

## **Importance of the Iraqi Jewish Archive (IJA) collection**

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Translated from Hebrew by Yael and Shimon Agassi

The catalog in this article was compiled prior to September 2018, the intended date of the unfortunate handing back of the Iraqi Jewish Archive to Iraq. It should be emphasized that the IJA archive contains much more items than those covered in this catalog.

The catalog is intended to shed light on, depict the scope of and raise the awareness to the vast Torah and historical items – both hand-written and printed - that the IJA archive contains. The catalog holds information that does not appear in the IJA website, which clearly indicates that the State of Iraq has stolen these items from their owners.

This archive unequivocally belongs to the Babylonian Jewish community, which preceded Islam in Mesopotamia by about 1000 years and was expelled by the Iraqi authorities between the years 1950 and 1972: The Iraqi Jewish community, whose descendants and representatives are spread throughout the globe (except in Iraq!), holds the legal and moral rights to the archive. The archive and all items that had been (until 2003) and are currently located in the Official National Library of Iraq, have been violently plundered from the synagogues in Iraq!

The robbery of the Iraqi Jewish books carried out by the Iraqi intelligence in Baghdad (1963-1978) is not fundamentally different from the robbery of European Jewish books by the units of Himmler and the Nazi ideologue Rosenberg - during the Holocaust. The only difference being that while many books that the Germans stole have been returned to their Jewish owners, the books that were stolen by the Iraqis have not been returned to this day. Now, to add insult to injury, there are those who wish to return the Jewish archive (which is a small part of what the Iraqis looted from the Jews), brought by the grace of God from Iraq to Washington, to the ones who committed the crime and robbed books to which they have no right.

Even the Official National Library of Iraq, which on 2003 had some 9,400 Jewish titles, did not acquire the books from Judaica merchants and collectors. The Iraqi official institutions simply raided the remaining Jewish synagogues in Baghdad, destroying everything they could find, and thus the Jewish department was built in the National Library of Iraq. Let us imagine that the department of Islamic writings at the British Museum is built on a robbery carried out by the British commando from mosques in Saudi Arabia... This is exactly the state of affairs.

In addition to the above, in 1950 the Iraqi democratic government enacted a law in parliament, pursuant to which any Jew (and Jews only!) who wishes to leave the country, is allowed to do it provided that he leaves all his property in Iraq, which was what most of the families did, being terrified by the horrible terror inflicted upon them by the democratic Iraqi regime; They left behind the property of a great many generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem 2016-2019. See also on this parasha: Vol. 1, pp. 206-7, vol. 2, pp. 623-8

Iraqi Jews have lodged a claim of at least \$ 3,000,000,000 against the democratic regime in Iraq, while the current archive in Washington has the estimated value of not more than \$ 3,000,000, and as is customary in Western courts, a monetary offset should be made against countries that commit crimes.

Finally, sincere thanks should be expressed to the Government of the United States for bringing the books from Iraq to Washington, and for preserving and making them accessible to the public in an inspiring manner. Nevertheless, it is important to note that due to the poor condition of the material and water damage that it had sustained, there are many sections that are not decipherable from the current scans. Moreover, the scanning of some pages is incomplete. It is also puzzling why most of the printed books have not been fully scanned, as is the custom in respectable archives. All those facts make the availability of the original documents crucial.

In conclusion: There is no formula or legal theory that can shatter Iraqi Jews' direct demand to hold the material in their hands. This material is the flesh and blood of the Iraqi Jewish community, and its deep emotional connection to it is unfathomable.

**The following catalog holds information, that does not appear in the IJA website, about dozens of items from the IJA archive with clear community affiliation, or with signatures of private or yeshiva ownership, which clearly shows that the State of Iraq stole these items from their owners.**

1. File 37 - 45 pages, sermons by Rabbeinu Yosef Hayyim (hereafter: "HaRY"Ch")<sup>2</sup> - handwritten copy, and drafts from his monumental book - Ben Ish Chai. At the top of the file is a letter from Hakham David to his father, Ya'akov ben HaRY"Ch, which was sent from Hawaz (Iran) to Baghdad - 1918, who apparently was staying there during World War I, at least in part.
2. File 44, 540 - Sefer Chok LeYisrael (Livorno), double Chumash Bamidbar. On the first is the signature of HaRY"Ch and the signature of his nephew Yitzchak ben Nissim. On the second are remarks and signature of HaRY"Ch . In addition, there is a long request in the handwriting of Hakham David for the reading of the Law for Israel, which is very faded and cannot be read without the source.
3. File 72 - 200 pages, sermons, autograph of HaRY"Ch. Printed in Birkat HaRY"Ch (Museum of Syrian Jewish Heritage - Sfarid Museum, New York, 2016).
4. File 73 - 192 pages, responsa in Halakha to HaRY"Ch, most of which were printed in his book Rav Pealim, the Tosafot on the printed edition were published in Birkat HaRY"Ch, Vol. III (2019).
5. File 86 - Chumash Vayikra, signature and inscription by Rabbi Shimon Agassi, leader of Babylonian Jewry after HaRY"Ch.
6. File 99 - 384 pages, archival documents, court documents; Correspondence with the head of the community - Hakham Sasson Kadouri; Court documents.

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<sup>2</sup> (1835-1909), the rabbi of the community in Baghdad for fifty years, one of the greatest Hakhamim of Israel in recent generations.

7. File 132 - page 8 contains parts of a torn page in the handwriting of HaRY"Ch from one of the responsa notebooks.
8. File 298 - Sefer Tikun Sheva Baadar to HaRY"Ch, ownership signatures of Hakham Avraham Hakham Rabi Nissim, son of the brother of HaRY"Ch . See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I (Jerusalem 2016), p. 207, with his photograph.
- 8B. File 332 - Sefer Hok Natan (Livorno 1776), Rabbi Natan Borgel. Inscription to the elevation of Gabriel Ya'akov Eli[sha] Gabriel' soul, so he will not leave the beit midrash [=Beit Zilkha]. See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. II, pp. 574-575.
9. File 380 - The Book of Ohev Yisrael (Zhitomir ~ 1863), the Rebbe of Afta, with the inscription "Zkhut HaRabim", a Baghdadi society for the encouragement of Torah study.
10. File 389 – Nevi'im Cetuvim with the commentary of Chomat Anach to HaChid"a, in which the text "Leshem Yichud" was written for the commandment to wipe out Amalek.
11. File 642 - Letter by Rabbi Ezra Dangur - Hakham Bashi of Baghdad, and more.
12. File 708 - Responsa Rav Pe'alim, Part 1, Ownership of the above mentioned Hakham Avraham Hakham Rabbi Nissim.
13. File 729 - Sefer Chok LeYisrael (Lemberg), signature of Rabbi Eliyahu Hakham Nissim. See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. II, p. 577.
14. File 733 - Sefer Pa'anach Reza (Tarnafal ~ 1813), signature of Rabbi Eliyahu, father of HaRY"Ch.
15. File 932 - Large book of expenses and income, Zilkha Synagogue.
16. File 934, 1414 - Chumash Torah Or (Livorno), signature of Rabbi Eliyahu, father of HaRY"Ch.
17. File 961 - 239 pages, novellae on the Torah, handwritten manuscript of HaRY"Ch, printed in Birkat HaRY"Ch (Museum of Syrian Jewish Heritage - Sfaradik Museum, New York 2016).
18. File 967 - 172 pages, manuscript containing two essays: commentary of the Zohar; Explanation of Idra Rabba for Maharai Tzemach, Baghdad 1678.

On page 94, proofreading and signature of Rabbi Yitzchak Aryeh, it is possible that he belongs to Rabbi Avraham Lev Aryeh family, who was in Iraq between the years 1874-1878 and author of Heichal Melech. See Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, p. 42.

On page 99, signature Rabbi Chaim Moshe Gabbai, one of the judges of Baghdad, and student of Rabbi Salah Mazliah - Rabbi of Baghdad. See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, p. 53.

On page 101, owner's signature - to Yosef ben Suleiman, is the ancient Baghdadi Kabbalist Rabbi Yosef Suleiman Ma'atuk. See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, p. 24.

The book was written either in Baghdad or in 'Ana, a clear oriental manuscript.

Kolfon, the copyist, also proves this: "As a writer [wrote the book] As'af al-Abad al-Raj, to the mercy of Allah al-'Abd al-Fakir al-Dilil - Siman Even Yehuda his soul is Eden".

The name of the writer As'af al-'Abd al-Raj wrote the book Rahmat Allah (The Mercy of God) the slave, the poor, the teacher Siman Even Yehuda.

The Arab name of the writer proves that it originated from 'Aana, where until that time they continued to give distinctly Arab names as they were during the period of the Rishonim. See Meir Benayahu in the introduction to responsa from HaRit"z to the community of 'Aana (Jerusalem, 1951).

At that time, many people of this city settled in Baghdad, and in fact many of the old Baghdadi families came from 'Aana.

19. File 981 - Sefer Leshon Hakhamim including prayers and requests to HaRY"Ch, plus 80 pages containing new requests in handwriting of his nephew Hakham Avraham HaKham Rabi Nissim' published in the book Birkat HaRY"Ch Vol. 3.

20. File 988 - 130 pages, an early handwritten book of liturgical poems, written in 1826 (see page 10), with signatures of many prominent figures and rabbis of Baghdad, among them many from the Somekh family. Many songs from the ancient sages of Baghdad.

21. File 1000 - Seder Iluy Neshamot, with attached pages in handwriting of Hakham Salman Debi - "Abu Eliyahu", cantor of the Meir Twaig Synagogue. On page 5, the list of those killed in Baghdad, 1969. Later on, a list of those killed in Baghdad after the mass immigration to Israel (50-51). In the library, which is located next to the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, there are many books on which many similar cases have been written by Debi.

22. File 1015 - Siddur with many prayers and requests by HaRY"Ch, manuscript by Hakham Meir Hakham Rabbi Sasson, nephew of HaRY"Ch, and the director of the medical house in Baghdad, see his signature on p. 10.

23. File 1146 - Chumash of Slavita, signed by Rabbi Eliyahu, father of HaRY"Ch.

24. File 1048 - 282 pages, rich archival material on "Tomchei Torah" company in Baghdad, with signatures of Rabbi Shlomo Laniado - head of the company, Rabbi Binyamin Hakham Rabbi Moshe, chief rabbi of Baghdad, and many other sages.

25. File 1169 - Arvey Nahal (Lvov ~1867), Rabbi David Shlomo Eivshitz, dedication on the soul of the late Hakham Rabbi Moshe Reuven Dangur, see about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, pp. 380-381.

26. File 1248 - 17 pages, novellae on the Bible and Pirkei Avot.

On page 5, an innovation was mentioned in the name of Rabbi Refael Katsin of 1848. He was the first Bashi in Baghdad, see Yeshivot Baghdad, vol. 1, p. 103-104.

27. File 1034 - Midrash Shmuel, Rabbi Shmuel di Ozida, signature of Rabbi Eliyahu Elisha Zachariah. See about him, *ibid.*, Pp. 348-9.

28. File 1328 - Sefer Chok LeYisrael (Livorno), with ownership signature of the great Rabbeinu Rabbi Abdalla Avraham Joseph Somekh, founder of the Torah world in Baghdad. On a nearby page, written thanks to Gabbai family for purchasing the book.

29. File 1344 - Sefer Azan Aharon (~ 1886), Rabbi Aharon Azriel, dedication of the Rabbi Elya Shalom Gabbai of Calcutta to the Beit Midrash [Beit Zilkha].
30. File 1337 - Gemara Sota, signed by Rabbi Nissim Kaduri, the greatest of the Baghdadi arbiters in recent generations.
31. File 1346 - Sefer Mekor Chaim (Livorno ~ 1655) Rabbi Chaim Cohen of Aleppo. On the book cover there is an ownership signature of Rabbi Eliyahu, father of HaRY"Ch.
32. File 1396, 1889 - Zohar belonging to the synagogue and Midrash "Knesset Meir Eliyahu".
33. File 1418 - Pardes Rimonim Book (Koretz ~ 1786), signature of Rabbi Eliyahu, father of the HaRY"Ch.
34. File 1430 - Manuscript: An important essay on the Bible, 80 pages, all explained in Derech Hasod. It is headed by Rabbi Eliyahu the father of HaRY"Ch. The essay is ancient, and apart from the Rabbi [Ha'Ari], Maharai N' Tabul and Maharam di Luzano, he did not mention others. In Parashat Chayei Sarah (page 5 in PDF) he signed his name at the end of the essay - Moshe.
35. File 1490 – Sefer Kol Aryeh (Jerusalem ~ 1866), with a large dedication by the grandson of the author – the Habadic Shadar Rabbi Shlomo Zalman son of Rabbi Menachem, in honor of Rabbi Yosef Gabbai, the father of HaRY"Ch's spouse.
36. File 1525 - "Ketuvim" (Venice ~ 1568), with ownership signature of Mordechai Mordechai, son of Moshe Mordechai. Title page bears signature of David Nissim Menachem Gabbay. P. 630, signature of Rabbi Suleiman David Ma'atuk, one of the ancient sages of Baghdad. On page 356, writing is copied. At the end of the book - his own handwriting. Throughout the book there are occasional glosses.
37. File 1541 - Chidushei Maharsha, Meir Eliyahu Yeshiva in Baghdad.
38. File 1693 - Sefer Birkat Avot (Livorno ~ 1864) HaRY"Ch, signature of the ownership of Hakham Avraham Hakham Rabbi Nissim.
39. File 1988 - Responsa of HaRY"Ch. The notebook includes 140 pages, and most of them are full.
40. File 2018 - Commentary of Maharam Alsheikh, between the pages of the book are excerpts from the book of Imrei Binah, the manuscript of the HaRY"Ch.
41. File 2460 - Ben Ish Chai book, belonging to the Meir Twaig Synagogue.
42. File 2477 - Sefer Simhat Olam, Rabbi Chaim Shabtai Lago (Salonika ~ 1801), signed by Rabbeinu Moshe Chaim, the revered Rabbi of Baghdad, the grandfather of the HaRY"Ch.
43. File 2480 - Masekhet Succah, signature of "Knesset Masuda Eliyahu Reuven", signature of Hakham Yehezkel Naji Nissim Bilbul, see about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. II, p. 561.
44. File 2484, 2619 - The Zohar, Ownership Signature Yechezkel Hakham Rabbi Eliyahu, brother of HaRY"Ch, purchased from Jerusalem, Sivan 1922.
45. File 2624 - Sefer Or Ha-Hama (Salonika 1842), glosses by Rabbi Shalom Nuriel, see about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, pp. 78-79.

46. File 2668 - 42 pages, a large Drasha in the handwriting of HaRY"Ch, printed in Birkat HaRY"Ch book, part III.
47. File 2688 - Rich rabbinical and communal material, legal rulings and documents from the sages of Baghdad - Hakham Binyamin Hakham Rabbi Moshe, Hakham Sasson Schayk, Hakham Salman Hugi Abudi, Hakham Eliahu Canush, and others.
48. File 2740 - Rich rabbinical and communal material, correspondence of many of the sages of Baghdad, in particular Hakham Rabbi Binyamin Hakham Rabbi Moshe - Chief Rabbi of Baghdad.
49. File 2691 - Community material from 1939, correspondence with Hakham Sasson Kadouri, numerous press clippings written against the Jews, and more.
50. File 2719 - Marriage Records 1947, handwritten by Shimon ben Hakham Shaul HaMikdash, grandson and grand-grandson of Rabbi Sasson Mordechai Moshe, author of Kol Sasson.
51. File 2727 - 701 pages, including material from 51-52, concerning the immigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel.
52. File 2819 - Correspondence to Beit Din: Rabbi Yechezkel Ezra Elya, Rabbi Refael Yitzchak Chaim, Rabbi Meir Gavriel, Rabbi Sasson Kaduri, Rabbi Salman Hugi Abudi, Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe, and others<sup>3</sup>.
53. File 2871, 2819 - Court correspondence from the 1920s. Rabbinical judges: Rabbi Yechezkel Ezra Elya, Rabbi Refael Yitzchak Chaim, and Hakham Sasson Kaduri.
54. File 2921 - Passover Haggadah handwritten and illustrated.
55. File 3007 - Tikunei Zohar with commentary Benayahu, signature of Rabbi Avraham Hakham Nissim.
56. File 3021 - Masechet Avodah Zarah, Yeshivat Beit Zilkha.
57. File 3024, 3031, - Sefer Ben Yehoyada, ownership signature of Hakham David Shamai. See about him: Yeshivot Baghdad, Vol. I, p. 321, p. 626. In the library next to the Babylonian Heritage Center, several other volumes belong to it.
58. File 3025 - Sefer Lechem Mishna (Venice 1609), signed by Rabbi Eliyahu, father of HaRY"Ch.
59. File 3126 - Siyach Yitzchak on Yoma (Livorno ~ 1766), signature of Rabbi Shlomo Yehezkel Yehuda - father of the Jerusalem family of Judah (known from his descendants - scholar Hakham Yitzchak Yehuda, his brother Prof. Avraham Shalom Yehuda and Prof. David Yellin). Rabbi Avraham Moshe Hillel - the Hakham Bashi of Baghdad, with a caption from whom he purchased the book in 1869. After his passing, the book was donated to Yeshiva for his soul's elevation (his known descendants are Rabbi Ya'akov Hillel and Minister Shlomo Hillel).
60. File 3146 - Sefer Likutei Shas (Livorno ~ 1790), signatures of HaRY"Ch.
61. File 3328 - Marriage Records Hakham Shimon HaMikdash, 48-49.

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<sup>3</sup> The history of all of the aforementioned is written in the book Yeshivot Baghdad.

62. File 3339 - Archive of Rabbi Ya'akov Ben HaRY"Ch, correspondence, novellae, letters. Correspondence with the lady Rivka Blilius daughter of Yosef Avraham Shalom of Calcutta.
63. File 3519 - Book of Sermons on Parashot Hashavua and Haftarot, Manuscript of HaRY"Ch, 151 pages.
64. File 3528 - Sefer Ruach Chaim (Lemberg ~ 1831), signature of HaRY"Ch.
65. File 3541 - Mikra'i Kadesh (Izmir ~ 1729), Rabbi Chaim Abuelafia, signature of Rabbeinu Moshe Chaim - grandfather of HaRY"Ch and Rabbi Avraham Hakham Rabbi Sasson (author of Kol Sasson book). At the end of the book - Kuntress Simaney Nevi'im and Ketuvim, which were read by the Jews of Babylon every Sabbath, and by this also completed the reading of the Bible each year.
66. File 3593 - Sefer Yeshaya with the signature of Rabbi Eliyahu Hakham Nissim.
67. File 3617 - Yefe Mar'eh, Rabbi Shmuel Yaffe, commentary on Yerushalmi (Venice ~ 1590), signature of Rabbi Sasson Barazani, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Shabat and Rabbi Moshe (Azulai), the last Rabanim of Morocco.
68. File 3699 - Documents about the immigration of the Jews of Babylon to Eretz Israel (Operation Ezra and Nehemiah 1950-51).
69. File 3772 - Correspondence of the Beit Din, Rabbi Salman Hugi Abudi, Rabbi Avraham Azlan, Rabbi Eliyahu Canush and Rabbi Sasson Ezra Sehayek.
70. Sefer Tsitsim and Prachim (~ 1904), Rabbi Ya'akov Ben HaRY"Ch, Roblicka Torah, end 9, two pages containing ancient poems by the Babylonian poet Rabbi Nissim Sleiman Ma'atuk and his signature. Special writing developed by members of the Maatuk family in Baghdad<sup>4</sup>. The pages were not properly photographed and cannot be copied.

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<sup>4</sup> See Meir Benayahu, Books Composed in Babylon, Jerusalem 1993, p. 26, with photographs in identical writing.