943)	4,000-5,000
Tunisia	105,000	2,800
Turkey	80,000	22,000-25,000
Yemen (including Aden)	55,000	1,000-2,000
APPROXIMATE TOTALS	1,003,000-1,060,000	68,806-78,856

It has been noted that the total number of Jews who felt impelled for various reasons to leave their ancestral homes in Arab countries since 1948 roughly approximates the number of Palestinian Arabs who left the territory that became Israel. Since the majority of the Jews from Arab lands have settled in Israel there has in effect been an unofficial population exchange. However, the ways in which the two refugee problems have been handled have been quite different. The Palestinian refugees have continued to be recipients of large-scale international assistance administered through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), have won increasing international recognition of their national identity, and have organized militant groups under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which has rejected suggestions for resettlement and compensation, insisting instead on a "right to return."

By way of contrast, the Jews from Arab lands have not sought to perpetuate their refugee status and have striven instead to be integrated within Israel and other host countries in Europe and North America. They have been helped to become full citizens in their countries of resettlement by the Government of Israel and by the Jewish communities around the world. In documentation provided to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography of the Council of Europe, on April 6, 1987, Mordechai Ben-Porat, Chairman of the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC), estimated that "the cost of absorption of 600,000 Jews who arrived as refugees from Arab countries" in Israel amounted "to some 10 billion U.S. dollars."

As pointed out in the article "Situation: Precarious" by Dr. George E. Gruen, only a handful of Jews have accepted the "invitation" made by Iraq in 1975 and several other countries that they renounce Zionism and return to their countries of origin. There was a natural suspicion that the Iraqi offer was not genuine but motivated by propagandistic considerations. The promise of equal treatment seems hollow with memory still fresh of the hangings of innocent Jews in Baghdad scarcely six years earlier.

What Jews from Arab lands have demanded--through such groups as WOJAC is that they receive adequate compensation for personal and communal properties left behind and that recognition be given to their contribution to the social and cultural development of their countries of origin. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967, which is the basis underlying the Camp David peace process, affirms among the necessary elements of a comprehensive peace "achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem." American officials have stressed that this language deliberately does not use the word "Palestinian" or "Arab" so as to indicate that the claims of the Jewish refugees need also to be addressed.

Iran and Turkey are set apart from the other countries of the Middle East in that they are basically non-Arab in history and culture, although the majority of their population is Muslim. Until the overthrow of the Shah in Iran, the governments of both countries were pro-Western in outlook and had recognized Israel. Ankara continues to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, while Teheran broke its unofficial ties with Israel shortly after Khomeini came into power and permitted the Palestine Liberation Organization to take over the Israeli commercial headquarters, which had served as an unofficial embassy. In a special

study, Dr. Harold Rhode examines the Religious, Cultural and Ethnic Tensions Underlying the Iranian Revolution and points out the extent to which Khomeini's anti-Israel stance is not simply the result of pro-Palestinian sentiment, but can be traced back to his fundamentalist Islamic outlook which rejects the concept of a sovereign Jewish state coexisting with an Islamic state. Knowledge of this classical theological position helps one to understand Khomeini's declaration to Der Spiegel, January 22, 1979, that his Islamic Republic would break off relations with Israel "because we do not believe there is any legal justification for its existence. Palestine belongs to the Islamic space and must be returned to the Muslims."

Although the Islamic Republic's new constitution declares Jews to be a recognized religious minority entitled to religious freedom and other fundamental rights, Dr. Gruen's background memorandum on "Iranian Jewry and the Execution of Albert Danielpour" points out instances in which Jews have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and summary execution because of Zionist connections, which were quite lawful and innocent in the past--e. g. the importation of honey from Israel--but which are now being regarded as serious offenses. There is a growing concern that the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is being blurred and that government-instigated hostility toward Israel may be interpreted by the masses as a license to attack Iranian Jews. Lois Gottesman provides a brief survey of "Iranian Jewry: Since the Revolution," in her article in AJC's News and Views (Spring 1982).

In contrast to the Islamic revolution in Iran, the military officers who seized power in Ankara in September 1980 have reaffirmed Turkey's basic commitment to secularism and alignment with the Western world. The position of the Jewish community had been endangered not by overt anti-Semitism, which is restricted to small extremist fringe groups, but by the economic difficulties, political instability and left and right wing terrorism that beset Turkish society. Turkey's success in coping with these problems and recent developments in Turkish-Arab and Turkish-Israel relations are examined in Dr. Gruen's special study, Turkey After the Military Coup, and two articles: "Schizophrenic Turkey," Present Tense, Autumn 1981, and "Turkey's Relations with Israel and Its Arab Neighbors," Middle East Review, Spring, 1985. In Combatting Terrorism: Lessons from the Istanbul Massacre, Dr. Gruen describes the shock within the Jewish community and the outrage of the Turkish authorities and general public over the brutal attack by two Arabic-speaking terrorists on Sabbath worshippers at the Neve Shalom synagogue in September 1986.

Finally, we include several pieces that reflect the range of the Jewish condition in the Arab world today. Abraham S. Karlikow's background memorandum on "The Jews of Morocco" describes this largest and relatively secure Jewish community and notes that the benevolent rulers of the country have always insisted on distinguishing between attitudes toward the Arab-Israel conflict and toward the local Jewish population. However, such efforts have not always been successful in shielding the Jewish community from mob action inflamed by extreme nationalists. This latter point is underscored by Nives Fox in her memorandum on "Rising Jewish Tension in Morocco." The ambivalent position of the Moroccan government, which seeks to project a tolerant and pro-Western image while also playing a role in inter-Arab affairs, is described by Dr. Gruen in his article, "Morocco: Plotting for Peace?" in Reform Judaism, June 1981.

In contrast to the Moroccan Government's liberal policy, the Syrian Government has kept its Jewish community hostage, denying the right of emigration on the grounds that Jewish emigrants might strengthen the military might of Israel, a far-fetched argument in view of the fact that the Syrian Jewish community numbers fewer than 5,000, the majority of whom are married women or elderly. In addition to special anti-Jewish measures, Syrian Jews have also suffered from internal instability within the country. Thus, reports were received in June 1980, that two Jewish women were raped in Aleppo by men belonging to special security units while they were ostensibly engaged in a house to house search for members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had been assassinating supporters of the Assad regime. The still unsolved murder of a pregnant Jewish woman and her two young children in Aleppo in December 1983 heightened the sense of insecurity within the Syrian Jewish community.

The plight of the Syrian Jewish community is described by Dr. Gruen in "Syria's 5,000 Jewish Hostages," and the general course of political developments within the country is surveyed in his article "Assad's Syria: From Liberalization to Repression," Worldview, June 1981. Eleanor Lester's interviews with two Syrian Jews permitted to briefly visit the United States provides additional information on the hopes and fears of this endangered community, Jewish Week, September 24, 1982. "Inside Baghdad," by Nick Thimmesch, Jewish Week, March 4, 1983, provides a rare first-hand report of the situation of the aged remnant of this ancient community in war-torn Iraq.

"Tunisia's Troubled Jewish Community," a background analysis based on reports from the American Jewish Committee's European representative, Nives Fox, notes that a suspicious fire that destroyed the Jewish synagogue in Zarzis, Tunisia in October 1983 aroused great concern within the relatively tranquil Jewish community of Tunisia. Several other recent anti-Jewish incidents, most serious of which was the attack by a crazed guard on the synagogue in Djerba on Simchat Torah 1985, killing three Jews and wounding several others, have increased fears in the Jewish community that virulent anti-Jewish propaganda beamed from neighboring Libya, combined with nationalist fervor and Islamic fundamentalism were beginning to have an effect upon the masses even in traditionally tolerant Tunisia.

A rare glimpse into the life of the small, isolated Jewish communities remaining in northern Yemen is provided by Dr. Amnon Kapeliuk in "Jews in Yemen," extracted from a series of articles based on his eye-witness account of a visit to the Yemen Arab Republic in November 1984.

The kidnapping of four Lebanese Jews at the end of March 1985, provides tragic evidence of the extent to which even Lebanon, which had long been the most tolerant country in the Arab world, has been engulfed by fanaticism and wanton violence. Christian and Muslim officials, including Nabih Berri, the leader of the Amal, the mainstream Shi'ite militia in Lebanon, condemned the kidnapping of the Jewish leaders in Beirut. In February 1986, a new radical Shi'ite group, the "Organization of the Oppressed in the World," claimed responsibility for the kidnappings and threatened to abduct and kill other Lebanese Jews unless Israel withdrew from "all of the occupied territories" and freed all Lebanese and Palestinian detainees. Eight Lebanese Jews have thus far been murdered by this

terrorist group, which is ideologically linked to the pro-Iranian Hezbollah (the Party of God). Detailed information on this group and on their Jewish victims is provided in two background papers by Dr. Gruen. As of June 1987 nothing was known of the fate of Isaac Sasson, president of the community, kidnapped in March 1985, and Salim Jammous, secretary-general of the community, who had been abducted in August 1984.

An "Update on Jews in Arab Lands," a May 1987 AJC report based on information received from Nives Fox and other sources, reviews recent developments affecting the Jews remaining in Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia and the international efforts on their behalf. In "Once Upon a Time in Libya," David A. Harris, AJC's Washington representative, examines the forces pressuring Libyan Jews to leave their ancestral community, which effectively came to an end in the wake of anti-Jewish riots in June 1967. The First International Convention of Jews from Libya met in New York in June 1987. In addition to featuring the history and culture of this ancient North African Jewish community, the conference also focused on establishing machinery for pressing the claims of the community for compensation for property seized by the Libyan authorities. Although in the 1970 law nationalizing the assets of Libyan Jews, the Libyan Government explicitly committed itself to issue fifteen-year bonds to provide fair and full compensation, the July 21, 1985 deadline passed without any action by Colonel Muamar Qaddafi to fulfill this pledge.

As both recent and historical events amply demonstrate, Jewish life in the Muslim world is precarious at best and subject to sudden deterioration through change of regime or as a result of mob violence. These mercurial changes can also have a profound effect upon the position of the United States within this strategic region. We believe that the enclosed materials will prove useful in increasing understanding of the current issues and underlying problems within this perennially turbulent area.

GEORGE E. GRUEN, Ph.D.

Director, Middle East Affairs Division

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THE RESURGENCE OF ISLAM
and
THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

I. Introduction and Guide to Materials by George E. Gruen.

II. List of Source Materials:

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2. "Foundations for Oppression" by Martin A. Cohen, Keeping Posted, January 1977, Vol. 22, No. 4; "What is an Arab Jew?" by Albert Memmi, Ibid.; "Situation: Precarious" by George E. Gruen, Ibid. "Once Upon a Time in Libya," by David A. Harris, Moment, May 1987.
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9. "Jews in Yemen," by Amnon Kapeliuk, Yediot Aharonot, November 1984.
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11. Update on Jews in Arab Lands, an IRD report by Nives Fox, May 1987.

III. Bibliography compiled by Lois Gottesman and Harriet Mandel.

**NOTE: If you would like a set of the source materials described above, please write to Middle East Affairs Division, IRD, AJC, 165 E. 56 St., New York, NY 10022. (There is a charge of \$5.00 per kit to cover printing and postage.)*

KHADAFY GETS 'NYET' FROM MOSCOW

By NILES LATHEM
and URIDAN

THE Soviet Union abandoned Moammar Khadafy in his confrontation with the U.S., The Post has learned.

Senior U.S. and Israeli intelligence analysts revealed the Pentagon had evidence of a Kremlin decision to "disengage" from the growing crisis even before U.S. warplanes and ships crossed Khadafy's "line of death" in the Gulf of Sidra.

Moscow refused an urgent appeal from Col. Khadafy for help early yesterday — and even urged him not to use force against the U.S.

The Post also has learned that although Soviet spy ships have been monitoring U.S. naval activities in the area since December, the intelligence was not shared with Libyan military commanders on shore during the military engagements yesterday and today.

That is crucial, say U.S. and Israeli military analysts, because if the Soviets had shared information on positions of U.S. ships, planes and radio commands, Libyan SAM-5 missiles

fired at the U.S. Fleet might have hit their targets.

"There was no apparent Soviet involvement in this incident," said a senior Reagan Administration official after yesterday's initial Libyan attack.

"For whatever reason, the Russians decided to disengage themselves from any involvement in this and treat it as a local matter, not an East-West issue."

Since Reagan ordered the U.S. Fleet to conduct maneuvers off the Libyan coast last December in the wake of terrorist attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports, the Soviet navy had stepped up its presence in Libya.

However, Israeli defense sources said that in recent weeks Moscow withdrew several ships, including its Mediterranean flagship, to the Black Sea.

The Soviet Union, Libya's primary arms supplier, began delivery of SAM-5 missiles late last year to help Khadafy construct an air defense corridor stretching along Libya's Mediterranean coast.



Before the fighting flared up, sailors prepared aboard the Iwo Jima. The message on the back of this fellow's jacket tells the Libvans how it is.

Reuters

NEWS FROM THE Committee



The American Jewish
Committee

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Morton Yarmon
Director of Public Relations

The AJC protects Jewish interests the world over; combats bigotry and promotes human rights for all; defends pluralism, enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people, and contributes to the formulation of American public policy from a combined Jewish and American perspective. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the U.S.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, June 7 . . . Over 300 Libyan Jews from around the world convened this weekend in a historic two-day convention marking the twentieth anniversary of the end of the 2,000-year-long presence of Jews in Libya.

The principal goals of the convention -- sponsored by the Association of Jews from Libya, the Cultural Center of Libyan Jews in Israel, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith -- were to focus attention on the little-known history and rich cultural heritage of Libyan Jewry. The assembly also sought to remind the world that there is another "forgotten refugee problem" in the Middle East, namely that of the nearly 1 million Jews of Arab countries, including close to 40,000 from Libya, who were forced to flee the lands of their birth.

The convention was organized by Raffaello Fella of Rome, President of the Association of Libyan Jews, and the International Relations Department of the American Jewish Committee.

"Had it not already been proven in the times throughout that long history when the Jewish community in Libya had been struck down only to rebuild itself again, then it would be proven here tonight," said Ambassador Alan L. Keyes, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, the opening evening's keynote speaker. "Even though there are those who believe that they have extinguished a community of free souls in Libya, it is clear from this gathering that there is no meaning to extinction. In fact, that effort at extinction has only led here, in Italy and in Israel and in places around the world, to the most inspiring triumph over fear and overt hatred."

In addition to Ambassador Keyes' address, the opening event was marked by messages of support from Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, presented by the Honorable Francesco Corrias, Italy's Consul-General in New York; Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres; Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY); New York Governor Mario Cuomo; Sir Leon Tamman, president of the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries; and Nissim Gaon, president of the World Sephardi Federation.

During a day-long symposium, presentations were given by a number of distinguished academic experts on the history and culture of Libyan Jews from Italy, Israel and the United States. A documentary film on Jews from Libya

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premiered during the symposium, a photographic exhibition from the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv was displayed for the first time in the U.S., and the English edition of Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970 by Renzo de Felice (University of Texas Press) was released.

In addition, the event provided an opportunity for the Libyan Jewish community to honor those organizations and individuals who played such a vital role in protecting the rights and lives of Libyan Jews, particularly from 1945 to 1967. Awards were presented to the American Jewish Committee, the American Joint Distribution Committee, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

In the wake of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, 5,000 Jews who had not already emigrated were forced to flee Libya to escape attacks by enraged Libyan Arab mobs that resulted in death and widespread property damage. This departure brought to an end over 2,000 years of a continuous Jewish presence in Libya that, although punctuated by periods of tension, was overwhelmingly peaceful and productive for the Jews, Arabs, and Berbers of Libya. Today, members of the scattered Jewish community of Libya live in Israel (where they and their descendants number close to 100,000), Italy (2,500), the United States (500), England and France (several hundred each).

For those who attended, the convention was, in a sense, almost a family reunion. Libyan Jews from all across the United States, Canada, Venezuela, France, Italy and Israel came to New York to reunite as a community, if only temporarily. Conversations could be overheard in Arabic, Hebrew, Italian and English. In addition to the formal and academic portions of the convention, there was Libyan Jewish singing, dancing and cuisine.

"We came to assert our roots and our rights," said Mr. Fellah, founder as well as head of the Association of Libyan Jews. The rights include the legal commitment made on July 21, 1970, by the Libyan government to compensate within 15 years Libyan Jews for properties "nationalized" in their absence. This law affects Libyan Jews holding citizenship at the time in various nations (U.S., France, England, Holland, Italy, Tunisia, Malta and stateless "Italo-Libyans," who never received Libyan citizenship despite the assurances of Libya's 1951 constitution as drafted by the UN).

Despite Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qadhafi's reported willingness to settle fairly the claims of Libyan Jews "once the necessary documentation" has been compiled, which he last said publicly in an interview in the Italian newspaper II Messagero on December 6, 1984, no compensation has been forthcoming.

Upon the recommendation of a commission of international legal experts, the convention adopted resolutions calling for the immediate implementation of concrete steps toward pressing the individual and communal claims of Libyan Jews -- the preparation of appropriate legal briefs and memoranda.

In the words of Raffaello Fellah, "We come to ask, in a calm and dignified fashion, only what is due us -- indeed what the Libyan government promised us by law. We would hope that it will deal with our claims in a fair and just manner.

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"We, as Jews from Libya, as men and women brought up in a symbiosis of cultures and Muslim and Jew, should ask ourselves if we do not have a special role to play in bringing peace between Muslim and Jew in the Middle East. And who knows but that, steeped as we are in Western as well as Libyan culture, we cannot make some contribution to easing tensions between the people of Libya, including Qadhafi himself, and those of the West. Because without dialogue in good faith, there is no way to solve any problem. Certainly, we must always keep these wider goals in mind even as we seek the resolution of our own particular problems."

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC Director of international relations, who chaired the Sunday convention program, said that "this convention of Libyan Jews was a dramatic testimony to the growing relationship between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews throughout the world. Our country together with Libyan Jewry is an act of healing and reparation of the world Jewish community, which urgently needs such therapeutic experiences in the face of the tragedies we have suffered. Having lost one-third of our people in the Nazi holocaust, every Jewish life becomes infinitely precious and therefore we cherish our reconciliation with every Libyan Jew in the recovery of the full Household of Israel."

David Harris, deputy director of AJC's international relations department, and Harry Milkman, AJC Middle East specialist, served as coordinators of the conference with Mr. Fellah.

The American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. Founded in 1906, it combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people everywhere.



**LIBYAN JEWS TO SEEK INDEMNIFICATION
OF PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY PROPERTY**
By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, April 13 (JTA) -- The first international convention of Jews from Libya will be held in Manhattan June 6-7, it was announced here Thursday.

Raffaello Fella, founder and president of the Association of Jews from Libya, said in a press conference at the American Jewish Committee (AJC) that the convention is timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the forced departure of the Libyan Jewish community in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War. Almost the entire Libyan Jewish community of 4,500 was forced to leave, including Fella, a businessman who now resides in Italy.

During the conference, to be held at the Shearith Israel (Spanish-Portuguese) Synagogue on Central Park West, legal experts will seek ways to address Libyan Jewish personal and communal property claims against Libya.

Fella explained that in 1970, Col. Muammar Qaddafi's revolutionary regime nationalized the property of Jews who had left Libya indefinitely, promising indemnification in 15 years. In 1985, when payment became due, the Libyan leader failed to fulfill his promise, Fella charged.

Noting that since the establishment of Israel in 1948 and following pogroms with the outbreak of any new Mideast war, about 40,000 Libyan Jews left, most of them to Israel. Fella estimated that the total claims of Libyan Jews against the Libyan governments are "some billions of dollars."

Other events at the up-coming conference, Fella said, include the premier of a documentary film on the Jews of Libya, an exhibition of photographs of Libyan Jewry and religious objects from the Beth El Synagogue in Tripoli and a history symposium relating to the Jews of Libya.

According to Fella, whose father was murdered in a 1945 pogrom in Tripoli, only "five-and-a-half Jews" are presently living in Libya. The half, he explained, is a result of a mixed marriage between an Arab and a Jew.

The convention, scheduled to be attended by hundreds of Libyan Jews from Israel, Italy and the United States, is jointly sponsored by the Association of Jews from Libya, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION
Marc H. Tanenbaum

AMERICAN JEWISH
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Menaces sur les otages

juifs du Liban

LIBERATION • MERCREDI 18 DECEMBRE 1985 23

Une mystérieuse organisation a annoncé qu'elle liquiderait quatre otages juifs libanais si les détenus de la prison de Khiyam n'étaient pas relâchés par Israël... D'autre part, le médecin Razah Raad est revenu à Beyrouth dans l'espoir d'obtenir la libération des Français.

Le médecin français Razah Raad, tenu d'obtenir la libération des quatre otages français enlevés au Liban, est revenu mardi à Beyrouth. « J'espère qu'ils vont passer Noël en famille », a-t-il déclaré à son arrivée à l'aéroport. Le médecin, d'origine libanaise, était accompagné du diplomate français Pierre Blouin, qui était venu avec lui au Liban du 19 au 29 novembre en « mission humanitaire ».

Le Dr Raad a déclaré qu'il avait des lettres des familles des otages, mais n'apportait pas de « propositions » du gouvernement français. « Vous savez, a-t-il dit, on a déjà établi un bon contact, je crois qu'on continue. » Le médecin a indiqué qu'il amenait « plusieurs tonnes » de médicaments et de matériel médical, qu'il compte offrir aux « musulmans et aux chrétiens » du Liban. Pierre Blouin, ancien ambassadeur au Koweït, a précisé que le Dr Raad et lui-même ne comptaient pas « rester longtemps » au Liban.

D'autre part, l'évêque de Canterbury, Terry Waite, qui tente d'obtenir la libération de quatre otages américains, retournera à Beyrouth vendredi, a annoncé mardi le secrétaire de l'archevêché.



Isaac Tarrab,



Isaac Sassoun.



Elie Srour.



Haim Halala Cohen.

de la prison de Khiyam (Sud-Liban), au nombre de 300, n'étaient pas relâchés « le plus rapidement possible » par Israël.

Aucune mention n'a été faite, dans le communiqué, des deux derniers otages juifs enlevés (Elie Hallak et Sélim Jammous, respectivement vice-président et secrétaire de la commu-

nauté). C'est la deuxième fois que la mystérieuse organisation se manifeste. Mais c'est la première fois qu'elle parle de « liquider » ses prisonniers.

Le communiqué accuse par ailleurs les quatre otages « d'espionnage au profit d'Israël », demande au Conseil supérieur de la communauté juive du Liban de « ne pas couvrir les activités

d'espions » et assure ne pas détenir les otages « parce qu'ils sont juifs ». En fait, les six hommes se retrouvent dans une situation impossible. Dans sa très grande majorité, la communauté juive libanaise n'a été qu'une communauté de passage. En 1948, au moment de la création de l'Etat d'Israël, les Juifs syriens, irakiens, yéménites, ont quitté massivement les pays arabes où ils étaient implantés depuis la nuit des temps. Ils n'ont jamais connu de pogroms et, avec un statut de « minoritaires », vivaient en communautés groupées autour de leurs synagogues et leurs écoles, dans une région dont ils avaient adopté le mode de vie et la langue.

La colonisation juive de la Palestine, mouvement parti d'Europe, a progressivement rendu suspects aux yeux de leurs concitoyens. Certains d'entre eux trouvèrent refuge au Liban parce que le pays, mosaïque de communautés, était dirigé par les chrétiens-maronites. En échange de leurs suffrages, ces derniers ont assuré les Juifs de leur protection.

Mais après la guerre de 1967, de nombreux Juifs libanais trouvèrent plus prudent de reprendre leur balluchon. Quand la guerre civile éclate, en 1975, beaucoup sont contraints de partir, principalement parce que le quartier juif, central, est le premier touché par le conflit.

En 1985, il ne restait donc à Beyrouth-Ouest qu'une poignée de Juifs, oubliés de tous. S'ils ont traversé sans encombre majeur les dix ans de guerre, c'est paradoxalement grâce à l'OLP. Celle-ci n'avait en effet aucun intérêt à être accusée de faire la confusion entre « Juifs » et « sionistes ». Mais avec le départ de l'OLP, le conflit libanais est progressivement devenu une stricte guerre de tribus : les « opinions » n'avaient guère plus d'importance. seule comptait la

ganisation juive ultra-orthodoxe, qui, pour des raisons théologiques, s'est toujours opposée à Israël. La mission de deux semaines qu'elle a menée au Liban, où les différents mouvements chiites et l'ambassade d'Iran l'ont reçue, apporte peut-être des éléments d'espoir concernant le sort des six Juifs qui, jusqu'à présent, ont été abandonnés de tous, ou à peu près,

Sélim NASSIB

Mme Ruth Blau donnera une conférence de presse jeudi 19 décembre à 11 heures au siège de la Ligue des droits de l'homme (27, rue Jean Dolent Paris 14ème).

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