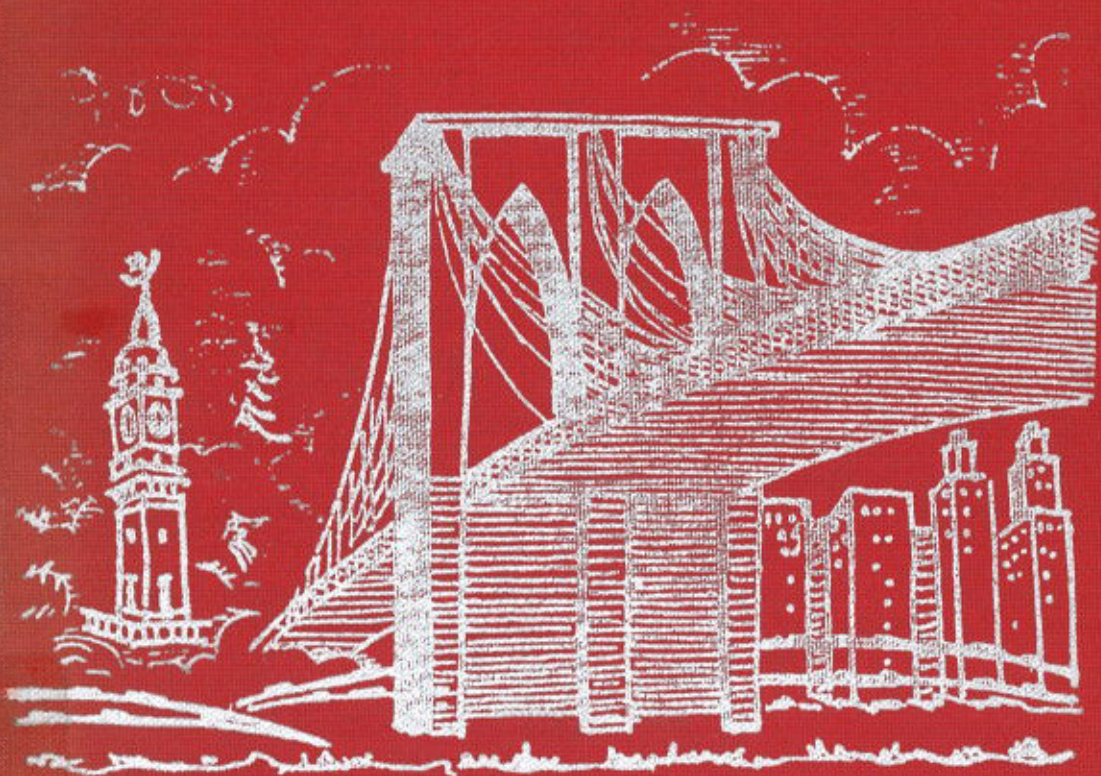
MAGIC CARPET: ALEPPO-IN-FLATBUSH

The Story of a Unique Ethnic Jewish Community



JOSEPH A. D. SUTTON

Foreword by S. D. Goitein

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With best wishes to
a noble institution
and its revered leaders,
past and present

Joseph A. D. Sutton



THAYER-JACOBY
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This book is the gift of

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Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush

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I am deeply indebted to my brother the late Leon A. Sutton (1903–1978) for his influence on my formative development, and for a lifetime of affection and faith.

Other individuals to whom I am happy to express my gratitude for their encouragement are (given alphabetically), Ely and Saul Ashkenazi, Irving Franco, Prof. S. D. Goiten, Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht, Prof. Setsuko Matsunaga Nishi, Edmond J. Safra, my nephews, Joseph D. and Victor D. Sutton, Robert I. Toussie, and Abraham Zagha.

The National Foundation for Jewish Culture saw the value of my studies in their initial stage. Later, the National Endowment for the Humanities honored me with a Research Fellowship which contributed to advancing my work in this field.

ERRATA

Several typographers' errors persisted despite careful corrections.

Most regrettable is the misspelling of Professor Goitein's name in the first encounters with this great scholar's name.

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Foreword

THIS IS AN UNUSUAL book, which might be read with interest and profit by educated laymen and scholars alike.

At first blush it might appear that we have before us another product of the *Roots* boom, which dominates the American scene at present. That is not the way in which this book came into being. It is the fruit of many years of thought and observation. As a little child the author was brought to the United States from the Jewish ghetto of Aleppo, Syria, just before World War I, but revisited his native city later. In the 1930's he became captivated by ideas about social reform, then wide-spread among the Jewish youth of New York, for a long time his Syrian Jewish background was of little interest and value for him. With passing decades events in Europe presented one gruesome disaster after the other. The author, with scanty formal education until late in life, turned from commerce to ethnic and historical studies. He began to ponder whether his own tiny community did not indeed represent a unique phenomenon demanding intensive study.

He was right. Anyone reading this book will realize that, besides traits common to most immigrant societies, the Aleppan Jewish community exhibits many specific traits which set it apart from comparable compact groups. Its people were not flown to America, like the Jews of Yeman or Iraq, who were brought to Israel in massive airlifts. They arrived in the States in trickles and over a prolonged period, from a society of

merchants which by its very nature is prone to disintegrate and assimilate quickly. These immigrants however, slowly reasserted and reconstituted themselves as a closely knit community of extraordinary inner strength. Moreover, they have preserved, perhaps without being aware of it, many Middle Eastern traits of great antiquity and of significant sociological character. The present writer who has closely studied several Arab and Jewish societies, past and present, was alerted by this book, to quite a number of new problems. And what is food for the scholar makes fascinating reading for the uninitiated.

The author is to be lauded for depicting this society without any attempt at embellishment or romanticism; less pleasant phenomena are recorded with the same candor and detail as heart-warming traits. He sharpened his natural gifts of observation by delving into works on sociology and history, and the reader will find valuable hints in his Notes. No attempt has been made on my part to influence his seemingly erratic spelling of Arabic and Hebrew words; it is important to learn how these terms sound when spoken by the Aleppan dwellers of Flatbush, New York, or Deal, New Jersey, not how they are spelled in a dictionary. Nor have I helped the author with his historical survey on Aleppo and its Jews; his portrait, as it stands, reveals what an intelligent researcher and inquisitive lover of books and people (following the tradition of his family) has himself brought to light.

The United States, and New York in particular, prides itself on the diversity of its ethnic group cultures. The present book is a most instructive and charming addition to this multi-colored spectrum.

S. D. Goiten

The Institute for Advanced Study
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Introduction

A Unique Ethnic Community

Magic Carpet deals with a tightly-knit community of Jews — Sepharadeem * in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, whose families emigrated from Syria in the past seventy years. While some hail from Damascus and others more recent immigrants from Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, the largest number — perhaps 12,000-15,000 — are from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. It is a community whose exceptional characteristics have allowed it to withstand the compelling pressures of assimilation, pressures which have markedly altered the character of other immigrant generations.

These characteristics have shaped the Syrian-Jews in Brooklyn into one of the few American sub-cultures able to maintain a cohesive, traditional community. The extraordinary perpetuation of its customs in the United States has succeeded in creating a center which is a phenomenon — a source of wonderment and curiosity.

Two other sub-cultures whose singular traditions, customs, and beliefs have also successfully resisted assimilatory presures are the Amish in Pennsylvania and the Hassidic Jews in the Boro Park, Williamburgh, and Crown Heights

* *Sepharadeem, Ashkenazeem, Hassideem,* etc. represent the *authentic* "Sephardic" pronunciation, and accord with the usage in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. Other, unconventional, phonetic spellings have been used to agree with the pronunciation of the community. Aleppo and *Halab,* the ancient name of the city, are used interchangeably.

areas of Brooklyn, as well as in some parts of Rockland County, New York. The Amish choose to live side by side on farms, isolated from urban areas. They maintain themselves as a "people apart" through their chosen geographic isolation, their distinctive mode of dress, and by spurning most social aspects of modern culture. The Hassideem, however, cluster mainly in large cities and, like the Amish, affect a distinctive appearance. The former follow a charismatic *Rebbe* who, to them, is a "saint" and is sometimes a mystic leader.

The Syrian Jews, however, live in urban middle-class Brooklyn, with a burgeoning colony in Deal, New Jersey. Religiously, they follow no charismatic leader, and in their personal appearance they are indistinguishable from other well-dressed New Yorkers. Their livelihood is gained through interaction with other American businessmen, as well as their fellow Syrians. Nevertheless, they succeed in keeping their unique and colorful characteristics — some of which date back to the 9th century Haroun-il-Raschid — while all around them one sees an erosion of religious and ethnic distinctiveness.

The period of immigration to the United States, arrival on the lower East Side with its tribulations for Syrian Jews who could speak neither English nor Yiddish — the trials they underwent in a sea of a million East European Jews with a culture so alien to the accustomed tranquility of their minaret-studded city in the Orient — this forms a colorful section of the study.

By no means is Aleppo-in-Flatbush a static community, however. Small changes in its mores have taken place and are taking place more rapidly than ever before. In most basic characteristics, the French maxim *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* very aptly applies here.

This study focuses on continuity and discontinuity in this unique ethnic community, which is in fact a minority within *another* minority — that of American Jews, most of whom are of Eastern European (Ashkenazic) ancestry. I shall examine the daily life of this community, its religious customs, many of whose forms are unchanged from those of old Aleppo, and its social life, which generally clings to the patterns of the

Arabic culture the immigrants brought with them almost seven decades ago; accompanied by an account of the everyday history of the Jews in Syria, which describes life at the time of the mass emigration to the U.S., a lifestyle that the ancient community had followed for twenty centuries or more.

In addition the history of ancient Jewish life in Aleppo receives close examination. Relations with the Turkish and Arab Muslim rulers are studied and shed light on expectations of present-day intercourse with Israel's neighbors and adversaries.

Maimonides' connection with Aleppo, as well as, earlier, that of Sa'adia Ha-Gaon in the 10th century, C.E., throws additional light on the city and its Jewish residents. Nor is Shakespeare neglected vis-a-vis his acquaintance with Aleppo.("Her husband's to Aleppo gone . . ." says one of the witches in *Macbeth.)* The existence of a colony of English gentlemen-merchants of Queen Elizabeth's Chartered Company in Aleppo for hundreds of years, of Spanish-Portuguese fugitives, refugees from the Inquisition who made Aleppo their home, and the Italian Sepharadeem who came to participate in the local and caravan trade. (They planned a short visit but stayed for centuries.) The *Aleppo Codex,* perhaps the *most precious possession* of Jewry (dating at the latest from the 9th century C.E.; important authorities date it from the *5th century B.C.E.),* this is studied, with its connection to the Crusaders as well as to Maimonides. The partial burning of the *Codex* in the incendiary fire of the Great Synagogue of Aleppo in 1947, its rescue and its being spirited out of Syria to be entrusted to Yitzhaq Ben Zvi, President of Israel, form an exciting story which was related to me by the rescuer himself, now a resident in Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

Six characteristics of the Brooklyn community are illustrative of its relative isolation:

The majority of Syrian Jews live in close proximity in a small area approximating half a square mile and in an equally small area in New Jersey.

Members of the community worship together in several

allied synagogues, following the ancient traditions of Syria.

Large numbers of their children attend Syrian-Jewish day schools.

Syrian Jews marry among themselves for the most part.

Their economic pursuits are distinctly similar.

They vacation together, in Bradley Beach and Deal, New Jersey, as well as travel together in the Caribbean.

I know Aleppo-in-Flatbush from having lived in it for nearly seven decades. Born in Aleppo, I was brought to the United States with my family at the age of eight. I speak Arabic, am familar with Arabic culture and history, as well as the history of Jews in Arab lands, and have traveled extensively in the Near East, visting Aleppo twice, as a young man.

In addition to my own experiences and recollections, I have drawn upon interviews with older members of the community, leaders in official and non-official capacities, open-ended questions addressed to a representative sampling of the community, and a questionnaire soliciting information from young people and their elders.

In my study of Old Aleppo and Aleppo-in-Flatbush, the focus is on what Robert and Helen Lynd have referred to in their well-known *Middletown* studies, as the "truckline" activities:

- making a living
- acquiring a home
- educating and training the young
- the use of leisure
- religious practices
- community activities

Since no in-depth ethnography of the Jewish people in Aleppo, Syria or the community in New York has ever been published, I have sought to include the Jewish-Arabic memories and customs in the old world, before the erosion of time makes this an impossibility.

While Jewish life in *Halab* is fast becoming a fading memory, the modifications between its traditional mores and the lively, colorful pattern of Aleppo-in-Flatbush are carefully outlined. Is this not the community whose modern enterprise

and traditional mode of living made possible the recent migration to New York of the "Proxy-Brides"?

Because of the vast scope of the history and every-day details of the life of the Jews in Aleppo and Syria, this work has concentrated on the high-lights for the most part. There are many valuable details yet to be researched and studied.

Folk-lore, Jewish-Arabic Aphorisms, proverbs and anecdotes, examples of humor and wit, many colorful nicknames, *Pizmoneem,* and a small vocabulary of popular Arabic terms and expressions, all these are planned for Vol. II, in preparation.

The work is divided into two Sections:

Book I: THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Book II: LIFE IN THE ORIENT

BOOK I
THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Chapter One

A Social Portrait (I)

IN the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, New York, there is a community of 20,000 to 25,000 Sepharadi Jews, mostly from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. Their customs appear to continue unchanged, transplanted from the Middle East, although the Syrians as a recognizable social entity have lived in New York for more than seven decades. It is a remarkable community, whose religious structure and continuity of ethnic and religious practices represent features which have eroded in most communities of immigrant Jews. How can we understand why this tightly knit community has continued the Oriental customs they brought with them to twentieth century New York — alongside a sophisticated physical mode of living? How can we explain the fully attended weekday and Sabbath services; where else can this be seen, whether in Jewish or Christian houses of worship? This is indeed a significant phenomenon both religiously and sociologically.

The casual observer sees well-kept private homes in this area. Many of them are sizeable, some may be called mansions, situated on tree-lined streeets. To the extent possible, Syrians live side by side, with a scattering of non-Syrian Jews and Italian gentile neighbors. Since the area is one of the best and quietest in all of Brooklyn, attractive — even extravagant prices offered for the homes of such non-Syrians have proved unavailing. Strollers on these streets are likely to be Syrians,

but their homes and appearance do not distinguish them from other middle and upper-class New Yorkers.

Most of these Syrians originated in ancient Aleppo, perhaps a fifth are from Damascus. After the Suez War of 1956, almost all Egyptian Jews fled, and because considerable numbers of their families originated in Aleppo and Damascus, large numbers of Egyptians settled in this Flatbush area to form a peripheral part of the community.

It is on Kings Highway near East Third Street that we find members of the community thronging several oriental food-supply stores. Some of the shopkeepers had sojourned in Israel after their flight from Egypt; thus in some of the stores one will encounter rapid-fire cross-currents of conversation in French, Arabic, Hebrew, and English. The shops carry a wide variety of imported spices and other comestibles, many of them from Israel and other parts of the Levant.

The Community Today

The small area of Aleppo-in-Flatbush — perhaps half a square mile in size — is distinguished by four impressive Syrian synagogue structures. On Saturday mornings in particular, streams of men and boys can be seen hurrying to services in these synagogues. The central synagogue housing the Shar'areé Zión (Portals of Zion) Congregation is at the geographic hub of the community on Ocean Parkway between Avenues "T" and "U". It was completed some thirty years ago, and is the focus of admiration for its original and tasteful architectural design. The auditorium is circular with no columns or beams and with a huge rotunda. The building possesses a striking and pleasing juxtaposition in its front elevation — a huge curved window set against the rectangular entrance. It is a testimonial to the financial success of its members. Plans are now underway to build a large social center to provide meeting rooms, a gymnasium, pool, and classrooms for study groups, and since there is nothing niggardly about the the planning of this community, there is talk of the need of substantial additional sums for the building fund.

The Immigrant Generation

Such prosperity and largesse, however, have not always characterized the fortunes of the Syrian-Americans. First generation Syrians and other immigrants came to the United States almost penniless, and were frequently in debt for the cost of their passage. The first few immigrants came at the turn of the century. They were primarily adventurers, not motivated by the more pressing reasons that compelled the migration of later — and larger — waves of Aleppoans and Damascenes. Specific reasons for the small early migrations are difficult to uncover although it is known that the commercial lives of *Halab* (Aleppo) and *Il-Sham* (Damascus) were shaken by recurring financial crises. How did the early migrants hear of the United States? A few, it was said, had left *Halab* to trade at the World Exposition in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, and went on to try their fortunes in other lands. Some finally found their way to New York, while a few others had gone on to countries in Latin America. They came, stayed, and blazed a trail for the thousands who were to follow their footsteps in the next few years.

Aleppo's history has been marked by waves of both immigration and emigration. Elsewhere we speak of the Hittites, the Aramites, the Greek rulers who succeeded Alexander the Great, as well as the later Arab conquerors and the Egyptian Mamelukes. Spanish Jews, too, refugees from the terror of the Inquisition, emigrated to Aleppo — as we read in the next chapter. In the 17th and 18th century, Italian and other European Jews had come intending only to trade, and stayed to become an integral and important part in the life of the city's Jewish population. The recent flow of migrants *out* of Aleppo therefore represents a significant reversal of the direction of the Italian and Spanish Jews who had come to Syria in past centuries.

Aleppoans went to Manchester, England, late in the nineteenth century to trade in cotton and woolen cloth in which the parent-companies in the *souks* — the bazaars of Aleppo, had traded for generations. Just as some Italian Jews, who at

first thought to make a temporary stay in the Levant ended up making it their permanent home, the Aleppoans who went to Manchester soon found themselves comfortably established and became permanent residents there. The qualities of Flatbush Syrians manifested themselves in the *Didsbury* suburb of Manchester, England — a microcosmic prototype of Aleppo-in-Flatbush — as well as of other countries where Aleppoans were to settle. Earlier, when the Suez Canal was opened and new commercial opportunities developed because of the fall-off of caravan trade that was affecting Aleppo's trade with the East — there had come a spirit of unrest. Hundreds of Aleppoans migrated to Egypt, settling in Alexandria and Cairo, along with immigrants from Damascus. The move to Egypt was easier to contemplate than the later journey to the United States; it was closer, a matter of some twenty-four hours of railroad travel, and more importantly, Arabic and French were spoken there. Many Halabi Jews moving to Egypt had spent a few years as students in the Aleppo branches of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle,*[1] schools where they had studied the French language and culture, in addition to their Hebrew studies. The major movement of emigration from Aleppo did not come, however, until the first decade of the twentieth century.

The Jews were not the only people to leave Syria. Maronite Christians mostly from the hills and towns of Lebanon, began in 1880 to flee to the persecutions by Muslims (and other Christian) sects.[2] The war between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon in 1975-1976 and renewed in 1978, reflects the historic mutual hostility.

Syrians: Why They Came

The rate of emigration from all parts of the Turkish Empire — which included Syria and the Ladino-speaking areas inhabited by Turkish-and-Greek Sepharadic Jews, increased considerably in 1907-1908 with the rise and accession to power of the "Young Turks" movement.[3] A group of Turkish army officers displaced the Sultan, *Abd-il Hamid,* a despot wedded to the old absolutist ways of the Ottoman (Turkish)

Empire. The new regime sought to modernize and strengthen the Turkish Empire by creating a larger and more effective army. As a result, the customary exemption of Christians and Jews from military service through the payment of a small tax was abolished, making all residents in the Turkish Empire subject to conscription into the Army. This was repugnant to the Christian subjects who would fall under the domination of the dreaded Muslim Turkish officials, with their disdain and dislike for "unbelievers" in general, and Christians in particular. For the Jews, conscription was an intolerable prospect. In addition to their reluctance to have any dealing with *any* military establishment, they saw it as a threat to their religious observances. In the army they would have had to eat non-kosher food — although pork was forbidden food for Muslims as well — and to violate the sacred Sabbath laws.

This political development was coupled with increasingly severe and recurrent world financial crises which shook the economic life of Aleppo and sharply curtailed its quite considerable commercial activities. Employment shrank, marginal merchants were ruined, and the depression of commercial activity created widespread misery. These political and commercial factors alone might have encouraged emigration, but the knowledge of small colonies of Aleppoans and Damascenes in New York and elsewhere, whose members had been able to earn money, to allow them to purchase steamship tickets for their wives and children they left behind — this further opened the floodgates to travel. Thus, the Aleppoan-Jewish settlement in the New World began to grow after 1907 and 1908.

It is difficult to speak with certainty concerning the number of Aleppoan Jews in New York in the early years of the twentieth century. Census figures did not specify Syrian-born residents nor did they indicate religious background. What little is known of that period comes by way of the few remaining original immigrants and their descendants. It is reported that twenty or thirty Syrian Jews travelled to the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 to trade there. L. C. Miller, in a study covering the period, speaks of the presence of 100 Syrian "Hebrews" in New York City around 1903.[4] One

informant who arrived in New York in 1907 told me of finding a very small number of Syrian Jews there. The family of Joseph Raymond *Beyda,* the *Blanco, Chabbot,* and *Bracha* families, are the earliest to have come, in 1903; along with Ezra *Sitt,* who reportedly had once come in 1891. Other early immigrants mentioned are Joseph *Picciotto* (a member of one of Aleppo's distinguished Italian-Jewish families), and *Murad* and *Yacob Dushey* — the latter two from Aintab, Aleppo's "satellite" city.

The Immigrants' Arrival: Ellis Island

The Syrian immigrants — almost all males — poured into Ellis Island, where they were examined for contagious diseases, especially trachoma, which could cause their rejection from these shores. Trachoma, a contagious eye disease which can result in blindness, was wide-spread in Syria and the countries of the New East.

As a child of seven, I was anxiously treated for a minor eye inflamation for fear that it would cause my rejection at Ellis Island since, with the remaining members of my family, we were about to set forth to be reunited with my father. When we disembarked from the S.S. Caserta, we were taken to Ellis Island in the midst of much excitement and tension, very nervous because of the dreaded health examination — the eye examinations for trachoma which could result in being *sent back.*[5] There were long lines leading to the doctors who used a shoe buttonhook to turn back the eyelids. Some migrants had an "E" chalked on the back of their clothing; later, we learned that these individuals were refused entry because of eye infection and would have to sail back — or go on to another destination.

It may have been noticed by even a casual observer that all of the Aleppoan (but *not* Damascene) immigrants bore a scar on their faces, ranging in size from a ten-cent piece to that of a half dollar. This was known as the *Bouton d'Alep* — the "Aleppoan Button." In Arabic it is called *Habt il Sánneh,* the "scar of a year's duration," the result of a non-contagious infection caused by the then-polluted drinking water of Aleppo. Everyone who lived in Aleppo until about 1920

became infected and had a sore or scab on or around the face. This sore supposedly required a year to heal.

Some immigrants to New York were rejected, and denied entry. These unfortunates were not discouraged, however, from their resolve to make a life in the New World. Some went on to Mexico where a few other Syrians had already settled, and others to Brazil. Most such rejected immigrants chose to go, to Buenos Aires in Argentina – "Bani-Sares" as it is still referred to by Syrians everywhere. Like the Aleppoans and the Jews from Damascus who took root in New York, their cousins and friends who went on to Latin America also established colonies there, as in Manchester, and in time, flourished. They created homogeneous communities remarkably similar to the New York settlement – but *none* as religious.

Living Quarters

Having passed the dreaded health examination immigrants may have been taken to the temporary shelter by a representative of the ever-present "HIAS" – The *Hebrew Immigrant Aid and Sheltering Society.* More likely the Syrian immigrant was met by fellow-Aleppoans; they amazed the newcomer with their air of sophistication, acquired in so short a time since leaving *Halab.* The New Yorkers then installed the new arrival as a roomer, usually with an Ashkenazic (East European) Jewish family, since in the beginning there were few Syrian families with whom he could board. "Rooming" on the East Side of that period meant sharing a bedroom with two, three or even four others. If an entire family arrived, it was installed in what was all too-often a small and dingy flat on the upper floor of a five or six-story tenement (on Eldridge, Essex, Norfolk, or Hester Streets, with running water and toilets only on the *street floor);* the cramped family members were consoled with the words, "It is closer to God."

The late Joseph Isaac *Hafif* came to New York around 1912 without his family, and was met by friends at Ellis Island. They took him to a boarding house, which he was unable to tolerate for more than two days. "It was so crowded, so dirty,

that I would have preferred to sleep on a park bench." A good friend from the old country, Joseph ("Joe") *Dweck* who was to become his long-time partner and an outstanding merchant — introduced him to a cousin who accepted boarders. "This was a fine home! I was glad to bring my valise there". *Hafif* laughed when I asked if he had enjoyed the room to himself. "There were two other boarders who shared that small room. In spite of that, it was a much better place in which to live." As a boarder, he shared dinners with the family every night and on the Sabbath. *Hafif* paid ten dollars a week for room and board, a fee that was considered quite high in the period. Another immigrant, Elie *Laniado,* came from Aleppo via Cairo, where as an orphan he had lived for several years with prosperous relatives. When he arrived in New York in 1911 with his young bride, the couple were taken to live with an Ashkenazi family, where their room was little more than an alcove. "My bride and I spent many nights in tears," *Laniado* recalls, due to the misery of their living space. With some experience as a tailor, he found employment in a large garment factory, at fifteen cents per hour. One year later his earning had reached fifteen dollars per week, and consequently he was able to rent a small flat on his own.

The East Side was teeming with life, torrents of activity and noise; with busy shops, congested sidewalks, pushcarts side by side, human porters carrying mountains of semi-made clothes, horse-drawn trolley-cars clanging their gongs unceasingly, vendors hawking their wares, with carters shouting from atop their horse-drawn vans, and the Second and Third Avenue elevated trains roaring overhead. It was to this hectic, dizzying, lower East Side that the bewildered Aleppoans and Damascenes came from the tranquility of their minaret-studded cities, and from the calm Oriental life.[6]

The Souk: Peddler's Headquarters

After securing living quarters, the next step was to escort the new arrivals to the *Souk,* the market-place, where they were able joyfully to once again greet old friends and rela-

tives. The center of this market-place was on Allen Street, with the Second Avenue Elevated train overhead. Allen Street was then narrow, *half* the width of the street as it is today. It was dark and deafeningly, terrifyingly noisy because of the Second Avenue Elevated train above. This did not deter the Syrians, nor the shoppers who came there for dry-goods, days and evenings; as well as for the popular East European brass articles, samovars, etc., for which it was also a center. (In a somewhat earlier era Allen Street had been notorious as a flagrant "red-light" center).

The countless pushcarts on near-by streets did business well into the evening. They were illuminated by gasoline flares, which threw off a strong wavering light, noisy, sooty, and acrid. Allen Street formed only a part of the popular East Side marketplace, a shopping center for the the millions of immigrant New Yorkers throughout the city. Some of the shoppers perhaps knew of the existence of department stores, by they regarded them with suspicion and mistrust. They were "uptown" and therefore forbidding, shopping places for "Americans", old native stock. It was to the East Side market that these shoppers flocked — just as many do today — particularly on Sundays. (Even now a segment of the old East Side is still to be seen on Orchard Street, between Delancey and Stanton Streets; it displays the chaotic and almost frantic excitement of the old days.)

Somewhat earlier than the establishment of "Oriental Jobbers" at 54 Allen Street, Sha-yah Shalom's (Shalóm) business was flourishing at 70 Orchard Street. Like other supply houses which provided the merchandise for the many immigrant peddlers, Sha'yah bought much of his goods from Christian Syrian-Lebanese merchants on Washington Street. Shalom told me that as an illiterate youth of sixteen (he remained so — unable to read and write), he came to America in 1907 in order to accumulate "a few hundred dollars, as capital" before returning to Aleppo. Sha'yah Shalom drew the patronage of most of the venturesome — and less pious peddlers — including the small number who lived and worked outside of New York; they came on week-ends, to shop and to see their friends. Shalom reminisced to me

before his recent death at 87, "I did not deal in *takhbeer* ("informing") like other merchants such as Oriental." They sold at a *fixed* rate of profit of *four percent* above their invoiced cost [the cause of their ultimate failure], which they "informed" — revealed — to their customers. Thanks to his skill and enterprise, Sha'yah Shalom was a formidable competitor. He bought at lower price by paying cash. "My nickname is 'Cash'. People called me *'Cash Shalom'* " he related. Ability and a brilliant mind helped to make Sha'yah a leading merchant among the Syrian Jews.

At 54 Allen Street, the *"Oriental Jobbers"* was operated by a partnership of eight Syrians. This was the town hall, post office, bank, and meeting place of most Aleppoans and some Damascenes. All of the partners in the enterprise had begun their New York careers as individual entrepreneurs — at first as peddlers selling dry-goods. In 1911 a startling idea and had come to several of them. Why not join forces and thus establish a larger retail business, with more variety and a stronger appear to the market? By pooling their savings its founders established the large wholesale and retail store selling tablecloths, scarfs, curtains, and womens' underwear. Several similar Syrian-owned stores were operated nearby, but none met with the success and popularity of the *"Oriental Jobbers,"* whose existence was almost as widely known to the distressed in Aleppo, as on the East Side.[7]

Each of the partners was a respectable, pious, and reliable individual. The titular head of the firm was the venerable *H'aron Sha'rah,* along with *Moosa Eliahou Attié,* who hailed from Damascus; *Dahoud Chabbót* (Levy), *Isaac Shalom, Hayeem Cohen, Yishaq Esses, Sha'yah Dweck,* and *H'aron Gindi. 'Haham' Mosé Ashe'ar* (Ashear) was the financial administrator.

Peddling

Many East European Jewish immigrants had experience working in garment factories in Lodz, Warsaw and elsewhere in the Slavic lands. Such factories, however, did not exist in Aleppo. Had there been early immigrants from *Halab* who opened clothing factories, our Syrian immigrants would have

had a choice in selecting a trade; instead, the ready approach to a gainful occupation was peddling. This was a trade which required no special skill, no knowledge of the English language, nor of Yiddish. It left them free to observe the Sabbath. The few Syrians who had been craftsmen in the old country had no means of getting into craft-shops in New York, so they too, almost all of them, turned to peddling. *Ezra Garazi* (Grazi) who came to the United States in 1911 reminisced to me, "Buenos Aires, Argentina, was also considered in Aleppo when choosing a country to which one would emigrate. I chose New York," he related, "because it was reported that, to peddle in Argentina, one had to carry a *heavier satchel* than in New York."

How simple it was to become a peddler, in which hard work and long hours would increase earnings. An additional lure was that they would have no master over them, as most of them had had in Aleppo, masters to whom they had been obliged to be subservient since jobs had not been easy to secure — and which were often impossible to replace.

It appeared almost fated that most immigrants from Aleppo should have become merchants of one sort or another; *trade and commerce had been the traditional major enterprises for Jews in Aleppo from time immemorial.* The newly arrived immigrants needed to work; it had to be work that required no special skill, no fluency in the language of the country, and which left them free to observe the Sabbath. Equally important, it had to be work *which did not require capital* — which they did not have. The "Oriental Jobbers" and other similar enterprises provided the necessary solution. The Aleppoan would become a peddler and the "Oriental Jobbers" and their neighbors would provide the necessary capital; a truly fortuitous situation, since the immigrant needed credit and the wholesaler needed outlets.

Soon after the new arrival had been settled, an assortment of household dry goods, tablecloths, pillow cases, curtains, and the like were crammed into a heavy satchel *(chánta)* and the new arrival was launched on a career as a peddler. In the beginning he was usually accompanied by a somewhat experienced friend to teach him where to go, how to sell, and to

offer companionship as they traveled through the alien areas of the Bronx, Canarsie and elsewhere in the city. The day's earnings were usually a pooling of the day's fortune. That a license to peddle was required was an unfortunate nuisance which the peddler and his companion disregarded — took to be their fate when they were apprehended. In most such unhappy encounters with the authorities their professed ignorance of the law — and the language, added to their apparent state of poverty, sufficed to get them off with a warning. They wandered over the more likely neighborhoods from early morning until close to nightfall. At this hour the supply stores were teeming with returning peddlers. An inventory was taken of the contents of the satchels, the peddlers paid for what they had sold, and added new goods to the *chanta,* in preparation for the next day. In several of the popular supply stores, evening prayer services were held, after which the merchants again turned to their business affairs. This practice was not unlike the prayer services held in the "Khan-Il-Gimrog," the great court-yard in Aleppo — which was formerly used as a caravansery and later as offices and warehouses. There, because of Oriental tradition, the business day came to an end toward sunset. Toward evening on Allen Street the stores were besieged by the local retail shoppers — East Europeans, Irish, Poles, and Italians. Huge signs above the sales counters warned: **ONE PRICE.** This was a fact indeed, but the "one price" was established only after much bargaining.

In these Syrian supply stores, stock boxes on the shelves were marked in Hebrew in *Rashi*-like script, *"nuss (alam) qalam"*, reading, *stpn:* "step-in", *shimmi* "chemise", *pantalon* and *renaissance* tablecloths, bed-sheets; ("renaissance" was a generic name for lace-like trimming, a highly popular decoration with the Syrians and their customers).

Not all peddlers were of the same temperament and manners. Most were pious and serious-minded, but others were not overly religious, fun loving and boisterous. Relying on the fact that their customers could not speak Arabic, a few of the wilder ones would knock on the door of a prospective customer, shouting in their native tongue: "Open up, you slut" *(Ifftah-hi yasharmoota").* Sometimes this "prank" back-

fired, as it did for one young peddler working in the Bronx. On one such occasion the door was opened by a smiling housewife who, in perfect Arabic, invited the peddler to grace her home by visiting if only for a few minutes. This was the home of one of the few Syrians who managed to escape the grinding misery of the crowded life of most Jewish Syrian immigrants on the East Side.

"Shalóm Aleichém" was the standard greeting of the Jewish Syrians. It served to establish their brotherhood with Ashkenazeem, in whose 'ocean' they seemed to swim; *Shalóm Aleichém* was indeed an "open sesame" when the Aleppoans knocked on doors to offer their merchandise. Ashkenazeem were often very cordial when they discovered that these exotic non-English, non-Yiddish-speaking individuals were indeed coreligionists. In Aleppo the poor often made a meal of bread with oil and *za'tar,* a mixture of dried thyme and other tangy herbs. Sometimes when the Syrian peddler in New York began his lunch of bread and *za'tar* the Ashkenazeem looked on with curiosity. "What are you eating?" they asked. The reply served to enhance the Syrians in the eyes of their fellow-Jews. "It is the soil of the Holy Land," they replied, for indeed the mixture of dried herbs did resemble soil. (Aleppo is a rabbinically considered "holy", a part of the Holy Land).

We may conjecture that some who had been modest employees in *Halab* were content with peddling and its small yield. At the end of each day they were able to see their savings increase, forwarded to *Halab* and Damascus for the needs of their families. Soon they accumulated enough money to send for them. Even after families were reunited some men continued their small but steady earnings through peddling. Other immigrants, fewer in number, who had been merchants or who had merchandising experience in the old country soon sought wider horizons and greater profits through wholesale operations or other enterprises.

Alternative Endeavors

In addition to shopkeeping, a few Aleppo immigrants, a handful, worked in tiny sewing plants at or near 54 Canal

Street, which manufactured merchandise to be distributed by Syrians. They were paid fifteen cents an hour for operating hemstitching machines used in making scarves, tablecloths, pillowcases, and similar objects. One may conjecture as to the number of long hours they toiled in order to accumulate enough money for steamship tickets for their wives and children. A very few others worked in a tobacco factory rolling cigarettes, which had been their employment in Aleppo. A *'Spanioli* (a Ladino-Spanish-speaking Sepharadi from the Turkish Empire) operated such a factory. Thus, some former cigarette-rollers from Halab gravitated to Schinzai Brothers, whose expensive, superior quality "Egyptian Prettiest" cigarettes enjoyed wide distribution throughout Metropolitan New York — but not like Sweet Caporal, Hassan, Camel and other cheaper brands.

Yet another trade was pursued by *'Ishaq* (Isaac) *Shamosh.* Each day he prepared a batch of candy made from sesame seeds *(semsom* in Arabic), a familiar sweet in the old country, known as *semsmiye.* The candy was cut into bite-size lozenges, which were piled high on to a tray. Shamosh peddled the semsmiye throughout the city, carrying the tray on his head with a characteristic scurrying gait. At the end of each day this small, rolypoly, bespectacled merchant would return with an empty tray, his wares entirely sold. Here was the introduction to New York of the now factory-produced sesame confection. This early version was fragrant with the flavor and scent of rose or orange blossom water — an absolute necessity in traditional Near East sweets.

Dahood (David) *Cohen,* (nicknamed *"Slelatt"),* also made *semsmiye,* in a tiny stall on Essex Street, a "store", in which he sold some groceries. Since the grocery business dependent on Syrian customers was so limited, *Dahood Cohen* branched out into the making of sesame candy. He did not peddle it himself, however, but left the retailing to his two youngsters, *Sam* and *Al.* They carried *semsmiye* throughout the city, and in the summer they would thread their way through the crowded beaches at Coney Island. (Could *Dahood Cohen* foresee the future, when his two young sons would own a chain of bustling "discount" stores, and their philanthropic gifts would be in the tens of thousands of dollars?)

As the number of Syrian-Jewish immigrants increased, a few enterprising individuals, as mentioned, had sought to manufacture merchandise which previously could be obtained only from Christian Syrians on Washington Street. Small rooms were engaged in nearby loft buildings. One small table for cutting materials and a few old sewing machines had been obtained and a "shop" was ready to operate. Why didn't these enterprises flourish, since there was a huge American market for such articles? Perhaps the failure can be explained by the immigrants' ignorance of American business methods; they could not compete with modern well-run enterprises — and perhaps they limited their commercial outreach to the Syrian market with which they were familiar.

Other entrepreneurs met with greater success. I was told that Ya'cob Dushey, who manufactured silk underwear, "was highly successful." With an imitative characteristic of following familiar patterns, several Syrian Jews soon established themselves as manufacturers of silk underwear. In addition to the factories of Albert Zerah and of Vita Grazi who with one and then another partner, created Victory Silk Undergarment, Abdo, Joseph, and Syahou *'Ades* formed Vanity Silk Underwear Company, now a huge company operating under another name; "Lorraine" and "Beauty" were other such companies. *Kamooniyat* (the Arabic-English plural of kimonos, as the unfamiliar word fell on the ears of the Arabic speaking merchants), *shimmi* ("chemises"), and similar garments were soon being manufactured for peddlers who sold such garments. Some peddlers specialized in exotic undergarments for the erotic women — those of "easy virtue" — who were abundant throughout the city.

'Sportive' Peddlers

It would be misleading to portray the immigrants as a monolithic, pious group. While varying in their piety, almost all, however, outwardly respected the Sabbath and religious holidays, although some had been "sportive" in the old country. Some young men benefited from the information of "sportive" peddlers, who passed on addresses of particularly attractive customers. Thus, it was not only staid dry goods

stores that were opened; those who were less religious opened retail shops on Grand Street, Essex Street and nearby points in which they featured silk stocking, chemises, step-ins, and other glamorous items of intimate apparel. These stores were popular with some of the young men, who spent their leisure hours there, perhaps with the hopes and expectations — not always disappointed — of forming intimate, although casual, friendships with attractive customers. Even young men known for their piety visited dance-halls with the hopes of innocent (?) friendships. Less than a handful of marriages with Ashkenazi girls did take place, but most men sought only diversion and did not consider the possibility of marrying the girls, Ashkenazeem or others, whom they met — only a Syrian mate qualified.[8]

Food Problems

Later, with the arrival of a considerable number of wives and families immediately before and after World War I, could Syrians coalesce and take shape as a community. Until then, the Aleppoan faced certain food problems. Except for Sabbath meals when they had sometimes been guests of one of the few Aleppoan families, single Aleppoan men ate in Ashkenzai-operated restaurants, which, even though strictly Kosher, served unfamiliar food, utterly alien to the Arab-accultured Syrians. This added to an unhappy and trying existence.

Around 1910 the first Jewish Aleppoan restaurant in New York was established at the corner of Allen and Grand streets, not two hundred yards away from the location of the later "Oriental Jobbers." This restaurant was patronized by those who came to eat, and a few who later lingered to play backgammon *(tówleh)* and to sip their Turkish coffee. It was both a restaurant and a cafe in the classic sense of a gathering place, much like other cafes in the area operated by the Ladino-speaking Sepharadeem — but with fewer loiterers.

In the early years many Syrians did *not* patronize the noon-day restaurant. Not that it was not kosher; there was no question of that. Large numbers of peddlers were scattered

about the city selling their goods. Others in the area were perhaps too busy attending to their small businesses; some may have found the modest cost too much to yield. While not-over-crowded the restaurant had a goodly number of noon-time patrons. There was no printed menu, nor were the selections chalked on the wall as in some restaurants. Patrons would ask the waiter what had been prepared; more likely, however, the customer drifted directly in to the kitchen where he removed the cover of several pots on the fire and made his selection.

The restaurant had been established by the enterprising Raffoul Jamoús (now the family is "James"), a flamboyant individual about whom many "colorful" stories are remembered. The restaurant didn't suit Raffoul and soon became the property of Eliahou Sh'hebbar. His chef and waiter was *Abu* Habeeb ("Habeeb's Father") Husney who is spoken of with much affection by early immigrants.

By 1914, ownership was invested in *Yisrael Misriyeh* (now "Misrie") and his witty wife "Rosie", a laconic, charming *restaurateuse,* with gleaming green eyes. The eating-place, it would appear, could not have been profitable; Yisrael was constantly in debt for supplies and services. One time Yisrael ran up a considerable bill for gas service covering many months. To avoid the gas-man expected to turn off the service the following morning, Yisrael, a jolly Falstaffian buffoon, placed a sign on the door **CLOSED DUE DEATH OF OWNER.** Soon after he borrowed again, enough to settle his bill and continue his indispensable eating-place.[9]

An Important Interlude

A brief overview of the Jewish world of the East Side into which the Orientals had come will be helpful in explaining the estrangement — and some understandable fearfulness, into which the Syrian immigrants had plunged. The Syrian Jews in the New York of 1910 lived among perhaps more than a million 'alien' Jews; most of them from Eastern Europe. The cultural differences may have left a permanent mark upon the Aleppoan and Damascene immigrants, and

may help later to better understand their present-day insularity.

The New York into which the Syrians came had received two waves of Jewish immigrants even before the coming of the East Europeans. The first was a settlement of Jews in *Niew Amsterdam,* early in 1654. Sepharadic Jews from Spain and Portugal had come here — by way of Holland and from other lands in the New World where they had taken refuge from the terrors of the Inquisition; they had settled in Brazil, the Netherlands West Indies and other islands in the Caribbean. With the entry of the Inquisition into Latin American lands, *auto-da-fes* and massacres of the Jews drove them out. Their settling in *Niew Amsterdam* came only after they overcame the anti-Semitic hostility of their governor, Peter Stuyvesant.[10] Other Sepharadeem settled in hospitable Rhode Island.

Between 1848 and 1880, relatively large numbers of German Jews arrived in the United States. Since many of them had come from areas where Reform Jewry was important, many were less reluctant to try their luck outside the Jewish Orthodox centers of New York, New England, and Pennsylvania. Like others who came to the new land, they loaded themselves or their wagons and set out to peddle their wares. Widespread travels and wandering brought them to the towns and cities of the South and the Midwest, where they settled, and later became important drygoods merchants.[11]

When the German Jews arrived on these shores, they were barely tolerated by the aristocratic early-settler Sepharadeem. They were guilty of being poor, without *yihhoús* (lineage). True, they were Jews, but they lacked the history and patina of their Sepharadi co-religionists.[12]

Although they had suffered resentment when they came here poor, the German Jews, upon becoming rich and "refined," at first turned against the East Europeans in resentment at *their* "intrusion"; however, they soon set about to help.[13] Later, some East Europeans looked down on immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. All united in showing scorn for still other Jewish national groups — the Roumanians and Galicians. In addition, it should be noted that *all* Jewish groups named above joined to show their

superiority to what they considered the two "uncouth" and "uncivilized" groups – the Syrians from Aleppo and Damascus and the Ladino-speaking Sepharadeem from the region around Turkey and Greece. Although the latter were more European and less wedded to Oriental manners and customs, nevertheless they were held in disdain – they too could speak no Yiddish and little English.

Jews from Eastern Europe did not begin to flock to the United States in significant numbers until the 1880's and 1890's and flooded New York around the turn of the century. During this era the anti-Semitic decrees and pogroms (massacres), carried out by the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Russians, and other Slavic Christians had made life difficult for the millions of Jews of these lands. Earlier, they had been welcomed in to Eastern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – refugees from the intermittent massacres and tribulations of life in Christian France, Germany, and elsewhere in Western Europe. The immigrants had brought with them their skills and professions, which were then eagerly sought in the Slavic lands.

As the lands began to develop, and in a measure, to prosper, commercial jealousy, resentment, and religious bigotry brought pogroms, restrictions for Jews in almost every area of life, including education, occupations, and where Jews were permitted to live.

The Chmielnitzki pogroms of 1648-1654 saw the slaughter of close to 500,000 Jews and the total destruction of 774 Jewish communities.

In Eastern Europe the majority of Jews were devoted to Orthodox religious studies since most had little or no access to secular schools.[14] Thanks to the fervor of nationalist, socialist and other revolutionary activity around them, beginning in the mid and later 1800's, many Jewish youth became involved in radical political movements of the time, mostly socialist, in one faction or another.[15] With this came an interest in the literature and thinking of the West and a measure of secular learning.[16]

Not all East European Jews who came to the United States were socialists, however; the majority were apolitical – and

pious. They had two overriding passions — the welfare of their families and the strict observance of their religious duties. Both were provided for in the structure of life on New York's lower East Side, which teemed with fellow Jews from every Eastern European *shtetl* (Jewish village), every town, and every country.

The new immigrants received much needed aid through self-help groups, initially established by Jews from the same areas as the new immigrants (and HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant and Sheltering Society). Other aid groups functioned under the auspices or with the financial aid of Spanish-Portuguese — descendants of those who had arrived centuries earlier. In addition, the wealthy German Jews had also, ultimately, joined in these efforts.[17] At first, German Jews not only resented the coming of the East Europeans, as remarked above, but, in fact, attempts were made to *deny* the Eastern Europeans *the right of entry.* In 1884 the *American Israelite,* edited by the influential Isaac Mayer Wise, urged that the then restrictive *Immigration Laws of New York State* (long since repealed) be used to turn away some two hundred indigent Jewish refugees from Russia who were about to arrive on the "S.S. California." [18]

Living quarters for the East Europeans were hastily found for them on the Lower East Side, crowded as it was with tall tenements which housed Italian and Sicilian, Irish and Slavic immigrants, each on their respective streets. They found work as peddlers, pushcart merchants, and in the proliferating sweatshop clothing factories which supplied the residents of New York and indeed all of the United States. It was a busy and bustling East Side where the Syrians landed.

The Syrian immigrant arrived with a multitude of handicaps. He experienced considerable difficulties in adjusting to the new scene. He spoke no English, and though surrounded by Jews, since he was unable to speak Yiddish, was *almost totally* unable to communicate with them or relate to their ways. In addition, although most Jews in Aleppo and Damascus had never set eyes on an Ashkenazi, a negative attitude toward East European Jews had somehow existed among them in Syria.

Early Religious Worship

Why hadn't the Syrian immigrants, in the early years before the Syrian synagogue on Orchard Street was to be established united in synagogue services with the many existing houses of worship? For one, their mannerisms had caused them to appear "different" ("queer") to the East European Jews. They were Oriental, Sepharadeem, and almost totally unable to understand the prayer services, even though the texts of the prayers are almost completely identical with those of the East European and of Jews everywhere. The Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew, in its various regional renditions — Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Roumanian, and particularly Galician — made it impossible for the Aleppoans to follow the cantor's prayers; the Ashkenazi and Sepharadi pronunciations of Hebrew were almost mutually unintelligible.

During a mid-week prayer service in an East European synagogue, my father, ritually clothed in *taleet,* a prayer shawl, and *tefileen,* phylacteries, was approached by an Ashkenazic congregant. Since he did not understand what was being said to him in "plain Yiddish," the man who had spoken to him asked in evident amazement, *"Bist du a Yid?"* ("Are you a Jew?"). Similar experiences were common.

Their own Sabbath prayer services were arranged in the basement of an Ashkenazi synagogue, on or near Grand Street. This location was succeeded by the "synagogue" established by the affluent Dushey. This place of worship was short-lived. We are told of Syrian Sabbath prayer-services that were held in the *Educational Alliance* on East Broadway. The eminent Dr. David De Sola Pool, at that time assistant rabbi of *Shearith Israel,* the synagogue of the "uptown" wealthy aristocratic Spanish and Portuguese Jews, was then conducting adult classes for immigrants at the Jewish Alliance on East Broadway. He arranged for Syrian prayer services there and acted as their unofficial rabbi, leaving his family to sleep on the East Side some Friday nights, in order to be in attendance at the Syrian Sabbath Services.

A Community Is Established

The community as such was established with the arrival of women and children shortly before the beginning of World War I, as money had been accumulated to send for them. As Syrians increased in number and wives and children joyfully relieved the men of the solitary grim life they had undergone — a community came into being. Happily, family life was once again restored; once again, families and friends, reunited, visited together, and spent Saturday evenings at modest card parties as in Aleppo. It was normal life restored.

Now it would no longer do to hold makeshift Sabbath prayer services. Congregation Sha'aré Sedek, was duly established in 1911 or 1912 at 48 Orchard Street, exactly one block behind the "Oriental Jobbers." There on the top floor of a three or four story walk-up loft building, a synagogue and Talmud Torah (afternoon Hebrew School) were initiated.

No rabbinical head officiated at the service in those days. Prayers were chanted by *'Haham'* Mosé Ash'ear (Ashear) or any pious member with a pleasant voice. Adult classes in Talmud and other religious studies were conducted Saturday afternoons by several lay scholars versed in rabbinical law and the Talmud. A rabbi from Tiberias, Meyer Vaknin, visiting during 1917 and 1918, captivated the community with his learning and graciousness. The community was unable, however, to persuade him to stay, as rabbinical head and spiritual leader. Not until 1934, almost fifteen years later was an official rabbi appointed.

East-Side Jewish Education

In the new synagogue the Hebrew school, the *kittab,* was different from Aleppo's; there, students attended all-day Hebrew schools. Here, because of the inescapable American law, the children were obliged to attend the public elementary schools, a rigid regime from nine in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. After public school hours, the boys would hurry to Orchard Street — to the Hebrew School

for another phase of education ("girls do not need religious education"). The population of the *kittab* was still somewhat small and had only a few teachers, each with the sometimes-honorary title of *Haham* (rabbi). There were *Haham,* Ezra Baqqaii-"Kohen," Isaac Aboudi-"Killzi", Ezra Sutton (referred to slightingly not as *Haham* Ezra, but "Ezra *Haham*"), Mosé Hidary, and others. *Haham* Kilzi, had a hypnotic and fierce personality; the dread of severe physical punishment was ever-present for the misbehaving boy or one who did not learn as expected of him. Baqaii-"Kohen" (as explained elsewhere his children opted for "Cain") was the witty and compelling Talmud teacher. Elementary stages in reading were followed by studies in the *Humásh* (Pentateuch), the Prophets, and others of the *Twenty-Four* Books of the Bible. These in turn were followed by volumes of the Babylonian Talmud. (The teachers had spent the greater part of their day, from early morning until the school hour, loaded with their peddling merchandise.)

The method of teaching was the same as in *Halab.* The Talmúd is in part Aramaic (the Hebrew term for Aramaic is *Targum,* or "Translation"). Nevertheless, Talmúd lessons had to be learned without the aid of an Aramaic glossary or introductory lessons in the language. A traditional method of group study was effective in the advanced classes on Orchard Street. A page of the particular volume of the Talmud was given a preliminary over-view by the class of eight or ten students, with the assistance of the rabbi. The class was then divided into groups, each of which went off to a separate area for intensive study of the text. Later the groups gathered again to be examined by the teacher.

Three o'clock in the after noon until six o'clock in the evening of each week day — Fridays excepted — was not the only time the children engaged in Jewish study. On Saturday afternoon they recited Biblical excerpts that were additional to their weekday studies. The children were drilled in the Book of Ruth with approach of *Shabuót* (Pentecost) as well as in the traditional Sepharadi *Azharót* (eleventh century poems by Ibn Gabirol, encompassing the 613 *Mizvót* of the *Tórah).* Likewise, with the approach of *Purim,* they were drilled in the

text of the Scroll of Esther. Some of these texts were studied by rote in classical *Nahawii,* (Arabic comparable to Chaucer's Middle-English which only those well-educated in Arabic are able to fully understand). To this day some of these students are able to repeat in Arabic — with relish, the lessons they had memorized, recited (shouted, really) in unison. Nor was this all of the Toráh the children were made to study. On Sundays, *kittab* hours were from nine in the morning until three or four in the afternoon.

The loft housing the Syrian synagogue and *kittab* on "Or-chair" (Orchard Street) had an Ashkenazic religious congregation below it. On Sundays as the children trooped down to their lunch, they were treated to a strange view. It was almost noon, yet on the floor below through the open door they could observe the congregants garbed in *taleteem* prayer shawls, and phylacterics. The men at prayer shook vigorously as *each* intoned the prayer in a loud voice. How very curious that morning prayers should be intoned loudly — and almost at noon; what manner of Jews were these? Only later did the children learn that some Hassidic groups draw out their morning prayers for several hours.

One of the rewards of the day for many was the luncheon, a "delicatessen" smoked meat sandwich, delicious and unlike anything at home. One small boy vowed, "When I grow up and have my own money, I will eat 'deli' every day of the week." (It is known that he virtually keeps his vow.)

The existence of not-very-religious school mates from homes that may have been only formally religious was illustrated by the choice of the Sunday lunchrooms. My pious father had cautioned me to buy my sandwich only at the Isaac Gellis establishment on Essex Street, a strictly kosher eating place. Some fellow-students, however, boasted of the "better and bigger" sandwich they ate at East Houston Street. Only later did I discover that Katz' — still a very popular "delicatessen" restaurant there sixty years later, made no claim whatever to being kosher.

All such boys did not submit readily to the teaching in the *kittab.* Some absented themselves when they could. Others were virtually dragged there by their fathers. Having come,

the students did not feel the necessity *to stay.* On the pretext of the need of the toilet in the hallway, they made their way to the streets. To overcome this, once the boy was returned to the *kittab,* to prevent his escaping, his shoes were taken away. This was effective with most — but not all; the restless and unruly boys ran away even though they were barefooted. (Nor was Isaac Gellis' lunchroom necessarily for *them.)*

On warm days, with a west wind blowing we were treated to the barn-yard odors emanating from the stables situated across the street from the *kittab,* of A. Gutterman, Funeral Directors. (A close relationship between Gutterman and the Syrians continues to this day — but in another context. His is the community's official funeral service.)

Usually the children's entertainment for the week consisted of Sunday attendance at a movie show. Admission at some East Side theaters was "two for five cents" for children, or three cents for one admission. This made it common to hear the ritual chant, "Who'z got "chree" (three)?" at the doors of the theaters.

Patterns of Segregation

Since weekday classes did not end until after six o'clock in the evening, 'supper' and some public-school homework consumed the remainder of the evening. When did these children have time for recreation — baseball, basketball, or even "stoep ball," games that other children of their ages were accustomed to play everyday? Surely they would be able to compensate on Saturdays, for the demanding schedule of the week? Alas, no — ball playing and bicycling were *strictly forbidden* on the Sabbath. This constricting schedule of activity left Syrian children no time to associate in play with children of other backgrounds and cultures — language difficulties played no part since they learned to speak English quickly enough. What choice did the parents have but to see that their some receive a Jewish education such as *they themselves* had received and which would result in pious, observant Jews, like themselves and their forefathers?

The Talmúd Toráh schooling and the training of first and

early second generation Syrian-Americans set them apart from the Ashkenazeem. Second generation Ashkenazic children were urged to acquire the utmost in secular education, no matter what price or sacrifice to their parents. Through this education, superior to that of their parents, the Ashkenazic immigrants' children would strive for a life comparable to that of the affluent Americans about them, by becoming doctors, educators, lawyers, and educated businessmen; education they craved for and were denied by the Czarist regime.

This widespread compulsion for secular education is illustrated in this excerpt from Mike Gold, a writer who lived on and loved the east Side.

> "I am certain to be rich! I will make a school teacher out of you, Esther! You will dress in a fine waist and pompadour and be a teacher. Isn't that wonderful, Esther?"
>
> "Yes, poppa."
>
> "And you, Mickey will be a doctor! You will be what I would have been, had I kissed a priest's hand —. It is better to have wisdom than to have money. I will earn the money, Mickey, and make you a doctor!" [19]

The thirst for *secular* education did not exist in Aleppo. Syrian parents had the same aims for their children as had been instilled in them in the Arabic-Oriental tradition-dominated environment. They were anxious that their offsprings grow up to be orderly, respectful, well-mannered, hard-working and above all, God-fearing practitioners of the Jewish religion. They were not to become like the "wild" American children around them, not to be *bumbiyeh* (Arabic-English for "bums"). Only thus would they maintain the respectability of the family. Morroe Berger says of the Arabs: "Parents make their children conform to the ideal: well mannered, modest, respectful of elders, helpful and obedient." (In *The Arab World Today*, p. 118).

With the onset of war in 1914 — the United States entered the blood-bath in 1917 — the immigrants saw a measure of prosperity, thanks to the shortage of merchandise. The few

who had manufactured bedsheets, pillowcases, curtain and the like were customers of the agents of the southern textile mills. Accordingly, they succeeded in securing contract allotments of "piece goods," which they utilized at highly profitable prices. With the end of hostilities, contracts for merchandise at inflated prices collapsed — but not all the newly acquired wealth.

A few years of limited acculturation in the new country, along with a tradition of mercantilism and hard work which the Aleppo Jews brought with them, helped to improve their economic lot. They had served their apprenticeship in the American commercial world as peddlers. Soon after the end of World War I, most of them turned to an easier way of earning a living. They became shopkeepers, offering merchandise not unsimilar to that with which they had become familiar in their door-to-door selling. They specialized now in articles such as embroidered tablecloths, fancy handkerchiefs, and the like. This was the beginning of a significant change in the commercial — and social — life of the Syrian immigrants.

The Women's Role

The women and housewives in the Syrian home in New York emerged slowly from the subordinate position common to women in the Orient. Among the early immigrants, a small number, particularly those from middle-class origins, had perhaps attended the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* schools in Aleppo and Damascus and thus could read and write. Such women learned some English fairly soon after arriving in New York in the early days. The majority, however, brought up in the tradition of Islamic countries had no schooling whatever and thus were illiterate — except, of course, for young immigrant girls who had been subject to mandatory attendance in public schools of New York. With or without the ability to read or to speak some English, the married women had little opportunity to move about in the city or even on the East Side, due to the care of the many children; as in Syria, Jewish marriage encouraged the producing of large

families — and the preparation of time-consuming Oriental dishes. In effect she was a prisoner in the small, dark and dingy tenement residence.

Unmarried young girls attended public schools, after which some supplemented their family's income by afternoon work. At sixteen, girls were allowed to work full time, in one of the sweat-shop manufacturing holes that abounded in the area. But this would not be for long, since there were many more male Syrian immigrants than females. The girl would soon be sought in marriage, and not too long afterward would be confined to a tenement flat to care for the constant flow of babies. Families with six, seven, and even more children were not uncommon. The increasingly large family continued to occupy a small flat which became almost intolerably overcrowded. One family with ten off-springs had *six children sleeping across the width of a bed.*

Unlike some Ashkenazic women, who operated sewing machines in small home 'factories', no married Syrian women worked gainfully. The Syrian housewives, following the tradition of most Jewish women in the old country, performed no gainful work then — and for many decades to come.

The Syrian Jewish wife was treated with respect and consideration. Nevertheless, the tradition, of patriarchal control found in Muslim countries prevailed in the Syrian-Jewish home. The husband kept his hand on the pursestrings, doling out to his wife what he deemed necessary. Since no Jewish female worked in the Orient — except for a few, servants or cooks — the woman thus had neither earning power nor authority over any family earnings. Following the custom in Aleppo and Damascus, the husband did the marketing and shopping, if only because he spoke some English, and in any case he was the more skilled "negotiator" for more favorable prices; *nothing* purchased in those days was not bargained for, on the East Side. Some small purchases were made by one of the older children, who acquired fluency in English with amazing rapidity.

The housewife's release from her taxing work came only with the "blessed Sabbath." At this time, free from forbidden

work, she had an opportunity to go out, to visit nearby relatives and friends. Saturday evening was the only night for entertainment. Husband and wife would join others at the home of a friend for the accustomed card party. The arrival of additional immigrant families was greeted with pleasure. It meant a reunion with friends or relatives and an enlarged circle of people to visit.

Almost all early Syrian immigrants had lived on the Lower East Side. A handful of immigrant wives, including the lady we met as the hospitable smiling housewife who spoke perfect Arabic, had fled with their families to the middle-class Jewish area of the Bronx, rebelling against the squalor of the East Side. The several Grazi families, Abraham David Sutton (my father), Isaac Matalon, Abraham Haber, Abraham Chabbot and his children's families as well as Jack Cabbasso formed the valiant vanguard to the north. However, the colony was not a success, and, not being able to draw enough additional Syrians to help create a viable community — and a Sepharadic prayer service — it was soon abandoned.

It was unthinkable to return to the squalid Lower East Side after the Bronx. Instead, to approach the East Side by being close, the Bronx Syrians chose Williamsburgh in south Brooklyn as their residence, and soon, almost all Syrians were installed there, as we will see now.

Notes

1.The *Alliance Israelite Universelle* was formed by wealthy French Jews (with the aid of the French government) to help Oriental Jews in securing a measure of secular (French) culture. It took the form of the current "day schools," devoting half the day to Hebrew education, as well. Four to six years-or-more-of education was offered at small cost or none at all for the interested indigent.

2. It is estimated that Syria in this period had a Christian population of about 70,000 and a total Jewish population numbering 30,000. Syria was the cradle of many disputing sects in the new-born Christian religion. Druze-Muslim Anti-Christian riots and massacres in 1860 prompted emigration.

3. For information concerning Ladino-Spanish Jews see: Luis Hacker "The Communal Life of the Sephardic Jews in New York City" in a resume of his report given in the Jewish Social Service Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 2, New York, December, 1926, pp. 32-40. See also Mair-Jose Benardette, "Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews" Hispanic Institute in the United States, New York, 1953, pp. 139-140. See also *the important studies* of Rabbi Dr. Marc Angel (1974).

4. "A study of the Syrian Population of Greater New York", an unpublished M. A. Thesis-Columbia Univ., New York; This reference was encountered in Walter P. Zenner's "Syrian Jewish Identification in Israel", an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, Dept. of Anthropology, 1965.

5. These impressions remain vivid in the memory of a wide-eyed eight year old immigrant child, the author of this text.

6. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers,* New York. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976. The latest and most informative work on lower East side life.

The writings of Hutchins Hapgood, particularly *The Spirit of the Ghetto* depicting immigrant life on the Lower East Side of New York and *The Ghetto* by Jacob Wirth provide an accurate and colorful picture, as does *The Rise of Abraham Levinsky* a fictional work by Abraham Cahan, long the editor of the "Forward", the leading Yiddish daily in New York. (An exciting and informative novel.)

A keenly evocative record in photographs and newspaper articles of the period is contained in *Portal to America: the Lower East Side 1870-1925* Allan Schoener (ed.) Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1967. Schoener drew on the wealth of material in the Jewish Museum in New York.

7. Much of this material and much of what follows concerning life on the lower East Side is the experience of the writer, his family, and was repeated by informants in many interviews.

8. I asked David ('Danny') Beyda how it had come about that his oldest brother Raymond had then married an "Idshiyeh" an Ashkenazi girl. The pioneer Beyda family operated a small factory in which a demure and charming *"Idshiyeh,"* Charlotte Katz, worked at a machine. All were taken with her sweetness and loveliness, so that "it became a contest who would marry her." Raymond, the oldest, had "won out" over Abe and the still younger brothers. (David is the 'hero' of an early East side episode; yet to be told, in Vol. II of this series.)

Two Ashkenazic girls who then married Syrians assimilated so thoroughly and learned to speak Arabic so fluently that it came as a surprise that they were not indeed Syrians.

9. Saleem Salem served the clients when the restaurant moved (circa 1927-29) to West 29th Street, and took the name "EGYPTIAN (Misr-ieh, the owner's name, "Egyptian") ROSE" (after the name of Yisrael's wife, the chef and the co-owner. Long a widow, "Rosie" resides with one of her children in No. Carolina.

10. Governor Stuyvesant had appealed to the Chartered Company, in the Netherlands, for authority to ban Jews from residence in Niew Amsterdam. Little did he know that important members of that governing body were themselves Jews, Sepharadeem – Spanish-Portugese refugees from the Inquisition.

11. Harry Golden, *Forgotten Pioneers* World Book, Cleveland, 1965. Floyd Fierman, *Peddlers and Merchants on the Southwestern Frontier* in Password, Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer, 1965. See also – Ruth Say *Jews in America,* Basic Books, New York, 1965, pp. 45-46.

12. David and Tamar DeSola Pool, *An Old Faith In the New World,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1966, p. 3. Also see – Stephen Birmingham's *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite,* Harper & Row, New York, 1971.

13. Lucy Dawidowicz, "Louis Marshall's Yiddish newspaper" in "Jewish Social Studies," Vol. 25, No. 2, April 1963, pp. 103-132.

14. "The Rabbinical tradition was the dominant culture in the Pale," C. Bezalel Sherman, *The Jew Within American Society,* Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1961, p. 28.

Lucy S. Dawidowicz, The *Golden Tradition, Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe,* Holt, Rinehart, Winston, New York, 1967 (An 84 page Introduction embraces a brief history).

15. Nevertheless, large numbers brought their socialist thought with them, and this was to account for the powerful Socialist Party movement in New York City and elsewhere. Indeed it was to account for the 145,332 votes cast for Morris Hilquit the Socialist candidate for Mayor of New York City in 1917. He lost to Democrat John Hyland (who, curiously, was nicknamed "Red").

The same wave of Socialist activity brought from Eastern Europe succeeded in electing eleven Socialist State Asemblymen in New York. Because of the "anti-Bolshevik" hysteria rampant in 1920 and the repressive measures, they were denied their seats, despite winning two court suits. See also: Zoza Scajkowski, "The Jews and the New York City Majoralty Election of 1917," in "Jewish Social Studies" Vol. XXXII, No. 4, October 1970).

16. A small but influential movement known as the *Haskalah* (Hebrew, for intellectual understanding) developed as the Jewish response to the Western Enlightenment. It flourished in Germany and was also vigorous in Eastern Europe. It dealt largely but not exclusively with Jewish intellectual problems. It is associated with the development of the Yiddishist culture and was the cradle of the movement to restore Hebrew as a secular living tongue used in common discourse. The *Haskalah* also influenced Zionism, the movement to restore the Jewish people and Hebrew culture to their native soil *Eres Yisrael* — the land of Israel. Without the fire of this small group of intellectuals the reestablishment of a Jewish state, a revived Israel, would not have become a reality. It would have continued to wait for the coming of the *Mashiyah,* the Messiah, in accordance with the continuing views of Orthodox sages. The *Haskalah* was thoroughly secular and thus earned the condemnation of pious, observant elements of Orthodox Jewry.

17. A recent popular history of the German Jews in the United States is the subject of Stephen Birmingham's *Our Crowd,* Harper and Row, New York, 1969. The New Jersey summer areas of the German Jews of that period now abound with the Syrian Sepharadeem.

18. Werner, Keller *Diaspora,* Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1969, pp. 428-432.

Considerable material has in recent years recounted the maneuvering of the wealthy Jews to have their fellow Jews appear in a somewhat "better" light, before the citizens of the city. Louis Marshall, leading philanthropist of Germanic origin, sought to publish a newspaper which would specifically attempt to rapidly Americanize the immigrants, to make couth the uncouth Poles, Galicians, Litwaks and the rest.

19. *Jews Without Money,* New York, Liveright Publishing Corp., 1930.

Chapter Two

A Social Portrait (II)

The Flight To Williamsburgh

AS we see throughout their brief American history, the Syrian Jewish immigrants, like the bees which as one body desert a hive to swarm to a new location — just as mysteriously the Syrians moved to Williamsburgh almost as a whole — and as they did in later moves. In 1918-19 they moved to Williamsburgh, Brooklyn, a Jewish Ashkenazic middle-class area only a short distance — just across the East River — from the familiar East Side. (In taking the bridge-trolley at Delancey Street in Manhattan in the evening, the newsboys would be heard shouting, "Journal, World, Globe, Mail, Sun, Telegraph-Journal!")

By 1919, almost every Syrian-Jewish family was residing near Lee Avenue and Roebling Street.

Soon after the move to Williamsburgh, a congregation was established, occupying for Sabbath and Holiday services the spacious second floor of the Masonic Order, in the building of the Amphion Theater, a moving picture house with a somewhat varied history. (Occasionally the Amphion housed matinee performances of Corse Payton's travelling repertory company.)

The commercial life of the Aleppoans had improved but the circumstances of their estrangement from the Eastern European Jews remained unchanged. Their seeming need and desire to cling to their cherished traditions served to keep them apart in Williamsburgh as it had on the lower East Side.

Numbering perhaps 4,000-5,000, the community was not large enough nor well enough rooted in the new location to operate food stores to supply the traditional Oriental specialties. These continued to be secured from the large Christian-Syrian community on Washington Street near the Battery, and from a small Jewish Syrian shop on the East Side.

There was no social or religious interaction with other Jews (and non-Jews); the community life of the Aleppoans continued to be insulated, especially so in the area of marriage. The social isolation of the Syrian community provided no ground for Syrian-Ashkenazic marriages. The Syrians, in the light of their traditions, shied away from such marriages on the grounds that they did not know the family antecedents of the Ashkenazic youth. Their concern was for family *adamiyeh* (gentility), and 'eugenic' background. They would say of the Ashkenazeem, "We don't know *qar'it abou'hom* (the 'bald pates' of their forefathers) — their ancestry. Knowing the 'bald pates' of the forefathers of their fellow Syrians, they were careful to effect marriages with families of their own traditional class and "gentility," marrying upward, if possible. Class lines were permitted to overlap in cases of deep emotional attachment; or when an upper-class marriageable daughter was no longer in the prime of her desirability — and when a lower-class man was "overwhelmingly" rich.

Even during the era of Williamsburgh sojourn (1919-1922), and for decades later, marriage between Syrians and Ashkenazeem was virtually unthought of. It was considered as "intermarriage," almost like marriage to a gentile. Two or three worldly Syrian young men who frequented the company of East European Ashkenazic girls *had* married them in the early days, before many Syrian families with marriageable daughters had immigrated to New York.

Marriages then were usually the result of arrangements between the respective parents. In most cases the services of a go-between were employed. These part-time marriage brokers were respected members of the community who possessed the necessary knowledge regarding suitable family class and lineage. The respective brides and grooms usually

knew one another, if not well; and marriages were seldom arranged without the ready – or ultimate consent of both individuals. A dowry of some sort was usual then, and it operated *in either direction.* The father of a particularly pretty and sought-after girl received the dowry, or an especially well-favored young man's father was the beneficiary. The size of a dowry reflected the financial position of the family, in addition to the desirability of the respective bride or groom.

Holiday Visits

Among the traditional Aleppoan customs which were brought to Williamsburgh was the mandatory holiday visit to every esteemed friend, and older relatives. These were brief formal afternoon visits. After a short interval of polite conversation a tray of sweets and liquor was presented; a nibble and a sip were customary. But the guests *could not leave* until they were served the small cups of Turkish coffee. Those in a hurry would ask to have the coffee served in order to obtain their release. On one Festival holiday, my father had paid *seventy* courtesy calls. Now, holiday courtesy visits to friends are no longer mandatory. Parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, of both husbands and wives, however, continue to receive visits as a family duty. To omit such visits would bespeak neglect or a lack of esteem.

The Syrian Jews who settled in Williamsburgh after moving from the crowded Lower East Side seemed happy in their new location, as I recall. Why then, after only a few years in Williamsburgh did they begin to move to Bensonhurst? Was it the lack of their own house of worship – a situation which could have been easily remedied? What brought about this new restlessness *so uncharacteristic* of their life in Aleppo?

The Move to Bensonhurst, Brooklyn

At first, about 1919-1920, only a few families had moved to Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, to the *"See-Beej"* area – on the *Sea Beach* line of the B. R. T., the Brooklyn Rapid Transit subway

system completed in 1914. Just as almost all the Syrians had left the East Side only a very few years earlier, so now all had removed from Williamsburgh to the *See-Beej.*

Bensonhurst was then largely populated by Ashkenazeem and some Italians. Parts of it appeared semi-rural. Syrians took up residence in row-houses on or near 20th Avenue between 60th to 72nd Streets, but nearby there were open fields, and truck-farms which grew tomatoes and other vegetables for the city market. The first time I visited *See-Beej* I thought "This is Real Country!" It was 'true'. The air was fresher than in Williamsburgh — the many open areas, fields thick with trees, gave it a "rustic" appearance. My family was among the last hold-outs in Williamsburgh, moving to *See-Beej* in 1921. Across the street from our spacious house at 6906 22nd Avenue (now Bay Parkway) there was an open field where we played and adventurously climbed tall trees — it was many years later before the Marboro Theater would occupy the site. Ours was a larger and more expensive home than those owned by most Syrians; my father, in the early 1920's was an importer of lace from China, which he sold in sizeable volume. Our house cost $12,000, while the row-house residences acquired by most Syrians had been priced at about $4,000 or $5,000.

Here, at last, in pleasant *See-Beej,* the Syrian-Jewish immigrants found a happy haven, which seemed destined to be their permanent location.

The market-place was on 20th Avenue, the heart of Syrian residences. A few Syrians opened stores to supply the special necessities that the Oriental cuisine required.

A butcher shop was operated by *Hayyem Lévy* and *Sha'ya J. Shalom* (not to be confused with *"Cash" Shalom,* the wholesale dry goods dealer). There was also the barber shop of the genial *Moosa* and *Kamel Zalta,* his brother (the latter's given name is typical of Muslim-influenced Damascus), which they moved from Essex Street on the East Side. *Hayyeem Chabbott,* a pioneer immigrant was partner with *Tawfiq Seroor* in their tailoring shop on 65th Street, off 20th Avenue. ("Tawfiq" is also characteristically Damascene, indicative of a measure of limited Muslim assimilation by some Jews.) Among several

Syrian grocery stores which were soon functioning, perhaps the most popular and typical of all of them was that operated by *Abu Yomtob* Nikchari (*"Yomtob's* father"). He was a venerable and gentle individual, always willing to pleasantly yield a little on the price of his groceries. The floor of his store was littered with bags of rice, lentils and other legumes; barrels of olives and baskets of fresh vegetables were everywhere; and thus, the haphazard appearance of the store saw none but Syrians.

"Abu" Yomtob, as an example, is a title given as a mark of veneration — indicating that the individual has a *male* offspring [the first male of the many children in most families]. In Brooklyn the title "Abu" is used only by those still closely wedded to old Syrian customs.

The much-loved *Abu Yomtob* was ninety-one years old when he died. On the way to his store at dawn one morning he did not see an approaching car because of failing eyesight, and was fatally struck. (*Salem* is the authentic name of the "Nikchari" family.)

Early Places of Worship

After briefly occupying the basement of an Ashkenazic synagogue on 66th Street, Syrians acquired a small row-house in 1920, on 66th Street between 19th and 20th Avenues close to their residences, a house of prayer they could call their own.

It is religious custom to serve a snack at late afternoon prayers on Saturdays in Syrian synagogues, *Seudah Shellisheet* a prescribed "third meal" to celebrate the "bounty" and appreciation of the sacred Sabbath. In Williamsburgh and Bensonhurst a *ká-ké* (a kind of bread-stick "doughnut") was served to each individual, along with a few roasted almonds; we children were *avid* for the almonds. *Abu Daniel* ("Daniel's father"). *Mizrahi,* the *shamosh* (sexton), a hold-over from Williamsburgh, (and later *Sha-ool Sémah)* would make our eyes pop with excitement when, as he approached us, he would scoop up a huge handful of almonds. But alas, as he came closer, he permitted the almonds to dribble back

through his fingers so that when we were given the handful it *always* consisted of only eight to nine almonds — to our unfailing disappointment and chagrin.

With the influx of hold-out Williamsburghers and the remnant of East Side residents, the small synagogue was soon bursting at the seams. On a plot of land Syrians acquired in 1921-1922 the Magen David Congregation was built at 2027 67th Street, where it still stands. (It now serves the few Syrians and some of the new Egyptian immigrants who live in Bensonhurst. Coincidentally, Magen David is directly behind the Ashkenazic synagogue where the Syrians held their first prayer-services in Bensonhurst.) Shortly thereafter, a substantial Talmud Torah afternoon school building was erected at the side of the synagogue, to serve the numerous offspring of the large families. It was now *mostly* boys who attended the after-public-school classes in the afternoons. The "boys" still recall today — with not unalloyed nostalgia — their teachers in the Talmud Torah, rabbis and lay-instructors; hamameem: Rabbis Matloub Abadi, Mosé Kassab, Ezra Mish'aniyeh, Mosé Hidary, Ezra Ba'qaaii Kohen (whose children anglicized to "Cain"), and the only female instructor, Geberett ("Miss" — Hebrew) Nissim who is fondly remembered by *two generations* of her students.

A small *Shammi* (Damascene) synagogue was located on 64th or 65th Street with an afternoon Talmúd Toráh school. Sha-ool Isaac Betesh (from *Killez),* a well-to-do merchant, established a small synagogue in a converted private home at 1970 64th Street — for what reason? Despite his death dozens of years ago, it continues to function.) Abraham David Sutton, my father, had also established such a synagogue.

A Rabbinical Head

Neither the lower East Side nor the Williamsburgh community had appointed an official rabbi. Until 1934 in Bensonhurst, the synagogue's spiritual needs — such as they were — were met by the lay-scholars, and the rabbi-congregants who attended services. As post-war immigration became somewhat easier, several rabbis from Aleppo joined the com-

munity, and while no official rabbinical head was appointed, the newly arrived rabbis, alone with the earlier lay-scholars, sufficed for the needs of the Syrians. The respected Mosé Ashe'ar (Ashear) who enjoyed the honorary title of *haham,* officiated as *hazzán,* cantor, at the same time producing numerous *pizmoneem,* religious poems which he set to the melodies of popular Arabic songs, poems often written to commemorate a happy occasion in the life of a prominent member of the community, as was done in the 8th to 13th centuries Old Cairo.

Among the leaders in the synagogue were Abraham and Sha'ool Tawil, brothers, Abraham David Sutton, H'aron Sha'rah, Yishaq Esses, Ya'coob Nahem, Seleem Garazi (Grazi), Elie Laniado. Others remembered are *Haham* Haim Tawil, Yusef (Abu Azoor) Dweck *Hahams* Abraham Azar and Mosé Kassab-Dweck. In 1934, with a fine synagogue structure and a large population an "official" rabbi became available and was deemed necessary. Of course, this rabbi was a Sepharadi, who was familiar with Syrian customs and ritual — *Haham* Ya'cob Kassin — a descendant of a long and distinguished family of Aleppoan rabbis was brought to New York from Jerusalem. Born in Palestine he had been ordained at the Porát Yoséf Yeshiva, the Aleppo-founded seminary. *Haham Ya'cob* became the *Haham Bashi* or "chief rabbi" and continued his service in Bensonhurst until most of the congregants moved to Flatbush.

The Yeshiva-Social Center

Teenage youth in Bensonhurst were numerous in a community with large families. Yet, despite their ability to build a sizeable synagogue and Talmud Torah, the community leaders made no provisions for the social life of the young (nothing of the sort had existed in Aleppo). Thus, in order to socialize, to meet each other, young people strolled along Bay Parkway and soon converged on the sidewalk in front of "Meyer's Ice Cream Parlor" on Bay Parkway near 69th Street; at times, blocking the entrance to the store — and being driven away. Sensitive elders were disturbed at this haphaz-

ard meeting place (*"A street hangout"*) and proposed the establishment of a small clubhouse to provide a dignified meeting place for the youth. The religiously zealous and more influential community leaders admitted the necessity of a clubhouse of some sort, but had other ideas in the matter. They had in mind the building of a social center, yes, but one *which would also house a yeshiva.* Several years of debate and fundraising went by, during which the young people continued to meet on the street, in front of "Meyers."

There is an excellent, long-established center, the Jewish Community House ("J.C.H.") at Bay Parkway and 79th Street assisted with funding provided by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropy — Ashkenazic. It embraces a fully equipped gymnasium and large pool, as well as providing lectures on topics of Jewish interest in addition to classes in arts and crafts. The "J.C.H." urgently invited the Syrian Community to share in its activities, even offering to build a new wing for the use of the Syrians. Since it was not exclusively a social center that some Syrian community leaders had in mind, the offer was rejected.

Finally, a large building was constructed in 1950-1951 at Avenue P and 75th Street — a location close to *neither* the Bensonhurst residences nor the new Flatbush community which was now growing rapidly. The incompletely-equipped Social Center was not a success, it did not draw the youth, and soon the entire building was taken over by the present-day Magen David Yesshiva.

The Move To Flatbush

How was the Flatbush area (near Ocean Parkway) settled by the Syrian Jews, what caused some of them to begin the move there, that was ultimately to transplant almost all of the *Halabiyeh* and *Shaw'am* (Aleppoans and Damascenes)? It was about 1939-1940 (?) that a small number of families took possession of spacious homes there, some of them small mansions. They established a synagogue in a large private house that they converted for prayer services, on Ocean Parkway, corner Kings Highway. They were the wealthier

Syrian families, and, consequently, moving to the Ocean Parkway area was then referred to as joining the "400," (after the 400 prominent New York families listed in "high society's Blue Book").

After many families made the move to the Flatbush area, again there came a need for a formal large synagogue structure. The present elegant *Sha'aré Zión* building at 2020 Ocean Parkway, near Avenue T, was the result. The early Flatbush residents, perhaps feeling insecure in a new location, felt the need for a rabbinical head while in the converted synagogue, and appointed the late Rabbi A Kurt Klapholtz, who served for several years as the spiritual leader of the new Sha'aré Zión A gentle and scholarly individual, Klapholtz did not suit some of the "assertive" congregants; while he in turn was not happy there, and resigned. "I was not sorry to leave," he reminisced to me some years later. With the strong recommendation of Isaac Shalom, the de-facto head of the synagogue (he was very pious, the richest, and very generous) — the young Abraham B. Hecht, as noted, had been brought in as rabbi, in 1947, "for one year." Rabbi Hecht continues in the congregation to this day, repeatedly re-engaged, to the satisfaction of the vast majority of the congregants.

A Syrian rabbi with the prestige of his background, *Haham Ya'cob* is effectively and recognizably the "Chief" Rabbi of Sha'aré Zión Congregation-serving also as head of the *Va'ad Ha-Rabbaneem* — the "Sephardic Rabbinical Council," consisting of the heads of Syrian synagogues, as well as a few scholars-rabbis. However Rabbi *Hecht,* serves as the *functioning* rabbi of Sha'aré Zión. He is attached spiritually to the vital Lubavitch Hassidic Chabad Movement as are his six rabbinic brothers — and has been elected several times to the presidency of the Rabbinical Alliance of America. (This is a group of very Orthodox rabbis who are loosely and otherwise affiliated to the prestigious, *"Lubavitche Rebbe,"* Rabbi Dr. Menahem Schneerson, a graduate in science, of the *Sorbonne* in Paris.)

Residential Expansion

After some years, large desirable homes in the Avenue S and Avenue T area were no longer available for the young newly married families. They found similar spacious houses on or near Avenue J and East 7th, 8th and 9th Streets. Soon, too the new community converted a private home into a synagogue, before a large imposing structure was erected at 1061 Ocean Parkway, a 'satellite' of Sha'aré Zión. *Zevulun S. Lieberman* became, and continues, as its highly esteemed rabbi. In time, as *additional* large homes needed were no longer available, other families bought homes near the intersection of Avenue J and Bedford Avenue. A relatively small number of families moved there, and again occupied a large home as an improvised synagogue, with *Haham Abraham Harari-Raffoul* as spiritual leader. A formal building was planned, land was acquired — but the intent to build has come to a halt, because of a new development, the birth of a new Syrian community — in New Jersey, which drew some of the younger and more affluent members of the Bedford Avenue area.

Bradley Beach and Deal, New Jersey

Hundreds of Syrian Jews had begun to summer together, to buy or rent homes in Bradley Beach, N.J. from the late period of Bensonhurst *(See-Beej)*; in 1938-1940, they bought or rented New Jersey homes as summer residences. Bradley Beach was so permanently the Syrian summer location that a substantial synagogue seating some four hundred worshippers was erected on the ocean front. Soon 'everyone' came to summer in "Bradley," taking up residence according to their means, the "poor" as well as the rich. Every family with children of marriageable age came — it was incumbent on them — to enable the offspring to meet and marry a *Syrian mate.* Every summer ended with many engagements and marriages.

The wealthier Bradley Syrian residents sought a more exclusive summer place, and found one in nearby Deal, an affluent area with large homes and spacious grounds which had once been the summering place of rich (the "Our Crowd") German Jews. Emulation, "keeping up with the Joneses" is a characteristic of the Syrians in New York, and in a few years most of them deserted Bradley Beach for the "good life" of deal. Syrians bought the large homes for their summer residences, escalating real estate prices as they bid against one another for choice homes. Hundreds of homes were acquired, and a large synagogue was built on Norwood Avenue with Isaac S. Dwek, a dedicated tradition-oriented Syrian as spiritual head. (Although thoroughly 'Syrian' Rabbi *Dwek* attended the Ashkenazic, very Orthodox, *Ner Israel* seminary in Baltimore.) Life in this beautiful suburb enticed some younger home-owners to take up year-round residence, to the extent that now more than three hundred Syrian families have made the Deal area their permanent home — in addition to the hundreds who maintain summer homes.

The availability of Deal homes having been exhausted, Syrians flowed into the adjoining townships of West Deal, Oakhurst, Elberon and West End. These locations are a little too far to walk to Deal Synagogue on the Sabbath; and where else but in an Oriental Sepharadi synagogue could they worship? They must form small congregations in their own vicinity — and accordingly, did so.

Syrians who no longer wished to have the responsibility of maintaining large summer homes bought one and two bedroom condominiums in a high-rise building in West End, adjoining Deal; they now number sixty or more families and hold weekly prayer services in a rented room in an adjoining resort hotel. However, this does not serve the needs of the nearby Oakhurst and Elberon residents; consequently a part of an Orthodox Ashkenazi synagogue on Park Avenue in Elberon was engaged for their use. There is talk of Syrians building their own house of worship in the vicinity, but this is not yet a certainty.

A number of Syrians have bought land and are building homes in a new development in West Deal on the former

Reade property. The mansion formerly housing the Walter Reade motion-picture headquarters was recently bought by a group of Syrians for use as a club but has been donated, and now serves the West Deal and some Oakhurst residents as a synagogue.

The Jewish education of the Syrian children living in New Jersey is not being neglected, by any means. Hillel School the elementary-level yeshiva (Ashkenazic) in the area was there to take the Syrian children; with the religious devotion and enterprise of the Syrians, it has assumed a new vigor and size. More than three hundred Syrian children are now in attendance. The curriculum has been improved and enlarged, to include Sepharadi-Oriental material. Rabbi Dwek head of The Deal Synagogue, is the Hillel School's educational director. Thanks to the initiative and generosity of two brothers, Ely and Saul Ashkenazi, who donated a sixty acre plot of land, a new school-complex to embrace elementary, intermediate and high-school yeshiva education is in the making. Their enterprise is also responsible for the community's acquisition in near-by Long Branch of a nursing home, for Syrians.

The Deal community is a young and lively one, with baseball and basketball leagues *centered around the synagogue,* as well as tennis and backgammon evening parties. The Deal Casino, a fashionable beach club until recently renting cabanas only to Deal residents is very popular with Syrians, who comprise more than 50 percent of the membership. The youthful Deal Synagogue Sisterhood is busy arranging fund-raising activities as well as presenting speakers on timely topics.

Each weekday several privately chartered buses take Syrian residents to New York, delivering them close to their mid-town enterprises. Some of the riders form prayer-services on the buses, while others remain engrossed in their compelling card games.

The New Immigrants

The Syrian community in Flatbush — and now in Deal as well, has grown. In addition to the old-time Aleppoan and Damascus nucleus, it has expanded through the addition of close to a thousand Egyptian families whose ancestors are from Syria. Some came here directly after Nasser's persecutions and expulsions; the majority first migrated to Israel and/or Lebanon, and came here after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Lebanese Jews — most of them originally from Aleppo and Damascus before 1948 when the State of Israel came into being — have also settled in Flatbush. The turbulent and bloody Christian-Muslim civil war in Lebanon, 1975-1977-renewed in 1978 compelled them regretfully to leave the pleasant life of balmy Beirut. They number some five-hundred families, who seem to have found no difficulty in adjusting to their new life.

Unlike the immigrants who came to a strange and hostile environment on the East Side, the newcomers find themselves in the midst of a prosperous community, of well-integrated relatives and friends. However, both Egyptians and Lebanese tend to form separate social spheres, clinging to memories of their own pleasant life in their respective countries.

Chapter Three

Sorrows and Joys

Serious Illness

LET us glance at the ceremonies that take place in connection with the illness or death of a member of the Aleppo-in-Flatbush community. When an illness takes on an ominous character, the recovery of the patient is aided by several extra-medical measures. A sometimes-practiced ritual is *nassb zeht,* the "setting up of oil lamps" before the sacred Ark in the synagogue. The wife, mother or other close female relative murmuring prayers for the sick one's recovery, pours oil into suitable vessels and sets lighted wicks into them. The prayers are accompanied by customary gestures, extending the open palms toward the Ark and drawing them back to kiss the fingertips, symbolizing touching the Sacred Scrolls. The ritual of setting out oil lamps is also practiced by the older among the first generation women before the onset of the Sabbath and the onset of holidays, to ensure the general welfare of the woman's family.

Another means of aiding the desperately ill person is (based on a Kabbalistic premise) that the illness has been brought about by the machinations of the "Evil One"; it is only necessary to hoodwink the devil to save his victim. Religious rites are performed in which the name of the sick one — "*David* the son of Ruth," for example, is thereby annulled and a new name is bestowed upon him, such as "*Benjamin,* the son of Ruth." By this means the "Evil One" is

confused and turns his wicked efforts elsewhere. Name-changing is undertaken only at the most desperate condition of illness.

There is an additional, frequently practiced means of aiding the critically sick. The Book of Psalms is recited (usually at high speed) in its entirety, which is thought to have special spiritual efficacy. The more often it is repeated the better the anticipated effect; when the Psalms are recited by more than one individual the effect is multiplied. Accordingly, several rabbis may be engaged in this endeavor. In the event of the desperate illness of an especially eminent individual, the children in the religious schools are set to reciting the Psalms, because they are considered "innocent" and their efforts will prove particularly effective.

An additional aid to recovery is the enlisting of the prayers of the rabbis and graduate-students in the *Porát Yoséf* Alleppo-oriented rabbinical Yeshiva in Jerusalem. To secure this aid, money is given to the local representative of *Porát Yoséf,* who cables to Jerusalem that a sum of money has been donated for prayers for the recovery of the afflicted. Thereupon the recitation of Psalms and selections from the mystic Zóhar are undertaken — sometimes with successful results. These extra-medical efforts, are practiced widely in Flatbush by the very religious — as well as some who, while no longer zealous practitioners, nevertheless will be sure not to neglect any traditional means of aiding the sick.

Death and Mourning

If all the measures employed are ineffective, the disease takes an unhappy and fatal turn — the patient dies. It is then the unvarying custom for a close relative to inform an official of the *Hebráh Kaddisháh* (the "Sacred Society"), which thereupon assumes responsibility for all funeral and burial details.

The *Hebráh Kaddisháh* societies exist among *all* Orthodox Jewish communities; but, in the Syrian community there are no "burial societies" on a co-operative or Fraternal basis. The ownership of family burial plots is also unknown. In charge of the burial details is the venerable Jacob "Jack" Aráma,

descendant of a long line of North African and Palestinian rabbis.

The officials of the *Hebráh* are volunteers, pious members of the community who are ready to assume duties which are repugnant to most. "Memorial chapels" or "funeral homes" are foreign to the customs of the Syrians, both in Flatbush as in *Halab.* However, an undertaker, an Ashkenazi funeral director acts for the *Hebráh Kaddisháh* to execute all the necessary legal and internment requirements. This undertaker is none other than A. Gutterman and Sons who we met in our recounting of the early Syrian history on the East Side. (Gutterman's stable for the horse-drawn hearses was located directly opposite the synagogue and Talmud Toráh on Orchard Street.)

Orthodox religious observance, following the Biblical injunction that "the remains of the deceased shall not remain unburied until evening" (Deut. 21:23), requires burial on the same day that death occurs, except on the Sabbath and holidays. Should death take place too late in the day to permit the preparation of the necessary legal documents, the funeral takes place early on the following day. Obituary notices are not usually inserted in the newspapers; knowledge of the demise is only by word of mouth.

Immediately before the funeral, relatives and close friends converge in silence at the home of the deceased. Until this hour the remains are in the custody of the undertaker. The initial step in the funeral ceremony requires that the hearse pass slowly in front of the home of the deceased, as if for a final farewell. The approach of the hearse is quietly signalled, adding tension to the scene. When it makes its appearance it usually triggers considerable emotional display on the part of the mother, widow, and daughters of the deceased, and by emotional female friends whose display of feeling, at times, surpasses that of the bereaved family. (While genuine grief may be felt, some of the cries are often ceremonial role-playing. Wives who have been known to detest their husbands are often loudest in their outbursts of grief. Loud outbursts of grief are common among other Mediterranean peoples, seen among some Italians in the United States. In

Aleppo, Muslim custom, includes the hiring of professional weepers and mourners' and at one time Jewish custom, as well). The grieving Syrian women in Brooklyn are soon quieted by friends and relatives as the hearse moves on toward the synagogue.

Female members of the immediate family often remain at home, avoiding the funeral ceremony at the synagogue and the internment rite — although the more acculturated women attend the *funeral* services of loved ones.

The Funeral

With the departure of the hearse from the home of the deceased, his relatives and friends repair hurriedly to the *Magen David Synagogue* on 67th Street. Despite the move of most Syrian Jews to Flatbush and the building of synagogues there, all funeral services are conducted at the 'old' synagogue in Bensonhurst. As the mourners and friends enter — women sit separately — they find the coffin set up before the altar, covered with a black ceremonial cloth. Along with the principal rabbi of the community who customarily conducts the funeral service, an additional rabbi from the deceased's own synagogue, or even several more, are often invited by the family to participate in the funeral service to add luster to the memory of the deceased. (Each of the participating rabbis usually receives an honorarium, the size of which depends on the wealth and generosity of the family.) The officiating rabbi delivers a brief sermon and intones the appropriate prayers. The eulogy follows customary forms of attributed (often exaggerated) praise of the virtues and good deeds of the deceased. The service ends with the men present reciting Psalm 91 for a deceased man; for a woman, Proverbs 31, which lauds the "virtuous woman", is recited.

Members of the *Kohaneem,* the priestly clan, are forbidden to be under the same roof as the dead person; they follow the service while standing at the portals. Upon exiting from the synagogue, the coffin is paraded in a cortege, carried on the shoulders for one street block by men who deem it a virtuous deed to assist in this rite of the funeral service.

Burial almost invariably takes place in the community burial grounds on Staten Island. Until about thirty years ago burials were always in the Montefiore Cemetery, until no space remained. Now, in a part of the United Hebrew Cemetery owned by the Community – which is used for Aleppoan and Damascene burials as well as for other Oriental Sepharadeem in the community, the deceased is buried in the next available grave, without regard to status or wealth. Men and women are usually buried in separate sections of the Syrian cemetery, as separate in death as they are in the Synagogue. In somewhat infrequent instances after the *funeral* service the remains are flown to Jerusalem for burial on the Mount of Olives in accordance with the expressed preference of the deceased, who may have previously purchased a burial plot there.

The internment ceremony is a simple one: the plain wooden coffin mandated by Jewish law, as it is lowered into the grave – the lid of the coffin which is never nailed, is loosened – sometimes, rarely, revealing the remains of the deceased enveloped in a simple white shroud. The opening of the coffin-cover is intended to hasten the return of the deceased to the worms, and the dust from which man was created.

Mourning Customs at Home

Most of those who had attended the synagogue ceremony return to their respective endeavors. At the end of the interment, the deceased's family and closest friends go to a home designated by the family to be the location of the week-long mourning rituals, the *Shiváh* ("seven days" of mourning). There a member of the *Hebráh Kaddisháh* awaits the return of the family of the deceased to perform the ancient *Qerriáh* ritual of rending of clothes as evidence of the state of mourning. (This custom is followed by all Orthodox Jews.) Each member of the immediate family is required to publicly submit to the small tearing of a visible upper part of an outer garment as a ceremonial mark of grief. When the garment is torn, the mourner is required to say *Barúkh Dayán ha-emmét,*

"Blessed is He, the Judge of truth." It is obligatory for Orthodox mourners to wear this torn garment during the seven days of prescribed deep mourning. To show their grief the mourners are required by religious law and tradition to eschew all pleasures and comfort, including comfortable seating. Orthodox mourners will sit on the floor with a thin cushion beneath them. (Showers, full baths are also forbidden; they wash, however). Orthodox law requires that males of the immediate family refrain from shaving for thirty days from the beginning of the mourning period for the death of a parent, sibling or offspring.

The tradition is for a visitor to enter quietly, giving a slight (and uneasy) nod of somber greeting.

Mourners are required to absent themselves from their work for seven days, with the business establishments they control supposed to be closed for three days. Upon returning to work many, if not most male mourners will shave, while the more observant will refrain from shaving for thirty days in the event of the death of a parent, child, or sibling.

During the *Shiváh* period, Orthodox-observant families usually arrange to have morning and evening prayer services in their homes for the full period of seven days, (except on the Sabbath), even families without great means. This is intended to provide *Menuhá Elyoná* ("exalted comfort") for the soul of the deceased. The morning services end at about eight o'clock in order not to inconvenience those who attend to show their respect. A breakfast of bread, cheese, oranges and coffee is usually served. Since the mourners are not permitted customary work about the house, close relatives assume the responsibilities, preparing meals for the mourners and serving all visitors the ubiquitous Turkish coffee. Often a caterer is engaged instead — his entourage looks after all cooking and serving. Pious men and rabbis are offered a fee to come spend the afternoons reading religious works — frequently the mystical "Zóhar" — for the soul of the deceased. Toward the close of the day, relatives and friends throng the home of the mourners to attend evening prayer services, to indicate their respect and friendship.

The final ritual of the seven-day period of mourning is a

more widely attended afternoon *qráyhyeh* or "reading" – of religious texts. This "reading" marks the close of the mourning ceremonies, and is followed by prayer services, a sermon and eulogy and a dinner, for the attending rabbis and visitors. The *qráyhyeh* ceremony is repeated on the weekend approximately thirty days after the death has occurred. This *qráyhyeh,* like the first, is followed by an evening prayer-service, somber lecture and eulogy by a leading clergyman, and followed by a sweets-table.

Visitors *may* pay only one condolence call during the *Shiváh.* If they were to come twice, Aleppoan tradition requires them to pay a *third* visit. I am unable to discover why only two visits are supposed to bring "bad luck." If the two-times visitor is unsure of his ability to make a third visit, he may walk out of the house and then reenter, if only for a few minutes. Among Aleppoan Jews, as opposed to Ashkenazeem, those paying condolence calls do not bring gifts of fruit, other food, or gifts of any sort.

The *Hebráh Kaddisháh* has assumed all responsibilities for the funeral, burial functions, and includes billing the family of the deceased soon after the end of the "Seven Days", the *Shiváh.* All burials are alike, but the fees demanded vary considerably. While the billing is commensurate with the means of the family, a larger-than-expected fee is sometimes demanded. It is usually adjusted to a mutually accepted level, sometimes after considerable discussion. (The *Hebráh Kaddisha* is largely autonomous and operates with efficiency and discreetness. It is not often discussed, but its smoothness of operation is nevertheless, widely appreciated.

Strictly Orthodox laws and Aleppoan customs lay down severe restrictions on the activities of those in mourning for the deceased close relative. For the period of a whole year, mourners may not participate in any festivities. They *may* attend limited religious celebrations such as a circumcision or Bar Mitzvá but not, however, if they involve musical entertainment. In strict observances the mourner does not attend any entertainment such as a concert, play or movie. Neither does he or she play a phonograph, nor listen to music on a radio during the year of mourning. Parties are avoided, and

only quiet visits to relatives or intimate friends are encouraged. A son is expected to attend prayer services, mornings *and* evenings, eleven months of the year. There he recites the *Kaddiśh,* the prayer for the dead (actually a sanctification of the name of God, the original usage of the prayer). It has long been decreed that only those purified by sorrow are worthy of uttering this sanctification, the *Kaddísh,* "to give solace and comfort to the soul of the departed." Many members of the Aleppo-in-Flatbush community assume the full burden of the laws on mourning.

Note that not all the customs and observances given above are exclusively Sepharadic. Some are observed by pious Jews everywhere.

Engagements and Marriage

"Rites of Passage," Von Gennep's term for significant events in the history of an individual's transition from one stage of development to another, are observed with great enthusiasm by the Aleppo-in-Flatbush community.

When a boy and girl in Aleppo-in-Flatbush decide to marry, the choice has usually been their own choice — unlike the traditional marriages of an earlier epoch, when they were arranged by the parents. In the following episode of an earlier time in Bensonhurst, it was not even the father who arranged the match. An elderly reverend gentleman said to his grandson, "Kiss my hand, Joseph." The lad replied that he would do so, accepting the bidding *'ala éinee u rássie* "on my eye and head" (most willingly), and inquired the occasion. "I have engaged you to marry, a certain 'S.C.' " — totally unknown to the lad. (A happy and fruitful marriage took place, to be blessed by many sons and daughters, thirty-four grandchildren and several great-grandchildren). Such extreme occurrences, engagements to marry without having set eyes on the prospective mate, were rare, even though arranged marriages were not uncommon in the early days.

The choice of mates now is almost always individual, but the marriage and its attendant ceremonies are occasions for

family festivities. Approximately sixty-five percent of marriages of Syrians take place with a mate of the same or similar background. While most families probably know each other, there is a formal reception at the home of each of the pair, as was customary in Aleppo. In New York it is commonly referred to as "meeting the family." Unlike many such receptions in less homogenious communities, where such meetings are marked by the chilly atmosphere of strangers meeting strangers with the respective families forming separate encampments, in Aleppo-in-Flatbush there is at least an acquaintanceship between them, if not indeed bonds of relationships or friendship.

If a *nóbeh* (musical party), a lavish gesture, is not provided, the evening is given over to card games. Toward midnight an elaborate buffet-table is presented with a large variety of food, especially a multitude of Oriental baked sweets. The food has perhaps been in preparation for weeks in advance and kept in freezers; or it may have been prepared by an Oriental caterer.

The nóbeh

In the event that a musical party, a *nóbeh* is announced, there is considerable anticipatory excitement. The *nóbeh* is the term for the evening, as well as for the musical ensemble that performs — it includes a vocal soloist, a percussionist playing the *dirbákkeh,* the small knee-held tambour-type drum, and a lutanist with an elaborately inlaid imported lute, the *ood.* This instrument may be supplemented or replaced by a *qanoon,* a zither, specially strung and tuned to Near-East musical requirement. A *nóbeh* is a particularly festive occasion, and it is incumbent on the hosts to invite, by telephone, all relatives and close friends; failure to do so is tantamount to offering a relative or friend an unforgettable slight.

Sometimes the facilities of one of the two Syrian social clubs are available during the week (but never on weekends); or, the *nóbeh* is held at home. But how will so many relatives and friends be accommodated, since invitations to a *nóbeh* are seldom refused? How to fit into a private home the multi-

tudes invited? The premises will assuredly be crowded, no matter what steps are taken. Two alternatives are available to increase seating space. Large pieces of furniture are moved to private rooms, thus making way for the rented folding chairs. Otherwise, if expense is of no account, the furniture will be moved *out of the house.* Moving vans with their crews are hired to store the furniture on the vans overnight. Nevertheless, whatever provisions are made, the home will be — sometimes insufferably — crowded, and certainly noisy.

As eager as the guests are to attend this music festivity, the ever-present electronic amplifiers (turned up to a sometimes deafeningly high level) are insufficient to override the ceaseless chatter on all sides. The happy-seeming singer, carries on despite the tumult; it is customary, the singer is neither temperamental nor demanding. The more avid music lovers take seats close to the music, although the other guests too — most of them, are also familiar with the music being performed.

Throughout the evening, trays of *hors d'oeuvres* are circulated, along with continuous servings of drinks, especially Scotch whiskey, the preferred drink among Syrians in New York. (Arak, too, is available but is no longer popular.) Alcohol stimulates the gaiety but never to the point of intoxication; there are never any instances of rowdiness or unpleasant scenes resulting from the liquor available.

Arabic Music

The music sung is well-liked by most of the guests, particularly the older generation. Many Syrian families regularly acquire recordings of Arabic music, either on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn from Raschid's Record Shop or from local distributors. The popular music is in simple, easily-remembered and melodic form of folk-dance tunes. The accommodating musicians receive many requests for popular songs and a few for classical Arabic music; most requests are usually for *tahk-a-teek,* simple, rhythmic, tunes. Perhaps once during the evening the soloist will offer a classic type song, a

"qhasída," (or *qhasáed,"* in plural form). It is dance-type songs that the soloist is asked for at the *nóbeh.* Soon some of the guests, young ones, too, are in the center of the floor in vivacious Arabic dances. These take the form of a few short steps with the outstretched undulating arms. There is some waist-gyrating, which is thought more becoming to *married* women — although the movements are not quite suggestive as those of "belly-dancers." Arabic dancing is popular with the young women who learn these steps from their mothers and grandmothers. If space permits there may be a short Israeli *Hora* performed; even the Christian or Muslim Arabic musicians know "Hava-Nagilla."

The popular music sung and played at the *nóbeh* may have become familiar through the recordings of the most famous of the singers, "Professor" Muhammad Abd il Wahab, or of Im-Kalsoom ("Kalsoom's mother"), Badia, and the late Muhammad-il-Bakkar, whose recordings are in so many homes in Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

As the evening progresses and engenders increasing enthusiasm, shouts of appreciation come from some of the guests. *Ya Salaam* ("how lovely") or *Ya 'Ainee* (literally "My Eye," it signifies a quality as precious as one's eye!), or a cry of *ahmáhn* an untranslatable Turkish expression implying "What beauty!", (in the current vernacular, "oh, wow!").

Cries of appreciation are sometimes accompanied with the offer of a drink to the singer who, barely pausing, ceremoniously makes a gesture of tasting. But our soloist will not be satisfied with cries of appreciation or offers of drinks. Dollars are held to be a singer's best friend. Thus, at a particularly moving moment in a song, an admirer will put a bill into her hand, perhaps five or ten dollars, or as much as twenty dollars. Gifts are looked for, and accepted with a smile, and with no interruption in the song. This is a traditional Oriental custom, a part of the evening's performance. In a negotiation I witnessed with a singer and her troupe for their services, before a fee was quoted the singer wanted to know if this would be an event at which she could expect occasional "money gifts," *tahnkeet.* Fees for such a musical

troupe will vary from $300 to $700, depending on the season of the year, availability of engagements, and the size of the orchestra required.

Swéh-nie

An Old World ceremony which is fading away is the sending by the prospective bridegroom to his fiancee, of "platters" (usually only *one)* filled with a variety of gifts. This ceremony is called *swéh-nie* ("platters"). An expensive handbag will usually be included in the midst of the customary sweets. The handbag may contain a gift of cash, as well as pieces of fine lingerie and jewelry.

This custom is encountered in the life of old Cairo (in the *Geniza)* almost 1000 years ago, as we read in Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society,* (Vol. III, P. 116). Professor Goitein wrote me of his surprise that the custom continues to this day.

The Sabt ("The Sabbath")

The Saturday following the engagement to marry, or other important celebrations, is marked by an announcement during the morning synagogue service, of the engagement; the bridegroom-to-be is to be honored with an invitation to participate in the reading of the week's Toráh. Immediately as this announcement is made an informal group of synagogue members breaks out in song, *pizmoneem,* lyrics of praise to God, to the melodies of traditional Arabic tunes, and which include passing mention of a life event, as was noted.

When any happy event is being commemorated, on a Sabbath morning, the family will have invited the relatives and close friends to a ceremonial brunch – the *Sabt,* at home after synagogue services. Here again a variety of Oriental dishes and delicacies are served and always include pastries with meat fillings, cold, sliced broiled and stuffed veal or beef as well as a large variety of appetizers and other delicacies. (At the end, a full dinner is served to those who remain.)

Those of the guests with pleasant voices and a familiarity with music then break out into rounds of popular *pizmoneen.* The *Sabt,* is celebrated at the birth of a child, a Bar Mizvá an engagement, or after the return from the honeymoon etc. One well-known family has a *Sabt* every week, *without* a festive reason; the *Sabt* moves weekly from home to home within the family.

Circumcision

Circumcision ceremonies follow the tradition and custom of Old Halab and Damascus. On the "Eight Day" of life, relatives and friends throng the home of the parents, usually in the morning, to share in the joy, and the sacred rite. The presence of *Eliáhou-ha-Nabee* (the prophet Elijah) is an active legend of benevolence for all Orthodox Jews. A seat is reserved at Passover *Seders'* ritual banquets for Elijah; as well as "Elijah's Cup," the fifth cup of wine, in addition to the prescribed four. His "presence" is associated particularly with circumcisions. Syrian Jews mark this "presence" with special ceremonies. Aleppo's Great Synagogue has a separate gallery in the courtyard dedicated to *Eliahou,* where circumcisions were held. It is called *Kisséh Eliáhou* — "Elijah's Throne.")

The first ceremony connected with the birth, one that is not mandatory, is sometimes held, one evening before the circumcision. It is a (Kabbalistic) festive and religious party called *Shadd-il-Asse* (Arabic,) "pulling the pods" — of the myrtle-branches, a semi-sacred shrub. According to Kabbalah (mystical), myrtle branches serve to protect the newborn male child from "evil spirits." Until he is circumcized he is not yet 'Jewish', he has not yet been admitted to the Covenant of Abraham, and is especially vulnerable immediately before he becomes circumcized on the following day. The central part of the evening is the protection afforded the child by a brief reading of the Kabbalah's pertinent *Zóhar* literature. This accomplished, the gathering turns into a gay party.

In addition to other sweets that the hosts offer, if they are

very traditional they will serve a "festive," delicious drink, *shraab-il-lohz* (almond sherbert-syrup). It is reserved for important gatherings, such as an engagement party, and the like. Since this sweet almond puree requires much time to prepare, its custom is becoming infrequent.

On the morning of the circumcision relatives and friends gather at the home of the parents to partake in this meritorious event. *Eliáhou-ha-Nabee* is sure to be 'present.' An invariable custom among Syrian jews at circumcision is *Sehneet Eliáhou ha-Nabee* ("the tray of Elijah the Prophet"). This is a huge, round flower-bedecked "tray" with many tiers of lighted candles. Guests place their charitable contributions into it — "it brings much good luck." At the close of the religious activity, the tray is "auctioned off" to the highest bidder who may bid from fifty to several hundred dollars. The winning bidder usually adds the contents of the tray to his donation. This is followed by a repast, a sumptuous buffet, holding many delicious dairy dishes, and even more of traditional Oriental desserts.

Bar Mizvás

These often feature a multiplicity of celebrations. The initiation into manhood is marked by the boy's first putting on of *tephilleem* (phyllacteries), a ritual the Orthodox Jewish man is expected to perform every morning except on the Sabbath and holidays. This initiation into Jewish Orthodox adulthood is held on Mondays and Thursdays, the only mid-week days when short sections of the weekly portions of the Pentateuch are read as part of the mid-week prayer service. After the service, a repast is offered by the boy's family in the foyer of the synagogue to everyone present. Following this, close friends and members of the family may be invited home, to an elaborate breakfast accompanied by Arabic music on records. The breakfast usually stretches to lunch, and in many instances, becomes an all-day "open house", with card games in the afternoon. Since only a few male relatives and friends are able to remain for the home festivities, the day's party frequently stretches into the evening

and night. Friends and relatives arrive (or *return)* to attend afresh, a "new" party.

However, the weekday celebration is not all that is offered by the parents. After the Sabbath morning service, relatives and friends converge on the home of the parents for a *Sabt* with much rich food and singing of *pizmoneem.* Most of those attending leave by one or two o'clock of the afternoon, at which time a dinner is served to the remaining guests. Enough celebration of the Bar Mizvá or other festivities? There may still be a bit more — usually at Sha'aré Zión's Banquet Hall, a dinner-dance to which 250 to 400 guests may be invited — in addition to the other festivities described.

The dinner may be buffet-style with an abundance of every delicacy; or it may be more formal — "sit down". A modern danceband is at hand and may sometime during the evening alternate with an oriental music ensemble. The dance band is familiar with the requirements of the host and in the absence of a *Nóbeh* will provide some Israeli music for a *Hora.*

There are few *Bar Mizvá* parents who offer all the festivities detailed above. A *Sabt* is 'compulsory,' as is the simple — or elaborate weekday breakfast; not all add the formal dinner-dance, the "catered affair". Those who have dinner-dances are likely to omit some other form of festivity, if only because of the enormous drain of energy that the multiplicity of entertainments require.

Chapter Four

Commercial Life

The Commercial Heritage

THE economic life of most members of the Aleppo-in-Flatbush community is based on commerce, on the buying and selling of a variety of products, the importing of some and the manufacturing of others. In the beginning these were almost exclusively textile products, tablecloths, pillowcases and similar articles of domestic use. Anything other than trading would have been a divergence from tradition; in old Aleppo trading was the major occupation of the city's Jews for millennia. Even in recent centuries the Jewish merchants of Aleppo engaged in trading in woolen and cotton cloth, spices, legumes and other commodities. Some were local, and some transported from the interior of Asia, which then were sold to the home market or to the markets of Europe. Later, however, when the European Industrial Revolution brought about machine-manufacture of textile cloths, the Aleppoan merchants turned to importing such articles from the West. It was then, in the latter half of the 19th century that Aleppoans took up residence in Manchester to serve as export agents for the home market. A history of trading in textiles formed an important part of the heritage which Syrian immigrants brought with them to New York, Buenos Aires, Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas. For most of the immigrants in New York a path had been hewed open by the few earlier pioneers, who had prepared

for them the facility for dealing in textile products — selling them door-to-door as peddlers.

The characteristic of pursuing business enterprises established by one's countrymen is not exclusively a Syrian one, of course. Two other ethnic groups readily come to mind which also follow in one another's activities: the Chinese, as restaurateurs and in laundry operations, and the Greek immigrants whose restaurant enterprises have proliferated through the country.[1] Among desert Arabs there is a feeling of folk-community; if one has an abundance of wealth of some sort, others feel that they, too, have the right to share.[2] In recent years the success of Barney Dweck, son of the pioneer Joe Dweck, in the bargain-discount store operation, encouraged the youth employed by him and others, to apply his methods to their profit. They, too, opened bargain-discount stores, often at locations near "B-D-" stores. Thus, for example, 14th Street in New York, between 6th and 7th Avenues, has no fewer than eight such Jewish-Syrian "discount" stores. Many more are found throughout New York and in the large cities covering the country. As in the days of peddling, credit is easily obtainable. The wholesalers know the individuals through the community; sooner or later the merchants pay their bills.

Shopkeeping and Importing

Shopkeeping was a step above early peddling. Some who had initially had retail-wholesale stores on the Lower East Side — on Allen Street and on nearby Grand Street — became exclusively wholesalers and importers. In becoming importers they followed in the pioneering footsteps of Christian Syrians, most from the Lebanon. The latter had pioneered, having come to the United States before Jewish Syrians and brought with them hand-embroidered and other needlework articles which were traditional skills in their towns and villages. Aleppoan merchants had been customers for many years of these Lebanese importers on Washington Street where their community and commercial center was then located. With the increase in demand, thanks to the prolifera-

tion of these Syrian linen stores — almost exclusively Jewish, some Lower East Side merchants had also become wholesalers, and later, importers. As long as there was a considerable demand — now rare — for these fancy linens, some Jewish shopkeepers continued to buy from the Lebanese because of wider variety, and to shop for lower prices.

To Higher Status

The transition from peddling to shopkeeping was a rise in status; the change to being a wholesaler meant rising still higher. Despite the need for substantial capital for the wholesale and importing business, some were able to make the change. There are several factors which make wholesaling particularly desireable. Many retailers were unhappy with the long hours that were necessary — and customary — in such stores. Except for those located in financial or business locations, which closed with the departure of their office-hour customers, most linen stores remained open well into the evenings, some until ten or eleven o'clock — a situation which made it impossible to lead normal family lives. In addition, for some, the wholesale business had a powerful appeal for religious reasons. As shopkeepers, many felt compelled to operate their businesses on Saturday — usually the best day for retail sales — despite their longing to observe the Sabbath in traditional Orthodox fashion. As wholesale merchants they would no longer feel obliged to violate their religious scruples. It is noteworthy that such religiously-inclined shopkeepers violate the Sabbath laws no more than is absolutely imperative. They refrain from operating *electric* cash-registers, turning over the writing of sales slips to others, certainly refraining from smoking, violation of the Sabbath according to Orthodox law.[3] Many attend Sabbath prayer services before going to their stores.

World War II, and the subsequent change of China's political system cut off that country as a leading source of goods. Japanese manufactures were sometimes substituted as staples of commerce for many Aleppoan importers — but not hand-embroidered articles, however. An additional factor

which affected "fancy linens," the by-word for Syrians' trade until 1939, was unavailability of domestic help except for the wealthy. This made it impractical to buy dainty embroideries and lace articles which require careful and laborious handling. In addition the growing popularity of paper kerchiefs cut deeply into the demand for the popular embroidered handkerchiefs. The supply from China had shrunk at almost the same time that the demand declined so disastrously.

At the end of World War II, Japan, with its industrial adaptability, soon filled the distressing gap. European articles of all sorts, were sent to Japan to be quickly duplicated if not improved upon — at a fraction of the original cost. Wholesalers now import from Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore sources in which the labor costs are lower — in descending order, countries which export to U.S. huge quantities of electronics, men's, women's and children's apparel. Infant's wear, however, has traditionally been manufactured in the Philippine Islands, long known for its delicate embroidery work. The Far East is the source also for headscarves, allied to the formerly important handkerchief business, stuffed toys, low-priced vinyl luggage, women's handbags, and a large variety of small consumer items such as wallets, popular-priced costume jewelry, cigarette lighters, and similar novelties.

Successful Businessmen

The outstandingly wealthy individual among the hard-working prosperous Jewish Syrians is Edmond Safra, head of The Republic National Bank and several allied financial institutions. Jacob Safra, his father, was an Aleppoan and a partner in the private banking firm of Safra Fréres. He left Aleppo for Beirut in 1912 to be closer to the world financial exchanges. Edmond, with an *Alliance Universelle Israelite* education there was sent to Italy in 1947 *at age 16* to represent his father's interests. Later he went to live in Brazil where — at the age of 21 — he established a bank; to be followed by the establishment of a Swiss bank three years afterward. Without connections when he came to New York, he succeeded in

obtaining a Charter for a new bank, The Republic National Bank. As a result of the subsequent acquisition ("merger") of the Lafayette National Bank, "Republic" branches are seen throughout New York.

Safra's financial wizardry has brought The Republic Holding Company to the position of one of the 50 *largest banks* in the United States — and 25th in importance of capital funds. His world-organization of banks (in Brazil, United States, Switzerland, Luxembourg, etc.) controls assets in excess of four *billion* dollars.

Safra is strongly tradition-minded, generous to a variety of institutions — the *Jacob Safra Chair* at the Judaic Studies Center at Harvard University, is his endowment — with a fund of one million dollars. Jewish institutions around the world are his beneficiaries; in particular, Sepharadic Syrian religious organizations. In New York these are usually channeled through the cosmopolitan Meyer ("Miro") Sutton, a devout and devoted cousin and a Senior Vice President of the New York bank. At his wedding in Geneva, Switzerland where Safra makes his home, the ceremony was performed by *Haham* Obadia Yosef, *Rishon Lé-Sión,* the Chief Rabbi of all Sepharadeem.

One of the outstanding *local* enterprises — perhaps the most important — is that of the late Isaac Shalom, continued by his sons. In addition to the original handkerchief business (Joseph and Henry) they are involved in several allied enterprises, banking (Stephen), and a number of manufacturing enterprises in Israel, as well as property there, which their father had originally acquired.

Stephen Shalom is the New York Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, (U.J.A.).

The largest sales volume of any Syrian concern is in the field of electronics, principally stereos and tape recorders; a company headed by Ely and Saul Ashkenazi: current sales exceed 120 millions. Aleppoans via Mexico City, these brothers, too, had "gone wholesale" relatively recently. Previously they had owned a linen store in Georgia and subsequently in North Carolina. Anxious to live among Syrian-Jews to provide their children with a traditional Orthodox education —

as well as Syrian mates — they came to New York. Community donations of these individuals exceed those of most Syrians, with the possible exception of the late Isaac Shalom's family.

Abraham Zagha, a popular self-made young man (known to his friends as "Tootie") is the descendant of a modest family. He too, is an importer of stereos and other electronic articles and has achieved an impressive measure of success. His skill and acumen resulted in an enterprise also traded on a major stock exchange.

Ezra Antar ("Crazy Eddie") should be mentioned in connection with electronics, if only because of his visibility. "Crazy" is a man of a modest family, who is also self-made; with enterprise and intelligence he began a growing and highly publicized chain of stores in Metropolitan New York. While not rabbinically educated he is now eager to support measures toward perpetuation of "the treasured community traditions".

Names of other distinguished individuals, will be found in an appendix.

Retailing Today

Sales clerks in linen and electronic gadgetry stores — "yo-yo stores" (so termed after the string-attached suspended top — a "novelty" object; in reality, they carry a varied stock of gift and novelty items), also opened their own stores after a few years of work at impressive wages. They, too, could do what their employer was doing — or what *they* were doing for *him* as branchstore managers. The same pattern obtained in the "bargain-discount" stores as well, stores which have proliferated with the same fecundity that marked the opening of linen-stores in the 1920s and 1930s. Such stores are to be found in every central city business-area, as well as in the busy shopping streets throughout the several boroughs. "Bargain-discount stores" offering apparel, cosmetics and small-wares, require a minimum of store fixtures — bins along the walls and "dump" tables on the floor. Credit is still relatively easy to secure, as noted, almost with the ease of the

linen-store days, even though at that time, the community was smaller and there was a greater face-to-face acquaintance of sellers and buyers. Today too, an earnest Syrian would-be buyer with an unmarred reputation will have little difficulty in securing the merchandise he seeks.

The wholesalers are aware of the new retailers' urge to succeed; too, like their friends and relatives – to "make it" and by hard work and luck – "to make it big." Most, if not all, of these stores are moderately and some, spectacularly successful, when they operate a chain. They sell merchandise of reasonably good quality at genuinely discounted prices and are thus able to win the continuing patronage of working class customers, of whom Latin Americans and blacks form the larger number. Bargain-discount stores operate on a conventional basis; every article is price-tagged, for self-service.

Such is not always the case with a few shops, 5th Avenue shops dealing in linens, "fine" art and china. The salesmen "sniff out" visitors from outside the city, and are almost unerring in ascribing wealth to some unprepossessing customers. Some customers who "they will work on" assidiously despite their modest and almost rural appearance, will prove to be "rurals" indeed, rurals, however, with oil wells on their farms. Some such shopkeepers, few in number, perpetuate a tradition of "less-than-frank" dealings with their customers. This brings a shadow of questionable reputation to Syrian store keepers in New York, the overwhelming majority of whom are serious and sincere merchants.[4]

(The occasional use of high pressure sales methods which distinguish a few Syrian stores from their more sophisticated neighboring shops, the many "galleries" selling silverware, art and other high-priced articles, is that the latter show *more refinement* in their own high-pressure methods. Some of America's notable art collections were assembled by their owners thanks to the effort of Sir Joseph Duveen, the Patron Saint of high-pressure selling. Some of his exploits, if known to them, would have rejoiced the hearts of linen-store "artists," the few high-pressure Syrian linen-shop salesmen).[5]

Success and Successors

As in other close-knit communities, estimates of the financial worth of individual members is often astonishingly close to the actuality. Thus a few years ago, in a "bull-session" in which the participants were knowledgeable and successful younger business men, one hundred fellow-Syrians were named, who could be termed *quite wealthy*, based on their volume of sales. In checking on the validity of this recently, I was told that the figure of one hundred such individuals is no longer accurate. Their number, in the opinion of this knowledgeable informant, is now closer to one hundred and fifty. This is indeed a disproportionately large measure of financial success in a community which numbers approximately 20,000 persons, many of them first and second-generation Americans.

Most of the Syrian businessmen, however, are *not* millionaires. The enterprises of the majority may be classed as small- or medium-sized. The success of the outstanding businessmen serves as a goad, a source of motivation for friends and relatives with whom they mingle socially on terms of equality. Hard work, striving for success — demonstrably achievable — encourages the latter to increasing efforts.

Active Aleppoan business houses bear within themselves the seeds of their own competitors, as suggested. The Aleppoans' social and communal in-breeding which we encounter in this study, manifests itself in their business enterprises, as well. Merchants prefer to employ Syrian youth, possibly because of greater trust in "their own." The young are offered ready opportunities by relatives and friends to enter into businesses about which they knew from their childhood. Their employers know them, their background and their potential, from their childhood in most cases. Honesty is absolute — only a fool would compromise his good name in this tight-knit community — the consequences would be devastating and ruinous. In time the youth saves money as he learns the business. Soon he seeks to establish his own business in a similar line of merchandise. With the collabora-

tion of a similarly ambitious youth usually, they start their own enterprise. Frequently additional financing is required. This is often available from wealthy fellow-Syrians who become "silent partners."

Isaac Shalom's, the most successful textile (handkerchief) importing concern, is known to have been the training ground for a number of now quite successful former employees. Not only did the patriarchal head of this company *not* harbor any reservations that the former employees were now attempting to become competitors, but instead, he afforded them *advice* and *financial aid* at the beginning of their careers.

Neighborhood Enterprises

Unlike the economic activities of some Hassidic Jews in and around New York, the Syrian Jewish community has not developed businesses with a specifically Jewish focus.[6] A few Syrian-Jewish enterprises do exist to satisfy some food needs of the community. There is no Syrian baker, although there are several Syrian grocery shops in Flatbush which carry many of the articles used in the Syrian cuisine, including the popular Oriental bread known as *pitta,* and a Syrian kosher butcher. Of these, most are operated by Syrian Jews who came from Egypt and Lebanon via Israel. Another, a small grocery, is operated by Hassan, an Egyptian Muslim, who is accepted without prejudice. There is a sweets shop (Egyptian-Jewish) which offers traditional oriental pastries, such as *bakláwa, K'naffeh, ka'ik.* In addition, there are two stores which prepare Oriental baked and cooked delicacies, for home consumption, and a small, strictly-kosher catering service which prepares some of the popular but time-consuming Syrian dishes. They supply the needs for festive parties and meals for mourners, as well as stocking freezers in the homes of some of the "recklessly" rich.

A number of local shops, other than food suppliers, opened in recent years, successfully catering to a largely Syrian-Jewish clientele, two jewelry and china gift shops, a lingerie and handbag store, several travel agencies, as well as several Israeli-Syrian "fast-food" shops, "fallafel", etc. All

are located on or near Kings Highway (close to the food stores) where a Syrian shopping center, in effect, has been created.

Syrian Professionals

For reasons which will be valuable to study elsewhere, pioneer Syrian youth in New York, who studied professions as early as the 1930s did not meet with the expected patronage of the community. Two brilliant young men of my acquaintance, Jacques E. Attie and Edmond Dayan, had become attorneys. They abandoned the profession, however, since Syrians would not come to them, whether through lack of confidence in their fellow-Syrians' ability – or for reasons of secretiveness.[7] The two young attorneys turned to familiar linen-store operations, one in Atlanta, the other in California. Another Syrian professional, who was born in Egypt, and who trained for medicine in Berlin and Vienna in the 1930s, likewise did not succeed as he expected, in attracting fellow-Syrians to his practice. Heads of community welfare organizations were lavish in praising his skill. As he told me, "They sent the charity cases to me, but they themselves went to their accustomed physicians, Doctors Robbins, Goldberg and Hamilton." With the current number of sizeable business enterprises, all of which require legal services from time to time, the several new Syrian attorneys now enjoy a large Syrian clientele.

Several Syrian accountants serve many Syrian clients, as does a supplier of shipping-room supplies. He is the preferred source of most Syrian business houses in the textile and related fields. In recent years Syrian-Jewish youth have become physicians, dentists, engineers, physicists and in at least two instances to my knowledge, professors in universities. Things have changed in recent years; now the several new professionals enjoy abundant Syrian patronage.

The traditional pattern of sons entering their fathers' businesses continues to operate for many young Syrians, especially in families whose children have had a traditional Oriental-Sepharadic Hebrew education. A considerable

number of those who studied at the Ashkenazic Yeshiva of Flatbush High School, perhaps because of the greater acculturation they received there, are now studying in colleges and professional schools with no thought of entering their fathers' businesses — although the fathers would welcome them. The trend as we see in the chapter on "Youth," is away from entering family businesses.

While many Syrians continued the Old-World and early Lower East Side tradition of dealing in textiles, others manifest the ability to adapt to the need to change. No longer do they deal only in linens and handkerchiefs with which they are associated in the minds of many. Shares in several of their enterprises are traded on the major stock exchanges; many Syrians deal with the large-scale retailing chains — Sears, Woolworth and others. Like other American businessmen, they are constantly on the lookout, seeking new branches for their enterprises. Withal, they jealously retain a strong sense of traditional community, religiously and socially.

Notes

1. Morroe Berger, *The Arab World Today*, new York, Doubleday and Co., 1962, p. 149. "The Arabs are highly susceptible to emulation. . . ."

2. Sania Hamady, *Temperment and Change Among the Arabs*, New York, Twayne, 1960 p. 17. Hamady, an Egyptian sociologist is fiercely critical of the Arab psychology and temperament.

3. "Lighting a fire" is one of the Thirty-nine major forms of "Labor" forbidden the Orthodox during the Sabbath. Operating any device employing electricity also falls within the purvue of "lighting a fire."

4. In the chapter on "old Aleppo" we read testimonials by Maundrell and others concerning the great integrity of the Jewish merchants in Syria with whom and through whom the European traders dealt.

5. A biography of Joseph Duveen by S.N. Behrman relates his extraordinary sales efforts, worthy of the talents of the Fifth Avenue Syrian linen store salesmen. Unable to reach Mellon (or Frick), Duveen, when he learned that his prey was sailing to Europe, booked passage on the same steamer, and bribed the steward to place Duveen's deck-chair alongside that of his prospective customer.

Here are some antics used which would perhaps have brought a smile of recognition to Sir Joseph Duveen's face:

A promising customer who stubbornly refuses to buy from the salesman is not abandoned. It may be that the salesman's style of presentation meets with a negative reaction. Accordingly, having skillfully elicited verification of the customer's means, the customer will be introduced to "Mr. Teeo," for "Turn-Over." She is turned over to another salesman, whose personality and sales manner may

prove more effective. (Salesmen in these highly specialized emporiums earn salaries ranging from fifteen to thirty-five thousand dollars per year. It is thanks to large sales in linens, undistinguished oil paintings and the like, that these high-rental Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue Syrian-owned shops are able to maintain themselves). Other gambits in this game draw deeply on the salesmen's romantic story-telling abilities. One is the plea to buy, based on "dire need"; if the customer does not buy, the salesman, his wife and children will be "evicted" from their home and/or "his" store. This gambit is an elementary one, an often used move. One salesman whose histrionics could produce a flow of heart-rending tears was so effective that as soon as tears began to roll down his cheeks, the wrapping paper for the merchandise was brought out in readiness. In another instance a bewildered and fascinated customer was unable to say "no," and yet hesitated to buy the 'glittering' bargain being offered. At last she appeared to have decided *against* the purchase and turned to leave the shop — but not before the salesman had sprung to close the door. Before long he decided her *in favor* of the purchase and had taken her check for several thousand dollars.

The customers will have purchased articles that *may* have been overpriced; however, embroidered articles of such intrinsic loveliness are *not* usually found even in good department stores. Such quality merchandise *wherever sold* will be "overpriced."

6. See Samuel Poll, *The Hassidic Community in Williamsburg*, Schocken, N.Y. 1962.

The Hassideem operate chains of businesses whose sole patrons are the Hassidic families throughout the city and beyond. Observant Hasideem will buy meat that is sold only in shops operated by other Hassideem, organizationally, or having the sanction of their *rebbe* — Hassidic rabbi.

7. Syrians continued to take their legal business to two attorneys, both very popular with Syrian-Jewish businessmen. One was a Lebanese, non-Jew, named George Faris who had a remarkable record of winning his cases. The other was a blind Ashkenazi, Jacob Ansbacher. After his death the Syrians continued their legal business with his former assistant, "Abe" Goldstein.

Chapter Five

Religious Life in New York

Early Synagogues

TODAY'S youth know only the beautiful structure of *Sha'aré Zión* and other impressive Syrian synagogues where they worship. Their elders, however, recall the progression of earlier Syrian houses of worship. The first formal synagogue was on the top floor of a loft building at 48 Orchard Street on the lower East Side, which housed both a synagogue and Talmúd Toráh. With the move to Williamsburg, Sabbath services were held in the leased premises of a Masonic Lodge on Bedford Avenue. A few years later with the beginning of the trek to Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, a small private house was acquired and converted to a synagogue at 1911 66th Street. Soon after the small stream to Bensonhurst had become a torrent, and most Syrian Jews had moved to Mapleton Park/Bensonhurst, centered at 65th Street between 20th Avenue and 22nd Avenue (22nd Avenue is now known as Bay Parkway), soon, the swollen congregation outgrew this makeshift synagogue. A site was acquired nearby and an imposing structure at 2027 65th Street went up about the year 1921-1922. This building still functions for the few remaining Syrian residents, of Bensonhurst and the new immigrants from Egypt.) Shortly thereafter a structure was built adjoining the Synagogue: its numerous first-floor classrooms served as a Talmud Torah, or after noon Hebrew school, while an open floor above served as an auxiliary synagogue. The initially small segment

of the community which moved later to the Midwood section of Flatbush, repeated the pattern of acquiring and converting a large private house — in this case, a large one on Ocean Parkway at the corner of Kings Highway. This house too, soon proved inadequate and was succeeded by the impressive synagogue that is the present-day *Sha'aré Zión.*

Sha'aré Zión

The central house of worship *Sha'aré Zión* is the hub of Aleppo-in-Flatbush in more than a geographic sense; it functions as the center of social as well as religious activity. Through a day-to-day observation of the synagogue life which follows we may judge the measures of continuity and discontinuity of the traditions of old *Halab,* in Syria as they are mirrored in this and other Syrian "houses of gathering."

At *Sha'aré Zión,* the largest of the four Syrian synagogues, prayer services are held Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and evenings and on holidays, as in every Syrian synagogue in Aleppo-in-Flatbush (and in the Deal, N.J. area). The community, in addition, embraces a congregation of Jews from Damascus and a smaller one from Egypt. The Aleppoan community, by far the largest Syrian group, has several synagogues, loosely affiliated with the central *Sha'aré Zión* Congregation.

The central synagogue has a paid-up membership of some 500 persons and although some attend only on the holidays, the majority are active worshippers; many more than 500 attend Sabbath services as we shall see.

Services

In this central house of worships — as in *all* Syrian synagogues — there are services not only on Sabbaths and holidays, but morning and evening services during the week. Indeed, *several* prayer services are held every morning for the convenience of the businessmen in attendance.

Weekday morning services begin at about six-thirty, with additional services sometimes overlapping. The last *minyán* or

prayer service — a *minyán* is a quorum of at least ten adult males — is held at about eight o'clock. Like other weekday morning services it lasts from forty to fifty minutes.

After the last service a dozen or more men remain to pursue religious studies which vary from very simple homiletics *(musár)* to Talmúd studies, or the mystical Zohar. Other worshippers often turn to *Hok Le-Israél,* a volume containing short sections prescribed for each day, drawn from the week's "Penteteuch" and other related readings, from the Prophets, as well as other Writings. While most mid-week morning prayer services are brisk and unceremonious, to permit the worshippers to go about their affairs, on some mornings there is a different order of prayer.

Bar Mizvá

At this final service of the morning, many women attend. This is because of a Bar-Mizva, Confirmation, is taking place. (At all other times women are totally absent from mid-week services). Those present are relatives and friends of the family, the parents, grandparents, sisters, cousins, aunts, and other relatives — as well as a few intimate friends. Normally seated in the gallery, women are permitted to occupy the rear seats of the synagogue on such occasions. The Bar Mizvá ushers the youth into the duties and obligations of adult religious observances. It is marked by the first wearing of the *tefileen,* phyllacteries, (the leather straps and manuscript texts which are symbolically wound on the left arm "against the heart" from above the elbow downward to be finally twisted about the middle finger, and other straps and texts hanging from the head. It is the duty of every observing Jew to don *tefilleen* every morning of the year except on the Sabbaths and holidays). The happy occasion of a Bar Mizvá ceremony midweek is often held on Mondays and Thursdays; on these days a short prescribed section of the weekly Toráh portion is read from the Sacred Scroll as part of the service. The young man participates in the reading in his new role of adult, a full-fledged adult Jew, upon reaching the age of thirteen.

The Sabbath in the Synagogues

Since Sabbath observance is the keystone of Jewish piety, Saturday services are understandably the scene of greatest activity in the synagogue. The seating capacity of the main sanctuary of Sha'aré Zión congregation is four hundred and fifty, in addition to the women's gallery. On most Saturdays and holidays, however, many more attend the Sabbath morning services — at times the number reaches eight hundred or more. The Cantor officiates, with the rabbis in attendance. Every available space is utilized in *several* separate services.

The vocally-gifted cantor leading the main Sha'aré Zión Sabbath service is Rafael Elnadav, a professional cantor and rabbi from within the Oriental community, since he was recruited from Israel after migrating from his native Yemen. He is thus familiar with Oriental cantillation and pronunciation of the Hebrew prayers. There is also, usually, a short sermon in English by Rabbi Hecht. A service for as many as 250 early risers, commences soon after six o'clock and ends some two hours later. Some of these early worshippers are shopkeepers who, regretfully, feel compelled to hurry on to their stores. Still another prayer service, held in the *Bet Midrash* or chapel, accommodates some fifty to sixty worshippers. Another and larger service for young adults (18-22 years) is conducted in the "crypt," and is attended by up to two hundred young people. The young women are seated at the rear, with a ritual barrier to separate them from the males. There is, in addition, a separate service for children (8-13), mostly boys. Other, smaller synagogues are also well-attended with several weekday services as well.

Special Sabbath Celebrations

On one of the many Sabbath services which commemorate special events, the sancturary is filled to overflowing. There may be several Bar Mizvá commemorations (the *weekday* Bar Mizvá is for the more religious) — in addition to other *rites of*

passage which mark major changes of status in the life of an individual – such as an engagement, the presence of a newly-wed groom or the celebration of the birth of a son or daughter. The celebrants are honored by being publicly called up to say the Blessing before the reading of part of the weekly Toráh portion. The celebrant is called aloud to share in this honor: "The father of the newly-born son, etc.", the *shammósh* (sacristan) cries out, as was the custom in *Halab* and Damascus for countless centuries.

Customs and Honors – Aliyót

As is traditional in Aleppo and other Oriental and Sepharadic centers, the *bimmah,* the Toráh-reading-and cantoral-platform is close to the center of the sanctuary.

When an individual is honored with an *Aliyah,* a call to the *bimmah* for a reading of a section of the weekly "portion" of the Penteteuch, we observe that some worshippers rise to their feet, in various parts of the sanctuary. What is taking place – why are they suddenly standing during the reading of this section? They have risen in the traditional honor to the individual "invited up" to the Toráh-reading – grandsons, sons, younger brothers and nephews of the individual being honored. At the end of the Honor, as the individual returns to his seat, grandsons and sons hurry to him to kiss the back of his hand, in the accustomed Oriental form of respectful greeting and submission. He will murmur a blessing – the beginning of the Priests' Blessing *(Birkát Kohaneem)* as he places his hand over their heads. Nephews and younger brothers, too, hurry to his seat to shake his hand and to offer congratulations on his having partaken in the reading of the Toráh. *Hazzak u'Barúkh,* they will say, "strength and blessing on you." Rabbi Marans of the Cedarhurst Synagogue a Ladino-Sepharadic (Turkish-Spanish) congregation, recently lamented the passing of this tradition of rising for an older relative among the congregants, when he is called to the Torah-reading.

Pizmoneem

With the announcement of a new-born son or other cause for celebration, a group of synagogue members who form an informal choir for such happy occasions, break out into songs, *pizmoneem,* (sung *a capella)* appropriate to the particular celebration. *Pizmoneem,* now almost uniquely Aleppoan, are songs of praise to God that are *not* part of the ritual or prayer service. Their melodies are for the most part popular secular Arabic songs, with lyrics in Hebrew. They usually make reference to the nature of the event, and when written for the specific occasion manage to include the names of the individuals involved, with the *pizmón,* (singular) appropriately, dedicated by the poet. Such dedications called for an honorarium in the manner in which Al-Harizi was rewarded in 1190 C.E.

Rising for an Elder

To cite another otherwise unfamiliar custom, when visiting a small prayer service in the chapel of the Sha'aré Zión Congregation one afternoon, I was startled by a sudden movement among the congregants — in no way connected to the service. The majority of those present had risen to their feet — why? A rabbi had walked in and was making his way to the opposite end of the room. They had risen almost as one man in conformance with the Biblical command, traditionally observed in Aleppo, that one "should rise before an elder."

Women and Girls at Services

Women also, attend Sabbath and holiday morning prayer services. Most will sit quiet and motionless in the balcony during the recitation of the prayers. Their principal interest is the moment when the Tabernacle is opened and the scrolls containing the Script of the Toráh are brought forth. Each woman then offers silent prayers for the welfare of her loved ones. She holds forth outstretched hands which are then

brought to the lips repeatedly — for her, this symbolizes touching the Sacred Scroll. Only a few of the women in attendance have prayerbooks in their hands. The majority know little Hebrew, since few among the first, and only some among the second generation females have had religious schooling. This is not the case with young girls and women at the present time. Teenage girls follow the service with prayer books in hand. Most Hebrew-educated young adult girls are found along with males of the same age, attending the prayer-service of the Young Sha'aré Zión Congregation in another auditorium.

Announcements — and Calls for Quiet

Unlike Aleppo, announcements are made in English, the language understood by the majority and the only language most of the youth know. English is also used for the repeated calls for quiet during the Toráh reading when it is not strictly forbidden to talk, as is the case during the other parts of the service. The torrent of conversation on all sides, particularly among the youth, makes the continuation of the Toráh reading difficult if not impossible. Again and again the reading comes to a halt while congregants are requested to be "quiet, to permit the continuation of the service." The youth have become restless — the service requires more than two hours — eager in this period of "not-so-strict silence" to exchange items of news with their friends, whom they may not have seen for several days — or even an entire week. It is evident that the "gathering-house," *(bet hakeneset,* "synagogue" in Greek) is most appropriately named, for the youth — and their elders.

Chatting during parts of the Service is not exclusively Sepharadic. It occurs at many of the Orthodox Services everywhere. In some — earlier synagogues — in Eastern Europe and on the East Side a small leather padded cushion was available on which to slap the palm, calling for silence.

Youth Attendance

Measures are taken among the youth to foster the continuity of the Aleppoan religion traditions, and to encourage the youth in Orthodox practices. Such efforts are seen in the special Sabbath prayer services established for them; the pre-adolescent youth have a prayer service of their own which is at present attended exclusively by boys — but a service for young girls is contemplated as well. Attractive prizes such as basketablls and footballs, dinners at Kosher World in Coney Island and sightseeing excursions, are available for uninterrupted weekly attendance for six or seven Saturday morning services; or for a number of readings, with correct rendition and cantillations of a few lines of the weekly Toráh portions in the unpunctuated Scroll, the *Sepher Toráh.* The reading of an accumulated total of 300 lines is awarded with a *ten-speed bicycle.* The individual young congregants are encouraged also to lead sections of the prayers as cantors — gaining experience for their future roles as adults. At the end of the service several volunteers, the men who oversee the service, produce a repast of cakes, candies, ice cream, sodas — in generous quantities. A young American-born (Baltimore yeshiva trained) rabbi, Murray Maslaton, a descendant of a long line of Damascus rabbis is the initiator of this enterprise. He has instituted a similar service — with all its attractions — at the Ahi Ezer (Damascus) synagogue.

A bounteous repast is also offered at the close of Saturday morning services for the late-teens and unmarried young men and women of the Young Sha'aré Zión Congregation. Here a considerable number of young women are in attendance — in their separate section. Rabbi Joseph Harari-Raful, perhaps the most zealous — and most Talmudically-scholarly rabbi in the community, is the "official" rabbi of the Young Sha'aré Zión Congregation.

Sabbath Afternoons and Study-Groups

At the end of the Sabbath morning services, the congregants return to their homes and families, sometimes to a

traditional large festive *Sabt* (Sabbath, in Arabic) brunches, or to intimate family dining. They sometimes pay short visits to close friends or family, or retire to their bedrooms for a customary Saturday nap (if not for religiously-ordained Sabbath union with their wives).

The youth and their elders flock in large numbers to the synagogue for late Saturday afternoon prayers; there is a considerably larger number of youth in attendance than during the morning; so much that they overflow onto the portico of the synagogue in lively groups. Because of lack of space in the sanctuary and perhaps due to lack of interest in the service, some of the youth are content to remain on the portico, socializing with their friends. This large number of youth before the synagogue resembles nothing so much as a mass-meeting. Most of the youth are not content to socialize, however. Several hours earlier, male study-groups had gathered to pursue their studies of a variety of religious texts. There are as many as six or more study-groups in session, each of which may number from ten to twenty persons, and as many as eighty men in one of the groups.

Accommodations and Change

The community life in Aleppo-in-Flatbush incorporates and modifies American life to the community's own needs and style. Such changes as have inevitabley crept into the synagogue and its life exhibit the old traditions alongside the changes that have taken place.

The planning and building of the synagogue illustrate the community's assimilation of new patterns. Thanks to the community's prosperity, its synagogue would be a place of dignity and beauty, reflecting its emergence from the inferiority with which the Aleppoans had been regarded by their Ashkenazi co-religionists. The synagogue on Ocean Parkway, is indeed all that they desired, (ultimate cost: one million dollars, when built about thirty years ago).

The Rabbinate

Earlier, having prepared the edifice of the Bensonhurst Magen David it was necessary to further improve the community's religious life. No longer could the Aleppoans be content with an informal institutional organization, without a Community Rabbi. In 1934 the occupant of the traditional Aleppoan office of "Haham Bashi," (Chief Rabbi) Jacob Kassin was recruited from Jerusalem. Later, the Flatbush community sought a synagogue-life which only a "modern" rabbi could provide — one with the knowledge and ability to organize synagogue groups and adult classes in Jewish life, a 'ladies' auxiliary,' a men's club, classes for post-Talmud-Torâh school adolescents, etc. They longed for a synagogue life that old Aleppo had never dreamt of, but which they saw about them in Ashkenazic synagogues. Such a rabbi-organizer, speaking fluent English in order to appeal to the youth, was not available among Aleppoans or other Oriental rabbis close to the community — there was no Sepharadic seminary in the United States at that time, and those in Israel did not produce the efficient, well-trained administrators, speaking fluent or adequate English — it had to be an Ashkenazi. Through his authority, this rabbi would serve an additional highly-desirable end — to maintain greater decorum during prayer services and eliminate the occasional disputes which sprang up. Kurt Klapholtz, an Ashkenazic rabbi served the congregation for several years, before he resigned.

The need for an efficient rabbi remained, however; and as noted elsewhere a young rabbi, Abraham B. Hecht, devout, and with an engaging and brisk personality, was engaged for one year in 1942. The rabbi readily adjusted to the needs and customs of the community and soon developed a near-Aleppoan pronunciation of Hebrew (even to mastering the difficult Oriental vocalization of *'ayeen* and *'hett,* two letters which, in both Hebrew and Arabic, are almost impossible to pronounce authentically without early childhood training). In addition to his familiarity with Talmudic and other religious

literature, the rabbi, is zealous in his religious habits. He prizes his post and expresses pride in the religious prosperity of his Syrian congregation when meeting with other Ashkenazic rabbis. Few can match this congregation's attendance at services, especially youth services. Few can approach the large number of study groups, not only on the Sabbath, but during weekdays as well. Smilingly, he commented to me at the end of a United Jewish Appeal (U.J.A.) Campaign Fund Drive during one holiday service, "What do you think of my people, aren't they *great?*" 'His' people, comparatively few in number, had pledged close to three-quarters of a million dollars to the United Jewish Appeal (U.J.A.).

His ability, diplomacy, and smiling approach have won him the support of the vast majority of congregants — particularly the very religious youth — to whom he has endeared himself. The Rabbi is also occupied with other problems, among which is his concern for drug abuse, and dealing with disturbed marriages.

Haham Ya'acob Kassin, the Chief Rabbi who, *primus inter pares* ("First among equals"), is traditionally Aleppoan, by birth, training and temperament. He is the senior rabbi not only because of age, but because he is a *'Halabi'*, and a *Haham* — an 'Aleppoan' rabbi. The first, and some of the second and third generation congregants deem it desirable to continue the tradition — that an Aleppoan rabbi should head their House. His sermons, given during High Holy Days, are in Arabic with some English, punctuated with simple parables, marked by mild homiletics.

There had been talk of engaging a synagogue administrator, one who could also organize youth activity. This plan was not implemented and apparently has been abandoned.

The synagogue has a number of paid functionaries in addition to the rabbis; an indispensable *shammósh* or sexton and his maintenance staff, and several *ba'aleh keriáh,* Toráh readers, and secondary cantors, who also serve to relieve the principal *Hazzán* in leading 'lesser' sections of the prayers. Several others, needy rabbis, are said to receive small stipends for somewhat obscure services.

Rabbinical Authority

The organizational structure of the Sha'aré Zión Congregation is purportedly a democratic one. The Executive Committee is elected annually by the votes of paid-up members. No individual has a dominating influence in the Committee — except for the rabbis who are ex-officio members. No decision touching even distantly on the religious standards of the synagogue and the community will be enacted if the rabbinate looks upon it with disfavor, even if a favorable decision had been arrived at by the overwhelming majority of the Committee.

Several issues arose in the past few years which aroused opposition to the rabbinical decisions. The rabbinical insistence carried the day; the opposition has quietly melted away. The uncontested authority of the rabbinate in Brooklyn is less pervasive than the authority of its counterpart in *Halab.* Recent incidents in Brooklyn evoke the remarks of Hans Kohen, a visitor to *Halab,* regarding the *"rabbi-dominated"* community in Aleppo and illustrate the *spirit of continuity* that is prevalent.

The almost inflexible authority of the rabbinate is illustrated by its attitude toward Syrians' marriages with non-Jews. In "a pact" purportedly agreed upon in 1937 by the nascent Syrian Sepharadic Rabbinical Council it was agreed that, "even when the non-Jewish mate *converts, in order to marry* a Syrian *the marriages will not be recognized* in the religious life of the community." The off-springs in turn, would not be permitted to marry a religiously conforming Syrian. This stern attitude has served to discourage marriages to non-Jews.

It is clear that the lay group in the synagogue hierarchy is of one mind with the rabbinate: no measures are deemed extreme when they purport to protect the religious integrity of the community. In elections to the Sha'aré Zión governing board, the ultra-orthodox slate repeatedly wins a majority. Yet, there remains an unorganized small minority in mild

opposition — limited to murmurs — to some of the decisions of the rabbinate and its supporters.

Significantly, there are none but strictly Orthodox houses of worship; Conservative and Reform services are unthought of in the community.

Synagogue Income — Auctioning Honors

There are several sources of income available for the operations of Sha'aré Zión and other Syrian synagogues: membership fees, the sale of seats for the Holy Days, fund drives, and contributions for receiving an *aliya* ("going-up"), the Honor, to participate in the reading of the weekly portion of the Toráh on Saturdays and festive holidays. In addition there is the income from making the various Honors available on the High Holy Days. Such Honors on the Sabbath are conferred by invitation, on High Holidays they are auctioned off to the highest bidders. The auctioning, immediately after the first of the three sections of the prayer-service, may consume upward of half an hour, as the auctioneer seeks to cajole increasingly higher bids for each of the Honors involved. A record Rosh Hashaná bid — the New Year Holy Day — was $1,700. This custom of auctioning off the Honors is an old and respected Aleppo tradition from time immemorial, according to a rabbinical informant. (It existed, too, in Frankfort-Am-Main, among other places.)

All these sources of revenue provide ample means for all current synagogue programs. To raise money for the *construction* of the edifices, each of the seats in the Sanctuary was sold "in perpetuity," with a bronze name plate attached to the seat. Depending on proximity to the Altar, seats were sold for prices ranging from $500 to $1,250. Further, in order to occupy the seats on the High Holy Days, an annual membership fee of $150 or more is required, in addition to the High Holiday 'cost' of seats. Seats are available in the banquet hall, which seats perhaps six hundred worshippers, in the library, which seats several hundred individuals, and for the service in the "crypt" (the caterer's "Terrace") conducted by Young Sha'aré Zión. (Admission tickets are not sold to the public-at-

large in the main Sanctuary; they are available only to those who own seats "in perpetuity.")

At the newer Aleppoan Synagogue, Bet Torah, on Ocean Parkway at Avenue J, the younger-generation directors, who are relatively more "Americanized," found the public-auction custom unseemly. While the Honors there are also made available to the highest bidders, this was on the basis of bids tendered *prior* to the holidays. The financial yield would not be as great, Bet Toráh's treasurer informed me, without the incentive of public and competitive bidding and the persuasions exerted; nor is there the possibly of having "assistance" (*masá'adeh* in Arabic), a means of showing honor to the bidder, on the part of relatives or close friends, who add their bids to his, and thus increase the total of the bid-price. Nevertheless, this innovation has now been abandoned, in favor of subscribing in advance to stipulated contributions for each of the Honors.

The Synagogue Caterer

Yet another new institution entirely unknown to the old tradition is the Caterer, whose presence reflects some acculturation, to American-Ashkenazi custom. In designing the Sha'aré Zión Synagogue, the experienced architect persuaded the Executive Committee to make provisions for a professional caterer; thus, suitable kitchens were installed and a contract was awarded to an established catering firm. Thanks to the wide appeal of the beautiful synagogue and the caterer's skill, a wedding, Bar Mizvá or other celebration at Sha'aré Zión has become the goal of many celebrants. Large numbers are Ashkenazeem — who can afford the considerable cost and succeed in booking a date well in advance — Spring weddings must be booked *one year in advance.* With the renewal of each succeeding contract with the caterer, the fee for the synagogue was increased. A new contract was recently negotiated to yield in excess of $100,000 per annum, based on a fixed fee in addition to a percentage (20 percent) of the bill presented to the celebrants (for the food only). A spacious and tastefully decorated banquet hall along with the

appeal of the sanctuary (the "Dome") with its unusual style have contributed to the success of this phase of the Synagogue's activity. Nor are the Syrians themselves hesitant to celebrate marriages and Bar Mizvá ceremonies under the auspices of the caterer. It is difficult to find a more attractive setting, or tastier dinners than this caterer serves with abundance. A dinner for about two hundred and fifty guests is estimated to cost ten thousand dollars if it is a "sit-down affair," served to the guests, and somewhat less for an equally sumptious dinner served buffet-style). On Saturday evenings, worshippers are barely leaving the synagogue when members of the wedding party or other celebrants are hurrying in for last-minute preparations of their festive ceremonies.

Social Centers

Need for a social center forms a continuing presence in Aleppo-in-Flatbush's history. In the late 1930's and early 1940's, the need for a social center was felt keenly and ultimately, one was built. Because it lacked suitable facilities — for one thing no swimming pool was planned — it did not meet with popular support. In addition, the center was inconveniently located for the Bensonhurst residents as well as for the new homes on Ocean Parkway which were becoming popular.

This Center 'expired;' it was supplanted by the newly-conceived day-school — the Magen David Yeshivah, as was noted earlier.

An additional effort to establish a social center in the heart of Aleppo-in-Flatbush was made during the years 1966-68. On Avenue S close to Ocean Parkway, a modest building was erected housing little more than a gymnasium and two small meeting rooms. This center was bedevilled by controversy from the beginning, largely because the central synagogue authorities feared that it would house a non-Orthodox group. Unwilling to create a schism, the center's supporters found no difficulty in abandoning the project, particularly since there was little popular support.

Sh'aré Zión planned to build a quite large *extension* to the synagogue to serve as a social center — to include full gymnasium facilities, as well as meeting and classrooms for adult education. This project was abandoned because of the civic Community Board's opposition, and anonymous threats of arson from nearby residents. A new social center is now being financed, to cost close to three million dollars, at a site *close to,* but removed, from the synagogue.

Nor is Sh'aré Zión alone in its ambitious planning. Ahi Ezer Congregation, most of whose members are Damascenes, have demonstrated enterprise and skill for several decades. In addition to the construction of a handsome house of worship one block removed from the larger Aleppo religious center, they established the successful Ahi Ezer Yeshiva and, several years ago and acquired a sizable apartment building directly behind their synagogue, intending to convert it into an old-age home. Now, Ahi Ezer is forging ahead with plans to convert the building to small apartments for Syrian senior citizens.

The community's Egyptians are also constructing their own synagogue. Until now many Egyptians have attended services at Syrian synagogues or at premises adjoining Young Israel of Flatbush. The new *Ahabá-ve-Ahvá* Congregation will help create a sense of traditional Orthodox Cairo-in-Flatbush.

An estimated 800 (?) Jewish-Lebanese immigrants, refugees from the recent Muslim-Christian conflict in and around their beloved Beirut, have also settled in Flatbush. They too are being encouraged to establish their own prayer services, although their rites differ only insignificantly from those of the Aleppoans and Damascenes. It is thought that the establishment of their own synagogue will encourage greater adherence to Orthodox religious practice on the part of the Lebanese. $50,000 was loaned to them by Edmond Safra, the Aleppoan/Lebanese, to encourage the project.

Synagogues Far from Home

Considerable numbers of Aleppoans and some Damascenes are engaged in importing from the Far East. Accordingly, during their buying season, twenty to thirty (or more) Aleppo-in-Flatbush residents can be found at the same time in Taiwan or Hong Kong. At the President Hotel in Taipeh, they arrange for a room where prayer services are held in accordance with Aleppoan ritual; interested Ashkenazic travellers are invited to attend. At the elegant Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, a penthouse suite is reserved for Saturday services, which are followed by a sumptuous brunch reminiscent of the *Sabt* in Flatbush. (They call themselves "The Flying Minyán").

Closer to home, Syrian students at Brooklyn College attend evening services between classes; and on the chartered busses which Syrians use to commute from Deal, New Jersey to Manhattan, daily prayer services are held. Not all the riders participate — some are preoccupied with one of the several "gin" games in progress. In general, however, traditional-Oriental religious activity in and around Aleppo-in-Flatbush is "alive and well," and facilities for it are expanding.

Not all Syrians who seek a more pleasant locale than Brooklyn settled in New Jersey. Once again, a handful have established themselves in Westchester County. More have chosen Great Neck, in nearby Long Island, thirty minutes from Manhattan.

Others live at some distance from New York, based on their commercial enterprises. There is a distinct colony in Los Angeles, and a cluster in Washington D.C. In each place the Syrians seek to perpetuate the familiar pattern, creating their own ethnic world, the size of which may be estimated through attendance at their own religious services.

Scarsdale in Westchester organized a Sepharadi prayer-service this year for the first time, in a wing of an Ashkenazi house of worship. It is reported that the service was well attended — mostly by Iranian, Baghdadian and others from the Middle East. Syrians, to the extent of ten or twelve

individuals formed the nucleus and were able to provide a young Syrian religious leader and cantor, Morris Harary. (An Assistant District Attorney in N.Y.C.).

A larger number of Syrians live in Great Neck; several attempts to secure permission to build their own synagogue met with no success. Their own services are conducted on the High Holidays. Many non-Syrian Orientals, attended, along with an estimated forty to fifty expatriates from Aleppo-in-Flatbush. "Abe" Hedaya is the moving spirit in the religious life of the community, a descendant of the revered family of rabbis in Aleppo; in co-operation with three brothers, Jack, Albert and Morris Nasser.

Washington, D.C. has had Sepharadic holiday services for many years, attended by the dozen or more families who live in Washington — sharing with considerably larger numbers of other Middle Eastern Jews. Samuel Dweck is the leader there, a former retailer of childrens' wear who turned to successful real-estate operations; (his boyhood nickname is "Shalooleh"). Dweck is a sizeable contributor to Jewish causes, as well as to Aleppoan institutions in Brooklyn and Israel, and is prominent in "UJA" and other Jewish activities.

The Syrians in So. California form the *only* Syrian community away from the Metropolitan-New York area. It is small, and geographically dispersed over the sprawling huge city of Los Angeles. It strives to replicate the religious institutions of Aleppo-in-Flatbush, with a synagogue and a Hebrew school — for Syrians and other Sepharadeem; but there are few Syrians there who compare in religiosity with those in Brooklyn and Deal. Synagogue attendance during the year, except for the High Holidays is reported to be sporadic.

Jack Gindi and Rachel, his mother — with a like pattern of retailing followed by rewarding real-estate operations — are the leading individuals motivating the religious activity, in conjunction with Joseph Fallas, who is president of the synagogue.

Chapter Six

Youth and Education

NOTHING serves to highlight the distinctive and separatist cultural orientation of the community of Syrians in Flatbush as effectively as the community's education of its children. The children are almost all native-born, and some are third-generation Americans. The pattern of close proximity on the part of the majority of Syrian Jews in their choice of residence makes for a clustering in a few specific schools. It is the private schooling that is particularly noteworthy as much for its mass as for its special quality.

The Syrian community in Flatbush has two elementary-level yeshivas. In addition, it avails itself of the facilities of a third. The Aleppoan faction, by far the larger, operates the *Magen David Yeshiva,* the outgrowth of the afternoon Hebrew school that formed part of the Magen David congregation when the community lived in Bensonhurst. The second Syrian school is the *Ahi Ezer Yeshiva,* administered by the Damascus part of the community.

Magen David, the Aleppoan Yeshiva

This school has completely engorged the once-furiously-debated and ambitiously conceived Community Center of the early 1940s. It was logical to use the building for a yeshiva

since the structure had cost many hundreds of thousands of dollars. It has a registration of 800 boys and girls.

For many years the *Magen David Yeshiva* suffered. The quality of the teaching was only fair, particularly in secular studies, and perhaps as a result, its funding was inadequate. In the past several years new interest and fresh enthusiasm have manifested themselves. The decline in the quality of public school education may be one contributing cause. Another, is a greater and deeper consciousness of Jewishness, possibly the outgrowth of the strife in Israel, particularly the threat to the Jewish state before the Six Day War. The interest and ability of the younger leaders in the Aleppoan community was galvanized and applied to the welfare of the Yeshiva.

They succeeded in recruiting the highly able Rabbi Sholom Himmel as Administrator. His talent when at the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* had made the expansion at that school a possibility. Ability, drive and sagacity, applied at *Magen David,* contributed in no small measure to the growth of this school. Seeking the "best-as-usual" — the Syrians captured Rabbi Moshe Greenes as Executive Director.

The facilities of the Yeshiva have been expanded and continue to grow, assured through the enthusiastic and generous cooperation of the community members. This is indicated by the financial pledges made — which have always been honored in the past. For the construction of a new wing, an outstandingly active family, the family of the late Isaac Shalom, gave $100,000; the wing carries Isaac and Alice Shalom's name. Other "dedications" brought additional impressive pledges: the new library, $54,000; an auditorium and gymnasium, $50,000 each; the lobby, $36,000. Fourteen pledges of $10,000 each came from dedications of some classrooms, thirty pledges ranging from $6,000 each to $7,500, for other classrooms; fifty-five other sponsorships ranged from $1,000 to $5,000 each. All of these are augmented by countless smaller contributions. In all, about one and a half million dollars were spent at the end of the recent building program. The current Fund Drive is seeking $300,000 the deficit for the year.

Ahi Ezer

This Yeshiva is an adjunct to the synagogue of that name — founded by the Damascus-originated Syrians in the larger community. Despite a relatively small population the Yeshiva is a large and thriving one with two locations. It draws most Damascene children in addition to some Ashkenazeem, Egyptians and Lebanese, who live close to the school. The enrollment is close to 800 students — almost as large as that of the Aleppoan Magen David.

Yeshiva of Flatbush

The third Yeshiva, which hundreds of Syrian children attend, is the Ashkenazic (East European) *Yeshiva of Flatbush,* which has schooling at the elementary and high school levels. With an enrollment of nearly 1300 students in the elementary school, almost a fifth are Syrian children, mostly Aleppoan. In the light of the Aleppoans' history of keeping apart socially and religiously from Ashkenazic Jewry, this comes as a seeming contradiction.

This Yeshiva is outstanding in its academic training, with a disproportionately large number of its students winning state and regent scholarships and other academic awards. Graduates of the *Yeshiva of Flatbush High School* find ready admission to many prestigious colleges. At the H.S. about 15% of the 700 students are Syrians, according to the genial David H. Schwartz, Administrator. Since their children would receive an excellent secular and religious education, and since Syrians with means will seek out "the best" in every area, some Syrian Jews prefer the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* as the school for their children. This quality school had no competitive yeshiva to challenge its appeal until a few years ago. With the improvement in the quality of education in the *Magen David,* many who would perhaps have previously chosen the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* now lean to the Syrian institution.

According to a study by Professor Morris Gross, published by the Center for Urban Education (December 1967) the

"readiness" gap between Ashkenazic and Sepharadic students entering the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* elementary school compares to the gap between black and white beginning students. Cautioning that "one must be careful and circumspect in generalizing from this study" (p. 44), Gross found that Syrian students average 17 points lower than Ashkenazic students on the Peabody (one I.Q.) test. Social class differences do not explain this gap, since like their Ashkenazic peers, most Syrian students come from a middle-class, statistically-matched background. The results of four other I.Q. tests do *not* correspond with those of the Peabody test. (Syrian girls do average lower scores than beginning Ashkenazic girls.) Syrian families, Gross observed, are "commerce" oriented: the Ashkenazics, more "education" oriented. By the second year *all differences disappear.*

The quality of the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* did not draw, even in past years, some of the *most* orthodox Syrians. To them the traditional and intensive religious education was of paramount importance; *Magen David Yeshiva,* thus, drew the children of the more orthodox. In addition, it appealed to the more Oriental-acculturated, since, in effect, it is an "Oriental" Yeshiva (despite the overwhelming preponderance of Ashkanazeem in its faculty). In any case the children would receive religious education with much emphasis on Syrian customs, and a flavor of the traditional Aleppoan Hebrew school.

Other Schools

The *Magen David Yeshiva,* being at an elementary level, it was recognized that continuity of Syrian community traditions taught in the school was not sufficient; the graduates would go on to the public high schools, and only the minority would go on to a religious day-school which would be Ashkenazic. Accordingly *Magen David* contemplated a Sepharadic high school but found it not feasible. Other educators in the community felt the pressing need for a high school on traditional Syrian lines and instituted classes at the secondary level.

The *Sephardic Institute* which had originally intended to function as a seminary has now become the *Sephardic High School* at 511 Ave. R. in the heart of Aleppo-in-Flatbush. Its founder, the devout and dedicated *Haham* Moshé Shamáh reports a current enrollment of 200 pupils, receiving secular as well as a thorough highly-religious Hebrew education.

Still another new school, post high school level, but with a strong rabbinic-training direction is headed by Rabbi Chaim Benoliel, a "Ladino" Sepharadi from the state of Washington. (He is also the spiritual head of the Syrian *B'nai Yoseph Congregation).* This school is *Yeshivat Mikdash Melekh* ("The King's Sanctuary"). The *Sephardic High School* and *Mikdash Melekh* both draw the off-springs of the more pious and tradition-oriented parents.

The Yeshiva University High School is also in the area of Aleppo-in-Flatbush. There are several dozens of Syrian students there. Strong efforts are made to draw increasing numbers of Syrian students, with prayer-services for them in the Sepharadi custom, and with special cultural instructions. The efforts however have not yet been fully successful, although this school is affiliated with the parent Yeshiva University's *"Sephardic Studies Program"* under the leadership *of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Gaon,* aided by Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky.

A new significant trend has arisen in the community, an inclination to ultra-Orthodoxy approaching the Hassidic. Thus some parents are not satisfied with the Orthodoxy of the existing schools in the community and send their children — mostly boys to schools such as *Torah ve Daas,* the *Mirrer, Ner Israel* in Baltimore, the Yeshiva in Lakewood and others. It is estimated that approximately 200 such Syrian children attend these ultra-Orthodox institutions. The influence of the students of these schools is beginning to be and will be increasingly felt in the religious life of Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

Youth Separatism

The schooling for the children of a large number of families demonstrates the distinct separatist trend of the Syrians. The *Magen David* student body is almost exclusively Syrian,

boys and girls who live close to one another and whose families' circles often overlap, comprise the student population. The homogeneity of the student body discourages, and in fact effectively excludes children of other Jewish ethnic backgrounds. An Ashkenazic mother who for unknown reasons enrolled her boy at *Magen David Yeshiva* complained bitterly that her son had not received a birthday-party invitation although all his other classmates were invited. She placed the blame on the exclusivity and clannishness of the Syrians, whose children follow in the path of their parents. In an interview with an Ashkenazi graduate of *Yeshiva of Flatbush* — Joel Wolowelsky, now on the faculty of the High School, I was told that some of his best friends in the Yeshiva had been Syrians. "But," he mused, "as soon as another Syrian appeared on the scene, my friend would drift away, to the company of the Syrian boy."

The in-group and clannishness syndrome were again emphasized to me in an interview with members of the faculty of the public Abraham Lincoln High School on Ocean Parkway, the high school closest to Aleppo-in-Flatbush. They too, found the Syrian youth to be distant from non-Syrian students, and had noted their closeness to the other Syrian youth; the in-group quality manifested itself in their experiences with Syrians boys in particular, the girls were highly regarded, and were considered superior students.

In stating the themes which served to provide their guidelines, the sociologists Goldstein and Goldscheider, ask in connection with their study of the Jewish community of Providence, Rhode Island: "Are there variations in the degree of assimilation within generations, and, which social groupings within each generation are more receptive or more resistant to change?" It is the continuing resistance to assimilation, in the *public high schools* as well, which demonstrates vividly the in-group identification of the Syrian students. Since quantitative material has not been gathered, what follows is based on our own knowledge, research and experience with such youth, and is a perhaps somewhat simplistic judgment to explain the very marked separatism which the faculty members remarked upon.

We know of the youth's clannishness in almost all settings where Syrian boys and girls mingle with their peers of other ethnic backgrounds, (as in the *Yeshiva of Flatbush,* this was affirmed by the dean of the elementary-level school there.) Syrian in-group feeling is intensified in the public high schools whose very heterogeneus student population includes Ashkenazeem, Italians, Irish, Blacks and other ethnic groups. That the in-group feeling of the Syrians is intensified is due in a large measure to two factors. The Syrian cultural background and the on-going desire of the Syrian community not to assimilate, reenforce its separateness and exclusiveness. The social and religious closeness, the widespread use of Arabic — at least to the extent of common phrases and colorful words — provides the youth with an additional source of group-identification, and an additional shield against the compelling forces of assimilation and *loss of distinctiveness.*

Syrian parents send their children to public high-schools for two possible reasons: either they do not consider superior education a necessity, or, while they desire the achievement resulting from private schooling, they cannot afford the tuition fees especially when they have several children of school age, as is often the case. Still another category of parents of public high-school children are themselves without much schooling, either religious or secular. Many such parents' main goal is the quick accumulation of money — financial success to equal that of some of their friends and relatives. Some are often of limited means; it is likely that they work in retail stores, salesmen, of radios and allied items, or perhaps operating a small bargain-discount store. These are enterprises which do not require much formal education, but rather, a modicum of business skill. Such goals often rub off onto their children who, because they seek only *some* high school education without too much exertion, often become indifferent scholars. Once they graduate high school, as most, but not all of them do, they are ready to plunge into Money-Making. Many such boys and some girls wil have tasted the fruit of money-making, as part-time workers in Syrian-owned retail stores. After school, weekends, and holiday jobs

as salesmen or cashiers will sometimes earn them up to one hundred and fifty dollars a week. Their earning power leads to the youths' developing a lack of respect for their teachers. The latter have gone to college, studied intensively for many years, and withal the Syrian boy or girl is able to earn "almost as much" even while their pupils, and working only part-time. Such employment does not leave much opportunity for serious after-school studying; classroom performances reflect the neglect. In many cases, students manifesting precocious money-making ability brazenly seek to "outsmart" their teachers and the school authorities. They give bizarre reasons for not doing their work or for unjustifiable absences. They think that they are able to hoodwink their disgusted teachers, and thus are so much cleverer than the teachers and the other non-Syrian students. Accordingly, they appear to believe that Syrians are "superior." Syrian students associate in most instances with other members of the "elite", with their ethnic in-group peers.

Other Syrian public high school boys are equally negligent of their studies even though they do *not* earn substantial sums as part-time salesmen. They are frequently the sons of fathers who have amassed money, and seek to demonstrate their success. One means is through large money allowances to their sons, and by giving them their own private automobiles. With such precepts at home, these boys seek to "have fun," rather than do their studies after school. They gravitate to similarly-minded Syrians and non-Syrian peers.

Such "fun-seeking" activities have created serious problems for parents in some instances. In an interview with Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht of Sha' aré Zión Congregation, I was told that there is a "drug problem" in the community. I took this to be innocent alarm about casual experimentation with marijuana. Since then, however, several cases of heroin addiction among Syrian youth have come to light. The extent of this problem is difficult to ascertain; it must, however, be of some consequence due to two indications: the attempt to establish a community committee to deal with the problem of drugs. The committee met a few times, but from lack of active interest disbanded. More recently a number of moth-

ers of teenage youth began the formation of a group to deal with the problem of drug use by their children.

Youth Organizations

The social life of the youth is much like that of the non-Syrians of the same class, although here too it is largely Syrian-oriented. Movie-going, dating, parties, and other similar activities are largely with other Syrians, neighbors. A considerable number pursue interests which center around religion and synagogue-oriented activities.

Young Sha'ré Zión is a 'junior' congregation which draws late teen and those in the early twenties — most of them unmarried boys and girls. Each year this organization — along with others, which we will discuss, draws a full house to the Holocaust Commemoration Day. Exhibits of scenes showing the plight of the Jews imprisoned in Warsaw and other ghettos are displayed; films of life there, as well as talks by survivors are presented. "*Young Sha'ré Zión* Congreg. organizes occasional inspirational "Oneg Shabbát" (Sabbath Celebration) activities where on Friday evening young people assemble to sing, dance the Hora and partake of the generous supplies of delectable Oriental dishes which they so deeply relish — in addition to a spiritual address. Once or twice each year they plan seminars and week-ends held in some country hotel. These are enjoyable periods of singing, dancing, educational and inspirational lectures. Senior councilors are available to help the youth to find their way to an Orthodox Jewish life. *Young Sha'ré Zión* in addition, sometimes offers the young adults classes in religious subjects each week.

The "*Committee of Concerned Youth*" ("C.C.Y.") is an ostensibly secular organization, but is related to *Young Sha'ré Zión.* It aims to activate the young in areas important to the Jewish Syrian youth, undertaking community services within the context of the religious life. Once each year the "C.C.Y." conducts a clothing drive, collecting used garments to be sent to needy families in Israel. Since the community is both affluent and generous, quantities of excellent clothes are donated. Several times each year "C.C.Y." organizes a dance

for the youth. These customarily follow the Jewish holidays, the night of Yom Kippúr and a spring celebration following the end of Passover, etc. 500 to 600 young people throng these dances. There the young people socialize and develop friendships which ultimately lead to the marriages of Jewish Syrian girls to the boys *within the community.*

"The New Trends" better known as "T.N.T." is the organization of the 15 to 18 year old youth, with an affiliation of close to 100 members. (There is as well the "congregation" of youth ranging in age from eight years upward which conducts its own Saturday morning prayer services, as was noted elsewhere.)

Beth Torah Congregation in Brooklyn, like other religious institutions, operates a social youth-organization "Beth Teens."

The Deal, New Jersey, colony of year-round residents is a supporter (and is now principal activist) of the Hillel School in its area. Of the 382 enrolled students in this day school yeshiva more than 300 are Syrian youth. An hour each school day is devoted to inculcation of the customs and traditions of the Near East, that prevailed in Syria and that continues, with considerable vitality in the New Jersey area, as in Flatbush.

During the summer, with large numbers of families occupying their vacation homes, the community operates a day-camp in Bradley Beach with more than 300 children in attendance. Appropriately it is called The Magen David Day Camp — resonant of the Bradley Synagogue there, and the large Yeshiva in Brooklyn.

The focus of interest of many of the youth is in perpetuating the ethnic traditions of the senior members — maintaining the community cohesively — and thereby to continue the Orthodox religious pattern.

Change

That the Syrian community is a monolithic whole seemingly unchanged and unassimilated to any marked degree, again appears to be at partial variance with actual life in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. The stereotype of static Syrians which

persists reflects only a portion of the community and only one facet by which they are typed — the continuation of religiosity of all Syrians, and of their clinging to ethnic traditions. The actuality is one of change — and some contradictions. One finds large numbers of Syrian youth, a far larger proportion than is met with elsewhere, who attend synagogue services every Sabbath and holiday. Yet, most of them are stylishly dressed, their hair is cut modishly, and discoteques are not unfamiliar to them.

Given the previous history of Flatbush, it comes as a surprise that considerable numbers of Syrian youth are now in attendance at institutions of higher learning. Most attend Brooklyn College, some of the more religious study at Yeshiva University. A small number attend out-of-town colleges, universities, and seminaries. Inquiring about the unexpectedly large interest in college education it was found that many of the Syrian graduates of Yeshiva of Flatbush High School are imbued with an urge for increased education, and the example of their fellow Ashkenazeem, to develop themselves through education. Like others some of their parents deem it a status-symbol to send their children to college, and since they can readily afford it, permit their offspring to continue their studies.

In the limited number of mailed questionnaires which were returned, we were able to get an indication of trends — certainly not a basis for empirical conclusions. Answering the query as to whether they planned to follow in the careers of their parents, more than 50 percent of the youth stated that they will *not* do so. Their preferences are for entry into the professions: law, accounting, physics, and business administration, though not in their parents' businesses.

The earlier traditional pattern of conduct among girls and young Syrian women has been one of modesty almost to the point of puritanism. Unlike most American girls, adolescent Syrian girls did not mingle with boys of the same age. Only when a young man was deemed a probable candidate for marriage would a Syrian girl accompany him to a place of entertainment. She was sure not to be seen in his company more than two or three times; beyond that, it would be

assumed that there were serious possibilities of an engagement — the girl would no longer be considered available.

In a much earlier age girls of good family and reputation had a chaperone escort them when spending time with a suitor, even at a movie. In general, it was taken for granted that Syrian girls would remain chaste until marriage. Thus, some Syrian young men sought the company of others in seeking to fulfill their urges. As noted before, by no means had all the young men of the early immigrant days conformed to the majority's pious and chaste behavior, but young women continued to maintain the modesty and reserve, characteristic of the Near East. In a recent discussion with a worldly Syrian young man, I noted this traditional modesty, but was startled to hear him remark that "some girls in Aleppo-in-Flatbush are no longer what they once were". It is impossible, of course, to determine with certainty whether measures of much freedom extend to many Syrian girls, but there does appear to be a significant change from past patterns of modesty amounting to being prudish.

In the past decade, a number of the many affluent young unmarried Syrian men have taken apartments in Manhattan, usually with one or more Syrian friends. These apartments are used during the week; weekends are usually spent in Flatbush. To the dismay of one rabbi, it now appears that a few young *women* from Aleppo-in-Flatbush have also taken apartments in Manhattan. He remarked that, interestingly, these girls seek the company of *other Syrian girls* when they are not socializing with members of the opposite sex.

Chapter Seven

Class and Status

IN Aleppo, an old and well-established Jewish community, class and rank were based on religious preeminence and wealth, i.e., on scholarliness, and outstanding generosity *and* devotion to religious institutions, support of the corps of indigent rabbis, orphanages, and care for the large numbers of the poor. In addition, Aleppoan Jewry took into consideration the family respectability and kinship — *adamiyeh* and *'ayleh* — over several uninterrupted generations.

These standards characterize the Jews of the Near East for well over a thousand years as was revealed in the *Geniza* of Fostat (old Cairo). Writing of the material uncovered in this ancient synagogue in Egypt — of centuries of Jewish life — S. D. Goitein describes the basis of social prominence exactly as it is defined by Aleppoans.

Respectability and ancestry greatly influenced the choice of bride or groom. No one would marry more than *one level removed.* Since most marriages there were arranged by the respective families — unions for their offsprings were usually arranged through semi-professional intermediaries — men who were knowledgeable in the class-requirements of the families.

While some of the attributes of old *Halab's* class and status structure continue to be reflected in Flatbush, these facets of Aleppo's standards did not weather the ocean voyage during

immigration. The removal from the calm of the Syrian city to the lower East Side was a traumatic experience for most immigrants, especially in terms of family status and class. Life in New York was in an alien setting, in which the principal consideration was survival — the making of a living. In addition, the early immigrants were disorganized, disoriented individuals living in the strange atmosphere of boarding houses, usually separated from their wives and children who remained behind, and lacking the stable family life necessary for community — the social structure which could encourage the recognition of class and status lines.

The early Aleppoan immigrants in America lived with a spirit of equality, poor, and working hard to meet the challenge of building new careers — a new life for themselves and their dependents. Although earlier immigrants had achieved a small measure of financial success — for example, those who had succeeded in trading in their own stores instead of peddling — this did not serve to create class distinctions. The storekeeper had been a peddler only yesterday, and the peddler aspired to an improvement in his lot soon.

The only marks of distinction which the immigrant brought with him belonged to those of the *Tadjer* class, merchants, a few of who had come to New York; and to those immigrants whose outstanding scholarliness and piety had been recognized in old Aleppo. The latter had helped to organize the first religious organizations, establishing places of worship for Sabbath services and the adult classes in the study of the Torâh and the Talmûd.

Attributes of Class Distinction

Now, there were social class distinctions reestablished, in Williamsburgh; on the basis of what attributes? As in Aleppo, the dominant factors were again piety, religious scholarliness, respectibility and zeal in promoting the welfare of religious institutions. The latter is usually the privilege of the wealthier members of the community, who can afford to generously support the community's institutions. With the passing away of the first generation of immigrant elders,

especially those from the established upper-class, came the erosion of the traditional order of societal and family rank. By perpetuating those attributes respected by Aleppoan Jewry, a very few samilies have retained the respect which they commanded in the old country. Generally, however, the rigid social class structure as known in Halab no longer exists. The few remaining members of the old upper-class are now joined by those who have newly taken on the attributes which formerly defined a social aristocracy. Although they do not yet possess old-world, time-mellowed *adamiyeh*, this new aristocracy has achieved social and religious prominence by working for the benefit of the community religious institutions, and by outstanding financial contributions.

For marriages, such requirements of class distinction have virtually disappeared in Flatbush. In New York many families which were poor and lowly in the old country are often in the upper middle-class — wealthy. They are well regarded if they maintain respectability, and meet their obligations through suitable contributions to religious causes. Cross-class marriages have eroded the formerly sharp lines of family distinction — wealthy and respected individuals marry freely the daughters of 'not-so-wealthy' families. Since family relatedness is now found at all levels, there appear to be very faint class lines: cross-wealth marriages relating rich and poor families, and close residential proximity in a small area have served to create a measure of egalitarianism.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that there are absolutely no social distinctions. However, they are mainly in limited differences in style of living — not in class. Aleppo-in-Faltbush is divided into two geographic areas; the larger heterogeneous one is centered around the Sha'aré Zión Congregation, an area of several blocks in each direction of Ocean Parkway and Avenues S and T. As the population pressure increased and large homes near Avenues S and T were no longer available, the Syrians spread further away from the proximity of the central Synagogue. The other nearby geographic area is centered at Avenue J and East 8th Street. Like the better streets around the Sha'aré Zion Synagogue, the Avenue J area is lined with spacious homes on

tree-lined streets. For the most part it is the younger generation of Syrian families with its many affluent young business men, who comprise the population.

Leadership in Aleppo-in-Flatbush

The unmistakable leadership in the community was that of the late Isaac Shalom. ("Shalóm") Of middle-range social background in Aleppo, Shalom soon after his arrival in the United States displayed outstanding ability in trade. At a time when other similar merchants were beginning to enjoy only modest success, Shalom's business was thriving. His religious interest matched his financial prosperity. Thanks to the disproportionate importance of his contributions and his personal authority, his became the leading voice in community affairs. It has been said that he was permitted to take a dominant role in communal affairs because, even the many who would have opposed his views were reluctant to do so — for economic reasons. They needed ongoing, harmonious business relations with him.

Shalom's personal drive, his piety and zeal saw him involved in every Syrian religious institution in New York, as well as some in Jerusalem and Aleppo. Along with Joseph E. ("Joe") Shamah of Jerusalem it was his initiative that resulted in the organization of *Otzar Hatorah,* a chain of schools in Morocco, Algeria, Iran and elsewhere in the Near East, intended primarily for Jewish education, which was vanishing in those countries. In addition to Jewish studies, the students were also taught a trade. He was outstanding among American businessmen to substantially aid the new State of Israel with financial contributions and economic investments. Upon his death at an advanced age in 1968, Shalom was deeply mourned in New York. He had chosen to be buried in Israel, and there he was given a semi-official State funeral. It is said in the community "there is no one who has not had some personal benefit through Shalom." His widow, Alice, and three sons continue to play a leading role in community affairs. Since the demise of Shalom no individual has risen to equal prominence.

With the same devotion to the community's welfare but with a minimum of domination, a few individuals have come forth to meet the needs of the time; Ely Ashkenazi, and his brother Saul have been outstanding in their vision, and generosity to social and religious institutions. Their enterprise and generosity are responsible for the acquisition of a 60-acre plot of land; a part will be used for new buildings to house an educational complex in the Deal, New Jersey area, where many Syrian families are moving from Aleppo-in-Flatbush. With a modesty that borders on anonymity, Ely and Saul Ashkenazi are undoubtedly outstanding among the new leaders in the Syrian-American Jewish world — aiming at "maintaining a rich ethnic heritage." Edmond Safra, too, is among those who have the same objective. Safra however lives in Switzerland but is an outstanding financial contributor.

Many other individuals, wealthy merchants, have made very generous contributions to the community's religious organizations. Several are active in the leadership of such organizations. (See the chapter "Commercial Life" which provides additional information concerning such individuals).

Social Clubs

There are two social clubs in Aleppo-in-Flatbush, both in the Avenue J area. "Club 26" is smaller and more expensive to join, while "Club 100", intended to accommodate one hundred families is preferred by younger families. The principal pastime in both clubs is card playing. Poker, solo-whist, bridge, and canasta are preferred, in that order. Backgammon, a traditional Oriental game, with its new, wide-spread popularity, is a favorite for a limited number. The non-club-joining Syrians, especially the somewhat older generation, also find their amusements in card playing — principally at Saturday night parties in one another's homes.

Chapter Eight

Six Families

THIS series of family portraits of Syrian Jewish families in Brooklyn seeks to show how the people live and act in everyday life. Six families have been interviewed as representatives of a cross-section of the community. The pervading influences appear to be a blending of deeply ingrained Arabic culture with as deeply ingrained patterns of Jewish Orthodox traditions perpetuated through countless centuries of Aleppoan and Damascene life — as well as deviation from the strictly traditional patterns.

The anthropologist Friedrich Tönnies observed that when cultural custom is intertwined with deep religious observance in a closed community, their combined effect is virtually irresistible. Such influences are reflected even in second and third generation Syrian-Americans, who appear to be thoroughly middle-class in their style of living — a style that is seemingly as acculturated as that of other groups whose ethnic attachments are very loose, often limited to sentimentally traditional culinary preferences.

These few portraits do not, of course, encompass all Syrian families in the community, but seek rather to delineate the characteristics of a subjectively — typical variety. Since the compilation of these histories — within a ten-year span — ages have advanced; dollar amounts given may be increased by fifty percent or even one-hundred percent.

Names given are 'fictional,' suggestive. They have been

chosen alphabetically, randomly, from names that are typically Syrian. Thus the first family portrait is given the name *"A"*-ntebi, the second *"B"*-echor, etc.

Family Portrait of (A) "Antebi"

Antebi is an Aleppoan-born immigrant more than seventy-five years old, married and the father of three sons and two daughters. He is a long-time resident of New York, having migrated in 1910 with his father, Antebi is in the upper-middle class and still passively interested in the flourishing importing business he helped found along with his father and an older brother, who are both dead.

Antebi is recognized to possess high intelligence and is respected as one of the most scholarly individuals in the community in the area of religious literature and law. In the tradition transmitted by his father, he has been active in the leadership of the community and is particularly well-thought-of by the youth who attend the Saturday afternoon study group he leads. Not a small part of the admiration he commands comes from being conversant with current political and social developments, acquired from careful reading of the *New York Times* and the popular news weeklies. In addition — his fluency in Hebrew, French, Arabic and Spanish mark him as an exceptionally educated member of the older generation. However, except for the years of French (and some Hebrew) study at the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* School in Aleppo, and two years of evening high school in New York, Antebi is virtually self-educated in secular studies. His father was his principal teacher in advanced Hebrew studies.

Antebi's success in business, along with his generous religious contributions, excellent Talmudic and Biblical scholarship and a recognized family lineage in Aleppo as well as New York, all contribute to his high status in the community; as do the facts that he has been a decorated worker in United Jewish Appeal campaigns, and several times the president of his synagogue, Sha'ré Zión.

He is a present-day patriarch, commanding great authority at home, an authority supported by his highly tradition-

oriented wife (who is his first cousin). Antebi's word is virtually unchallenged by his children.

All three sons, as well as Antebi's two daughters, practice the traditional Orthodoxy. Like their father and grandfather the two younger sons are leaders in religious education work among young people. The oldest son follows most Orthodox rituals, but is less scholarly — and more worldly.

All of Antebi's children have married within the Jewish faith and each to a mate of approved-by-the-parents Orthodoxy. Two of the three sons married Ashkenazic girls, in contrast to the Aleppoan tradition which strongly encourages endogamous marriage of Syrian marrying Syrian, (this will be explained later). Certainly the family preference was that these sons marry girls of Syrian descent, like the oldest son whose wife is the daughter of a respected rabbi (one of the large number of non-office holding scholars who abounded in Aleppo). This son, while somewhat less Orthodox in religious practice, is nevertheless dedicated to the perpetuation of the traditions and ethos of Aleppo-in-Flatbush. His two brothers, more active religiously, state that they did not find among girls of Syrian background the desired combination of committed religiosity and good secular education. Their wives are Askenazeem, one from Borough Park, Brooklyn; the other is from the Midwest. The involvement of Antebi's second son in ultra-Orthodox studies (he is a graduate of the rabbical school at Yeshiva University) brought him into association with Askenazic youth and while on a business trip, the young man met and soon courted the lovely Orthodox, college-educated girl who became his wife.

Antebi's older daughter married an Orthodox Ashkenazi, the cousin of an Ashkenazi aunt-by-marriage. The younger daughter recently married the Orthodox, well-educated man she had been seeking.

Antebi lives in the heart of Aleppo-in-Flatbush, as do all his children and their families — except for one daughter whose husband's teaching and research work in physics took them to a nearby large city. The children and grandchildren customarily gather at his home for breakfast after the Saturday morning prayer service, and on holidays for dinner.

Saturday mornings at "Grandpa's" are gay gatherings and often evolve into sessions in the study of some timely religious theme.

While most second-generation Ashkenazeem move to residential areas different from their parents' and adopt differing patterns of religious observance, Antebi's children, as noted, live within blocks of the parents for the most part, continue in the same economic endeavor as the first generation and remain devoted to the perpetuation of the traditions of Aleppo transplanted to Brooklyn. It is in the teenage grandchildren of Antebi's oldest sons that we discern a pattern with particular significance for our study.

Because of his adherence to ethnic tradition, Antebi's oldest son (the non-scholar in his family) who married a charming daughter of an Aleppoan rabbi, vigorously discouraged his own son's developing attachment to a lovely Ashkenazic girl — a quite religious fellow student at the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* High School — sufficiently to shatter the budding romance. The youth subsequently married a girl of Syrian background. His daughter was much admired by her Ashkenazic fellow-students at the same high school, but was strongly encouraged to marry a third-generation Syrian-American. These children, she 19 years of age, he 22, are both observant Orthodox, devout enough not to carry even a handkerchief from a private to a public area on the Sabbath. (Such "carrying" is one of the "forty minus one" forms of "labor" prohibited on the Sabbath.) Nor will either answer the telephone Saturdays because of the "labor" involved in the electricity activating the telephone mechanism.

Both youth, like most of their fellow students at the *Yeshiva of Flatbush,* pursued a higher education, attending Brooklyn College. There, he earned a bachelor of arts degree, while she continued her studies after her marriage until, soon, she became pregnant. In addition to the two described above, Antebi's oldest son has another son and a daughter, teenagers who attend the Sepharadi *Magen David Yeshiva.* To obtain a very good schooling for the two *older* children, Antebi's, son sent them to the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* (Ashkenazi), since the Sepharadi *Magen David Yeshiva's* standards were deemed

inferior then, particularly in secular studies. When asked why his *older* two children had been enrolled in the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* and the *younger* two children in the Syrian Yeshiva, he replied: "With the improvement in the quality of education at *Magen David Yeshiva* why shouldn't I send my children where they can grow up in the Syrian traditions of the family?" The grandfather wields a gentle but decisive influence in shaping the outlook of his grandchildren; the children of his youngest son, boys of six and nine, are already instilled with eagerness to have additional lessons in religious subjects from "Grandpa."

A word of explanation to account for the several exceptional marriages of Antebi's children to Ashkenazeem. Mrs. Antebi's mother was also Ashkenazic, a Palestinian, born into a family which had lived in Palestine for generations when Sepharadeem – once before – predominated.

The marriage of Mrs. Antebi's father to an *Ashkenazeet* was the act of a "maverick" Aleppoan. (No such independent-minded individuals were to be seen among the sons of *Halab*, Aleppo, at the end of the 19th century.) Consequently, there was less reluctance to approve the marriage to Ashkenazeem on the part of three of Antebi's children. In two of these marriages Antebi's children appear to have somewhat weakened loyalty to the traditional ethos of Aleppo-in-Flatbush. A high degree of religious observance, however, is a feature of their lives, with perhaps greater intensity than the conventional acceptance characteristic of the majority of Syrians in New York.

Family Portrait of (B) "Beracha"

Beracha is a 'Syrian,' born in Brooklyn 49 years ago. While not from Aleppo, he is married to the daughter of a traditional Aleppo-in-Flatbush family. The couple have three children and occupy a rented apartment in a two-family house. Beracha's family lived in Tripoli, a medium-sized city situated mid-way between Aleppo and Damascus, where there were few Jews. His family is termed *Sha-wam* (Damascenes) in the social context of the Brooklyn Syrian

community, although his primary associations are with Aleppoans as well as Damascenes.

Beracha's father married a first cousin in Cairo, where her family had moved from Damascus. Unlike his grandfather who was highly respected for his piety and good deeds, Beracha's father was not religious, thus Beracha's religious training was minimal. He spent "only a few years in the Damascene afternoon Talmúd Toráh" with its ineffective methods of teaching. He remembers also a period when he went to a *Spanioli* (Ladino-Spanish, from the Levant) afternoon Hebrew School for a year or so, since this school was very close to his home. Beracha told me that he remembers little of what he was taught and is no longer able to read Hebrew prayers.

His father was the resident-partner in China for a New York company that imported hand-embroidered tablecloths, handkerchiefs and similar fancy linens. Beracha's general education was haphazard since he spent some of his formative years in Brooklyn and others in Shanghai and Cairo. Life in China was not ideally suited to the temperament of his Egyptian-born mother; he accompanied her on extended visits to her family in Cairo, one of which was of three years' duration. What he lacked in formal education he compensated for through his intelligence and experience. In time he established his own business in New York along lines at which he had worked in his father's business. The fancy linens business became increasingly smaller in volume; Beracha underwent several years of difficulty, ultimately having to close the business. Thanks to his ability and versatility he secured a responsible remunerative position with one of the larger Syrian importers of electronics and appears to have adjusted well to this new work.

Beracha has no high regard for religious precepts. "In general I pretty much reject 'the whole idea,' " he remarked. Nevertheless, *Yom Kippúr* observance is "very important" to him. "It would kill me," he said, "not to observe this Holy Day," during which he attends services for an hour or two. (Orthodox Yom Kippúr services are usually, almost nonstop, all-day prayers). He does however observe a full

twenty-four hour fast, refraining from any food and drink. "It is due to the influence of my grandfather," he explains.

Beracha lives in the midst of the Syrian community, and while friendly with some Ashkenazeem, most of his friends are Syrians, both Aleppoan and Damascene. He speaks some Arabic to his wife, and the cuisine at home includes Syrian dishes over the weekend. His home is kosher, if "not very strictly so; maintaining a kosher home is 'for the sake of my in-laws.' " He is careful not to eat non-kosher food in the presence of his teenage son, who receives an Orthodox religious schooling.

Why does he send his son to the Orthodox *Yeshiva of Flatbush* since he has little regard for religion? "I do it for my in-laws' sake, even though the tuition is expensive. When my father-in-law urged me to send my son to the Yeshiva I told him that it is too rich for my pocket-book." His father-in-law largely subsidizes his grandchild's tuition. Beracha prefers the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* for his own son over the Aleppoan and Damascene day schools; he sees it as more "modern," and his son can mingle with non-Syrian Jewish children as well.

His leisure activities are largely those of the middle-class body of his fellow Syrian and non-Syrian Americans; watching popular television programs as well as movies about every week, and an evening at cards, along with his wife, at the home of friends or one of his several in-laws. He subscribes to a popular news weekly and reads one or two novels a year.

Beracha knows of many Syrian-Ashkenazic marriages in the community and while he "neither approves nor disapproves" he believes marriages to Syrian mates are "more comfortable and easier" since the mates have the same background. At the same time he observes that marriages to *"JAY-DUBS"*, (Ashkenazeem, explained elsewhere) are successful, "they get along fine;" although he adds, *JAY-DUBS* don't come from a tradition of close family ties, like us *'S-Y's'* (Syrians)."

He is well integrated in the community and as he was observed at a "blood-doner" afternoon held in a Syrian synagogue, Beracha appeared to be highly popular with a

large number of those in attendance, mostly Aleppoans. Beracha confirmed my observation that indeed, the social standing of the Jews from Damascus has risen in recent years. He attributes this to the financial attainments of some of the Damascenes, and to the success the Damascene leadership had achieved in their efforts on behalf of the community's religious life.

Family Portrait of (C) "Chira"

Chira is a member of a *Signor* family with its history of leadership in the communal and religious life in Aleppo, carried these qualities to New York when Chira's father immigrated in 1924.

The Old World reputation of a prestigious family *(signors)* of which he, Chira is now the head is more important among those of the older generation. For the second and third generation American-Syrians, the *signors* and their prestige is a hazy impression. Interestingly enough, even among themselves a title honorifically and playfully applied to a friend in jest is still *"Signor,"* — in the manner that one may call a friend "Professor." They know nothing of the history or activity of these European-originated Aleppoans, but the prestige remains, part, (albeit dwindling) of the folk-lore of "Aleppo-in-Flatbush."

The migration had been from Cairo where Chira's father, as a young man, had chosen to make his home. In Cairo, Chira's father had met and married the daughter of an Ashkenazi Palestinian family which had lived in Jerusalem for many generations. Although the family retained its use of Yiddish language and customs, there was a friendly relationship with Sepharadeem. Thus, while in Aleppo itself marriage to an Ashkenazi was unlikely (since there were virtually none in the city), in Jerusalem and Cairo social barriers were lower. A somewhat head-strong man, Chira's father did not hesitate to marry an *Ashkenazeet;* to bring up a family of three sons and six daughters, in Cairo.

Chira's father, faithful to the family tradition of religiosity and public service, was active in Cairo's synagogue and com-

munity affairs. When Rabbi Solomon Schechter of England *eventually* became aware of the later-to-be-famous treasures of the Cairo *Geniza* which lay neglected in the synagogue of Fostat. – "old Cairo" – he asked the Community heads for permission to take away "some of those old papers." Chira's father recognized the potential importance of the priceless *Geniza* fragments and fought strenuously to restrain the removal of these documents, which date from the 8th to the 13th century, c. e. Chira's father lost the battle, and in 1896-1897 Schechter took possession of most of the *Geniza* material.

Chira's oldest sister living Cairo was courted by an American cousin Antebi (described in another of these Family Portraits) and married him in 1921; reluctantly at first because of the need to live in New York, separated from her family. A very few years later she persuaded her family to join *her* in New York where her brothers and sisters married and prospered.

Chira succeeded his father in quietly heading a small organization the latter had founded to aid the needy Syrians in the then-Palestine, as well as in Aleppo and Damascus. With the virtual imprisonment and restriction under which present-day Jews are compelled to live in Syria, the Near-East Relief Society plays a crucial role in arranging for important measures of aid.

Like his father Chira married an Ashkenazi young woman. And like the *signoreem* of early Aleppo he is removed from participating in Aleppoan synagogue affairs. His wife brought with her the Ashkenazi stereotype-opinion of the Syrian Jews. Thus she was known to say "Don't call my husband Syrian – he is an Egyptian!" Perhaps due to her influence and perhaps in reaction to his father's powerful personality, Chira prefers to worship in a nearby Ashkenazic synagogue, where services *are* more quiet.

He became active in the operation of the prestigious (Ashkenazic) *Yeshiva of Flatbush* where his fours son were students; in time he became president of the school. His outstanding leadership, sacrifice – commitment of time and money – saw him re-elected. It was under his leadership that the imposing building at Avenue J and East 17th Street in Flatbush was

constructed to house the Yeshiva's high school. During Chira's presidency factional disputes broke out when a new group sought to make the school ultra-orthodox. In the heat of the battles the new faction centered its criticism on the incumbent Chira, surreptitiously fanning the opposition by attacks on the "Arabs" on the Executive Board.

Chira's feelings were deeply wounded and he withdrew from all activity at the Yeshiva, as did his wife, the hard-working and successful head of the school's sisterhood. Mrs. Chira was embittered by the unexpected hostility of some in the Yeshiva leadership and now looks upon the Syrians with greater friendliness and warmth.

Chira's four sons graduated from the *Yeshiva of Flatbush* and went on to college. The oldest married a Syrian-American young woman and entered into his father's successful business — the manufacture of children's apparel. Another son also married a Syrian girl and went on to a Syrian cousin's business.

Chira's oldest brother had spent his youth away from the parental home in Cairo as a medical student in Berlin. He married there and came to the United States to join his family and to practice medicine. Embittered by the lack of Syrian acceptance he removed to New Jersey to a successful career, socially isolated from the Oriental community in Brooklyn.

Yet another brother is a business partner with Chira. Before migrating to America he married a childhood sweetheart in Cairo, an *Ashkenazeet,* part of the large community there, originally from Eastern Europe. Never close to his father and his insistent religious interest, Chira's brother is not a member of the community; he makes his home in Manhattan.

Chira's oldest sister had married a Syrian, residing in Cairo, where they lived until the death of her husband. Another sister married a cousin in New York, a not uncommon marriage among Jews from the Orient. (In Arabic culture, a marriage between a woman and her first cousin, who is often her father's brother's son ("FBZ") is so common that a traditional woman will always address her husband as *ibn-ámmii,* "son of my paternal uncle", even when he is *not* a relative. It is rude *not* to address her father-in-law as "uncle,"

in the "father's brother" form. Her mother-in-law she calls *m'raht'Ammi* "wife of my paternal uncle".) Yet another sister married a *Cairo* Ashkenazi in New York. Still another sister married a Syrian *Franji,* a member of a prominent Italian-Aleppo family. The youngest sister is married to a New York Ashkenazi.

Chira is well regarded by Syrians in the community both for his financial generosity to local and overseas institutions, as well as his almost single-handed control of the Near-East Relief Society, an organization whose annual call for contributions meets with ready response.

Family Portrait of (D) "Dayan"

Elsewhere I spoke of Aleppoans who migrated to urban centers outside the United States. Some Aleppoans had gone to Egypt, and others to Manchester, England. The migrating "unfortunates" who were unable to clear the U.S. Immigration Health authorities went to Latin America. Dayan's family had migrated from Aleppo to *several countries.*

I interviewed Dayan in New York where he now lives; he is indeed of Aleppoan stock but is not a part of the Community in Flatbush. He is, however, highly conscious of, and not a little proud, of his ancestry and Aleppoan background.

Dayan's father, he related to me, was like the Biblical Samson, a physically powerful individual, who as a youth would put any Muslim in his place when gangs of Muslim boys harassed and sometimes attacked Jewish boys and men. Dayan's father told him that this harassment sometimes (rarely) made it impossible for a Jewish funeral cortege to proceed. The coffin was abandoned on the roadside while the mourners fled to safety, but not when Dayan's father was in sight. One day a sign painted on a wall with insults to the Muslims and the Prophet Mohammed, was attributed (falsely) to Dayan's father, the defender of his people. A friendly Muslim quietly advised him to discreetly disappear from the scene, at least for a short period. The hint was taken to heart, and in 1903 Dayan's father left the country to join an uncle who had found his way to Argentina. A restless and

peripatetic individual, Dayan's father soon left Buenos Aires for Manchester, England. There he married the daughter of an Aleppoan couple, and soon after, Dayan was born: "I was born in the *Bahsita* [the Jewish Quarter of Aleppo] of Manchester, in *Cheatham Hill,* which was the predecessor to the middle-class *Disbury* where the Syrians now live." Soon, Dayan's father arranged for his parents in Aleppo to join him in the better life he had established in England. Before long, Dayan's father, restless again, travelled to Panama, to trade in textiles, at times as a shopkeeper, at other times as an itinerant, a peddler. He moved on to Costa Rica and shortly thereafter to Columbia.

Dayan said little about his mother but spoke repeatedly and admiringly of his father's strong personality and religiosity; the influence of his father is readily apparent in Dayan. Although with little formal education, Dayan's father was highly respected by all who met him. He stood particularly high in the esteem of the Ashkenazeem who constituted the majority of the Jews there. (There is a considerable-sized colony of Aleppoans there now.) "My father initiated *kashrútt* and *shehittáh* [kosher food and ritual slaughtering] in Columbia, Costa Rica and in Panama," he told me. Because there was no Hebrew School, Dayan's father was his teacher in religious subjects. The example of his father (who observed 13 twenty-four hour fasts every year) made a particularly strong impression on Dayan. His father's interest in Jewish studies, the high regard in which he was universally held, along with his own resistance to the insistent but clumsy efforts of the Jesuits at converting the Jewish children attending the *only* schools available in Columbia, served to ingrain in Dayan a strong and lasting identification with Jewish religion, traditions and history. To strengthen his Jewish education, Dayan's father enrolled him in a "rabbinical school" outside Paris for three years, from the age of eleven until fourteen. Following that he attended secular schools in Manchester, where he lived with his grandparents, and thus came to speak Arabic fluently.

Later Dayan spent some years in the Syrian Community in Brooklyn where he met the cousin he married. He did not elaborate in this phase of his history, except to state that it

was not a fortuitous union and soon ended with a divorce. After serving in the U.S. Army in World War II, he subsequently made his home in the United States.

Unlike the majority of Syrian youth who followed their father's careers, Dayan did not enter the field of dry-goods. Nor, despite his positive and fond attachment to his father's traditions, does he form a part of the New York Syrian community. "My father visited Aleppo-in-Flatbush but he didn't like the life there, nor the community," Dayan related. "He considered the Brooklyn Syrians here somewhat backward."

Thanks to his skill in English, French and Spanish, as well as Arabic and Hebrew, Dayan secured a responsible position with an international political organization based in New York. He observes the Jewish Holidays, principally by attendance at one or another of the large Manhattan synagogues and particularly *Shearith Israel,* the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue on the West Side. He does not have many close friends who are Syrians. "They do not love hiking and snowshoeing as I do," he explained laughingly.

Dayan did join in a (non-Syrian) Sepharadi effort to create an umbrella organization to unite all Sepharadeem in the United States. This effort was not a success, however, although a parallel organization, the American Sephardi Federation is now functioning – with only limited support by the Syrians. Having reached mandatory retirement age at the international organization, Dayan is now teaching at Columbia University, with a bow, perhaps, to the memory of his father.

Family Portrait (E) "Eliachar"

Eliachar and his siblings are second generation Americans, the children of an "early settler." Their father was a partner in "Oriental Jobbers" the dry-goods store and warehouse center, where in the early history of the Syrian-Jewish community in America, the newly arrived immigrants made their social and commercial headquarters. Eliachar's father, *Musa, ibn'Eliahu,* (Moses the son of Eliahu, to distinguish him from

Musa ibn Murad, the son of Murad, a cousin), originated in Damascus, where he was employed as a mosaic setter on inlaid decorative furniture. In New York virtually all his activities and his associations were with *Halabiyeh* (Aleppoans). Early in his marriage in Damascus he became the father of a son and daughter. Soon after, his wife died. He remarried, an Aleppoan woman in New York and fathered a large number of children.

Of the families examined in this study, few exhibit a like amount of dispersion and as great a variety of assimilation. While their father was still living, the two children from the first marriage left New York; the daughter and her husband for the Middle West to operate their own "Madiera Linen Shop" — at least one of which was found in every sizeable town in the country during the 1930's. Her seemingly incorrigible "black sheep" brother had reached a point of wildness — to enlist for several years in the peacetime army; in the early thirties this was an unprecedented and shocking move for a Jewish-Syrian. His home life had been often stormy; living with a step-mother and young half-brothers and sisters a source of tension and frustration. These young half-brothers and sisters received the affection and tenderness which had been denied him because of the death of his mother in his early childhood. Had there been a feeling, too, that the "new" children were being favored over him by his father? Eliachar believes that his half-brother and sister barely concealed their antipathy toward his mother; their feelings for the younger generation of children were tinged with seething hostility; raging against the usurper of their dead mother's position and her "taking their father away" from them.

Upon army discharge, this step-brother operated a "linen store" in New York, and after several years he was lured away by the siren-call of the "100 percent location" — a store centrally located — in the heart of a large Midwestern city. Despite an apparently highly successful operation, he was to shock the fancy-linen wholesalers in New York by announcing imminent bankruptcy. He persuaded most of his creditors to accept a fraction of their debt in settlement. In the interim he married an Ashkenazic girl, and moved to Califor-

nia, where he reportedly maintains little connection with the small community of Syrians in his town. His older sister subsequently moved to the same location, where she and her husband amassed a considerable fortune through the operation of "discount stores" and the acquisition of real estate.

We turn now to Eliachar's siblings, the children from the father's second marriage — four boys and three girls. All were educated in the public schools of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where the family resided, in the heart of the Syrian community. Most of them graduated high school, although only one attended college. The boys each spent a few years at the afternoon Talmúd Toráh Hebrew school. Their father, like many Jews from Damascus, was observant — but not rigorously — in the practice of Orthodox Jewish religion, and had made no determined effort to inculcate it in his children. The oldest of Eliachar's brothers began his working career as a "high-pressure" salesman in a Syrian-owned lined shop catering principally to tourists. "I did not like the practices of these stores," he related, "although I was a 'crackerjack' while I worked there." He chose instead to seek work in linen stores outside of New York where the business was "legit" (legitimate). It was his intent to learn "all phases of merchandising including the knowledge of window dressing." After his discharge from the Army at the end of World War II, however, he raised the capital necessary to open a hosiery store in New York from which he earns a comfortable living. Although married to a half-Syrian woman, he lives in a suburb with no interrelationship with other Syrians.

Another brother, interested in medicine but unable to gain admittance to an American medical school because of anti-Semitic restrictions, went to Beirut to study. Upon his return, he married the daughter of one of the richest Syrians and established a practice as a surgeon specializing in the treatment of carcinogenic ailments. Highly skilled and successful, he is well-regarded in his field — especially by Syrians.

Still another brother met and married here, a Syrian girl, from Bogota, Colombia (where there is a small and prosperous Syrian community), the daughter of a wealthy Syrian textile tycoon who migrated to Colombia from New York.

Glowing family promises of business success in their enterprise induced him to move to Columbia. After several years of work *in his own* business in Columbia as a textile printer, he moved his business to Venezuela. Here he subsequently took a position as director of a large American-owned textile printing plant and remains in Caracas in a financially rewarding post. His relation to the small Syrian colony in Caracas is unknown.

Questioned about the dispersal of his family, Eliachar remarked: "Isn't mobility the pattern of many Americans?" After some reflection he added: "It may have been due to unconscious 'sour grapes.' We tended not to be community-minded possibly because of my father's feelings of frustration and disappointment in his later years. In the Depression of the Thirties, my father was wiped out, he lost his store and his business. As a result he seemed to feel that he no longer commanded the respect and regard that he had been accustomed to as a well-to-do merchant. That embittered him toward the community, and somehow this communicated itself to us. The community, it seemed to us, respected only those with money; when my father was doing well, it was 'different'. Since the community was treating "Pappa" so shabbily we turned against it."

In answer to an inquiry as to what had particularly influenced his attitude to Syrians, Eliachar commented:

> "The community exerts pressures on all who associate themselves with it. One of them is to conform — not to try new areas; the pressure is very strong in the matter of religion. With the Depression things changed with my father even in religious practice. Before, he never failed to take us to the synagogue every single Saturday. After the crash he didn't seem to care anymore. It wasn't only the financial effect of the crash on my father that affected me. I began to rebel inwardly, there was something I wanted from my father, a deep need for affection which I resented not receiving from him — after all he had a lot of other children . . .; my rebellion was directed against what was close to my father — religious observance, attendance at Hebrew School and so on.
>
> I would play hookey, but only from Hebrew School, not

public school. There I did very well. I enjoyed my studies and got a lot of praise for my ability to draw. On the other hand, my experience with Hebrew was very bitter. The 'rabbi' was a mean character; he made difficulties for me when I transferred there from the Damascene school where I had been liked, received encouragement and did well. The Aleppoan 'rabbi'-teacher made life miserable because of my Damascus background, I think. This was a part of the cause of my rebellion."

A sensitive and bright boy was thus turned away from a positive association as a member of the community. Eliachar believes that his brothers responded in the same way. His oldest brother is in the hosiery business he notes, lives in a suburb in which he is the only Syrian, and his younger brother married into the Bogota-Syrian family, the wealthy textile manufacturers mentioned earlier. The physician brother married the "princess in the Syrian community," Eliachar remarked, since her father was then the leading and richest member of the community. This brother is only partially a part of the community since he chose to live in a nearby Long Island suburb which has a small number of Syrian residents. Eliachar believes that his brother's popularity as the preferred surgeon among Syrians qualifies him as a member of the community — "if only in a limited sense." Both the physician and his wife are more assimilated than the majority of Syrians. While his closest friend is a fellow-Syrian in the suburb in which they live, they both socialize primarily with Jews of East European origin.

Eliachar's three full-blood sisters have married Syrians. One of the husbands operates a modest linen and novelty store; another is employed as a salesman in a Fifth Avenue shop catering largely to tourists; and the third is a successful manufacturer and importer of babywear from the Philippines. All of Eliachar's sisters reside in Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

The youngest son, Eliachar is now fifty years of age. As a youth he was involved in friendships with other Syrian boys in his neighborhood, and even then he showed a strong predilection for art. After graduating from high school and winning a scholarship, he attended an art school. Soon after,

he established himself as a commercial artist in a studio in Manhattan while devoting his spare time to the fine arts.

Eliachar's searching spirit led him to the field of photography, which he soon made his career and avocation. His original (private) work in photography won him important international critical praise; an important Italian photography magazine recently devoted a long appreciative critique to Eliachar's work. There was the possibility of a one-man exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, initiated by the highly admiring Alfred Steichen, the dean of American photography. Unfortunately Steichen died before plans for the exhibition could be completed; but *Harper's,* the venerable monthly, for the first time in its long history featured a photographic essay based on his work. He was responsible for the work in a photographic volume, *Saloon Society,* describing facets of life in and around Greenwich Village, and recently published a photography book *"Russian Portraits,* done in Moscow. His living is made through his striking commercial photography, however. He sometimes teaches at the New School, recognized as an outstanding artist in his specialty.

Eliachar was not ready for marriage until the age of forty, when he married an Ashkenazic young woman, also a painter. As with many mature Syrians, his wife is considerably his junior — by seventeen years. (Would a 'youth' marry a middle-aged woman?) He remains thoroughly young in his thinking and activities.

Eliachar attributes his delayed marriage to a dichotomy he was not easily able to resolve; his unfettered life in the unconventional world of Greenwich Village artistic life, on the one hand, and Syrian and Jewish acculturation on the other. Although deeply drawn earlier to some lovely companions they were not of Syrian origin — nor Jewish. Eliachar's wife, now the mother of two children, continues to paint assiduously, and has met with some success and recognition. The family resides and works in the Twenties in Manhattan near the East River, in an old brownstone which they purchased.

Family Portrait of (F) "Franji" (An Oral History)

My family has traditionally been a very religious one; religiosity is its dominant characteristic and while I am not now a practitioner of strict religious rituals the family customs seem to 'hover' over me.

The first family influence I sensed, while in Aleppo, was my maternal uncle's, a reserved, gentle, wealthy aristocratic and childless *Signor* of Italian origin, whose sole devotion was to the study of religious literature, and to welfare activities. As a child, to visit his home in the vast 17th Century private caravanserai in the midst of the ancient *souk* of old Aleppo was an exciting treat, especially so because an orphaned cousin whom my childless uncle brought up as his son owned and played the only piano I had ever seen. What ecstasy it was to secretly tip-toe into the formal *salon* and to sound a few notes. Despite my uncle's piety and highly revered religious standing, my cousin had somehow gotten his own way — to take piano lessons from the Maronite nuns in the nearby convent. No piano lessons were available among Jewish Aleppoans — *nor another piano!*

I was less than three years old when my father left Aleppo in 1910, in the company of one of my four brothers, a sixteen-year-old youth, to go to New York. The *oldest* brother, already associated with my father in the importation of chemicals and sundries, stayed behind to continue what remained of my father's ruined business. Two years later he, too, left hurriedly because he was threatened with imminent conscription into the Turkish Army. After five years in America, my father was able to send us money to join him.

In anticipation of this I was being treated for a mild eye infection — but not trachoma, the highly contagious eye-infection which can lead to blindness. Since the family had heard that eye infections could be the cause of being denied entry into America, my mother was eager to have my infection cured before we set out on our journey. *Hakeem-il-Inglizi,*

("the English doctor") was selected, a highly regarded physician — next-best to the outstandingly leading doctor in all of Aleppo — a Dr. Altounian. (The latter, an Armenian native of Aleppo had studied medicine in America and returned there for new techniques at regular intervals of several years.)

Hakeem-il-Inglizi, (the 'English' Doctor); it was only many years later in New York that I discovered that indeed he was "Dr. Pepper," a Scottish missionary sent to convert the Jews. Although he treated the poor without charge he was so highly regarded by the well-to-do who did not wish to patronize Dr. Altounian, that he had a busy private practice.

The poor came to his clinic in the old Jewish quarters on specified days. They gathered in the *hohsh,* court-yard, to listen to his sermon before he would treat them, a sermon drawn from the New Testament, that was doubly unintelligible; the would-be patients who submitted resignedly to the inevitable sermon could understand nothing of the educated-Arabic of the text given; even worse was Dr. Pepper's somewhat difficult pronunciation of the language. After one such sermon, Dr. Pepper asked a woman if she had understood his sermon. She said:

"Docktohr, it came in one ear and went out the other!"

"Well, then," said Dr. Pepper, seizing her by the arm, "you came in through that front door and you are leaving through this rear door!"

Knowing that my family planned to migrate to America, while treating my eyes which were quickly cured, Dr. Pepper taught me all the English I carried with me to Ellis Island — "one," "two," "three."

We arrived in Ellis Island on a bitter cold day, and because of a misunderstanding were not called for until the following day; thus, we fully experienced Ellis Island for a day and a night. In anticipation of our coming, a top-floor railroad tenement flat had been rented in the East Bronx, where there were some half-dozen Aleppoan families who could not abide living on the lower East Side.

After two years in the Bronx, my family joined the *hegira* to Williamsburg, which was considerably superior to the East Side. The lower East Side with its excitement, however,

forms a vivid part of my early boyhood memory. I went there for Hebrew schooling after public school — at first from the Bronx, later from Williamsburg. How bitterly I regretted leaving the lively East Side with its evening pushcarts lighted by gasoline flares. "How lucky the 'poor' people are, the Syrian boys who still live here on the East Side!" I thought.

My father was always highly regarded in the community, for his Talmudic scholarship and because he, like his forebearers, had been a *tadjer* (merchant) in Aleppo. Enterprising and industrious, he soon abandoned the early door-to-door peddling, to buy locally and to import needle-work articles from Syria. These he sold to "Americans," Ashkenazic manufacturers of waists and dresses. (He had "gone wholesale.") Despite an inability to speak clear English, his customers showed a regard and liking for this scholarly-looking, Van-Dyke bearded, middle-aged immigrant who had begun a new career in a strange country. Sometimes he would speak at home of some good business deal he had consummated, with a favorite manufacturer he called *Madarej.* It was only many years later that I discovered that his dealing was with a company called "Maid-right" which he attempted *to pronounce phonetically.*

Stringent religious practice was a matter of course in my father's home; the real emphasis was on Talmudic scholarship. Earlier, upon his arrival in New York, thanks to his zeal and initiative my father had established adult religious classes even before the loft on Orchard Street that ws to serve as the first Syrian synagogue. It was there, as families with children arrived in America, that the Hebrew school was established. How awesome was the school building's "Howooz-keebar" (phonetic English for *housekeeper,* or janitor).

Though devout in his religious practices my father interpreted religion with as much flexibility as rabbinical canon allowed. Thus while it is forbidden to commence a subway ride once the Sabbath Evening had begun, yet, if we had boarded the train and paid our fare *before* sundown, this was canonically acceptable. However, we were not permitted to carry home the contents of our pockets; a non-Jew was asked to do that. A similar event occurred when one of my brothers

was sailing to Europe on business on a Saturday – he had technically begun his trip on the day *before* the Sabbath by depositing his baggage on the ship. When we went to see him off on the Sabbath, the subway ride was not considered by my father a violation of the Sabbath law, since the train operates even when we were not riding on it; like the current Sabbath self-operating hotel elevators that automatically stop at every floor. A non-Jew carried and paid our subway fare. Such liberal interpretation of the law would be frowned upon today—in the stricter Sha'aré Zión atmosphere, influenced by concern for possible misinterpretation and abuse of *Toráh* laws.

Although the study of the *Toráh* (Jewish Law) was uppermost in my father's mind and the tone of our home was one of strict Jewish observance, the atmosphere was social and convivial. We had occasional parties Saturday evenings, with the inevitable card games. My mother, too, was very devout but nevertheless enjoyed card games very much. My father did not participate; he retired early to read religious texts for many hours. My mother, while religious, was illiterate. In the Arab countries the daughter, even of the wealthy *Signoreem* as she was, was not given formal education in the years of my mother's youth (between 1875 and 1885). (Later, girls who attended school at the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* did learn some Hebrew as well as secular subjects.) Her chief interest in Aleppo, and later in New York was working for the relief of the poor, for which purpose she had begun informal charitable groups. I was influenced by my mother, and as a teenager it was my cheerfully accepted duty to collect discarded clothes twice yearly to be sent abroad to the needy, and to service a *Koopá* ("poor-box") route in the homes of Syrian families – who would surely contribute to the poor-box at every one of their frequent card games – for the multitude of needy in Jerusalem and Aleppo. Highly intelligent and with a sympathetic personality, her influence was felt by many families. Her advice and urgings, principally to keep some families from moving away from New York, where religious observance could be maintained, and her secret financial assistance to many, aided the children of such

families to ultimate prosperity and success, for which they continue to indicate appreciation.

Both my older brothers and my sister had attended the Aleppo *Alliance Israelite Universelle* and so, had a good knowledge of French. In the United States only my youngest brother attained a high school diploma. My next older brother, five years older than I, with two years of high schooling was deemed to have learned "enough"; my father's now flourishing business needed him.

I came to America at age eight. After graduating from grammar school, with six years of attendance, I was kept at home for two years with a "heart-murmur."

After I was graduated from the limited education of the Hebrew school, a rabbi was engaged to tutor me in Talmudic studies for a few years. I, too, attended synagogue services, not only morning and evening on Saturdays, but for a time on *every weekday* morning as well.

When I became sixteen and it was "too late" to go back to school, I was given a job in my father's lace importing business, owned together with my two quite older brothers. I read intensively; and ultimately succeeded in picking up a functioning knowledge of French, Spanish, some acquaintance with Italian and a smattering of Russian. I was, of course, fluent in Arabic — spoken at home — and knew Hebrew from my religious study.

Early in the 1920's the then-Bensonhurst community received a visit from the former Grand Rabbi (the *"Haham Bashi")* of Aleppo, Hezkiah Shabbetai, *an ego'centric,* originally from Turkey or Greece. Because of some differences between my father and the "Grand Rabbi" (stemming from old world disputes), the Synagogue Committee, in its awe, and zeal to demonstrate its loyalty to the *Haham Bashi's* historic exalted office, "invited" my father to leave the congregation, despite the high regard in which he was held; they sent home his prayer-shawl which he customarily kept in the synagogue. In the tradition of the wealthy in Aleppo my father established a *Bet Midrásh,* a privately-owned house of worship and study. The immediate family, some relatives, and a few friends sufficed to constitute an ample *minyan* (quorum). My father

then at the peak of his business success, bought a small house one block distant from the Magen David Congregation on 67th Street in the Bensonhurst sector of Brooklyn and transformed it into his own house of study and prayer. The lower floor formed one commodious room, with the Sacred Scrolls and all the other writings and ritual objects of a synagogue. Shortly after, he visited Damascus where he purchased a large library of important manuscripts and rare Hebrew books which were the property of an impoverished synagogue of that city, thus creating a library for his *Bet Midrásh.* Prayer services were held only on Friday night, on the Sabbath and holidays. On weekday mornings the *Bet Midrásh* was exactly that – a "house of study" for my ailing father and his elderly fellow-scholars. When my father died, my oldest brother took on the responsibility of maintaining the institution. Later, when he too moved from Bensonhurst to Aleppo-in-Flatbush, the synagogue was dismantled. What to do with the quite important library? Donating it to some institution did not appeal to my two (considerably) oldest brothers, for the books would perhaps not be used with the proper veneration nor piety? They decided to sell most of the library, and contributed the proceeds to *Porat Yossef,* the Aleppoan rabbinical seminary in Jerusalem. The remainder of the library is housed in the Sha'aré Zión Congregation on a loan basis.

My second oldest brother, the one who had come with my father to the United States, inherited my father's scholarliness. He is devoted to religious community service and study, mastering several languages and well informed on current affairs. He is a leading light among Syrians in religious erudition. At the same time this brother is strictly traditionalist, his views on the world and the political scene are characteristically highly conservative; usually votes Democratic, however. ("Conservatism means *status quo* and therewith a safeguard for Orthodoxy.") Thus, it comes as a surprise to those who remark on his worldliness and wide information to find that he supports the most Orthodox views. Two of this brother's three sons, men in their thirties, share his views on religious observance. They, too, will not carry even a

handkerchief on the street on the Sabbath. My two brothers and I, born a generation later, developed along less strictly Orthodox lines. Two of us found deep interest in political theory as it affected social betterment and change — a continuation of the influence of my mother. This, like the socialist movements which brought secular learning and philosophy to the *shtetls* and towns of Eastern Europe, led to our becoming interested in Western culture, literature, music, art, etc., and along with this development our religious observance slackened. However, concerned for the esteem and reputation of the family, we were discreet, careful to do nothing that could compromise the family's good name.

One of my brothers married a non-religious Ashkenazi girl; the others found mates of Syrian origin. Three of the brothers generally limit their social life to fellow Syrians. The two younger brothers (of whom I am one) are "marginal men" by the sociologist Stonequist's definition. My brother who is married to the non-religious woman, a highly cultured Russian immigrant, lives at a distance from Aleppo-in-Flatbush. While his social life is largely among Ashkenazeem thanks to his wife's influence, he is fundamentally Syrian-culture oriented.

Early in our marriage we lived in Long Beach, New York, where we formed warm friendships with Ashkenazeem, friendships which continue to this day, thirty years later. My wife, born in Brooklyn — of Syrian immigrant parents — feels a close tie to her family, and for this reason we moved to Brooklyn on the fringe of Aleppo-in-Flatbush. Our children — the first two — were educated without a strong religious influence although we had them attend an afternoon (Ashkenazic) Conservative Hebrew School for a brief period.

Our worldly Ashkenazic friends were shocked and a little horrified that we chose to send our young son to a ('modern') Yeshiva —, twenty years ago this would have been inconceivable to us. Now, in addition to a stronger feeling of cultural and ethnic Jewishness, we hope to have our son escape the withering influence of "hippie" culture or nihilistic, through orderly structured training. My wife, the product of traditional immigrant Syrian family, shares these views.

Despite an absence of parental motivation — both her parents are uneducated — her three of brothers and all four sisters went on to higher education; a brother earned a Ph.D. in physics and produced two text-books; one sister obtained two graduate degrees, and other siblings received B. A.'s. None of them is Orthodox, or very observant, for that matter. Two girls married Syrians, two, Ashkenazeem, one son married an Ashkenazic girl; two remain unmarried, undecided and unresolved "marginal men" whose early training appears to create a dichotomy in their inclinations, between Syrian values and American culture.

Those without a tradition of commerce and suitable family commercial connection are less likely to meet with commercial and financial success. While all my wife's siblings are productively engaged, none has achieved the exceptional financial success of the many Syrians dealing in textile products.

My wife's family, with its background of almost perpetual financial strain — unlike my own middle-class family — curiously, provided the background that led to a good education in the children. Was it the influence of a sensitive and alert older sister, my wife, who set a pattern for those who followed her? (During her high school years she worked after school, but because of the family's urgent financial needs she sometimes absented herself from school to hold onto a full-time factory job.)

Endowed with a modicum of intelligence, tradition and ability, the males of my family have gone on to some measure of financial well-being. The traditional patterns of my father's family with very limited secular education, is characteristic of a large number of the first-generation and early, second-generational Syrians in New York. This lack of much secular education did not deter them from following the mercantile pattern of the old country, with a resulting measure of financial and social reward.

Over the years we have developed stronger Jewish feelings, partly from disappointment at the 'delay' in the arrival of a world socialist millenium but principally due to a deeper

penetration of the lesson of the Holocaust, and the threat to fellow-Jews in the wars on Israel.

We feel strongly the need for measures to insure the continuance of the Jewish people, the importance of safeguarding Jewish traditions which, after withstanding a "Final Solution," are now in danger of disappearing — by attrition through indifference and assimilation, as well as through intermarriage with non-Jews — in addition to the alarming decreasing birth-rate among Jews.

Chapter Nine

The Damascus Immigrants

The Community

IN New York's Syrian community, the dominant influence is that of the immigrants from Aleppo, despite the presence and activity on the part of the Jews from Damascus — who are much fewer in number, approximately 400 families.

This small community has completed a synagogue of impressive size, and its elementary yeshiva boasts an enrollment of close to 800 boys and girls. Unlike the yeshiva of the Aleppoans, a considerable percentage of its student body is constituted of Ashkenazeem, as well as Egyptians and some Aleppoans. A somewhat larger number of Damascene Jews appear to have taken Ashkenazi mates, accounting partially for the large number of recognizably Ashkenazic-names among the students.

History

Damascus, one of the oldest settled areas in biblical history, is more widely known than Aleppo for continuing Jewish residence. Its proximity to Israel and Judea, in ancient times established sizeable communities of Jews there; evidence of the presence of Jews in Aleppo/*Halab*/*Beroea*, during the period of the Second Temple and earlier, is known to have had settlements of Jews from earliest recorded history. Like Aleppo, Damascus was pre-eminent in its commercial

life; it served as an important caravan center linking the Mediterranean coast with Baghdad, Persia, India and China. Damascus was fought over and conquered by the many contending descendants of Mohammed over the centuries. Later, it fell to conquering Byzantium, Persia, Egypt, Slejuks and Mongols; massacres of Jews, Moslems, occurred.

Damascus' closeness to Palestine, Tiberias and Saféd in the Upper Galilee – approximately one hundred miles removed, with Jerusalem barely twice that distance – made it almost a religious suburb of *Eres Israel,* the Holy Land. At the same time, it was also in constant communication with the important religious life of Babel, (Babylon, later, Baghdad) and its great schools, Aleppo, and Jewish centers in Egypt. In various epochs we read of the movement of important Palestinian rabbis who took up residences – and became the heads in the religious life of Damascus.

Estimates of the population there varied sharply in the reports of the travellers who visited the city. Benjamin of Tudela, who was there in 1173, gives the population as three thousand. Petahia of Regensburg, on the other hand, a German contemporary of Benjamin, stated that he found fully ten thousand Jews. Benjamin of Tudela's account appears, to modern-day scholars to be more a reasonable estimate; a population-size similar to that of Aleppo. Later, with a smaller Jewish population than Aleppo it appears to have reached a population crest of approximately ten thousand in the earlier part of our own century, prior to the several waves of emigration.

Yehuda il-Harizi, the Poet-Scholar, another itinerant at about the same time as Benjamin and Pethahia also spent time in Damascus in 1217, singing the praises of its generous patrons, learned rabbis, skilled musicians, and poets in Hebrew, Arabic and Persian; Oriental Music was highly developed and refined by this time. Both Damascus and Aleppo Jews gave considerable importance to their musical life, holding poets and composers in high regard. The most reowned Jewish-religious poet and musician was Rabbi Israel Najjára (of the "carpenter" family). While he was born in Safed in 1551 and lived there in his early years, Damascus

claims him as its son. The Galante rabbinical family, and Rabbi Hayyeem Vital are also counted as Damascenes.

Yehuda il-Harizi and travellers of all ages were lavish in their appreciation of the "luxurious vegetation and flowers, the flowing streams, the sparkling fountains of the city." For Damascus is indeed a cultivated oasis set in the midst of a vast desert land. In this beautiful city many Jews prospered, as they did wherever in the Orient commerce and trade was vigorous. Jewish merchants who engaged in the caravan trade became very rich.

Was it the envious and sometimes fanatical character of the local Moslems that brought about the persecution of the Jews in some periods? Certainly they were subject to the whims of the variety of rulers. Saladin ("il-Ayubbi") and his succeeding Ayubbid dynasty beginning in 1174 C.E. among some rulers, brought peace and prosperity to the Jew of the city. Under the rule of the Ayubbids trade relations were strengthened with Europe. With establishment of colonies of merchants from Genoa and Venice, in the Latin (Crusader) principalities along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, Damascus was to benefit less than Aleppo, later, when many Europeans came to the Near East to trade.

The *Mamluk* pashas of Cairo formerly Turkish slave-soldiers, succeeded in vanquishing the invading savage Mongols led by Ghengis Khan, about 1260 C.E. and took possession of Damascus. This brought continuing grief and tragedy. Attacks were made on the Jews, compelling some to convert to Islam. Jewish women were compelled to wear one black and one red shoe, and the men required to blow a whistle upon entering the *hammams*, the public baths. In 1392 the Jews were accused of having set fire to the central mosque and as a result, a Jew was burned alive and a synagogue was converted to a mosque. (Two years later, however, the synagogue was returned.) Tamarlane (Timur) the Mongol conquered and raped the city in 1401 to the grief of all its inhabitants. Thousands of Jews were massacred. In the succeeding half century that it took the economic life of the city to be restored, Jews once again prospered, led a relatively tranquil life, and their cultural and religious activity flourished.

During the early 16th century, a few of the Jewish refugees fleeing from Spain in 1492 began to arrive in Damascus; many more followed after 1516, when Syria became a part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1521, Rabbi Moshé Basola found approximately 400 Jewish families in Damascus, as well as synagogues belonging to the *must'Arab'eem* (native) Jews and those of Spanish, Sicilian and Mesopotamian origin.[1] Tax rolls of the Ottoman rulers, uncovered by Bernard Lewis, show the fellowing Jewish family breakdown: [2]

1548-1549 (955 Moslem Calendar)

Jewish quarter	101 households
Sicilians	28 households
Must'Arab'een (Native Orientals)	255 households
Karaites in *Bab-il-shark*	36 households
Samaritans	60 households
"Frankish" (West Europeans; *Francos* or *Franj)*	(no figures given)

Somewhat later, under Sultan Suleiman I, (1494-1566) the number of "Frankish" Jewish families *had become 201.* Each category had its own synagogues, burial grounds, rabbis and ecclesiastic courts.

Basola who is our chief source of information also compiled a list of the inhabitants of Salonika in Turkey, which had become the center, attracting along with Istanbul, the largest number of refugees from Spain. In Salonika, there were congregations from each of the many large cities in Spain, Portugal, Italy and from the Kindgom of Sicily, most of them Sepharadeem or followers of the Sepharadi ritual — as well as communities of local Jews. The largest single denomination in Salonika, astonishingly, appeared to be Germans, who also were apparently seeking refuge from the persecutions in their lands. There were no descendants of Germans in Aleppo, to my knowledge, nor mention of them

in present-day Ladino-Sepharadi communities, of which I am aware.

(It was reported to me that a "Bassol" family lived in Tédef, in the early years of this, our own century.)

The influence of the Spanish Jews among who were a number of religious scholars increased, thanks to their high cultural level. Ultimately the descendants of the Spanish Jews abandoned the use of the Spanish language, and the major division between them and the Must'arab'een was removed. They became assimilated with the 'natives'. Family distinctions, based on Italian origin – the "Franj," along with which came extraterritorial rights – were jealously retained by the descendants of these European families and kept them in the upper circles of Damascus' Jewish life. These distinctions accompanied the superior commercial skills of the Europeans; many of them came to possess considerable wealth. The important caravan trade, along with commercial connections with European-Jewish houses, helped perpetuate their economic superiority. Along with commerce and the holding of important government offices – mostly by the *Franj* – an important class of (private) bankers (dealers in specie and exchange), developed, among which was the old, distinguished, Fárhi family. The preeminence of the Fárhi, Mólcho, Attieh, Shema'yah (Angel), Tarrab-Maslaton, and Lisbona families, carried to the early part of our own century.

With the conquest of Syria by Egypt in 1832, the commercial life of Damascus' Jews met with difficulties. The important offices they held, their prominence in commerce, was succeeded by members of the large Christian population, never to be fully recovered. In 1840 the Damascus Affair, the notorious blood libel against the Jews resulted from the "instigation of the Christians." On February 5th of that year Father Tomas, "Badri Tooma" the Franciscan Superior, mysteriously disappeared with his servant. By means of the torture by the *'alah*, ("bastinado,", severe beating of the sensitive soles of the feet – a common means of punishment in the Middle East), a poor Jewish barber was induced to testify that the Jews had killed the two Christians to use their

blood for wine in the Passover ritual. Consequently, several prominent Jews were put to the torture, and a general massacre of the Jews appeared imminent. When the news reached Europe and the United States public indignation was widespread, with large mass meetings attended by Christians and Jews alike. Moses Montefiore, a distinguished English Jewish leader and his counterpart in France, Adolphe Cremieux (who was later to become Minister of Justice and a Senator-for-Life) interceded successfully with the Khedive, the Viceroy of Egypt and the Sultan in Istanbul, who ordered an end to the persecution but not before several Jews had been killed and another had died from torture in prison. It was a young Christian, Austrian Consul in Damascus who had heroically fought to end the persecution by helping to arouse the conscience of the world.

The wide-spread massacre of Christians in 1860 by Muslim and Druze Arabs, was followed by Christian accusations that the Jews had taken part in the disorders and violence and had bought the Christians' stolen property. Many prominent Jews were imprisoned and suffered tortures before intercessions with the Sultan from abroad, put an end to them.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 Damascus' important caravan commerce with India and further east became a trickle. Aleppo's caravan trade was also affected, but not to the same degree, since Aleppo continued to supply large contiguous areas in Southern Turkey, Mesopotamia and in some measure, Persia. Some Damascus Jews, though fewer than Aleppoans migrated to Egypt at this time.

The economic decline in Damascus was followed by a religious, moral and cultural decline, with Jews reduced to local crafts and small-scale commerce. At the turn of the century some Damascus Jewish girls became notorious known as *raqqasatt* "dancers" and entertainers. Jewish religious education and observances declined, the reason why subsequently Damascenes were negatively regarded in terms of their religiosity. I am told that this is the situation prevailing in other countries where considerable numbers of immigrants from Damascus had settled; as in Mexico City, for

example, where Damascenes are thought to be less religiously-observant than their Aleppoan counterparts. Such also was the early reputation in New York of many Damascenes.

The situation has changed, however, in the past few decades. The enterprise and zeal of the Bibi and Maslaton families, leaders among other, has brought about revitalized interest and religious observance. The memory of the numerous distinguished rabbis of Damascus, among who was Najjára, Hayyeem Vital and the several Galante rabbis, has helped to revive a pride in Damascus' distinguished past. Accordingly, New York's Damascenes were inspired to found the *Ahi Ezer* ("Helpful Brotherhood") group of institutions. It is thus that the impressive synagogue was built close to the Aleppoan *Sha'aré Zión* and *B'nai Yoséf.* Two smaller synagogues function under the auspices of Ahi Ezer, one housed in one of their two yeshiva buildings, serving the general Oriental population nearby; the other forms a part of the old *Ahi Ezer* institution near Bay Parkway in Bensonhurst, where most Syrians formerly lived. At this location *Ahi Ezer* operates a Senior Citizen Center with a nominal enrollment of 1800. Approximately 300 individuals are in attendance daily, for meals and recreation.

The yeshiva, housed in two locations was headed by Rabbi Saul Wolf. His dynamism is responsible for the growth of the yeshiva and the establishment of the Senior Citizen center. It was only in 1962 that the yeshiva began its operations, with an enrollment of twelve students and now has an enrollment of about 800 children; many, are not Damascenes, however. Since the tuition is lower than the Magen David's Yeshiva and for reasons of convenience, Aleppoan and Ashkenazi children, as well as Egyptians who live nearby, form a large part of the student body.

The late Rabbi Mordechai Maslaton spearheaded the religious revival. His son *Haham* Sión, is currently the rabbinic head. The Maslaton family (a recognizably Spanish-Portuguese name) had been rabbis in Damascus for many generations — like Aleppoan families, whose generations of males

were almost all rabbis. "Murray" Maslaton, named after his late grandfather, is also a rabbi, trained in the Ashkenazic yeshiva in Baltimore, and zealous in influencing the youth.

Considering the small population of the Jews originating from Damascus, their accomplishments are indeed impressive.

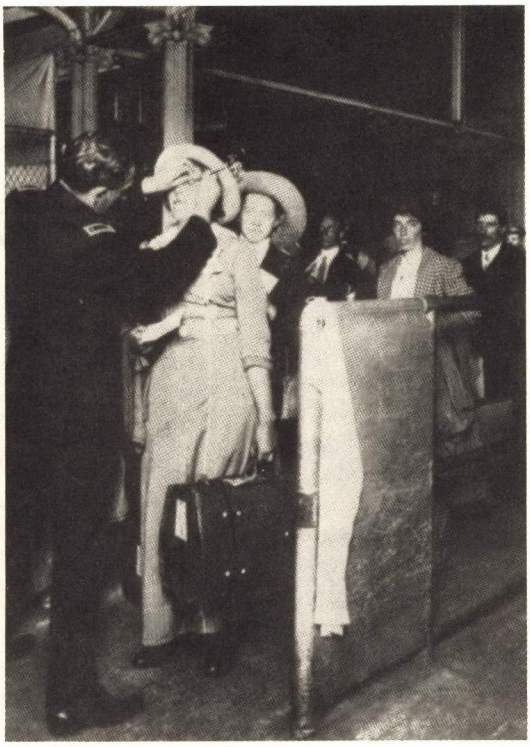
Chapter Ten

Sociological Observations

THE adherance of Syrian Jews to familiar tradition is not based on the laws of abstract social science, of course. However to offer an understanding of why the Jewish immigrants from Syria stubbornly continue in so many old country ways, let us seek an explanation of this phenomenon through the studies of social theorists who have focused on ethnic characteristics.

Aleppo and Damascus Jews have lived in these cities from ancient times, long before their capture by the Islamic Arabs in the 7th Century C.E. Life in the Fertile Crescent followed traditional patterns for countless centuries. Jewish religion, too, demands strict adherence to traditional precepts and modes, combining religious practice with the life and culture of the Arab world; the religious heritage and practice, and the highly traditional cultural environment.[1] A third contributing factor compelling conformity was the status of the Jews as a small and tolerated minority. They lived as a *self-governing* "corporate" entity accounting to the Islamic civil government. The rulings of the city's official rabbinic leaders were tantamount to law, since they were responsible for the *milleh,* the "government-protected" minority ("protected" to collect head-taxes imposed on the Jewish and Christian minorities). Thus the rabbinate was vested with the authority of the civil government to regulate Jewish communal affairs — and the life of their constituents





Above left, aboard an immigrant ship. *Above right,* examining immigrants for trachoma at Ellis Island. *Below,* typical Lower East Side scene, 1900–1910.





"Potatoes, 2¢, Two for 3¢"

Lower East Side merchant by Samuel Zagat (1890–1962).
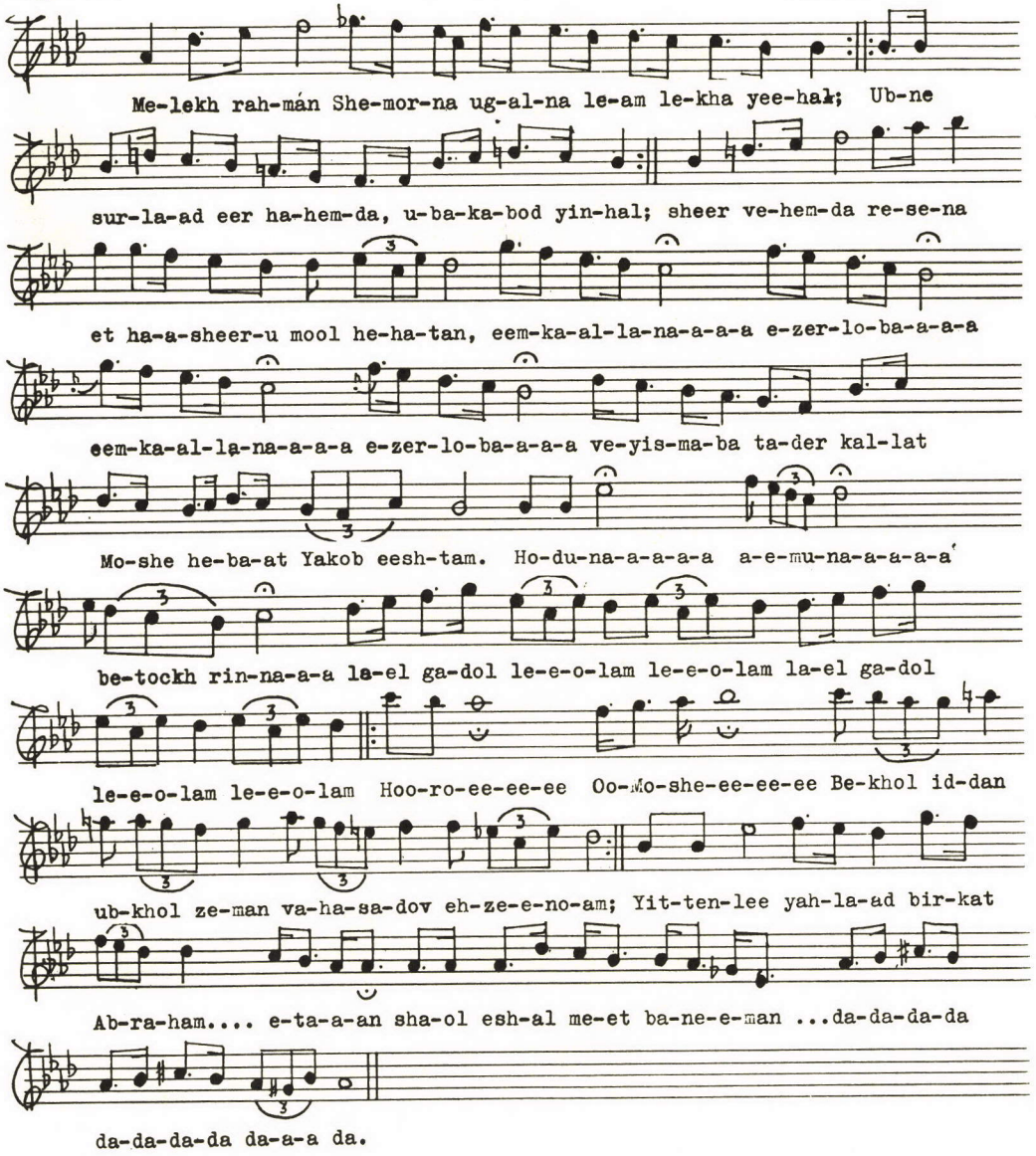
New York City fair-weather streetcar, circa 1910–1925.



Maqam: Aggam

Melekh Rahmán

arr. by
Jos. R.A. Sutton



הודו

נָא עַם אֱמוּנָה. בְּקוֹל רִנָּה לְאֵל גָּדוֹל וְנַעֲלֶם
לְעוֹלָם הוּא רוֹעִי וּמוֹשִׁיעִי בְּכָל־עֵדֶן וּבְכָל־זְמַן
מְחַסָּדָיו אַחֲזָה נֹעַם. יִתֵּן לִי יְהּ לָעַד בְּרֵכַת
אַבְרָהָם. אָב הָאֵיתָן. שָׁאוֹל אֶשְׁאַל מֵאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן.
כִּימֵי שְׁלֹמֹה יָאִיר אֶת הוֹדִי בָּעֲנָל: חפ

דום יא זמאן

מקאם עגם

בימן משה

מלך

רַחֲמָן. שְׁבִיר נָא וּגְאַל נָא לְעַם לְךָ יְחַל. וּבְנֵה
צוּר לְעַד עִיר הַחֲמְדָה. וּבָהּ כָּבוֹד יִנָּחֵל:

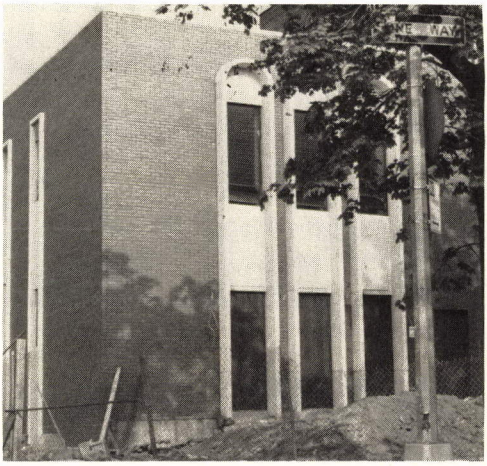
שיר

בְּחִבָּה. רְצֵה נָא עֵת אֲשִׁירָה. מוֹל הֵחֵתָן. עִם
כַּלָּה נָאָה. עֵזֶר לוֹ בָאָה. וְיִשְׂמַח בָּהּ תָּדִיר כַּלַּת
מֹשֶׁה הִיא בַּת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם:

A popular *Pizmon*, "Melekh Rahmán, (Merciful Sovereign)."



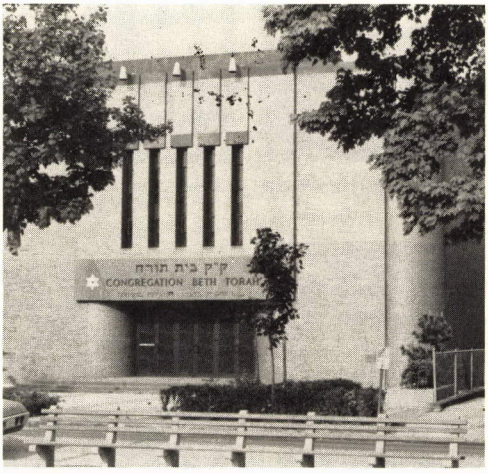
Map of Flatbush, Brooklyn, N.Y. "Stars" indicate location of some Syrian-Jewish religious institutions.



Congregation Ahabá Vé Ahvá under (construction)



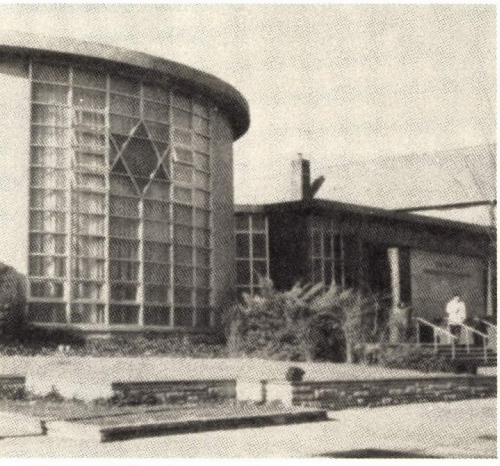
Ahi Ezer Congregation



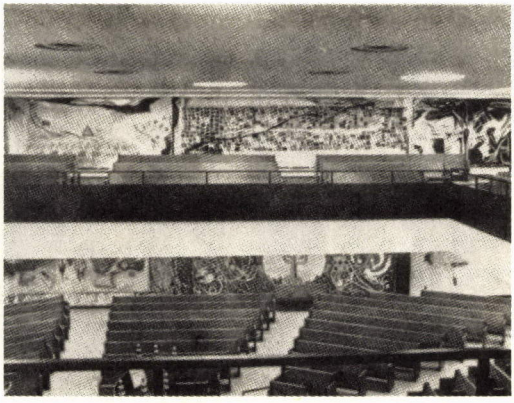
Beth Toráh Congregation



Magén David Congregation



Sha'are Zión Congregation



B'nai Yoséf Synagogue interior, murals by Archie Rand.



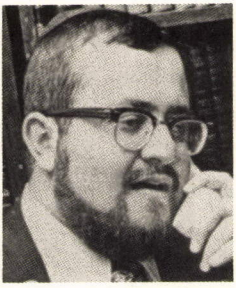
The late Haham Matloub Abadi



Rabbi Baruch Benhaim



Rabbi Chaim Benoliel



Rabbi Isaac S. Dwek



Rabbi Moshe Greenes



Rabbi Abraham Harari-Raful



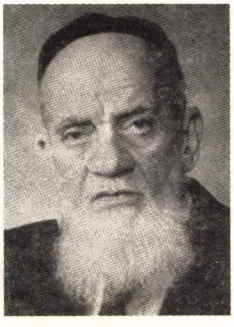
Rabbi Joseph Harari-Raful



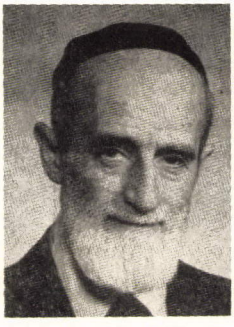
Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht



Rabbi Sholom Himmel



Chief-Rabbi Haham Jacob Kassin



Rabbi Shaul Jacob Kassin



Rabbi Zevulun S. Lieberman



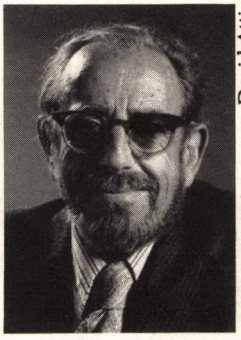
Rabbi Sion M. Maslaton



Rabbi Moshe S. Shamah

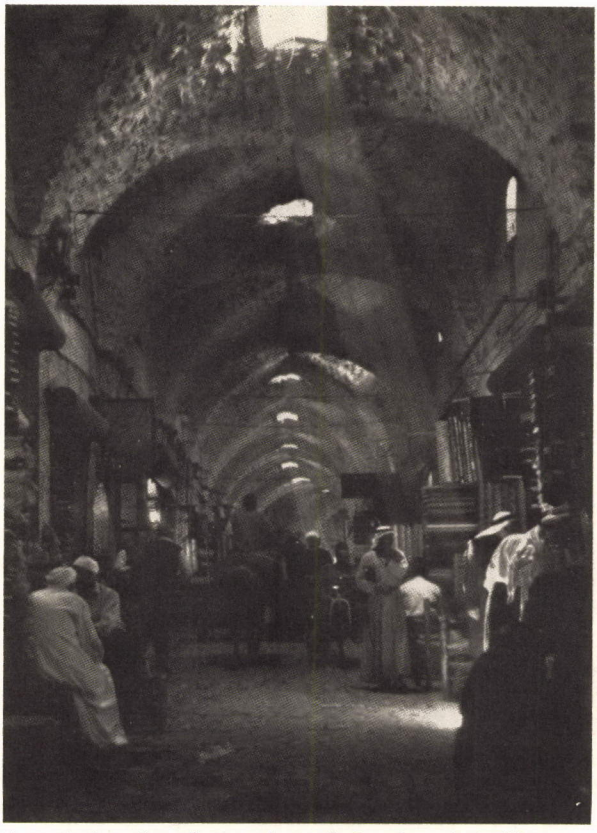


Hon. Stephen Solarz
U.S. Congress



Joseph A. D. Sutton

Geniza letter from a Cairo merchant, 11th century, such as could have been forwarded to an Aleppo commercial correspondent.



A typical *souk* as known by early immigrants to New York; *below,* The famous Citadel, the *(Q)al'a,* or fortress.

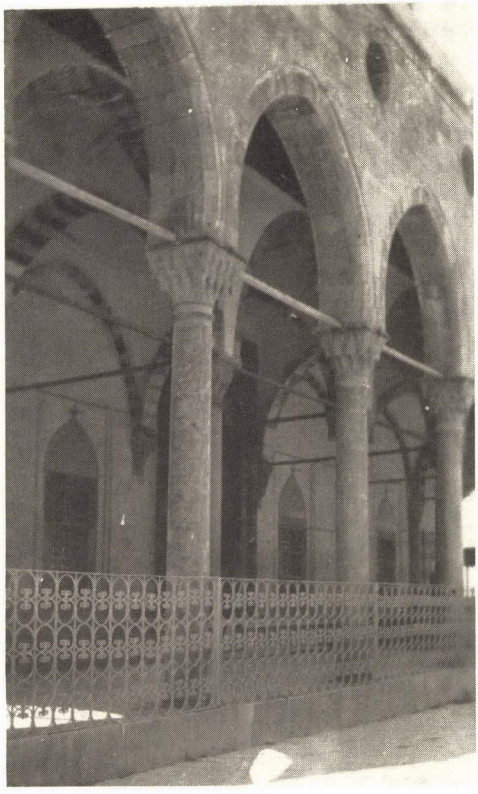


The Clock Tower at Bab-il-Faradj, the ci
center of Aleppo.





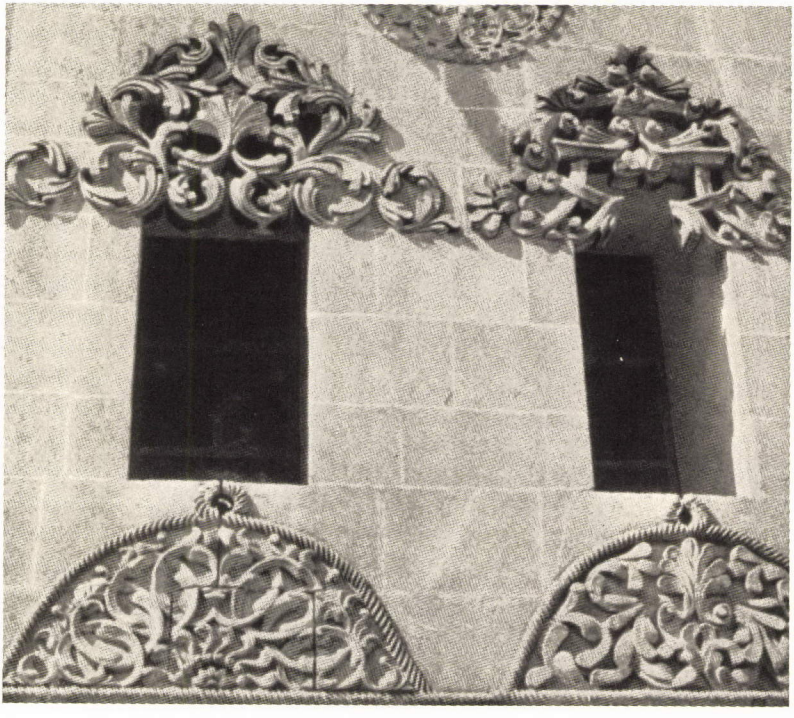
Above, carved stone in wall of The Great Synagogue of Aleppo, dated 241 C.E.; *Below,* scene in the ancient Great Synagogue (Knees't-il Kibbireh) in the *Sa'ha-Bahsita.*

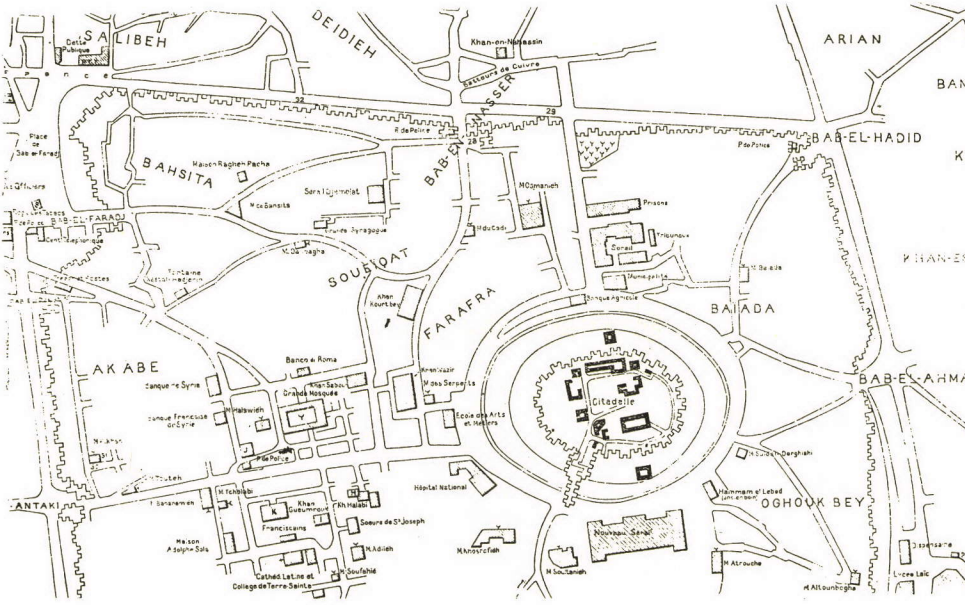






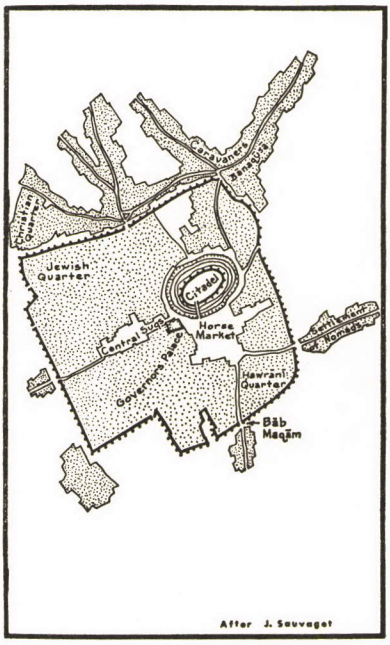
Above left: Ancient residential street within the city walls; *right,* portals of a small (private) caravanserai. *Below,* 18th century stonework decoration a *HOHSH* in Aleppo.



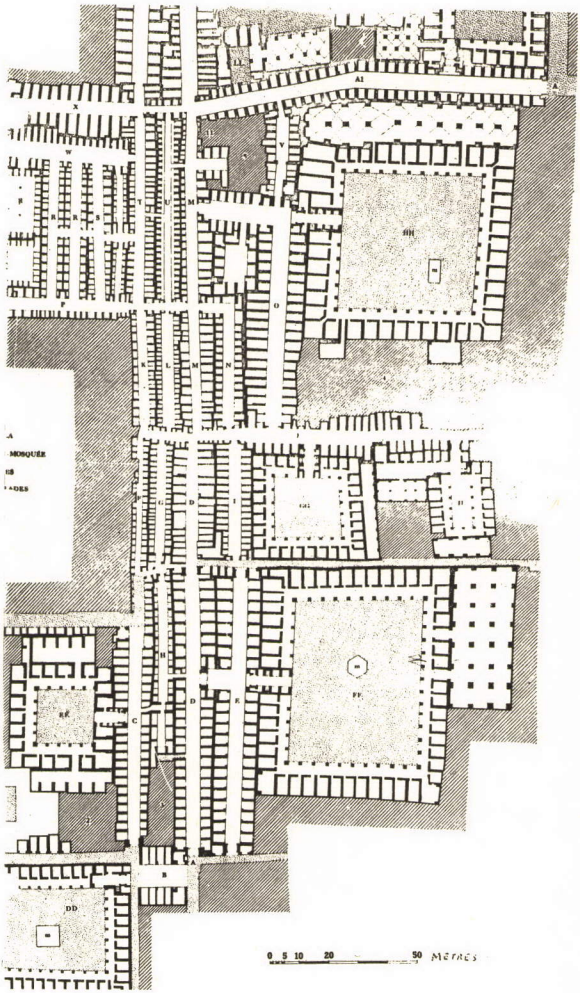


Above, The central area of present-day Aleppo; *below*, detailed map of the ancient city.





Aleppo at the beginning of the 16th century. *Below,* diagram of a part of the *souk* area (to scale). Squares areas are *khans,* formerly caravanseries, now warehouses and offices [HH] (top): Khan il 'H'behl; [FF] (center): Khan il Gimrog; [DD] (bottom): Khan il (Q)assabiyeh; (side): central mosque.

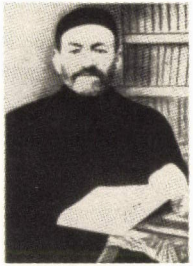




A representative Near East *Menorah* (called a "Shiviti" by European Jews), containing the opening Morning Prayers. *Menorahs* are hung on synagogue walls. This modern example is the work of Shelomo Ya'acob Harari.

Some of Aleppo's distinguished rabbis, described in Appendix VI.


Moshé Harari


Shaul Sutton


Hayeem Ma'ali Tawil


Yoséf Yedid


Ezra Abadi Sh'ayo


Ezra Hamwy-Khabbaz


Shelomo Meir Laniado


Hayeem Shaul Dweck


Eliahou D. Hamway-Khaski


Yomtob Sasson


Aharon Ma'ali Tawil


Eliahou Dweck-Khalousie


Ya'acob Shaul Dweck


Réuben Ancona


Rafael Antebi-Tabbouish


Eliahou Lofez


Nisseem Lofez


Ya'acob Lofez


Ezra Lofez


Yis'haq Laniado


Yis'haq Alfiah



Ya'acob Hayeem Alfiah



Sion Abraham Laniado



Aharon Aboud



Yis'haq Hedaya



Ezra Husney



Menahem Shwekeh



Shalom Hedaya



Yehuda (Aslan) Attiyeh



Shelomo Eliahou Laniado



Aharon Harari-Rafoul



Ezra Harari-Rafoul



Ya'acob Ades



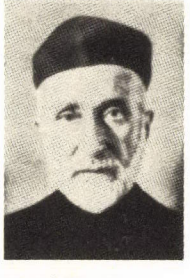
Abraham Salem



Yis'haq Alfiah



Moshé Mizrahi



Moshé Dweck-Kassab



David Sutton-Dabbáh



Yoséf Shrem



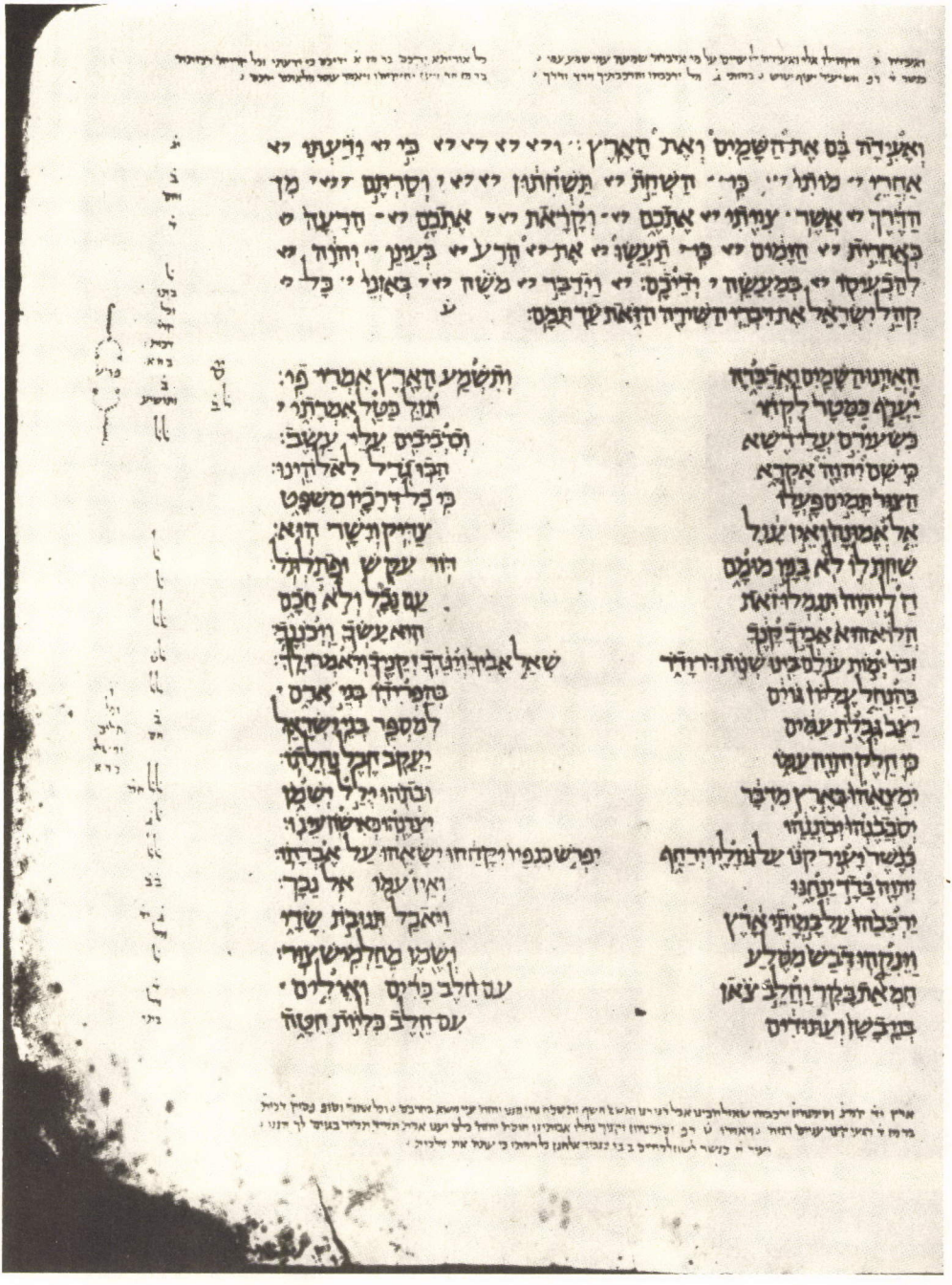
Yis'haq Abadi



Eliezer Yedid



Abraham Dweck-Khalousie



Page from the famous Aleppo Codex, the Keter of ben Asher, "pointed" and corrected, circa 915 C.E.

The pressure to conform in minority situations was studied by the sociologist Robert Merton of Columbia University, who spoke of "... the pressures for conformity which the culture dictates ... by the threat of less than full membership in the society for those who fail to confirm." [2] The noted anthropologist Ferdinand Tönnies punctuated Merton's point when he wrote:

> What is at the same time forbidden and demanded through custom and religion (through *religion* as part of *custom* and through *custom* as part of *religion)* is sacrosanct ..., hence the relation between custom and religion is of immeasurable significance within the development of a culture.[3]

This pressure to conform, the sacrosant hold of culture and tradition was especially powerful on the Syrian Jewish minority.

Upon landing in the United States why did the Syrian immigrants continue in the tradition of the Old World, unlike the multitudes, of Jewish, and other immigrants who arrived in the same era? The answer will be sought as we examine the differing responses by other immigrants to the new environment, the huge numbers that poured through Ellis Island — the Irish, Italian, Greeks, Slavs, Eastern European Jews as well as the smaller numbers of Sepharadeem from Salonika, Izmir, Constantinople and from the Balkans.

Distinct Identity, Solidarity

The continuing inter-dependence of the Syrians in the United States appear to be the result of their traumatic encounter with the American and East European culture in the early immigrant days on the East Side. Jews in Syria, always a homogeneous entity, were drawn together even more tightly when, as immigrants they faced unfamiliar, threatening situations. Thrust into the midst of a new and seemingly hostile environment they felt compelled to draw together for comfort — and survival. In time, with the estab-

lishment of a community life they were able to maintain and foster their sub-cultural distinctiveness.

The ability to continue as a separate community is partially explained by Tönnies' description of osme of the characteristics of the *gemeinschaft,* the face-to-face community. The characteristics he names apply to Aleppo-in-Flatbush, as much as Aleppo in Syria, ". . . community by blood, of place, of mind, language, neighborhood . . . friendship . . . , with community having . . . common will, understanding, natural law, language, mother-tongue, concord . . ." [4]

The creation of a distinctive community in New York was fostered by the immigrant experience, and was merely a continuation of the *gemeinschaft* life the Syrians had led in Aleppo and Damascus. Members of the community as we observed, live side-by-side within the confines of their 'village' in Flatbush, just as in Aleppo in earlier eras, where they had lived in the almost exclusively Jewish ancient quarters of *Bahsita* and the *'Sa-ha.'* Thus, the face-to-face community of the old country was transported with the immigrants.

The anthropologist Robert Redfield, in his classic study of a Yucatan-Indian group *could well have been writing about the New York Syrians.* He states:

> "The members of the folk society have a strong sense of belonging together, surrounded by hostile elements. Communicating intimately with each other, each has a strong claim on the sympathies of all other . . . they emphasize their own mutual likeness and value themselves as 'we', as against all other as 'they', . . . thus . . . small, isolated, non-literate [a trait not applicable to Syrian Jews] and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group society, . . . a little world by itself, in which recurrent problems of life are met by members in the same conventional ways, so long practiced as to form a coherent and self-consistent system. Such a system is what we mean in saying that the folk-society is characterized by a culture . . . though in the end, the activities of the society seem at a moment in time as diverse, while *interdependent* and *consistent.*" [5] [my italics]

The Melting Pot

The enormous influx of immigrants settling in New York's Lower East Side placed a heavy burden on the facilities available, in housing, sanitation and health. The pressures of immigrant life became the focus of interest of both the city authorities, the politicians, as well as social scientists and those concerned with social welfare. They believed that in the same manner that earlier waves of immigrants had adjusted and had been assimilated, the new immigrants would soon inexorably, imperceptibly, be molded into – "Americans."

True, the earlier immigrants had been Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians, "ethnic cousins", nevertheless it was expected that the diversity of ethnic newcomers, too, would soon be assimilated in the Melting Pot. One of the most enthusiastic exponents of this expectation was Israel Zangwill, a popular English-American Jewish novelist, pamphleteer and playwright. In a drama entitled "The Melting Pot" one of Zangwill's characters exults:

> American is God, crucible, the great melting pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see you at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to, the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jew and Russians – into the crucible with you. God is making the American.[6]

There were important differences between the East European Jews and the Syrian Jewish immigrants in terms of each's attitude to their old homelands. While Jewish life in the Slavic lands dates back several centuries, their Jewish settlements there formed "islands," within the native cultures around them. Their language, Yiddish, was a distinctive and exclusive one that they had developed, along with their

Jewish customs. The Jews of Aleppo and Damascus on the other hand, shared fully in the Arabic life and language for countless centuries, in the cuisine and entertainments, in the totality of Arab culture and custom.

With the Ukrainian Chmielnitzki pogroms of 1648, which cost the lives of perhaps half a million Jews and the sacking and destruction of hundreds of Jewish villages, Jews everywhere were plunged into sorrow and despair. Persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe continued from that time but only on a relatively minor scale and with compensative infrequency. Conditions changed however — for the worse, as we read in Davidowicz's *The Golden Tradition* (New York, 1967, p. 10).

Beginning in 1850 the Czarist government had again begun physical assaults on the Jews in its vast Empire; Jews in Eastern Europe began to suffer civil discrimination; restrictions were placed on where they were permitted to live, what occupations they could follow, the educational limitations, to which were added occasional sporadic outburst of violence. Beginning in 1881, organized violence — pogroms, became increasingly, alarmingly widespread. The aim of "converting one-third of the Jews" did not succeed, nor the intent "to starve a third" of the Jewish population.[7] Hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of Jews *did* flee the country, and when the majority of them came to the *"Goldene Medina"* (the Golden Land), they harbored a feeling bordering on hatred for their former homelands where they had led a harsh life. They looked forward with eagerness and hope for a peaceful undisturbed life, and to sharing in the American dream of prosperity.

Syrian immigrants, however, saw things differently. When they came to America it was with a bitter-sweet recollection of a peaceful and familiar life — which was still being lived by the family and friends they had left behind. They felt that they were *in exile.*

Another element of contrast between the East Europeans and the Oriental immigrants lay in the Western culture of Ashkenazeem, opposed to the unchanging life of the medieval Islamic land from which the Syrians came. The latter sought only to follow the aims of their life in the Orient, to be

faithfully observant Jews, to maintain their traditional respectability and propensity for sobriety and hard work.

To the East Europeans on the Lower East Side, the Syrians with their ignorance of both Yiddish and English, appeared strange. They were a "people apart" because of their insularity and unintelligible Sepharadic pronunciation of Hebrew and thus, their inability to become part of the (Ashkenazic) Jewish life. These differences created a cultural wall, behind which the Sepharadeem were content to lead their isolated lives on the East Side. Given their reluctance and resentment at having been compelled to emigrate, they did nothing to bring themselves closer to their East European fellow-Jews. They felt more "authentic" in that Syrian Jews had lived undisturbed lives in the Middle-East for countless centuries; in lands where elaborate courtesy was the rule and where they had continued to enjoy the tolerance and in many eras, the esteem, of the 'host' culture. Thus there was Ashkenazic disdain on the one hand and a reaction that turned the Syrians inward — for self-preservation — and the continuing traditional customs, on the other.

The Syrian immigrants, unlike their East European counterparts, did not leap to the educational opportunities which the Ashkenazeem sought for their children. They wished to avoid as much as possible the acculturation and assimilation of their children, "Americanization," that had affected almost all other ethnic and religious immigrant groups.

As social theorists studied succeeding generations of immigrants they outline the successive stages of immigrant-adjustment as follows:

1. The economic-technical stage which requires adjustment to new work methods.
2. The cultural stage which signifies departure from old cultural patterns, and the adoption of new ones.
3. The assimilatory stage, which includes intermarriage.[8]

The first generation of Syrian immigrants strove desperately to cope with a new and unfamiliar cultural environment; to learn enough English to earn a livelihood. As important as food and shelter for the East European immigrants was the desire — compulsion, even — to have their

children enjoy the fruit of becoming Americans, to achieve the style of life of the affluent host majority. This could be achieved only through the best education possible. As Milton M. Gordon, a student of Jewish immigrant life, remarked:

> Poverty limited the goals many immigrants could set for themselves; but if the immigrant had to be content to remain a peddler or laborer, *he was determined that his offspring should do better.*[9]

Happily, education in America was available at little or no cost, still, for immigrant parents to keep their children in school past the years when they might have secured "working papers" at age fourteen or fifteen meant no small sacrifice. The Ashkenazic second generation was urged — *pushed* — to acquire a good education, which was seen as the means of achieving social advancement.

The parents little realized the cultural separation — the impending alienation of their children — through the better education they sacrificed to give them.

Stage two in the adjustment process saw the second generation immigrants moving on to economic endeavors, different from those of their parents. They moved to new neighborhoods, and often joined Conservative or Reform synagogues with their reduced and diluted religious training. Ashkenazic children and grandchildren have increasingly entered into inter-faith marriages — now estimated at thirty to forty percent (or more) of all Jewish marriages. Turning to the adjustment of the Syrian Jews in New York, one finds a significant difference.

Syrian Education and Acculturation

An early stage in the acculturation process of *all* immigrant children was the compulsory public school. Here they were exposed to American culture for a large part of the day while being removed from the physical and cultural environment of their homes. In the schooling process they mingled with children of other ethnic origins who were also being molded

in the majority culture — represented in the person of the teacher. Syrian children too, were obliged to submit to this acculturation. However, the majority-culture's influence was mitigated by the Syrian Hebrew School, which 'all' the Syrian boys attended every afternoon from three to six o'clock, and which markedly restrained the assimilative process. Was it was an unconscious group-intent that the afternoon religious schooling should shield the younger generation from the influence of assimilation?

Perhaps more than any other factor the Hebrew School was successful in perpetuating the elder's pattern of isolation. It created an "in-group" spirit by preventing the children from freely associating with other young people of different backgrounds. Thus a strong group-life persisted, which was reflected in the family and the community. This "in-group" spirit served to compensate for the Syrians' sense of exclusion and of being inferior — given the coldness and hostility of the two-fold majority cultures they faced — the Ashkenazic "acculturated" majority, and the 'American' population (composed, nominally at least, of WASPS — White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants).

The "in-group" spirit is manifest in special terms used by the Syrians. They refer to East European Jews, Ashkenazeem, as "Jewish"; that is, 'Jewish' or Yiddish *speaking.* Thus, they refer to them also, as *"Iddish"*, (Y)iddish, Yiddish-speaking. (A male is an "Iddshy", a female is an Iddshiyeh.) In a like manner among themselves they refer to fellow-Syrians as "S-Y's," — S-y-r-i-a-n-s, and speak of an Ashkenazi as "Jay Dub," *(JW)* for 'J-E-W', ('Jewish'-speaking).

While there is a new trend toward professional careers on the part of some second and third generation Syrian youth, as a rule many follow enterprises similar to those of their fathers, for two basic reasons: many first-generation and second-generation Syrians have met with considerable financial success. This may have influenced their children to resist the idea that Syrians are culturally "inferior." Had not their fathers attained levels of success by which the general culture measured achievement?

Secondly, there is the financial hold on the younger gener-

ation. By conforming to their fathers' mores they could look to comfortable and remunerative places in the parents' businesses, and eventually to becoming their successors. Why, then, abandon the traditional mode of life of the Syrian community with its many rewards and satisfactions?

While the preceding material has embraced *all* of Aleppo-in-Flatbush let us now focus on the life and history of the Damascus Community in some detail.

Notes

1. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews;* New York, Columbia University Press, Vol. V, p. 216-217.

Baron quotes a rabbi of the Talmudic Era who stated that he had never taught anything he had not learned from his teachers.

2. Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure,* Free Press, Glenco, Ill. 1949, p. 135.

3. Ferdinand Tónnies, *Community and Society,* trans. by Chas. P. Loomis, Detroit, Michigan State University, 1957.

J.H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs;* London, Soncino Press, 1965.

Hertz, late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire stated that "Tradition is the keystone of Jewish observance."

4. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Custom;* Free Press. Glencoe, Ill. 1961, p. 54.

5. Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society", American Journal of Sociology, 1947, p. 293. Also in Wilson and Kolb, ed. *Sociological Analysis,* New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1949, pp. 353-355.

6. Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot,* New York, Macmillan Co. 1909, p. 37.

7. Lucy C. Davidowicz, *The Golden Tradition,* New York, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1967, p. 48.

8. Christina Galitzi, *Study of Assimilation Among Roumanians,* New York. 1929, p. 37.

9. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life,* New York. Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 29-30.

BOOK II

LIFE IN THE ORIENT

"We had rough treatment from the Ashkenazeem in the early days on the East Side. Some of them called us dirty 'Arabische Yidden' (Arabian Jews). They didn't know, and we had no means to tell them that we came from an old city, one of the oldest in the whole world; a city in which the traditions of Judaism and our Jewish community have been respected for thousand of years; yes, from the days of King David."

— Early Aleppoan Immigrant

". . . in all the Holy Land and in all of Syria, there is one city alone — and it is Hálab *— in which there are those who are truly devoted to the Jewish religion and the study of the Toráh . . ."*

— Maimonides — Ha-Rambam

"To understand a culture, it is imperative to know its history."

— Franz Boas

Chapter Eleven

Early History

HALAB and Damascus are known to be among the oldest cities in the world, referred to in the Bible as *Aram Sobah* and *Aram Damesek.* Tradition among Aleppo's Jews is that *Halab* received its name when the patriarch, Abraham, upon arriving in the city after leaving Haran some eighty miles to the east, "milked his cows" there ("Halab" means 'milked' in Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic).[1]

The city's Jewish population also asserts that the Great Synagogue of Aleppo was established during the reign of King David, almost three thousand years ago.[2] According to Biblical history, David's general, Joab Ben Seruyah conquered *Aram Sobah,* and some Aleppo Jews claim that General Joab established the synagogue which is still referred to by his name.

It is certain that Jews lived uninterruptedly in Aleppo for countless centuries. With the destruction of the Kingdom of Judea by the Babylonia Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E., Jews were dispersed to the surrounding areas. When King Cyrus of Persia, victor over the Babylonians, restored the exiled Jews to their homeland some forty years later, large numbers who had prospered *chose to stay in their adopted lands.* General Seleucis, who had snatched his share of territories after the death of Alexander the Great, herded his subjects into the large cities, foremost of which he made Antioch. The nearby city of *Halab* he renamed *Bereoa.* The Jews suffered in *Bereoa* as in Judea, under the rule of the Greeks/Syrians. At the time

of the Second Temple's destruction in 70 C.E., the largest such communities, Alexandria, Mesopotamia and Antioch, had an estimated million Jews (Antioch is only some sixty miles from Aleppo).[3] We must conclude that Jews must have inhabited Aleppo at that time and presumably even earlier. With the rise of Constantine and the Byzantine new State Church, in some eras the Jews felt free from possible persecution. The city of Antioch had been the seat of many of Christianity's earliest saints and Church Fathers, even before Constantine imposed the new religion on almost all of the Roman Empire.

Aleppoan Jews must have been well-established and quite prosperous, to have been able to build the Great Synagogue. A stone plaque on the wall of the synagogue, dated 241 C.E. attests to the antiquity of the building and the Aleppoan Jewish community. There is yet another synagogue of ancient origin in Aleppo. It was confiscated by the Muslims fifteen centuries ago and converted into a mosque, now called *Jámé-El-Hayat,* "Mosque of Life"(?) There are stone carvings in Hebrew on what was the *tebbáh,* the Toráh reading table, indicating its age in the 5th Century C.E.[4]

While Antioch, the nearby Byzantine metropolis, had been the commercial, political and religious center, Aleppo became the commercial hub when Antioch suffered an earthquake in 546 C.E., which cost the lives of a quarter of a million inhabitants. (Aleppo is not free from earthquakes; its land mass is similar Antioch's and a wide area adjacent, with serious geological "faults.")

We are on firm grounds, thanks to the evidence of the Cairo *Geniza,* in asserting that the Jews of Aleppo were engaged in imports and exports — in the ninth century — trading the wealth of their town and countryside for the specialties of neighboring and distant lands. (Caravan activity of that nature had existed in early Biblical time, long before the Islamic era.) Trading was to continue in Aleppo as the major means of making a livelihood and amassing fortunes — even to my own time in Aleppo — and more recently, in Aleppo-in-Flatbush, — but not by *land caravans,* however.

The Geniza and Aleppo

History had drawn a veil of some obscurity concerning Jewish life in the Near and Middle East in the medieval era. Until modern times little was known of Jewish life immediately following the rise of Muhammad. Shortly before the turn of the twentieth century — our own century — a great treasure-trove was uncovered which brought to vibrant life, gave many details of long ago, day-to-day activity in Syria, Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia and North Africa. This was the discovery of the *Geniza* documents mentioned above, hidden in the 9th to 13th Century, in the Synagogue of Fustat (Old Cairo). Like the Tablets recently unsealed in dug-up Ugarit not far from Aleppo, the Cairo *Geniza* material so masterfully studied by S.D. Goitein, gives colorful details of unknown activity and life in the Near East. From these formerly semi-buried documents, added to the existing Hebrew and Arabic documents we now have a clear picture of the life and activities of the Jews in the area.

The *Geniza* of Aleppo for some reason, had not been subjected to scholarly studies. The forbidding and secretative character of the Rabbinical heads of the city may have made such study impossible. In times of drought and other disasters, which were not infrequent in Aleppo and its region, dust from the *Geniza* was carried ceremoniously for burial in the cemetery, to the accompaniment of prayers for relief.

A more recent uncovering of *Geniza* material in a somewhat different form took place in Qumran in the Negev, where the *Dead Sea Scrolls* were found buried in cliff-caves.

According to Cairo *Geniza* fragments, Aleppo was a great banking and silk producing center, in addition to its important caravan trade. It is from the Cairo *Geniza* that we learn additional details of the founding of the *Karaite* faction of Judaism. Light is shed on the great Talmudic Academies in Phambodita, Nehardéa and Sura and on much of the political status of Jews in Baghdad, a very large city even then, and elsewhere. It was revealed that Baghdad in the 10th Century

C.E. had a population of 500,000 *non-Muslims,* a large portion of who were Jews.

Early Commerce and The Muslims

The rise of Islam and its speedy conquest of Syria brought measures of surcease from persecution, but not completely. The peacefulness of Jewish life depended on caliphs and rulers, many of whom looked upon Jews without animosity. However, Aleppo was swept by contending military forces, Mongol, Byzantine, Mesopotamian, Persian and Egyptian; Jews felt the violence of the warring armies with each change of rulership.

Soon after the almost unresisted sweep by the Arabian followers of the new Prophet Muhammed, regular and large scale trading became possible with increased relative safety. Now, for thousands of miles to the East, reaching ultimately to the Phillipine Islands in the Pacific Ocean, it was possible to travel with freedom through lands which professed Islam. From time immemorial Aleppo had been the base and terminus for wide-scale trading caravans and benefitted from the expanded opportunity for trade. Even then Jews were among the foremost commercial factors in the trade of the Orient. The Radanites, an association of Jewish merchants, travelled and traded throughout the known world in the 7th to the tenth Centuries C.E. According to Khordadbeh, the first Moslem geographer (circa 820 C.E.) the Radanites dealt in "silk, slaves, castor, marten, musk, camphor and aloes, from Frank [Western Europe] to Sind, [India] and China." [5] There is no proof that Aleppoan merchants were actually a part of the Radanite association of Jewish merchants, although the geographic situation of Aleppo as a principal initiator of large-scale caravans would have made it logical for Jewish Aleppoans to have been associated with the Radanites.

Particular interest in this period is due to the political, economic and social life of Jews in medieval Cairo and Baghdad, so similar to the one in which I lived in Aleppo while a boy, a thousand years later. Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia were then ruled by descendants of Mohammad, in

Egypt by the Caliphate or rulerships of Fatima's descendants, in Syria and Mesopotamia first by the Ummayad and soon after by the family of Abbas (forming the Fatimad, the Ummayad and the Abbasid Caliphates). The Caliphs, the early Muslim rulers, and later the Ottomans, had an ambivalently tolerant attitude to their non-Jewish subjects — tolerated but not equal. They permitted each religious denomination *(milleh)* a large measure of corporate self-rule. Under this system religious authorities were held responsible for their community head-tax for each of its members. The Jewish community of Babylonia and later Baghdad was ruled by the *Resh-Galuta,* the leader-in-Exile who was purportedly a lineal descendant of King David. The religious life was dominated by the "Geoneem" (singular "Gaoan"), the scholarly and religious masters of the respective and influential Talmudic academies in Sura, and Phombodita.

In each Jewish community the Leader was appointed by the *Caliph* on the recommendation of the community — and the influence of Jewish friends at Court. Such friends were usually the several families who served as the ruler's bankers, physicians and other Court functionaries. This exemplifies again the extraordinary similarity between the customs of the 10th Century and my own observations in Aleppo in the first decades of the 20th Century. It may be recalled that the head of the Jewish Community in all of the Turkish Empire (the *Haham Bashi,* "Grand Rabbi") was confirmed by the Sultan and became an officer of the Imperial Court. In turn he approved the selection of the local *Haham Bashi.*

The religious tolerance of the Muslim authorities toward Jews in Mesopotamia many centuries ago, as in past years in Aleppo — is illustrated by the history of the founding of *the Karaite* sect, an anti-rabbinical Jewish sect which recognized only literal *scriptural* teaching.[6] When the "Gaon" David died in the 8th Century, his *younger* son was unexpectedly chosen to replace him. The older son, Anan, the apparent successor, rebelled against this ruling and founded a faction of followers. Under the protest of the Jewish community, the Caliph promptly clapped him into prison as a heretic and

schismatic. While in prison, Anan formed a friendship with a fellow prisoner — the Muslim Jurist, Ibn Hanufa — now regarded as the greatest writer on Islamic jurisprudence. Ibn Hanufa counselled Anan, and following his advice, Anan claimed that he was not at all a heretic and schismatic but rather the founder of a *new religion.* Anan was set free without delay and allowed to develop his doctrines. (Ibn Hanufa, however, ended his days in prison.) For the *Caliph,* one "unbelieving" religion was like another; so long as the religious community complied with his laws, was peaceable and paid its communal tax, its members were free to rule themselves.

In his migration from Fayoum in Egypt to Baghdad, the great Sa'adia Ha-gaon lived in Aleppo for a number of years at the beginning of the 10th Century, and in 921 C.E., he returned to the city to visit and confer with its rabbis.[7]

During this period, an event whose historic importance cannot be over-estimated, occurred: the completion of the *Keter of ben Asher,* or "Aleppo Codex", by Aharon ben Moshé ben Asher of Tiberias. This is perhaps the most sacred Hebrew text in existence, revered more than a millennium after its completion. The *Keter Toráh* ("Crown of the Toráh") was "corrected" by ben Asher, who applied to this Toráh-in-bookform, the *Massorah,* "handed down" (absolute authority), and "pointed" it, adding vowel-marks and indications for its cantillation. Maimonides relied on this authority for his "Laws on Writing a Sefer Torah."

The Aleppo *Keter* is believed to have been written in Biblical times. (See Appendix for a full account of its exciting later history and its connection with Aleppo-in-Flatbush.)

Must we not assume that it was the prosperity of Aleppoan Jews in the 10th to 12th Centuries, and perhaps earlier, that prompted Baghadad to send *sheluheem* there? *(sheluheem* are "sent-individuals," usually rabbis travel to distant cities and lands to collect money for their specific academies or communal needs) We know that a future Baghdad "Gaon," Zekharia Ben Barkel, who had himself originated in Aleppo, arrived in his native city in 1191 C.E. to collect money. (Papers of Samuel ben Ali in the *Geniza* documents tell of the visit.)

The antiquity of Aleppo's Jewish customs and traditions now explains a bewildering event from my childhood: the fact that I had seen pious Jewish merchants take their lunch of broiled lamb at the stall of a *Muslim butcher* in the *Souk.* As early as the 10th Century, the Karaites had constantly sniped at traditional Rabbinic Jews — and the Jewish *shohateem* (ritual slaughterers) of Baghadad's abbatoirs in particular.[8] "How dare these ritual slaughterers show their contempt for the Muslims of the city by turning over to them for consumption animals that they rejected as "not kosher"? [due to imperfections or diseases — and thus not acceptable to Rabbinic Jewish consumers]", they asked the Islamic authorities. We have no record of how the Karaites' opponents warded off this accusation. Yet, since most of Aleppo's meat was slaughtered by qualified *shohateem,* pious Jews had little hesitation in buying meat from a Muslim butcher once they saw the *shohét's* stamp of *kashrút* on the carcass. In Aleppo as in Baghdad, Jewish slaughtering practice continued for a thousand or more years, even into recent times, when so many of Aleppo's Jews migrated.

The next that we read of Aleppo connects us in the 12th Century with Maimonides who sent his major philosophical work, "Guide to the Perplexed" *(Moré Nebukheem)* to Aleppo in 1191, written for a resident of that city, Rabbi Joseph Ibn Aknin, his friend and pupil.[9]

Maimonides was thought to have visited the Aleppo community but of this we are not certain. It is certain, however, that he was thoroughly, familiar with the quality of Jewish life there. In a letter to the community of Lunel, France, he attested to the great and enduring peity of the Aleppoans, in contrast with vanishing Jewish observance in many lands.

Maimonides was the spiritual leader — but not always unquestionedly — in the whole of the world of Jewry. He was in constant correspondence with every important Jewish center, from Yemen — *"Teman"* — on the Red Sea to whom he addressed his Letter of Consolation and Encouragement — to Lunel in the South of France, a prosperous area which had many towns with strong Jewish religious adherence. In a letter to Lunel, he wrote lamenting the weakening of Jewish religious observance and study:

". . . I announce to you that in this time there are few men ready to raise the banner [of Toráh]; only you and all the towns in your environs. In all these other places true Toráh study is lost among the inhabitants, in cities great and small.

In all the Holy Land and in Syria, there is *one city alone — and it is HALAB* — in which there are those who are truly devoted to the Jewish religion and study of the Toráh." [10]

Ha-Rambam was well acquainted with conditions in Aleppo through his voluminous correspondence with ibn Aknin; there are touching exchanges of deep sentiment between them. (In one letter ibn Aknin expresses his deepest agitation and dejection over the troubles he was experiencing with his wife — who ran away several times. Was it due to her unhappiness at being separated from her family which she and her husband *Yoséf* had left behind in Egypt? The solution to this marriage problem is not revealed.)

Secular Hebrew literature, in addition to information revealed in rabbinic Responsa material, supplies us with two explicit accounts concerning *Halab* and the life of its Jews in the 12th and 13th Centuries C.E. The famed Spanish traveller and gazeteer, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (Hebrew, "Rabbi Benyameen, Ha Nosé-ah") reports to us about *Halab.*[11] His memoirs cover all of the countries of the Near and Middle East, and almost all cities and towns that had a Jewish community, large or small. Rabbi Benjamin visited *Halab* in 1173 C.E., almost 800 years ago and related that he found there a Jewish community of about 3,000 individuals. Rabbi Benjamin's report is so terse that it causes us to wonder, since his accounts of other and smaller towns are more detailed than his report on *Halab,* "a very large place". (Perhaps Rabbi Benjamin did *not* visit *Halab,* so that the meager description he provides was merely hearsay?) He does not fail to mention the impressive *Qal'a,* the Citadel, which he refers to as the "Castle of the King Nour-el Din" (predecessor to Saladin). Three rabbis are mentioned by name. He wrote further that ". . . there are no streams [the 'river' Quaik may have been dry during Tudela's spring or summer visit], no wells; the inhabitants drink rain water and each householder has a cistern." [11]

Rabbi Yehuda Al-Harizi's visit to Aleppo in 1225 C.E., however, was an extended one; he stayed there several months, participating in the life of the community. Al-Harizi, a poet, a rabbi, scholar and wit, had also translated Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* from the original Arabic to Hebrew (and conversely the poetry of the Arab, *Al-Harriri,* into Hebrew). Al-Harizi's major poetic work, "The Tahkemoni" contains information on *Halab* elsewhere in his poem (Maqams 46, 47 and 50).[12]

He writes of his delight at the cultured life of Aleppo, and sings the praises of *Haham* Yoséf Ibn Aknin, the friend of Maimonides, for his patronage. Al-Harizi refers to Ibn Aknin as *"Haham* Yosef ben Yehuda, il-Maghrabi," (the North-African) who had settled in Aleppo in the year 1186."

Al-Harizi speaks of *Halab* as "a beautiful city" with a respected community where rabbis, doctors, writers and singers abounded. He mentions Rabbi Hanania Bezalel, Rabbi Yosef and the "sacred Rabbi Pinhas." The official scribe in the "king's" house is Rabbi Shemuel. Al-Harizi recounts a "scandalous and impious" incident which occurred during his visit, having to do with the "King" of Aleppo's physician. "The physician," Al-Harizi wrote, "Eleazer, a 'free thinker', shed his faith, because when the King of Hamath (Hama) sent for him, he set out on the Sabbath." [12]

Could wealthy men who failed to patronize Al-Harizi have known that they would carry his stigma for ignorance and stinginess for more than eight hundred years, to this day? Those who patronized him generously earned his extravagant praise.

Other travellers who visited Aleppo at about this time are Rabbi Petahia of Ratisbon and "Rabbi Jacob, 'The Messenger'." The latter, who visited Aleppo in the year 1238, wrote: "Here there are three synagogues – and in the 'Tower of David' [the famous Citadel] there is a house of 'our Father Abraham' which houses the Muslim chapel, [or Maqam, atop the Citadel]." [13]

Tolerance and Massacres

As in Spain and North Africa from which Maimonides and ibn Aknin had fled, persecution of Jews was widespread in Christian Europe, but *not* in the Islamic Near East. The persecution by fanatical Byzantine Christians was interrupted when the Arab Muslims took Aleppo in the mid-seventh Century. The religious fervor of the Crusades generated economic greed in the zealous Christians *and vice versa.* In their sweep through Europe to free the Holy City of Jerusalem from its Arab rulers, the Crusaders robbed, pillaged and killed in all towns in their path. Many Christians, too, lost their lives and their removeable property. Death was certain for Jews who fell to the Crusaders. In many towns, as soon as the devout Crusaders arrived, the Jews were rounded up and gathered into their synagogues — which were then set on fire. (Only the fanatical Al'mo'ahad sect of Islam in North Africa and the Southern part of Spain in the 12th Century, acted like the Crusaders in their treatment of Jews and Christians). With every resurgence of Crusader activity in France, England and elsewhere in Western Europe, the period saw the slaughter or expulsion of the Jews of the country. In the Muslim lands everywhere — with the exception of the Al'mo'ahads — in the Near East, Jews were permitted to lead undisturbed lives, to develop their professions and trades and to heal the sick; Maimonides in Cairo, Eleazer in Aleppo were but two of many Jewish physicians who treated not only the nobility of the land, but the common people as well.

In 1260, Aleppo was captured by Ghengis Khan's Mongol hordes, killing many thousands of Jews and Christians. A Muslim, ibn Nahas, saved countless Jewish lives by buying a "patent of security" for his entire "quarter" in which there were many Jewish residents. An apostate butcher, formerly Jewish, also saved many Jews by standing guard at the gateway of his "quarter."

Aleppo was invaded again in 1401 by the savage Mongol troops of Timur (or Tamerlane), resulting in the slaughter of countless thousands, among whom were large numbers of

Jewish victims in the Bahsita, the Jewish "quarter" of the city.[14]

The Great Age

History does not record any major change in Jewish life in Aleppo immediately before the beginning of the 16th and 17th Centuries. However, the Crusaders had taken back with them from the Orient a taste for fine textiles, spices and perfumes, along with the 'Gothic' Arch, a borrowing from Arabic art. Although Oriental goods had gone to Europe for centuries before, it was on an irregular basis. Soon after the Crusades, European merchants began a new chapter in the history of Aleppo and its ancient Jewish community. Despite the opening of new markets, life in Aleppo, until the early years of this, our own century, was not radically different from that of the 16th Century – in Baghdad, Cairo and Aleppo.

Two factors contributed to the changed situation in Aleppo: the consequence of the expulsion of Spanish Jews following the Inquisition, and the arrival of European merchants who came to Aleppo eager to buy for their own markets the luxuries available then only in the Orient. The English, in particular, also found a market for their goods in Aleppo, the gateway to the interior of Asia. With the expulsion of Jews from Spain, Portugal and other Catholic and Protestant countries and city-states, vast numbers of Jews found places of refuge in the domains of the Ottoman Sultan. The Muslim authorities were eager to improve conditions in the Empire and threw open their doors to the Jews from prosperous Spain and the West. Thanks to the Ottoman's historic relations with the Jews of their own country and the knowledge of the skills of their Jewish subjects in commerce, medicine and banking, they welcomed the settlement of hundreds of thousands of European Jews. Most of these settled in Constantinople, Smyrna, Salonika, and the Balkans in what is now Bulgaria, Romania and Yugo-Slavia.[15] These immigrants continued to speak "Ladino," a Hebraic dialect of Spanish.

Contemporary historians of Sepharadic life and Rabbinic commentary speak of the "settlement" of Spanish Jews in Aleppo, (but nowhere have we been able to find much more than one fragment of *documentation* of this). A certain Captain Domingo de Toral, Spaniard, wrote that in 1634 he was "saved from captivity in Aleppo by a very learned Jew of that City." He stated that in Aleppo he found "more than 800 families of Jews," living in a separate quarter.[16]

> ". . . Their common language is Castillian [Spanish] which they retained from the time they were expelled from Spain." (". . . La lengua comun suya y casere entre ellos, es Castillana, la qual conservan desde que fueran echado de Espagna".)

Clearly — all of the "more than 800 families" who may be presumed to have been the *entire* Jewish population of Aleppo — could not all have been Spanish-speaking, since we are certain of the existence of large numbers of old-time native Jewish Aleppoans, the *Must'arab'een* (Arab-acculturated).

We know, however, that the Jewish traditions of Aleppo indirectly acknowledge the presence of Spanish-Portugese influences. Many family names are distinctly Iberian, such as Laniado, Lopez ("Lofez" in Aleppo), Attié, Paredes ("Baredes") Franco, Bellilos, Sutehon and others. In addition, Syrian Jews in New York still prepare *medias*, a Spanish dish, made with "half" of a vegetable, such as artichoke, pasteles ("bastel"), a meat stuffed pastry. Jews from Aleppo still commonly use such terms as "cabesal" (head-pillow), "tobaja" (near-Spanish) for towel, and "mesa franca," the table set in the mode of the "Franks" — Europeans.

There is more substantial evidence of the presence of Spanish-Portugese Jews in Damascus provided by Rabbi Yishaq Basola in the period around 1620. Bernard Lewis, who told me of this rabbinic source, further substantiates Spanish-Portugese life in Damascus in his research into the Ottoman Imperial Tax Rolls which were instituted in that period. Rabbi Basola wrote of the presence of Jews of Spanish, Italian, Portugese and Sicilian origin, as well as of old time

Must'arab'im, Samaritans, Iraquis (Baghdadians) and Karaites.[17]

Aleppo is some 500 miles from Salonika and Constantinople, centers of Spanish refugee settlements. Since its size and commercial importance was well known, considerable numbers of Spanish and Portugese Jews must have settled there soon after the expulsion from Spain.

There was a small but significant migration of Italian Jewish merchants in the 17th and 18th Century who came to buy for their families' businesses at home. They, too, were known as "Francos," or, more popularly, "Franj," terms which are derived from "Franks." They were also referred to as *"Signoreem,"* (the Hebrew plural of *Signor,*) acknowledging their Italian origin. They came as young, unmarried men intending to return to Italy after a few years of trading. Instead, the Italian Jews prospered and stayed; to marry native Jewish girls and become a permanent, albeit a somewhat separate, part of the Jewish life of the city.

Initially it was the Venetian, and traders from other city-states of Italy, who came to Aleppo to trade, since their maritime activities had established them in Cyprus only 80 miles from the coast of Syria, and elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Queen Elizabeth's Gentlemen Merchants

It is to the English geographer, Richard Haklyut and his renowned "voiages" of 1589 that we are initially indebted for knowledge of the formation and activities of England's "Levant Company" and its Merchant Adventures; it was England which most intensively developed trade with Aleppo.[18]

Although active trade in Aleppo had existed with Europe centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, it was mostly to the East that her huge caravans travelled. The European trade, however, brought the greatest activity to Aleppo and to its Jewish merchants. Trade with England brought Aleppo to the summit of its success and its rewards.

In the year 1580 Queen Elizabeth concluded Treaties with Sultan Murad III, similar to those granted to France in 1535,

known as the "Capitulations." These provided privileges and guarantees for the English (and other European) traders in the Levant, guarantees of safety for their persons and property.[19] The rich resources of the Near and Middle East had been available to the Venetians, Netherlanders as to the later English. England's resourcefulness and relatively advanced industrial technology, however, enabled her to benefit most from the East and to result in the enrichment of the industrious and able Jewish families as well as of a number of Armenian and Greek (Byzantine) Christians of the city.

Prior to the "Capitulations Treaties," the physical welfare of the daring European trader was subject to the whims and fancy of the Sultan, the governors of the provinces, to the caprice of the local pasha, and even to the populace with its sometime Islamic fanaticism. In spite of the guarantees of the "Capitulations" Europeans did not always enjoy unmolested activities.

The "Capitulations Treaties" protection from Muslim persecution and harassment was a great asset to the Western European trades, including the Italian "Franj" Jewish merchants who had come to partake directly in the commerce of the East.

One part of Aleppo's Jewry consisted of the native Jews whose ancestry we have traced back for countless centuries and with them the Spanish refugee settlers *who were absorbed* into the native community. The other, and smaller, part of Aleppo's Jewry were the "Francos" or "Franj" who shared in the immunity to Ottoman law through extra-territorial rights which formed part of the "Capitulations." Native Jews, as well as "Franj," occupied a vitally important place in the local trading of the large European combines such as the English Levant Company. Except for some Armenians and Greeks, Jews dominated the commercial activity as agents for the Europeans. Italian Jews in particular were very active; they exported to their own family businesses in Europe as well as acting as agents of the western Europeans in Aleppo. Agents and their families, if native Aleppoans, were sometimes awarded a *Barā'ah*, a *Náfar Firmánli* (some of the Sultan's rights and privileges of their patrons), and in time citizenship

was sometimes confirmed upon them in the country of the patrons, a most valuable acquisition. As we read in the testimony of many European Traders, the Aleppo merchants, Jews (as well as Christians and a few Muslims) were highly respected by Europeans for their honesty, diligence and faithfulness in transacting business of the European "factors" and the requirements of their "factories." Such factories were largely assembly points for merchandise, principally the cotton yarns of the city, and for the storage of cotton *cloth* shipped from England. Cotton was vitally important for England's cottage weavers. In addition spices, jewels, and silks, from the interior of Asia were also important commodities.

"Franj" and English Traders

The trading of Englishmen with Aleppo was evidently of considerable importance and note in England. Shakespeare's plays written for the uneducated masses, mention Aleppo twice; his audience *must* have been familiar with these references to Aleppo:

"Her husband's to Aleppo gone . . ."

MACBETH, ACT I, SCENE III

"In Aleppo once, where a maligned and a turban'd Turk [Aleppoan] beat a Venetian . . ."

OTHELLO, ACT V, SCENE II

Life for the Englishmen stationed in Aleppo of the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries forms a fascinating story. Several English "factors" wrote of their daily activities and of the native population, with particular reference to the Jewish merchants with whom and through whom they traded.

By 1775, the period of *Haham* Laniado's dispute with the *Franj* there were *85 foreign trading firms in Aleppo,* most of them doing their business through the Jewish merchants.

The English sent their first consul, "W. Barret," who arrived in Aleppo in 1580. He was the first of a series of such officials over a period of several centuries; the records are to

be found in the files of the "Levant Company," which was then in Cavendish Square, London. These consuls represented England and the Company's authority and near-monopoly. They served as judges in cases involving their countrymen, as their protectors and guides to the life in the city. They were in constant negotiations with the ruling pashas to resist the imposition of "Avanias," local taxes that the authorities constantly sought to impose on the foreign traders; and to seek redress for insults, or infringements on the rights of the "factors," the Agents of the Company.

That the factoring trade was largely in the hands of the ancestors of our Syrians in Aleppo-in-Flatbush is attested to by Factor North. He wrote of the factor-ing business:

> . . . it is dominated by the Jews, who control most of the business of the Levant. When a new factor appeared . . . he was immediately laid hold of by the first Jew . . . and he was obliged to do his business through the Jew, for by their compact among themselves, no other Jews would accept his commission.[20]

Of particular interest is the account of Henry M. Maundrell, an English clergyman stationed there. In a letter written in 1698 to a friend in England he remarks that the "Turks" (Aleppoans), in his opinion, do not deserve the high opinion of them popularly held in England for their:

> ". . . exact justice, veracity and other moral virtues, upon account of which I have sometimes heard them mentioned with very extraordinary commendations . . ."

He charges them with "great conceit of their religion and contemptuousness of that of others." The *only thing* he can say in their favor, he continues in his letter, is:

> ". . . the outward decency of their carriage, the profound respect they pay to religion and everything relating to it, and their great temperance and frugality." [21]

Like most of the English factors in the Aleppo factor-ies Maundrell did not bother to learn to speak Arabic and thus

was unable to penetrate into the culture of the city. In addition, Maundrell was plagued with ill health during his several years as pastor to his countrymen, which may have contributed to his xenophobia. A clerical young man of thirty, recently out of Oxford when he set sail for Aleppo, he had undergone a shatteringly unhappy love affair, which may have additionally embittered him at being so far from home. All was not gloom for him, however, as we read him further:

> As for living with them [the Aleppoans] it is with all possible quiet and safety, and that is all that we desire, *their conversation being not in the least entertaining.* Our delights are among ourselves, and there being more than forty of us, we never want a most friendly and pleasant conversation. Our way of life resembles in some measure the academical. We live in separate squares [large "khans" or caravansaries] shut up every night, after the manner of colleges. We begin the day as you do with prayers, and have our own set time for business meals, and recreation. In the winter we hunt in the most delightful campaign twice a week; in the summer we go as often to divert ourselves under our tents, with bowling and other exercises.[21] *(our italics)*

The homes of the European traders, the Englishmen, of which Maundrell wrote, as well as other "Franj" or "Francos" were in the heart of the *Souks* — the bazaars. Each was a warehouse, a "khan," and "factor-y" as well as a residence; they served as caravansaries. As I recall, from personal observation, each establishment had huge doors to permit the entry of loaded camels, with smaller doors for personal use, cut in the huge portals, (see my photograph). These opened in to large courtyards around which one or more merchants maintained their warehouses. For safety the portals were closed by the night watchman, providing security for the merchants, whose residences were on the upper levels. These had terraces and walks overlooking the sleeping city with its multitude of minarets. The "khans" were situated so close together that the European factors would sometimes visit their neighbors by means of ladders over the rooftops. Complete silence at night was the rule in my own recollection, as a young man, except for the sound of footsteps over the cob-

blestones, of the rare youth returning from carousing in the not too-distant brothel district, and the midnight prayers of the meuzzins *(muádden)* from the many minarets.

The English consul Barker wrote of card parties, weekly concerts, masquerades during Carnival time involving the English and the factors of other European nations. Because of the intense dry heat during summer months they sometimes felt compelled to sleep on the open balconies and roofs of their "khans," much in the manner of recent Aleppoans during my childhood. The English colony's Dr. Russel, like recent Aleppoans, spent his summer vacations in Baylan near Antioch (Antáké) near the Mediterranean shores. Again like Aleppoans of recent decades, the English and their fellow-factors, during the summer of 1662 through 1669, fled Aleppo to escape the plague and cholera which struck the city. Native Aleppoans, in the period of the "Levant Company," continued to trade with the interior of Asia, just as they had done in the time of Yosef Ibn Aknin and earlier.

We see that an Aleppoan, Rabbi Rahabi, was active in the mid-17th Century, traveling to India to trade there as Agent for the Dutch East Indies Co. It was then that Rabbi Rahabi first uncovered the Indian "Bene Israel" Jews. They claimed to have been a part of the Lost Ten Tribes, and asserted they had been in India before the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabbi Rahabi and his sons after him guided the new-found Jews to the traditional adherence to Jewish religion, which they had forgotten centuries before.[22]

The high status of the Jewish Europeans was due to both their wealth and the extra-territorial rights which served to set them on an aristocratic level vis-a-vis the native Jewish Aleppoans (the *Mustarab'een,* those acculturated to Arab life). Extra-territorial rights continued with no interruption for centuries, despite the *Signoreem's* permanent residence in *Halab.* Even into recent decades Italian Jews, "Franj" whose ancestors had not set foot on Italian soil for hundreds of years, retained Italian citizenship and the prestige of being immune to the authority of the Ottoman Pashas. I recall hearing that when a "Franji" broke a local law, only the consul of his own country could sit in judgment. Since the

consul was one of their members, usually also a co-religionist, matters were settled quietly with the local authorities. As a segment of the Jewish population and a very pious one for the most part, and with an aristocratic code of conduct, few incidents involving Muslims were permitted to take place, if only to avert arousing the ire of the Muslims who could turn on the native "non-Franj" Jews as scapegoats.

The "Franj" enjoyed other honors as well. They served as (honorary) consuls for their countries of origin and for other countries as well; countries which had no need whatsoever for a consul in Aleppo. The De Picciotto family held a whole "cluster" of such consulships, which were accorded the esteem of full ambassadorship in the Pasha's Court.

Others among Italian Sepharadeem — "Franj", were the families Silvera, Altaras, Bellilos, Ancona, Bigio, and perhaps still others.

The DePicciottos were pre-eminent. One branch was Austrian, another Italian, from Livorno, and there was still another, *Signor* Mosé *Moscof* was a "Franji" whose name I had heard mentioned. Yet to my immediate knowledge no *Moscofs* existed in *Halab* in the first decade of our century. Had the line become extinct? Armand Picciotto of New York and Manila informed me that *Moscof* was indeed a branch of his family — *Picciotto-Moscof,* from "Muscovy", the old Aleppoan name for Russia. (Picciotto is a widespread name appearing in various spellings in other countries, i.e., Piexotto, etc.)

Shabbetai Sebbi — The False Messiah

There appears to be a veil of silence drawn by rabbinical literature in Aleppo and elsewhere, perhaps in embarrassment at the wide-spread acceptance of the False Messiah — Shabbetai Sebbi, circa 1666. Yet, as we see revealed in the research of the notable scholar, Gershom Scholem in his exhaustive study "Shabbetai Sevi" (Princeton, 1973), Aleppo and some of its leaders were among the first to accept Shabbetai and were most enthusiastic proponents.

Haham Shelomó Laniado, (whose namesake later attacked

the "Franj") – had embraced Shabbetai's mission many years before, when the latter had spent some time in Aleppo, and later, when he was read to reveal his 'role' – his announcement as the *Messiah.*

Not only Laniado, but most *hahameem* of Aleppo and almost every Sepharadi and many European centers – with a few notable exceptions – embraced Shabbetai as the *Mashiyah* – the Messiah – and the 'end of the secular world' as it had been known. Shabbetai, and his prophet *Haham* Natán of Gaza, were both deeply, kabbalistically mystical. (Shabbetai came from Smyrna (Izmir) of a rich family – Agents for the European Traders, similar to those of Aleppo who also dealt with The Levant Co.)

The Chmielnitzki pogroms of 1648 resulted in the death of almost half a million Jews in Poland, the Ukraine and nearby regions. These massacres brought a shudder of horror to Jews everywhere, and created widespread depression and despair. This may have accelerated the dream of a Redeemer, a Messiah, who would put an end to uncertainty and fear under which many Jews lived. It may well have laid the groundwork for the enthusiastic – and even hysterical acceptance of Shabbetai Sebbi when he announced himself as the *Mashiah,* The Messiah.

In distributing 'kingdoms', Shabbetai awarded Silvera the "Kingdom of David," and to Laniado the "Kingdom of *Aram Soba*".

Signor Isaaco Silvera, ("Silveira"), the *Franji* from Livorno who had established himself in Aleppo was also a leading proponent, and no doubt, financial supporter of Shabbetai, earlier than 1666. It was in this year that Shabbetai having inflamed and captured the imagination of huge multitudes of Jews – not only in the Near East, but everywhere – including distant Eastern Europe, had declared that he was the Messiah.

The Jewish folk were hungry for a sign to the end of their destruction, and when Shabbetai appeared they flocked to him. Aleppo remained a stronghold; *Haham* Natan of Gaza, Shabbetai's 'prophet' found a haven and support in Aleppo, which he sometimes made his headquarters even after Shab-

betai's apostasy and adoption of Islam. Many Jews followed Shabbetai's abandonment of Judaism. They founded a sect – and communities – which continued to believe in this 'Messiah' – who could do no wrong. Even into modern times such communities of *Dónmeh* existed in and around Salonika.

The "Franj" Dispute

Until early in the 18th Century, the "Franj" worshipped in the Great Synagogue in a separate section reserved for them. When an attempt was made by Rabbi Shelomó Rafaél Laniado circa 1765, to compel them to submit to the communal taxing authority, the *"gabilla,"* they demurred. (Rabbit Laniado was himself a "Franji." His title was *"Signor Haham"* or "Milord Rabbi"). The "Franj," most of whom were from Liverno, Italy, claimed exemption because they were currently paying an impost-tax to the French Consul Arvieux, under whose protection they lived. Rabbi Laniado cited rabbinical canon in support of his argument that *all* permanent Jewish residents of a town must submit to the town's rabbinical authority. This opinion was disputed by an equally important Rabbi, *Haham* Yehuda Kassin. Laniado's views prevailed in the community, upon which the *Signoreem* withdrew their attendence from the synagogues and stopped their formal financial support of the community organizations.[23] When in Aleppo as a young man, my uncle, a *Signor* showed me a charter the *Signoreem* had prepared in 1778 establishing their own charitable foundation. At the same time many of them established, in their own homes, *Batté Midrash* or chapels, family places of worship and study. Ultimately the dispute ended decades later with the yielding by *Haham* Laniando's son, Rabbi Shelomó Rafael, who had succeeded his father. Despite this capitulation, the "Franj" remained a group apart – pursuing separate worship, charities and studies in their private chapels. Nevertheless, they continued to assist community undertakings. They maintained warm relations with the rabbis of the town, some of whom may be considered to have been their private chaplains and retainers since, with little communal wealth, many of the non-office

holding rabbis depended on the patronage of the rich for a good part of their meager livelihood.

Local Disasters

Life in Aleppo was seemingly uneventful, *except* for the disasters which often struck the city. The geological formation of the region — similar to large areas of central Turkey to the North — brought earthquakes. Cholera, small-pox, diphtheria, and plague, also caused considerable loss of lives. To cite some major disasters, in 1769 almost 160,000 died; 60,000 perished in the Plague of 1797. The earthquake of 1822 caused the destruction of 4,000 houses, followed by plague which left 30,000 dead. Nor was this all the misery that overtook Aleppo through the years. Drought and crop failures struck the area with some regularity. Wheat and other grains, often stock-piled in the warehouses in expectation of still higher prices, caused prices to sky rocket. Stock-piling was not limited to periods of drought; even with relatively abundant harvests there were severe shortages of grains on the market. Thus, famine was not unknown. To provide relief for the hungry the Jewish leaders undertook collections of money or grain from all those with means. They were deemed generous when they donated some wheat from their stocks.[24]

The *Geniza* fragments, (thanks to S.D. Goitein) almost 1,000 years before our time, report, that as in Aleppo, collecting alms for the needy was pursued all year round. In one instance, because of a natural or economic catastrophe which required urgent relief, the community leaders went in person from one individual, from one warehouse or workshop, to another, to ask for contributions. Again we note the continuity and similarity of customs in the Aleppo of our own century with those in Old Cairo of the 9th to 13th Centuries.[25]

I heard it related in Aleppo that during a severe drought in 1890 or 1900 a committee waited on a wealthy *Signor* seeking a contribution of wheat. Unwilling to disclose how much was being sought, the committee remained silent, until a young, apparently inexperienced member stipulated a quantity, to

which the *Signor* promptly agreed. He was later castigated by the older committeemen; they were waiting for a voluntary commitment which they would then have sought to substantially increase.

Unchanging Life

In Aleppo, as in Damascus, in the unhurried life of the *Muezzins* and the *souks* of the Arab world, few fragments of the Age of Enlightenment had penetrated or were available to the Jewish population, except to the small number who attended the schools of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle.* There were few changes in the pattern of living from one century to another, no modern innovations. Thus, with the self-esteem and self-satisfaction with which they lived in *Halab,* Aleppoan Jews lacked the quest and thirst for secular education, which characterized the Ashkenzeem. The Syrians' path to advancement was seen to come only through work and commerce. The railroad reached Aleppo only shortly after the turn of the century. The first small trolley car line was not installed until 1920. In this epoch there were no telephones, not even in important business establishments, much less in private homes.

During the early period of major migration to America, electric lighting was totally unknown in Aleppo as were flush toilets and running water in the homes. Thus, for the majority of Aleppoans around 1910/1920, life was carried on almost entirely in the same manner as in the Baghdad of *Haroun al Raschid* in the ninth century C.E. and for centuries before. While some Jewish Aleppo businessmen traded with Europe, their lives remained much the same as other Jews and Muslims of the same economic level.

Climate

The climate of Aleppo on the plain at an elevation of fourteen hundred feet, is a dry and generally healthy one. It knows some extreme cold, and a burning sun in the long summers. Snow may fall once every second or third year;

Aleppo frequently experiences a very short period of bitter cold, especially painful for the vast number of the poor with no provisions for heating and little means of procuring coal.

The snowfall was festive and novel for children. Everyone, however, enjoyed gathering bowlsful of snow to which sweetened preserved fruit syrup was added to make a tasty sweet dish, called "sweeh". The name, I would suppose, is derived from the English "sleet," wet snow, perhaps a remnant of the days of the English gentlemen of the Levant Company. Winter cold was shortlived. By March, Spring had set in in earnest, with trees and bushes in full bloom in those areas where they existed.

Here are statistics collected by Dr. Russell, in one of the thirteen years he spent in Aleppo. Temperatures given are the high-low in Fahrenheit, circa 1750-1755.[26]

Jan. 34/57	May 67/92	Sept. 62/92
Feb. 40/55	June 71/96	Oct. 51/84
March 44/67	July 77/101	Nov. 44/65
April 51/87	Aug. 44/92	Dec. 40/53

Vital statistics were not carefully recorded; many born in the 19th Century did not (and some still do not) know the exact day and year of birth; less so now than in previous generations. Thus, it was sometimes. "He was born in *SANT-IL-ZANZALEH'*, the year of the [severe] earth-quake", or else — *"SANT-IL-TALJ"*, the year of the [extraordinary] snowfall. This was sometimes 'refined' to being born for example ". . . Three days after *Pésah,* the "year of . . . etc." Some families kept such careful records; and so too, did some *Mohéls,* who recorded every ceremony in which they participated.

The month of March usually coincides with the Jewish Festival of Purim, in Aleppo and Damascus, "walled cities in the period of Joshua ben Nun", a two-day celebration, especially joyous for children. They would receive the customary Purim presents (usually money) from parents, grandparents, uncles and adult friends of the family.[27] The arrival of Purim of officially marked the beginning of Spring. Soon the hot sun, beating down in a climate with low humid-

ity, made walking in the open uncomfortable, while a stroll in the shade or in the covered *souks* was endurable and cool. Even in the hottest days of summer, refuge in the shade was cool and pleasant. There were many hot days and some very uncomfortable hot nights which made sleeping indoors impossible and in the Aleppo of our own time (and memory) some nights it became desirable to take mattresses to the rooftops, just as Maundrell and the English Factors were compelled to do almost four hundred years previously.

Aleppoans with means would take their families to the mountains around *Baylan, Antioch* and *Alexandretta* to the east, or to the resorts in the Lebanese Mountains, *Aley, Sofar* and *B'hamdoun,* for the summer. They journeyed to the hills in Southern Turkey, to *Tédef* or *Aintab,* trips respectively of one day and two days, by carriage. There a house, frequently with an orchard, was rented for occupancy through the Jewish High Holy Days in September or Early October. The peasant whose house was rented would supply abundant quantities of the "incomparably tasty" vegetables and fruits and dairy products which abounded in the mild climate and rich fertile soil.

City Landmarks

The foremost features in Aleppo are the *souks,* the Qal'ah, (the Citadel — the huge fortress dating to ancient times) and Bab-il-Faraj, the "Gate of Deliverance," a large 'square,' central to the entire city. The origin of this name is unknown to any informants in "Aleppo-in-Flatbush," except that it marks one of the ancient gates of the old walled city. Here was the location of the only Post Office, the Telegraph building, Baron's, a small hotel, (still functioning) virtually the only one, barely worthy of the designation; and the location of Orosdi-Beck, a small department store which was part of a Near East chain of variety-stores operated by an Austrian Company. Nearby was the *Na-Oura,* the tiny stream which coursed through part of the city; or, to give it its more formal name, the 'river' *Quaik.* The outstanding feature of Bab-il-Faraj, the city center — was the clocktower in the middle of

this area. The tower, a narrow square structure perhaps fifty to sixty feet high, had clocks on each side at its top. Two of the clocks showed European ("Franji") time, while the others kept Oriental time. The Oriental day marks sundown as "twelve o'clock," when the day ends, as in the Hebrew observance.

A canon-shell was fired there at sunset to mark the beginning of the new day during the month (and Fast) of Ramadan. It announced to the pious Muslims that they could then break their day-long fast, to feast and make merry. The fast was resumed at the break of day. Long before dawn the town would have been bustling with joyous activity, preparing a meal which was consumed before day-break.

The Souks and Commerce

Much of the interest and history of Aleppo lies in its *souks*, the *streets* of roofed bazaars. From personal observation, which is borne out by Robin Fedden, these are more impressive than the *souks* of Damascus, Istanbul and Cairo.[28] The *souks* of Aleppo remain as they were rebuilt in the Thirteenth Century. With Saracen gateways and fine, vaulted roofs and arches, they have preserved the spirit of the ancient caravan traffic. Each roofed 'street' is devoted to a particular trade or craft; the *souks* form a compact, homogeneous mass. One need not look to know the craft or trade of a particular *souk*. In one was *souk-il-ittereen*, with the beguiling fragrance of herbs and spices; in another the sound of the hammer of silver and goldsmiths; or that of *souk il ni'heh seen*, the coppersmiths; in yet another the pungent odor of the treated hides and skins; while in still others there was the quiet and serenity of the dealers in carpets or textile stuffs.

It is difficult to exaggerate the charm of some of the smaller khans, such as *Khan il Wazeer*, and the quiet and sunny expanse of the great courtyard which becomes visible when the Khan is entered from the bustling activity of the dark, covered *souk*. Some Khans have a grape arbor and perhaps a tree. A disheveled Muslim porter is often seen asleep in a corner on a pile of bales; under a tree backgammon is played, while nearby a mule or donkey awaits its master under a strip

of shade, as Robin Fedden, the contemporanious English traveller observed.

The *Souks* have a curious effect of a subterranean roofed-over city, with windows letting slashes of light from above, illuminating the beams of motes. This effect is accentuated when it is realized that sheep and goats are quietly grazing on the field overhead in the empty expanses where the murmurs of commercial life from below continually rises into the sun.

It was in the nearby quarters of the "Sa-ha" and "Bahsita," that most of the Jews had lived earlier times. It was in the midst of the *souks* and the "khans" that they pursued their economic lives, from the lowly human beast of burden — the porter *or hammál,* to the affluent *tádjer,* the merchant and the *sarráf,* the money changer, a private banker; all following the same pursuits as in the medieval days of the *Geniza,* and perhaps even earlier, much earlier.

"Khans" and Commercial Life

The Aleppo merchant was ensconsed in his 'room' *(óhda),* his office-and-warehouse in one of the two huge "khans" or in one of the lesser "khans. The large "khans" are huge rectangles, enormous courtyards, with warehouses lining all sides.

"Khan-il-Gimrog," "the Caravansary of the Customs" has perhaps one hundred private offices with adjoining warehouses. It is large enough to have a small mosque in the center of its courtyard (A diagram of one or more khans, to scale, may be found in an Appendix). *"Khan-*il-*Gimrog"* (the principal street of the souks) was entered from *"Souk-il-Gimrog",* "the bazaar of the Customs House." "Khan-il-Qassabiyeh," second in importance to "khan-ll-Gimrog" was named after the gold thread *(qassabb)* used for ornamentation; (it is now the jute center). By its side is the relatively 'new' (1925-1930), and especially luxurious *hammam* built through a joint enterprise of a wealthy Jewish textile merchant, Siyáhu Shamáh, who shared in may building ventures with Gózzem, a highly respected Muslim partner. The same joint-venture was responsible for the first multi-storied apartment house,

constructed in the early 1930's and boasted electricity and running water, *with a tub.* It was built in the "Djamiliyeh," the better class Jewish residential area at the then-limits of the city.

The Dalál — The Broker

A number of businessmen in Aleppo were not merchants but adjuncts to the merchants' trades. They followed the ancient profession of *dalál,* a free-lance commission broker who, as his title indicates — "led," he led the buyer to the merchant, and the merchant to a likely customer who was on a "buying trip." The buyers were local or, often, from the desert, or from villages, towns and cities as far east as Baghdad (before Iraq-Mesopotamia, gained its independence) — from the areas hundred of miles in the interior of Syria, Iraq or southern Turkey. The *dalál* dealt with sellers and buyers in all commodities. Much of this was in textile materials, a principal commodity traded, in which Aleppoan Jews excelled.

They were involved in agricultural products too, such as wheat, sesame, and other grains, olive oil, soap and imported kerosene. One enterprise, that of Ráhmo Nehmad, an Aleppoan Jew, held an agency for an oil company (Shell, or perhaps Mobil or the like), as well as trading in other commodities. According to information gathered in Aleppo, the extent of this individual's riches were widely estimated to be on the order of several million gold pounds, (Circa 1930; the distribution of kerosene was a basic need in the country for lighting and cooking fuel).

The *dalál* was the middle-man who would see to the completion of the deal because, with the inevitable extended bargaining of the Near-East, an intermediary was *absolutely* necessary to draw together the the 'adversaries' — the buyer and the seller. An Aleppoan asking another what price he had paid for a purchase would say *"bee-kaam fasáltah?"* ("At what level did you finally bargain the price?") The *dalal* was in a measure a court of arbitration, and of persuasion. At long last, when the 'bargain,' the *bázrah* (from which "bazaar"

stems), was concluded, the *dalál* would grasp the hands and bring the principals to a seemingly reluctant handshake with the ritual remark, *"sha-yef-il-khéhr,"* to the effect that may they, the principals, "see prosperity" (through the deal), and thus seal the negotiation.

Home Life

Many of the twenty-four 'quarters' of Aleppo were almost self-contained villages, each with its own suppliers of food and services, with tailors and shoemakers, barbers and bakers and butchers and grocers. Each 'quarter', in addition, had its own administrative 'quarter-chief,' *(mukhtár-il-hara),* often a Muslim, in "Bahsita" and the "Sa'ha," predominently Jewish locales. The *mukhtár* was the peace-officer as well as the ward-heeler and 'fixer' in matters involving the city authorities.

Residences in the inner city were apartments or rooms surrounding an inner courtyard, a *hohsh.* The family with means occupied a many-roomed private *hohsh.* Others occupied several rooms while still other *hohsh* families were fortunate to command one. Perhaps four or five families comprised the less affluent residents of a *hohsh.*

A cistern or well in the *hohsh* courtyard supplied the water in those days (in dry periods these *cisterns* would often breed worms). The *hohsh* served as a gathering place for its residents and it was there that their festivities were celebrated. In a *hohsh* housing more than one family, a common kitchen was usual; it was a small chamber with one or more tables on which food was prepared. The cooking was done in metal or clay pots under which charcoal was burned. The wealthier families employed a *Primus* stove, a kerosene burner, force-fed by the air pumped into its magazine, a *"babór,"* ('vapor').

A *hohsh,* the property of a wealthy Jewish family would be sometimes almost luxurious — with stone carvings on the walls of the court, the work of traditionally expert carvers of Aleppo. I know of no truly luxurious homes belonging to Jews, such as existed in Damascus. In Aleppo the truly elegant homes, concealed by plain exteriors, belong to Muslims and Christian families, such as those of *Ghazáleh* and

Eida. The khan in the midst of the *souks* which belonged to my maternal uncle (a *signor)* adjoined the Ghazáleh home, but my uncle did not visit his neighbor — during my visits to Aleppo as a young man. The interior walls of these homes are covered with exquisite fresco paintings. In some rooms one finds depictions of flowers, bowls of fruit, scroll work and decorative Arabic inscriptions — all set apart by medallions and arabesques in painted plaster. These and other elaborately decorated residences have modest exteriors to avoid being targets of pillage and to guard against envy and the *'ein* (the evil eye).

Running water was unknown in homes. Water was available from the well in the courtyard or from a cistern which held water gathered in the winter — the rainy season *(shitteh,* the term in Aleppo for "winter," is the term used in Egypt for "rain"). In 1918 spring water became available from public spigots in nearby streets, water that was piped from wells some fifteen miles away, from "Ain-il-Tel"). Toilet facilities were located in the courtyard — outhouses; (thus chamberpots were a common feature of bedrooms.) Thus, too, in Aleppo, as in most Oriental towns and cities of the period, even in the Muslim sections of cities as modern as 'French'-Algiers, the cesspools often made their presence evident in the atmosphere.

Until the turn of the 20th Century, almost all Jews in Aleppo lived "in town," that is to say, in the center of the ancient city within the confines of its historic walls. The Jewish 'quarter' was centered in *Bahista,* where most Jews had lived from ancient days. Others lived in the *Sá-ha,* or in other nearby 'quarters.' The streets of old town are narrow and winding, some almost alleys. Above some lanes in the old residential areas would be found the balconies projecting above the lanes, constructed of dark, elaborately fluted and carved wood panels. Parts of the home of the wealthier Aleppoans and most of the *signoreem* and a few wealthy *Must'arab'een,* had been large apartments attached to their khans — their caravansary — warehouses in the midst of the *souks.* Early in this century most Jews — except for the poor — moved away, to the outlying edges of the town to the south,

to the new neighborhood called Djamiliye, for the greater number, and some to Ismailiyé (named after the Ottoman Pashas, *Djamil* and *Ismail).* Some Jews lived in 'quarters' inhabited also by Muslims, but *never* among Christians.

Some food suppliers were renowned among the inhabitants of Aleppo. Among them was the *Tédfee* (from the town of Té'def), whose specialty was the preparation of *sahlab,* a kind of hot custard much sought-after on chilly mornings by the *souks'* merchants and workers. Unless one reached the *Tédfee* by about eight o'clock, the *sahlab* was likely to be sold out. (Why didn't he prepare more? What did he do the rest of the day?) *Sha'ya Dweck,* who became a prominent member of New York's Syrian community, also began his career as a lowly maker-and-seller of *sahlab. (Sha'ya's* renown did not come in Halab but in New York's Bensonhurst Area. During the heart of the Depression in 1933-35, a poor youth in Aleppo, *Sha'ya* became wealthy in New York. Many families facing the foreclosing of their mortgages found a savior in *Sha'ya,* who often assumed their mortgages and waited for years until the families could pay back the overdue installments.)

Another much patronized supplier of choice sweets was *Mansoura,* whose pastries were the "best in Aleppo." With two generations as cake-bakers, Mansoura fled to Egypt in 1914 to escape conscription into the Turkish Army. With the persecution of the Jews under Nasser, his heir Issac came to Aleppo-in-Flatbush where the traditional *Mansoura* quality is again recognized on Kings Highway.

The ancient *Bahsita* contained the Great Synagogue, and the *Sa-ha* 'quarter' the renowned synagogue *Bet Nassi,* "the prayer house of the Prince". (The Dayan family of rabbis claimed descent from King David.)

Except among the "Franj" and the wealthier natives, beds were seldom used. At sleeptime, an hour or two after sunset, mattresses were brought out of cupboards and placed on the floor. In the morning, after being aired outdoors, the mattresses were restored to their storage areas in a cupboard (as in Japan), or piled up in a corner of the room in a *reema* (Spanish, "pile"). This custom permitted the sleeping room

to be used as living quarters at the same time that the floor served as a firm base for the mattresses. The latter were usually stuffed with wool or cotton fibers. With time the fibers became lumpy and uncomfortable. Thus, at seasonal intervals a professional, the *menáged,* would come to empty the mattresses and re-work the wool or cotton to softness. This was done by means of a one-string "harp;" the string would be plucked and as it vibrated clumps of wool were applied to it, spreading the fibers.[29] At other times, the courtyard was visited by a "whitener," *(m'bah-yed).* Cooking utensils usually were made of heavy copper with "white", tin, applied to their interiors to prevent the poisoning that could result from food coming in contact with the copper.

Until the early 1930's no Jewish homes were equipped with electricity; illumination was by means of kerosene lamps or by the use of a *wan-naseh* which was what the poor could afford. (The *wan-naseh* is a small dish that holds oil in which one or two small wicks floated. When lighted, the wicks gave off a feeble light). The wealthier families employed one or more kerosene lamps to illuminate their rooms. For the many card parties to which Aleppoan Jewry was addicted, especially the more affluent, several more kerosene lamps were brought in. In the winter such upper class families heated their formal living room, the *salon,* by means of a *chamanéhyeah* (the arabicized version of the French *cheminée,* chimney-stove) located in the middle of the room. The person facing the stove would be well crisped while his or her back would freeze — much like the effect of open fireplaces. The prospect of retiring to an unheated and dark bedroom was a reluctant and unwelcome one indeed since there was no provision for heating this chamber.

Those who were not rich enough to own a *chamanéhyeah* heated their rooms with small braziers in which charcoal was sparingly burned, to minimize the danger of smoke poisoning. During the most bitterly cold days of winter a low table was sometimes placed above the small brazier over which a quilt was spread. The chilled householders would huddle under the edge of the quilt to share the genial warmth that was thus conserved. Joking and story telling were customary

then, to the special delight of the children. This arrangement was called a *tannour* — the word in both Arabic and Hebrew referring to an oven. The intense cold, fortunately, was of short duration.

Kapparót

There was another annual event which was the source of particular excitement for the children. This was the visit of the *shohét* the ritual poultry slaughterer. It is Orthodox ritual among most Ashkenazeem and Sepharadeem to have a head of poultry slaughtered for each individual in the family to atone for possible sins, on the evening immediately before the beginning of Yom Kippúr, the Day of Atonement; a rooster for males, a hen for each female. (The custom is somewhat Kabbalistic and some important rabbinical authorities condemn this practice of offering the life of a fowl as a "scapegoat", a means of supposedly sparing the life of the individual who had been perhaps fated for death). The custom was widespread among Aleppoan Jews and every *hohsh,*with its several tenants, would await the arrival of the busy *shohet* with excitement. The couryard would be loud with the cackling and crowing of the many nervous fowl, brought in readiness. The excitement would sometimes continue until midnight, when the busy *shoshét* would finally arrive; only then would the children go to bed. Their presence was required so that the just-then slaughtered fowl would be waved around the child's head. The father would intone *"Halifata, Kaparata"*, (Aram). "Substitution and atonement, etc."

Bathing and the Hammam

Daily washing of hands and face was done in an alcove with water fetched from outdoors. Most men and women bathed once a week in the *hammam,* the public "Turkish" bath. Each would resort to his or her favorite *hammam,* which had separate days for men and women. Children were bathed at home on Friday, in preparation for the Sabbath. A huge copper pan would hold the crouching child as the water

heated for the occasion was poured over it. As a treat the small child would sometimes be allowed to accompany the father or mother to the *hammam,* accompanied by a bundle of towels and fresh clothing — sometimes carried by a servant. I remember the visits to the *hammam* as indeed a delight. To my sorrow, at the age of six, the door keeper would no longer permit me admission with my mother — my father had already gone to America.

The *hammams* were appreciatedly described by numerous European travellers.[30] The *hammams* offer a view of old structures, some dating back to the 17th century or earlier. Usually a door with small partitioned areas, raised as on a dias. Sometimes one sees a decorative stone fountain in the room's center.

Each 'hot-room' within, has a cupola containing multicolored glass inserts which throw a soft light; in the manner of Mideastern architecture, the cupola is supported by a number of arches. Further within the *hammam,* smaller vaulted chambers house the actual bath. Here, hot water flows into stone basins from which it is poured over the bather, the attendant using soap and lather, rubs with a *kees-il-tafreek* "a rubbing mitten" made of fine mohair, which rids the body of all dirt — as well as unsuspected dead skin.

Before and after bathing the visitor enters a dressing quarter, where an attendant assists him or her in disrobing, and later in dressing.

Returning to the couch in the cool ante-chamber, the visitor, now relaxed and swathed in layers of towels, is offered syrup, *shraahb* ("sherbert"), a juice drink made from orange or lemon syrup. Often, the visitor would follow his *shraahb* drink by smoking *timbák Adjmi* (pungent Iranian tobacco) from a *nargilah* (water pipe). As Robin Fedden, a visitor to Aleppo who loved the city wrote, "You can imagine yourself back in the Aleppo of Nour-il-Deen (11th Century) or among the English factors of the Levant Company, three or four hundred years ago."

While a *kees-il-tafreek* may be found in some of the Syrian importing shops on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, the use of the *kees* is no longer popular here and to most second and

third generation Syrians it is unknown. (Its efficacy remains great however, in America, as in the Orient).

The Bride's Hammam

Besides regular bathing the *hammam* was reserved for the *Hammam-il-aroos* ("the bride's bath") party, several days before a wedding. Only the bride's female relatives and friends were invited to this joyous evening party, which was the occasion of much merriment, singing, dancing and *zaghloutas* (ululations); a marked contrast to the bath's normal quiet and tranquility.

A central part of this prenuptial celebration was the *swehni* ("trays") gifts set on one or more trays which are customarily sent by the bridegroom to his chosen shortly before the wedding. The "trays" – actually there is usually only one – include a piece of jewelry, sweets, a bag of *beyloun-b-ward* (a rose-scented form of clay used as shampoo) and one of *henna*, a red vegetable dye used by Muslim women to stain, and thus 'beautify' the soles of their feet and palms. Some Jewish brides merely bathed in a ritual bath, a *mikvéh, into which a pinch of henna* was thrown for 'symbolic' (Arab) reasons.[31]

Married Jewish women, as was customary in the traditional Jewish patriarchal society, held a secondary role. Although Jewish canon commands consideration and courtesy for a wife, the finances were completely controlled by the husband; no wife knew the financial worth of the family. A husband granted her what money she required for her personal needs; for personal shopping, sometimes for expensive European materials if he was well-to-do. There were many large shops, with wide varities of fine dress fabrics, which prided themselves on the elegance of their imported stock. The ladies would select materials fastidiously and then turn to examine the latest fashion books of *modéls* which had just arrived from Paris.

The many poor women struggled at home to manage with the miserably small earnings their husbands may have somehow secured; often, necessarily, supplemented by communal assistance.

No woman in the middle and upper class — or indeed of any class would ever be found shopping or marketing for household needs (safety?) Men with means would lay in staple houshold supplies for the whole year. For example, when a caravan load of olive-oil soap that was widely used came to the market seasonally, a supply would be sent home to last perhaps a year or longer. Staple foods, too, were bought in quantities: rice, lentils and other legumes, salt, sugar and other items were put in for long periods. Fresh foodstuffs were bought by her husband as well; it was he who selected the vegetables and meat. Never, however, was he seen carrying a bundle. Everything was dispatched to his home and charged to his account, to be paid for at settlement-time, at the end of the month, or season.

Wakeel-Il-Kharjj

While the wife never did the marketing, in some homes *neither did the master* of the household. This task was often entrusted to a reliable employee in his business. At other times it was a trust-worthy and respected poor man known as *wakeel-il-kharjj*, "agent for spending" who served. In consultation with the husband (or housewife) he would proceed to market to make the best deals for the fresh food ordered. In some instances the same *wakeel* served several households, making sure to deliver his purchases before noon. At that time he was ready to carry lunch down to the *souk* for his patrons. Lunches consisting of several courses, were placed into interlocking metal dishes, piled one above another and held together by metal bars; the *tahbah-iyyeh* guaranteed a hot lunch. For the merchant to return home at noon required too much travel time, and perhaps expense.

Not all our merchants had a *tahbah-iyyeh* delivered to them, however. Some would consume a lunch in the *souks*. There were no formal restaurants, only lunch bars or lunch rooms of informal character where the food was frequently eaten while standing. The lunch rooms were operated by fellow Jews and were certain to observe stringent ritual food laws. Another popular resort was lunch *'and il qassáb* ("at the

butchers"). As noted earlier, almost all butcher shops were operated by Muslims (while all cattle were slaughtered by Jews). When the carcass hanging on a hook bore the *kashér* stamp some Jews felt free to have a piece of lamb broiled for them over the open charcoal fire. The presence of these food-butcher shops in the midst of the *souk* adjacent to the premises of Jewish merchants, was evident from some distance away, thanks to the fragrance of hickory-wood smoke. It is known that sometimes fragrances are indelibly etched on the memory bank. As a young man in New York I was frozen in my tracks and transported instantly to the roofed *souk* of my native Aleppo, when a whiff of fragrant hickory smoke was wafted from a nearby "backyard," the first smell of this bouquet since my childhood in Aleppo.

Cultural Life

In *Halab* of old, even to the days of first-generation American immigrants, life had changed little from that of a thousand years before. Aleppo had no theatres, no lectures, no concerts of Europe's great music; in fact, none of the cultural developments that were features of cities and towns in the West — even those with populations far smaller than Aleppo's 350,000 to 400,000 inhabitants in the first decades of our century. In 1930, Bourain, an Aleppo-Christian publisher, wrote with bitterness of the dearth of "cultural" activities even among the educated, those who had benefitted from the influence of French education, which was then the culturally dominant Western influence in the Middle East.[32]

Major cultural activities based on the life of the Orient were few and indeed far apart. True, while there were no lectures, as Bourain had hoped for with "visiting professors discoursing on French writers," nor *any* lecturers of which we know, there were, however, local singers and instrumentalists giving performances of Arabic music, and visiting musicians, came from Damascus, Beirut or Cairo. Generally, one or two visited Aleppo in the course of the year and perhaps a travelling Arabic theatrical troupe would perform; but not every year, however. I had been told of the visits of great

artists who had come to Aleppo many years before, among who was the foremost vocalist of the Arabic world, Sheikh Saláme'il'Hedgazi, (died circa 1910).

Local musicians performed at cafes, and at parties — of which more below.

Other Entertainments

Moving pictures — the cinema — had barely been seen in the days of my Aleppo recollection (1913-1915). A small Italian circus troupe gave a performance once each week for a short 'season.' At the end of the Sunday performance a screen was lowered to present a few moments of filmed news events.[33] Aleppo's streets, however, had their own presentation of pictures. *Ajay-ban Ghar-ayban* could be seen in the itinerant exhibitor's boxes, small, windowed openings. "*Ajay-ban Ghar-ayban* ('views, strange and bizarre'), the exhibitor would cry out; "Come view the King of England on his throne; come see the miracle of men riding through the air." These wonders were to be seen in the picture box upon the payment of a small coin. They were colored illustrated newspapers, or rotogravure pictures originating in the West. Men and women as well as the children flocked to view these marvels.

Karagoz u-Aiywaaz, ("Karakoz" in Aleppo), was another popular form of entertainment in Aleppo as well as in many parts of the East. This was an evening shadow-screen comic presentation offering the two legendary characters "Kargoz and Aiwaaz," in short skits, with the characters bickering and fighting. It may have been a feature of Aleppo's entertainment from the beginning of the Turkish conquest centuries before. The names *Karagoz* and *Aiwaaz* are distincly Turkish in origin; *Karagoz,* for example, is a province in Central Turkey.

The Sawáss

An ever-present feature of Aleppoan street life was the presence everywhere of the *sawáss,* the vendor of *soos,* a drink which was 'fermented' — it is non-alcoholic, made from the

branches of the licorice trees which are plentiful on the interior plains close to Aleppo. The *sawáss* (Plural, *sawesseen*) carrying his supply in a goat-skin slung on his shoulders, could be heard everywhere as he cried out to the accompaniment of the resonant brass bowls in his hand, striking one bowl inside another. The bowls were filled with *soos* for his customers throughout the day. However, fastidious clients would proffer their *own bowls* to be filled. While casual customers paid the trifling cost on the spot, merchants and shop keepers would have their account scored on their door post in chalk for weekly accounting. *Soos* is a delicious beverage but its custom has not, alas, accompanied the Syrian emigrants anywhere, to my knowledge.

Celebrations, and the Hadji

The town had many fair-like festivities to mark the abundant Muslim holy days, and particularly the commemoration of the death of *Hassan* and *Husehn,* two of Mohammed's grandsons who were assassinated in the ceaseless power struggles for the succession to the Prophet. On the commemoration of *Hassan* and *Husehn's* death, *soos* vendors would run about offering free drinks to one and all, asking only that a prayer be intoned "for the souls" of the martyred heroes, "Ala róh *Hassan* and *Husehn.*" (As a boy, was it my over-indulgence in the free drink that caused a night of agonizing stomach-ache?)

Jewish residents were necessarily fully familiar with *Ramadan* and other Muslim celebrations of their fellow townsmen. An important private annual celebration marked the return of the fortunate Muslim who could make the pilgrimage to Mecca (and to return safe and healthy). It was not only the returned traveller's sacred journey that brought joy to his family and friends. The trips were marked by many deaths due to bandits, the unsanitary conditions that existed in Mecca and Medina, and the stops on the way to the shrines.

The returning *hadji,* a lifetime title of honor acquired by those who had made the *hadj,* the pilgrimage, would have had

his home gaily decorated several days before his return. A sacrificial lamb was slaughtered at the doorstep before the *hadji* stepped into his home. All his relatives and friends, a few of who may have been Jews, would surely pay a ceremonious visit of congratulation during the several days of joyous celebration following the return. The hour of the return itself brought forth songs and the *zaghlouta* (or *zaghrouta),* a trill-yodel ululation sounded with the tip of the tongue darting to the roof of the mouth at machine-gun speed and with the mouth, curiously, partially covered by the hand).

A popular anecdote tells of the woman who approached a neighbor who was about to set forth on a *Hadj,* a pilgrimage to Mecca. "Neighbor," she said, "in Mecca they make a special penny-whistle. Would you kindly bring one back with you for my little boy?" The neighbor replied that it would give him much pleasure to accomplish this small service. He apologized when he returned — without the whistle. The following year when the *Hadji,* the life-time title of honor for one who had previously made the pilgrimage — was preparing to leave for Mecca, the mother approached him once again, "I will be glad to reimburse you for the cost of the whistle." He replied. "Dear neighbor, it is only a trifle. This time I will be sure not to forget!" Once again he returned — *without* the whistle; solemnly promising that on the *next* pilgrimage, etc., etc. . . . The following year — these pilgrimages can be annual for the very devout Muslims — as he was about to leave, the mother placed a small coin in his palm. Said the *Hadji "Halát shábbab* [or *zámmar*] *b'náyek."* — "This time your son will whistle [or toot]"; (A *shabbábeh* is a whistle, a *zammára* is a primitive form of clarinet or oboe).

Cafés

Cafés first became popular in the Middle East, where cafe-going is an old custom. When one ordered *qah'weh* (coffee), an added request for *daqqa* (a "touch") would bring a small bottle of *'araq,* pickled artichokes, cucumbers, camahyeh (truffles), olives, cheeses, as well as *ka'ik,* a local form of

bread-stick bagel. Coffee was served in diminutive cups which were frequently refilled, at the same time that one customarily smoked a *nargeelah,* a water-pipe to which a long, flexible tube was attached. The careful cafe-goer brought out of his pocket a small silver mouthpiece, which he inserted at the end of the tube for reasons of hygiene. All the while, boy-attendants circulated, offering the guest fresh water and lighted charcoals to put on the tobacco atop the water pipes. "*Nahrah, máhy*eh!" ("Fire and water") they shouted again and again. Finally, when no longer puffing on the *nargeelah,* and he had curbed his hunger, the guest picked on a variety of roasted seeds.

Larger cafés featured musical ensembles, a *nóbeh,* after dark, while smaller ones made do with a phonograph. My very first recollection, when I was two and a half years old, is of a café to which my father took me, shortly before he left Aleppo for the United States. He gave me a small coin to present to the man who sat by the phonograph patiently grinding away at the springless phonograph. (The elaborate musical-ensemble is called a *nóbeh* — the same term is used for a festive party, at which a *nóbeh* performs).

At the end of the day, Jewish businessmen would visit their favorite — usually Jewish — cafés, where they passed a pleasant hour with fellow merchants and friends, often, concluding a business deal. On special occasions, which featured an important musical group, their wives sometimes accompanied them.

Marriage

Marriage ceremonies of Jewish Aleppoans — and of Muslims, too — benefitted from the dual characteristics (of the *nóbeh.)* They were festivities as well as musical presentations; unlike the custom of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn, who now usually celebrate marriages with dinner-dances, any evening of the week — the suggestion of a Friday evening wedding would appear *bizarre* to them. Aleppo marriages, however, were almost always celebrated beginning late Friday afternoon. The guests gathered in the *hohsh* or courtyard, of the

groom's parents and a simple marriage ceremony took place. Saturday evening the *nóbeh* ensemble would make its presentation. Immediately after dinner in their own homes, the guests returned to the music and lavish offerings of the exotic and varied sweetmeats for which the Orient is renowned. On Sunday afternoon of the following day, the musical *nóbeh* would surely take place, even if in the unlikely possibility there had been no musical treat the evening before (possibly because of the expense).

The Sabbath

Every Aleppoan Jewish household was sure to have a private Friday evening Sabbath dinner, which would comprise several dishes. Late Friday afternoon 'she' sometimes sent her pots to the local bakery. There they would be put into the bake-oven for slow cooking and on the following day the pots which contained the *bayet* would be returned, with the food ready for the table. The bakers, traditionally Muslim tribesmen from another area, they were referred to as *Swasneh* (singular *Susahnee),* were patronized during the week, too. Twice a week, usually, the housewife prepared her dough, to bring it to the bakery. Thus two days each week the family ate fresh baked bread. The remaining loaves would be heavily wrapped in cloth to keep them from becoming stale too quickly. Despite the care, the family necessarily ate increasingly stale and hardened bread several days each week.

Sabbath in the Jewish community meant an *absolute* cessation of work. A shopkeeper who would (unthinkingly) attempt to trade would be placed under *Herem* (an "anathema") after being given due warning.[34] In fact, with the approach of sundown on Friday, as a boy I saw a rabbi patrolling the streets, chasing shopkeepers home, even shoeshine boys, who sought to squeeze out an additional few coppers.[35] Soon after sundown the miserably-poor would begin their rounds, begging at the doors for food with which to greet the Sabbath. Jewish neighborhoods would ring with their cries for *Mazz-o-n* (food, in Hebrew). They sought bread mostly. On the following day they would open their knapsacks to the

householders to have the remains of their leftovers from several dishes, the alms-givers' meals, dumped into the sacks without separation *" 'anee, y'ammo"*).[36]

Outdoor Pleasures

An important form of entertainment in the spring and fall of the year, was picnicing in the vast and numerous *bassateen* (singular, *bistan,* fruit orchards or gardens) surrounding the city. Families would pack their hampers, engage a carriage with its driver and hie themselves to a *bistan.* There they would stroll about under the welcome shade of the trees, eating and drinking and making merry.[37] The trifling fee for the use of the *bistan* included being supplied with almost limitless quantities of the fruits of the orchard. There were apricots, fresh pistachios and walnuts and other fruits and nuts as well, — figs, and mulberries available in abundance due to the large scale cultivation of mulberry trees, as a source of food for the silk-spinning worms. (Silk had been an important commodity in Aleppo. Mention of large scale manufacture and trade in Aleppo silk reaches back to the tenth century as we read in the uncovered *Geniza* papers of Old Cairo). Residents in Aleppo were known to say, "What a fine day for a *bistan,"* on *rare overcast days* in the hot spring and summer. This made an excursion to the orchards tolerable, otherwise it was uncomfortable, and even unsafe, to venture far under the hot sun in the very dry climate.[36] (See Dr. Russel, above).

Other "pleasure domes" were the *Shah'bandar* (Persian, for "the Shah's Garden"), located some fifteen minutes away from the city by carriage, comprised of a spacious café under the trees, with a small, artificial fountain. The *Sabeel,* in the city, similarly was pleasant for an afternoon's diversion. It lay just beyond the ancient walls.

Attire (Early 20th Century)

The visitors to Aleppo saw its inhabitants attired in the same fashion as any Middle Eastern city of centuries ago.

With a few exceptions, the Muslim women wore dark or black dresses with hoods-scarves which served to cover all of their faces except for the eyes. This preserved their modesty in not permitting anyone but their kinsmen to see their faces (and thus to be inflamed with lust). Prettier women were careful *not* to conceal too much of their attractive features. Covering the face except for the eyes, was an exclusively Muslim custom.

Most men, of all three faiths, wore an *imbaazz* or *yallak*, a robe reaching to their ankles. Most such robes were of striped or figured cotton materials; men of some substances wore fancier striped and figured robes. Apparel for festive occasions brought out an *imbaazz yallak* but with jacquard patterns in which gold or silver threads were sometimes introduced discreetly. Most men wore a fez *(tarbohsh)*, a flat-topped conical head-covering of red felt, lined with caning to maintain its shape. (The fez of Aleppo was characteristically a "tall" one, to a height of six to seven or eight inches; the Egyptians sported a shorter one, the Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians also wore a short fez, without caning.) In the colder months the *yallak* or *imbaazz* was supplemented by another garment over it, a *jibbeh*, a cloak, of heavier material which the wealthier traditional Aleppoans wore; the *jibbeh* was customary at all times for the important men of the city, such as a sheikh or a rabbi with a high official position. Those who could not afford a *jibbeh* wore a familiar suitjacket over the *imbaazz*. These were often imported second-hand, from America.

A *láffeh* (turban) was worn by the poor and more elaborate ones were worn by the rabbis, mullahs, sheikhs, dervishes *(daraweesh)* and others with claims to religious standing. The colors of the turbans differentiated the respective sects. Only lineal descendants of Muhammad wore a *green* turban.

Laborers characteristically wore a *shirwehl*, a huge bloomer reaching to the ankles, with a blouse above it. Yes, there were some who wore European-type suits, the 'elite' Jewish merchants, *tidjaar* of some importance and *sirehfeen*, the money-changers — private bankers and *all* of the "Franj," those who maintained foreign citizenship. Many among the large popu-

lation of Christians in Aleppo also wore European dress. Suits were usually topped by a fez; only the "very European" wore hats.

Jewish (and Christian) women all wore conventional, simple dresses. The rich among them wore fashionable gowns *à la mode de Paris.*

Most immigrant men had worn a *yallak,* a *laffeh* or a *fez.* When they prepared for the voyage they donned a suit and hat, since the 'American' friends or cousins had written to them to be in Western clothes when they arrived in New York. This referred to Damascus' immigrants as well as to the Aleppoans.

It is now time to glance at the history of Damascus, and the role of the Jews there.

Notes

1. "Aleppo" was the name given to *Halab* by Italian merchants in the 14th and 15th Centuries. French merchants referred to it as "Alep" *('Alap-Halab)* Aleppo and *Halab* will be used interchangably.

2. A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia,* Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 389. ". . . From Hittite, Egyptian and Assyrian sources we know that *Halab* was fought over by the empires in the second millenium B.C.E. It is also mentioned in the texts from Ugarit and Alalakh." Aleppo has been called the "sister city" to Carchemesh, which is mentioned often by many historians as an important Hittite center. (The Hittites presumably got their name from the biblical "Heth, child of Canaan," *Genesis)* The Hittites under King Shubiluiuma reportedly swept down from Turkey in 1296 B.C.E., and captured *Halab.* Many large pieces of Hittite sculpture and *stele* have been uncovered in the vicinity of the Citadel and are now in the small Museum of Aleppo where I saw them.

3. Josephus, Flavius, *Wars of the Jews,* reprinted, New York: Holt, Renfrew, Winston, 1961, p. 832. See also: Charles Guignebert, *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus,* Rutledge and Kegan Paul, London (1939), pp. 213-216. A highly knowledgeable informant, the late *Haham* Matloub Abadi, told me that the size of the Great Synagogue in Aleppo "dwarfs the "Sha'aré Zión" edifice." He thought that the Great Synagogue was probably the largest synagogue in the world" and could accommodate within its structure more than half a dozen buildings the size of "Sha'aré Zión" – in Flatbush.

4. Ben Zion Lurie, *Hayehudim Bé Suriya,* (Heb. "Jews of Syria"). Jerusalem, (1957), Kiryat Sefer Press. We may assume that the Great Synagogue was originally smaller; it may have been added to in ensuing centuries after the original construction. We conclude, from Guignebert's research (op. cit. p. 218/219) that the substantial size of the synagogue at the time of its construction is in fact the same as the synagogue as it was known to living members of the Aleppo-in-Flatbush. Guignebert describes the design used, with few variations, in the

construction of synagogues at the end of the era of the Second Temple in the First Century (B.C.E. and C.E.) "A large, large wall encompassing the huge court yard, where prayer-services were held on fine days. Beyond the courtyard, and a portico giving access with or without a vestibule, to a large rectangular room there was a sort of platform on which stands the reading desk." The Great Synagogue of Aleppo had a number of 'chapels,' some of which *may* have been additions to the original design. Disputes between scholars as the correct reading of the Hebrew dating of the stone in the Great Synagogue have been resolved in favor of the Third Century.

Alex Dotan (Lutzky) studied the Great Synagogue on a visit to Aleppo. His article in *Sefunot* Vol. I, Kiryat Sefer, Jerusalem 1956 (in Heb.) gives a history of the synagogue, a diagram to scale, and photographs including the *Seven Hekhaleem.*

5. L. Rabinowitz, *Jewish Merchant Adventurers, A Study of the Radinites,* London: Goldston, 1948.

6. Baron, Salo, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 216-222, Vol. V.

7. Henry, Malter, *Sa'adia, his Life and Works,* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921, p. 127.

8. Moslems were content to have skilled Jewish ritual slaughterers handle most of their meat; they follow many Jewish precepts in their food patterns, such as avoidance of Biblically proscribed animals – pigs and shell fish, etc., – and the necessity to slaughter animals by serving their jugulars with a sharp knife.

9. Aknin is remembered for his work *Kelalé Ha-Talmud,* still currently studied.

10. Maimonides, *Essays of Ha-Rambam* (Heb.) New York: Yeshurun Publishing Company, 1945, p. 67, in a letter to the Community of Lunel in Southern France.

11. Benjamin of Tudela, *Travels* (Hebrew) Tel Aviv, Oumanant Press, 1930. Biographies of the famous Benjamin exist in English.

12. *The Tahkemoni of Yehuda ben Shelomo Al-Harizi,* (Hebrew), Vienna: Schidbauer and Holzwarth, 1954. The *Tahkemoni* may be read in the English translation by Victor Emmanuel Reichert (Jerusalem, Cohen Press, 1965).

13. According to Jean Sauvaget who has written extensively on ancient Syria and published several volumes on the history of Aleppo, archaeological digs have proven that Aleppo's Citadel was indeed a fortress as early as the 8th Century B.C.E. See his *Le Tel d'Alep* (French) in *Melange Syrienne* Librarie Paul Guenther Paris, 1939, also (Aleppo) *Alep* (a history, French) Paul Guenther, Paris, 1941.

14. Sauvaget, (Ibid; *Alep*) states that the Bahsita in its present-day form represents a "pure Syriac style" and was completed about the 4th Century, C.E.; Murad Guindi, a current resident of Aleppo, stated to me that the name was originally "Baha-sita" (*sita* means reputation in Arabic), Guindi says that "Baha-sita" refers to the "quarter's" *fine reputation;* (in ancient time perhaps, in late years it was a slum).

15. Bernard Lewis, *Oriental Notes and Studies, A Contribution to the History of the Jews of Ottoman Empire* (Jerusalem, The Israel Oriental Society, No. 3, 1953). Lewis' information is drawn from the Official *O Hime Jizye Defteri* and *Muhimme Defteri* in 263 volumes dating from early in the 16th century; as well as from the Ottoman *Defter Il Khanni Khagami* giving the non-Moslem population by province, town, street, married or single, religion, name; usually "so-and-so," the son of "so-and-so," following Oriental usage. (Thus we are deprived by this source of the

possibility of knowing *possible* family names, some of which may have continued to our own time.)

16. Mair Jose Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (New York, Hispanic Institute in the U.S., 1952, p. 97. (Benardete's quote is from R. Mendez Pidal in *Cultura Espaniola*, Sec. II, pp. 1050-1055).

17. Bernard Lewis, *Damascus Just After the Ottoman Conquest*, [1453 C.E.] (B.S.C.S.X., 1939, Notes 3 and 5) (Bracketed date added).

18. Blacker, Irwin, *Haklyut's Voyages*, ed. (New York, Viking Press, 1965), pp. 263/265. See also the Facsimile edition of the 1589 C.E. original *The Principal Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1965) p. 53.

19. A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 214. See also: Lutzky, Alex., *The Francos and the Effects of the Capitulations on the Jews of Aleppo*, in *"Zion"* VI, 1940, Jerusalem, pp. 46-79, (Heb.) See also Davis' *Aleppo and Cavendish Square*, London, 1967.

20. A. C. Wood, Ibid., p. 214/215 (quoting Factor North).

21. Information and quotations are from: Maundrell, Henry, *A Journey From Aleppo to Jerusalem* originally published 1697, republished by Khayats, Beirut, 1963. (In Maundrell's time even lions were hunted in the countryside, not far from *Halab*).

The French consul *Arvieux*, under whose protection the Italian Jews rested later, also wrote glowing testimonials about the character of Aleppo's Jewish populace, in his memoirs of the 18th Century.

22. See, Strizowar, Shifra, *Exotic Jewish Communities* (Popular Jewish Library); also Kehimkar, H. S., *History of Bene Israel of India* (Tel Aviv, 1937).

23. Laniado, Shelomó Rafael, *Bet Dino Shel Shelomó*, (Hebrew, published in *Istambul* 1774-1775). This work deals with questions of Jewish law and the dispute with the Italian Signoreem. (A first edition copy, part of the A. D. Sutton Library of rare Hebrew books, is on loan to the Sha'aré Zión Congregation, the hub of Aleppo-in-Flatbush.)

Haham (Rabbi) Yehuda Kassin, a descendent of Spanish refugee settlers, the opponent in the controversy with the Laniado, also makes mention of this issue involving the "Francos of Franj" in his work, *Mahanneh Yehuda* (Hebrew)."

(Haham) Yeshaia, Attia, an Aleppoan, (This family name is also common among Ladino-Spanish Jews in Turkey and Greece), wrote at the beginning of the 1800's, attesting to the separate charitable activities of the "Franj." Rabbi Yeshaia Attia's *Bighde Yesha* is quoted in Alex. Lutzky, ibid, note No. 19.

24. Alex. Russell, M.D., *A Natural History of Aleppo*, published in 1752, 1756 and 1794 describes the city and gives details of heavy loss of life in the attacks of bubanic plague. His brother, Patrick, succeeded him as physician to the English colony. He wrote, *A Treatise of the Plague: At Aleppo in 1760, 1761 and 1762*, London, 1791. See also: Bodman, Jr., Herb L., *The Political Factions in Aleppo*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1963), pp. 131.

It was not always because of a bad crop that there were shortages of grain. They occured even with ". . . a relatively abundant harvest." Quoted in: Bodman, Jr., Herbert L., *Political Factions in Aleppo* [11th Century], University of North Carolina, 1963. p. 60.

This writer lost two sisters, victims of waves of plague (or cholera). The family

had prematurely returned from refuge in the mountains, on the advice of the leading physician in Aleppo, Dr. Altunian.

25. S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society; the Jewish Communities of the Arab World As Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza,* University of California Press, 1967, Vol I, p. 78.

(Vol. II and Vol. III of this series have already appeared, with Prof. Goitein currently at work on the 4th and concluding volume of this study. It is a *monumental* work, an almost incredible recreation from Geniza fragments, of the total life of the Jews, (and others) of the period, viewed through the documents of Fustat. Vol. III which was published November 1978 deals with *families.* The last volume will dwell on *individuals.*

Goitein's *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* Princeton University Press, 1973 contains letters written by 'our' ancestors 800 to 1000 years ago, letters to and from Aleppo, etc. When I showed Ben Dweck a copy of this work with photographs of some letters, he remarked, in amazement, "These are letters that *my father* could have received in Jerusalem only a few decades ago!" Photos of some *Geniza* letters show the correspondence written in the Hebrew script used *even today* by Oriental Jews. It is *similar* to Rashi-script, and is in *Nuss Qalam* (arabic) — popularly called "Nuss 'alam" — or "half a pen" possibly because it is not in the "square" alphabet used in Séfer Toráhs — this is known as the *Ashureet alphabet).*

26. Alexander Russell, Ibid., pp. 47-57. Dr. Russell kept meticulous records.

27. *Ma'moül* and *Mamouniyeh* were two delicacies that were invarably prepared for Purim celebrations; nor were other tasty "goodies" omitted. *Sabeeka,* was a favorite holiday dish of the poor. It made use of inedibly hard bread, cooked and flavored with molasses.

28. Robin Fedden, *Syria,* London, Robert Hale, (Readers Union Edition), 1955 p. 34.

29. The writer had expected never again to see this process. However, in the recent Israeli film, "I Love You, Rosa" depicting life in Israel among Sepharadeem at the end of the 19th century, the protagonist's brother, and later the hero, are shown fluffing the wool of a mattress.

30. Alex. Russell wrote a long and appreciative description of the *Hammam.* Robin Fedden (in *Syria,* see above) gave an even longer and rhapsodic account of the Aleppo *hammam* (a tribute this writer shares).

31. This provided a treat for the children. Sugar was added to the remains of the crushed almonds, to provide a tasty treat. In effect, it was MARZIPAN.

32. Paul Bourain, *Alep* (Fr.) Aleppo, Costam, 1930, pp. 107. Bourain cites the long-before visit of the French poet Lamartine, who wrote of "the elegance and tenderness of the life" of Aleppo.

33. I have read that short movie-presentations were customary in Europe at the end of circus performances in that era.

34. *Herem* was resorted to as the ultimate step. First came *nezipha* ("rebuke") a one-day confinement at home. More serious was *niddooy* ("banishment"), a thirty-day ostracizement (expect by the immediate members of his family).

35. As a young child who left Aleppo in 1915, before age eight, I did not know one rabbi from another. However my recent research into the history of Aleppo's rabbis revealed this zealous rabbi's identity *Ya'cob Dakneesh Gindi,* who died in 1911, four years before my departure for America. Gindi was a "fearless man" (and a "great preacher"). "Dakneesh" (in his name) means "whiskers," and may

have been a derisive term, applied to him by those he may have goaded or rebuked constantly.

36. On Saturdays, in answer to the housewife's query, "Who is knocking at the door?" the reply was always "*annee* [beggar, in Hebrew], oh, Mother" (*"annee-ya-mmo"*). This created the metaphor in Aleppo-Jewish-Arabic, for dire poverty to be referred to as *"annee ya-mmo."*

37. This was, it will be recalled, the custom of Queen Elizabeth's Merchant Gentlemen, as described by Maundrell, given in the text of this study. The *bistan* excursions may well have existed a thousand, or fifteen hundred years earlier.

Chapter Twelve

The Rabbinate in Old Aleppo

Within a radius of perhaps one hundred and fifty miles the Jews looked to Aleppo as their spiritual as well as commercial capital. To cite one example, Aintab, to the north, a city with a population of perhaps eighty to one hundred thousand total population was Turkish-speaking. Yet the several thousand Jews there spoke Aleppo-Arabic, as well as Turkish. Some, but certainly not all of their families had originated in Aleppo, and in any case identified with Aleppo's considerable larger Jewish population. Aintab in nearby Turkey with its sizeable Jewish population living there for countless hundreds of years also contributed well-known rabbis, some comparable in stature to those of Aleppo. In the United States immigrants from such towns and villages form an integral part of the Aleppoan community, and while they are fully accepted, their origins in Killez, Tédef, Diarbakyr, Urfa and elsewhere in the interior are remembered by the Aleppoans in New York; they subtly identify then as "small-towners." Aintab will be found on modern maps as "Gazintab" in southern Turkey, above Aleppo. "Tédef" is somewhat closer to *Halab.*

Jewish Self Government

It was remarked elsewhere that the community in Flatbush has undergone a significant modification in being "synagogue-oriented" while Aleppo was termed *rabbi-dominated.*

The Jews in Aleppo and in Damascus owed their principal allegiance not to the synagogue of their respective neighborhood, but to the central rabbinical body, as represented by the chief rabbi and the *Bet Deen.* Under the Caliphates beginning in the seventh century C.E. and during the long Ottoman rule, the Jewish community was internally self-governed. The *Bet Deen,* the Ecclesiastic Court, along with the lay committee of "notables" (the *akkaber)* served with the *Haham Bashi* to administer Jewish life in the city. The *Bet Deen* ruled on all religious issues while the role of the *Haham Bashi* was often only political and administrative. Thus, some times the *Ab Bet Deen,* the "Father" of the religious court exerted greater authority, enjoyed more respect and reverence than the Grand Rabbi.

In earlier periods usually a native of Aleppo had been selected as the Grand Rabbi. Sometimes he served also as *Ab Bet Deen* in recognition of his scholarliness. In a few instances the *Haham Bashi* had been recruited from Baghdad, a sister-city — although somewhat distant — and in one or two instances from Palestine. In some periods other cities recruited a *Haham Bashi* from Aleppo.

The *Bet Deen* had jurisdiction over most aspects of Jewish life, its rulings enforceable by the authority and arm of the local Pasha. This authority was seldom resorted to however, since the power of public opinion supporting the Rabbinical Court was sufficient. The Court had, additionally, the religious authority to enforce its rulings by imposing *Nidduii,* a condition less severe than *Herem,* but nevertheless one that denied the guilty one some limited rights of trade and personal intercourse with fellow Jews. A person under *Herem* was a total outcast — to the degree that he would not receive an answer if he were to ask a question — until he submitted to the authority of the Rabbinical Court with adequate signs and acts of penance. Thus Aleppo Jews lived under strict rabbinical rule throughout their lives. In some earlier periods they were forbidden by the Rabbinical Court to have their wives escort them to a public place such as a café on the score of "modesty" — and possible molestation by some unruly Muslims of a troubled period.

The *Bet Deen,* the lay Committee and the Grand Rabbi

administered the social organization — the many schools, charity and health funds — *Sedaqqá -u-Marpé* — the care of the many orphans and orphanages, as well as the association for facilitating the marriages of penniless young men and women, *Móhar-u-mattán.* This association would endow the couple with a few gold pounds, enough to enable them to buy a mattress and covers, and a few kitchen utensils. The *Bet Deen* passed on the qualifications of the many *dabbáhs* and *shohetteem,* the slaughters of fowl and animals, the acceptability of the *mohels,* performer of circumcisions, etc.

The *Bet Deen*'s authority was resorted to in disputes between individuals and in commercial disputes requiring judicial decisions. It was deemed irreverant, even insulting to the rabbinate, and a violation of community tradition to hail a fellow-Jew to the Ottoman court. Such a move was avoided as well, because of the uncertainty of an unbaised ruling, and the expensive bribery — the *bakhsheesh* — necessary merely to have the case *heard* by the *qaadi,* magistrate. (Later, the *qaadi* was usually ready to accept a somewhat smaller bribe from the disputant with a more just claim.) Thus, the rabbinate commanded utmost authority in the Jewish community.

Aleppo's Rabbis

It was estimated that at the turn of this century — and probably as in earlier generations — there were about fifty rabbis in Aleppo. (As we read later, 53 *hahameem* in 1866 signed the grant of patent to *Haham* Abraham Sassónon for his printing press). Not all of them functioned in the *Bet Deen,* nor was any the head of one of the eighteen synagogues. How did they earn a livelihood? Most endured a meager, penurious existence — as low-paid *dabbáhs,* slaughterers, *mohéls,* circumcisers, or as Hebrew teachers employed in the community schools or as private tutors. Some were "retainers" attached to the *Bet Midrash* (private Hall of Study) of a wealthy family which may have provided the rabbi with part-time employment in its commercial enterprise. Others enjoyed small subsidies granted them by the community authorities or may have operated tiny stalls or shops.

The poor *hahameem* usually looked forward to the occasional "study day," the *shilhohn,* a special day of Toráh studies, arranged by wealthy individuals specifically to benefit the rabbis. There, in addition to a small fee, they would surely lunch well, an eagerly sought change from their meager diets — at the feast which was a feature of the *shilhohn.* A story is told of a poor rabbi invited to such a *shilhohn.* Just before the feast to which he was looking forward so expectantly, a mischievous son of the host invited the rabbi to a "secret snack," offering him a delicious meat-pastry. The rabbi ate, gratefully. It was to discover to his deep dismay when he sat at the festive board — that *the meal was a dairy one.* Having eaten meat he could not partake of a *simsmeh,* a sesame-seed — the smallest particle — of a dairy product, before six hours, in accordance with Jewish law.

Jewish Scholarship

The evidence of history and the attestation of Maimonides in his letter to the community of Lunel in southern France assures us of the importance of Aleppo as a significant center of Jewish life and learning. This adherence to religion existed before and continued well beyond Maimonides' 12th century life — and appears to be replicated in Flatbush and in Deal, New Jersey in the New World. The testimony of others who knew Aleppo's life in that period, travellers from afar who visited Aleppo — in the 12th and 13th centuries — Rabbi Benjamin from Tudela, Spain, Rabbi Yehuda al-Harizi, Rabbi Petahia of Ratisbon, among others cited — attest to a well-organized Jewish community numbering several thousands, with numberous rabbis, singers and poets. In a later century an Ashkenazi rabbi traveling from East Europe to the Holy Land, in visiting Aleppo remarked, "This is another Vilna!" (Vilna, Lithuania, "Litvaks") was an important center of Jewish learning, perhaps *the* most important in the Slavic lands. It was referred to as "the Jerusalem of Eastern Europe.")

Where Jewish learning abounds and where the rabbinate flourishes, volumes of commentary are sure to be produced. The earliest Aleppoan commentary which I have been able to

uncover is the 12th century *Kellaléh Ha-Talmúd* by Rabbi Yoséf ibn 'Aknin, the pupil and friend of Maimonides, who had chosen Aleppo as his home. This work achieved wide recognition, and is still currently studied in Hebrew — it was written in Arabic. *Amánat Ua-i-Tiqádat,* ("Beliefs and Opinions") was the original Arabic title of the renowned *Emunótt ve-Deótt* written in the 10th century — but not during Sa'adia's residence in Aleppo).

Many later rabbis were important authorities in religious law. Some were revered Talmudists and Kabbalists, the latter a *central focus* of Aleppo's religious learning. Those pre-eminent in Jewish law dealt with the life and practice of everyday religion. They authored numerous Biblical and Talmudic commentaries, as well as many volumes dealing with interpretations affecting religious observance. These often took the form of *Sh-élót-ut-Shubót* (Questions and Answers, commonly known as *Responsa),* dealing with laws pertaining to everyday life; a newly risen situation requires a logical interpretation with *total conformity to precedent.* The *Responsa* interpretations of Aleppo's rabbis did not differ from the methods of *any* period. They had been the mode of Sa'adia, Maimonides, of lesser-known rabbinical scholars of every important Jewish community. Nor were such views always received without conflicting opinions. To the extent that they became widely accepted the interpretive opinions established the reputation and authority of their authors and became the standard for religious practice for coming generations.

These rulings (and others) were later collected and codified in the *Shulhán 'Arúkh* ("the Prepared Table") by Rabbi Joseph Karo "Maran") in Safed, in 1654/1655 C.E. with the Addenda by Rabbi Moshe Isserles (known as "Muram" and "Rema") which pertains exclusively to Ashkenazic usage and custom. The *Shulhán 'Arúkh* is *the* Authoritative Code followed by Orthodox Jewry everywhere. New situations and their determinations must conform in principle, with the Authoritative Code.

The scholarly rabbis of Aleppo and Damascus were in constant communication with the rabbinates of other centers of Jewish learning, Babylon — later Baghdad, Jerusalem,

Safed, etc. who they queried; and in turn they were asked for their opinions, their *Responsa,* on difficult questions that arose.

Works of The Rabbis of Aleppo

Beginning in the 16th century the works of some Aleppo rabbis were published on the Jewish presses of Constantinople, Salonika, Venice and Livorno in Italy, the important Sepharadi religious centers. (More of these early works in an Appendix).

Among the outstanding works sent to large Sepharadic centers for publication were *Haham* Yehudá Kassin's *Mahanné Yehudá* and his contemporary *Haham* Shelomó Laniado's *Bet Dinó Shel Shelomó,* both about 1775. A wealth of books in manuscripts by Aleppo and Damascus rabbis exist which were not so fortunate – and remain unpublished. Some of their titles will appear elsewhere in this study. (See the Appendix on Aleppo's rabbis).

An attempt was made to publish in Damascus in 1605, by Rabbi Yoshiahou Pínto in 1605 of, his own *Nibhaar mi-Kessef* ("More Precious Than Silver"). Pinto was dissatisfied with the poor quality of his press and he abandoned completing the publication himself. His book was to come to light more than 250 years later, published in Aleppo by *Haham* Abraham Sassón. It has now been out of print for a hundred years, but was recently re-issued in Israel through the enterprise of *Haham* Abrahan Hapoota.

Even earlier, *Mahzór Arám Sobáh,* The Festivals Prayer Book of Aleppo was printed in Venice in 1527, not too long after Guttenberg's invention of moveable type. Somewhat later Aleppo *Haham Bashi* Abraham Laniado published in Venice in 1603.

Prior to 1866 *Haham* Abraham Sassón had sent a few rabbinic manuscripts to Livorno (Leghorn) Italy to be printed, among which was *Haham* Abraham Antébi's *Ohel Yeshareem* ("Tents of the Righteous") and *Haham* Moshé Rosa's *Zikhrón Tob.* (Was *Rosa* an Aleppoan? No one of that name existed in Aleppo in the past 75 years; had the family become extinct,

or had they perhaps migrated elsewhere? In discussing this with Dr. Hayyim J. Cohen he offered a reasonable theory — that *Rosa* was likely *Rouso,* a common name in Ladino-Sepharadi areas. The Rosa family *may* have moved to Jerusalem; the late *Haham* David Laniado found the tombstone of *Haham* Rahameem *Della Rosa* there; and I have heard of a Rosa family in Buenos Aires.)

In addition Sassón sent Eliahu, one of his three sons, to Livorno to learn the printing trade. In 1866 with the help of his apprentice son and another offspring Sassón imported type and machinery to establish a publishing house. But not before he secured *an exclusive patent,* to be the sole publisher in Aleppo of Hebrew material; the patent was governmental as well as rabbinical. *53 rabbis of the city* were signatories. The first books published were, the famous Damascus/Safed Kabbalist *Rabi* Hayeem Vital's, *Sha'areh Kedushá* — copied from an earlier edition published in the Hague, and the Aleppoan *Haham* Yis'háq Shrem's *Musár Ha-Hokhmáh* — in addition to Rabbi Pinto's long-delayed publication.

Sassón's publication enterprise did not last the full 20 years granted him. Was the enterprise too financially unrewarding? For whatever reason Sassón ceased publishing in 1873 after issuing 16 volumes of scholarly rabbinic works.

Haham Yesha-iá *(Sha'yá)* Dayán took up the venture but was not permitted to affix his name as publisher, until 1886, exactly twenty years after the issuance of the patent to Sassón. *Haham* Yesha-iá was an influential rabbinic leader in the city, who was financially supported by two wealthy individuals: *Haham* Eliahu Hamwii ("Hamway" is the family's name in New York), a "holy" man, merchant, rabbi and *Ab Bet Deen,* and Signor Rafael De Picciotto, a member of the prominent *Franj* family (see the Chapter on "Old Aleppo/Halab"). *Haham* Yesha'iás Press continued for several years, issuing Judeo-Arabic tracts, job-printing for the Jewish institutions of the city, as well as turning out scholarly works of Aleppoan rabbis for a short period toward the end of the 19th century.

In a scholarly unpublished doctoral dissertation by Rabbi M. Mitchell Serels of the *Sephardic Prgram* at Yeshiva Univer-

sity, there is an engrossing history of Sepharadic publication houses. The study includes details of Sasson's publishing venture in Aleppo.

There is a renaissance of interest in making Aleppoan rabbinical works available through print. Rabbi Hapoota's effort with Pinto's *Nibhar Mi-Késsef* is only one of the several works recently reissued. Joseph Eliahu ("Joe") Shamah of Jerusalem and the *Chief Sepharadi Rabbi* Obadia Yosef are leading activists in this endeavor. Flatbush and Deal, New Jersey have contributed money for this work; the cost of publishing a number of manuscripts was collected by leading members of the community at a private meeting initiated by Ralph Saul Tawil. "Abe" S. and David S. Sutton, his brother, have already financed the publishing of several neglected Aleppoan scholarly works.

Several books of Talmudic and Biblical commentary are the works of rabbis living in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. Among them are the books by the highly-revered late *Haham* Matloub Abádi; a work of commentary by the Chief Rabbi, Jacob Saul Kassin, as well as the publication of the works of his late father, by *Haham* Shelomó Yedid. Names of these tomes will be found elsewhere.

Pizmoneem Publications

Pizmoneem the age-old religious lyrics set to Arabic secular songs, accumulated over the centuries. They were perpetuated by oral tradition from one generation to another, in the manner of epic poetry, *troubadour* songs — and oral *Toráh.* Many *pizmoneen* were published in Aleppo some eighty years ago, and again a few years ago, to include newer *pizmoneen* by later lyricists including *Haham* Rafael Tabboush(-Antebi) and Haham Mosé (Ashe'ar) Ashear. The book has again been augmented to exceed five-hundred pages with some lyrics whose melodies are now unknown. Shelomo ("Sam") Cattan, a highly and affectionately regarded modest Community-leader, joined with the knowledgeable *Hazzan* Gabriel Shrem, to spark the financing and editing of the enterprise. Cattan is also largely responsible for the publication of elegant Holiday prayer-books. These were edited by Ezeiel H. Albeg, a

writer and adapter of *pizmoneem-songs.* Still another Holiday prayer-book, a more compact one, was published by Louis A. Missry, with the liturgical supervision of Haham David Salem. Both sets of prayer-books contain the poems-songs - the *Azharot,* etc. of *ibn Gabirol,* and others, traditional in Aleppo for centuries.

Charismatic Rabbis, Amulets, and Superstition

Some Aleppoan rabbis gained their eminence — ephemeral in many instances — through their authority and influence on the community life. We have inherited names of some Aleppo rabbis of the past with reputations for saintliness, charisma, and the authority necessary to maintain a deeply religious character in the life of the community.

Indeed, the charismatic character of such rabbis of Aleppo endowed them with reputations akin to miracle-workers among some of the Jewish populace — and Muslims, too, in some instances. *Haham* Matloub-ibn-Menásheh Suttehon (Sutton), a master of Kabbalistic learning, was credited with being able to "slay" any Muslim who persecuted Jews, by invoking sacred, ineffable Names, known only to Kabbalistic Initiates. Other rabbis were sought after for their famous amulets *(hirz,* Arabic) worn as protection against evil.

Many rabbis placed much emphasis on discouraging the Jewish populace from the popular superstitions prevalent in the Arab culture. In *Haham* Yoséf Menásheh's *Kennesiyá Leshem Shahmahyeem* we are given solemn warnings against the rite of *tah-laii* ("sweetening"). This involved putting out plates filled with honey for consumption of the nether-spirits, the demon-inhabitants of the underground, *Jineeyeh* ("genii"). It was thought that the demons thus propitiated would be won over by consuming the honey and would then, somehow, reveal "valuable secrets" to the individual. Such beliefs and practices are in gross violation of Jewish law.

The *fabled* abilities and supposed exploits of the rabbis were widely accepted among the uneducated and unsophisticated. The following tale of a rabbi in Urfa, some 200 miles from Aleppo, was related to me recently, and is typical:

"A travelling rabbi, collecting funds for his *yeshivah,* was imprisoned by the despotic pasha of Urfa, charged with 'spying', and condemned to be hanged. Asked for his last wish, the rabbi requested a tray of *bakláwa* and permission to cook a white rooster. The *bakláwa* and rooster were brought him. As the rabbi cleaned and plucked the fowl, each discarded feather flew, and as if aimed, *pierced the hearts of his torturers, killing them instantly!* Thereupon, his sanctity was recognized and he was immediately released; at which time he caused a huge pond to appear.

It is forbidden to fish in this miraculous pond. Rather, sterile women and the sick come to feed the sacred fish, and to pray for a cure. The pond is called *Ein Ibrahim il-Khaleel,* (Ibrahim il-Khaleel's Spring), to this day."

However, it has been pointed out to me by another source that *Ibrahim il-Khaleel* is a reference to none other than the patriarch Abraham, "Abraham the Good."

Sacred Rabbis

Through the centuries some rabbis who were deemed holy were buried at the gates of, and in the caves of the Great Synagogue, *Knissit-il-Kibbireh* in the "Graves of the Just"; *Keboorát Ha-Sadeeqeem.* On days preceding holidays, oil lamps were burned at the tombs of the holy men by those who had faith in their ability to affect cures, and to protect the offerants from evil. The reputation of such rabbis carried over even to some in the Muslim populace, who also burned oil-lamps before the tombs. Respect and friendly relations were not uncommon between rabbis and leaders in the Jewish community and their Muslim counterparts. One particularly revered individual, *Haham* Yoséf Menásheh, was deemed so wise and just that Muslim scholars and government officials would seek him out for advice and counsel.

Rabbinic Continuity

A striking element is the continuity of ordained rabbis in succeeding generations within individual families. A ready example is offered by the Laniado family mentioned, Rabbi Shelomó's father was an outstanding rabbi, as was his son; in

this example, each of three rabbis rose to become head of the ecclesiastic structure, either as *Haham Bashi,* or *Ab Bet Deen.* (An earlier Rabbi Laniado had functioned in the late 16th century, as noted.) Rabbi Yehudá Kassin, of eighteenth century fame, likewise had ancestors and sons who gained rabbinical prominence — culminating today in Rabbi Jacob ("Haham Ya'coob") in Flatbush. In turn, *his* son Shaûl is a rabbi, as well. The rabbinate in the Kassin family in Aleppo reverts to the 16th century.

Thanks to a book written in recent years by the late *Haham* David Suttehon (Sutton) Dabah who spent his last years in Buenos Aires, we are indebted for a history of his family's ancestors and their rabbinical attainments. *Haham* David was descended from a continuity of outstanding scholars and religious writers on both sides of his parentage, his mother having been the daughter of the renowned Menásheh family (itself a branch of the Suttehon (Sutton) dynasty of rabbis). In his *Ya'aleh Haddas, Haham* David traces generation after generation of ancestors who wrote extensively — and procreated prolifically.

As we see illustrated by Rabbi *"Yehudá"* Kassin, (whose principal work is Mahané *Yehudá* and Rabbi *"Shelomó"* Laniado with his Bet Dino Shel *Shelomó*) the authors systematically introduce their own names as part of the titles of their book or books. Other examples of this practice are Kehillát *Moshé* and Debaar *Moshé,* works of Rabbi *"Moshé"* Suttehon; Rabbi *"Yisháq"* Abulafia's Peneh *Yisháq,* (first published in Aleppo 1870/71). Rabbi *Yoséf* Suttehon wrote ten works, each of which contained *Yoséf* as part of the title.

Rabbinic Attire

As to their dress in Aleppo, rabbis wore distinctive turbans — differing only in color from the headwear of the Muslim ecclesiasts. 'Everyone' dressed in the apparel of the city — a *yallak* or *imbaaz,* a robe reaching to the ankles and invariably with a sash around the waist. The dress of the *Haham Bashi,* the chief rabbi, was also a robe, but finer; his ceremonial clothes were impressively embellished with Governmental

orders and medals, and much gold and silver embroidery. The *Haham Bashi,* when he went forth, was preceded by two fierce Government-appointed *Kawass* ("shooters") — body guards, who carried the rabbi's tall Staff of Office and peremptorily, scowlingly, cleared the way before him. An awesome sight. It will be recalled that the *Haham Bashi* was a Governmental Official, confirmed by the Instabul Chief Rabbi, on the authority of His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan. The last Aleppo *Haham Bashi* of whom I know resigned (?) his office about 1919. Surely there must have existed "chief rabbis" after 1919 (?). However, the renown and prestige of the Office was no longer the same after the collapse of the Imperial Ottoman (Turkish) Empire at the end of World War I. In Flatbush, *Haham* Jacob Kassin is the head of the Rabbinical Council of Oriental clerics, and is thus the heir to the (unofficial) title of Chief Rabbi — the *Haham Bashi. He* customarily wears a black frock-coat with black/gray striped trousers.

Chapter Thirteen

Jewish Education in Halab

IN Aleppo at about the turn of the century educational methods were similar to those of the Muslims. Muslims in Aleppo had no schools of secular higher education, nor at the professional level, except for schools of law based on the teachings of the Koran. Christians and Moslems developed lawyers and some few doctors; their professional education, however, took place away from Aleppo.

Very few Jews felt impelled to seek professional training. Their highest goal, to reach the pinnacle of Jewish Aleppoan society, was achieved by becoming successful merchants, private bankers, highly-placed rabbis and scholars. For such ends little secular education was necessary beyond that which the community had to offer.

The Alliance Israelite Universelle

An important attribute to successful communication with the world of commerce outside of Aleppo was the knowledge of a European language. For those who sought it, French could be acquired through the years of study at the *Alliance Israelite Universelle.*

Thanks to these schools conceived in 1860 by French Jews and administered from France, Oriental boys and girls were given an elementary and junior-high school Western (French) general education, introducing them to some mathe-

matics, history, geography, etc., (as well as a limited amount of Jewish studies). Above all the *Alliance* schools emphasized the study of French history and literature; acquaintance with Moliere, Racine, and Corneille would have been non-existant for the Jewish students in all of the Near or Middle East had it not been for the subsidized schools established by French Jews. The success of this educational effort in the Orient supported the effort to make French "the second-language," and French culture the dominant second culture for Jews (and others) in the vast areas from North Africa to Syria, Egypt and nearby lands. Since separate *Alliance* schools for both girls *and* boys (mostly boys) were established, perhaps 10 to 15 percent of Aleppoan Jewish youth studied for six to eight years at the *Alliance.*

I recall as a child in Aleppo, an older cousin who studied at the *Alliance,* committing to memory and declaiming in the characteristic florid French style, the rhymed couplets of a French poet. In later years in New York I discovered that he had been reciting Corneille, in medieval *Halab.*

Religious Studies

While an *Alliance* education and the pursuit of advanced Toráh studies were not mutually exclusive, children of many families deeply devoted to Toráh-studies did not attend the *Alliance* schools. These schools were considered by ultra-priests as virtually worse than Christian schools because, being Jewish in character, they would more effectively 'subvert' the students to "Reform" Jewry — little better than outright idolatry. However, while not encouraging attendance, no rabbinical ban was placed and many among the more pious, observant, Jews gave their children the advantages of an *Alliance* education.

Thanks to the *Alliance* education, many young men and a lesser number of young women had new horizons opened to them, and although most were content to live in the static cultural society of their Jewish world, some did break away. The migration to Egypt soon after the opening of the Suez Canal placed those with the *Alliance*'s French education —

coupled with their knowledge of Arabic — in truly advantageous situations vis-a-vis the largely uneducated population of Egypt. They became among the leading entrepeneurs of the country. The orderly secular education of the *Alliance* was a help to the immigrants in New York, too. Although almost all began their work as peddlers, those who had been exposed to this secular education were able to advance their careers more rapidly.

Some of the very pious needy were not able to send their children to the *Alliance* despite partial or total scholarship assistance. Their sons pursued Torah education at a *Bet Midrásh,* a chapel-study-hall, poring over Talmudic tomes as well as mastering the *Shulhán 'Arúkh,* the authoritative 16th century compilation of Jewish laws, and similar works dealing with the specifics of day-to-day religious observances, as well as of spiritual life in general. Many of these students were able to find part-time work while their main devotion was to studying. Others worked full-time and came to study, at the end of their work-day following a hasty meal. Still others spent their entire days and some evenings at one or another of the many *Batté Midrashèem,* which were in effect rabbinical seminaries, the beneficiaries of small stipends.

The Hebrew Schooling

The education of the majority of the Jewish children in Aleppo was largely religious. It began at the age of about five years, when the child learned to identify the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, along with the symbols used to indicate the vowel sounds, found below the individual letters. Identifying the letters of the alphabet apparently presented less of a problem than knowing the vowel marks since the secondary class of the educational process was then entitled *esh-tahta* which in Arabic means literally "What is under it?" — what vowel symbol is under the letter? The succeeding class in the young child's education was called the *asacar* class. Here the child was expected to form words and sentences from the elements he had acquired in the earlier grades. (The *asacar* class derived its title from two possible sources. The first

suggests the uncorrupted Spanish term *a/sacár* — to draw or pull out. The second, also from a Spanish source would derive "asacar" from *azucar* — sugar, the prize possibly offered as an incentive to learning. Likewise the term for word-joining was *a-juntár,* clearly a Spanish term, "to join.")

Any individual with a reputation for piety was considered qualified to be a *haham,* a "rabbi" — a teacher, regardless of the level of his scholarship or pedagogic skill. The methods of teaching had been laid down centuries before. Some of these so-called "rabbis" who taught beginning classes, without inspiration or skill, had a derogatory appelation. When one was incensed with the dubious quality of a rabbi's supposed Hebrew scholarship, he would refer to him as a *Haham-Kabb-il-Sha-if.* ("Rabbi, he spilled the embers") — one who was on the level of "rabbi" to whom urchins in a kindergarten-level class maliciously inform — that a companion was guilty of having "spilled the few embers of charcoal in the *sha-if*" — the brazier — kept to warm the room.

To determine intermediary progress and to complete a satisfactory examination in the *Arba'ah'vé'Isreem,* Twenty-Four books (the Bible) and the Talmud, the students would submit to examinations Saturday afternoons before *gizbareem* (Hebrew — the "overseers"), of the school, lay scholars — usually successful merchants — and some of the scholarly rabbis of the area. Boys who were to continue their Hebrew studies full-time, after moving on from the standard classes, were in the minority. Usually, either they hoped to achieve the rabbinate, or they were children of men of sufficient means not to urgently require their earning power. However, most students left to seek work, usually at the age of thirteen or so.

The Schools

Until the boy had completed his earlier training the student may have attended either a tiny kittab (the East European *"Kheider"*) — a school-"room" or one of the few larger formal official Community establishments which had several hundred pupils. All schools charged a small tuition fee based

on ability to pay, the balances needed for the upkeep of the larger schools came from the central Community fund. One of the elementary schools which required almost no tuition fee, understandably, was the *Kittab-il-Yetomeem* — the Orphan's School. Since it enjoyed a reputation for good teaching, some tuition-paying non-orphans were admitted. I was among the latter, since my family had been associated with the support and administration of the school for generations. One of the classrooms in this *Kittab-il-Yetomeem* had a window facing out on a Muslim "quarter" whose women screamed curses at us, the "infidels" — *kiffár*. The window did indeed look out at a neighborhood of several streets — inhabited by women exclusively. This I found later was the historic *Manzool,* the licensed "red-light" or brothel district of the city. As tiny boys, we looked out with curiosity and innocence, unable to understand why these women were swearing at us.

Other Aleppo schools widely known in the period (1907-1915) included *"Kittab Sariyeh Anzaroot"* (elementary grades) established by a childless and wealthy widow and bearing her name. Another popular *kittab* at elementary level bore the title *Kittab Haham Bashi,* operated under the auspices of the *Haham Bashi.* In addition there were numerous one-room 'schools' established and operated by lowly "rabbis" — as in Eastern Europe, from which they eked their livelihood.

Discipline

Teachers in the lower grade schools maintained discipline and served out punishment for the unruly by the historic methods practiced in the Orient from time immemorial — the *Suhntah* and the *'Al'ah.* Minor infractions were meted out blows on the open palm of the offender, held out tremblingly to the flat stick in the hand of the *haham.* Four or five vigorous stinging blows were inflicted, the *suhntah* usually sufficed to correct behavior. For more serious offenses there was the *'al'ah* (universally known as the "bastinado"). The offender was laid on his back with legs raised and tied to a railing, the *falla'h* used for this function. Then, with some gleeful class-

mates holding down the victim by the shoulders and arms, the *haham* would lay on the stick. He would rain several blows on the bare soles of the wicked one's feet. The punishment of the *suhntah* was an everday occurrence, the *'al'ah* less frequently resorted to, because of its severity. (The *kittab* on Orchard Street in New York continued these historic forms of discipline, but used the *'al'ah* only rarely. Bensonhurst — the *See Beej* used only the *suntah*).

Batté Midrasheem

Other centers of learning were the sometimes family-owned and semi-private "chapels", *midrasheem,* where advanced studies were pursued by full-fledged rabbis, as well as by more mature young students. Such *batté midrasheem* often bore family names, as, for example, *Midrásh Bet Silvéra;* Silvéra was one of the leading families among the "Franj," noted for its religious pre-eminence; *Midrásh Abood Harari* was another well-known semi-private center for advanced studies, likewise bearing the name of its founder and benefactor.

In the *bet midrásh* school to which the youth "graduated," he began the study of a variety of advanced texts. At these higher levels, where more advanced Talmudic and other texts were pursued, lessons were given to small classes. In the New York East Side *kittab,* as in Aleppo, the teacher ("rabbi") as remarked elsewhere, would introduce a new Talmud lesson, after which the small class group broke up into still smaller groups which would retire, each to its own area to review and master the fresh lesson, and later to recite it in competition with other sub-groups.

The "Art" of Writing

In addition to studying various texts, the student in the elementary school also received lessons in reading and writing Arabic, perhaps twice each week for two-hour periods. The same master taught the pupils to write in Hebrew script

as well. This script, *nuhs' allam* ("half a pen") taught for countless centuries, was used in the *Geniza* documents as early as the ninth century and later, in the Near East and everywhere that Eastern Jews were then to be found. It is somewhat similar to "Rashi-script", as was noted earlier.

The art of writing, whether in Arabic or Hebrew, was a matter of economic importance, especially to poor parents who may not have had the privilege of studying much reading and less of writing — nor the opportunity to acquire much more than elementary prayers in Hebrew. Literacy, accordingly, was highly prized in the culture of the Levant — so few had the means to acquire it. Thus a rhymed aphorism stated that

Il khitt, 'and il fa-eer ma'al
'and il akkábehr gamál

"Literacy for the poor is [is a source of] wealth, for the *akkabehr* (the near-noble) an attribute of grace or beauty." It may be estimated that the number of illiterates — except for the ability barely to read the prayer-book, may have been fifty to perhaps seventy percent of the Jewish population, (a quite rough and imprecise estimate).

(There is a different order of life, however, for these Aleppoans and Damascenes who are now installed in Brooklyn, as we read earlier.)

Summary and Conclusions

This study of Aleppo-in-Flatbush was begun with a preliminary hypothesis that despite almost seven decades of residence in New York the Syrian Jewish community here had remained almost totally unchanged, a monolithic body clinging to the ethos and customs the immigrants brought with them. To the casual observer this may appear to be a valid assumption. Closer observation, however, reveals that changes have taken place, even to say, that in some areas modifications are taking place at an accelerated pace, that responses to new situation are not static. This view, however, is somewhat sweeping and must be examined with some refinement, based on three concepts—acculturation, assimilation, and religious life. *Acculturation* encompasses the ability to adapt to the dominant culture of the locale and the host-community, while *assimilation* is the *fusing* of the minority into the body of the majority, characterized by intermarriage.

We do indeed find a change from the circumstances of the early immigrant days on the Lower East Side, when the Syrian Jewish immigrant felt helpless and lost without a knowledge of English – and Yiddish. They have now found their way in the New World and learned to deal with elements that were alien and fearsome. With a tradition of soberness, hard work and a heritage of mercantilism they improved their economic life – and their places of residence.

From one to another of successivly better residential areas they reached the comfortable environs in Flatbush and the greater reward of suburban life on the Jersey Shore in Deal, Bradley Beach and surrounding locations. Thanks to the acculturation process, important areas in their style of living make them indistinguishable from those of middle and upper-middle-class neighbors.

Their economic status rose, from peddling to wholesale and retail operations. Wholesalers supply the consumers through selling to stores, retailers, who choose low-priced lines of popular commodities operate stores in central areas of the city. (In time they too meet with considerable success by operating *chains* of such stores). Syrians have acculturated economically, following in the footsteps of successful American merchants.

With economic prosperity a development of other American traits took place; comfortable homes are occupied in Brooklyn and on the Jersey Shore with its tennis enthusiasm and basket-ball and soft-ball leagues. Syrians too are television addicts with much interest in the broadcast sports contests. A small number attend race-horse meets regularly and one or two owned horses.

Was it a characteristic acquired from the Jewish majority around them that made them — disproportionately large — contributers to charitable and communal organization? Rather, it may well be a response to the needy which they developed as poor immigrants who were able to improve their lot, and to contribute to organizations here, in Israel and Syria.

Most first and some second generation youth were content to acquire a year or two of high-school education, after which they felt ready to work, often a necessity to help the large families of which they were members. Increasingly interest in higher education assumes importance. They complete public high school courses. Others acquire better education, in high school level yeshivas. Considerable numbers of Syrian youths now go to the colleges and universities and like most non-Syrian youths many are thinking of careers independent of their fathers' enterprises. A number have emerged as

accountants, physicians and dentists, lawyers, and in other fields.

Most Syrians — *unlike others,* have not moved away from their parents' communities, have not settled in other cities and states. Almost 95% of their numbers live in Flatbush and on the Jersey shore. (The "Exiled" dream of returning to the Syrian communities from the cities where they have their businesses.) Their social life is largely with fellow-Syrians, attending the same parties, the same festivities and other events. Those who do not live in or near Deal spend their summers in New Jersey, with its very lively social life. Even when they vacation — in the winters and spring — it is to the same Caribbean hotel; organized Passover-trips often draw 800 to 1000 Syrian individuals to the same resort.

Socializing is a concommitant to further closeness — marriage. While Syrian Jews are now more comfortable with Ashkenazeem, the Jews of East European origin, in the early days of their immigrant experience there was almost no socializing whatever with the Ashkenazeem; marriage to one of them was frowned on, it was unthinkable — "intermarriage." Feelings toward Ashkenazeem have warmed, to some degree — the Syrians are no longer looked down upon. A somewhat reluctant admiration — if not envy — appears to exist for the prosperity of the Syrians' religious life — and for their relative economic prosperity. These factors — added to the mingling of the youth with others in the Ashkenazic yeshivas attended by hundreds of Syrian youths — have altered the circumstances of exclusive marriages of Syrians to Syrians. Nevertheless more than two-thirds of marriages are still among themselves. (The others also marry fellow-Jews, but Ashkenazeem). Interfaith marriages are minute in number — so few as to be so insignificant; in such an event the spouse usually converts to Judaism. Divorces are few.

That Syrians continue to be 'different' (on the East Side they were considered "queer") is borne out by their religious in addition to social insularity. They built several handsome large synagogues in Brooklyn; two large structures on the Jersey Shore, in addition to three small services there. Services are exceptionally well-attended, with the cantillations

and prayers exactly as they were in the Old Country. More than a third of adult males attend Sabbath services (a phenomenon, indeed, which will be examined later). While some second, and succeeding generations of Ashkenazeem affiliated to Conservative and Reform houses of worship, these are unknown among Syrians — all are Orthodox, traditional, in their religious practices.

It is not only on Sabbaths and holidays that services are held. In every community synagogue prayers are available mornings and evenings every day of the week. In the larger synagogues, weekday mornings have successive ones, to meet the convenience of the congregants.

In addition to the prayer services of Aleppoans and Damascenes in Brooklyn, the Lebanese and Egyptian refugees (their late ancestors had originated in Syria), also hold their own services; the Egyptians have begun the constructon of their own synagogue. Aleppoans and Damascenes operate elementary-level yeshivas with an enrollment of about 800 students in each. In addition there are two modest yeshivas on the high school level with a total of approximately two hundred boys, and only a few girls since the emphasis is a very religious one.

Modification and Change

Marriages are no longer arranged by the parents; Syrian boys and girls now mingle freely, in social settings and in community religious organizations. The girls' former modesty bordering on prudery has been diminished, influenced perhaps a little, by the radically changing modes of the majority culture. With close to 30% of marriages to Ashkenazeem, the new spouses are usually co-opted into the "in-group" Syrian environment with its seductive communal activity. If Syrian-Ashkenazi marriages continue in the present trend, there is a basis for conjecture as to what extent they may affect the community's homogeneity in future decades.

At present most Syrian youth seeking higher education attend local colleges and universities remaining close to the

parents, the community, and its protective influence. When more of them in the future choose schools away from New York the assimilative forces influencing Ashkenazi youth will no doubt be felt by some of the young Syrians, serving to alienate them from the traditional modes of their parents. (Reports of interfaith marriages of Ashkenazi youth in out-of-New York schools vary from *40% to 60%*.)

Although there is secularization, a loosening of religious ties and practices everywhere, among Syrian Jews as well, yet among some of the Aleppoan youth we observe an increasing degree of Orthodoxy on the part of a small and influential group of young women and men. They have come under the influence of ultra-orthodox leaders and friends who may have studied in the seminaries of Baltimore, Lakewood, N.J. and other near-Hassidic institutions. These youth leaders, rabbinic and non-ordained, are effective with the teenager, inculcating a perpetuation of traditional Orthodoxy — and perhaps a little more, *zeal.*

A third group of young men and women, and their elders — the majority — fall into a middle-range, neither perceptibly drifting away, nor assuming greater Orthodoxy. They remain in a *traditional fashion* following the custom of family and community. It is not a zealous commitment, but rather an easy-going, relaxed attitude, which reflects an inherent flexibility — one that through the centuries has perhaps also made for durability. Maimonides singled out Aleppo for highest praise, remarking at the same time their lack of fanatical zeal . . . *"Abal ehn mohsreem eht'assmahm . . ."* ("they do not surrender themselves" to the ultimate).

Most, must be said to attend services for purely religious reasons. However like their elders some of the youth may attend for mixed reasons. "Synagogue" and "Bet Ha-kennesset" are Greek and Hebrew for "a House of Gathering". Just as in ancient Israel in the late years of the Temple, and in the tiny prayer-houses of the East European experience, synagogues served as more than merely prayer-houses. They were religious centers, primarily, but did not exclude a warm informal socializing at the same time; attending a synagogue yields a religious and social satisfaction. Syrians attend Sab-

bath services for religious ends, yes, but also to mingle with their friends and relatives. This dual purpose is more evident among some of the youth.

This synagogue attendance is a historic *institutionalized pattern* which animates the Syrians Jews, to perpetuate not only religious expression, but also to reinforce the social insularity, the preference for separateness, for a cherishing of the Oriental heritage.

Once again we see a similarity, a resonance, of Fernand Tonnies' theory, when he wrote of the virtually irresistible power of *tradition wedded* to *religion.*

We have seen measures of acculturation in the Syrian life. Outwardly they are indistinguishable from other Americans of their social and economic strata. However, assimilation — in which the minority group fuses with the majority — is not seen in most Syrians. The community remains a minority — an Oriental-Jewish minority *within another minority,* the Jewish population of the city and country.

Religious separateness continues with added vigor, as we observe in the additional communal structures that Syrians are undertaking, not only in Flatbush. The Jersey Shore's community with its' ambitious building of a large religious school complex is but another instance of a determined effort to perpetate the traditional life.

It is particularly significant, that the youth of the community relishes, and appears to insist on the continuance of the customs and mores of their elders as well as the religious observances that are the heritage from the Orient

Tradition — and "roots" — have become increasingly important for ethnic minorities. Social scientists too, have again discovered the value of tradition and the *extended family* — interaction with grandparents, cousins, etc. They are seen as vital measures for mental health. These are continuing features of the Syrian community's ongoing life, and are supportive elements in its stability and robust structure.

The community, in the heart of the largest metropolitan area in the world, continues to comprise a small traditional cosmos, a face-to-face society in which large numbers in the 'folk-village' know and interact with one another.

Barring major upheavals in the life of the country, it is reasonable to look to a perpetuation of the Syrian community life for the foreseeable future. The Syrians enjoy a mode of life that is structured, it affords them recognition — a place in the small society, the satisfaction of respect and protection. Why, they ask, abandon this envied pattern for an assimilated life; — why leave the community and its multiple satisfactions, to become an unidentifiable individual afloat in unfamiliar and unstable isolation?

I am aware that this study has not answered all questions, nor provided all the information. Nevertheless it is hoped that this inquiry into a unique and colorful community has furthered an understanding of ethnic dynamics and diversity, so that future students of the subject need not retrace these steps.

Appendix I

Questionnaire

Dr. Victor Sanua, a psychologist and social scientist had done a survey of Jews from Egypt who settled in New York after The Suez War of 1956. When Dr. Hayyim J. Cohen then Senior Reader at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, came to New York in 1969 to complete his world-wide study of Oriental Jews, Sanua brought us together since he know of my study of Syrians in New York, begun at that time. Seeking similar information, Cohen and I prepared and mailed a questionnaire in the name of the Hebrew University to Syrian-Jews, culled from The Brooklyn Telephone Directory. We chose randomly 500 names, from a compilation of 2000 that we recognized as "Syrian"; their Jewishness was based on their residences, in what I have since called Aleppo-in-Flatbush.

Syrians and Arabs in general are reluctant and wary of revealing information about themselves. This is due to the oriental trait of "modesty" or "covertness" – *SITRA*, based on suspicion, fear of harm coming to them from evil individuals – or "spirits". (Sonia Hamady, an Egyptian social scientist has written on this and similar traits). Dr. Sanua had experienced similar reticence when he sought some information from Syrians – and alerted me to this. The resulting replies to the questionnaire were small indeed – thirty-three, in number from adults, and fifty from the youth.

The information from this small sampling can by no means

be taken as definitive; however it does provide an *indication* of attitudes, which in its limited scope I found to be consistent with my study and my intimate knowledge of the subject-community over a long span of time — from the early East-Side experience. It supports my observations of some change — and much continuity in ethnic and religious adherance. Although this information was gathered a number of years ago, except income levels which have since risen considerably, and higher education which is ever on the increase, the trends and balance indicated in the replies to the questionnaire may be assumed to be current, and with the reservations and dialectic movements observed in my conclusions, can be said to reflect the character of the present-day Aleppo-in-Flatbush — and in New Jersey.

Adult Response

Of the thirty-three responses to the questionnaire by adult Syrians all were from males. The average age of respondents was 42 — that of their spouses 35, a mean average spread of seven years between them.

49% of respondents and 55% of their wives are U.S. born, 51% of the males were born in the Near East, mostly in Syria and Egypt.

Their wives have more diversified origins when not born here, almost equally divided between Syria, Egypt, Israel, Poland, Panama, etc.

Occupations

Large numbers of Syrians own their own businesses (46%), with an additional number who are independent professionals and commission salesmen. Thus 80 or 85% are individual entrepreneurs, in effect. (Their wives are home-makers to the extent of 85%).

Income

The respondents' higher average income compared to the National mean is largely attributable to owning their own businesses.

National mean earnings were $7870 according to the U.S. Department of Labor, The Census Bureau Report for 1970. The Figures for Syrian income were gathered in 1969, (and correlate with a similar verification query elsewhere in the questionnaire).

Table I

	%
Less than $8,000 to $15,000	27
$16,000 to more than $25,000	61
No reply	(12)
TOTAL	100%

Synagogue Attendance

More than one-third adult males (37%) attend Sabbath Services regularly, an impressive segment. (However they are outstripped by the youth who worship every Sabbath to the extent of a 44%). Adult males attend *daily* to the extent of *close to half* of those who attend on the Sabbath. Those who attend on High Holidays only are 30% of respondents. 6% state they attend "infrequently" (not at all?), while 9% attend only on the Festival Holidays.

Religious Observance Compared to Father's

Recognizedly, there is a universal increase in secularization, observed in Syrians as among others. At the same time there is a small but marked trend to *increasing* Orthodoxy in the Syrian Community — 36% are "as religious", or *"more religious."* (A phenomenal condition, in the United States of today.) 58% state that they are less religious.

Oriental Cuisine

Adherance to the time-consuming-to-prepare Oriental dishes continues with regularity. 27% of the respondents are served Oriental dinners *every* evening, 49% are sure to have Oriental meals every weekend, while the minority (18%) do so "on rare occasions". 6% do not prepare Oriental dishes.

Frequency of Visits to Parents

The extended-family pattern and traditional respect and care for the elderly is demonstrated by the frequency of visits to respondent's parents. Replies show that 54% visit once every week with their children, while some do so more frequently, 13.5% twice weekly, 9% every day. Only one respondent indicated bi-weekly visits. (11 Respondents have no parents here or they are deceased; there were 5 "no response").

Voting Activities and Party Preferences

Syrian Jews are not different in their civil voting pattern from the majority around them. Of respondents eligible to vote, 64% vote regularly, with an additional 28% voting "occasionally." Their wives are stated to vote regularly 52%, "occasionally", 24%.

The preferences are for the Democratic Party to the extent of 30%, and 24% for their spouses. They vote independent "tickets" 43% and 33% respectively. *None* votes the Republican Party slate.

Residences of Friends and Relatives

A tight-knit residential pattern is characteristic of the Syrian Jews. Ninety-four percent who live in New York, reside in the same area (Flatbush), an additional 3% live in "New York City." (This date precedes Deal, N.J.)

Self-Evaluation of Religious Performance, and Private Preference

No Conservative or Reform houses of worship exist in Aleppo-in-Flatbush. However, 18% rate their religious adherance as 'Conservative' and one individual as 'Reform'. The overwhelming majority (67%) view themselves as Orthodox; ('all' attend Syrian houses of worship).

There is a shift to greater liberalism when asked their "private" religious preferances. Only 55% opted for "Orthodox", the "Conservative" drew nine (27%) (against 18% "adherance"), while Reform curiously disappeared. Religious "adherance" gave 9% as

"non-religious" while under "private preferance" there was an increase to 12%.

Religious Education

The overwhelming number of Syrian Jewish male respondents (82%) have had formal Jewish schooling, (with 15% "no reply"). Talmud Torah afternoon schools account for 58%; the others attended yeshiva day schools at elementary and high school levels. Only 24% of the respondents' wives attended religious schools confirming the former attitude of many Syrians: "Girls don't need religious education."

Religious Observance Compared To Father's

The preference for a Jewish friend for their children amounts to 67% of the total with a surprising, only one, respondent insisting on Syrian friends only. 30% are content to have their children form friendships with "Non-Jews and Jews."

Preferences in Children's Friends

Table II.

	%
Any Jews	67
Non-Jews and Jews	30
Only Syrians	3
	100%

Attitude to Proposed Marriage with Non-Jew

A powerful religious adhesion is indicated here. 76% indicate opposition to such marriages, from 12% whose "friendship would be disrupted," to 58% who would "seek to discourage"; and an additional 6% who "would be disturbed." None "would encourage."

Secular Education

61% of respondents show an educational level of "8th grade to high school graduates" (with 15% "no reply). 21% had higher education, to masters degrees. One Ph.D. (3%) is indicated. The respondent's wives had comparable education, to B.A. only, with 24% "no reply." (The majority's "modest" level of education has not inhibited their financial success, as we see in "Incomes.")

Attitude to Marriage to Ashkenazeem

This has seen a sharp swing from earlier unconditional opposition. While a more friendly attitude with Ashkenazeem has developed, an additional factor is the dread of off-springs' marriages to non-Jewish mates, a condition which is almost epidemic among some Ashkenazeem, and Sepharadeem of other national origins. This induces greater tolerance to Syrian-Ashkenazic unions (91%)

Table III.

	%
Would try to dissuade	9
"Prefer Syrian," accepts Ashk.	39
Ashkenazeem totally acceptable	52
	100%

Self-Identification

(a) The overwhelming number of respondents (85%) define themselves as "part of the community," some 12% as "partially so."

(b) The majority of Syrians are convinced of their superiority to Ashkenazeem in religious observance and education; they believe

themselves to be inferior in general (secular) education. (This latter view may have been modified in more recent years.)

Table IV.

	Superior %	*Same* %	*Inferior* %
Religious observance	55	37	6
General education	3	33	43
Religious education	36	30	24
No reply	(6)	0	(27)
	100%	100%	100%

Social Relations

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) have on-going frequent relations with fellow-Syrians, 24% "not often." With non-Jews, 6% had frequent social intercourse, while the overwhelming majority 70% have little or no such relations. (24% did not reply to this category). As to Ashkenazeem, 27% of respondents socialized with them "frequently," with 58% "rarely" or "not often."

Marriages

Every marriage in the respondents' families is to a Jewish spouse. Three wives are converts, two who converted to Judaism before marriage, one after. (This appears to be an abnormally high rate of "intermarriage" in the community and may be distorted by the very small sampling. Intermarriage is believed to be on the order of 1% to 2%, attended by conversion to Judaism, in most cases.)

Youth Response

No. of Respondents: 50. *Sex:* Male — 18 (36%), Female — 32 (64%). *Ages:* 16 to 22, of which 29 (58%) over 18; 21 (42%) below. *Number of Children in Family:* average — 4.

Occupation of Parents

74% of parents are in their own enterprises, against 22% who are employed by others.

Birth Place

86% were born in New York (and New Jersey); others gave Kentucky, Florida, North Carolina, as well as Haiti and Mexico, areas in which their parents conducted retail stores for the greater part.

Closest Friends

Throughout, as in the response to "importance of kosher food," the females indicate greater traditional adherence.

Females to the extent of close to 37% have other Syrians as "closest friends," while only 14% males show this preference. Males, 36%, and females approximately 43%, prefer Ashkenazeem. Close to 50% of males and 32% of females admit of "closest friends" who may be Syrian, Ashkenazic *or* non-Jews.

If a friend proposes to marry a non-Jew, twice as many females, approximately 77%, "would discourage," while to 26% males and 30% females it would be of "no importance."

Religious Education

Almost 77% males (16%" no response") and 54% female (36% "no response") had religious schooling; with 37% (fem) declaredly having no such schooling, and only 6% male religiously unschooled.

Religiousness Compared to Father

11% males and 35% females state that they are *more religious* than their fathers, with 49% male and 33% female "as religious", arriving at a remarkable total of almost 60% males and 68% females who maintain religious adherence *at least as great* as their fathers. Males 38.5% and females 10% state that they are "less religious."

Frequency of Synagogue Attendance

Youth attendance appears to be greater than that of the adults, with a total of 44% males who attend every Sabbath and 15.5% who worship only on holidays. 15.5% do not attend services. Females: 15.5% attend every Sabbath, 69% on holidays only; 12% do not attend.

Table V.

Importance of Kosher Food

	Male %	*Female* %
Very	45	60
Moderately	22	18
Not very important	11	11
Not at all	11	11
No response	(11)	0
	100%	100%

Could You Love and Marry a Non-Jew?

4% each of males and females answered "yes" (*without* indicating whether or not conversion to Judaism is a prerequisite). "No" was the response of 25% (males) and 38% (females).

The responses when conversion was indicated as a prerequisite was "yes" 8% and 16%, males and females respectively, "no," 67% and 59% male and female

Preferences in "Dates" (Only)

Again the clinging to traditions is manifest in this category, with almost seven-fold (26%) females who prefer social-engagements with Syrians only. 16% males prefer Ashkenazeem only. One respondent prefers non-Jews only (Italians). "Dates," including non-Jews are indicated by 6% of males, 4% of females.

Preferences in Marriage Partners

Four times as many females (32%) wish to marry "Syrian only." Females and males are equally divided in willingness to marry

"any Jew" (44%). One male prefers an Ashkenazi, one female wishes to marry only "an Italian."

Parental Relations

Warm, cordial relations were maintained by 64% of respondents, 30% stated "fair" (?). Only two percent admitted to "poor" relations.

Reasons for Attending Synagogue Service

Of males, approximately 25% attend for purely religious reasons, while about 50% do "to pray and see friends." The latter reason is given by females, approximately 42%. Males (13%) and about 33% females attended "to satisfy parents." 6% males and 25% females attend services "only to see friends."

Use of Drugs

Males 27% and females 15% report that their friends use drugs, "frequently", but only "pot" (marajuana), "uppers" and "downers." Twenty-eight percent report that friends use "pot" and "uppers" and "downers" but only "infrequently." One (female) reports a friend takes drugs "infrequently," but takes heroin, as well.

It is known, however, that an undetermined small number of Syrian youths are drug-abusers, employing "hard" drugs. This is not shown in this survey.

Higher Education:

Of 29 respondents 18 years and over, 20 are attending colleges and universities. 16 (80%) are in New York City universities (14 at Brooklyn, 2 at Baruch). The majority of younger respondents indicate a plan to attend a university or graduate school.

An overwhelming percentage of respondents indicate their intent not to enter their father's business, a sharp departure from traditional patterns. (However many professionally-trained youth are known to end up in their fathers' prospering business enterprises).

Most Cherished Syrian Characteristics

Almost as many respondents *disliked* the characteristics of the community which others found to be attractive, "cherished"; many responses overlapped. "Liked":

Table VI.

	%
Food	24
Close Family Life	12
Close Community Relations	20
Social Gatherings	12
Traditional Religious Observance	12
No Response	20
	100%

Appendix II

The Aleppo Codex

PERHAPS THE MOST precious document of all Jewry is the Aleppo Codex, referred to in Halab as the *Keter,* "the Crown," and also as *Keter* Torah, "the Crown of the Torah," and *"Keter* of ben Asher." It is a manscript text of all of the Toráh, written on parchment. It differs from the standard Sefer Toráh since it encompasses the additional Books of the Bible; it is in book form and has diacritical markings *(ta'ameem* and *neqoudót)* vowelling and cantillation marks, on which synagogue reading of the unmarked Torah are based.

There are conflicting opinions as to when the *Keter* itself was written. Some modern day scholars maintain that it was written by Aharon ben Moshe ben Asher, a well known 9th century scribe of Tiberias. Other authorities maintain that ben Asher had only provided the "pointings," the diacritical marks, and had "corrected" it to conform to the *Massorah,* the ancient "handed-down" correct version. On the basis of the testimony of the *colophon,* (the details of the writing attached to the end) of the *Keter* the manuscript was written by Ezrá in the 5th century *B.C.E.* The *colophon* was destroyed in the incendiary fire in 1947 along with parts of the text of the *Keter.* However, it had been carefully studied previously by a highly reliable rabbi of Aleppo, *Haham* Meír Nehmad. In 1933 *Haham* Meír published a booklet about the *Keter* in which the he quotes the colophon, attesting that the *Keter* was written by Ezra-ha-Sopher and that it concluded with a prayer for the *"continuing prosperity* of the Temple in Jerusalem." The text of the colophon was previously reproduced in 1856-1857 in Hammaqid I, No. 47.

It is known that the *Keter* had been seized as a booty of war,

either by the Seljuk Turks in 1071 when they sacked Jerusalem, or by the Crusaders in 1099. It was carried to Cairo where the *Rabbinic* Jews of the city (in contrast to the Karaites who were an important part of the Jewish population) ransomed it. Shortly afterward, Maimonides saw the Codex in Egypt and used it as his authority for the correct Hebrew text of the Scroll of the Law that he himself copied, since he deemed it the most authentic version. He based his authoritative *Hilkhót Sefer Toráh* on it.

It is not clear when the *Keter* became the property of the Jews of Aleppo and, subsequently known as the "Aleppo Codex." Most likely it was when Rabbi David "ben R. Joshua, ben R. Abraham, ben R. David, ben R. Abraham, the son of Maimonides", settled in Aleppo in 1375. He carried with him many manuscripts of his renowned ancestor, and perhaps also the *Keter* of ben Asher.

The Codex was most jealously guarded in the Great Synagogue of Halab, and in the words of Haham Yis'haq Sh'hebbar, an unimpeachable contemporaneous scholar of Aleppo (who removed to Buenos Aires),

> "... no Jew had the presumption to go near it. Thus, its great sanctity in the eyes of the masses preserved it intact at all times. ... In addition, some suspicious-looking people in the guise of *tourists and scholars* came from various countries to look at the book and the members of the community *feared that they would steal or photograph it.*" [My italics]

(In Sh'hebbar's letter to President of Israel, Izhak Ben-Zvi, a renowned Biblical scholar, in *Textus*, Magnes Press. Jerusalem, 1960. page 11).

The anti-Zionist zeal of Muslim fanatics in 1947 resulted in the burning of the Great Synagogue – and all of Aleppo's numerous synagogues. Parts of the *Keter* were destroyed along with the *colophon* before the manuscript was rescued by Jews. It was jealously guarded, but was nevertheless, stolen by a member of the Syrian Cabinet, which was soon overthrown. He took it with him to Lebanon in his flight. Later he was induced to return to Syria with a promise of amnesty; upon his return he was promptly imprisoned and soon was hanged.

The theft and return of the *Keter* created great distress in the Jews of the city, they were most anxious about its future safety.

Murad Faham, pious Aleppoan Jew who nevertheless continued his family's Iranian citizenship, had suffered expulsion from Syria, and the loss of his considerable wealth. At the insis-

tence of the then powerful Shah of Iran the Syrian authorities were compelled to receive Faham back into his native city. Soon Faham found life in Aleppo impossible for him and decided to emigrate. But not before he had – with the consent of the community, secreted the sacred *Keter* in the bales of his belongings. He was challenged by the Syrian Customs authorities to open the bales for inspection. "What trepidation I felt," he related to me. He succeeded through bluster – the threat of 'reprisals' by the President of Syria himself if he was further inconvenienced – in leaving with his goods, *unexamined.*

Arriving in Israel, Faham was in anguish and uneasiness about the safety of the sacred Manuscript. "How to preserve it from harm, where to keep it free from molestation?" Soon he was led to the President Ishak Ben-Zvi, to whom he gave it for safekeeping. The *Keter* was placed in the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem in a special vault, which would instantly sink underground if the electronic safeguards were ever to be disturbed.

The *Porat Yosef* Yeshiva in Jerusalem was founded by Aleppoans in 1920, and since that time has been the unofficial repository of Aleppoan 'authority' in the Holy City. As such *Porat Yosef* claimed 'ownership' of the *Keter* as representatives of Aleppo Jewry. This ownership became the basis of a recent dispute when the Ben-Zvi Institute proposed to publish a facsimile limited-edition of the Codex; the dispute was composed somehow. (A facsimile copy of the *Keter* is owned in Flatbush-in-Aleppo, by David A. Tawil.)

Despite all offers of financial or other aid by President Ben-Zvi, the penniless Murad Faham refused to accept any benefits through his rescue of the *Keter* – the colophon of the Manuscript had carried "a curse on anyone who benefited through the *Keter.*" Murad Faham ultimately settled in the United States, where he is a highly esteemed member of the Syrian community in Brooklyn.

Appendix III

The "Proxy-Brides" and the Condition of the Jews in Syria

THERE ARE TWO HEROES, both named Stephen, involved in the dramatic story of the Jewish Syrian Proxy-Brides — U.S. Representative Stephen J. Solarz and Stephen Shalom, (a community leader). It is they who are principally responsible for the immigration to the United States of twelve young Syrian women who came to America July 31st 1977 to be married to their unknown proxy-bridegrooms.

From a Syrian-Jewish population of perhaps 25,000 to 30,000 before Israel's creation in 1948, there remain only 5100, most of who would be overjoyed to leave Syria. The intensely pro-Arab, anti-Israel government treats them almost as hostages, withholding permission to leave the country. Many escaped Syrians recounted the tales of discriminatory decrees and harsh mistreatment to which the Syrian Jews were subjected. Their means of livelihood are restricted; none is permitted to retain an official or semi-official position — teachers and government employees were dismissed. Movement beyond three miles from their homes was forbidden.

Consequently all who could make their way out of the country — by whatever means — did so. Most unmarried young men who did not fear imprisonment if they failed, made their dangerous way across frontiers. Consequently, five-hundred young women of marriageable age faced a bitter life of celibacy, since they will marry only those of their own faith. Meanwhile, President Hafez al-Assad (a member of a small dissident sect of Muslims) had begun to somewhat ease the conditions of life for the Jews of his country, in the period that Syria's relations with the United States

began to show small improvements; improvements which have again deteriorated.

Congressman Stephen J. Solarz, whose district encompasses most of the approximately 25,000 Syrian Jews in New York, has evidenced continuing deep interest and sympathy in the fate of the Syrian cousins and friends of his constituents. In December of 1976 Congressman Solarz made a trip to Damascus to meet with Syrian officials and heads of the Jewish community. The overriding concern of the Jewish leaders was the situation of their hundreds of girls of marriageable age who were doomed to remain without mates. Upon his return Congressman Solarz approached the State Department in behalf of these young women, and when Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance visited Damascus on a tour of the Middle East, he raised the problem of the Jewish women — and *did not receive a rebuff.* Informed of this Congressman Solarz sought the help of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor to the President, under whom Solarz had studied in Columbia University. Brzezinski arranged a meeting with President Carter for Congressman Solarz and Stephen Shalom, at which time the President expressed his sympathy for the plight of the Syrian Jewish women. When in Geneva, May 9, 1977, Carter met with Assad, and incidentally, discussed the problem of the Jewish women in Syria. He carried the proposal that the women be given permission to emigrate, in order to be enabled to marry. President Assad finally gave Carter his assent to the proposal, authorizing a small number of women to first be married by proxy to Americans, and would then be given permission to leave Syria. Solarz informed Shalom, who set to work immediately to enlist unmarried Syrian men in the Brooklyn community to come forward with proxy-marriage proposals to twelve women as a beginning, with plans for an additional number to follow.

Michael Lewan, Congressman Solarz' Administrative Assistant, accompanied Shalom, Albert Chabot, and Rabbi Isaac S. Dwek of the Deal, New Jersey community, to Syria to complete arrangements for the emigration of the twelve "brides." Syrian law recognizes proxy marriages, U.S. laws do not; the proxy marriages would be completed in New York, but only with the consent of the proxy "husband" and the Syrian "bride."

The *New York Times* of July 31, 1977 was only one of countless newspapers which were intrigued by the arrival of "proxy brides." The *Times* related the event in a prominent two-column article on its first page, and reported at some length elsewhere in the news-

paper the celebration in the Congregation Sha' aré Zión Synagogue in Brooklyn upon arrival of the Syrian "brides." Radio and television coverage of the arrival of the women was nationwide, and was echoed in the media of Europe and elsewhere.

Individual Syrian girls were received as guests in the homes of volunteers in the community, who act as foster-parents. (The girls' ages range from sixteen to twenty-three.) Arrangements were made for schooling and training, learning English, and a profession or skill of their choice. They are reported to be eager and excellent students by their teachers in the ORT schools. Several have found bridegrooms – but not those who had initially "married" them.

Less than one year after the arrival of the twelve, plans were completed to have fifty proxy "bridegrooms" send their offers of marriage, and to arrange for host-families to receive the "brides" when they arrive.

The emigration of additional "brides" is in limbo, at this time, awaiting the uncertain ambivalent approval of the Syrian government, approval which is dependent on the see-saw attitude of the Arab government to negotiations for a Middle-East peace. At this time Syrian authorities are oblivious to all pleas for the implementation of earlier encouragement.

Syrian Jews Today

The Jews in Syria today are are bound with many restrictions which place them in the position of a people on 'parole', free to move about within an area limited to about three miles. They may hold no governmental or municipal post of any kind – including teaching, as noted earlier. Their shops are singled out – *"MOOSA'-WI"* (a follower of "Moosa" – Moses), discouraging Muslims from patronizing them. Nevertheless, historic heritage of hard work and sobriety – which we saw attested to by the Queen Elizabeth I Gentlemen-Merchants, these characteristics have served to succor the Jews of Syria. Numbers manage to support themselves through their skilled work, or through businesses they are able to maintain. Numerous others have difficulty in making ends meet; this is when the Jewish Near East Society plays its role. A very few have met the needs of the population of a developing country through their own commercial enterprises and have amassed some substance.

The degree of restrictions placed upon Jews is illustrated by the following episode:

A Jewish merchant secured a difficult-to-get travel permit, enabling him to make a business trip to a town about 150 miles away. Upon arriving in this town he was required to register immediately with the police, and to present himself to them when he was ready to travel home. At the end of his business the police escorted him to the bus and firmly ordered the bus-driver not to permit the Jew to descend from the vehicle *until the arrival in Aleppo.* Despite a rest-stop where they paused, the Jew's need for a toilet facility was denied — "Police orders" said the embarrassed bus-driver. Off went the bus on its trip. Finally the bus-driver showed compassion, decided to risk the possible consequences and drew up at the side of the road for our merchant to descend for a moment.

It is in desperation that Jews of Syria live — and leave when they can. A rash of escapes from the country took place recently; several families somehow made their way out of the country. Their relatives and friends left behind were subjected to harsh treatment by the secret police. All regulations directed at Jews were reinforced, creating fear and uncertainty as to what would next befall them.

No predictions about the future can be hazarded. Peace, when accepted by all the Arab States will likely bring release to the Jews of Syria. Short of that their future is uncertain; as is, now, the fate of the "proxy-brides" waiting in vain for exit-visas.

About 900 years ago Hahám Yehuda al-Harizi visited Aleppo; the Jewish population he found there was a prosperous one, socially as well regiously. In his epic poem al-Harizi named some of the rabbis of the city. Today, Aleppo's Jewry is few in number, limited by the government in their activities and movements. Nevertheless it is possible to name several rabbis and teachers who continue to function, in a community that is but a ghost of its former status. The head is Hahám Yomtob Yedid, with Yoséf Shásho, Edouard Kohén and Abraham Za 'farani. Among the lay-leaders I know Henri Guindi and his son Murad.

Appendix IV

Family Names

THERE IS SOME UNDERSTANDABLE curiosity about the possible meanings and origins of Syrian family names. In an attempt to satisfy this interest, here is some limited information.

Some Damascus and Aleppoan family names are derived from the near-by regions from which families had originally come. Thus:

ADJMI	stems from	Adjam (Persia/Iran)
ANTAKY	" "	Antioch ("Antakeh")
ANTEBI	" "	Antab (or "Aintab" in Turkey; now "Gaziantab" on maps)
DIARBAKILLI	" "	Diarbakyr, some 250 miles N.E. of Aleppo
HALABI	" "	Aleppoan origin - Halab
HAMWY	" "	Hama ("Hamath" was its ancient name)
HOMSI	" "	Homs
KILLZI	" "	Killiz in near-by southern Turkey
MOGHRABI	" "	west-North Africa
MISSRY	" "	Misr-Egypt
SAFDIEYEH/ SAFADI	" "	Safed
SHAMMI	" "	Damascus - "il Sham"
TRABULSI	" "	Trablos; - Tripoli
URFALLI	" "	Urfa, about 175 miles N.E. of Aleppo

Other names are based on crafts, professions and personal characteristics, names which are recognizeable in the community.

[Family names *per se*, are comparatively new, a matter of a few

centuries. Previously men were known, for example, as "Ya'cob ibn Asher, ibn Yis'haq" etc., etc. (Jacob, son of Asher, son of Yis'haq. etc., etc.)].

ADES	(Arab/Heb.)	Lentils
ALFIEH	(Arab.)	A large earthenware Bottle
ASHE'AR (Ashear)	(Arab.)	Blond; of fair complexion
ASHKENAZI	(Heb.)	From the 'west'; Western ritual
ATTAR	(Arab.)	Dealer in fragrances, etc.
AZRAK	(Arab.)	Blue
BEYDA (BEDA)	(Arab.)	An egg; a white (fem.) object
BERACHA/ BRACHA	(Heb.)	A blessing
CATTON-KATTAN-Cattan	(Arab.)	Dealer in cotton
CHINI-ALECHINI	(Arab.)	Maker of slippers
DABBAH	(Heb./Arab.)	Slaughterer of animals
DWECK	(Arab.)	Young cockerel; Earthernware jar or jug
ERANI/IRANI	(Arab.)	A person from Iran/ Persia
GINDI	(Arab.)	Soldier
HADDAD	(Heb./Arab.)	A smith, (iron or steel)
HEDAYA	(Arab.)	Gifts; leader to the "right path."
HIDARY	(Arab.)	Dealer in greens, Vegetables
HILLOU	(Arab.)	Sweet
HARA	(Arab.)	A neighborhood
HAZAN-HAZZAN	(Heb.)	Cantor
KASSAB	(Arab.)	Butcher
KHABBAZ	(Arab.)	Baker
LAHAM	(Arab.)	Dealer in meat
MALEH	(Arab.)	Salty
MENAGED	(Arab.)	Maker or repairer of Mattresses
MIZRAHI	(Heb.)	Easterner (oriental)
NEHMAD	(Heb.)	Cherished

RAHMEY	(Heb.)	Compassionate
SABAN/SABBAN	(Arab.)	Maker or dealer in soap
SABBAGH	(Arab.)	Dyer
SAKA/SAKKAH	(Arab.)	"Supplier" of beverages
SALEM	(Heb./Arab.)	Secure or safe
SASSON	(Heb.)	Delight, joy
SAYEGH	(Arab.)	Jeweller, (maker or seller)
SHAMMAH/ SHAMAH	(Arab.)	Dealer in wax or candles
SHAMS	(Arab.)	Sun
SHOMER	(Heb.)	Guardian
SULTAN	(Arab.)	King
TAWIL	(Arab.)	Tall
TAHAN/TAHANN	(Arab.)	Miller-grinder
YEDID	(Heb.)	Cherished, beloved
ZETOONY/ ZETOUNEH	(Arab.)	Olive, or dealer in

Appendix V

Sepharadeem

BOOKS BY RABBIS of old in the Near East mention in passing the presence in their midst of the "esteemed *Sepharadeem*" who came to make their homes among them in Aleppo, Damascus and elsewhere. Nowhere, however, have we found specific references as to when, and in *what numbers,* the refugees from the Spanish Inquisition had arrived in Syria. The *Sepharadeem* in time became absorbed into the communities of native Jews, the *Must'arab'eem.* Later the Italian Jews, the *"Franj"* arrived, who resisted absorption for reasons that we read below.

We may well ask, is it only the Spanish and Portuguese who may be called *Sepharadeem?* It is true that the land of *Sepharad* is traditionally considered to be Spain, but according to *Genesis,* 10.3 and *Obadiah* 1.20 the lands called "Sepharad" and "Ashkenaz" were *not* Spain and Eastern Europe; they were located in areas "north", – somewhere in the vicinity of Armenia, perhaps. Thus, Spain for "Sephard" and Eastern Europe for "Ashkenaz" are not, strictly speaking, entirely correct.

As to the Jews who lived in Spain for several centuries, these "Sepharadeem" were none other than decendants of Middle East *ancestors.* They are revealed to have originated in the Middle East; they had come in stages, from Egypt, Baghdad, North Africa, Palestine and Syria. Arabic was the chief language in large areas of Spain until the Christian conquests; it was used by the Jews in everyday speech as well as for many religious works – just as in the Middle-East, *(vide:* Saádia, ibn Gabirol, the two ibn Ezra, Maimonides, etc.). In effect Jewish Spain was merely an *extention* of the Middle East, to all intents and purposes the *Sepharadeem* did

not substantially differ from their brothers in the Fertile Crescent, in language, religious practices, and endeavors.

It is, thus, reasonable to speak of *all* these Jews as *Sepharadeem;* in contrast to *Ashkenazeem,* the Jews of Europe whose language and culture later differed sharply from the Arabic-speaking co-religionists. When the victims of the Inquisition arrived in the Near East, it was to join communities whose basic customs were largely identical with those of their native cities in Spain. That Spanish was now spoken by the refugees — since they lived in cities that had become Christian — offered the major difference from the Jews among whom they settled.

'Sephardic' Pronunciation

It is generally agreed in Israel that Hebrew should be spoken in the *'Sepharadi'* mode, advocated by Eliezer Ben-Yehudáh, and other linguistic authorities, and its use the official one in Israel, — *by Law.*

The basis for the use of *Sepharadi* pronunciation is the recognition that Hebrew is Semitic, a cognate of Arabic, Assyrian, etc., languages which are pronounced like authentic Sepharadi Hebrew. Aramaic continues to be spoken in north-east Iraq by the remaining Assyrians, continues also to form part of the Maronite-Christian ritual, pronounced like Arabic and Sepharadi Hebrew. Accordingly Hebrew pronunciation should *closely resemble* Arabic.

Ancient Hebrew (and Arabic) possesses "gutterals — *'Ayeen, 'heht,* and "emphatics" *'teht'* (not "tet") *'ghoff'* (not "cuff") and *sahdiq,* which sounds were lost or distorted over the centuries in Eastern European Hebrew, becoming increasingly stacatto. Other distortions, *changed accentuations,* etc., arose there and were carried to Palestine, where the Pioneers, East European Hebraists, perpetuated them. (It is to be remembered that the *'Humásh,* in printed form, carries *massorah markings for accent,* which are scrupulously followed in authentic Sepharadi pronunciation, but neglected in the Ashkenazi and Israeli Hebrew). Thus, for example, in Israel we have "Sephardim" or "Sfardim" in place of the authentic *Sepharedeem.* The town of S-a-f-é-d is now called *"S'fat"* through a continuation of these distortions.

Jews of the Near and Middle East, Yemen, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, however, perpetuate the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew, with its greater plasticity and limpidity.

There is more than authenticity and aesthetics. The Talmud (trachtate *Megillah,* 24-B) and the *Shul'hán 'Arúkh* (Orah Hayeem, 53). saw these changes in pronunciation as violations. So too, did Ha-Rambam who stated that such changes render prayers unacceptable. Trachtate *Berakhot* also carried such warnings.

In discussing *authentic* 'Sephardic' pronunciation with Dr. Hayyim J. Cohen, formerly a Senior Reader at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Cohen saw this as a "hopeless cause." Israeli Sepharadeem from the Middle East look to the dominant Ashkenazeem, powerful and successful, who set the standards. Thus most Sepharadeem, who are in a generally inferior social status seek to identify with the Ashkenazeem, and adopt the European staccato mode of speech.

Is it a "hopeless cause"? Although most Sepharadeem appear resigned — even important *hahameem* (in non-religious speech), there is a small movement which has begun to attempt a remedy. Dr. Abraham Matalon, a linguistic — and legal expert is active in bringing this matter to Israeli educational and governmental authorities. He is weighting the feasibility of appealing to the Israeli Supreme Court. Matalon bases such a possible proceeding on the fact that since according to Israeli law Hebrew is the official language it follows that it should be perpetuated in its correct historic pronunciation. Dr. Matalon believes that even if such a suit should not succeed, it will, in any case focus the attention of the Israeli world on the importance of the issue. At the same time, it will raise the self-esteem and spirit of the Jews originally from the Middle East.

If however the Court suit receives a favorable decision it will be the responsibility of the authorities to take steps necessary for the inculcation of *correct Hebrew.* The adult population will not easily take to this requirement — psychologically; however the differences between and authentic Hebrew and Neo-Hebrew or 'Israeli' are not great, although the effect is a significant one. In any case, Dr. Matalon expands, we must realize that unauthentic Hebrew has been *widely* spoken in Israel for a matter of *less* than one lifetime. Surely the People that is turning deserts into gardens can achieve the teaching of the true language of the ancient land.

Matalon relates that he has the support of many important individuals who, like him, feel strongly about the Preservation of the language. Among them he named Navon, President of Israel, the renowned Professor Mirsky, and other scholars. Mirsky wrote

The Introduction to Dr. Matalon's recent book on the pronunciation and morphology of the language.

To organize pressure for this movement Matalon stated that he is seeking support from the Diaspora. Solomon (Sam) Catton, a leading Community leader in Aleppo-in-Flatbush has undertaken to gather financial support for this project in Brooklyn.

Appendix VI

Memories of Aleppo's Rabbis

THE LIFE OF ALEPPO'S JEWRY was thoroughly intermeshed with the religious tradition of countless centuries — and with the pattern of the rabbinical corps which represented the "government within a government". The city had been endowed with able religious leadership, which succeeded, century after century in maintaining a healthy and respected religious community life. More than that, as was pointed out earlier, it was a religious community which was the envy of rabbis in other important cities, where the practice of religion was marked by weakness and wavering. "In most lands and in all of Syria and Eres Yisrael (Palestine)", Aleppo was cited by Maimonides as the *only city* in which the Jewish religion and scholarship was pursued with devotion and dedication. This tradition is deeply ingrained in Aleppoans, in every land in which they live, practiced with *varying degrees of fidelity.* Aleppo-in-Flatbush-and-on-the Jersey-shore perpetuates the tradition of Syria with considerable faithfulness, if not with the zeal of the multitude of Aleppo's rabbis.

Who were these ecclesiasts of whom old-timers speak with such reverence?

There are few sources for names of Aleppo's countless rabbis throughout the centuries. Such sources make mention of only a few of the most prominent, some of who succeeded in having their works published. A modest and unassuming researcher *Haham* David Sion Laniado did indeed see the importance of remembering many who did not succeed in publishing and consequently stood in danger of being forgotten,

Haham David's work is *Liqdosheem Asher Ba'ares* — "To the Sa-

cred Ones of the Land" – Aleppo, (published in 1952). He had visited Aleppo's Jewish burial places noting the years of death of the *hahameem. Haham* David's search in the Jewish graveyards of Aleppo brings to mind the work of Edgar Lee Masters whose now-classic *Spoon River Anthology,* also based on tombstones, created a sensation when it was published in 1915. Masters spun his poetic biographies from imaginary tombstones in his fictional village in the United States.

Laniado sought out the tombstones of rabbis buried in Aleppo and a few of those who had migrated to Jerusalem, Safėd and Tiberias, to spend their last years on the soil of the Holy Land, as well as a few others who had migrated to Egypt and the New World. The names which follow are mostly of those buried in Aleppo.

Aharon Laniado, his son, (one of thirteen children), reminisced to me in New York of the memory of his father's return home from the cemeteries, day after weary day, covered with dust from head to foot.

In addition to cemeteries, *Haham* David mentions particularly revered rabbis whose last resting places are in the caves and graves within, and at, the portals of the Great Synagogue near the *Bahsita,* in what is called *Mė-arrât Ha-Saddiqeem,* "The Cave of the Just." The graves of these holy men, as was noted earlier, are visited regularly immediately before Holy Days, not only by Jews but by some Muslims as well. Oil lamps are burned there to honor their memory.

Laniado's book *Liqdosheem* mentions the names of 'all' Syrian/Aleppoan rabbis available. Some are given only a few lines; more important rabbis have greater space devoted to them, with information regarding their important connections and the names of their works. In addition, Laniado provides a summarized list of books, both published and in manuscript, the works of Aleppo's and Damascus' rabbis, he does not neglect rabbis of Ladino-Sepharadeem.

In his book *Haham* David provides a summary of one of the rare books dealing with Aleppo's Jewish past, *Haham* Abraham Dayan's *Holekh Tameem-u-Poel Sedek.* I found this work to have valuable information, as well as improbable folklore. Dayan's book includes a detailed account of the structure and contents of the Great Synagogue of Aleppo, ". . . so that information concerning this ancient House of Worship should never be forgotten." The author of *Liqdosheem, Haham* David, includes in his book a variety

of assorted information, of facts which he deemed important to be preserved, all that he knew of the rabbis, the accumulation of many legends of the city of Aleppo, as well as short excerpts from the books of rabbis which deal in any way with the history of the city — information that he feared may be forgotten or lost. The result is an informative, valuable and interesting-*pot-pourri. Haham* David's eager devotion reveals a sometimes naive — but endearing personality.

Laniado reminds us that

> Aleppo's rabbis were anxious not to gain worldly benefits through Torah-study. Many had a trade or profession to support them. Several were successful merchants, in addition to serving as heads of communal or religious bodies. Others received tiny stipends weekly — from four or five piastres to perhaps ten piastres, equivalent to 25¢ to 50¢ weekly, not quite enough for bare survival.

Earlier in this history I wrote of my Aleppoan childhood memory of a rabbi who hovered, toward sunset on Friday evenings, to compel Jewish shopkeepers to close their establishments, and to chase home shoe-shine boys eager to earn a few more coppers. It is only now, many decades later through *Haham* David's *Li-qdosheem,* that, almost miraculously, I discovered his identity *(I was four years old when Haham Ya'cob died!) Haham* Ya'cob Daqneesh Gindi, "... a great preacher, ... he was feared for his uncompromising attitude ... a man who was fearless in the face of the highly placed, *and who on Friday evenings would force the shops to close"* (my italics).

As to his curious middle-name *Daqneesh,* we may assume that it was a fond — or perhaps resentful or derisive nickname for his beard, since *daqn* ("Daqn-eesh") is Arabic for "beard"

What follows, then, is a somewhat *incomplete* compilation of names of rabbis of Aleppo, etc., dating from the late 1500's C. E. and with Rabbi Yosef ibn Aknin, from the 12th century. These are rabbinic scholars whose names figure as ancestors of families who carried the names and traditions of Aleppo and Damascus to present-day Flatbush and Deal, New Jersey.

Note that the photographs of old Hahameem in this volume were collected by *Haham* David Laniado, the doughty tombstone-researcher. They illustrate the everyday dress of most men of Aleppo and Damascus as it had been for countless centuries. (Of particular interest is that of *Haham Bashi* Abraham Dweck ("Kha-

lousi") the "learned and wealthy Chief Rabbi of Aleppo." His apparel, rich with Governmental Orders and medals, was the ceremonial attire of most Chief Rabbis in Aleppo. Remember, too, that when the *Haham Bashi* went forth in the streets he was proceeded by two Kawass' ("shooters") in much-buttoned uniforms – they were called *Djaerkas,* armed and of fierce demeanor, who cleared the way for the *Haham.* Djerkas were central Asian subjects of the Turkish Sultan).

Herewith, then is the fruit of *Haham* David Laniado's toiling in the burial-places of Aleppo, and research covering the deceased rabbis in *Halab* and elsewhere; a work for which we are deeply in debt to him.

ABRAHAM, BEN ASHER, Perush Hamidrash, also Or *Hassekhel.* A pupil of the great Yosaf Karo who lived 1488-1575.

ABADI, ABRAHAM. "Antaki" (from Antioch)
Enjoyed "Two Crowns – Torah and Wealth". died 1881.

ABADI, YIS'HAQ. Kabbalist and *haseed* died in Jerusalem 1916.

ABADI, ELIAHOU ABRAHAM. Wrote: *Ben Abraham* died 1808.

ABADI, EPHRAIM. Renowned teacher. Died 1865.

ABADI, EZRA. See 'Sh'ayo"

ABADI, MATLOUB. Mentioned in *Kennesiyah;* signed Sasson's patent; leading rabbi in Tédef. Died 1909.

ABADI, MATLOUB. Highly esteemed in New York where he lived. "Most scholarly". Authored: *Maghehn Ba'adie* and numerous articles. Died 1969.

ABADI MORDECHAI. One of Aleppo's most highly cherished rabbis, most highly praised *"One and only . . ."* Wrote *Ma'yan Ma'yeem, Melees Na'eem, Vikuah Na'eem, Hehn Mordechai: Some work published in the lands of the Ashkenazeem". Was imprisoned on false charges by "informers" when he lost manuscript to two books Derkheh 'Hehn and Sha'aré Hehn, and 'Hehn Beresheet;* also wrote religious poetry – Pupil of R. Moshe Swéd died 1883.

ABADI, YA'ACOB. Popular teacher died 1876.

ABADI, YESHA'IA. Author *Qol Rinnah Vi'shuah.* Died 1852.

ABADI, YIS'HAQ ABRAHAM. Wrote *Haq'qeh Lehb,* details of Great Synagogue. Died 1900.

ABADI, YIS'HAQ. Well known as teacher, Died 1915.

ABIGDOR, YISHAQ. family was of No. African origin – one of

many such families who made Aleppo their home. Died 1918.

ABOUD, AHARON. In *Bet. Deen,* and Kabbalist (photog.)

ADES, JACOB. "Antebi"-(from Aintab); in *Bet Deen* and outstanding teacher. Died in Jerusalem, 1963. (photog.)

AKNIN. See ibn Aknín

ALFIAH, YA'COB HAYEEM. Noted Kabbalist (photog.) Died 1916.

ALFIAH, YIS'HAQ. Died 1965, (photog).

ALFIAH, YIS'HAQ. "Pious, zealous." Died in Jerusalem, 1912.

ALTARAS, DAVID. Member of early "Franj" family. A school-colleague of the renowned Rabbi David Pardo. Altarás went into commerce, with great success, Pardo into religious writing. When they met, Altarás pointed to a thick business ledger and wept, at his own "meaningless endeavors". Friend of R. Sádqa Husein. died Circa 1795.

AMRAM, NATAN. Author: *Noah Ha-middótt* (no date)

ANCONA, REUBEN. Of an Italian family. Died 1917, (photog.)

ANHORAI, MOSHE. Passing through Halab as a *'Shaliyah'* R Moshé won the esteem of the city and was induced to become Chief Rabbi. Originally from Morocco, he later became Chief Rabbi of Egypt and died there in 1824.

ANTEBI ABRAHAM Chief Rabbi, author of *Mahr vé-Aholót, Ohel Yeshareem, Yosheb Ohaleem, Ohel Yis'haq.* He is buried in the "Cave of the Just", " . . . *(Me'arat Ha-Sadiqeem)* near the great Synagogue; entry through the middle *hohsh* [courtyard] of the Dayan residence, in the middle of the second row, just before the grave of Haham Ya'cob Dweck". A man of great piety and learning. "Widely known" Upon word of his death a day of mourning was proclaimed in Aleppo, Jerusalem, Koshta and Salonika. Died 1858.

ANTEBI, RAFAEL See "Tabboush"

ASBAHN MORDECHAI Born in No. Africa. Lived in Livorno many years, but left to settle in Aleppo after a dispute with Livorno's Chief Rabbi, Haham Abraham Rodriguizi (Rodriguez?) Died 1750.

ASHKENAZI, ABRAHAM GABRIEL Wrote introduction to *Yosheb Ohaleem,* in 1822.

ASHKENAZI, DAVID Head of a *metibtá* (seminary) died in 1848.

ASHKENAZI, GABRIEL mentioned in *Qorbaahn Ishsheh*

ATTIE, HAIM. A rabbinic signer of Sasson's printing patent in 1866. Died 1891.

ATTIYEH HAYYEEM Was Laniado's son-in-law, circa 1780.

ATTIYEH, YEHUDA (ASLAN) in *Bet Deen,* Died Jerusalem 1961 (photog).

ATTIYEH, YESHA'IAH. (Mentioned by Rab "Hida" (Azoulay). author: *Bighdeh Yésha* circa 1830 (?).

ATTIYEH, YIS'HAQ YESHA'IAH mentioned in R. Shelomó Laniado's work of 1775.

BERAKHAN, (BERACHA) YISHAQ Wrote: *Berákh Yisháq.* Pub. in Venice, 1872.

BETESH, HIYAH. Chief rabbi of Killiz, Died 1764.

BIGIO, SHALOM. [from "Vigio" Spain (?); "B" and "V" are often interchanged].

BUQQAII, YA'ACOB. "Benefactor of many" Died 1900.

BUQQAII, ABRAHAM. "Had multitude of students". Died 1914.

DABBAH, YESHA'IAH. Member *Bet Deen; noted* poet singer Died 1772.

DABAH, SHAUL. See "Sutton-Dabah"

DABBAH, YIS'HAQ. Signed R. Abraham Sasson's patent in *1866;* Died same year.

The Dayan family was at the head of Jewish life in Babylon (Babel, later Baghdad), for hundreds of years. They are 'traceable' to Josia-Hassan ben Zakkai brother of the *Nassi* (Prince), David, the Exilarch or *Resh Galuta,* (917-940, c.e.). The Dayan family claimed descent from King David. Later, a descendant of Shelomó ben Azariá was invited by Aleppo to become Chief Rabbi of the city. *R. Moshé ben Sa'adia* was the first to assume the name of Dayan ("Judge"). Yosef Natán Dayan listed below claimed to trace his antecedents 77 generations, back to King David. (This listing is included in *Liqdosheem.)* The famous synagogue *Bet Nasi;* (House of the prince) was the seat of Dayan rabbis.

DAYAN, ABRAHAM. author: *Sheer Haddásh, Zikhrón La-néfesh Holékh Tameem-u-poél Sedek, Voyosef Abraham, Tohb Ta'ahm, Ta'ameem Nekhoneem and three manuscript* works. Buried in "Caves of the Just" Died 1877.

DAYAN, AHARON. Member of *Bet Deen,* author *Bet Aharon.* Died 1894

DAYAN, ELIEZER, MORDECHAI. ("called Hayeem Mansour") Died 1817.

DAYAN, YOSEF NATAN. Jurist," . . . the one and only head of the Sepharadi (Spanish immigrant) community *and* of the

native Jews" — 77th generation from King David, Dayan's ancestor. Died 1695.

DAYAN, YESHA'IA. A most highly revered jurist and scholar. head of the *Bet Deen* Court. Published *Imreh Nó aam, Hazzohn Yesha'ia.* Buried in the "Cave of the Just", 1830.

DWECK ABRAHAM YIS'HAQ. (Douek/Dwek). Much respected teacher. Died 1930.

DWECK, ELIAHOU. author, *Birkat Eliahou,* mentioned in Laniado's work of 1775.

DWECK, MOSHE. See "Kassab"

DWECK, SHAUL. Buried in "Caves of the Just" in the Great Synagogue. Died 1934.

DWECK, HAYEEM SHAUL. Kabbalist. Died in Jerusalem 1933

DWECK, YA'ACOB SHAUL. Pupil of Haham Mordechai Abadi; was *Haham Bashi,* and *Ab Bet Deen* (chief rabbi and head of Rabbinic Court) from 1906 — an unusued distinction. Issued many *takkanoht* (edicts) for Sabbath observance. "No burial in sacred soil for a flagrant Sabbath violator; He is like a *goy* for all matters" wrote: *Derekh Emuná* and *She-ereet ya'acob.* Quoted in R. Yeshaia Dayan's *Imreh Nóaam* Buried in "Cave of Just". Died 1919 (photog.)

DWECK, YEHUDAH E'PHRAIM "One of the great among Aleppo's Rabbis" Died 1928.

DWECK YOSEF. Son of author *Emmett Me-erres,* singer and poet. Died 1883.

DWEK-KHALOUSI, ABRAHAM Chief Rabbi, wrote extensively, (not published). died 1901.

DWEK-KHALOUSI, ELIAHOU Kabbalist. Died Jerusalem 1949 (photo).

ESSES, YEHUDAH "Wise and benevolent.' " died 1908.

ESSES, SIMANTOB Known for his modesty and scholarliness. Died 1885.

ESSES, SIMANTOB Died 1923.

FRANCO, YEHUDAH See "Hallak"

GINDI, MOSHE Revered Kabbalist, Scholar, in New York. Died 1954

GINDI, YA'ACOB DAQNEESH "Fearless, great preacher", *patroller, to safeguard Sabbath observance* His books remain unpublished. Died 1911.

HALLAK, EZRA His modesty concealed his great sanctity (until after his death, in 1904)

HA-KOHEN, ABRAHAM. With R. Sadqa Husein wrote *Reya'h Sadé'h* "Buried with *Arohn Ha-Eloheem* and *Torat Eliahou*" [books], died 1735 or 1736.

HA-KOHEN, HAYEEM. Pupil of renowned R. Hayeem Vital, the Kabbalist. Author of *Torat Hakhaam.* Buried in the "Caves of the Just", in 1655.

HAI-REKKI, IMMANUEL A North African (?) who wandered through many cities, finally settled in Aleppo, for its holiness. An ascetic, for twenty-two years he fasted sunrise until sunset, every day except Sabbaths and holidays. Wrote: *Mishnat Hasideem* and *Yósher Lebáb.* Died Jerusalem, *Circa* 1750-1770.

HA-LEVI, HAYEEM "modest, teacher"; died 1905

HAMWY ELIAHOV. (Hamawy) (See also "Kahasky") Much revered and beloved leader. A successful merchant who contributed money generously. Was *Ab Bet Deen.* Supported R. Dayan's taking over of Sasson's printing enterprise about 1880. Published: *Péh Eliáhou;* another work *Ben Yáyeen,* in manuscript. Buried in "Sacred Caves", 1916.

HAMWY, EZRA. Pres. *Bet Deen;* died Jerusalem 1946. (photo)

HARARI, ABRAHAM mentioned in *Zakkhor le-Yis'haq;* d.circa 1900.

HARARI, HIYAH. Signed patent in 1866 for Sasson's press.

HARARI, MOSHE Member *Bet Deen.* Buried in Great Synagogue, 1918.

HARARI, MOSHE. Grandfather of Yishaq, (author of *Zakhór lé Yis'háq).* Buried in "Caves of the Just" 1866.

HARARI, MOSHE. died 1649

HARARI, MOSHE. died 1817.

HARARI, MOSHE. Member of *Bet Deen.* Buried in "Cave of the Just", 1919. (photog.)

HARARI, YIS'HAQ Buried in "Caves of the Just", in 1866.

HARARI-RAFOUL, EZRA "Wise, understanding, learned", Kabbalist. Died in Jerusalem, 1936. (photo.)

HARARI-RAFOUL, AHARON. Noted Jurist, in *Bet Deen.* died 1961 (photo).

HEDAYA, SHALOM Outstanding Rabbi and Kabbalist. (photo) Died 1942.

HEDAYA, YIS'HAQ. Noted Kabbalist. Died Jerusalem 1962. (Photog.)

HANAN, YA'ACOB. Scholarly and wealthy; died 1736.

HANONA, RAHAMEEM "ben-Dayan". Head of a *Bét Midrash.* Died 1827.

HUSEIN, SADQA Very highly regarded scholar in Aleppo. When the cholera plague devastated Baghdad and decimated the Jewish population, the rabbis wrote to Haham Laniado, circa 1750, asking him to send them "an outstanding rabbi to serve as *Haham Bashi".* Laniado recommended Husein who served in Baghdad for many years. He sent the manuscripts of several books with a caravan travelling to Aleppo, destined for *Signor — Haham* David Altarás to have Altarás arrange for publication in Venice. The caravan was attacked and the manuscripts were destroyed. Later, *Haham* Sadqa lost three sons in an ensuing cholera plague in Baghdad. (These plagues and cholera are mentioned by Dr. Alexander Russel and his brother, who wrote of "The Plagues in Aleppo" and elsewhere, which took place about 1750-1760). d. circa 1760-1780

HUSNEY, ELIAHOU Rabbi-merchant in New York. Died Circa 1948

HUSNEY, EZRA A noted Kabbalist (photo)

IBN AKNIN, YOSEF friend of Maimonides, left Cairo to live in Aleppo. wrote *Kellaléh Ha Talmud;* lived 1160-1226 C.E.

KASSAB-DWECK, MOSHE Teacher and Kabbalist scholar, in New York. died 1946. (photog).

KASSIN, DAVID. Author: *Vayahr Davíd,* died 1904

KASSIN, ELIAHOU DAVID Died in Alexandria in 1921. (photo).

KASSIN, DAVID YEHUDAH In *Be't Deen.* Died 1810.

KASSIN, ELIAHOU YEHUDAH Mentioned in Abr. Antebi's *Yoshéb Ohaleem,* Circa 1865

KASSIN, YEHUDAH Foremost member of renowned family. President of *Be't Deen,* author of *Manhanném Yehudah.* Opponent of R. Shelomo Laniado in controversy affecting The "Franj" (circa 1770) Died 1804

KHASKY, YESHA'YAH Signed patent for Sasson in 1866

KHASKY-HAMWII, YA'ACOB Buried as *"Ya'acob Hamwii",* 1858.

KHASKY, SHALOM Was important rabbi in Aintab, but returned to Aleppo. Highly revered. Buried in *Mé-arrát Ha-Sadiqqeem* 1892.

KHALOUSI See "Dweck"

KOHEN, ABRAHAM " ... from *Aram Soba,* (Aleppo) ... ben Ishaq, ben Abraham, ben David, ben Yosef *Ha-Sepharadi*

(from Spain)". Born in Aleppo, then *Haham* Abraham set out for Italy with his son, to see to the publication of his manuscripts. They were seized by pirates near Malta; were shipwrecked in a fierce storm. With his son, flung on to "a strange and savage land", with the manuscript of only one of his works. He wept at the loss of many years of study and writing. They were "threatened by wild beasts and serpents". For twenty years he wrote day and night (after being rescued, somehow). He lived to publish in Livorno, Italy *Menorát Zaháb. 'Aterret Shalóm*, Meginatt Lehb. Torát *Héssed* and *Misfar 'Halameem.* Died Livorno, 1706.

LABATON, ABRAHAM HELFON Labaton is a well-known Ladino-Spanish family.

LABATON, HELFON R. Helfon was eulogized by his father, R. Mordechai, (a *later* Mordechai) in 1924

LABATON, MORDECHAI One of Aleppo's most cherished rabbis. Wrote *Nokha'h Hashulhan* (published) and *Ben Ya-eer.* (in manuscript). died 1869.

LAH'MI, SHALOM A signer of R. Sasson's patent of 1866.

LALA, Natán See "Marcus"

LOPEZ, EZRA. (LOFEZ) A recognizeably Spanish name — Died 1904 (photog).

LOPEZ, ELIAHOU, 'Dayan" (judge) and teacher. Died Jerusalem 1936. (Photog.)

LOPEZ, NISSEEM. One of the outstanding rabbis in his generation. Eulogized by *Haham* Ya'acob Shaul Dwek, Died 1894.

LOPEZ, NISSEEM Kabbalist died in Jerusalem. Died 1950.

LOPEZ, SHELOMO ME'EIR "Able teacher of multitudes". Died 1905 (photog)

LOPEZ, YA'ACOB Kabbalist. Died in Jerusalem 1937 (photog).

LOPEZ YIS'HAQ. Author: *Cor Misráf,* died 1695 (?).

LANIADO, SHELOMO. This Haham Laniado, Chief Rabbi, was a Kabbalist and in correspondence as early as 1650 with *Shabbetai Sebi (Sevi)* a rabbi who had "advanced" ideas on the inner secrets of the Heavenly Order. Shabbetai Sebi was received enthusiastically by the rabbis and the populance when he visited Aleppo for several months in 1665. At this time Shabbetai announced himself as The Messiah *(Mashee-ah).* Sebi's 'prophet', *Haham* Natán from Gaza, a revered Kabbalist, made Aleppo his second home, thanks to the enthusiastic hospitality the movement received in

Allepo, headed by Laniado and Isaaco Silvera (Silveira). The importance of Aleppo as a great religious (and commercial) center is confirmed by the weight given in other communities, to its wide acceptance of Shabbetai. Some of Shabbetai's followers became Muslims, in the example set by Shabbetai, Orthodox Jews disclaimed the "False Messiah", *after* the initial hysteria and his apostacy.

LANIADO, SHEMUEL B. ABRAHAM Known as *"Ba'al ha-Kelleem* for his several works with "Kele or "Keli" (vessels) in title; a renowned scholar. Authored: *Keli Hemdah* (Venice, 1619) *Keli Yeqaar, Kele Paz,* and many other published and unpublished works. He was the grandson of the Shemuel Laniado who first settled in Adrianople as a refugee from Spain. Soon after, the Laniado family moved to Aleppo, with uninterrupted generations of outstanding rabbis. Circa 1560-1590 (?)

LANIADO EPHRAIM YEHUDAH "Took his great father's Seat." Author: *Dehghel Mahanneh Ephráim;* buried in The Great Synagogue, circa 1590

LANIADO, ABRAHAM, SHELOMO. father of *Ba'al Ha-Kelleem;* mentiond in his son's *Kele Paz,* circa 1550

LANIADO, ABRAHAM YIS'HAQ. (Pupil of R. Yosef Karo) wrote *Maghén Abraham* and *Nequdott Ha-Késsef,* published in Venice 1619.

LANIADO EPHRAIM YEHUDAH "Took his great father's Seat." Author: *Dehghel Mahanneh Ephráim;* buried in The Great Synagogue, circa 1590

LANIADO, SHELOMO (b. Shemuel). Haham Bashi (Chief Rabbi) in Aleppo, the opponent of R. Yehudah Kassin in the "Franj" controversy. Published: *Bet Dino Shel Shelomó* (Constantinople 1775, re-issued several times); also *Ha-Maalot L'ish'lomó,* and other responsa. Died circa 1790.

LANIADO, SHALOMO MEIR Kabbalist. Died in Jerusalem 1925 (photog.)

LANIADO SION ABRAHAM. Father of author of *Liqdesheem,* died 1948 (photog.)

LANIADO, YEHUDAH. "A great preacher" Buried in the Great Synagogue, 1902.

LANIADO, BECHOR RAFAEL. Buried in "Cave of the Just", 1864.

LANIADO, SHELOMO ELIAHOU ("Malki-Shuba" means "Return, my king", reason unknown) Died 1932 (photog)

DE LUBIN, YISRAEL YEHOSHUAH. An East European Ashkenazi (?) who settled in Aleppo; (mentioned in *Berákh Yisháq* of R. Yis'háq Berakha, 1872).

MARCUS, NATAN (Lala) "Great teacher." Died 1920.

MARCUS, SHELOMO poet and singer. Died 1905.

MASLATON, YAACOB See "Tarrab".

MA'ALLI, HAYYEEM See "Tawil".

MATALON, YEHIZKEL Member of important Ladino-Sepharadi family, and

MATALON, EZRA Two brothers, who were killed by night-marauders, in 1908.

MENAGED, SHELOMO "(from Damascus)" Noted teacher and reformer (Eulogized by *Haham Ya'cob Abadi who died 1876.).*

MENASCHEH, DAVID. A branch of the Sutton-(Sittehon)-Menascheh family, (a discussion of the family is in the body of the text). Wrote *Arukhá-U-Marpéh."* Died 1909.

MENASCHEH, YOSEF (Information about this revered prolific writer is in the body of the text.)

MISHAAN, ELIAHOU. A student of the works of Galante of Tiberies and Damascus (renowned Kabbalistic). Wrote *Sefer Emmétt,* (Jerusalem publication). Died 1902.

MISHAAN, HAYEEM SHAUL Leader of Kabbalists, died 1933.

MIZRAHI MOSHE Scholar, in *Bet Deen.* Died in Aleppo circa 1940 (photog).

MIZRAHI, OBADIA Mentioned in *Mahanném Yehudá* (1775). Wrote *Hazzón Obadiáh,* (published in Livorno). Eulogized by "Bigdeh Yeshah" Attíeh.

MIZRAHI, YIS'HAQ BECHOR. Head of *Bet Deen* Court, died 1905.

MIZRAHI, MOSHE Member of *Bet Deen,* died 1955 (photo).

MURCIA, SHEMUEL (Murcia is the name of a city in Spain.) An advanced Aleppo Kabbalist. Wrote introduction to Zikhron Tohb. Family is currently unknown under this name in Aleppo circles.

NAWII, YOSEF ELISHA Recorded as "an Aleppoan Rabbi" in a letter of R. Yosef Irgaz to his brother-in-law, *"Reyah Ha-Sedeh"* (Name suggests an Iraqi or Persian origin.)

NEHMAD, HAYEEM SHALOM. "For forty years a teacher in the Jewish quarter" died 1916 (photo)

NEHMAD, MEIR. Pres. Ben Zvi of Israel wrote of him, "A scholar of vast knowledge and scientific exactness" Wrote on the

Aleppo Codex ("Keter"), before parts of the Codex were burned. (published 32 p. pamphlet on the "Keter".)

NEHMAD, SHELOMO Talmudic scholar, died 1869.

NEHMAD, YEHUDA "Seven rabbis of Tiberias pleaded with R. Yosef Sasson [died 1932] to have R. Yehuda sent to them."

PELAGGI, YA'ACOB "Lived later years in *Halab.*" Delivered eulogy of *Haham* Abraham Antébi (who died in 1858).

PICCIOTTO, HILLEL ("Signor-Haham") member of leading "Franj" family. Buried in "Caves of the Just", 1884.

PICCIOTTO, HILLEL HAYEEM "Public Benefactor", died 1773.

PICCIOTTO, SHEMUEL DANIEL "Endorsed" with Algaz; wrote *Dibréh Yosef.* Died 1810.

PINHEIRO (PINERO), ABRAHAM The name is of Portugese origin. (Is Arthur Pinēro, the English dramatist, a member of this family?) Died 1766.

PINTO, DANIEL. After death of his father (known as HAREEF) came to live in Aleppo. Author: *Lehem Hamudot,* active supporter of Shabbetai Sebi. (circa 1660-1680.)

PINTO, SHEMUEL "ben *Harab Daniel*" leading rabbi, circa 1690-1695.

ROSA, HAYEEM A Spanish-Ladino (?) (discussed in body of the text) died 1772.

SAKKA, ABRAHAM Scholar, zealous in working for the poor; died in Jerusalem 1957 (?) (Photo).

SAFDIEH ("SAFSIYEH") Shelomo (Safdeye) *Haham Bashi* and *Ab Bet Deen,* a double role enjoyed only by the most scholarly and revered. A member of a select board of 26 rabbis who agreed to consult weekly on difficult issues. Died 1904.

SALEM, ABRAHAM Outstanding preacher. Died in Jerusalem, 1938. (see also (photo)

SASSON, ABRAHAM Yehoshuah The Sasson family came from Persia or Baghdad upon invitation for a member to be *Haham Bashi* of Aleppo. Generations later, Abraham Yehoshu'ah established a print shop in 1866. Died 1870.

SASSON, MEIR "Adjmi, from Persia." Translated into Arabic the *Azharot,* Psalms, *Ekha* (Lamentations), *Iyób* (Job), *Mikamo'kha,* and The Ten Commandments. Latter two translations included in *Liqdosheem).* Died 1912.

SASSON, YEHOSHU'AH YISRAEL Wrote *Yeshu'at Yisraél.* Died 1775.

SASSON, YISRAEL. Wrote *Kennesset Yisraél.* Died 1921.

BAR YAAFET, SET. (Set Bar Yaafet) author: *Hemdat Hateudá Lebet Yisraél.* Died 1237 C.E.

SHAMAH, ELIAHOU YOSEF. Author *Makhshereh Millah* publ. in Livorno posthumously; also *Qirban Aesh.* Buried in "Caves of Just" 1793.

SHAMAH, ELIAHOU YOSE'F Merchant and scholar, a leading figure in Jerusalem life. Secretly negotiated with Emir Abdullah of Trans-Jordania for the Jewish Agency. Died 1934.

SH'AYO, EZRA ABADI "Teacher of rabbis" and in *Bet Deen* — Circa 1900.

SH'HEBAAR, YISHAQ Scholar, expert on The Aleppo Codex Died in Buenos Aires, circa 1965

SHREM 'MENAHEM, Outstanding scholar, Kabbaist. (photo) Died in Jerusalem 1949.

SHREM, YOSEF Leading seminary Teacher (photo)

SHREM, YISHAQ Very rich. Left all his wealth to charity. Died 1873.

SHWEKEH, MENAHEM Kabbalist and great preacher. Died in Egypt, 1904

SHWEKEH, ABRAHAM Scholar and wealthy merchant. Had a great following of students.

SILVERA, ELIAHOU ("Signor-Haham" — "Milord-Rabbi"). Founder of Silvera family in Aleppo (?) came from Livorno, Italy; one of the "Franj" families, who formed the aristocracy of Aleppo's Jewish life.

SILVERA, ISAACO A 17th century Italian from Livorno, perhaps the earliest "Franji" to settle in Aleppo (?) Became an early and enthusiastic supporter of Shabbetai Sebi around 1665, along with a Laniado — *Haham* Shelomo. *Signor-Haham* Isaaco's epitath described him as "pious and humble", terminology reserved for the *most revered.* Died 1681.

SILVERA, ISAACO SOLOMON Lay-Scholar. Lived in Egypt, fought to have Cairo's Jewish Community retain the precious *Geniza* Fragments. In New York founded — Near East Relief Society. Died in New York in 1952.

SILVERA, ELIAHOU In 18th Century dispute with *Haham Shelomó Laniado,* circa 1765-1770; Haham Silvera with other "Franj" then founded *Kupat Holeem,* establishing a continuing fund to care for the sick. The noted R. Ishaq Berakhá praised Silvera highly in *Berakh Yis'háq.* R. Hai-Rekki dedicated books to him and to his spouse. Established an important **Bet Midrash** and named *Haham* 'sha'ia Dabbah as its head.

(Mistakenly, it was sometimes referred to as *"Midrash Dabbah."*) Rabbis attending him at home "saw a great light, one evening, in the study where Silvera was in privacy. They attributed the great light to a visitation by *Eliahou-Ha-Nabí* to another Eliahou — Eliahou Silvera"; d. circa 1780.

SILVERA, RAPHAEL A pious and scholarly "Franji", overseer over the Orphans' *Kittab* (school) and other communal organizations. Died childless in 1938.

SILVERA, SOLOMON. RAPHAEL. Leader among Aleppo's Jews, and outstanding rabbinical lay-scholar. died circa 1895.

SUTTON, ABRAHAM DAVID Lay-scholar, community leader and merchant in New York. Founded *"Midrash bét Sutton"*, with an important library; parts of which are now on loan to the Shá'aré Zión Congregation's Library; (the author's father); died 1938.

SUTTON, ABRAHAM SHELOMO Saintly writer, singer, poet. Early vowed to devote six days to Torah, one day only to gain sustenance. Later, wealth replaced poverty. A favorite pupil of *Haham* Yis'háq Beracha; his Responsa appear in his master's *Qorban Ishái. Haham Abraham* himself authored *Dalleh-Beh-Pisqayah, Millel Lé Abraham,* and other works which are lost. Greatly revered. Died circa 1815.

SUTTON, DAVID (Sittehon-Dabbah). In *Bet Deen;* two books, published. Died, Buenos Aires, 1940. (photog)

SUTTON, MATTOUB (Menasché-Sutt*h*on). Died 1885

SUTTON, MATLOUB (Menasché-Sutte'hon). Died 1934.

SUTTON, MENASCHE. Author: *Kennesiyah Le'Shém Shammayeem, Parhéh Shosheneem.* Died Alexandria, 1936.

SUTTON, MOSHE Wrote: *Kehillat Moshé, Dibreh Moshé,* both published. Also, in manuscript, *Zikhronot* (Chronicles)

SWED, EZRA ("Swed" Means "Swedish", possibly a family that held the consul-ship for Sweden.) Haham Ezra was highly revered for his sanctity. Was son-in-law of the great Haham Mordechai Labaton. Died 1884.

SWED, MOSHE His scholarship was greatly respected. Was *Ab Bét Deen.* (Head of religious Court.) Wrote *Emmett-u-mishpaat, shalom ve' emmunah,* both "Approved" by R. Shelomo Khasky and R. Shemuél Vasan. (The latter's name does not appear in Laniado's *Liqdosheem)* Swéd died in 1889.

TABBOUSH, RAFAEL "Antebi- (From Aintab) — Tabboush" Kabbalist and *pizmoneem* poet; the most renowned in Aleppoan tradition. (photog.)

TAH'HAN ABRAHAM A trustee of the foundation of Aleppo that provided stipends to poor *hahameem;* 41 rabbis are listed, who received from 4½ to 10 piastres weekly for support, a pittance.

TARRAB YA'ACOB Maslatons, outstanding rabbinicals in Damascus and New York. Wrote *Dabb ar Tob* and *She'ereet Ya'acob.* Died in Beirut, 1923.

TAWIL, AHARON MA'ALLI Kabbalist. Died in Jerusalem 1916.

TAWIL, EZRA-ELLI-HA-KOHEN A noted teacher; in *Bet Deen.* Died 1930 (photog)

TAWIL, HAYEEM "MA'ALLI - In *Bet Deen,* in Jerusalem. Died 1842 (photog.)

TAWIL, HAYEEM YIS'HAQ Leading Talmudist in Aleppo and New York; Died Jerusalem, 1941

YEDID, AHARON HA-LEVI Yedíd Family forms a continuing line of Kabbalists. Wrote commentary, most of it is yet unpublished. Died in Jerusalem 1912.

YEDID, YOMTOB Left Aleppo to live in Jerusalem; misery there during World War I tempted him to return to Aleppo. He yielded to rabbis of the city to remain in the Holy Land; later, returned to Aleppo. Buried in the Great Synagogue 1923.

YEDID, YOMTOB. (Father of R. Shelomó Yedid now living in New York.) Wrote extensively and published *Torát Hahakham. Yehméh Yoséf,* Vol. I published in Jerusalem; Vol. II recently publ. by his son, as well as Volume III called *Yehméh Yoséf Batra; She-ehreet Yosef,* Vol. I, II, III already published, Vol. IV in preparation as well as *Vayhee Yoséf.* Lived last years in Jerusalem. Died 1930.

ZA'FRANI, SHALOM. Lived in time of R. Moshé Swed, circa 1880.

ZONANA, ELIAHOU A leading Talmudist. Died 1914.

Appendix VII

Community Organizations

Congregation Sha'aré Zión

2030 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11223

Chief Rabbi: Jacob S. Kassin
Rabbi: Abraham B. Hecht
President: Abe M. Cohen
Cantor: Rev. Raphael Elnadav

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Ronnie Tawil
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2030 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230

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Carol Tawil
Esther Tawil
Ezra Tawil
Bobby Tawil
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Victoria Doueck
Mikey Tawil

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Suzan Cohen
Hymie Azari

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1885 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223

Rabbi: Sion Maslaton
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Cantor: Meyer Levy

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Basil Cohen
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Sam T. Cohen
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Isaac Escava
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Abe Mann
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Ahi Ezer Congregation

At 2433 Ocean Parkway

Rabbi: Hanania Elbaz
Officers: Eric Rofe, Ezra Azizo, Isaac Esses

Congregation B'nai Yosef

1616 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223

Rabbi: Chaim Benoliel
President: Ezra ("Eddie") J. Sitt
Cantor: Gabriel A. Shrem

Ahaba-ve-ahva Congregation

1801 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223

Rabbi: Jacob Israel
President: Joseph H. Barnathan

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Eli Esses	Solomon Harari	Gabriel Shehebar
Albert Gammal	Marco Levy	Joseph Setton

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President: Jack E. Cattan
Cantor: Isaac Cabasso
Executive Director: Abraham L. Grusegott

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Irving A. Esses	Dr. Robert Matalon	Isaac M. Sutton

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3211 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y.

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Cantor: Joseph Benhaim
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Cantor: Meyer (Mickey) Kairey

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128 Norwood Ave., Deal, N.J. 07723

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President: Charles S. Haddad
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Deal Rd., W. Deal, N.J. 07723

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Abe Kohen, Sec'y
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(The congregation houses a *KOLLEL*, a Bet Midrash-seminary for rabbinate-candidates).

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50 Avenue P, Brooklyn N.Y.

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2433 Ocean Parkway, and 293 Neptune Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11235

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2030 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230

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530 Avenue R, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230

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Congregation Rodfe Zedek

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2027—67th St., Brooklyn, N.Y.
Chief Administrator: Jacob (Jack) Arama

TRUSTEES

Eli A. Hedaya	Moses Hidary	Jos. Judah Sultan

Glossary

aliyáh — (Heb. — "ascent", "going up") — The privilege of being "called up" to the Reading of the Torah at public readings in a synagogue, Saturdays and holidays as well as on Mondays and Thursdays. (Also *'ascent,'* settling in Israel)

ádami — (Arab.) Gentle, of good breeding (as was Father "Adam"). (pl. Awahdem)

adamíyeh — (Arab.) Good breeding; a background of such good breeding.

'ajay — ban Ghar-ayban — Picture-box on wheels showing "wondrous" views.

Alliance — Alliance Israélite Universelle, schools established by French Jews to introduce Western education to Jews in Oriental countries.

"anni-ya-immo" (Heb./Arabic combination) "A beggar, oh, mother," (seeking food).

Aram Soba — Soba; Ancient and Biblical name for Aleppo.

Aram Damesek — Damesek; Ancient and Biblical name for Damascus.

argeeleh — (Arab.) also *Nargeeleh,* Water pipe, ("hookah") used for smoking tobacco.

Ashkenazeem — (Authentic Sepharadic pronunciation of "Ashkenazim"), Jews of German and Eastern European origin.

Bar Mizvá (Bar Mitzva) — (Heb.) The ceremony in which a male is inducted, at age thirteen, into the responsibilities of Jewish manhood.

bázraah — (Arab.) A negotiation.

bazaar — Where negotiations take place; "a deal!"

Bereet Meeláh ("Briss") — (Heb.) Covenant of circumcision.

bét midrásh — (Heb.) "House of Study," usually of advanced religious texts. Prayer services are held there as well.

beyloun-b-waŕd — (Arab.) a special form of "clay with rosewater," used cosmetically.

bimáh — (Heb.) Raised platform toward the center of the synagogue where the cantor functions and where the Toráh is read.

bistán — (Arab.) Garden or orchard. (pl. *b'sehteen).*

Citadel — (Fr., fortress) The European term for the *Qal'ah,* the almost pre-historic fortress, which continues to dominate the skyline of Aleppo.

chánta — (Arab.) Satchel, large valise. (*chanta'yeh* is diminutive).

dallál — Broker; literally "one who leads" (to the desired object to be acquired).

dáqqa — A 'pounding,' refers to a serving of light food and drink at a café; also a "touch."

Franj — Foreigners, Europeans, derived from "Franks, Francos."

gaón — (Heb. - pl. gaoneem) Title given to Chiefs of Academies of Babylon (Baghdad); literally, "excellency" or "pride"; a rabbi with extraordinary standing for his knowledge.

genizá — (Heb.) Hiding Place. A storage place for Hebrew texts or documents written in the sacred Hebrew script, which therefore may not be destroyed or desecrated. The Cairo Geniza yielded precious pieces of history of the 9th to 13th century, C.E.

glatt — (Yiddish) "glott kosher" is most scrupulously kosher meat; a requirement of some rabbinic authorities.

hegira (Arab.) Commonly used to indicate wandering; more specifically the wandering of "the Prophet Muhammad" in the 7th cent. C.E.

Hias — Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, a U.S. society founded in 1909, (a merger of the Hebrew Sheltering Aid Society [1884] and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society [1902]. With branches and representatives everywhere, it was *invaluable* in its aid and guidance to Jewish migrants. It is known to early Syrian immigrants as *Hakhnasaat Or'heem,* (or "travellers shelter").

hohsh — (Arab.) Inner courtyard of a residence; a residence with such a courtyard.

habt il sanneh — Bouton d'Alep (Fr.) A scar, left on or around the face, resulting from an infection which caused "a scab of a year's duration."

hadj — (Arab.) The pilgrimage to Mecca

hadji — A life-time title of honor given to such a returned pilgrim, (male).

hahám báshi — Chief Rabbi ("Bashi" is Turkish for "Chief")

hahám — A learned man, a rabbi; term also used for a Hebrew-school teacher.

hammám — Bath; also refers to public baths.

hammám-il-aroos — A bath-house party for the bride-to-be.

hazzák u barúkh — (Heb.) "Strength and blessings (on you);" (equivalent to Ashkenazic *Yishshar Ko-ah).*

hazzán — (Heb.) Cantor, one who leads public prayers.

"iddish" — (y)iddish, *Yiddish*-speaking Jews — Ashkenazeem;

"iddshy" — male Ashkenazi; "iddshiyeh" — female.

imbaazz — Ankle-length 'gown' worn by 'native' men; it is similar to a *yállak,*

Jay-Dub — J — W, a J (-E-) W. An American-Syrian-Jewish term for Ashkenazeem; "Jewish," (Yiddish) speaking.

jíbbeh — A cloak worn by men over a "yallak" — a gown.

kamooniyeh — (pl. "kamooni-at") Arabic-English for a kimona, the loose robe of Japanese origin.

Karagóz-u-Aiywaaz — Two characters, principals in shadow-screen entertainment.

khan — (Turkish or Persian) Large enclosed courtyard where caravans were accommodated and goods warehoused.

kees il tafreek — (Arab.) 'Friction-bag'; a mitten-like bag of very fine mohair used to rub off dead skin in the weekly bath.

Keter — (Heb.) Crown. Also "Keter Torah", "Crown of the Torah"; a codex; pages of the Bible text on parchment kept in book-form, with vowelling and cantillation indications.

kittáb — (Arab.) School, elementary level.

Kashér (kosher) — (Heb.) Objects or food-stuff meeting with religious requirements as to purity, ritual-acceptance.

Ladino (1) The 15th Century Castilian-Spanish spoken by Turkish-Greek Jews originally from Spain-Portugal. It contains many Hebrew expressions. (2) An individual speaking this language or dialect.

Mamluk — Corps of Turkish (formerly Christian) soldiers-slaves of the Sultan. Sometimes they were so powerful as to seize the 'throne' in colonies, such as Egypt, etc.

Maqqam (pl. *maqqamat)* Near and Middle Eastern musical "modes" — somewhat like moods. Songs and, *Pizmoneem* are set to such 'scales.'

mazzón — (Heb.) Food, or sustenance.

mílleh — (Arab.) Term for "protected" (special tax-paying) minority (non-Muslim). Commonly used now for "religion" or religious (non-Muslim) sect.

minyán — (Heb.) A "count", of ten males; the minimum number of congregants for a prayer service.

must'arab'een — (Arab.) "Arab-ized," people who adopted Arab culture and customs; but not necessarily the Muslim religion.

náhawii — Classical Arabic, used in almost all publications. Differs considerably from the vernacular Arabic.

nargeeleh — Same as argeeleh — water-pipe for smoking tobacco.

Nifs-Firmanli — (Turk./Arab.) "Nifs" is person, "Firman" is order issued by the Sultan's command; thus, "a person falling under Royal decree or protection".

nóbeh — (Arab.) A concert; a group of musicians; also a festive party which includes a concert.

pasha — Turkish dignitary, equivalent to baron or count; may refer also to "governor" of a province, etc.

phylacteries — (Heb.) Prayer-ritual leather straps attached to the left forearm and head with a small box attached to each, containing hand-written quotations from *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*. Worn during morning prayers, except on Sabbaths and holidays.

pizmoneem — Characteristically Middle-East religious poems *(not* part of the official litugy) sung to the melodies of popular Arabic songs; similar to *piyuteem*, religious poems which usually are *not* sung. *Pizmoneem* are introduced in the prayer services on some Sabbaths and holidays, and at "Sabt" parties.

Rashi-script — Semi-cursive Hebrew script, familiar through its use in Rashi's Commentary, which accompanies the texts in bold-face type. Rashi-like script was in use centuries before Rashi's time. Early Cairo Geniza fragments (beginning 800 C.E.) are in *Rashi-like* script. Called *Nus (q)alam*, "half-a-pen," in the Middle East.

Resh-Galutá (Aram.) "Chief in the Diaspora" (or Dispersion). The governor of a Jewish community in the medieval Near-East. (usually refers to Babylon — Baghdad.)

rites de passage — (Fr.) Rites commemorating the passage of an individual to a changed social status (Bar Mizva, marriage, etc.).

sahlab — (Arab.) A hot starch custard drink; a flavor (characteristic of such a drink).

sáhra — (Arab.) An evening party.

saraaf — (Arab. pl. *sirehfeen)* Money changer (dealer in species;) private "banker."

sawáss — Dispenser of the (licorice) *soos* beverage.

See-beej — ("Sea-Beach"), a subway line serving Bensonhurst in Brooklyn.

Sepharadeem — (Heb.) Authentic Sepharadic for "Sephardim" or even 'Sfardim", Jews originally from Mediterranean/Middle-Eastern countries.

Sepharad — (Heb.) Spain now; in Genesis located near Armenia.

Shalóm Aleichém — (Heb.) "Peace be upon you." In the Middle East the courteous response was *"Aleichem berachá tobá"* ("on you, a goodly blessing"); flippantly the response was *"Aleichém, BT"* the initials of *Berachá Tobá.*

Sham — Damascus.

Shámi — A (m.) resident of Damascus. (f). — Shammíyeh)

shawaam — Damascenes.

shammósh — (Heb. "servant") Also "shammash;" sexton, beadle or sacristan.

sheluheem — (Heb.) *(Shaliyah,* sing.) "Sent" individual(s). (Sent by a distant city's religious organization to solicit money for it.)

shirwéhl — A form of full bloomers worn by workmen and others of low income.

shohateem — (Heb. *shohét,* sing.) Ritual slaughterer of animals.

shraahb, or *sharabat,* pl. hence "sherbet"). A beverage or syrup. Usually of lemon, orange or almond puree.

signoreem — (Ital./Heb. *signor,* sing.) "European" Jews. Originally, most of them, from Italy.

soos — (Arab.) A popular street beverage made from licorice wood. In *Halab* it was carried in a goat-skin on the dispenser's back.

Sobá — (Aram Sobá) Talmudic and Biblical name for Aleppo.

souk — (Arab.) Market place (also "suk"). (Hebrew and Aramaic is "shouk".)

'Spaniol, 'Spanioli' — (Español, "Spanish") a Ladino-Spanish speaking Jew, originating in the Greek-Turkish provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

S-Y — American Jewish-Syrian in-group term for S-y(r-i-a-n.).

tádjer — (pl. *tidjaar*) Merchant.

tah-bah-iyeh — (Arab.) A series of metal pots fitted one over an-

other for convenience in carrying a variety of cooked dishes.

takhbeer — (Arab.) Informing; a method of trade in which the seller "informs" *(bi-khábbehr)* his cost to the buyer and exacts a fixed rate of profit. ("Just price.")

tarbohsh — (Turk.?) "Fez"; a cylindrical brimless hat, almost always red, sometimes black.

Talmúd Toráh — (Heb.) A school for elementary Hebrew learning.

Toráh — (Heb.) The Bible; also used to include *all* Rabbinic texts.

wakeel-il-kharjj — (Arab.) "Agent-for-expenditure," an agent employed part-time, to make purchases for household needs.

wáli — Governor of a province or *walá-yeh.*

wan-náseh — Small dish of oil in which lighted wicks are floated to provide (feeble) illumination.

yallak — (Turk.?) Long robe worn by men, formerly customary apparel in Middle-East, secured by a sash around the waist.

Yid — East European term for Jew (contraction of *"Yehudi"* Heb. — Jew), thus: *"Yehud," "Yud," "Yid".*

zaghlouta (zaghrouta) — A trilling cry, sounded by women on joyous occasions.

záa'tar — Dried herbs in which thyme predominates; tangy, somewhat acid. A popular food among the poor; bread is first dipped into oil, then into the *záa'tar.*

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