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Foreword

The most dramatic and violent anti-Jewish pogrom which took place in the Arab Middle East during the Second World War began in Iraq on 1 June 1941. It came to be known among Jews as the *Farhūd*—a Kurdish term indicating a murderous breakdown of law and order. During the pogrom an estimated 137 Jews of all ages were killed, buildings which housed more than 12,000 Jews were pillaged and nearly 600 Jewish businesses were ransacked. The anti-Jewish rioting was centered in the capital city of Baghdad, led by Iraqi soldiers and paramilitary youth gangs followed by an incited Muslim population that went on the rampage in an orgy of murder and rapine. It struck at what was arguably the most prosperous, prominent and well-integrated Jewish community in the Middle East—one whose origins went back more than 2,500 years. The 80,000 Jews of Baghdad had played a strikingly important role in the commercial and professional life of the city. However, from the 1930s the community had faced growing hostility from Arab nationalists in Iraq and from antisemitic propagandists in the press and political opposition groups. Moreover, high officials in the Iraqi Ministry of Education, such as Dr. Sāmī Shawkat, were great admirers of Hitler and did not hesitate to brand the Jews as the enemy from within. Anti-Jewish agitation in Iraq was further envenomed by the arrival in Baghdad in 1939 of the Palestinian Arab national leader Haj Amīn el-Husseini and other Palestinian exiles.

The position of the Iraqi Jewish community worsened still further with the coup d'état carried out on 2 April 1941 by a former Prime Minister, the pro-Nazi Rashīd Alī al-Kailānī. This anti-British coup forced the Hashemite Regent Abd al-Ilāh to flee the country and brought to power rabid Jew-haters like Yūnis al-Sabāwī, who would be instrumental in inciting the pogrom that occurred two months later. It was no coincidence that Nazi antisemitic propaganda in Iraq reached its zenith at this time and was a further contributing factor to the *Farhūd*. It could build on the widespread hostility to the British and the Jews in the population, especially since the latter were being depicted in both Nazi and Iraqi nationalist propaganda as a “fifth column.” Yet, ironically enough, it was the victory of the British and the

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return of the Regent which sparked the disaster on 1 June 1941—perhaps in part as an act of frustration and revenge by the Muslim masses at seeing the fall of the pro-Nazi regime. The British army, encamped on the outskirts of Baghdad, could easily have prevented the anti-Jewish massacre but chose not to do so, claiming that its intervention would have damaged the prestige of the Regent in the eyes of his own people. The British behaved in a similarly unscrupulous manner in Libya in November 1945 and in Aden in December 1947.

The Farhūd nevertheless remains a uniquely grim episode for the Jews in Arab lands during the Second World War, even though they found themselves in danger across the region from Morocco to the Levant. It is also an event that has never previously been studied in the systematic and comprehensive manner undertaken in this important book edited by Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda. The editors have put together some striking narratives of the pogrom as well as interpretive assessments in the light of a wide variety of archival sources and documents; they have included essays on the role of National Socialism in the Arab East and of Palestinian incitement in the Farhūd as well as on the attitude of Arab intellectuals towards it. There are articles on the position of the Communists in Iraq during this period and about the Zionist response to the events in Baghdad. As a result, the reader receives a broad panorama seen from multiple standpoints concerning a defining event which already heralded the tragic end of Iraqi Jewry ten years later. By 1951, the government of Iraq, acting in peacetime and without provocation, effectively expropriated, dispossessed, and brought about the forced emigration of nearly 120,000 Iraqi Jews, thereby terminating the oldest of all Diaspora histories. The Farhūd was, as this volume clearly shows, the writing on the wall that preceded this final act. The Jews of Iraq, already in 1941 had found themselves in the crossfire of three converging forms of antisemitism—that of the German Nazis, the Palestinian exiles led by Haj Amīn el-Husseini, and the local Iraqi nationalists. The Farhūd exposed with shocking clarity just how vulnerable they really were and what would most likely be their fate under any native Arab nationalist regime in the future.

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Preface

The present volume is being published on the sixty-ninth anniversary of the *Farhūd*, the pogrom committed by religious and nationalist Arabs against the Jews of Iraq on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (*Shavu'ot*), 1–2 June 1941. A Hebrew edition of this book was published in 1992 by the Research Institute of Babylonian Jewry in Or Yehuda, Israel. This volume is a revised version of the Hebrew edition. It consists of papers on the pogrom and on the events leading up to it which were originally published in English, others which were written in Hebrew and now appear in English for the first time, and documents which have not been previously published, including an updated list of the names of victims of the *Farhūd* and a map indicating the places in Baghdad where rioters attacked Jews. The book thus provides the English reader with comprehensive and updated information on the *Farhūd* and constitutes a memorial to the innocent victims killed during these pogroms and whose only crime was that they were Jews.

The studies in the present volume deal with various aspects of the *Farhūd*. The paper by Prof. Stefan Wild, former head of the Orientalisches Seminar at Bonn University, deals with the influence of National Socialist propaganda on the Arab youth movements and political parties between the two world wars, and the attempts made to translate Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* into Arabic. The many defects in these translations provided the impetus to compile what became H. Wehr's *Arabic-German Dictionary*, later translated into English by Prof. J. M. Cowan. Prof. Wild bases his discussion on diverse archival records as well as published sources in German and Arabic that describe the rise of Nazi influence in the Arab world.

Prof. Hayyim J. Cohen's article describes the events leading up to the pogrom of 1941, the *Farhūd* itself, and how these events affected Jewish-Muslim relations in Iraq.

The late Prof. Elie Kedourie discusses the progression of events that culminated in the looting of the shops of the Jews of Baṣra.

In the article by Dr. Nissim Kazzaz a first attempt is made to clarify the position of the Arab Communists in Iraq, who were opposed to anti-Jewish persecution, and to explain the ideology on which this position was based.

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Dr. Esther Meir-Glitzstein describes the reaction of the leaders of the Jews of Mandatory Palestine to the pogrom in Baghdad.

Prof. Shmuel Moreh in his first article surveys all the literature written by Iraqi Jews up to 2005 which he was able to locate, including poetry, memoirs, and novels written in Hebrew, Arabic, English, and French. He shows that this literature adds a new and more comprehensive dimension that complements previously published studies and documents. These poems, memoirs, and novels paint an authentic picture of the pogrom itself, its repercussions, and the scars left in the hearts, spirits, and souls of the Jews of Iraq, in particular, the Jews of Baghdad. It is only thanks to these literary materials that the reader can get the kind of balanced and complete picture that scholars can rarely provide, including an explanation for the mass emigration to Israel in 1950–1951. In his second article, “The Role of the Palestinian Incitement to the *Farhūd* Massacre in Iraq and the Attitude of Arab Intellectuals to the *Farhūd*,” Prof. Moreh deals for the first time with the Palestinian leaders who had escaped to Iraq and the results of their incitement against the Jews of Iraq, who had been mainly passive towards Zionist activities in Palestine.¹

Dr. Zvi Yehuda has contributed an article and three important sets of documents to this volume. “The Pogrom (*Farhūd*) of 1941 in Light of New Sources,” reviews research on the riots and uses unpublished sources to shed new light on German activity against the Jews of Iraq, the outbreak, the course of, and the responsibility for the *Farhūd* pogrom. In addition, he has provided a selection of documents, including personal interviews in English, Hebrew, German, Arabic, and Judeo-Arabic translated into English; plus an updated list of the victims of the *Farhūd*; and a map indicating the locations of the riots in Baghdad.

The editors would like to thank the management and staff of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, in particular Mr. Mordechai Ben-Porat, Chairman, for his support in publishing the Hebrew and English editions of this book; and Mr. Yigal Lushi, General Director; Mrs. Tmima Hillel, and Miss Rachel Silko, assistants in the Babylonian Jewry Research Institute; and Mr. Yaacov Zamir, librarian, for their help.

We would also like to thank Mr. Murray Rosovsky and Mr. Michael Guggenheimer, the translators, and Mrs. Mercia Grant, the text editor, for their work in preparing this volume for publication.

Thanks also go to the managers and staff at the Central Zionist Archives, the National and University Library, the Yad Vashem archives and the Ben-

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Zvi Institute, all in Jerusalem, as well as the Public Records Office in London, for the assistance they provided. Our thanks are due to Prof. Robert Wistrich, the director of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, to the editor, Alifa Saadya of the Center for their devoted work to publish this book.

Finally, we would like to thank the late Mr. George Elias from Manchester, former Honorary President of the Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq, and the late Mr. Saleh R. Masri from New York for their kind support and encouragement to have this English version published.

Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda, Editors
Or Yehuda, January 2010

1. Shmuel Moreh, "The Palestinians' Role in the 1941 Farhud Riots in Iraq," in *Zion and Zionism among Sephardi and Oriental Jews* (in Hebrew; Proceedings of Misgav Yerushalayim Fifth International Congress), edited by W. Zeev Harvey, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Haim Saadon, and Amnon Shiloah (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 2002).