

NOTES FROM THE FIELD
TEHRAN'S UNMINED ARCHIVE OF KURDISH JEWRY:
A FIELD REPORT

by

Mustafa Dehqan

This brief article offers an overview of the various Kurdo-Jewish records preserved in Tehran in the Iranian Parliament Records archives. The documents reflect the perspectives of Jews and non-Jews alike and were originally reported by Kurdish officials of the Jewish colonies in Iranian Kurdistan,¹ by Jewish senators of the National Parliament of Iran, as well as by Kurdish peasants of Kurdistan. Most of the documents are in Persian, with the exception of perhaps nine in French stemming from Westernized Jewish circles.²

The purpose of the present contribution is not to offer a review of previous scholarship on Kurdish Jews. For this the reader may consult a number of recent valuable contributions.³ Rather, the aim here is simply to describe the outlines of a

1. Most of the Jews in Iranian Kurdistan lived in isolated towns, such as Qesr, Bicar of Gerus, Sine, Kirmaşan, Seqiz, and tiny groups of Mukri Kurdistan. The fundamental work on the history of all Iranian Jews, including the Kurds, is still the three-volume Persian work by Ḥabīb Levy, *Tārīkh-i Yahūd-i Īrān* (Tehran: Librairie Y. Beroukhim et fils, 1955–60; repr., Beverly Hills: Iranian Jewish Cultural Organization of California, 1984). Though indispensable, it is in need of much revision.

2. Despite the prominence of Persian in the archives, the Jews of Kurdistan spoke a distinctive dialect of neo-Aramaic very similar to that of the surrounding Kurdish community. See Haideh Sahim, "Languages and Dialects of the Jews of Iran and Afghanistan," in *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, ed. Houman Sarshar (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 287.

3. First of all, see P. J. Magnarella, "Jewish Kurds of Iran," *Jewish Digest* 15 (1970): 17–20. Other helpful works, mostly concerned with folkloristic or ethnographic themes, include Yona Sabar, trans. and ed., *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); idem, "Nursery Rhymes and Baby Words in the Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Zacho (Iraq)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94 (1974): 329–36; idem, "The Arabic Elements in the Neo-Aramaic Texts of Nerwa and Amadiya, Iraqi Kurdistan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984): 201–11; D. Shai, "Changes in the Oral Tradition Among the Jews of Kurdistan," *Contemporary Jewry* 5 (1980): 2–10; S. Epstein, "Die Juden von Kurdistan," *Ariel* 51 (1982): 66–79; B. Ammann, "Kurdische Juden in Israel," in *Jahrbuch für vergleichende Sozialforschung, 1987–88* (Berlin: Berliner Institut für vergleichende Sozialforschung, 1990), 241–58; O. Schwartz-Be'eri, "Clothing of the Kurdish Jews," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1992), 5:825–26; idem, "Kurdish Jewish Silversmiths and their Craft," *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 6 (1993): 12–24; and Erich Brauer, *The Jews of Kurdistan*, comp. and ed. Raphael Patai (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

recently discovered collection of Persian records related to modern Kurdo-Jewish history that have not yet been consulted by earlier researchers.⁴

Included in this archive are hundreds of records that differ dramatically from or richly augment previously published material. Each document has its own personality and its own individual character, colored by the particular perspective of the individual who produced the record in a particular time and place. We learn, among other things, about the extent of bribery, extortion by government officials, and insecurity along the roads, all of which threatened the activities of Jewish merchants, as well as the journeys of pilgrims. Other sources, not always stemming from Jewish circles, allude to the tendency of some mercantile Jewish families to make marriage liaisons with Muslims of comparable social class. This provides fascinating and important insights into the existence and operation of family networks within and across the Muslim and Jewish communities. Numerous allusions suggest that the members of prominent families experienced varying degrees of persecution and oppression at the hands of Sunni Kurds. Other documents, on the strength of incidental references, suggest the variety of Jewish connections to the power structure in Tehran. Furthermore, we may notice many details concerning the character and disposition of the various Muslim Kurdish officials with whom Jews interacted. Finally, despite a nearly complete lack of explicit reference to the political frontiers of Iran, the collection's materials concerning the geographic distribution of Jews, especially their dispersion into neighboring states, affords a better understanding of the Kurdish-speaking communities and the Jews in Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan.

THE LIST OF RECORDS

The list of documents indicates the kinds of sources that are preserved in the collection. I present them with brief descriptions and notes. The collection contains approximately 400 pages, measures 21×14 inches (29×21 centimeters). Sometimes the records can be found in more than one file and in more than one format (manuscript, type, or print). The appendix offers photographic reproductions of some of the materials.⁵ Herewith is the list:

1. April 1911, Doc. 17/14/131. Letter from a Jewish woman who converted to Islam, married a Muslim in 1905, and sought to inherit the properties of her paternal Jewish uncle.

4. A Persian librarian mentioned to me the existence of a "very few French documents" that relate to the more Westernized Jewish Kurds, but I have not had the opportunity to look at them or to record their titles.

5. No part of this collection is reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, photocopying or recording, including any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Iranian Parliament Records. I have attempted to include some documents of the Jewish Kurds that have not been treated by earlier scholars, and I have incorporated some basic bibliographical notes. However, because of the sensitivity of the Kurdish-Jewish theme in Iran, I can claim neither completeness nor consistency in these matters.

2. July 1911, Doc. 17/15/42. Reply of the Persian government, with various brief notes.
3. September 1924, Doc. 114/17/5. Telegram from Mr. Şālîḫ to the Persian Parliament regarding his situation in Kurdistan.
4. January 1927, Doc. 74/6/39. Letter from Jewish Kurds of Kurdistan (Seqiz) on the anti-Jewish attitude of Sunni Kurds.
5. February 1927, Doc. 74/6/40. Letter from the Jewish Association of Seqiz to the Iranian Parliament regarding fire damage.
6. August 1927, Doc. 13169/29. Letter from Jewish Association of Bicar regarding its situation in Kurdistan.
7. August 1927, Doc. 29/17/131/69. Letter from the Jewish Association of Gerus to the Iranian Parliament regarding its situation in Kurdistan.
8. December 1927, Doc. 13169/55. Notes from the Iranian government regarding legal inheritance issues affecting Jews.
9. December 1927, Doc. 29/17/1411. Reply of the Iranian government regarding Jewish inheritance issues.
10. November 1928, Doc. 130/72. Telegram from the Jewish Association of Kirmaşan to the Iranian Parliament.
11. December 1928, Doc. 74/6/52. Reply of the Iranian government, with an annex containing observations and comments on the Jewish Association of Kirmaşan.
12. February 1930, Doc. 13/131/9765. Telegram from Mr. Ya'qūb Ibrāhīm of Qesar to the Iranian Parliament regarding his complaint against Muslim Kurds.⁶
13. September 1930, Doc. 13/131/9757. Telegram from Mr. Ya'qūb Ibrāhīm of Qesar to the Iranian Parliament regarding his complaint against Muslim Kurds.
14. November 1930, Doc. 149/70/2. Memorandum by the secretary of state for the Jewish colonies in Kurdistan.
15. April 1931, Doc. 12/31/1434. Telegram from the Jewish Association of Kirmaşan to the Iranian Parliament regarding some complaints about the situation of the Jews.
16. May 1931, Doc. 12/31/1587. Telegram from the Jewish Association of Kirmaşan to the Iranian Parliament reiterating complaints about the Jewish situation.
17. May 1934, Doc. 149/53. Memorandum by the secretary of state for the Jewish Kurds.
18. March 1935, Doc. 10/150/8. Letter from Mr. Moşî Şālîḫānî and Ibrāhīm 'Udhrā to the Iranian Parliament complaining about their banishment from Qesr to Kirmān.⁷

6. Note that Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, etc., are sometimes referred to by their Jewish equivalents, Afrāyim/Abrohom, Moşî, etc.

7. Kirmān is situated in southern Iran.

19. August 1935, Doc. 10/150/18. Some notes from the Iranian government regarding Jewish Kurds.
20. October 1935, Doc. 14/8/33. Telegram from Mr. ‘Alī Kūrdī Ibrāhīm Mišrī to the Iranian Parliament regarding his banishment and the helplessness of his family.
21. November 1935, Doc. 14/8/46. Letter from Mr. Ishāq Zargarān to the Iranian Parliament complaining of banishment from Qesr to Kāšān.⁸
22. January 1936, Doc. 33/114. Letter from Mr. Ishāq Kan‘ānī to the Iranian Parliament regarding conflict between Jews and Muslim Kurds.
23. October 1938, Doc. 98/61. Memorandum by the secretary of state for the Jewish groups in Kurdistan.
24. June 1940, Doc. 98/82. Memorandum by the secretary of state for the Jewish merchants of Seqiz.
25. February 1941, Doc. 150/10/18. Some telegrams from the Jewish Kurds of Seqiz to the Iranian Parliament regarding conflicts with Sunni Kurds.
26. August 1941, Doc. 17/14/2. Letter from the Jewish School of Ilyās (Kurdistan) to the Iranian Parliament.⁹
27. December 1941, Doc. 17/14/1. Letter from Dr. Luqmān, representative of the Jews, to the Iranian Parliament regarding the situation of the Jews in Kurdistan.¹⁰
28. December 1941, Doc. 17/14/6. Letter from Dr. Luqmān to the Iranian Parliament.
29. October 1942, Doc. 137/9/2. Record of Parliament discussion on Jewish Kurds.
30. November 1943, Doc. 150/10/6. Record of Parliament conclusions regarding Jewish Kurds.
31. June 1950, Doc. 74/6/37. Letter from the Association of Kirmaşan Province to the Iranian Parliament.
32. July 1950, Doc. 74/11/5. Note from the Iranian government.

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Karadj, Iran

8. Kāšān is a central city of Iran.

9. This Persian record has not been available to me. Moreover, there is, to my knowledge, no “Ilyās” school in Kurdistan. The reference is probably to the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in Kurdistan. On the establishment of the Alliance schools in Kurdistan and Persia, see especially the material in Faryar Nikbakht, “As with Moses in Egypt: Alliance Israélite Universelle Schools in Iran,” in Sarshar, *Esther’s Children*, 199–212.

10. The reference is to Ayūb Luqmān Nehūrāy, the active representative of the Jews in the Iranian Parliament or *Majlis* (1909–43) and one of the founders of Zionism in Iran. Cf. Shirin D. Daghighian, “Political Life: Jewish Iranian Intellectuals in Twentieth Century Iran,” in Sarshar, *Esther’s Children*, 261–73.

APPENDIX

No. 74/6/52, page 1

مورخه: | ماه: | سال: ۱۳۰۶
 ضمیمه:

کسره محمد رضا
 ریاست وزراء ۲/۳/۲
 ۱۹۲۷



ریاست محترم مجلس شورای ملی

جواب سرودنزه شمسه حاج بیگم جین زوگان مستقر خت اول
 که بگوت کردن دستور داده شبات میزان داقی خت اوله کسره
 تحقیق صورت به اند تقیمی که مستقر خت در امانت بگوت زوگان
 رده منستقر اول صورت بزود اتمت



سرادک میرزا محمد علی

۷/۳/۱۳۰۶

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انجمن ولاء کرمانشاهان

بتاریخ ۱۸ ۱۲ ۱۳۲۹

شماره ۳۴۱



مقام معزز سردار حاج آقا سید ابوالحسن

در این احوالات کس لایحه سرریا به حیب فوت شده ضعیف
 جدیداً عدم برادر زلفه متره مرادف قانون مذکور ادعا نموده
 عم خود را دارد و سایر وراثت اکتفا و کسب حضرت آقا
 در سید در اعظم سداف لفظ نموده و در ظرف حضرت آقا
 سداف ترقیف اموال ظاهر گردیده است خاطر آنکه در محترم
 متذکر امید است که در حکم عم و در وجه نایب و قانون همبر
 متروک است متره ضعیف سده با بر برسد چون آنچه در محترم
 قانون محکمتر نسخ قانون آتیه را در بنیاد و در ظرف دیگر
 در ماده بجز آنکه در سده و آنچه نیز در تصدیق لغات
 خود تکرار از زمانیکه محترم استیضاح و کسب لایحه
 مرادف قانون مذکور با بر رفت و کسب لایحه در
 مرقوم محترمه ذکر را در قریب استثنای فرمائید



کسب عرض
 ۲۹ مهر ۱۳۲۹



Coque

Le 10 avril 1911



Telegramme

N° 48

Barraque Alliance Bébar.

Demoiselle juive convertie Islamisme
 six ans auparavant mariée musulman
 réclame héritage oncle juif ayant héritiers
 réclamation soutenue p. l'Etat de la r.
 Trois joursrière faire démarches nécessaires
 même recevoir ministre France
 obtenu par tous moyens ordre officiel
 immédiat perfol autorité Reims
 chah par notre intermédiaire empêché
 injustice pareille et renouvellement
 réclamation. Ce genre situation men-
 çante juifs ayant parents convertis
 Signé France.



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 دفتر ترجمان
 ادوات نامه
 بهت گزیده
 فرانسه
 ۱۳۱۰

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 ۱۳۰۸
 مجلس شورای ملی

جان مبارک و له الحقی زرگران (بطوریکه گراما بعض مبارک رسانیده
 و تمنای عاجزانه نموده و بند بجانم هنوز موفق بجواب نشده ام)
 شخصی ششم ثلث ساله دارای یازده نفر عاقله و مدت در سال است
 که چشم اب آورده و خانه نین ششم نمیدانم بچه علت و سببی و بار کتاب
 هم بزم و جایای تا اینبات قصر شیرین بدون هیچگونه رسیدگی و تحقیق و تعیین
 تقصیر تبعید بکاشانم نمود در صورتیکه تاکنون ابداً خطا و خلاف از جان مبارک
 بطور نرسیده و هیچ نحو سابقه سوءه در هیچیک از ادارات و دوائر دولتی
 ندانسته و ندارم که مستوجب هیچ گونه مجازاتی باشم لهذا وجدانا و استرحانا
 تمنا دارم امر مبارک صادر گردد تحقیق و رسیدگی بعمل آید در صورت
 ثبوت مجرمیت اعلام نمایند و در وضوح به تقصیری اراد شوم تا بوطن
 خود مراجعت نموده با یازده نفر عاقله داعی وجود مقدر اولیا امور باشم

مسئول

۱۳۰۸/۸/۲۳

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کتابخانه
۱۳۱۲۲۵

بکرانه بنام سرسنگ فرویدان (موتی جی) و (افزودیم) که تیا است در ایران ۹

در کتابخانه وی که تیا از (افزودیم) تبعید گردان میگردند و شرح است که

ریند گار و تیا و ... از آن به ... و ...

که ... است ... و ...

پاران در ... است ...

بر ... است ...

در ... است ...

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