



צדק ליהודים יוצאי מדינות ערב    Justice Pour Les Juifs Des Pays Arabes    العدالة لليهود من الدول العربية

## Report on the Jews of Yemen

### Historical and Economic Analysis



Cover Photo: Yemenite Jews waiting to board their flight to Israel. Source - JDC Archives

#### Disclaimer

This Executive Summary provides data on the history and economic losses when Jews were displaced from Yemen. Although every attempt was made to collect testimonies and locate all relevant statistical data, this Report should not be considered as definitive. Research was adversely affected by the fact that this mass displacement of Jews occurred many years ago and there is no central repository where records of losses were maintained. It is hoped that additional research will be conducted in the future which would expand upon and refine the financial projections contained in this Report.



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## PREFACE

**Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC)** has completed a multi-year project to document the historical ethnic cleansing of Jews from Aden, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen.

The eleven Country Reports portray the narrative of ancient Jewish communities indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa for thousands of years; from their plight under the Muslim conquest, to Ottoman rule; then colonial occupation; their persecution under Arab nationalism and Islamism, then their flight from the region. Their story is one of an oppressed minority that was uprooted from their countries of birth and who suffered extensive losses of both personal (homes, businesses, property, etc.) and Jewish communal assets (Synagogues, schools, cemeteries, etc.)

This report is based on extensive personal testimonies and exhaustive statistical data. This process included a thorough and comprehensive review of available documentation, discussions with community leaders and subject-matter experts, the collection of testimonial data, an analysis of each Jewish community's place within their respective country and a consideration of previous valuation attempts.

Extensive archival research was conducted in the following 22 archives in six countries:

**Israel:** Israel State Archives (ISA), Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Israeli Ministry of Justice archives, Israeli Ministry of Social Equality archives, Yad Ben Zvi Institute, Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot, World Jewish Congress, Israel Archives

**Canada:** Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa

**France:** Alliance Israelite Universelle, Paris, Archives Nationale – France, Paris Branch, Pierrefitte Branch, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve

**Switzerland:** National Archives, Bern, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva

**UK:** London Metropolitan Archives, National Archives of the U.K.

**USA:** American Jewish Committee, New York, Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) – New York, National Archives & Records, College Park, Maryland, World Jewish Archives, New York

Research was adversely affected by the fact that records in Arab countries were inaccessible. Moreover, this mass displacement of Jews occurred, in some cases, more than 75 years ago and there is no central repository where records of these losses were maintained. Consequently, this Report should not be considered as definitive.

It is hoped that additional research will be conducted in the future which will expand upon and refine the projections contained in these Reports.

# Yemen Executive Summary

## Context

The Jews of Yemen stand as another illustration of a broader historic pattern that unfolded across the Middle East and North Africa,

Jews are indigenous to the region, having lived there for thousands of years - roughly one thousand years before the birth of Islam in the seventh century C.E. For the next thousand years, Jews lived under Islamic rule as 'dhimmis', a subordinate class, marked by legal inferiority and social humiliation.

Under Ottoman rule, Jews faced fluctuating conditions, from oppression to limited reforms. The arrival of colonial powers to the Middle East and North Africa marked a dramatic turning point for indigenous Jewish communities. Many Jews gained access to education and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the cultural, economic, and professional life of their countries. But this chapter was short-lived.

The rise of Arab nationalism, at times fueled by fascist ideologies, and growing opposition to Zionism unleashed a wave of discriminatory laws, violence, and state-backed repression. While Jews were often victims of violence and pogroms throughout their time in Muslim countries, the situation worsened immediately before and after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

What followed was not a mere exodus, but the erasure of ancient Jewish communities, through forced expulsion, flight under duress, or systemic marginalization. With respect to Yemen:

## Displacement of Jews from Yemen: 1948-2025

	1948	1958	1968	1976	2001	2025 (est.)
<b>Yemen</b>	<b>55,000</b>	3,500	500	500	200	<b>1</b>

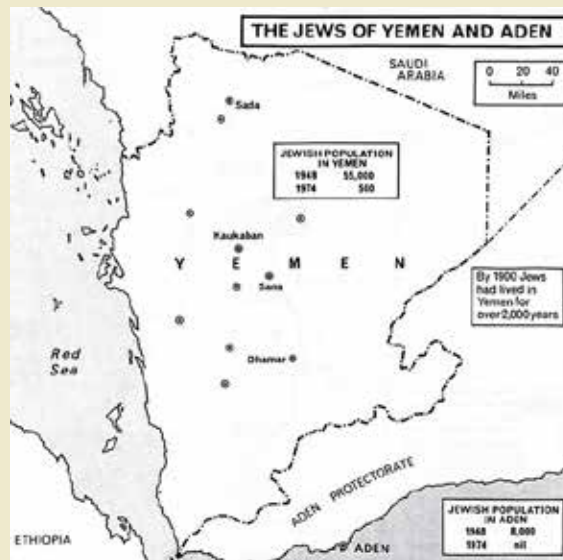
Today, over 99% of the descendants of the historic Jewish communities in 10 Arab countries plus Iran no longer reside in these vast regions.

Neither the mass violations of the human rights of Jews in Arab countries, nor their uprooting from their countries of birth, has ever been addressed by the international community.

This publication is a sincere call to recognize the rights of Jewish refugees from Arab countries on both moral and legal grounds and to ensure their story is no longer forgotten.

Inspired by the spirit of the Abraham Accords, time has come to face history with honesty and courage. Only through truth and justice can the peoples of the region move toward a future of dignity, healing, and lasting peace.

## History of the Jewish Community of Yemen



The Jewish presence in Yemen is one of the most ancient in the world, dating back to biblical and pre-Islamic times. Historical evidence suggests settlement from as early as the 1st century CE, with flourishing communities by the 3rd century. In the early centuries CE, the Himyarite Kingdom in southern Yemen embraced Judaism as a state religion, creating a rare Jewish kingdom that controlled key trade routes and left a lasting mark on the land's identity.

The Muslim conquest of Yemen in the 7th century had a significant impact on the Jewish community, as Jews in the region were classified as dhimmis, a status that granted them protection but subjected them to a subordinate and humiliating social position. As dhimmis, Jews were required to pay the jizya (a tax), which symbolized their inferior status. They were prohibited from holding public office, had limited legal recourse, and were often subjected to social segregation. However, Jews were allowed to practice their religion and maintain their communities, albeit under these significant constraints.

In 1172, amid forced conversion under a fanatical Muslim ruler who issued anti-Jewish decrees following the appearance of a false messiah, Yemenite leaders reached out to Maimonides in Egypt. His reply, known as the Epistle to Yemen, became a lifeline. It encouraged them to hold firm in their faith, refuted a false messiah, and strengthened their spiritual resilience for generations.

For many years, Yemeni Jews endured widespread persecution and humiliation. This included discriminatory clothing laws, restricted housing, prohibitions on riding animals like Muslims, and degrading forced labor laws such as the "Dung-Gatherers Decree." Most traumatic was the 1679 *Expulsion of Mawza*, where Jews were forcibly deported to harsh conditions in the Mawza desert, resulting in mass death and lasting communal trauma.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Yemen's partial exposure to Ottoman and British influences brought limited modernization but also intensified resistance from the Muslim

population to any relaxation of anti-Jewish restrictions. Ottoman reforms that aimed to lift Jewish legal inferiority were blocked by local opposition. Social hostility, including routine insults and physical abuse, remained pervasive.

Notwithstanding, the Jewish community of Yemen played a key role in the country's economic and cultural life. Jews were renowned for their craftsmanship – especially in silversmithing, blacksmithing, and leatherwork. They also contributed significantly to local and regional trade, acting as intermediaries in markets and engaging in spice and textile trade.

However, discrimination against Jews was deeply rooted. In 1913 the enforcement of Sharia law worsened Jewish dhimmi status. A particularly devastating practice was the *Orphan Decree*, under which the Imam forcibly converted orphaned Jewish minors to Islam. Families responded with early marriages, concealment, or smuggling children to the British protectorate of Aden.

The emergence of Zionism and the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine further exacerbated tensions. Yemeni Jews were accused of supporting Zionism and were targeted in anti-Jewish violence, culminating in the 1947 Aden pogrom, which left 87 Jews dead and dozens of businesses and homes destroyed. In 1949, Jewish property was registered for ransom. While in that same year Jews were officially banned from emigrating, these conditions precipitated a mass exodus.

Operation “On Wings of Eagles” (1949-1950) brought over 49,000 Jews to Israel in a dramatic airlift. Although some Jews remained, further waves of immigration occurred into the 1990s. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Yemen's Jewish community had been reduced to a handful of individuals, many of whom continued to face harassment and threats until their eventual evacuation. The story of Yemeni Jewry is one of profound endurance, identity preservation, and eventual rescue after millennia of marginalization and suffering.

## Economic Analysis of The Jews of Yemen

### Methodological Benchmarks & Economic Indicators

For the purposes of this report, a total Jewish Yemenite population of 55,000 Jews was estimated. The Yemenite Jewish population was determined to be 85% rural and 15% urban. The definition of ‘urban’ in the case of Yemenite Jewry is different from that of other countries in the region. In the case of Yemen, there is no correlation between the urban/rural divide and the socioeconomic distribution of the population. It was further determined that the average size of a Jewish family in Yemen in and around the 1948 period was 5 people. Therefore, based on a population of 55,000 a total of 11,000 Jewish households was calculated.

The population in Yemen circa 1948 was overwhelmingly rural and was not divided into urban cities and rural communities per se. Villages in Yemen were not regionally concentrated and instead were dispersed all throughout the countryside, with significant urbanization waves only beginning in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The geographic distribution of the Jewish community of Yemen was similarly dispersed, with Jews settling mainly in the country's agricultural belt and living in thousands of



different villages. Most of the 15% of urban Yemen Jews lived in Sana'a.

Yemen Jews were predominantly artisans, craftsmen, and traders, often participating in international commerce via the port of Hodeida. Despite the variance in occupations held by Jews, it appears that all the occupations represented a similar socioeconomic class and there was no significant distinction of wealth brackets based on types of occupation. The Jewish community of Yemen also had a few members who were extremely wealthy, usually merchants. Given the relative poverty of Yemen compared to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa in 1948, it can be assumed that the entire Jewish community of Yemen, aside from a wealthy class of 0.1% were poor.

## **Asset Categories & Types**

This project considers losses suffered by Jews as individual members of Jewish households, as well as assets that belonged to each Jewish community, respectively. These losses include urban and rural land, urban and rural immovable property, personal property and moveable assets, financial assets, employment losses, business losses, and communal losses. This report does not attempt to account for non-pecuniary damages, such as pain and suffering, nor personal injury or death.

Unlike other countries with stronger colonial influence, Yemen was not subject to the same kind of land administration. Jews in Yemen were not typically involved in agriculture, with experts suggesting they were not permitted to work in agriculture as a rule. Yemen Jews in the poor class typically lived in homes that were two or three stories tall and 200 sq meters in size. These homes were owned by the Jews themselves and usually housed a nuclear family together with their daughters in law and grandchildren. It is also noted that there is no distinction in the value of assets of rural vs urban Jews, and instead they are discussed according to class division (wealthy and poor).

Reliable testimonials and historical data were not available for Yemen to make any conclusions as to the value of losses across the different asset categories. Instead, discussions and summaries were carried out for each asset category to provide further historical context. In addition to private ownership by Jewish individuals throughout Yemen, the various Jewish communities in the country owned communal assets that belonged to the Jewish community. Jewish communal property did not exist in the immovable form in Yemen, however, Torah scrolls, and other holy books were owned by the Jewish community.

## **Summary of Findings**

Due to the lack of reliable testimonial and historical data for Yemen, it was determined that the analysis for Egypt, Syria, and Iraq would be used for illustrative purposes. Lost assets found in the first three countries at 1948 values were used to determine the value of lost property per person. This yielded a range, with Iraq providing the lowest value of lost property per person among the three countries, and Egypt being the highest. The low and high values were then multiplied with the population of each remaining country, and a midpoint was calculated from this range. In the absence of "best evidence" to reach accurate and verifiable country-specific values a discount factor of 50% was determined based on precedent discounts and applied across the

mid-point value for Yemen. Finally, a compound interest formula which makes use of the principal amount and an average yearly rate based on the ten-year yields on US treasury bonds over a total compound period from January 1, 1949, through December 31, 2024, was applied to the mid-point value for each of the countries on a yearly compounding basis. As there is no internationally recognized, risk-free rate, the 10-year US Treasury Yield rate was chosen, as it is an accepted benchmark for the time value of money over long horizons and aligns with established practices in historical asset valuation. The table below illustrates the calculated mid-point of lost assets for Yemen:

(\$ ) Range of Lost Assets		
Yemen	1948	Estimated Present Value (\$, 2024)
Population	55,000	
Estimated – Low Range	267,508,206	
Estimated – High Range	841,207,261	
<b>Estimated – Mid-Point</b>	<b>554,357,734</b>	
<b>Discount</b>	50%	
Estimated – Mid-Point (with Discount)	<b>277,178,867</b>	<b>14,457,139,985</b>





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# Chapter 1

## Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries – Legal and Political Context

When the term ‘refugees’ is mentioned in the context of the Middle East, the international community’s singular focus has been on Palestinian refugees.

Yet, within the last 75 years, the world has ignored the mass displacement of some 1,000,000 Jews from the totalitarian regimes, dictatorships and monarchies of Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco Yemen and Aden, as well as Iran.

Neither the mass violations of the human rights of Jews in Arab countries, nor their uprooting from their ancestral countries of birth, has ever been appropriately addressed by the international community.

In reality, as a result of the longstanding conflict in the Middle East, two populations of refugees emerged – Arabs as well as Jews from Arab countries. In fact, there were more Jews displaced from Arab countries (856,000 plus Iran))<sup>1</sup> than there were Palestinians who became refugees as a result of the 1948 Arab Israeli war (726,000)<sup>2</sup>

Asserting rights and redress for Jewish refugees is not intended negate any suffering of Palestinian refugees. It is a legitimate call to recognize that Jews from Arab countries also became refugees as a result of that same Middle East conflict and still possess rights even today.

### **Jews as an Indigenous People of the Middle East**

Jews are an indigenous people of the Middle East having lived in the region continuously from pre-historic times to the present. Jews and Jewish communities proliferated throughout parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region for thousands of years, fully one thousand years before the advent of Islam in the seventh century C.E.. For the next thousand years, Jews lived under Islamic rule as ‘dhimmis’, a subordinate class, marked by legal inferiority and social humiliation.

### **Longstanding Jewish Presence in the Region**

Throughout the millennia, the Jewish presence endured despite various empires ruling the region, including the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, and British. Notwithstanding some periods of exile, descendants of the Jewish people, maintained their unbroken lineage in the Middle East, stretching across millennia.

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1 Roumani, *The Case 2; WOJAC'S Voice* Vol.1, No.1

2 United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine p. 18; United Nations, *Annual Report of the Director General of UNRWA*, Doc 5224/5223, 25 Nov. 1952 *First estimate as September 1949*

**Table 1** - Early Jewish Presence in the Middle East and North Africa

Country/Region	Date of Jewish Community	Sources*
Iraq	6 <sup>th</sup> century BCE	Meir, Esther. Iraq and the Jews of Iraq – a General Survey. In Haim Saadoun (Ed.), <i>Iraq</i> (Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), pp. 11-12. [Hebrew]
Egypt	6 <sup>th</sup> century BCE	Ehrlich, Haggai. Egypt and its Jews. In Nahem Ilan (ed.), <i>Egypt</i> (Ben Zvi Institute, 2008), pp. 9, 12-14. [Hebrew]
Iran	6 <sup>th</sup> century BCE	Sahim, Haldeh. Iran and Afghanistan. In Reeve Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (eds.), <i>The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in modern times</i> (Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 368.
Libya	4 <sup>th</sup> century BCE	Goldberg, Harvey. Libya and the Jews of Libya. In Haim Saadoun (Ed.), <i>Libya</i> . Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007, p. 11 [Hebrew]
Lebanon	2 <sup>nd</sup> century BCE	Schulze, Kirsten E. <i>The Jews of Lebanon: Between coexistence and conflict</i> (Sussex Academic Press, 2001), pp. 12-13.
Yemen	1 <sup>st</sup> century CE	Araqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. Introduction. In Haim Saadoun (ed.), <i>Yemen</i> (Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), p. 17. [Hebrew]
Morocco	1 <sup>st</sup> century CE	Bashan, Eliezer. <i>The Jews of Morocco, their past and culture</i> (Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2000), pp. 15-16. [Hebrew]
Algeria	1 <sup>st</sup> century CE	Cohen, David. Algeria. In Reeve Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier & Sara Reguer (Eds.), <i>The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in modern times</i> (pp. 458-470). Columbia University Press, 2002.
Syria	1 <sup>st</sup> century CE	Harel, Yaron. Syria (Jerusalem, Ben-Zvi Institute, 2009), p. 11 [Hebrew]
Tunisia	2 <sup>nd</sup> century CE	Les Juifs de Tunisie: Quelques repères historiques. <i>Confluences Méditerranée</i> 10 (1994), pp. 149-154.

\*These time periods are conservative projections, based on archeological and academic sources. Biblical and traditional sources claim earlier presence of Jews in these countries.

The ancient Israelites were among the first inhabitants of the region. Their illustrious history is detailed in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The uninterrupted historical presence of Jews in the Middle East can then be characterized into six periods:

**Period One: Ancient Israelite History ([See Appendix A](#))**

**Period Two: Destruction of the First Temple to The Rise of Islam ([See Appendix B](#))**

**Period Three: Prophet Muhammed To Colonialism**

**Period Four: Colonial Period**

**Period Five: The Rise of Jewish and Arab Nationalism**

**Period Six: The Founding of The State of Israel**

## **Period Three: Prophet Muhammed To Colonialism.**

With the birth of Mohammed in 570, and the advent of Islam, the region was transformed.

Starting in the seventh century, pan-Arab imperialism foisted the Arabic language and culture on indigenous peoples like Assyrians, Berbers, Kurds, Zoroastrians, Maronites, Egyptian Copts and Jews.

Following the Muslim conquest of the region, from the 7th century onward, Jews were ruled by Muslims for years under the Pact of Umar, attributed to the Second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644 CE). Enacted in 637 CE, the Pact of Umar was a bilateral agreement of limitations and privileges between conquering Muslims and conquered non-Muslims who were declared “dhimmi”. The term *dhimmi*, ‘protected,’ was a diminished status assigned to Christians and Jews, among others, who were considered a ‘People of the Book’ (as opposed to atheists or polytheists) and therefore extended some degree of legal protection, while relegated to second-class status<sup>3</sup>

The most concrete law to which *dhimmis* were subjected was the need to pay a special tax known as ‘*jizya*.’ The origin of this tax is contained in the Qur’an which states: “Fight against those who have been given the scripture until they pay the due tax [*jizya*], willingly or unwillingly.”<sup>4</sup>

By paying the *jizya*, Jews and Christians were allowed to practice their faith, maintain personal security and were permitted limited religious, educational, professional and business opportunities. They were also subject to discriminatory restraints.

Restrictions for the *dhimmi* under the Pact of Umar prohibited Jews and other religious minorities from holding public religious ceremonies; and the legal exclusion of Jews from holding public office. The *dhimmi* could not raise himself above the Muslim nor could his synagogue be higher than the mosques. Non-Muslims could not ride horses, only donkeys and were required to dismount if he passed a Muslim. The Jew was tolerated but barely so.<sup>5</sup>

These practices were not uniform within the Arab world and there were even differences in individual countries.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the countries colonized by the Muslim conquest, non-Arab and non-Muslim minorities, among the indigenous inhabitants in those regions, remained as minorities in their ancestral places of birth.

## Period Four: Colonial Period

European colonialism in the Arab world was partially spurred by the British conquest of India, which led Napoleon to invade Egypt in 1798, in part to disrupt British trade routes. Although the French occupation of Egypt was short-lived, it was not long before the European presence in the Arab world grew. France’s colonization of Algeria began in 1830, of Tunisia in 1881, and of Morocco in 1912. Meanwhile, Britain colonized Egypt in 1882 and also took control of Sudan in 1899. And in 1911, Italy colonized Libya.<sup>7</sup>

After World War I and with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, control over the Middle East fell into the hands of France and Great Britain.

Jews fared well under secular, colonial ‘European’ rule. This period witnessed a gradual erosion of the *dhimmi* system and a growing integration of Jewish and other communities into the broader societies in which they lived.

Many Jews experienced increased prosperity and opportunities during this era, contributing significantly to many fields such as education, finance, culture, politics, and administration.

## Period Five: The Rise of Jewish and Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalism emerged in the early 20th century as an opposition movement in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and European imperialism, later evolving into

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4 Quaran, Sura 9:

5 Cohen, *Crescent* 65

6 Yeor, *Islam and Dhimmitude*; Yeor, *The Dhimmi*; Deshem and Zenner; Stillman, *Jews of Arab Land*

7 Arab Center, “The Colonial Legacy in the Arab World: Health, Education, and Politics”, Washington DC., Accessed Nov. 10, 2024. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-colonial-legacy-in-the-arab-world-health-education-and-politics/>

the overwhelmingly dominant ideological force in the Arab world.

It started out as a political ideology asserting that Arabs constitute a single nation. As a traditional nationalist ideology, it promotes Arab culture and civilization, celebrates Arab history, the Arabic language and Arabic literature. It often also calls for unification of Arab society.<sup>8</sup>

Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, is a modern political movement. Its core beliefs are that all Jews constitute one nation (not simply a religious or ethnic community) and that the only solution to anti-Semitism is the concentration of as many Jews as possible in the biblical land of Israel, and the establishment of a Jewish state in their ancestral homeland.

Most associate Theodor Herzl with the founding of the Zionist movement in 1897. While Herzl succeeded in bringing together virtually all Zionist groups under one organizational roof, there was significant Zionist activity even before Herzl came onto the scene.

The history of Zionism began earlier and is intertwined with Jewish history and Judaism.<sup>9</sup> More than 20 new Jewish settlements were established in Palestine between 1870 and 1897 (the year of the first Zionist Congress).<sup>10</sup>

Arab nationalists predominantly perceived Zionism as a threat to their own aspirations.

Beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and intensifying in the 1930s during the Arab Revolt, tensions between Arab nationalism and Jewish nationalism escalated. From as early as 1922 and into the 1960s, all the North African states gained independence from their colonial European rulers.

In the aftermath of World War II, many regions transitioned from imperial rule to nation-states. Countries like Jordan and Iraq emerged in the wake of colonialism's decline. The Middle East became a focal point for political realignment, with borders redrawn and new Arab governments established. The evolution of Arab, Muslim states did not bode well for its Jewish inhabitants.

## The Arab League and Jewish Refugees

To promote Arab unity, the Arab League was established by Pact on March 22, 1945, initially composed of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi-Arabia, and Yemen, according to the Pact, the League has as its purpose to strengthen relations between the member-states, to coordinate their policies in order to achieve cooperation between them, and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, these Arab League member states colluded in, and coordinated, a shared pattern of conduct that appeared intended to coerce Jews to leave, or to use them as weapons in their struggle against first Zionism and then the State of Israel. This is evidenced even before 1948 from: (a) reports on multilateral meetings of the

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8 Dawisha, Adeed, "Requiem for Arab Nationalism", *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2003. Accessed Nov. 10, 2024 <https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/requiem-for-arab-nationalism>

9 University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, accessed Nov. 10, 2024 [https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/cmenas-assets/cmenas-documents/unit-of-israel-Palestine/Section1\\_Zionism.pdf](https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/cmenas-assets/cmenas-documents/unit-of-israel-Palestine/Section1_Zionism.pdf)

10 Snitkoff, Rabbi Ed "Secular Zionism". *My Jewish Learning*. Accessed on Nov. 11, 2024 [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Jewish\\_Thought/Modern/Secular\\_Zionism.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Jewish_Thought/Modern/Secular_Zionism.shtml)

11 The Avalon Project "Pact of the League of Arab States, 22 March 1945". Yale Law School. 1998. Accessed on Nov. 10, 2024, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/arableag.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp)



Arab League; (b) statements and threats made by delegates of Arab countries at the U.N.; and c) and strikingly similar legislation and discriminatory decrees, enacted by numerous Arab governments, that violated the fundamental rights and freedoms of Jews resident in Arab countries.<sup>12</sup>

The danger to Jews was well known and even declared publicly in threats made against their Jewish populations by Arab regime officials at the United Nations.

- In a key address to the Political Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on the morning of November 24, 1947, just five days before that body voted on the partition plan for Palestine, Heykal Pasha, an Egyptian delegate, made the following statement:

*"The United Nations ... should not lose sight of the fact that the proposed solution might endanger a million Jews living in the Moslem countries. ... If the United Nations decided to partition Palestine, they might be responsible for very grave disorders and for the massacre of a large number of Jews."*<sup>13</sup>

- In an afternoon session of the Political Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on November 24, 1947, the Palestinian delegate to the UN, Jamal Husseini, representing the *Arab Higher Committee of Palestine* to the UN General Assembly, made the following threat:

*"It should be remembered that there were as many Jews in the Arab world as there are in Palestine whose positions might become very precarious."*<sup>14</sup>

- On November 28, 1947 Iraq's Foreign Minister Fadil Jamali, at the 126<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly stated:

*"Not only the uprising of the Arabs in Palestine is to be expected but the masses in the Arab world cannot be restrained. The Arab-Jewish relationship in the Arab world will greatly deteriorate."*<sup>15</sup>

Words were followed by actions

In 1947, the Political Committee of the Arab League (League of Arab States) drafted a law that was to govern the legal status of Jewish residents in all Arab League countries. Entitled: Text of Law Drafted by the Political Committee of the Arab League, it provided that "...all Jews – with the exception of citizens of non-Arab countries – were to be considered members of the Jewish 'minority state of Palestine,'; that their bank accounts would be frozen and used to finance resistance to 'Zionist ambitions in Palestine'; Jews believed to be active Zionists would be interned as political prisoners and their assets confiscated; only Jews who accept active service in Arab armies or place themselves at the disposal of these armies would be considered 'Arabs.'"<sup>16</sup>

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12 The Text of Law Drafted by the Political Committee of the Arab League was reported on in a front page, May 16, 1948 New York Times article headlined: "Jews in Grave Danger in All Moslem Lands"

13 U.N. General Assembly, Second Session, Official Records, Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question, Summary Record of the Thirteenth Meeting, Lake Success, N.Y., November 24, 1947 (A/AC.14/SR.30). This comment was made at 10:30am.

14 U.N. General Assembly, Second Session, Official Records, Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question, Summary Record of the Thirty-First Meeting, Lake Success, N.Y., November 24, 1947 (A/AC.14/SR.31) This comment was made at 2:30pm.

15 U.N. General Assembly, Second Session, Official Records, Verbatim Record of the 126<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting, November 28, 1947, p. 1391.

16 The Text of Law Drafted by the Political Committee of the Arab League was reported on in a front page, May 16, 1948 New York Times article headlined: "Jews in Grave Danger in All Moslem Lands"



The draft law was a prediction of what was to happen to Jews in the region. It became a blueprint, in country after country, for the laws which were eventually enacted against Jews - denationalizations; freezing of Jewish bank accounts; diverting funds of frozen Jewish bank accounts to pay for the Arab wars against Israel; confiscation of property of "active Zionists"; and Zionism became a criminal offence throughout the region, in some cases punishable by death. Property confiscation of Jews was widespread<sup>17</sup>. The Arab League had accomplished its goal.

## **Period Six: Jewish refugees and the founding of the State of Israel**

There were many factors that finally influenced virtually all Jews resident in North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf Region to leave: the rise of Arab nationalism; after the European colonialists left, the establishment of sovereign Arab, Islamic states; discriminatory decrees adopted by Arab regimes; the UN moving towards partition; the outbreak of war in 1948; etc. These factors convinced Jews resident in Arab countries that their situation had become dangerously untenable and that it was time to leave.

Following the UN vote on the partition plan in November 1947, and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, the status of Jews in Arab countries changed dramatically as six Arab countries – Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – as well as the Palestinians, declared war, or backed the war against Israel. This rejection by the Arab world of a Jewish state in the Middle East triggered hostile reactions to Jews by Arab regimes and most of their peoples. Jewish populations in Muslim countries were suspected of dual loyalties and were under assault. For example: After the 1947 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (Partition Plan), rioters, joined by the local police force, engaged in a bloody pogrom in Aden that killed 82 Jews and destroyed hundreds of Jewish homes.<sup>18</sup>

➤ In Syria, during November 1947 there were pogroms in several cities; synagogues were burned and of Jews were arrested.<sup>19</sup>

➤ Between June and November 1948, bombs set off in the Jewish Quarter of Cairo killed more than 70 Jews and wounded nearly 200.<sup>20</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 War of Independence, hundreds of thousands of Jews were either uprooted from their countries of residence or became subjugated, political hostages of the Arab Israeli conflict.

## **Displacement of Jews from Arab Countries**

In reality, the displacement of Jews began even before the founding of the State of Israel. It accelerated in the twentieth century when, under Muslim rule, Jews were subjected to a wide-spread pattern of persecution. Official decrees and legislation enacted by Arab regimes denied human and civil rights to Jews and other minorities; expropriated their property; stripped them of their citizenship; and other means of livelihood. Jews were often victims of murder; arbitrary arrest and detention; torture; and expulsions.

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17 Ibid

18 Sachar, *A History of Israel*, p. 397-398.

19 Trigano, Samuel, "Elimination of Israelite Communities in Arab and Islamic Countries", Outline Presentation, p. 9

20 Sachar, p. 401

As a result of these twentieth century developments, post-World War II life for Jews in Arab countries became dangerous and untenable. Leaving was not always easy – the difficulty varied from country to country. In some countries, Jews were forbidden to leave (e.g., Syria); in others, Jews were displaced *en masse* (e.g., Iraq); in some places, Jews lived in relative peace under the protection of Muslim rulers (e.g., Tunisia, Morocco); while in other states, they were expelled (e.g., Egypt) or had their citizenship revoked (e.g. Libya).

However, the final result was the same - the mass displacement - the ethnic cleansing - of some 856,000 Jews from some ten Arab countries – in a region overwhelmingly hostile to Jews.

As noted in the Table below, the mass displacement of Jews from Arab countries coincided with major conflicts in the Middle East (e.g. 1948 War; 1956 War; 1967 War; etc.) Each conflict led to major displacements of Jews from Arab countries. The cumulative result was that, over a seventy-five-year period from 1948- until today approximately 99% of all Jews resident in Arab countries and Iran have been displaced.

**Table 2 - Country of Origin and Jewish Population Compiled by Justice for Jews from Arab Countries**

Displacement of Jews from Arab Countries and Iran:1948-2025

	1948	1958 <sup>i</sup>	1968 <sup>ii</sup>	1976 <sup>iii</sup>	2001 <sup>iv</sup>	2024 (est.)
Aden	8,000	800	0	0	0	0
Algeria	140,000	130,000	3,000	1,000	0	0
Egypt	75,000	40,000	2,500	400	100	8
Iran	100,000 +					8,756 <sup>v</sup>
Iraq	135,000	6,000	2,500	350	100	5
Lebanon	5,000	6,000	3,000	400	100	50
Libya	38,000	3,750	500	40	0	0
Morocco	265,000	200,000	50,000	18,000	5,700	2,500
Syria	30,000	5,000	4,000	4,500	100	3
Tunisia	105,000	80,000	10,000	7,000	1,500	1,500
Yemen	55,000	3,500	500	500	200 <sup>vi</sup>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>856,000<sup>vii</sup></b>	<b>475,050</b>	<b>76,000</b>	<b>32,190</b>	<b>7,800</b>	<b>4,067<sup>viii</sup></b>
<p>i American Jewish Yearbook (AJY) v.58 American Jewish Committee</p> <p>ii AJY v.68; AJY v.71</p> <p>iii AJY v.78</p> <p>iv AJY v.101</p> <p>v Official Census in Iran; As of 2012</p> <p>vi AJY v.102</p> <p>vii Roumani, The Case 2; WOJAC'S Voice Vol.1, No.1</p> <p>viii Estimates derived in discussions with the recognized leadership of the World Organizations representing Sephardi/ Mizrahi communities from these respective countries</p>						

What led to this mass exit and displacement of was a wide-spread pattern Arab regimes instituted legal, economic, political and behavioral processes aimed at isolating and persecuting Jews in their countries. These measures can be categorized as follows:<sup>21</sup>

- A) Denial of Citizenship**
- B) Quarantine and Detention of People**
- C) Legal Restrictions**
- D) Economic Decrees/Sanctions**
- E) Socioeconomic Discrimination**
- F) Pogroms**

The examples listed below are a mere sampling of the actual and extensive discriminatory measures and decrees enacted by Arab regimes against their Jewish populations.

## **A) Denial of Citizenship**

### **Egypt:**

- According to the first Nationality Code promulgated by Egypt on May 26, 1926, a person born in Egypt of a 'foreign' father, (who himself was also born in Egypt), was entitled to Egyptian nationality only if the foreign father *"belonged racially to the majority of the population of a country whose language is Arabic or whose religion is Islam."*<sup>22</sup>
- A mass departure of Jews was sparked in 1956 when Egypt amended the original Egyptian Nationality Law of 1926. Article 1 of the Law of November 22, 1956, stipulated that "Zionists" were barred from being Egyptian nationals. Article 18 of the 1956 law asserted that "Egyptian nationality may be declared forfeited by order of the Ministry of Interior in the case of persons classified as Zionists." Moreover, the term "Zionist" was never defined, leaving Egyptian authorities free to interpret the law as broadly as they wished.<sup>23</sup>

### **Iraq:**

- Law No. 1 of 1950, entitled "Supplement to Ordinance Canceling Iraqi Nationality," in fact deprived Jews of their Iraqi nationality. Section 1 stipulated that *"the Council of Ministers may cancel the Iraqi nationality of the Iraqi Jew who willingly desires to leave Iraq for good"* (official Iraqi English translation).<sup>24</sup>

### **Libya:**

- The Citizenship Act of June 12, 1951, (Section 11/27) places restrictions on the status of non-Muslims (e.g. Jews were not allowed to vote or play any political role).<sup>25</sup>
- On August 8, 1962, the Council of Ministers announced a Royal Decree amending Article 10 of the Citizenship Act, which provided, *inter alia*, that a Libyan national forfeited his nationality if he had had any contact with Zionism. The retroactive effect of this provision, commencing with Libyan independence on December 24, 1951, enabled the authorities to deprive Jews of Libyan nationality at will.<sup>26</sup>

## **B) Quarantine and Detention of People**

### **Yemen:**

- In 1949, Jews were officially banned from leaving the country, an injunction which still exists today.<sup>27</sup>

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22 Article 10(4) of the Code. See : Maurice de Wee, *La Nationalité Egyptienne*, Commentaire de la loi du mai 1926, p. 35.

23 Law No. 391 of 1956, Section 1(a), *Revue Egyptienne de Droit International*, vol. 12, 1956, p. 80.

24 Law No. 1 of 1950, entitled "Supplement to Ordinance Canceling Iraqi Nationality," *Official Iraqi Gazette*, March 9, 1950.

25 Trigano, p.3

26 UNHCR Archives, Confidential memorandum to Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, dated May 8, 1970.

27 Trigano, p. 3

### **Libya:**

- Law No.62 of March 1957, Article 1 of which provided, inter alia, that physical persons or corporations were prohibited from entering directly or indirectly into contracts of any nature whatsoever with organizations or persons domiciled in Israel, with Israel citizens or with persons acting on behalf of Israel, or with their representatives.<sup>28</sup>

### **Syria:**

- In 1973, communication with the outside world was banned<sup>29</sup>

Many other measures were imposed in Iraq; Tunisia; Morocco; Iran and Egypt<sup>30</sup>

## **C) Legal Restrictions**

### **Egypt:**

- Promulgation in 1957 of Army Order No. 4 relating to those who administer the property of the so-called people and associations ("Zionist" i.e. Jewish) are subject to imprisonment or supervision.<sup>31</sup>

### **Libya:**

- Law of Dec 31, 1958, a decree issued by the President of the Executive Council of Tripolitania, ordered the dissolution of the Jewish Community Council and the appointment of a Moslem commissioner nominated by the Government.<sup>32</sup>

Many other legal restrictions against Jews were imposed in Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen; Syria; Morocco; and Tunisia;<sup>33</sup>

## **D) Economic Sanctions**

### **Syria:**

- In April of 1950, a 'Jewish property foreclosure Law' allowed authorities to seize Jewish houses, land, and shops in the cities of Aleppo and Qamishli. Palestinian refugees were then allowed to settle in these formerly Jewish neighborhoods. A ransom had to be paid for every Jew leaving the country.<sup>34</sup>

### **Egypt:**

- Law No. 26 of 1952 obligated all corporations to employ certain prescribed percentages of "Egyptians." A great number of Jewish salaried employees lost their jobs, and could not obtain similar ones, because they did not belong to the category of Jews with Egyptian nationality.<sup>35</sup>

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28 Gruen, "Libya and the Arab League", p. 11

29 Trigano, p.3

30 Trigano, p. 3-4

31 *Egyptian Official Gazette*, No. 88, November 1, 1957

32 UNHCR Archives, Confidential memorandum to Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, dated May 8, 1970.

33 Trigano, p. 4

34 Ibid, p. 6

35 Laskier, "Egyptian Jewry"

### **Iraq:**

- Law No. 5 of 1951, entitled “A law for the Supervision and Administration of the Property of Jews who have Forfeited Iraqi Nationality,” also deprived them of their property. Section 2(a) “freezes” Jewish property.<sup>36</sup>
- There were a series of laws that subsequently expanded on the confiscation of assets and property of Jews who “forfeited Iraqi nationality”. These included Law No. 12 of 1951<sup>37</sup> as well as Law No. 64 of 1967 (relating to ownership of shares in commercial companies) and Law No. 10 of 1968 (relating to banking restrictions).

Other economic sanctions were imposed in Iran, Yemen; Libya; Morocco and Tunisia.<sup>38</sup>

## **E) Socioeconomic Discrimination**

### **Egypt:**

- On July 29, 1947, an amendment was introduced to the Egyptian Companies Law which required at least 75% of the administrative employees of a company to be Egyptian nationals and 90% of employees in general. This resulted in the dismissal and loss of livelihood for many Jews since only 15% had been granted Egyptian citizenship.<sup>39</sup>

### **Iraq:**

- In Iraq, no Jew is permitted to leave the country unless he deposits £5,000 (\$20,000) with the Government to guarantee his return. No foreign Jew is allowed to enter Iraq, even in transit.<sup>40</sup>

### **Libya:**

- On May 24, 1961, a law was promulgated which provided that only Libyan citizens could own and transfer property. Conclusive proof of the possession of Libyan citizenship was required to be evidenced by a special permit that was reported to have been issued to only six Jews in all.<sup>41</sup>

Other such socioeconomic discriminatory measures were imposed on the Jews in Yemen; Syria; Libya; Morocco; Egypt and, Tunisia<sup>42</sup>;

## **F) Pogroms**

### **Morocco:**

- In Morocco, On June 7 and 8, 1948, there were riots against Jews in Ojeda and Jareda.<sup>43</sup>

### **Egypt:**

- In 1954, upon the Proclamation of a State of Siege in Egypt, the Military Governor

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36 Law No. 5 of 1951, entitled “A Law for the Supervision and Administration of the Property of Jews who have Forfeited Iraqi Nationality,” *Official Iraqi Gazette*, March 10, 1951 (English version), p. 17.

37 Law No. 12 of 1951, supplementary to Law No. 5 (*Official Gazette*, English version, 27 January 1952, p.32)

38 Trigano, p. 5

39 Cohen, H.J., p. 88

40 *New York Times*, May 16, 1948, front page

41 UNHCR Archives, Confidential memorandum.to to Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, May 8, 1970.

42 Trigano, p. 6-7

43 Trigano, p. 9



of Egypt was authorized “to order the arrest and apprehension of suspects and those who prejudice public order and security.” At least 900 Jews, without charges being laid against them, were detained, imprisoned or otherwise deprived of their liberty.<sup>44</sup>

### Iraq:

- At the end of 1968, scores were jailed upon the discovery of a local “spy ring” composed of Jewish businessmen. Fourteen men, eleven of them Jews, were sentenced to death in staged trials and hanged in the public squares of Baghdad; others died of torture.<sup>45</sup>

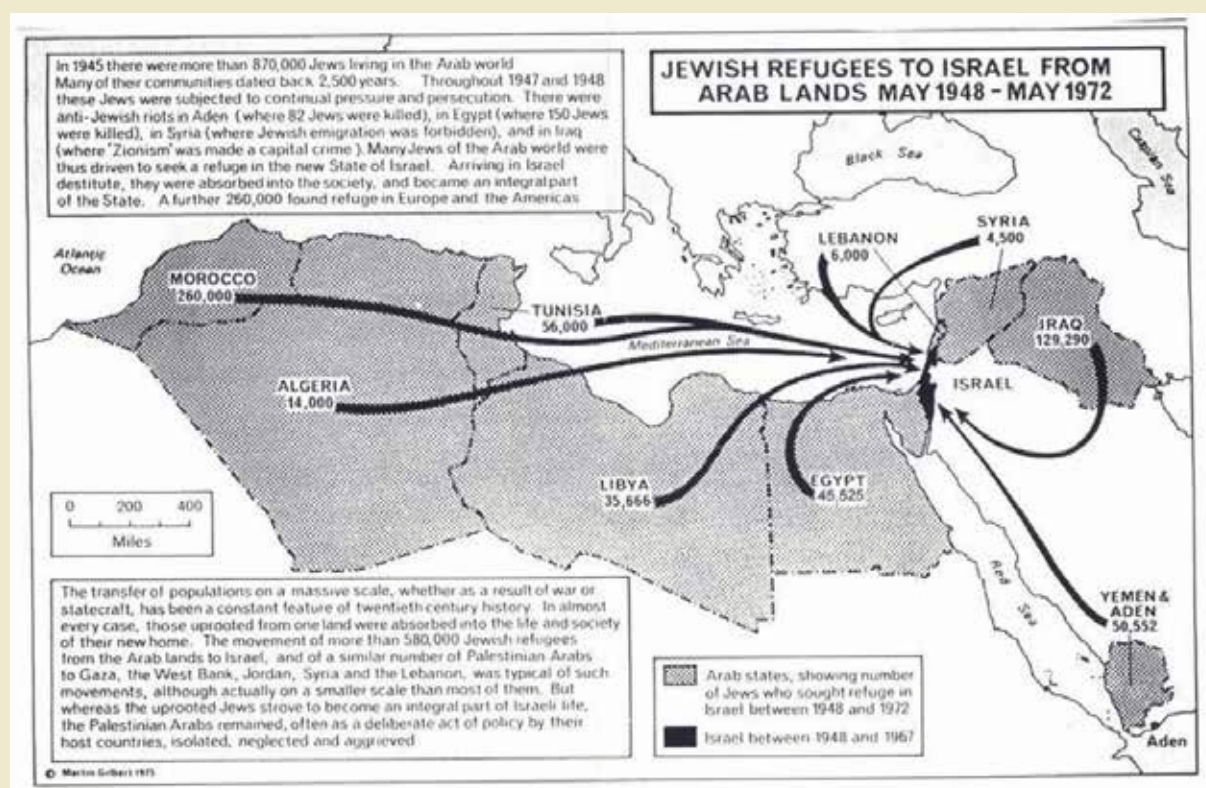
Other pogroms and violence against Jews occurred in, Libya; Lebanon, Iran, Yemen; Syria; Tunisia; and Algeria;<sup>46</sup>

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Jews who left Arab countries were not voluntary migrants. They left their home countries neither for economic reasons nor solely for religious freedom. They suffered from harassment and discrimination. They were driven from their homes as a result of the persecution they suffered.

Over 2/3 of all Jews displaced from Arab countries – roughly 650,000 - emigrated to Israel:

**Map 1** – Jewish Refugees to Israel from Arab lands May 1948 – May 1972



Source: Martin Gilbert, *Jews of Arab Lands*, p.16 (Egyptian Jewish community leaders claim the number fleeing from Egypt to Israel was significantly higher).

44 Article 3, Paragraph 7 of Emergency Law No. 5333 of 1954.

45 Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf*, p. 34.

46 Trigano, p. 7-10



While Zionism motivated most to settle in Israel, an estimated 260,000 people<sup>47</sup> – or about one third - of all Jewish refugees immigrated to other countries (e.g. Britain, France, USA, Canada, etc.). In virtually all cases, as Jews left their homes and their countries of birth, individual and communal properties were confiscated without compensation.

## **Were Jews Displaced from Arab Countries Legally Refugees**

The internationally accepted definition for the term “refugee” derives from the Statute of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that was established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 319 (IV) on December 3, 1949. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted on July 28, 1951, by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, which was convened under General Assembly Resolution 429 (V) of December 14, 1950, and entered into force on April 22, 1954. Article 1 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states the following:

*For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “refugee” shall apply to any person who: ... (2) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it....*

This internationally accepted definition of “refugees” applied to many Jews who fled Arab countries who clearly had, a “well-founded fear of being persecuted.”

The plight of Jewish refugees displaced from Jews in Arab countries was finally and formally recognized when, on two separate occasions, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) specifically declared that Jews fleeing from Arab countries were indeed refugees “who fall under the mandate” of the UNHCR. The first recognition pertained to Jews fleeing Egypt. In a 1957 statement to the UNREF Executive Committee, Mr. Auguste Lindt, UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated:

*“Another emergency problem is now arising - that of refugees from Egypt. There is no doubt in my mind that those refugees from Egypt who are not able, or not willing to avail themselves of the protection of the Government of their nationality fall under the mandate of my office.”<sup>48</sup>*

The second recognition by the UNHCR that Jews fleeing Arab countries were indeed refugees came in 11 years later in a letter released by the Office of the UN High Commissioner:

*“I refer to our recent discussion concerning Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries in consequence of recent events. I am now able to inform you that such persons may be considered prima facie within the mandate of this Office.”<sup>49</sup>*

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47 Gilbert, *Atlas of the Arab-Israeli conflict*. p. 48

48 Mr. Auguste Lindt, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Report of the UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session – Geneva 29 January to 4 February 1957.

49 Dr. E. Jahn, Office of the UN High Commissioner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Document No. 7/2/3/Libya, July 6, 1967.

The significance of this second ruling was twofold:

- 1) Unlike the first statement by the High Commissioner that merely referred to “*refugees from Egypt*” - the vast majority of whom were Jews - this letter referred specifically to “*Jews*”; and
- 2) Unlike the first determination that limited UNHCR involvement to “*refugees from Egypt*”, this statement constituted a ruling that Jews who had left *any* of the “*Middle Eastern and North African countries*” - namely: Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia – all fell within the mandate of the Office of the UNHCR.

## **Do These Former Jewish Refugees Still Possess Rights Today?**

The statute of limitations does not apply to the right of refugees to petition for rights and redress. This principle is enshrined in the “*Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*”, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly on December 16, 2005. It states, in part:

*6)... statutes of limitations shall not apply to gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law which constitute crimes under international law.*

The passage of time does not negate the right of refugees to petition for redress for the mass violations of their human rights as well as for the personal losses. If a refugee left behind assets, including bank accounts and pension plans, they do not lose their rights to these assets, notwithstanding how many years have passed. Therefore, former Jewish refugees have the legal right, under international law – even today - to petition for rights and redress.

## **United Nation and Middle East Refugees**

So, in fact, both Palestinians and Jews from Arab countries were recognized as *bona fide* refugees by the relevant UN Agencies.

The declaration that Palestinians were refugees was made by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and accepted by the international community. The designation by the UNHCR that Jews fleeing Arab countries were indeed refugees was less known and not publicized.

From the mid 1940's onward, the United Nations was faced with two refugee populations; both emerging from the same conflict; in comparable numbers, both recognized by the UN as *bona fide* refugees; with both still possessing rights today. Nonetheless, there are startling differences in the treatment, by the United Nations, of Arab refugees compared to Jewish refugees. For example:

With respect to Security Council resolutions, from 1946 – 2024 inclusive, there were a total of 338 Security Council resolutions on the Middle East in general, and 9 resolutions on Palestinian refugees in particular. During that same time period, there was not one Resolution dealing with Jewish refugees.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Urman, Dr. Stanley A., *The United Nations and Middle East Refugees: The Differing Treatment of Palestinians and Jews*; Rutgers University, 2010. Page 134. Analysis derived from United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), Statistics updated to 20.24 from UNISPAL on Nov. 2. 2024. <https://www.un.org/unispal/data-collection/>

UN Security Council Resolutions on Middle East Refugees			
	Resolutions on the Middle East	Resolutions on Palestinian Refugees	Resolutions on Jewish Refugees
<b>SECURITY COUNCIL</b>	338	9	0

With respect to Resolutions of the UN General Assembly,<sup>51</sup> from 1949 to 2024 inclusive, the General Assembly focused much greater attention on the issue of Palestinian refugees – over 21 % of its resolutions – more than on any other Middle East issue.

UN General Assembly Resolutions on Middle East Refugees			
	Resolutions on Middle East	Resolutions on Palestinian Refugees	Resolutions on Jewish Refugees
<b>GENERAL ASSEMBLY</b>	976	208	0

In contrast to Palestinian refugees, General Assembly resolutions never specifically addressed the issue of Jewish refugees, nor were there any resolutions on other topics that mentioned Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

However, there is one UN Resolution that does refer to Jewish refugees from Arab countries obliquely, while still not mentioning their plight directly.

### UN Security Council Resolution 242

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242, which laid down the principles for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Still considered the primary vehicle for resolving the Arab-Israel conflict, Resolution 242, stipulates that a comprehensive peace settlement should necessarily include “a just settlement of the refugee problem”. No distinction is made between Arab refugees and Jewish refugees. This was the intent of the Resolution’s drafters and sponsors.

On Thursday, November 16, 1967, the United Kingdom submitted their draft of Resolution 242 [S/8247] to the UN Security Council. The UK version of 242 was not exclusive and called for a just settlement of “the refugee problem.” Just four days after the United Kingdom submission, the Soviet Union’s U.N. delegation submitted their own draft Resolution 242 to the Security Council [S/8253] restricting the just settlement only to “Palestinian refugees” [Para. 3 (c)].

On Wednesday, November 22, 1967, the Security Council gathered for its 1382<sup>nd</sup> meeting in New York at which time, the United Kingdom’s draft of Resolution 242 was voted on and unanimously approved.<sup>52</sup> Immediately after the UK’s version of 242 was adopted, the Soviet delegation advised the Security Council, that “*it will not insist, at the present stage of our consideration of the situation in the Near East, on a vote on the draft Resolution submitted by the Soviet Union*” which would have limited 242 to

51 Ibid, Page 137. Statistics updated to 20.24 from UNISPAL on Nov. 2. 2024. <https://www.un.org/unispal/data-collection/>  
52 Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 67..

Palestinian refugees only.<sup>53</sup> Even so, Ambassador Kuznetsov of the Soviet Union later stated: "The Soviet Government would have preferred the Security Council to adopt the Soviet draft Resolution..."<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the attempt by the Soviets to restrict the "just settlement of the refugee problem" merely to "Palestinian refugees" was not successful. The international community adoption of the UK's inclusive version signaled a desire for 242 to seek a just solution for all – including Jewish refugees.

Moreover, Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, the US Ambassador to the United Nations who was seminally involved in drafting<sup>55</sup> the unanimously adopted Resolution, told The Chicago Tribune that the Soviet version of Resolution 242 was "not even-handed."<sup>56</sup>

He went further - pointing out that:

*"A notable omission in 242 is any reference to Palestinians, a Palestinian state on the West Bank or the PLO. The resolution addresses the objective of 'achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.' This language presumably refers both to Arab and Jewish refugees, for about an equal number of each abandoned their homes as a result of the several wars...."*<sup>57</sup>

So, it is clear that the intent of UN Resolution 242 requires a "just settlement of the refugee problem" that includes Jewish refugees, as equally as Palestinian refugees.

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Other international Agreements and entities have recognized the rights of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

### **Multilateral Initiatives**

- The Madrid Conference, which was first convened in October 1991, launched historic, direct negotiations between Israel and many of her Arab neighbors. In his opening remarks at a conference convened to launch the multilateral process held in Moscow in January 1992, then-U.S. Secretary of State James Baker made no distinction between Palestinian refugees and Jewish refugees in articulating the mandate of the Refugee Working Group as follows: *"The refugee group will consider practical ways of improving the lot of people throughout the region who have been displaced from their homes."*<sup>58</sup>

No distinction is made between Arab and Jewish refugees.

- The Road Map to Middle East Peace, advanced in 2002 by the Quartet (the U.N., EU, U.S., and Russia) also refers in Phase III to an *"agreed, just, fair and realistic solution to the refugee issue"*, language applicable both to Palestinian and Jewish refugees.

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53 Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 117

54 Security Council Official Records - November 22, 1967 - S/PV.1382 - Paragraph 117

55 Transcript, Arthur J. Goldberg Oral History Interview I, 3/23/83, by Ted Gittinger; Lyndon B. Johnson Library. March 23, 1983; Pg I-10

56 "Russia stalls UN Action on Middle East." The Chicago Tribune. November 21, 1967 pg. B9

57 Goldberg, Arthur J., "Resolution 242: After 20 Years." The Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace (U.S. Resolution 242: Origin, Meaning and Significance.) National Committee on American Foreign Policy; April 2002. (Originally written by Arthur J. Goldberg for the American Foreign Policy Interests on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary in 1988.)

58 Remarks by Secretary of State James A. Baker, III before the Organizational Meeting for Multilateral Negotiations on the Middle East, House of Unions, Moscow, January 28, 1992.

## **Bilateral Arab – Israeli Agreements**

Israeli agreements with her Arab neighbors allow for a case to be made that Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians have affirmed that a comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict will require a “just settlement” of the “refugee problem” that will include recognition of the rights and claims of all Middle East refugees:

### **Israel – Egypt Agreements 1978 and 1979**

The *Camp David Framework for Peace in the Middle East* of 1978 (the “Camp David Accords”) includes, in paragraph A(1)(f), a commitment by Egypt and Israel to “work with each other and with other interested parties to establish agreed procedures for a prompt, just and permanent resolution of the implementation of the refugee problem.”

Article 8 of the *Israel – Egypt Peace Treaty* of 1979 provides that the “Parties agree to establish a claims commission for the mutual settlement of all financial claims.” Those claims were to include those of former Jewish refugees displaced from Egypt.

### **Israel – Jordan Peace Treaty, 1994**

Article 8 of the *Israel – Jordan Peace Treaty*, entitled “Refugees and Displaced Persons” recognizes, in paragraph 1, “the massive human problems caused to both Parties by the conflict in the Middle East”. Reference to massive human problems in a broad manner suggests that the plight of all refugees of “the conflict in the Middle East” includes Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

### **Israeli Palestinian Agreements, 1993**

Almost every reference to the refugee issue in Israeli-Palestinian agreements, talks about “refugees”, without qualifying which refugee community is at issue, including the *Declaration of Principles of 13 September 1993* {Article V (3)}, and the *Interim Agreement of September 1995* {Articles XXXI (5)}, both of which refer to “refugees” as a subject for permanent status negotiations, without qualifications.

## **Recognition by Political Leaders of Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries**

Recognition by political leaders has enhanced the credibility of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and strengthened the legitimacy of their claims for rights and redress.

- U.S. President Jimmy Carter, after successfully brokering the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian - Israeli Peace Treaty, stated in a press conference on Oct. 27, 1977:

*“Palestinians have rights... obviously there are Jewish refugees...they have the same rights as others do.”*

- Former U.S. President Bill Clinton made the following assertion after the rights of Jews displaced from Arab countries were discussed at ‘Camp David II’ in July, 2000.<sup>59</sup>
- *There will have to be some sort of international fund set up for the refugees. There is, I think, some interest, interestingly enough, on both sides, in also having a fund which compensates the Israelis who were made refugees by the war, which occurred after the birth of the State of Israel. Israel is full of people, Jewish people,*



*who lived in predominantly Arab countries who came to Israel because they were made refugees in their own land.*

- Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin recognized Jewish refugees in a June 3rd, 2005, interview with the Canadian Jewish News which he later reaffirmed in a July 14, 2005, letter:

*A refugee is a refugee and that the situation of Jewish refugees from Arab lands must be recognized. All refugees deserve our consideration as they have lost both physical property and historical connections. I did not imply that the claims of Jewish refugees are less legitimate or merit less attention than those of Palestinian refugees.*

- British Prime Minister Theresa May spoke at a dinner in London marking the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017:

*We must recognize how difficult at times this journey has been – from the Jews forced out of their homes in Arab countries in 1948 to the suffering of Palestinians affected and dislodged by Israel's birth – both completely contrary to the intention of Balfour to safeguard all of these communities.*

## **Legislation Recognizing Rights for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries**

Unanimously adopted by the **United States** Congress on April 1, 2008, House Resolution 185 affirms that all victims of the Arab - Israeli conflict must be recognized and urges the President and US officials participating in any Middle East negotiations to ensure: *".... that any explicit reference to Palestinian refugees is matched by a similar explicit reference to Jewish and other refugees, as a matter of law and equity."*

On March 5, 2014, **Canada** formally recognized the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab lands. The Canadian Cabinet and Parliament accepted a committee recommendation that the federal government *officially recognize the experience of Jewish refugees who were displaced from states in the Middle East and North Africa after 1948.*"

The Knesset of **Israel** adopted two Bills, in 2008 and again in 2010, confirming rights - including compensation - for Jews displaced from Arab countries and that their rights must be addressed in any Middle East peace negotiations.

## **Jewish Refugees and Palestinian Refugees**

Emanating as a result of the 1948 conflict in the Middle East, Palestinians are considered as the world's longest-standing refugee population who continue to require significant international protection as well as material and financial assistance.

Their continuing needs, however, do not supersede the fact that, Palestinians were not the only Middle East refugees. During the twentieth century, two refugee populations emerged as a result of the conflict in the Middle East – Arabs as well as Jews.

There is no parallel history, geography, nor demography that could allow for any just comparison between the fate of Palestinian refugees and the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. Moreover, there is a fundamental distinction in the way the two crises were dealt with:

- The newly established state of Israel, under attack from six Arab armies, with scant and scarce resources, opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of Jewish

refugees displaced from Arab countries, granted them citizenship, and tried, under very difficult circumstances, to absorb them into Israeli society.

- By contrast, the Arab world, with the sole exception of Jordan, turned their backs on displaced Palestinian Arabs, sequestering them in refugee camps to be used as a political weapon against the state of Israel for the last seventy-five plus years.

So, while there is no symmetry between these two narratives, there is one important factor that applies to both: namely, the moral imperative to ensure that all *bona fide* refugees receive equal treatment under international law.

It would constitute an injustice, were the international community to recognize rights for one victim population – Arab Palestinians - without recognizing equal rights for other victims of the same Middle East conflict – Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

The legitimate call to secure rights and redress for Jewish refugees from Arab countries is just as in any Middle East peace proposals, the rights and claims of Palestinian refugees will certainly be addressed. What is important is to ensure that the rights and claims of hundreds of thousands of Jews displaced from Arab countries are similarly recognized and addressed.

As Jews were forced to leave their homes, communities and countries of birth, they left behind assets now estimated at over \$263 billion. But the true loss goes far beyond wealth. It was the erasure of a civilization, a rich tapestry of language, faith and identity that helped shape the very fabric of the region.

This publication is a sincere call to recognize the rights of Jewish refugees from Arab lands—on both moral and legal grounds—and to ensure their story is no longer forgotten. The Middle East conflict created two refugee populations –one Palestinian, one Jewish—and both deserve acknowledgment.

In an era of historic reconciliation, inspired by the spirit of the Abraham Accords, the time has come to face history with honesty and courage. Only through truth, justice, and mutual recognition can the peoples of the region move toward a future of dignity, healing, and lasting peace.

In the spirit of the Abraham Accords, at a time of historic breakthroughs in political and financial ties between Muslim countries and Israel/Jews, the time has come for nations to unite in promoting peace and reconciliation among all peoples in the Region.





## Chapter 2

### Scope and Methodology

The purpose of this project is to provide a detailed and comprehensive appraisal and valuation of property left behind by Jews displaced from Arab countries in the years following the founding of the State of Israel as well as post-Revolution Iran. The breadth and scale of the near-total displacement of Jews from eleven Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region ranks among the more significant cases of mass displacement in modern history. Moreover, this massive civilizational presence was uprooted over only the course of just more than half a century and transformed into an enormous flow of refugees headed to Israel, Europe, North and South America, Australia and other locations. This report seeks to document this historical injustice to produce a valuation of assets left behind by Jewish refugees in Arab countries and Iran.

#### **2.1. Project Scope**

The scope of this project encompasses the Jewish communities of the following ten Arab countries.

- Aden
- Algeria
- Egypt
- Iraq
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Morocco
- Syria
- Tunisia
- Yemen

Also included is Iran.

“This project will bring to light the best evidence available on the scope of lost Jewish individual and communal assets, apply an orderly methodology on the data collected, and arrive at an aggregate valuation of the assets that belonged to Jewish refugees and their communities.

The research, which was conducted over a period of over five years, was orchestrated by Sylvain Abitbol, Co-President of Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, working with economists, accountants, historians, academicians, Jewish community organizations and Mizrahi Jewish community leaders, utilizing testimonies submitted by Jews displaced from Arab countries.

This process included a thorough, comprehensive review of available documentation, the collection of testimonial data, an analysis of each Jewish community's place within their respective country, and a consideration of previous valuation attempts where such attempts have been made. The final result will be an aggregate valuation of Jewish individual and community assets from Arab countries and Iran.

## 2.2. Technical Premises

For the purposes of this report's valuation exercise, the assumption was that all Jewish assets that belonged to Jews in most of the countries under consideration were lost over the course of each Jewish community's displacement, unless otherwise noted.

As this valuation report represents a comprehensive effort to collect information on all types of assets that belonged to Jews and Jewish communities in countries whose subsequent governments can be said to be generally hostile to this particular demographic group and the State of Israel, the amount and quality of information available for such an effort was limited.

## 2.3. Loss Types Under Review

This project considers losses suffered by Jews as individual members of Jewish households, as well as assets that belonged to each Jewish community, respectively. These losses include urban and rural land, urban and rural immovable property, personal property and moveable assets, financial assets, employment losses, business losses, and communal losses.

**Table 3** - Loss Categories and Types - Valuation Methodology

Loss Category	Loss Type
Individual	<b>Urban and Rural Land</b>
	<b>Property – Immoveable assets:</b> Urban and rural buildings, houses
	<b>Property – moveable assets:</b> Household and personal items, furniture etc.
	<b>Financial assets:</b> Bank accounts and other securities
Business	<b>Total assets:</b> Overall business value, including real estate, inventory, and commercial holdings
Communal	<b>Communally-owned assets:</b> All land and property communally owned by the Jewish community, including synagogues, cemeteries, mikvahs etc.

The report does not attempt to account for non-pecuniary damages, such a pain and suffering, nor personal injury or death. However, in rare cases some of the claim forms filed

by displaced Jews and analyzed for the report did include monetary valuations for time spent incarcerated and other such losses associated with mistreatment and expulsion. In these instances, the valuations were included as part of individual losses calculated in the movable assets category.

## **2.4. Methodology: Principles and Rationale**

The methodology implemented in this report consists of both preliminary research and a subsequent valuation. The research phase relies on general research and analysis approaches which have been further adjusted to fit the circumstances of each country under consideration, as well as the amount and quality of information available.

Furthermore, a significant aspect of the research and valuation methodology consists of information collected and analyzed from first-hand testimonials given by Jews displaced from all countries under consideration throughout the relevant time period. This aspect of the research and valuation methodology will also be described in greater detail below.

### **Research Methodology**

The scope of this project requires an assessment of the present value of all individual and communal assets left behind by Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran. This task requires a particular methodology both for compiling all the relevant research materials available and for converting those materials into a professional, present-day valuation. Therefore, a research methodology was devised to collect all primary materials that are relevant and available to assessing the particular assets that belonged to Jews and their respective communities in the countries under consideration, as well as supplementary overarching country research, meant to fill the missing pieces in each country.

Considering that no full material accounting of all Jewish property was kept on record, a research methodology based solely on either one of the aforementioned approaches would be incomplete. There is neither a comprehensive, primary accounting of all Jewish property left behind by Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran, nor a reliable approach that is able to reflect the particular nuances of Jewish property-ownership in every country under consideration. In light of this complex scenario, it was decided the optimal research methodology would be to combine a number of approaches in order to paint the fullest picture of Jewish property left behind in each country.

Primary research included a preliminary audit of relevant archives and visits to those archives that were likely to contain relevant information. This research phase also included meetings with community leaders from all the relevant countries and

subject-matter experts in order to clarify any questions, to pursue further detail in regard to other primary documents uncovered, to ask for any primary materials these community leaders or experts might possess, and to ask for further guidance where necessary. Finally, use was made of a wide selection of secondary sources, including books, journal articles, reports, websites, heritage/cultural centers, etc. for any other relevant materials that helped produce as comprehensive and detailed an evidence-based assessment of Jewish property that belonged to Jews from the countries under consideration.

The next step of the research methodology seeks to supplement the assessment of Jewish property ownership, to the extent necessary, with a series of calculations

taking into consideration the size and relative position of the Jewish community in each country, as well as other factors as the situation demands. There are a number of reasons why the evidence-based picture emerging out of any country will be less than complete, including the fact that these events took place over 75 years ago, some of them in places where government administration was in flux and in places that are inaccessible today. Other rationales include differing colonial administrative practices, as explained below. From this research, reasonable conclusions are drawn from the available information.

## **Historical Note on Mandatory/Colonial Administrative Practices**

This valuation report ultimately rests on the best information and evidence currently available based on multiple sources, including the primary administrative materials collected by the colonial/mandatory powers that directly or indirectly ruled many of the countries under consideration. As such, the administrative habits practiced by these powers (i.e. Great Britain, France, and Italy) ought to be considered for the purpose of illuminating any differences in administrative methods that may have had consequences for the amount and type of information and data available.

As far as the research phase of this project is concerned, the administrative habits exercised by Great Britain during its Mandate over Palestine from 1920 through 1948 ought to be juxtaposed with the administrative habits exercised by French authorities in its role as colonial/mandatory/protectorate authority in several of the countries under consideration (Italy ruled as a colonial administrator in Libya for a shorter amount of time that is relevant to this project). The British administrative record in Mandatory Palestine is interesting in particular, as these administrative habits produced the type of detailed information against which this valuation report must contend as an historical comparison. The historical record on this matter shows a starkly different approach to gathering and recording materials amongst the British and the French that are of major significance to this project.

The historical motives and interests that characterized the British presence in Palestine at the time were such that British authorities had reason to keep meticulous records of developments in Palestine. British authorities were well aware of their commitments to both Jewish and Arab nationalist aspirations in Mandatory Palestine and were sensitive to a future contest for land between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. This reality coincided with Britain's larger geo-political interests in maintaining a stable, long-term presence in part of Mandatory Palestine. The situation required a well-run administration capable of producing and maintaining detailed administrative records for the sake of controlling the eventual clash between Jewish and Arab communities, and for securing the long-term British presence in Palestine. This attitude was reflected in various British policies, including attempts at land reform, tax reform, registration of private and state land, aerial documentation of land throughout the territory etc. All of these efforts combined produced a detailed accounting of the kind of material that can serve as primary evidence for this sort of valuation project. And indeed, British land records, such as the '1945 Village Statistics' document, served as the basis for various Palestinian valuation reports.

From further research, it is apparent that French administrative habits were different to those of the British, for various reasons. To begin with, French authorities had a different 'ideological' outlook to the British, and this difference animated their administrative habits. French authorities were more determined to disregard the sociological divisions present in the populations they ruled, in an attempt to have their vision of an egalitarian society benevolently ruled by Frenchmen reflected in their administrative records. To this end, French administrative records show less distinctions among the populations over which they ruled, a practice which, for example, makes distinguishing Jewish and Muslim land records, much more difficult.

More importantly, however, is the fact that the French had no overriding interest in maintaining detailed records of the Jewish communities that were part of the territories they controlled. Unlike the British, who were in part dedicated to promoting the collective interest of the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine and of safeguarding the rights of Mandatory Palestine's Arab residents as well, a situation which forced British authorities to act as a neutral referee of sorts, French records were mainly concerned with recording narrower French interests, to cement their control of lands and economic interests in the territories they ruled. These differences between British and French interests and mindsets were reflected in their different administrative practices. These, in turn, produced different levels of detail and scope regarding the type of documentation necessary for a valuation project of this sort.

## **Testimonials by Jews Displaced from Arab Countries and Iran**

In addition to research materials collected and reasonable assessments deduced, per the research methodology described above, information collected from first-hand

testimonials by Jews displaced from Arab countries and Iran was utilized and analyzed. Details of the testimonial collection campaign and analysis can be found in Section 2.6.

The Israeli Government, under the auspices of the registrar of foreign claims department in the Ministry of Finance, began collecting claims of property losses by Jews from Arab countries as early as 1949. By 1950, the registrar had collected claims totaling \$54,032,576, as detailed below:

**Table 4** - Value of Jewish Property Losses in Arab Countries (including debts owed by Palestinian refugees), Recorded by Israel Registrar of Foreign Claims, 1949-1950

Country	No. of Claimants	No. of Claims	Amount (currency)	Total Amount (\$ -1950)
<b>Libya</b>	203	203	£Lib. 629,636,340 £Egypt 19,135 FF 1,248,620	1,065,927
<b>Egypt</b>	153	153	£Egypt 619,473 £Pal. 17,901 £UK 45,287 Rupees 74,357 \$US 3,025 FF 107,500	1,977,856
<b>Iraq</b>	1,619	50	Iraqi dinars 709,955 £UK 3,525	1,997,184
<b>Yemen</b>	15	15	£Pal. 15,000 Riyals 167,024 Rupees 116,217	85,512
<b>Syria</b>	121	121	£Syr. 2,453,090 £Pal. 100,902 Gold pounds 4,608 Ottoman pounds 34	1,410,467
<b>Lebanon</b>	74	74	£Leb. 289,946 £Pal. 90,417 £Syr. 2,459 £UK 1,667 \$US 253	390,981
<b>Jordan</b>	38	38	£Pal. 3,509,180 £Syr. 1,950	9,826,590
<b>West Bank</b>	1,414	1,284	£Pal. 3,094,294	36,664,023
<b>Palestinian refugees*</b>	111	111	£Pal. 219,015 £UK 998	616,036
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,748</b>	<b>2,049</b>	-	<b>54,032,576</b>

\* Debts owed to Jews by Palestinian refugees

Source: ISA (130) 1848/hts/9, "Overall Summary of the Work of the Foreign Claims Registration Office as of December 31, 1950."



Subsequently, efforts to document property losses suffered by Jews displaced from Arab countries resumed in the aftermath of new waves of mass displacement. Notably, an effort to document property losses suffered by Egyptian Jews was initiated by the Organization of Victims of anti-Jewish Persecution in Egypt (Association des ex-Victimes des Persécutions Anti-Juives en Egypte) in the wake of the expulsion of Egyptian Jews after the Suez Crisis in 1956. Similarly, following a renewed wave of mass displacement of Jews from Arab countries after the 1967 war, the Israeli Government signed Government Decision number 34 on September 28, 1969, directing the renewed efforts by the Department for the Rights of Jews from Arab Countries, under the auspices of the Head of Legal Assistance at the Ministry of Justice, to register the claims of lost property by Jews displaced from Arab countries (this particular effort concentrated on Jewish property losses in four Arab countries: Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Yemen).

This responsibility was renewed and expanded both in March 2002, in Government Decision number 1544 relating to the "Registration of claims of Jews from Arab Countries" (expanding the registration efforts to include all Jews displaced from all relevant Arab countries and Iran), as well as on December 28, 2003 in Government Decision 1250 pertaining to the "Rights of Jews from Arab Lands". Following this renewed emphasis on the matter, testimonial forms were made available for Jews displaced from Arab countries and Iran to document their stories and register any lost property. Later on, in 2009, the responsibility for these efforts was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Senior Citizens, which was subsequently renamed the Ministry for Social Equality.<sup>60</sup>

## Methodological Principles Guiding the Report Preparation

As mentioned above, this valuation report is based on information that is decades old. In addition, the historical circumstances are such that the existing evidence often provides only an incomplete assessment of the property that used to belong to Jews and the Jewish communities in the countries under consideration. That said, the methodological principles that guide the analysis are as follows:

1. **Transparency:** The facts, that the events in question took place so long ago, the difficulty with accessing potentially-useful sources of information, the lack of data and/or the existence of contradictory information in some cases – tend to lend themselves to the necessity to delineate what is known and what cannot be known; what sources were available and which were not, and for the report to be transparent in all of its limitations, assumptions and consequent calculations.
2. **Professionalism and practicality:** In undertaking the project, we were guided by high professional standards at every step, including the research and valuation efforts.
3. **Simplicity and consistency:** This project comprises eleven separate country reports. The sources of information, the cooperation of community leaders, the administrative legacies in each country – all of these presented a complex informational web that had to be standardized for the purposes of this project. Throughout, we strove for consistency in style, structure, scope, and methodology.

4. **Multidisciplinary:** The particular circumstances of this project demand a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical research, knowledge of the Jewish community in several countries over a lengthy timespan, familiarity with political, social, and economic trends at the time, as well as professional financial valuation expertise and strategic consulting insights that contributed to the problem-solving and analysis aspects of this project. We were guided by the need to fuse these disciplines in a coherent and direct manner.
5. **Trustworthiness:** We have referenced and documented all relevant sources of information and can fully stand behind the assumptions, methodological judgments, and final products in this project.

## **2.5. Level of Evidence**

As mentioned above, this project entails an inquiry into the value of assets owned by Jews and the Jewish communities in eleven different countries, over half a century ago. As such, a comprehensive and detailed accounting of all manner of assets is virtually impossible. The testimonials cannot purport to serve as a representative sample of Jews leaving all Arab countries; they do, nonetheless, provide informative and useful data in portraying an uprooted Jewish community and its lost wealth.

In addition to the testimonials, data was derived from a variety of sources including archives, books and interviews. Research was based on the best documentation available, and this evidence was supplemented with the most appropriate and reasonable analysis that could be made on the basis of the available evidence.

Archives in numerous countries were visited and research was conducted seeking relevant files and data:

**Israel:** Israel State Archives (ISA), Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Israeli Ministry of Justice archives, Israeli Ministry of Social Equality archives, Yad Ben Zvi Institute, Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot, World Jewish Congress, Israel Archives

**Canada:** Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa

**France:** Alliance Israelite Universelle, Paris, Archives Nationale – France, Paris Branch, Pierrefitte Branch, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve

**Switzerland:** National Archives, Bern, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva

**UK:** London Metropolitan Archives, National Archives of the U.K.

**USA:** American Jewish Committee, New York, Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) – New York, National Archives & Records, College Park, Maryland, World Jewish Archives, New York

In addition, Jewish community leaders and academic experts from numerous countries were consulted.

## **2.6. Methodology for the gathering, processing, and analysis of testimonials**

In order to organize and standardize the information derived from over 12,000 testimonials processed, a number of procedures were followed.

The testimonial methodology entailed filling out the following information: relevant country, year of displacement, family size, city of origin, year in which the testimonial was given, information relating to lost assets and their value (organized according to asset category: real estate, land, moveable assets, and business losses) and any other relevant information gleaned from narrative accounts written in individual testimonials.

An array of factors influenced the precision of these types of testimonials, and a measure of bias is usually an inseparable aspect of such methodologies. These factors include the following:

1. In many cases, 50 years or more had passed between the events and sums in questions and the recording of testimony/lost property.
2. A lack of representation of the impact of inflationary effects and other macro - economic conditions that might have influenced the real value of property under consideration
3. The age of respondents at the time the testimony was collected (many were children at the time of displacement and only documented their testimony at a much older age).
4. A lack of proper supervision during the documentation of testimony – in some cases, dependents filled out the forms for the relevant respondents.

The following details the testimonial methodology for use in the project, starting with the gathering of testimonials through to their analysis and the adjusted calculation of their values by class group.

The testimonial claims forms for this project were received from three sources:

- Scanned copies of testimonials collected by the Israeli government and various NGOs.
- Handwritten testimonials from the Israeli Ministry of Social Equality's *"And you said to your son"* project.
- Handwritten testimonials from the Israeli Ministry of Justice and Israel State Archives.

The process of analyzing the testimonials comprised three stages:

- Reception and cataloguing of testimonials.
- Manual entry of all testimonials deemed relevant, i.e. containing financial information, into a country-specific Excel spreadsheet for the purpose of data calculation.
- Testimonials underwent full processing, from reception to final analysis as laid out below.



### Standard Testimonial Methodology

1. The testimonial documents came in different versions and included close to 10 different form types.
2. All versions of the testimonials were useful for the purposes of this project, with two exceptions:
  - a. Some claimants were not instructed to detail their assets in a number of the categories crucial to this project, resulting in a failure to report full holdings.
  - b. Some claimants were asked to report the value of their assets in a convoluted manner, which made it impossible to extract reliable data.
3. The following chart indicates the testimonials processed and entered:

Country	Testimonials Processed from All Sources	Testimonials Entered for Calculation
Aden	2	0
Algeria	57	22
Egypt	5,563	676
Iran	223	92
Iraq	5,503	1903
Lebanon	96	0
Libya	233	129
Morocco	328	112
Syria	229	102
Yemen	85	20
Tunisia	175	76
<b>TOTALS</b>	12,494	3,132

## Stage 1 - Reception and Cataloguing of Testimonials

All testimonials were classified as “Processed” or “Unprocessed” and catalogued into the categories detailed below.

### Processed

All processed testimonials were classified and filed as follows:

**Entered:** Testimonials which were entered into the spreadsheet for the relevant country. These testimonials were analyzed in order to calculate the average holdings of each class group.

**Not Entered:** Testimonials which were not entered into the spreadsheet for the relevant country for the following reasons:

- a. Testimonials included information on movable assets alone
- b. Duplicate versions of testimonial forms already processed
- c. Testimonials included communal property alone and as a result, were irrelevant to the calculation of individual holdings but were used elsewhere to calculate communal losses
- d. Testimonials that were not relevant to this project were categorized as “NR”. Testimonials were entered into this category if they met one or more of the following criteria:
  - The form was empty or illegible
  - The form did not include information regarding assets in the Movables, Business or Real Estate categories
  - There was no currency type was listed (for example: “Home worth 1,500”)
  - The information contained in the form did not include monetary values (e.g., “We were quite wealthy”)
  - The phrasing of the form itself did not allow for the extraction of reliable data (e.g., “Were it in Israel today, what would be the value in shekels of the property left behind?”)

## Stage 2 – Entering Testimonial Data

Testimonials were entered into a country-specific Excel spreadsheet created in tandem with the structure of the testimonial forms and the needs of the project, according to the following parameters:

- a. Personal Information
- a. Real Estate
- b. Business
- c. Movables
- d. Rural Land

Claimants were instructed to list the value of their assets in the year in which the assets were abandoned. Therefore, as a rule, values were entered into the spreadsheet according to the currency used in the testimonial and the value of that currency in the year in which the claimant left their country of origin.

Exceptional to this are any testimonials for which the analyst was able to conclude that the values were not listed in regard to the year in which the claimant left their country of origin. This was the case in the following circumstances:

- a. The form itself instructed claimants to report values for a particular year, regardless of when they left their country of origin (for example: one version of the forms instructed all claimants to list the value of their assets as of 1949).
- b. The claimant listed values in a currency which was not in circulation at the time in which they left their country of origin (for example: a testimonial which reports values in NIS or EUR, despite the fact that the claimant left their country of origin in 1952).
- c. The claimant explicitly wrote that the values were reported in regard to a different year.
- d. In the analyst's judgement, it is not reasonable for the values listed to reflect the year in which the claimant was displaced.
- e. Any other circumstance in which the analyst concluded that a year other than the year of displacement should be used.

### **Stage 3 – Analysis of Testimonial Data**

To effectively and efficiently analyze the testimonial data, the following procedures were followed:

Historical exchange rates for the testimonial currencies were identified in the following sources:

- a. IMF Tables: "Exchange Rates Selected Indicators." IMF data. Accessed August 28, 2024. <https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61545850>
- b. IFS – IMF 1950: International Financial Statistics: International Financial Statistics, December 1950. Washington, D.C: International Monetary Fund, 1950, p. 34 & 54
- c. Pacific Exchange Rates: Antweiler, Werner. "Foreign Currency Units per 1 U.S Dollar, 1948-2015." PACIFIC Exchange Rate Service, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150512095429/http://fx.sauder.ubc.ca/etc/USDpages.pdf>.

It should be noted that the world exchange rate mechanism from 1944 until 1973 was operated under the auspices of the Bretton Wood agreement. Under this agreement, exchange rates were determined by pegging the countries rates to the gold standard and movements between major currencies were comparatively rare. Changes had to be formally implemented only after an application to the IMF/World bank. There were no constant hourly or daily changes as there are today – indeed rates could remain unchanged for years on end.



Because different testimonials were submitted at different times, individuals left their country of origin at different times, and values were listed using different currencies, a “base year” was identified and defined as the year in which the testimonial loss values are stated. A “valuation start year” was also identified, based on the circumstances governing each country. In each asset category, the relevant valuation start year is used as a benchmark. Testimonial data for each country was then converted to the valuation start year in two steps.

- a. Base year values for each loss category in the testimonial files were converted from the testimonial currency to USD in the base year using the exchange rate data (for example, real estate in Syria with a base year value of 20,000 SL in 1953 was converted to a value of 9,132 USD in 1953).
- b. The base year value in USD was then converted to the country’s “valuation start year” in USD using the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Inflation Calculator (Inflation Calculator | Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis ([minneapolisfed.org](https://minneapolisfed.org))) (for example, real estate in Syria with a converted value of 9,132 USD in 1953 was converted to a value of 7,617 USD in 1947, as this was the base year for valuation for Syria).

It should be noted that testimonials given in NIS were not used due to the assumed difficulty in recalling and converting values in these cases which would call into question their reliability.

Relevant population data and socioeconomic breakdowns of classes for each country were determined through primary and secondary research materials. Testimonial data was then divided into social classes based on the percent of population per socioeconomic breakdown, using the available data from relevant research materials. Social classes were consolidated into three groups:

- d. Wealthy and Upper Middle
- e. Middle
- f. Lower Middle and Poor

The summary of each country-specific testimonial data yielded a series of values per socioeconomic class. The median of the data in each social class was then calculated and multiplied by the number of households per class to determine the total asset value per class.

Due to the small number of testimonials in several of the categories, the following adjustments were made:

- a. The median calculation for each group includes the highest value of the class immediately below. For example: the range for the wealthy and upper middle class begins at the highest value of the middle class and extends to the highest value in the wealthy and upper-middle class group, thus creating a continuous range for calculations
- b. In cases where there were less than 10 testimonials in total in a given loss category, the median of all of the data in the category was used rather than dividing the data into the three classes above. The median was multiplied by the total number of households to arrive at a total loss value for the category.

## **2.7. Methodology for present day valuation**

The above steps are meant to document Jewish refugees' losses, which include the assets' market value at the relevant benchmark year (or a substitute value based on the best evidence available), plus interest. The final figures should reflect the actualized, present-day valuation of all assets under consideration, reflected in 2024 US dollars (USDs).

Due to the high number of countries under consideration, a preference emerged for a single standard with which to measure all principal amounts. In addition, the fact that the testimonial data had been converted into USDs for base year values and valuation start year values supports the decision to rely on a rate of interest measured in USDs. The choices available are therefore between relying on either nominal or real inflation rates, the US consumer price index inflation rate, or some other relatively risk-free rate, in order to actualize the valuation principles in the most substantive and appropriate manner possible. Judgement was that the latter inflation rates are too reliant on particular economic trends in the United States and are not the best determinants of an interest rate that fully actualizes the value of the assets under consideration. And while there is no internationally recognized, absolutely risk-free rate, it was decided to use the 10-year US Treasury Yield Rate.

Furthermore, it was resolved that a compound interest formula is the most appropriate formula for calculating actualized value plus interest, instead of simple interest, in order to show the present market value of the assets under consideration in addition to compounded interest rates on those assets.  $FV = PV (1+i/n)^{nt}$ . This formula takes into account both inflationary and interest on value effects and thus reflects the most substantial actualized value of the original assets. The compound interest formula was applied on a yearly compounding basis, ending on December 31, 2024.

## 2.8. Methodology for the remaining 7 country reports

Four reports have been published under this project scope, finding **\$166,239,520,930** of lost assets across Egypt, Syria, Iran and Iraq. This project also encompasses seven additional countries:

- Aden
- Algeria
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Morocco
- Tunisia
- Yemen

However, the documentation available for review of these seven countries was not on par with the data collected for the first four. Despite a thorough review of historical sources, discussions with subject-matter experts, and community leaders, as described above, the collection of available testimonial data was insufficient to be relied upon to conclude on the financial value of the Jews' lost assets. Therefore, to estimate financial losses, an updated valuation methodology was used. We note that the resulting conclusions are provided for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered as exact figures.

Due to the lack of reliable testimonial and historical data for the seven remaining reports, it was determined that the analysis for Egypt, Syria, and Iraq would be used for illustrative purposes. Iran was left out of this analysis due to its valuation start year being significantly different than the other three countries (1979). Iran also had very different circumstances in comparison to the other countries reviewed at the time. It was reasoned that the Jewish population's circumstances across the ten countries were similar in many ways, and therefore the lost assets found, at 1948 values, in the first three countries was used to determine the value of lost property per person, as shown in the table below.

**Table 5 - Range of Lost Assets for Egypt, Iraq, & Syria (\$, 1948)**

Range of Lost Assets for Egypt, Iraq, & Syria (\$, 1948)			
	Egypt	Iraq	Syria <sup>61</sup>
Total Value (\$, 1948)	1,147,100,811	656,611,052	215,562,196
Population <sup>62</sup>	75,000	135,000	30,000
<b>(\$) Value per person</b>	15,295	4,864	7,185

This determined the range of lost assets across Arab countries: Jews lost an estimated **\$4,864 to \$15,295** per person. This range was then applied to the population of each remaining country and a mid-point was calculated, per the table below.

<sup>61</sup> Syria's valuation start year is 1947, therefore it was decided to convert Syria's total assets as of 1947 to 1948 values to properly calculate a range across the three countries (Egypt, Iraq, and Syria). The reported total assets for Syria as of 1947 (\$ 200,167,458) were converted to the 1948 USD value (\$ 215,562,196) using the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis' Inflation Calculator (<https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator>).

<sup>62</sup> All population figures are based on Roumani population chart, for the year 1948.

**Table 6** - Range of Lost Assets for Remaining Seven Countries (\$, 1948)

Range of Lost Assets for Seven Countries (\$, 1948)							
	Aden	Algeria	Lebanon <sup>63</sup>	Libya	Tunisia	Yemen	Morocco <sup>64</sup>
Jewish Population	8,000	140,000	6,000	38,000	105,000	55,000	265,000
Estimated - Low Range	38,910,285	680,929,980	29,182,713	184,823,852	510,697,485	267,508,206	30,467,470
Estimated - High Range	122,357,420	2,141,254,847	91,768,065	581,197,744	1,605,941,135	841,207,261	336,863,513
<b>Estimated - Mid Point</b>	<b>80,633,852</b>	<b>1,411,092,414</b>	<b>60,475,389</b>	<b>383,010,798</b>	<b>1,058,319,310</b>	<b>554,357,734</b>	<b>183,665,491</b>

We note that though this methodology is intended for informative and illustrative purposes only, it is still lacking in that it is based on values found in other countries and is not adjusted to reflect the exact situation of each jurisdiction. Similar to other attempts to value lost assets following wars and other tragedies,<sup>65</sup> this project was predicated on the availability of contemporaneous evidence, historical sources, and testimonial data. The inability to rely on the latter opens the door for inaccuracy, overstatement, and falls below the standard set for this project. Additionally, this method does not consider country-specific considerations such as GDP, the Jews' socio-economic status and their relative wealth as compared to non-Jews, and their ability to take their assets with them when leaving the countries. It also does not reflect macro-economic conditions that might have impacted the value of the property in question.

In the absence of the "best evidence" to reach accurate and verifiable country-specific values, other valuation exercises have applied various levels of discount factors to manage the risk of overstatement created by the methodologies' shortcomings. For example, the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC) notes:

*"For instance, in the case of estimated cost of repair work not yet completed, in the absence of documents such as a quotation or description of damage, a 50 per cent discount factor was applied to the amount claimed. On the other hand, when claimants filed optional documents that had not been required upfront but which could serve to substantiate the claim, this would result in an add back to the adjusted value. The total of all deductions and add backs would result in an assessment score expressed as a percentage and applied to the adjusted value. The assessment score could not be higher than 100 per cent or lower than 0 per cent."*<sup>66</sup>

63 All population figures are based on Roumani population chart, for the year 1948. However, we note Lebanon's population is based on estimates for 1958, as the base year valuation date for the country is 1967, and 1958 is the last population estimate available through Roumani that predates 1967.

64 As Morocco had no state-directed confiscation of Jewish-owned assets, and many Jews were able to divest themselves of their assets and/or bring them out of the country, it was deemed inappropriate to try and project wholesale losses of assets. Therefore, a range based on communal assets of the first three reports was used for Morocco instead.

65 As outlined in IOM's "Property Restitution and Compensation: Practices and Experiences of Claims Programmes" (2008) publication.

66 2008. "Property Restitution and Compensation: Practices and Experiences of Claims Programmes." International Organization for Migration.

To accommodate the issues listed above, it was determined that a discount factor should be applied to the range of values for each of the seven countries. A discount factor of 50% was determined based on precedent discounts and the following:

- To migrate for the risk of overstatement if any evidence fell sort of standards
- To migrate risks due to limited testimonial data
- To account for some countries, such as Morocco, where the Jewish population was able to divest their assets and/or bring them out of the country, limiting total property losses
- To account for other countries, such as Yemen, where the population was mostly rural and poor, and there was a lack of public synagogues
- To account for other countries, such as Lebanon, where some of the Jewish population was able to leave and liquidate their assets in a relatively orderly fashion prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975
- To account for other countries, such as Algeria, where some of the Jewish population received compensation from the French government

The discount factor of 50% was applied across the range of values for each of the seven countries, as shown in the table below. This led to a mid-point of **\$1,865,777,494** across all seven countries.

**Table 7** - Range of Lost Assets for Remaining Seven Countries after discount (\$, 1948)

	Aden	Algeria	Lebanon	Libya	Tunisia	Yemen	Morocco <sup>67</sup>
Discount	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Estimated – Mid-Point (with Discount)	40,316,926	705,546,207	30,237,695	191,505,399	529,159,655	277,178,867	91,832,746

Finally, using the previously discussed present valuation methodology, each of the seven countries estimated mid-point with discount were brought forward to a present-day value as of December 31, 2024. This led to a total present value of **\$96,556,730,734** across all seven countries. See the tables below:

<sup>67</sup> It is noted that Morocco's range is based on communal assets only, as many Moroccan Jews were able to divest themselves of their assets and/or bring them out of the country, therefore communal assets were most likely the largest loss category.

**Table 8** – Range of lost assets & estimated present values for remaining Seven Countries (\$, 1948)

	Estimated Mid-Point with 50% Discount (\$, 1948)	Estimated Present Value (\$, 2024) <sup>68</sup>
Aden	40,316,926	2,102,856,725
Algeria	705,546,207	36,799,992,688
Lebanon <sup>69</sup>	30,237,695	818,350,236
Libya	191,505,399	9,988,569,444
Morocco <sup>70</sup>	91,832,746	4,789,827,140
Tunisia	529,159,655	27,599,994,516
Yemen	277,178,867	14,457,139,985
<b>Total of Remaining Country Reports</b>	<b>1,865,777,495</b>	<b>96,556,730,734</b>

Range of Lost Assets for Seven Countries (\$, 1948)							
	Aden	Algeria	Lebanon <sup>71</sup>	Libya	Tunisia	Yemen	Morocco <sup>72</sup>
Population	8,000	140,000	6,000	38,000	105,000	55,000	265,000
Estimated – Low Range	38,910,285	680,929,980	29,182,713	184,823,852	510,697,485	267,508,206	30,467,470
Estimated – High Range	122,357,420	2,141,254,847	91,768,065	581,197,744	1,605,941,135	841,207,261	336,863,513
Estimated – Mid-Point	80,633,852	1,411,092,414	60,475,389	383,010,798	1,058,319,310	554,357,734	183,665,491
Discount	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Estimated – Mid-Point (with Discount)	40,316,926	705,546,207	30,237,695	191,505,399	529,159,655	277,178,867	91,832,746
Estimated Present Value (\$, 2024) <sup>73</sup>	2,102,856,725	36,799,992,688	818,350,236	9,988,569,444	27,599,994,516	14,457,139,985	4,789,827,140

68 Rates from 2024 to 1954 are from "Interest Rates: Long-Term Government Bond Yields: 10-Year." Federal Reserve Economic Data. 2024 rate represents average interest rate through December 31, 2024 based on available data. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=IRLTLT01USQ156N>; Rates from 1954 to 1948 are from "An Update of Data shown in Chapter 26 of Market Volatility." R. Shiller, Princeton 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.econ.yale.edu/~shiller/data.htm>. R. Shiller notes that pre-1953 rates are government bond yields from Sidney Homer A History of Interest Rates

69 All population figures are based on Roumani population chart, for the year 1948. However, we note Lebanon's population is based on estimates for 1958, as the base year valuation date for the country is 1967, and 1958 is the last population estimate available through Roumani that predates 1967. We also note that the estimated present value is based on the start year of 1967 for Lebanon, while all other countries are based on 1948

70 It is noted that Morocco's range is based on communal assets only, as many Moroccan Jews were able to divest themselves of their assets and/or bring them out of the country, therefore communal assets were most likely the largest loss category.

71 We note Lebanon's population is based on estimates for 1958, as the base year valuation date for the country is 1967, and 1958 is the last population estimate available through Roumani that predates 1967. We also note that the estimated present value is based on the start year of 1967 for Lebanon, while all other countries are based on 1948.

72 As Morocco had no state-directed confiscation of Jewish-owned assets, and many Jews were able to divest themselves of their assets and/or bring them out of the country, it was deemed inappropriate to try and project wholesale losses of assets. Therefore, a range based on communal assets of the first four reports was used for Morocco instead.

73 Rates from 2024 to 1954 are from "Interest Rates: Long-Term Government Bond Yields: 10-Year." Federal Reserve Economic Data. 2024 rate represents average interest rate through December 31, 2024 based on available data. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=IRLTLT01USQ156N>; Rates from 1954 to 1948 are from "An Update of Data shown in Chapter 26 of Market Volatility." R. Shiller, Princeton 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.econ.yale.edu/~shiller/data.htm>. R. Shiller notes that pre-1953 rates are government bond yields from Sidney Homer A History of Interest Rates.



Additional historical context was provided across all loss types under review for each of the seven countries, however additional valuation details were not provided in these sections.

## Grand Summary Chart

Lost Assets Across All Countries (\$)		
Country	Base Year Value (\$, 1948) <sup>1</sup>	Estimated Present Value (\$, 2024)
<b>Egypt</b>	1,147,100,811	59,816,315,234
<b>Iran<sup>2</sup></b>	5,879,126,747	61,491,251,179
<b>Iraq</b>	656,611,052	34,239,408,861
<b>Syria<sup>3</sup></b>	200,167,458	10,692,545,656
<b>Subtotal of Comprehensive Reports</b>	<b>7,883,006,068</b>	<b>166,239,520,930</b>
<b>Aden</b>	40,316,926	2,102,856,725
<b>Algeria</b>	705,546,207	36,799,992,688
<b>Lebanon<sup>4</sup></b>	30,237,695	818,350,236
<b>Libya</b>	191,505,399	9,988,569,444
<b>Morocco</b>	91,832,746	4,789,827,140
<b>Tunisia</b>	529,159,655	27,599,994,516
<b>Yemen</b>	277,178,867	14,457,139,985
<b>Subtotal of Remaining Country Reports</b>	<b>1,865,777,495</b>	<b>96,556,730,734</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>9,748,783,563</b>	<b>262,796,251,664</b>

<sup>1</sup> All country base years are for 1948, except for Iran (1979), Syria (1947), and Lebanon (1967). Note for the remaining seven countries (Aden, Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen) the value is based on an estimated mid-point with discount, based on updated methodology discussed in detail within chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Note Iran's Base Year is 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Note Syria's Base Year is 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Note Lebanon's Base Year is 1967.



## Chapter 3

### Yemen Historical Section

#### Origins of the Community

Jewish presence in the Arabian Peninsula dates back several centuries before the rise of Islam. The biblical account of King Solomon's meeting with the Queen of Sheba, often associated with the region of Yemen<sup>74</sup>, hints at early connections between the Israelite kingdom and the Arab kingdoms<sup>75</sup>.

Since the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king (ruled 605-562 BC), there was a thriving trade network along the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula (Hejaz), involving merchants—many of whom were Jewish—trading primarily in perfumes and spices. This movement increased during the Persian period (6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), and even before the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jewish communities had begun to settle in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>76</sup>.

During the Hellenistic period (4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC), as Jewish communities in the Land of Israel grew crowded, Jews established communities in regions such as Damascus, Antioch, Asia Minor, and the Arabian Peninsula. Additional waves of Jewish immigrants arrived after the destruction of the Second Temple and the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt against the Roman Empire in 135 AD. It is believed that Jews migrated to Yemen from the northern regions of the Arabian Peninsula during this time<sup>77</sup>.

Clear historical evidence of Jewish settlement in Yemen dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, as discovered in the graves of Jews during the excavations at Beit She'arim in Israel. Jews living in the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula requested that their remains be buried in the Holy Land<sup>78</sup>. This suggests that Jewish settlement in Yemen likely began in the first or second century AD<sup>79</sup>.

Despite their cultural assimilation into Arab society, Jews were recognized as a distinct group with unique customs. Pre-Islamic Arab poets often mentioned these customs, such as the observance of the Sabbath. Consequently, many religious ideas and moral teachings of Judaism were known to the pagan Arabs before the advent of Islam. The presence of Jewish communities in the peninsula and early interactions with Islam left a significant imprint on the development of the new religion<sup>80</sup>.

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74 Tobi, Yosef. Queen of Sheba. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 16, MacmillanReferenceUSA, 2007, p. 765. *GaleeBooks*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587516220/GVRL?u=bengurion&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=ffa945fd. Accessed 12 August 2024.

75 Araqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. Introduction. In Haim Saadoun (ed.), *Yemen* (Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), p. 17. [Hebrew]

76 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

77 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

78 Tobi, Yosef. *The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their history and culture* (Brill, 1999), p. 3.

79 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

80 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the royal house of the Himyarite Kingdom in Yemen had converted to Judaism<sup>81</sup>. The most famous of the Himyarite kings was the last, Yosef Dhu Nuwas (known in Himyarite inscriptions as Yosef Asar), who corresponded with the Yeshiva of Tiberias, an important Jewish center in the Land of Israel<sup>82</sup>. Yosef Dhu Nuwas ruled between 517 and 525 until his kingdom fell to Abyssinian invaders<sup>83</sup>.

The nature of Himyarite Judaism remains a subject of scholarly debate. It is unclear whether the conversion to Judaism was widespread among the population or primarily confined to the royal family and the elite. In any case, in 630 AD, Yemen fell under Muslim rule, marking the beginning of a new era in its history and the history of the Jews in the region<sup>84</sup>.

## Under Muslim Rule

The legal and social status of Jews in Yemen was primarily shaped by Sharia law, which governed the treatment of religious minorities within Dar al-Islam (the Islamic world). Jews were designated as *dhimmis*, or "protected people," who were granted religious freedom and protection of their personal safety and property in exchange for acknowledging the political and social supremacy of Muslims<sup>85</sup>.

This acknowledgment was manifested in two main obligations: payment of the *jizya* tax (a head tax), and compliance with various discriminatory regulations. In Yemen, where Sharia was the foundation of the state's constitution, these discriminatory regulations were enforced as binding state law. This legal framework in Yemen was notably strict compared to other parts of the Muslim world, where Western influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries led to a reduction and eventual abolition of many discriminatory practices<sup>86</sup>.

The *jizya* tax held symbolic importance, emphasizing the subordinate status of the Jewish *dhimmis*, more than serving as a significant source of revenue. The collection of the tax was overseen by Jewish community leaders. In the capital, this leader was known as the Head of the Jews (*Ra'is al-Yahud*), and during the Ottoman period, he was known as the Chief Sage (*Hakham Bashi*). In rural communities, payment of the *jizya* sometimes took the form of labor on public projects, such as constructing access roads or building water reservoirs<sup>87</sup>.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, 'Ali ibn Mahdi, a radical Muslim ruler, seized control of Yemen. His dynasty aimed not only to impose a strict interpretation of Islam but also to force the Jews to convert. This context led to Maimonides' famous "Epistle to Yemen" (*Iggeret Teman*), where the great medieval philosopher wrote: "This man arose in the land of Yemen and decreed destruction upon Israel, compelling all the territories under his

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81 Robin, Christian Julien. The Judaism of the ancient kingdom of Ḥimyar in Arabia: A discreet conversion. In Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (eds.), *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish texts and societies between 400 and 1000 CE* (University of Cambridge, 2021), pp. 165-270.

82 Kjær, Sigrid Krogh. *Monotheism, kingship, and religious transformation in late antique Yemen: the rise and fall of Joseph dhu Nuwas*. PhD Dissertation. University of Texas, 2019.

83 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

84 Araqi Klorman, 2002, p. 17.

85 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 21-24.

86 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 21-24.

87 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 21-24.

control to abandon their religion and creed."<sup>88</sup> Maimonides went on to write:

*"God had hurled us into the midst of this people, the Arabs, who have persecuted us severely and passed baneful and discriminatory legislation against us... Never did a nation molest, degrade, debase, and hate us as much as they."*<sup>89</sup>

The discriminatory regulations against Jews, part of the Muslim Pact of Omar, were incorporated into the legal system in Yemen in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These regulations dictated that Jews must distinguish their clothing from that of Muslims, forbidding them from wearing colorful garments, carrying weapons, or riding horses. Jews were permitted to ride other animals, but only in a demeaning manner, with both legs on one side of the animal. In central Yemen, Jews encountering a Muslim were required to dismount and seek permission to continue their journey. Additionally, Jews were prohibited from living in houses taller than those of Muslims. The Pact of Omar was rigorously enforced in areas under the direct control of the Yemeni leader (the *Imam*), including the capital Sana'a and major cities where representatives of the central government resided<sup>90</sup>.

## **The expulsion of mawza' and additional discriminatory measures**

In 1667, Imam al-Mutawakkil Isma'il decided to revoke the rights of the Jews, stripping them of their status as a protected religious minority. Before his death, he instructed his successor, al-Mu'ayyad Ahmad (1676-1680), to either force the Jews to convert to Islam or expel them from the country. In 1679, this directive was carried out, leading to the confiscation of Jewish property and the destruction of synagogues<sup>91</sup>.

However, the intervention of certain Muslim notables allowed the Jews to remain in *Mawza*, a location near the Red Sea port of Mocha in western Yemen. Despite this reprieve, the event was catastrophic for Yemenite Jewry, with devastating economic, political, and demographic consequences—more than half of the Jewish population perished during the exile. The spiritual impact was profound as well, as the Jews, uprooted from their ancient homes, were severed from their traditions<sup>92</sup>. This event, known as the Expulsion of Mawza, is the most deep-rooted in the communal historical memory of Yemenite Jewry<sup>93</sup>.

When Jews eventually returned from exile, they were forced to build new neighborhoods outside the city walls, distanced from Muslim villages to avoid any perceived defilement<sup>94</sup>.

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88 Tobi, 1999, p. 41.

89 Halkin, Abraham S., and Hartman, David. *Crisis and leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), p. 126.

90 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 21-24.

91 Tobi, 1999, p. 6.

92 Tobi, 1999, p. 6.

93 Tobi, Yosef. Jews of Yemen. In Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (Eds.), *A history of Jewish-Muslim relations from the origins to the present day* (Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 248-257.

94 Tobi, 1999, p. 6.

**Figure 1** – Yemeni Pentateuch, the colophon carries the name of the copyist and the date in Arabic (Sana'a, 1649)



Source: Meddeb, p. 248

A humiliating policy toward the Jews was the enactment of the Dung-Gatherers Decree, also known as the Latrine or Scrapers Edict. Issued in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century and initially applied in Sana'a before extending to other towns, this decree required Jews to clear human feces from sewers and latrines. The waste was then burned to fuel communal baths used by both Muslims and Jews. Additionally, the ruling obligated Jews to remove carcasses and non-Muslim corpses<sup>95</sup>.

This responsibility fell on all Jews, including rabbis, but in practice, it was the poorest Jews who bore the burden, receiving payment from their fellow Jews but being relegated to a shunned caste. Other Jews refused to marry or dine with dung-gatherers, forbade them from reading the Torah in synagogue, and excluded their children from schools. Despite this, the broader Jewish community still felt the sting of the dung-gatherers' humiliation, which was exacerbated by Muslims who jeered at those forced to do this degrading work<sup>96</sup>.

In rural areas, the safety of Jews was achieved through traditional tribal customary laws, under which they were protected by local sheikhs and other tribal members in a client-patron relationship. Formal permission and guarantees of protection were required from the tribe in order to live within its boundaries. Without this protection, Jews would be vulnerable to physical assault and loss of property<sup>97</sup>.

This protection relationship was defined as a blood pact. The tribes regarded any

95 Sharkey, Heather J. *A history of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 261.

96 Sharkey, 2017, p. 261.

97 Eraqi-Klorman, Bat-Zion. Yemen. In Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (eds.), *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in modern times* (Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 389-408.



harm done to "a tribe's Jew" as a direct provocation and an offense against the entire tribe. Each Jew had a special relationship with a *jar*, a Muslim tribesman who acted as his personal patron. The Jew would offer gifts and seek the *jar*'s formal approval for significant actions, such as buying or selling property or arranging a daughter's marriage. In times of need, the Jew would turn to his *jar* for assistance<sup>98</sup>.

The sense of obligation toward the Jews was not only tied to their status as a vulnerable group but also to the perception of Jewish men as having a blurred gender identity, often being seen as not "real men" and compared to women. Because of this, Jewish men were not considered a threat to the honor and modesty of Muslim women. While unfamiliar Muslim men were strictly forbidden from entering a house and being alone with the women of the household, Jews were allowed to do so<sup>99</sup>.

## Ottoman and British influence

Due to Yemen's geographic and political isolation, the country remained relatively underdeveloped until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British colonization of neighboring Aden in 1839 and the Ottoman occupation of central Yemen in 1872 introduced some modernization to the lives of the Jews and the broader population. However, until the mid-twentieth century, highland Yemen largely remained untouched by foreign ideologies and technologies<sup>100</sup>.

**Figure 2 - Jewish Men in Yemen**



Source: JDC Archives

98 Eraqi-Klorman, 2002, pp. 389-408.

99 Eraqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. Yemen: Muslim and Jewish interactions in the tribal sphere. In Michael M. Laskier and Yaacov Lev (eds.), *The divergence of Judaism and Islam: Interdependence, modernity, and political turmoil* (University Press of Florida, 2011), pp. 125-142.

100 Eraqi-Klorman, 2002, pp. 402-405.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Aden emerged as the primary conduit for the movement of people, goods, and ideas to and from interior Yemen. Following the British occupation, Aden transformed into a significant port and commercial hub. These new economic opportunities attracted Jews and Arabs, mainly from southern Yemen, who sought to settle under British rule. Some stayed in Aden for only a few months, saved money, and returned to Yemen<sup>101</sup>.

Another avenue for modernization was the direct interaction with Ottoman officials and troops who, after invading in 1872, established a telegraph network and postal service. The impact of these modernizing influences was felt predominantly in Sana'a and its surrounding areas, as well as in other major towns. Hebrew newspapers began to arrive in Yemen, and connections developed with Sephardic Jews who traveled from various Ottoman provinces to trade with the army and government officials<sup>102</sup>.

One of the initial actions taken by the Turkish authorities in Yemen was the announcement of their intention to abolish the *dhimmi* status of Jews and to revoke the discriminatory laws that had oppressed them. However, these well-meaning efforts were ultimately thwarted, as they provoked strong opposition from the Muslim population, who vehemently rejected the idea of granting equal rights to the Jews<sup>103</sup>.

A letter to the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris described the reaction of the Muslim population in Yemen:

*"[T]he government of the Sultan without doubt spread its grace over our brothers in Yemen... but because the Yemenite Ishma'elites are very wicked and sinful and the Jew is in their eyes considered as nothing, and if now they can no longer strike their hands with their canes... they lash them with their tongues incessantly, and the whole day long speak ill of them in the ear of the Pasha, the Sultan's governor."*<sup>104</sup>

When the Ottomans attempted to abolish the Dung-Gatherers' Decree in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, local Muslims fiercely resisted, arguing that it was a long-standing tradition and questioning who else could perform such a degrading task. Ultimately, the Ottomans succumbed to local Muslim pressure and, as one historian put it, "persuaded the Jewish notables that it would be in their own interest to maintain the status quo."<sup>105</sup>

Another humiliating practice involved Muslim children pelting Jews with stones, yanking at men's sidelocks, and hurling insults as they passed in the streets, while social convention forbade the Jews from striking back. One account mentions that the Ottoman Governor attempted to put an end to this behavior, but a local jurist argued that it was "an age-old custom" and thus could not be lawfully prohibited<sup>106</sup>.

## The 20<sup>th</sup> century and the independence of Yemen

Amid the reformist currents emerging from Istanbul, the Jews of Yemen were, for the first time since the advent of Islam, granted a role in the political sphere. In 1911, Selim Amram, a Yemenite Jew, was elected by the Jewish community of Yemen to

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101      Eraqi-Klorman, 2002, pp. 402-405.

102      Eraqi-Klorman, 2002, pp. 402-405.

103      Tobi, 1999, pp. 87-88.

104      Tobi, 1999, pp. 87-88.

105      Sharkey, 2017, p. 262.

106      Sharkey, 2017, p. 262.

represent them in the Turkish Chamber of Deputies. However, after the Yemenite leader, the Shi'ite *Imam Yahya*, expelled the Turks from Yemen's highlands, the Jews found themselves without the protection of Ottoman authority<sup>107</sup>.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the independence of Yemen in 1918, the Imam took control of both the highlands and much of the lowlands. To unify this diverse population, Imam Yahya sought to establish an autocratic government grounded in the principles of Zaydi Islam, asserting his own omnipotence and even infallibility<sup>108</sup>.

Already in 1910, Imam Yahya made a triumphant entry into Sana'a. Representatives of the Jewish community greeted him to show their respect. He promised the Jews his protection, provided they continued to adhere to the obligations imposed by Sharia law. To formalize this, he issued an edict in his own handwriting, which he ordered to be read in all the synagogues:

*"These are the regulations that I give the Jews who must submit to my laws and pay their taxes without changing anything... The Jews must not:*

- 1. Raise their voice against a Muslim.*
- 2. Construct houses higher than those of Muslims.*
- 3. Brush against Muslims in the street.*
- 4. Engage in the same commerce as Arabs.*
- 5. Find any fault in Islamic law.*
- 6. Insult the prophets.*
- 7. Discuss religion with a Muslim.*
- 8. Ride animals using a normal saddle.*
- 9. Wink when observing the nakedness of a Muslim.*
- 10. Raise their voices during prayers.*
- 11. Blow the shofar loudly*
- 12. Lend money at interest (which could bring about the destruction of the world).*
- 13. Jews must always get to their feet before Muslims."*<sup>109</sup>

The disdain Muslims felt toward Jews in this period was frequently expressed in everyday speech. When addressing a Muslim, a Jew was required to use the term "Ya Sidi" (sir) or a customary phrase such as "Peace be upon you." The Muslim, however, would not return these greetings. Whenever words like "Yahud" (Jew), "Ibri" (Hebrew), or "Abu Zunnar" (wearer of sidelocks) were mentioned, a Muslim would typically add phrases such as "May God give you strength" or "God shield you from calamity" to soften the unpleasant impact of uttering these terms. Alternatively, after mentioning a Jew, a Muslim might say, "begging your pardon."<sup>110</sup>

Jews were often referenced in Yemeni proverbs and expressions. A particularly common insult was to call someone "O Jew!" (*ya yahudi*). When Yemenis ate together, if someone stepped over the food laid out on the floor, others might exclaim, "Don't be like the Jews who overturned the meal," referring to the Israelites rejecting manna from Moses. Similarly, if someone behaved poorly at the table, either by taking more food than they could eat or by wasting it, they might be called "O Jew!" or "Pig!"<sup>111</sup>

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107 Parfitt, Tudor. *The road to redemption: The Jews of the Yemen 1900-1950* (Brill, 1996), pp. 40-42.

108 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 40-42.

109 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 40-42.

110 Parfitt, 1996, p. 89.

111 Parfitt, 1996, p. 89.

Muslim mothers in Yemen scolded their children with phrases like "Ibn (bint) Yahudi" (son/daughter of a Jew), and a particularly stubborn market vendor might be accused of being a Jew. It was common to follow the remark "It's hot today" with "Ah! A Jew must have perished"—an allusion to a Jew burning in hell. Jews were expected to endure these insults, and their efforts to avoid mistreatment contributed to the stereotype of them being cunning and sly<sup>112</sup>.

Jews in Yemen were careful to ensure that the exteriors of their homes were extremely simple—sometimes in stark contrast to the interiors. This was done to avoid offending Muslim sensibilities. The contrast between the highly decorated houses in Sana'a and the simple homes in the Jewish neighborhood (*Qa al-Yahud*) was striking. The Lebanese-American writer, Ameen Rihani, who visited Yemen in 1930, noted:

*"What struck me when we first sighted the ghetto was the dead level of the low houses. So different from Sana'a... not a house more than two storeys, and nothing projecting above the roofs, not even the pinnacle or the dome of a synagogue."*

When he expressed his surprise, his Muslim guide retorted, "And should the houses of the *Yahoud* be like those of the *Muslemin*!?"<sup>113</sup>

## The Orphan Decree

Among the most dramatic laws reinstated by the Imam, after being abolished during the Ottoman era, was a regulation known in Jewish sources as the "Orphan Decree." This unique law, not found in other countries, mandated that the Yemeni state assume guardianship over every non-Muslim orphaned child whose parents died while the child was still a minor, educating them in the ways of Islam<sup>114</sup>.

A minor, for the purposes of the Orphan Decree, was defined as a child who had not yet shown signs of puberty and was not ready for marriage. Information about an orphaned minor was typically provided by neighbors of Jewish families, who acted either out of religious duty or personal motives<sup>115</sup>.

Once notified, authorities were compelled to take the orphans into custody. Two symbolic actions were carried out to mark the orphan's transition from the Jewish to the Muslim world: (a) removing visible symbols of Jewish identity, such as shaving the sideburns and changing the child's clothing to Muslim attire, and (b) forcibly feeding the child meat broth from a Muslim slaughterhouse<sup>116</sup>.

A letter from Sana'a of March 1929 explained:

*"The government has formally ordered that searches be carried out in all the towns and villages for children, boys and girls, with no father, to arrest them... These poor victims, deprived of all support and of any means of being purchased back, refuse to give up their faith. But their persecutor gives them no respite, he frightens them with all kinds of threats, hits them on the back with a stick, slaps them and punches them until they cry... The*

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112 Parfitt, 1996, p. 89.

113 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 100-101.

114 Eraqi-Klorman, 1995, pp. 82-110.

115 Eraqi-Klorman, 1995, pp. 82-110.

116 Eraqi-Klorman, 1995, pp. 82-110.

*unfortunate children find themselves locked up in dark cellars, bound in iron chains...*

*On Wednesday 23 January, Sana'a was the scene of a terrifying and impressive spectacle. Two young orphans, brother and sister, agreeable looking, were snatched away from their mother, in full view of the Jewish population, despite the cries of the desperate family. The Jews got together and collected a sum of money in order to buy back the children. But this was in vain... The brother and sister in question were so cruelly beaten that they had to convert. During the official ceremony hundreds of people accompanied the children. Around the children were fifty or so young children, gloomy and silent, as if it were a funeral procession."<sup>117</sup>*

The Orphan Decree was perceived by the Jewish community as a direct assault on their identity and an implicit declaration of war. Despite the severe punishments they risked, the Jews fiercely resisted this state-imposed law. Several strategies were employed to evade its oppressive reach. One such strategy was the marriage of minors. To prove the maturity of orphans and exempt them from being forced into Islam, Jewish families often arranged marriages for their young relatives. These early marriages, at an age significantly lower than usual, were increasingly used as a protective measure to shield orphans from the threat of conversion<sup>118</sup>.

Another approach involved hiding orphans or smuggling them to other settlements. In a large city like Sana'a, where the Jewish quarter was distinct yet adjacent to the Muslim city, it was possible to conceal orphans with relatives. However, in smaller communities where Muslims were closely acquainted with their Jewish neighbors, smuggling the children to a larger settlement became the only option. Here, they could blend into the population and effectively "disappear." By 1946, over a hundred orphans were living in Sana'a, but the community struggled to continue supporting them. The children faced severe hardships, including malnutrition, disease, and inadequate housing and clothing<sup>119</sup>.

The final measure was smuggling orphans to the British Protectorate of Aden. Often, Sana'a was just a stopover in the orphans' journey. From the 1920s to the 1940s, many orphans were secretly transported to Aden, where they hoped to obtain licenses for emigration to Israel. This movement of orphans to the British protectorate eventually intertwined with the broader Jewish emigration from Yemen to Israel, with Aden serving as a key transit point<sup>120</sup>.

## **Impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict**

In the early 1920s, the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Yemen was further complicated by the emerging conflict in Palestine. Accusations that the Jews in Yemen were allied with the Jews of Palestine and plotting against Palestinian Muslims led to frequent conflicts and harassment. Already in 1924, the former governor of Sana'a gave a number of passionate speeches whipping up hatred against the Jews, and

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117 Parfitt, 1996, p. 69.

118 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 28-29.

119 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 28-29.

120 Araqi Klorman, 2002, pp. 28-29.



secret meetings were organized at which massacres and pillage of the Jews had been planned<sup>121</sup>. News of the violent 1929 riots in Palestine sparked widespread indignation among Muslims in Yemen, as many of them believed that local Jews supported Zionism and continued to emigrate to Palestine<sup>122</sup>.

In response to growing public concern, it became crucial for the Yemeni authorities to demonstrate that efforts were being made to halt Jewish emigration. The Imam reacted by closing Yemen's ports to Jewish travelers, notably al-Hudaydah. This measure had a significant impact: al-Hudaydah had been the preferred departure point for Jews wishing to go to Palestine, except for those living near the border with the Aden Protectorate. With a blanket ban on Jewish movement from the port, emigration from Yemen became nearly impossible<sup>123</sup>.

After the 1929 riots in Palestine, anti-Jewish rhetoric had intensified in Yemen and in neighboring Aden. In January 1932, signs of rising hostility became evident in Aden when a number of Somali and Arab youths began harassing and assaulting Jewish residents. An even more serious incident occurred in May 1932, when an Arab mob stormed the Jewish quarter in Aden after Jews were accused of desecrating a mosque courtyard by throwing human excrement into it. The Farhi synagogue, one of the oldest in Aden, was desecrated, shops were looted, a Yemenite hostel was destroyed, and several Jews were seriously injured<sup>124</sup>.

In 1934, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, visited Yemen and stressed the importance of halting Jewish emigration to Palestine entirely. Shortly after his visit, the Imam imposed stricter restrictions on Jewish emigration. Proclamations were issued in numerous towns and villages across Yemen, declaring that Jews were not allowed to leave the country to fight in Palestine. As word spread, Jews traveling within Yemen were often accosted and interrogated by locals. Those suspected of attempting to reach Aden were frequently beaten, stripped of their possessions, and forced to return to their villages<sup>125</sup>.

Beginning in the mid-1930s, Yemen experienced another rise in anti-Jewish sentiment, fueled in part by posters imported from Palestine that falsely accused Jews of destroying mosques in Jerusalem. The Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936-1937) further exacerbated anti-Zionist and anti-British feelings in Yemen, contributing to this growing hostility. In 1937, the recommendation to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states intensified anti-Jewish sentiment in Yemen<sup>126</sup>.

## **The Jewish exodus: The first waves**

The organized immigration of Jews from Yemen to the Land of Israel in modern times began in 1881. Several dozen Jews embarked on this journey, first traveling to the port of al-Hudaydah. From there, they made their way through the Suez Canal to Egypt, reaching Alexandria, and eventually arriving in Jaffa. Between 1881 and the outbreak

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121 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 75-76.

122 Parfitt, 1996, p. 79.

123 Parfitt, 1996, p. 79.

124 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 128-129.

125 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 136-137.

126 Parfitt, 1996, p. 139.



of the First World War, approximately 5,000 Yemeni Jews immigrated to Israel<sup>127</sup>.

Several factors converged to stimulate emigration from Yemen. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 significantly simplified travel to Palestine by sea. Simultaneously, the Ottoman conquest of Yemen in 1872 began to expose the region to external commercial pressures, introducing Jewish artisans to competition from inexpensive, primarily European, goods. This economic disruption became a powerful driver of Jewish emigration over the following decades. Additionally, religious and especially messianic motivations played a crucial role in this exodus<sup>128</sup>.

A significant factor was the encounter between the Jews of Yemen, particularly those from the Sana'a community, and Jewish Ottoman subjects who had come to Yemen. These interactions inspired a strong desire among the Yemenite Jews to emulate their Ottoman counterparts. In a letter from the community in Yemen to Constantinople, they wrote: "[W]e have heard and seen the Jews who come to our holy habitat from the cities of the kingdom of the king our master, and their countenances shine as the stars and they are honored by the ministers of the king and his force with all kinds of honors, not like us unfortunate Jews, humiliated and downtrodden in the exile of the Yemen."<sup>129</sup>

As long as Yemenite Jews were isolated from other Jewish communities, most of which had already been officially liberated from their *dhimmi* status, they accepted their inferior position as "natural" and as part of their diasporic suffering<sup>130</sup>. However, when they encountered Jews who enjoyed full rights as Ottoman subjects, it stirred a sense of envy among them. Yet, they quickly realized that their own status could not be improved as long as they remained in Yemen<sup>131</sup>.

After World War I, Jewish immigration from Yemen continued, with approximately 9,000 Jews arriving in Israel during the 1920s and 1930s. These migrations were driven by both economic and political factors. The Jews of Yemen recognized that there was little hope for significant improvement in their legal, economic, and social conditions. This realization motivated them to seek a place that could offer them freedom, equality, and a more stable economic existence. Additionally, the growing conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, fueled by anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish propaganda, also played a role in their decision to leave Yemen<sup>132</sup>.

Leaving Yemen became more and more difficult: in 1927, the Imam enacted a law according to which any Jew preparing to emigrate from Yemen would forfeit their property. Property already sold by a Jew to a Muslim would be forfeited once the Jew emigrated, making it nearly impossible for Jews planning to leave to find Muslim buyers<sup>133</sup>.

The conditions in Yemen in the beginning of the 1940s continued to deteriorate. A representative of the Jewish Agency reported on the "deplorable conditions among our people," mentioning a particularly high death rate, lack of food, and the absence of sanitary facilities. "Additionally," he added, "the heavy head tax imposed solely on

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127 Meir-Glitzstein, Esther. *The exodus of the Yemenite Jews: A failed operation and a formative myth* (Resling, 2012), pp. 45-48. [Hebrew]

128 Parfitt, 1996, p. 53.

129 Nini, Yehuda. *The Jews of the Yemen 1800-1914* (Routledge, 2016), loc 237-238 epub version.

130 Goitein, Shelomo Dov. *Jews and Arabs: Their encounters through the ages* (Schocken, 1955), pp. 75-80.

131 Nini, 2016, loc 237-238.

132 Meir-Glitzstein, 2012, pp. 49-55.

133 Parfitt, 1996, p. 76.

Jews, along with the cruel and anti-Jewish laws and the degrading treatment they endure from their Arab masters, further exacerbate their suffering."<sup>134</sup>

Driven to desperation and forbidden officially to leave the country, many of the Yemenite Jews fled under the cover of night, risking capture, which would have meant imprisonment and heavy punishments. By that time, some 23,000 Jews fled through Aden and reached Palestine by ship via Port Said. The vast majority of them traveled on foot to Aden, with journeys often taking a month or more. The more fortunate had donkeys, which they would sell at the border<sup>135</sup>.

The riots in Aden had profound and far-reaching implications for the Jewish community in Yemen. They deepened the already existing sense of insecurity and fear within the Jewish community and left a lasting psychological impact.

## The 1947 Aden pogrom

Throughout 1947, relations between Jews and Muslims in Aden steadily deteriorated. This decline was marked by an increase in minor assaults on Jews, more frequent instances of Muslim children throwing stones at Jews, and incidents involving Arab lorry drivers deliberately driving towards Jewish refugees from Yemen walking in the desert, one of which resulted in a fatality<sup>136</sup>.

Muslim resentment toward the Jews intensified, not only due to the issue of Palestine but also because of what was perceived as unusual assertiveness by the Jewish community, such as the hoisting of Zionist flags on Victory Day (May 8<sup>th</sup>, commemorating the end of World War II in Europe). Most of Aden's Muslim population had immigrated from Yemen and the principalities of South Arabia during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They struggled to accept that the Jewish community, traditionally seen as inferior under Sharia law, was now openly asserting its status and wealth<sup>137</sup>. The looming prospect of Palestine being partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states further heightened tensions, culminating in an Arab strike in Aden in October 1947<sup>138</sup>.

At the beginning of December, the Arabs in Aden declared a solidarity strike with the Arabs in Palestine. The police advised that both Jewish schools and businesses should operate as usual, assuring the Jewish community that nothing would happen. However, as night fell, groups of Arab youths began entering the Jewish quarter, pelting the streets with stones. The youths were driven out, but this marked the beginning of a violent outbreak, which lasted three days and spread throughout the colony<sup>139</sup>.

The violence resulted in 97 Jewish deaths—76 in Aden (including 6 unidentified bodies) and 16 in nearby Sheikh Othman—and 120 wounded Jews, with 80 in Aden and 40 in Sheikh Othman. Most of the shops in Aden and Sheikh Othman were completely destroyed, along with two schools, numerous houses, and cars, many of which were set on fire. The loss of life, injuries, and extensive economic damage made this a devastating tragedy<sup>140</sup>.

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134 Parfitt, 1996, p. 143.

135 Parfitt, 1996, p. 143.

136 Parfitt, 1996, p. 165.

137 Eraqi Klorman, Bat-Zion. *The Jews of Yemen: History, society, culture* (The Open University, 2008), p. 366 [Hebrew]

138 Parfitt, 1996, p. 165.

139 Saadoun, Haim. The 'Palestinian component' in violent outbreaks between Jews and Muslims in Islamic countries. *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 63 (1995), p. 95. [Hebrew]

140 Saadoun, 1995, p. 95.

Many Muslims believed that the Jews had brought the violence upon themselves. The Arabic newspaper *Sawt al-Yaman* noted on December 18, 1947, that "[t]hose who favour the disturbances say that the Jews have become proud and raised their noses to the sky and have belittled the Arabs and Muslims. They deserve what had happened to them"<sup>141</sup>.

The outburst of violence contributed to a collective sense of persecution and reinforced the urgency of seeking refuge outside of Yemen. The sense of betrayal and the breakdown of trust that followed the violence made coexistence increasingly untenable, leading to the further isolation of the Jewish community. The riots ultimately played a significant role in accelerating the mass exodus of Jews from Yemen towards Israel.

### **The mass exodus: Operation "On Wings of Eagles" (1949-1950)**

The situation for the Jews worsened further with the outbreak of civil war in Yemen following the assassination of Imam Yahya in February 1948. As the country descended into anarchy, Jews found themselves targeted and suffering at the hands of troops from both sides. A letter from Sana'a to Jerusalem noted: "We are now enslaved and tortured, wandering and fleeing from bad to worse, from corner to corner, because of the manifold sorrows that have come upon us... Robbers take the peoples' money and slaughter them... Our soul is yearning for our country. We are filled with bitterness... Each one of us is afraid to write to you about disturbances in Yemen and whatever has been written contains only a very small part of what is really happening because we are afraid of the authorities"<sup>142</sup>.

**Figure 3** - Yemenite Jews waiting at the Aden airport for their flight to Israel



Source: Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, pg. 151

141 Parfitt, 1996, p. 169.

142 Parfitt, 1996, 173; Hünefeld, Kerstin. The 1948 turmoil in Sana'a from the viewpoint of two Yemeni Jewish sources. *Middle Eastern Studies* 60:2 (2024), pp. 284-307.

In late 1948, the bodies of two Muslim girls were discovered in a well within the Jewish quarter of Sana'a. A group of Muslims accused the Jews of the murders and demanded retribution. The British estimated that the girls were murdered by Arabs seeking to justify an attack on the Jewish quarter for the purpose of looting. Other reports suggested that a Muslim woman confessed to the murders, but the courts remained determined to blame the Jews. Dozens of rabbis and prominent Jewish community members were arrested and detained. They were held in prison in Sana'a as hostages, while anti-Jewish sentiments, fueled by the affair, were expressed throughout Yemen<sup>143</sup>.

The ban on Jewish emigration from Yemen remained in place throughout the ongoing war between Israel and the Arab states. However, after Egypt signed an armistice agreement with Israel in February 1949, Yemen's opposition to Jewish emigration began to weaken. By the end of April 1949, Imam Ahmad, the son and successor of the assassinated Imam Yahya, granted his consent for Jewish emigration. This decision was swiftly communicated to the leading Jewish figures and quickly spread throughout the community<sup>144</sup>.

The "On Wings of Eagles" (*Al Kanfei Nesharim*) operation to airlift tens of thousands of Jews from Yemen to Israel spanned 22 months, from December 1948 to September 1950. It involved coordinating with the newly formed Israeli government, securing transport, and ensuring the safe passage of thousands of Jews from remote areas of Yemen to Aden, where they were then airlifted to Israel<sup>145</sup>.

The operation is typically divided into two phases. The first phase, from December 1948 to March 1949, saw 5,500 Yemenite Jews make their way to Israel. The second and main phase, lasting from June 1949 to September 1950, brought 42,862 Jews to Israel, including 1,770 Jews from Aden. The entire operation was organized by the Joint Distribution Committee and funded by the Jewish community in the United States<sup>146</sup>.

## Epilogue

By the end of 1950, the majority of Yemen's Jewish population had left the country, leaving Yemen nearly devoid of Jews. However, several thousand Jews remained, with estimates ranging from 1,000 to 3,000<sup>147</sup>. They were largely scattered in small villages in the far north of Yemen, near the Saudi Arabian border. Most of them still wished to leave, and from October 1950 to April 1956, approximately 1,800 Jews immigrated to Israel. Further waves of emigration occurred before the 1962 coup in Yemen. In 1988-1989, around 3,000 Jews, primarily from North Yemen, made their way to Israel. Between 1992 and 1996, another 500 Jews emigrated. Today, a handful of Jews remain in Yemen<sup>148</sup>.

In 2009, *The Wall Street Journal* detailed a rescue operation that brought about 60 Yemeni Jews to the United States. One of the rescued individuals, Shaker Yakub, recounted his final months in Yemen, describing how rocks shattered the windows of

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143 Ariel, Ari. *Jewish-Muslim relations and migration from Yemen to Palestine in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Brill, 2014), p. 152; Parfitt, 1996, p. 191.

144 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 203, 205.

145 Saadoun, Haim. Longing for Zion and Aliyah. In Haim Saadoun (ed.), *Yemen* (Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), p. 122. [Hebrew]; Eraqi Klorman, 2008, p. 396.

146 Saadoun, 2002, p. 122; Eraqi Klorman, 2008, p. 396.

147 Eraqi Klorman, 2008, p. 405.

148 Parfitt, 1996, pp. 286-287; Saadoun 2002, pp. 122-123.

his home and car. Fearful for their safety, Jews began avoiding leaving their homes except for emergencies and essential provisions. When they did venture out, Yakub and other Jews disguised themselves as Muslims to avoid detection. "This was no way to live," Yakub told the newspaper. Another rescuee, Salem Suleiman, bore scars from stones that had struck his head. "They throw stones at us. They curse us. They want to kill us," he said. "I didn't leave my house for two months."<sup>149</sup>

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149 Jordan, Miriam. Secret mission rescues Yemen's Jews. The Wall Street Journal, October 31, 2009.  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125693376195819343>





# Chapter 4

## Yemen Economic Section

### Section 1 – Methodological Benchmarks

Based on the information presented above regarding the makeup of the Jewish community in Yemen in 1948, the following dates and figures will serve as a methodological benchmark for different points of analysis regarding the breakdown of different categories of Jewish assets:

#### **Valuation Start Year:**

The year 1948 represents a reasonable benchmark regarding the beginning of the Jewish community's gradual departure from Yemen, as well as a reasonable date from which to assess property values, as it predates the downward price-spiral associated with larger waves of Jewish departure in the years following

#### **Size of the Jewish community:**

For the purposes of this report, a total Jewish Yemenite population of 55,000<sup>150</sup> Jews, as supported by Roumani, will be used to value Jewish property.

#### **Distribution of Jewish population:**

Based on the information presented below in detail, the Yemenite Jewish population was calculated to be 15% urban and 85% rural.

Urban areas are widely recognized as larger metropolitan centers and their immediate environs/hinterlands, while rural communities are characterized by their distance from urban centers, their relatively smaller numbers, and an agriculture-centric way of life.

#### **Jewish demographics:**

As mentioned in detail below, the average size of a Jewish family being utilized for the relevant period covered, is 5.<sup>151</sup>

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150 Roumani, Maurice. *The Case 2; WOJAC's Voice* Vol.1, No.1. 1978.

151 Gavra (2015), pg. 14

## Section 2 – Economic Indicators

The following section is meant to describe the types of activities and occupations that characterized Jewish economic life in Yemen in the time-period under consideration. The data and conclusions from this section will serve as a point of departure for further analyses regarding the Jewish community's economic strength in Yemen.

### Jewish Demographics in Yemen

Opinions regarding the exact size of the Jewish community vary, especially given the fact that there was no official census of the Jewish population in Yemen.<sup>152</sup> According to Dr. Joseph Tobi, in 1917, there were 45,000 Jews in Yemen, though in his book he notes other sources that indicate that the number was closer to 40,000.<sup>153</sup> Later, in 1947, just two years prior to the beginning of Yemenite Jewry's mass departure from the country, there were 54,000 Jews in Yemen.<sup>154</sup>

Considering the absence of an official census, one way of calculating the size of the Jewish population in Yemen at the time is via the number of Jiyza tax payers. For example, it is known that in the town of Saanaa, there were 1,068 Jiyza taxpayers.<sup>155</sup> The tax was imposed on Jewish adult males above the age of 18. Given that Jewish males usually married at the age of 18, this number likely corresponds to the number of Jewish households. Therefore, it can be deduced that in the city of Saana, in the years prior to the mass departure of Yemen's Jews, there were approximately 1,068 Jewish households.<sup>156</sup> This method of estimating the size of the Jewish population, however, is neither comprehensive nor conclusive. Furthermore, it does not take into account the possibility that more than one Jewish adult male lived in each household. As such, reliance will be placed on the Sanaa population estimates compiled by JJAC,<sup>157</sup> concerning the displacement of Jews from Arab countries. On this basis, proceeding on the premise that in 1948, the valuation base year for this report, there were 55,000 Jews in Yemen.

Regarding the demographic makeup of the Jewish community in Yemen, Dr. Moshe Gavra, expert on the Jewish community in Yemen, explained how the norm, within the Jewish community, was for families to live together as clans. One nuclear family would traditionally live under one roof together with their children and the wives of their sons and grandchildren. Literature on the subject, including previous analyses of Yemenite Jewry's demographics, concluded that the average size of a Yemeni Jewish household consisted of 5 persons per household.<sup>158</sup>

### Jewish Distribution Patterns: Urban vs. Rural

An integral part of the nature of the Jewish community in each country includes determining the distribution between urban and rural dwelling Jews. In the case of

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152 Saadon, pg. 13

153 Tobi, pg. 102

154 Meddeb, Stora, pg. 303

155 Saadon, pg. 13

156 Ibid.

157 Justice for Jews of Arab Countries (JJAC), see p.16 of this report

158 Gavra (2015), pg. 14

Yemen, however, such a divide is of little significance due to the fact that the population in Yemen circa 1948 was overwhelmingly rural and was not divided into urban cities and rural communities per se, as was the case with Jewish communities in other Arab countries.

Villages in Yemen were not regionally concentrated but were dispersed all throughout the barren countryside. While censuses were not conducted in Yemen until 1975 (after the departure of the Jewish community), significant urbanization waves only began in the second half of the 20th century. Beforehand, 97% of the population was said to have lived in rural conditions.<sup>159</sup> The 1975 census counted more than 50,000 villages or hamlets, and a small number of cities/towns, most of which are small district towns.<sup>160</sup>

**Map 2 - Former Jewish Communities in Yemen**



Source: Gilbert, (epub), Maps

The geographic distribution of the Jewish community in Yemen was similarly dispersed, while also overwhelmingly rural, in contrast to the mostly urban nature of Jewish communities in other Arab countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa at the time. Jews in Yemen settled mainly in the country's agricultural belt and lived in thousands of different villages, usually located adjacent to Muslim villages.

159 Saadon, pg. 13

160 Ibid., pg. 13

(According to Dr. Gavra, there were over 2,000 Jewish villages in the late 1940s.)<sup>161</sup> Most of the Jewish villages were small, and sometimes only comprised a handful of families.<sup>162</sup> Only 15% of the Jews of Yemen lived in cities, with most urban Jews living in Sana'a.<sup>163</sup> 85% of Yemeni Jews lived in rural villages.<sup>164</sup>

The following excerpt describes the situation of rural Jews of Yemen in 1885, and their move from rural villages to bigger cities:

*The improvement in economic and political circumstances entailed an enlargement of the Jewish quarters in the big cities and provincial towns, most of whose inhabitants had been forced to abandon them before the Turkish conquest in search of livelihood, which was to be found in the farming villages. Although we have no statistical data, it may be concluded from various sources that at this time the trend of movement from village to town began; this process did not result from the decline of farming but from the rise of new sources of income in the towns, especially in the provinces where the Turkish forces were garrisoned. In this period the community of Jewish merchants at Manakhah developed. Most of them originated in San'a, whence they had fled in the hard times before the Turkish occupation. Jewish communities did not reside in the Red Sea cities that developed during the Turkish period, the chief of these being Hudaydah, although diplomatic representatives of various countries and colonies of overseas merchants were present in them. The Jewish merchants preferred to reside in Manakhah or San'a and to direct their international commerce from there via Hudaydah.*<sup>165</sup>

As previously mentioned, 85% of the Jewish community was rural with, "the Yemenite Jewish community were known for being rural and dispersed."<sup>166</sup> By contrast, speaking of the Jews living in the more urban Sana'a region in 1911, Zionist emissary Shmuel Yavnieli described the Sana'a community as entirely urban and therefore of no use as farm workers in case they were to leave for Israel. Yavnieli added that the Sana'a Jews were more intellectually developed than the Yemenis already in Palestine as well as the Ashkenazi Ultra-Orthodox community in Palestine at the time. Of their thirst for intellectual Jewish texts, he said: "They are thirsty for new books, and they wait for them impatiently." He added, "the poems of Bialik, and the writing of Aḥad ha-ʿAm, and the pages of ha-Shiloah will find understanding readers here."<sup>167</sup> The communities in Sana'a and other urban areas were noticeably Jewish and the men were known to wear sidelocks, dark-coloured robes, and black caps.<sup>168</sup>

Altogether, given that in 1948 there were 55,000 Jews in Yemen and given that the Saan'a Jewish community was made up of 1,068<sup>169</sup> families, which is tantamount to 5,340 persons, the urban Saan'a community, made up 9% of the Jewish community of Yemen. That is to say that of the entire Jewish community, 85% were rural, and 15%

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161 Gavra interview, 2019

162 Saadon, pg. 13

163 Ibid.

164 Wagner, pg. 4

165 Tobi, pg. 94

166 Saadon, pg. 31

167 Ariel, pg. 97

168 Wagner, pg. 4

169 Saadon, pg. 13

were urban, with two thirds of the urban Jewish population residing in Saan'a.<sup>170</sup>

It should be noted that the definition of 'urban' in the case of Yemenite Jewry is different from that of other countries in the region. In many Arab countries, the urban population were traditionally of a higher socioeconomic status than the rural population. In the case of Yemen, however, there is no correlation between the urban/rural divide and the socioeconomic distribution of the population. That is to say that the rural Jews were not poorer than the urban Jews in Yemen and their living standards were not entirely different.<sup>171</sup>

## Jewish Yemenite Occupations

With regards to their economic occupation, the Jews were predominantly artisans, craftsmen,<sup>172</sup> and traders, often participating in international commerce via the port of Hodeida.<sup>173</sup> Given Yemen's poor economic status in the 20th century, Jews and Muslims suffered similar degrees of poverty albeit they operated in different professions.<sup>174</sup> Jews worked in a wide range of professions including weaving, embroidery, calligraphy, ornate leather work, carpentry, joinery, copper, silver and gold work, coin minting for the royal treasury, building, stone and alabaster carving.<sup>175</sup> Jews were also architects, gunsmiths, well diggers, tar makers, cigarette rollers and tobacconists, and they tended to entirely dominate these industries.<sup>176</sup> Being that Jews were a significant portion of the non-agricultural labor force, their involvement in construction work, although at times unwanted, was, for the most part, inescapable. The following quote from the 1920's under the rule of Imam Yahya serves to illustrate this point:

*Notwithstanding a provision in the sumptuary laws that forbade Jews from working for the Muslim government, it could hardly avoid hiring Jews. "Most government building projects fell on Jewish shoulders first," writes builder Nissim Tayri. Imām Yahyā himself hired Jews to adorn the walls and ceilings of one of his palaces with plaster ornaments and to furnish it with beds. Both the Imām and his chief minister hired a Jewish painter to work on their homes. A Jew built the arches and installed imported porcelain tile in a governor's palace in Ta'izz. Interreligious tensions sometimes entered the construction site. T'ayri recalls that while expanding the Radā' jail, he ordered some trees chopped down for lumber. The trees were dear to a Muslim who hated Jews, although he did not own the trees. When the man attacked the Jewish workers who did the chopping, he was apprehended and fettered.*<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, while there is a shortage of significant data regarding the occupational division among the Jewish community of Yemen, the following statistics indicate the different industries in which Jews worked:

*According to statistics compiled by the Immigration Department of the*

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170	Gavra interview, 2019
171	Ibid
172	Sachar, pg. 422
173	Wagner, pg. 100
174	Frisch, pg. 281
175	Parfitt, pg. 116
176	Wagner, pg. 96
177	Ibid., pg. 97

Jewish Agency at the time of the mass departure of Jews in the late 1940's 51 percent were artisans, 30 percent were traders or peddlers, 15 percent worked the land and 4 percent were teachers, clerks and various other occupations. Traditionally, as is well known, the Jews had a near monopoly on a wide variety of economic activity. In Niebuhr's day all the workers in precious metals were either Jews or Banians, while all the current coin is struck by Jews.<sup>178</sup>

**Table 9 - Jewish Employment in late 1940's Yemen**<sup>179</sup>

Occupation	Percentage of Employed Jews
Artisans	51%
Traders or Peddlers	30%
Farmers	15%
Teachers, Clerks .etc	4%
Total	100%

Despite the variance in occupations held by Jews, as shown above, it appears that all the occupations nevertheless represented a similar socioeconomic class, and that there was no significant distinction of wealth brackets based on types of occupation.<sup>180</sup>

Regardless, the Jewish community of Yemen also had a few members who were extremely wealthy:

*Jewish merchants, like the Hibshūsh brothers of Sana'a and Hārūn Shih' b in Manākhah, dominated the sale of coffee beans for export and husks for internal consumption (in a hot drink called qishr (husk). Other merchants, including Sālim Sa'īd al-Jamal, S' ālih' al-Z' āhirī, and Mordecai al- Z' āhirī, provided the Muslim aristocracy with perfume. Jamal designed his own cologne, which he sold to Muslim notables.*<sup>181</sup>

The wealth of such Jews was substantial enough that it caused resentment from their Muslim counterparts. These Jews were perceived as those who didn't work, and yet 'had their bread'. They were also discussed as 'having their hands in several pots and being well connected to those in government.'<sup>182</sup>

*Yemeni historian Muhammad 'Alī al-Shahārī writes that the monopolistic trade that developed between the imām and Jewish merchants exacerbated the already widespread hatred for Jews among Muslims. (However, he does not distinguish between Jewish dominance in the trades and the new class of importers.) "Imām Yah' yā put no restrictions upon Jewish mercantile activity," writes another Yemeni historian. "Indeed, we find a monopolistic trinity between them, the most powerful administrators, and him." In the early 1940s a visitor from Iraq noted that a handful of Jews, acting in tandem*

178 Parfitt, pg. 116

179 Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency

180 Gavra interview, 2019

181 Wagner, pg. 100

182 Ibid., pg. 102



*with Jews in Aden, "controlled the rudder of trade."*<sup>183</sup>

It can be assumed that this wealthy class of Jews were a very small part of the entire Yemenite Jewish population. One Yemenite Jew who emigrated to Israel, estimated that only one in every one thousand Jews owned land.<sup>184</sup> Given that only the very wealthy Jews were owners of land,<sup>185</sup> this testimony serves as an indication of the size of the wealthy class in the Jewish community in Yemen and that accordingly, the wealthy class likely made up approximately 0.001% of the entire Jewish community.

In addition, Dr. Gavra explains that this class made up no more than one percent of the entire Jewish community. Bearing in mind these indications, this report will proceed on the calculation that the wealthy class of Yemenite Jewry comprised 0.1% of the entire community. Given the size of the Jewish community (55,000) and given the size of the average family (5 persons), this translates to 55 persons, or 11 families.

Testimonies collected from displaced Jews which were made available by an Israeli government entity were utilized for the purposes of understanding the value of assets belonging to the wealthy class of Jews in Yemen. Very few testimonies collected from Yemenite Jews were identified, however, representing a lack of available data that would be useful for the valuation of Jewish assets left behind by Yemen's Jewish community. As such, the following testimony published by Rabbi Shalom Mansura in his book, *The Magic Carpet Aliyah*, will be used as a reference in this report for the wealthy class.

The testimony given by Rabbi Shalom Mansura, (a.k.a. Salim Mansura), who acted as a liaison between Jews and Muslims at the time of the dissolution of the community, illustrates the fate of the wealthy class of Jews in Yemen. He told of being approached by a very wealthy Jew named Salem Sa'id, from the village of Alchiyariya, in the district of Thaiz. Sa'id approached Mansura asking him to help him to sell all of his assets so that he would be allowed to depart for Israel. His assets included fields and livestock. Rabbi Mansura approached the Imam and offered to sell his assets to the treasury for half of their value. The Imam responded with an offer of 3,000 Riyals, when the real value of the assets was estimated at hundreds of thousands of Riyals.<sup>186</sup>

In contrast, there were also poor Jews who performed the jobs considered to be at the bottom of the economic spectrum, namely the collection of dung for the purposes of burning.<sup>187</sup> Aside from being a job with low compensation, it was also considered humiliating and Jews were obliged by law to perform this job on behalf of the Muslim population.<sup>188</sup> Other poor Jews worked as domestic helpers in the homes of wealthy Muslims and in the 1920's, Jewish tailors were hired by the Imam of the time, Imam Yahya, to stitch uniforms for the Yemenite army.<sup>189</sup>

With regards to the contrast between the rich and the poor Jews in Yemen, the divide was not a natural one. The wealth had been by large imported and came on the heels

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183 Wagner, pg. 101

184 Gavra (2015), pg. 88

185 Wagner, pg. 121

186 Mansoura, Pg. 152

187 Wagner pg. 97

188 Tobi, pg. 89

189 Wagner pg. 97

of a wave of industrialization:

*Much of the disparity in wealth between rich and poor was based not on traditional structures, but on imported wealth. In addition, as we have seen, the modern world had penetrated Yemen in a variety of ways and the penetration of western goods and technologies throughout the twentieth century was to have a direct and decisive impact upon economic life in the country.*<sup>190</sup>

According to Dr. Gavra, aside from a very rich elite who made up less than one percent of the entire Jewish community, the vast majority of the Jews of Yemen were poor.<sup>191</sup>

While the Jews of Yemen were not divided into classes per se, under Ottoman rule, they were divided into three separate tax brackets. The Ottoman practice of taxing Jews, Jiyza, affected Yemenite Jews just like their brethren in the rest of the empire. In the city of Sana'a for example, the total amount to be paid according to the size of the Jewish community was determined by the relative wealth of each member. The Jews were divided into three brackets, with the wealthy Jews paying sixty qurush a year, the middle class to pay 30 qurush a year, and the poorest Jews were to pay 15 qurush a year.<sup>192</sup> An alternate source provided that the rich were to pay between three and four Riyals annually, the middle class were to pay two Riyals, and the poor to pay just one Riyal as Jiyza, annually. In the 1940's, salary for a few days of work was around one Riyal.<sup>193</sup>

*Despite the fact the determination was made on a per person, or more correctly, per adult male basis, the tax was paid as a community. The total amount to be collected was 22,115 qurūsh per year. After the first migrations to Palestine, the number of Jews in Sana'a dropped, but the amount of tax demanded from the community by the Ottoman administration remained the same. Each individual continued to pay the amount he was accustomed to paying, but the total received by the government was deficient.*<sup>194</sup>

No further information was identified stipulating a breakdown of how many Jews/ households belonged to each class. That being said, according to Dr. Gavra, more than a third of the Jewish community was extremely poor while the rest of them were of the average economic status for Yemen, but still very poor (when compared to other countries). In order to illustrate the relative poverty of Yemen, Gavra explained that wealth in Yemen was translated to a household's capacity to own and store food. Furthermore, he added that a well-off family was a family that had food for the forthcoming three days.<sup>195</sup>

The Jews of Yemen were of a similar economic status as their Muslim counterparts by and large; they were not significantly poorer than them. That being said, given the relative poverty of Yemen compared to other countries in the Middle East and North

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190 Parfitt, pg. 110

191 Gavra interview, 2019

192 Ariel pg. 50

193 Saadon, pg. 22

194 Ariel pg. 50

195 Gavra interview, 2019

Africa in 1948, the Jews of Yemen, even though economically stable, were poor when compared to Jews of other countries in the region.

Thus, both the information regarding the three tax brackets, mentioned above, and Dr. Gavra's expertise indicating that the Jews of Yemen were divided into three economic classes in its determination of Jewish socioeconomic classification in Yemen in 1948 was considered.

However, in the case of Yemen, both the 'extremely poor' and the 'poor' class, would classify as poor in terms of their wealth (when compared to Jews in other countries.) For this reason, this report will proceed on the basis that the entire Jewish community of Yemen, aside from a wealthy class of 0.1%, were poor.

## **Yemenite-Jewish Community Dissolution**

While Jewish immigration to Palestine began in an organized fashion in the 1880's, it was not till almost a century later, when the State of Israel was established, that the Jewish community experienced a mass exodus which effectively ended Jewish life in Yemen. In the years preceding 1948, the Zionist enterprise intensified in Palestine, the Jews in Yemen were visited by Zionist emissaries on several occasions. These emissaries were sent to assess the condition of Yemeni Jews and their readiness for immigrating to Palestine. One such emissary, the aforementioned Shmuel Yavnieli, came to Yemen in the early 20th century and wrote of his experiences saying that the Jews of Yemen were extremely well assimilated and that they were comparable in status to their Muslim neighbors. He added that their economic situation would probably be worse if they were to immigrate to Israel (at that time).<sup>196</sup> Afterwards, Jews continued to migrate in small groups. Just before World War I, several thousand Yemeni Jews made their way to Palestine.<sup>197</sup> During WWII, there was a significant decrease in the emigration rates of Yemeni Jews. In the years, 1940-1942, less than 200 Jews left for Israel, while between 1943-1945, over 5,000 Jews emigrated to Israel from Yemen."<sup>198</sup>

These small migrations were insignificant however in comparison to the mass departure that followed. As mentioned above, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 served as a major turning point in the fate of Yemenite Jewry. Within the following two years, the vast majority of the Jewish population would embark on a mass exodus to Israel, leaving behind their native Yemen.<sup>199</sup> Both the community in Yemen as well as Zionist activists wanted to bring the Jews over to Israel as soon as possible. However, as was the case in other Islamic countries, the Jews were not permitted to leave unconditionally. The ruler of Yemen at the time, Imam Yahya strongly opposed Zionism and didn't allow members of the Jewish community to leave until the mid-1940s.<sup>200</sup> Some sources suggest that Imam Yahya's eventual acquiescence to the departure of Yemen's Jews came from external incentives. "A bribe from the American Joint Distribution Committee to Yemen's ruler, Imam Ahmed ibn Yahya, led to his agreeing to the mass exodus of Jews to Israel in 1949–1950..."<sup>201</sup> The following was said of the mass exodus:

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196 Ariel, pg. 111

197 Gilbert (epub), Chapter 9

198 Saadon, pg. 121

199 Jewish Virtual Library

200 Ibid

201 Ariel, pg. 13

*(T)he aliya from Yemen is described as having brought relief and deliverance to Yemenite Jewry and it is also perceived as a daring, miraculous, even cosmic event in which the Yemenite Jews were rescued in the blink of an eye from a distressed country and taken by their saviors from a backwards, traditional society to a modern, progressive society.*<sup>202</sup>

In 1949, Israel launched operation Magic Carpet, during which Israeli agents airlifted around 50,000 Jews from Yemen (via Aden) and brought them to Israel.<sup>203</sup> Other sources suggest between 45,000<sup>204</sup> and 47,000).<sup>205</sup> In the operation, which began in December 1948, and ended in late 1951, the Jewish community were airlifted to Israel in mostly American aircraft. The Aliyah from Yemen was spread over three stages, between December 1948, until April of the following year, 7,000 Jews were airlifted (after having spent months in transit camps in Aden. After that, between April and November 1949, an additional 30,000 Yemenites were brought over. The first stage which took place until late in 1950, brought over an additional 10,000 Jews from Yemen. Jewish life in Yemen ended soon afterwards with a small cluster of Jews staying in the country.<sup>206</sup> In 2016, 19 Jews were airlifted to Israel, marking the end of the operation. Today there are thought to be no more than 50 Jews in Yemen.<sup>207</sup>

**Figure 4** - Jewish Yemenite couple



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202 Meir-Glitzenstein, pg. 150

203 Frisch, pg. 281

204 Sachar, pg. 422

205 Meir-Glitzenstein, pg. 149

206 Meir-Glitzenstein, pg. 149

207 Jewish Virtual Library, 2016

**Figure 5** - Jewish men in Yemen



Source: JDC Archives

**Figure 6** - Yemenite Jewish men



Source: JDC Archives

## Section 3 – Land Distribution

This section will discuss the Yemenite land tenure system, and its relevance to Jewish landownership in Yemen.

### Yemen's Land Tenure System

The land tenure and registration system in Yemen was poorly documented. As such, research did not procure specific data regarding the land tenure system in Yemen. With regards to the status of Jewish ownership, little evidence was found to support a broad and coherent assessment of Jewish landownership in Yemen at the time:

*Jews claimed that the paucity of documentation for their claims of private ownership of the Jewish Quarter of Sana'a stemmed from the periodic looting of the city by tribesmen. A court determined that waqf land was "mixed" (multabis) with land privately owned by Jews. A onetime payment of 7,500 riyāls (the figure is 8,000 in another account) from the Jewish community to the waqf was negotiated in 1918. The chief rabbi was made responsible for allotting the payment to community members. In August 1949, while many Jews were leaving Yemen for Israel, Sālim Mansūrah received a letter in Ta'izz from a Jew in Sana'a. The letter informed him that Hasan, the brother of Imām Ahmad who served as governor of Sana'a, had devised a new plan for disposing of the property of the emigrants. Since the land of the Jewish Quarter was "mixed" and had been bought from the waqf for a fixed sum, Jews who wanted to sell their homes had to document their ownership and would be paid for them out of the original 8,000-riyāl payment that had been made to the waqf (with no adjustment for inflation). This was no act of largesse toward the emigrants. Muslim buyers who had already bought houses at higher prices wanted their money back, Jews who had not yet left stood to receive a very small sum for their houses, and property that had already been vacated would revert to the waqf, since the owners were not present and probably could not document it even if they were still in Yemen.<sup>208</sup>*

Reference to land being 'mixed' indicated to what extent there was a lack in the documentation of land ownership. The overall absence in accurate data regarding Yemenite land administration has made this section of the report comparatively lacking.



## Section 4 – Rural Assets

### 4.1 Objectives and Scope of Work

This section discusses the condition of rural land and property ownership by Jews in Yemen. Research has established that a thorough land registration system was not in place in Yemen at the time. Unlike in other Middle Eastern and North African countries, with stronger colonial influence, Yemen, was not subject to the same kind of land administration practices. Furthermore, Ottoman land registration did not distinguish on the basis of religion.

### 4.2 Research Analytical Conclusions

Jews in Yemen were not typically involved in agriculture. According to Dr. Moshe Gavra, an expert on the Jewish community of Yemen, who was consulted for the purposes of this report, as a rule, Jews were not permitted to work in agriculture. This resulted in the Jews being entirely dependent on the Muslims for their food source. In years when there were food shortages and crops did not do well, the Muslims did not have money with which to contract the Jews for their goods and services.<sup>209</sup>

Gavra also explained that transactions were made in a barter-like system. Jews provided services and supplied goods in return for crops to be paid at time of harvest. In many cases, Jews asked for their payments, but the Muslims could not deliver, often remaining indebted to the Jews. It is important to add that there was barely any overlap in the roles assigned to each religion. Such a unique case meant that there were almost no Muslims who could provide basic services such as building, shoemaking, painting, and metalwork, while there were very few Jews working in agriculture. The two were entirely interdependent.<sup>210</sup>

*The division of labour, and resulting mutual dependency, between individual Muslim agriculturalists and Jewish craftsmen could be formalized in an “umlah” agreement; such agreements were sometimes recorded and enforced by shari’a courts, which prosecuted violators. In rural areas these agreements between a shaykh and his Jews might include Jewish work that ought to be kept “off the books”: casting spells and distilling alcohol. Considering Jewish dominance as craftsmen, tribesmen in rural areas who ranked the Jew low in the social order fawned and grovelled when they needed something made or repaired. Jews often extended them credit until a harvest.<sup>211</sup>*

It was not the norm for Jews to own or tend to agricultural land in Yemen. Gavra even added that Jews were prohibited from tending to rural land for superstitious reasons. That being said, there were areas in which Jews did own land for a number of reasons:

*In the modern period, there were a number of wealthy Jews throughout the Yemen who owned considerable tracts of land including coffee and tobacco plantations and orchards. Often land cost very little in the Yemen and after periods of drought or devastation by locusts, entire areas would be abandoned. Sometimes Jews would be given abandoned land by local shaykhs for one reason or another. Often debts to Jews would be repaid in land.<sup>212</sup>*

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209 Gavra interview, 2019

210 Ibid.

211 Wagner pg. 96

212 Parfitt, pg. 112

**Figure 7** - Rural Jewish family in Yemen



Source: JDC Archives

**Figure 8** – Rural Jews in Yemen



Source: JDC Archives

**Figure 9** - Rural Jews in Yemen



Source: JDC Archives

**Figure 10** - Jews in their homes



Source: JDC Archives

## Wealthy Jews and Rural Assets

In specific areas, especially in villages, wealthy Jews owned or inherited land. These lands were usually bought under the deliberate initiative of wealthy Jews who wanted to own agricultural lands. Some other Jews received lands in exchange for debts owed to them by Muslims. Jews who owned land were a very small minority of the entire Jewish community of Yemen.<sup>213</sup> As previously mentioned in this report, according to one Jew from the Madan village in the district of Saan'a, only one in every thousand Jews were land owners. The Jews usually did not work the land, the land was tended to by Muslims. The Jewish landowners were involved mainly in the harvest and protecting of the lands.<sup>214</sup>

## Poor Jews and Rural Assets

The following description was given of Jewish homes belonging to the poor class. "The majority of Jews in Yemen lived in homes, typically two or three stories tall, and 200 sq. meters in size. These homes were owned by the Jews themselves and usually housed a nuclear family together with their daughters in law and grandchildren."<sup>215</sup>

Another description mentions the condition of Jewish property:

*Most of the houses in the Jewish quarter in Saan'a were built from compressed earth and rubble and from mud bricks with very few foundational blocks. Such simple technique, which was typical of rural housing was probably the most suitable for these low built houses. In the North and East of Yemen, the buildings were different and were made mainly of mud, they sometimes reached six stories in height... Jewish homes were simpler in their décor than Muslim homes and were also typically located closer to the nearest water source.*<sup>216</sup>

In 1948, when the Jews began to plan their departure, the Imam at the time, Ahmad bin Yahya, permitted their exodus on the condition that they sell their property. This was done in order to prevent a situation in which the Jews would someday return to Yemen and reclaim what was once theirs. The decree also stated that Jews had to teach their profession to a Muslim prior to their departure. The results of this decree had devastating effects for the Jewish community and their ability to sell their property.<sup>217</sup>

The local Muslim population was aware of the time-sensitive nature of the Jews' desire to leave Yemen for Israel and of the aforementioned decree forcing them to sell their property as a prerequisite for their departure. Not wanting to pay full price for the Jews' properties, they often offered amounts of money that were a quarter of the actual value. Not wanting to sell their properties for such low prices, many Jews decided to forgo selling their property entirely, often reaching deals with local governors who would allow them to leave even without selling.<sup>218</sup>

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213 Gavra (2015), pg. 88

214 Ibid.

215 Ibid.

216 Saadon, pg. 155

217 Jewish Virtual Library; Parfitt, pg. 206

218 Mansoura pg. 151

*This Jewish real estate crisis entered a new and more intensive phase after the assassination of Imām Yahyā and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It should be borne in mind that there was no “land grab” of Jewish property between the promulgation of the nationalization order of circa 1920 and Imām Ahmad’s 1949 order that all Jews who left Yemen must sell their property. After 1949 Sālim Mansūrah responded to the real estate crisis by trying to convince the Imām to order the state treasury to purchase Jewish property or to assign a trustee who would oversee their property until a time when they could be sold at fair market prices. One Jewish source says the Imām ordered regional governors to dispatch soldiers to assess the property of Jews throughout Yemen, charging them a fee for this “service,” and looted the Jews of Dhamār outright. Another source says that Imām Ahmad dispatched soldiers to protect Jews in one village when he got wind of a plot to rob them. Imām Ahmad’s constituency also included Muslims who, through wealth or connections, were able to purchase Jewish property at very low prices.<sup>219</sup>*

The aforementioned wealthy Jew, Salem Sa’id, in the village of Alchiariya, in the district of Thaiz, was the owner of fields, sheep, and cows. He told Salim Mansurah that he wanted to leave to Israel and was willing to sell all of his property for half of its value, Mansurah, who worked as the liaison for the Jews and brought this case to the Imam. Mansurah understood that the Muslims had been advised not to buy from Jews, and that their offers, would be significantly lower than the real value. Situations similar to this were common all over Yemen, especially in Sana’a. Many Jews were so desperate to receive permission to leave Yemen that they simply handed their property over in exchange for the necessary permits.<sup>220</sup>

Essentially, the majority of Jewish property fell to the hands of the Muslims. In most cases Jews left their homes, closed the door, and received no compensation whatsoever for the property which they never saw again.<sup>221</sup> A house that was worth 100 Riyal would have been sold, (if at all), for 3 Riyal only.<sup>222</sup> As mentioned above, one Riyal was the average pay for a few days of labor.<sup>223</sup>

It can be said that the suffering of the Yemenite Jews went somewhat unnoticed:

*Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman notes that the voluminous body of letters and memoirs by Jews from Yemen rarely mention the large financial losses that Jews, particularly urban merchants, suffered.” 159 There is no doubt that the Jews suffered a great deal and were by no means compensated for the property the lost upon their exodus from Israel. “Jews in Yemen often sold their property for a fraction of its market value, faced coercion to sell from neighbors, and converted assets into cash that they were unable to take out of the country.<sup>224</sup>*

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219 Wagner, pg. 115

220 Mansoura, pg. 151

221 Ibid.

222 Gavra, 2014 pg. 518

223 Saadon, pg. 22

224 Ibid., pg. 116



There is no doubt that the Jews of Yemen, both rich and poor, were owners of their own homes, and due to institutional policies, were unable to sell their homes for their real values prior to their departure to Israel.

Three pieces of evidence (completed forms) relating to property abandoned in Yemen were found in the State Archives. One form is dated December 1949 and the other two forms are dated November 1952. These claim forms included, inter alia,

- A land plot worth 750 Riyals,
- 8 dunams of agricultural land worth 150 Riyals,
- 50 dunams of agricultural land worth 500 Riyals.

The combined average of these 3 claims amounted to 467 Riyals. There is no data on the volume of dunams that were owned by Yemeni Jews. In Dr. Gavra's book,<sup>225</sup> he gives an estimate of one of the Yemeni immigrants he interviewed, according to which only one in every thousand Jews had land, that is 0.1% of the Jews.

## **Wealthy Class**

According to this testimony, one wealthy Jew, Salem Sa'id, from the Thaiz district owned assets worth several hundreds of thousands of Riyals.<sup>226</sup>

Given that the exact number is not known, and that the number is somewhere in the range of 100,000-1,000,000, an estimate of 500,000 Riyals in terms of 1948 value was adopted as it represents the median of the two extremities.

## **Poor Class**

The poor Jews of Yemen, who constituted the overwhelming majority of Jews in Yemen, and who lived in rural villages, owned their respective set of assets, as discussed below. According to Dr. Gavra, there was no distinction in the size and value of houses between those in rural Yemen, and those in urban Yemen. At this point, information regarding the value of the assets owned by the poor Jews of Yemen had not been discovered. However, Gavra noted that these real estate assets were typically 2-3 stories high and were on average, 200 sq. meters in size.

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225 Gavra (2015).

226 Mansourga, pg. 152



## Section 5 – Urban Assets

### 5.1 Objectives and Scope of Work

This section will carry out a summary of urban land and urban property owned by Jews in Yemen.

### 5.2 Research Analytical Conclusions

As previously established by this report, 85% of the Jewish community lived in rural villages, while 15% of them settled in urban areas. However, there was no distinction in the value of assets of rural vs. urban Jews. Therefore, assets have been discussed according to class division (wealthy and poor), and not according to the urban rural divide. As such, urban assets have already been discussed above.

**Figure 11-** Rural Yemenite Jews



Source: JDC Archives

**Figure 12- - David Moshe Family Assets (Single Claim Found)**

25 - יולי - 2007

לכבוד  
משרד המשפטים  
המחלקה לתביעות רכוש - יהודים - פליטי ארצות ערב

הנדון: רכוש בחיטון, אדמות, בתים ותכולת בית.

א. ג. 2.  
שלום רב

יקירי משפחת דוד - משה פליטי תימן, פנינו למשרדי הממשלה ומשרד החרוץ בפרט, על רכושנו בחיטון אשר נלקח מאתנו בכח הזרוע.

הרכוש אשר היה ברשותנו מדורי דורות, אדמות ובתים וכו' נאמד בערך כ- 10 מילון דולר הרכוש הנסב על ידי משפחתנו במשך גלותנו בחיטון

פנינו אליכם להעמיד את רכושנו שנלקח מאתנו בחיטון מול תביעות הפליטים, הכותנו לקבל פיצויים על הרכוש שלנו שנלקח מאיתנו.

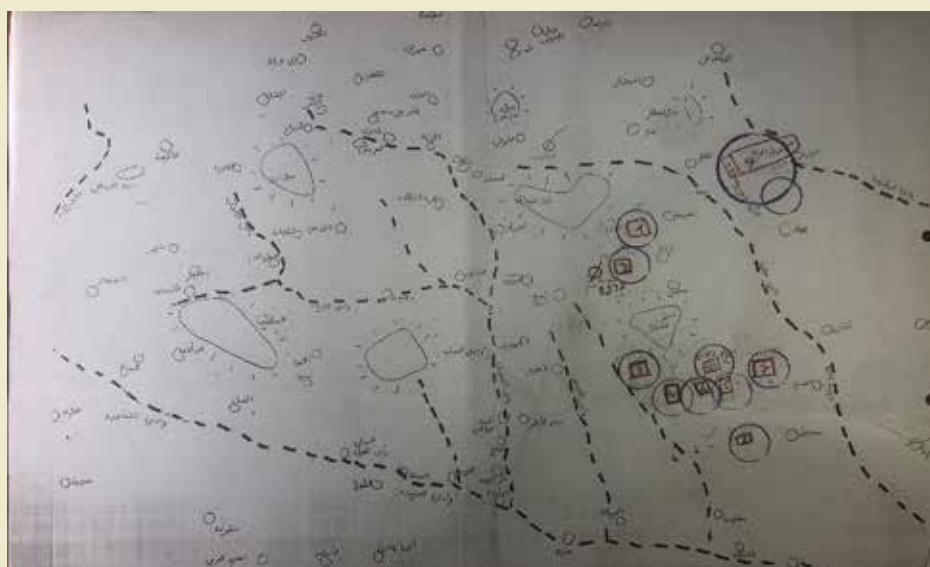
מצורפת תמונה של ראש המשפחה מר חיים משה-דוד

משרד המשפטים  
המחלקה לתביעות רכוש  
19-07-2007  
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1. 23/8/07 ע"פ ישרים האלון



Source: MOJ Archives

## Section 6 – Loss of Employment

### 6.1 Objectives and Scope of Work

This section will carry out a summary of employment and labour for Jews in Yemen.

### 6.2 Research Analytical Conclusions

As established in previous chapters of this report, the Jews of Yemen worked as artisans in a wide range of occupations, and traditionally, their occupations did not overlap with those of the Muslims. Furthermore, many of these professions, were occupied solely by Jews because it was not the norm or practice for Muslims to do such work. This included work with metals.<sup>227</sup> In addition, Jews were responsible for the Royal Mint of Yemen and the royal finances.<sup>228</sup>

The Jewish community of Yemen was comparatively poor (when compared with other Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa). While no specific data regarding their earnings exists, it is known that the average pay for a few days' work in Yemen in the late 1940's, was one Riyal.<sup>229</sup> Although this figure probably varied from profession to profession, 99% of the Jewish community are considered to approximately share the same socioeconomic status.

### Poor Class

Given that there were 55,000 Jews in Yemen in 1948, which translates to 11,000 households,<sup>230</sup> and given that each household had one breadwinner, it can be assumed that 11,000 Jews in Yemen were employed/working in 1948. Of that 11,000, 0.1% belonged to the wealthy class, who's income differed greatly from that of the poor class, who earned one Riyal for a few days' work.<sup>231</sup> Accordingly, 10,989 Jews were earning one Riyal for a few days' work, or two Riyals for one week's work. Therefore, bearing in mind that most Jews would have worked for 11 months of the year (allowing for festivals and other Jewish Holidays), the conclusion was reached that the average income per annum, for a Jew of the poor class in the year 1948, was 96 Riyal.

In addition, research established that the entire population of Yemen was thought to be living on the equivalent of \$200 US (1948), per head, per year, at the time of valuation:

*When western development experts started arriving (in very tiny numbers) in the Yemen in the 1940's they were astonished and appalled by the primitive conditions in which about five million people lived on the equivalent of about \$200 a year per head... There was not even a national currency.*<sup>232</sup>

The above data provides a discrepancy. According to the first source, one household would have lived on \$20 (1948) annually, given that there was one breadwinner per household. According to the second source, one household would have lived on \$1,000 (1948) annually. In the absence of more data to lead this report to a more substantiated

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227 Wagner, pg. 71

228 Gilbert (epub)

229 Saadon, pg. 22

230 Gavra (2014), pg. 14

231 Saadon, pg. 22

232 Parfitt, pg. 110

conclusion, it was decided to use the second figure, (\$1,000 (1948) per household per annum or \$200 per head times 5 people per family) as it represents research already conducted regarding the cost of living across Yemen, in the 1940's.

## Wealthy Class

There is no sufficient data to discuss an accurate evaluation for such losses of the wealthy class.

**Figure 13** - Jewish Men in Yemen



Source: JDC Archives

## Section 7 – Personal Property & Moveable Assets

### 7.1 Objectives and Scope of Work

This section will carry out a summary of personal property and moveable assets owned by Jews in Yemen. For the purposes of this report, personal property and moveable assets include cash, gold and silver, jewelry, private vehicles, commodity stocks, clothing, household goods, and furniture.

### 7.2 Research Analytical Conclusions

According to Dr. Gavra,<sup>233</sup> the Jewish community was known for their precious metal possessions. As previously discussed, the Jews were predominantly artisans, known for their work with metals. As a result of this, Yemenite women were known for their jewelry. Gavra added that when they left Yemen, they had to sell many of their possessions to fund the journey, and they were often robbed as they made their way out of Yemen. Lastly, Gavra, added that many Jews were tricked by local Adenine thieves. Just before their departure via airlift to Israel, the Yemenite Jews were told that their jewelry was not pure enough for the holy land, Israel, while others were told that their jewelry was too heavy for the airplane to carry. The majority of the Jews had never seen an airplane before and did not know what awaited them in Israel. According to Gavra many of them left their jewelry on the ground just before boarding the plane. The Adenine thieves took the jewels as soon as the Jews left for Israel.

**Figure 14** - Jews waiting to board plane to Israel



Source: JDC Archives

The following excerpt illustrates the conditions in which the Jews reached Aden, without their valuables and belongings.

*Afterwards they described the circumstances of the journey: the Jews had made their way on foot from Yemen to Aden, leaving their belongings behind: They have arrived at the border reception camps in rags and emaciated from their journey. From the border camps the would-be immigrants have been transferred to Hashad [sic] camp, a gigantic reception center about ten miles outside of Aden city. Here they have been fed and cared for by the JDC in cooperation with the Jewish Agency. A staff of some 70 doctors, nurses, clerks and cooks, both American and Israelis, serve in the camp at the present time. The immigrants are flown to Israel, 125 passengers at a time, in four-motored C-54's operated by the Near East Air Transport Company, chartered by [the] JDC. The big load is made possible by the fact that the average weight of the Yemenite Jews, who are small in stature, is 85 pounds (about 39 kilos). Seats which normally hold two American passengers hold three and four Yemenites.<sup>234</sup>*



## **Section 8 – Business Losses**

### **8.1 Objectives and Scope of Work**

This section will carry out a summary of businesses owned by Jews in Yemen and business losses.

### **8.2 Research Analytical Conclusions**

In the case of Yemen, we know that the Jewish population were for the most part artisans. In terms of ownership this also meant that a large number of them were independent and therefore owned their own businesses. Typically, the worth of these businesses would need to be calculated in order to evaluate the losses. Such an evaluation would be based on the value of the property of the business itself. However, given the relative poverty in which Yemen found itself in these years, the value of these businesses specifically, and of the entire Yemenite economy as a whole was not substantial. Furthermore, in firsthand testimonies given by displaced Yemenite Jews, businesses belonging to the poor class were not described as being of substantial size, nor were they described as having existed in the form of structures or properties external to the homes already discussed in this report.

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of the Yemenite Jewish community was, by international standards, poor. As for the wealthy class, in testimonials by Jews displaced from Yemen, one testimony was identified referring to businesses belonging to the wealthy class. In this testimony the Yemenite Jew estimated that he suffered business losses worth \$136,350 in 1948. Being the only testimony that details and gives values to business losses, this testimony was not seen as a reliable sample.

## Section 9 – Communal Losses

### 9.1 Objectives and Scope of Work

Community organization and property in Yemen was not like that of other countries researched in the region and was relatively undocumented. This section is meant to discuss the extent and value of assets owned by the Jewish community in Yemen. Such assets include synagogues, cemetery land, other communal assets such as mikvahs, schools, hospitals, community centers, Zionist organizations, as well as holy books and other moveable assets.

### 9.2 Research Analytical Conclusions

Several completed testimonial forms were located, relating to abandoned synagogues, in the State Archives. The dates were not filled in, but they were likely completed between 1949 and 1953 as this is when most Yemenite Jews came to Israel. A total of 5 synagogues were registered in the forms, and their total registered value was 21,780 Riyals. This gives an average value for a synagogue of 4,356 Riyals.

The article "Synagogues in Yemen and the Disputes Therein" by Dr. Moshe Gavra (published on the "Nosach Teiman" website) states that he estimates that close to the great immigration of Yemeni Jews to Israel, there were 700-800 synagogues throughout Yemen

The above testimonials also include 3 mikvehs with a total value of 540 Riyals, suggesting an average value per mikveh of 180 Riyals. According to Dr. Gavra,<sup>235</sup> in large localities the mikveh had a closed structure, but in the vast majority of the villages there was no mikveh built, and instead a spring, river, or cistern was used. These were usually also the water sources of a village. The estimate is that in total no more than 50 mikvehs were built.

In Yemen, Jewish communities were typically very small. According to Dr. Gavra, in 1948, there were over 2,000 Jewish villages all over Yemen, many of these villages were comprised of a handful of families alone. In the city of Sana'a, there were only 1,100 Jewish families in 1948, and this community was the exception to the rule. Such distribution patterns had bearings on the community organization of the Jews. In Yemen it wasn't the norm for there to be public synagogues, rather the Jews of each village convened in private homes for prayer.<sup>236</sup>

With regards to Jewish cemeteries, "[i]n Yemen, the Jewish cemeteries were usually just plots of land on the extremities of villages where the Jews were permitted to bury. The Jewish graves were unmarked and did not have tombstones. In Yemen there was no problem of land, so it was easy for the Jews to bury and it was free of charge"<sup>237</sup>

Jewish schools were not the norm in Yemen. Jewish boys learnt their profession from their fathers while they learnt to read and write. A Jewish school was established in Sa'ana in 1913, however it only survived for two years.<sup>238</sup>

Overall, it can be said that except for synagogues, Jewish communal property in Yemen

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235 Gavra (2015).

236 Gavra interview, 2019

237 Gavra (2015), pg. 195

238 Wagner, pg. 100

was insignificant in terms of its commercial value. However, while communal property did not exist in the immovable form, Torah scrolls, and other holy books were owned by the Jewish community.<sup>239</sup>

*Despite their difficult plight, he said, they insisted on bringing with them hundreds of Torah scrolls and thousands of religious books, and he attributed to them messianic ideas: these were “naïve Jews” who saw Ben- Gurion as the Messiah, people who arrived “broken and shattered by protracted suffering . . . but on their faces is the splendor of the divine presence and a lofty nobility.” The physical rescue was portrayed as religious and national salvation; it became redemption. This is important because it linked the messianic idea with the aliya from Yemen.*<sup>240</sup>

According to Dr. Gavra, the Jews also left many Torah scrolls behind. During Operation Magic Carpet, when the Jews were on their way to make Aliya to Israel, they arrived in Aden where they were then flown to Israel. They arrived in Aden with their possessions in hand, and among them were their Torah scrolls which had been brought from the various villages from which they had arrived. Prior to boarding the planes bound for Israel, Zionist representatives told them that there was no room on the plane for the Torah scrolls and that they should leave them there (in Aden), informing them that they would be sent to Israel later via ship. These Torah scrolls were never seen again, with the Yemenite Jewish community in Israel never having received their Torah scrolls.<sup>241</sup> It is not known how many Torah scrolls were left behind, nor if any successfully made their way to Israel.

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239 Glitzenstein, pg. 163

240 Ibid., pg. 158

241 Gavra interview, 2019

## Section 10 – Calculating Present Day Valuation

Over 75 years have passed since the baseline date for evaluating the property left behind by Jews in Yemen. As mentioned in our methodology in Chapter 2 of this report, we argue that a truly compensatory approach to valuating the aggregate assets left behind by Jews demands that this value be actualized to reflect present-day value. Thus, we rely on a compound interest formula which makes use of the principal amount, an interest rate based on ten-year averages of the ten-year yields on US treasury bonds, over a total compound period of 76 years, from January 1st, 1949, through December 31st, 2024:

$$FV = PV (1+i/n)^{nt}$$

### 10.1 Benchmark Values

As mentioned above, 1948 represents a reasonable benchmark regarding the beginning of the Jewish community's gradual departure from Aden. The present day valuation will assume a valuation start year of 1948.

### 10.2 Application of Compound Interest Formula

The compound interest formula,  $FV = PV (1+i/n)^{nt}$  was applied on the basis of a combined set of total values per asset category, all valued in 1967 USD, for a period of 57 years.

The formula is analyzed as follows:

FV = Future Value

PV = Present Value

i = Interest rate

n = Number of periods

t = Number of years in the period

The formula was applied using ten-year units with corresponding ten-year US treasury bond average yields. This methodology yielded the results as outlined in Section 12 below.

## Section 11 – Summary of Findings

A thorough review of historical sources, discussions with subject-matter experts, community leaders, and available testimonial data was conducted. However, due to the lack of reliable testimonial and historical data for Yemen, it was determined that the analysis for Egypt, Syria, and Iraq would be used for illustrative purposes. Lost assets found in the first three countries at 1948 values were used to determine the value of lost property per person. This yielded a range, with Iraq providing the lowest value of lost property per person among the three countries, and Egypt being the highest. The low and high values were then multiplied with the population of each remaining country, and a mid-point was calculated from this range. In the absence of “best evidence” to reach accurate and verifiable country-specific values a discount factor of 50% was determined based on precedent discounts and applied across the mid-point value for Yemen.

**Table 10 – Range of Lost Assets for Yemen, (\$)**

(\$ Range of Lost Assets	
Yemen	1948
Population	55,000
Estimated – Low Range	267,508,206
Estimated – High Range	841,207,261
<b>Estimated - Mid Point</b>	<b>554,357,734</b>
<b>Discount</b>	50%
Estimated – Mid Point (with Discount)	<b>277,178,867</b>

A compound interest formula which makes use of the principal amount and an average yearly rate based on the ten-year yields on US treasury bonds over a total compound period from January 1, 1949, through December 31, 2024, was applied to the mid-point value for each of the countries on a yearly compounding basis. As there is no internationally recognized, risk free rate, the 10-year US Treasury Yield rate was chosen, as it is an accepted benchmark for the time value of money over long horizons and aligns with established practices in historical asset valuation.

**Table 11 – Periodic Compounding Table for Yemen, (\$)<sup>242</sup>**

Year	LT Govt Bond Yields: 10-Year for US (FRED) + 10-Year [Treasury [RLONG (Robert Shiller)	(\$) Balance	Year	LT Govt Bond Yields: 10-Year for US (FRED) + 10-Year [Treasury [RLONG (Robert Shiller)	(\$) Balance
1947			1986	7.68%	2,647,717,410
1948		<b>277,178,867</b>	1987	8.38%	2,869,706,450
1949	2.31%	283,581,699	1988	8.85%	3,123,555,900
1950	2.32%	290,160,794	1989	8.50%	3,389,006,092
1951	2.57%	297,617,927	1990	8.55%	3,678,766,113
1952	2.68%	305,594,087	1991	7.86%	3,967,855,817
1953	2.83%	314,242,400	1992	7.01%	4,246,002,509
1954	2.40%	321,789,455	1993	5.87%	4,495,384,390
1955	2.82%	330,853,191	1994	7.08%	4,813,657,605
1956	3.18%	341,382,594	1995	6.58%	5,130,396,275
1957	3.65%	353,834,524	1996	6.44%	5,460,708,289
1958	3.32%	365,567,087	1997	6.35%	5,807,599,783
1959	4.33%	381,408,327	1998	5.26%	6,113,321,515
1960	4.12%	397,109,637	1999	5.64%	6,457,909,071
1961	3.88%	412,527,419	2000	6.03%	6,847,267,172
1962	3.95%	428,805,063	2001	5.02%	7,190,828,802
1963	4.00%	445,967,986	2002	4.61%	7,522,385,934
1964	4.19%	464,639,179	2003	4.02%	7,824,409,729
1965	4.28%	484,537,351	2004	4.27%	8,158,838,041
1966	4.92%	508,392,740	2005	4.29%	8,508,852,193
1967	5.07%	534,185,199	2006	4.79%	8,916,568,027
1968	5.65%	564,344,405	2007	4.63%	9,329,330,822
1969	6.67%	601,990,879	2008	3.67%	9,671,406,286
1970	7.35%	646,227,176	2009	3.26%	9,986,371,751
1971	6.16%	686,029,385	2010	3.21%	10,307,350,383
1972	6.21%	728,631,809	2011	2.79%	10,594,495,985
1973	6.84%	778,488,441	2012	1.80%	10,785,461,775
1974	7.56%	837,322,705	2013	2.35%	11,039,010,006
1975	7.99%	904,203,856	2014	2.54%	11,319,492,852
1976	7.61%	973,028,839	2015	2.14%	11,561,258,353
1977	7.42%	1,045,219,471	2016	1.84%	11,774,178,195
1978	8.41%	1,133,122,428	2017	2.33%	12,048,516,547
1979	9.44%	1,240,117,513	2018	2.91%	12,399,128,378
1980	11.46%	1,382,234,980	2019	2.14%	12,664,986,356
1981	13.91%	1,574,515,385	2020	0.89%	12,778,232,442
1982	13.00%	1,779,228,627	2021	1.44%	12,962,558,445
1983	11.11%	1,976,811,966	2022	2.95%	13,345,169,962
1984	12.44%	2,222,694,428	2023	3.96%	13,873,305,063
1985	10.62%	2,458,818,666	2024	4.21%	<b>14,457,139,985</b>

242 Rates from 2024 to 1954 are from "Interest Rates: Long-Term Government Bond Yields: 10-Year." Federal Reserve Economic Data. 2024 rate represents average interest rate through September 30, 2024 based on available data. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=IRLT01USQ156N> ; Rates from 1954 to 1948 are from "An Update of Data shown in Chapter 26 of Market Volatility." R. Shiller, Princeton 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.econ.yale.edu/~shiller/data.htm>. R. Shiller notes that pre-1953 rates are government bond yields from Sidney Homer A History of Interest Rates.



On the basis of the illustrated mid-point of lost assets for Yemen and the application of the aforementioned periodic compounding formula, the estimated value for all assets at December 31, 2024 USD equals **\$14,457,139,985**.

**Table 12** – Range of Lost Assets for Yemen with Present Value, (\$)

(\$) Range of Lost Assets		
Yemen	1948	Estimated Present Value (\$, 2024)
Population	55,000	
Estimated – Low Range	267,508,206	
Estimated – High Range	841,207,261	
<b>Estimated – Mid-Point</b>	<b>554,357,734</b>	
<b>Discount</b>	<b>50%</b>	
Estimated –Mid-Point (with Discount)	<b>277,178,867</b>	<b>14,457,139,985</b>

## Appendix A: Period One: Ancient Israelite History<sup>243</sup>

The illustrious history of the Jewish people in the region is detailed in the Bible and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These dates are derived from Biblical references.

YEARS – BCE	NOTES
2000-1750	Old Babylonian period
1813-1452	The life of Abraham; begins period of Jewish forefathers
1280- 1240	Exodus from Egypt, Entry into the Land of Israel
1200-1050/1000	Period of the Judges in Israel
1000-587	Monarchical period in Israel
900-612	Neo-Assyrian period
722/721	Northern Kingdom (Israel) destroyed by Assyrians; 10 tribes exiled
587/586	Southern Kingdom (Judah) and First Temple destroyed

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<sup>243</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Timeline for the History of Judaism: Ancient Israelites" accessed on Nov. 6, 2024  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-for-the-history-of-judaism>

## Appendix B: Period Two: From the destruction of the first Jewish temple to the rise of Islam 587 – BCE – 683 CE

In the years after the destruction of the Jewish Temple, the “Babylonian Exile” dispersed the Jews throughout the region. During this period, Mesopotamia became the preeminent center of Jewish life between the third and sixth centuries C.E. the Jewish communities in exile played a pivotal role in the development of Judaism. A prime example is the Babylonian Talmud, a foundational text of Rabbinic Judaism, composed between the 3rd and 5th centuries in present-day Iraq. This work, second only to the Hebrew Bible, serves as the primary source of Jewish law (halakha) and theology.

The Sages of Babylon also established the tradition of reading the Torah in an annual cycle, a departure from the triennial cycle practiced in ancient Israel.

Throughout the period of exile, there always remained a presence of Jews in the land of Israel.

PERIOD TWO: FIRST TEMPLE TO THE RISE OF ISLAM <sup>244</sup>	
YEARS – BCE	NOTES
541	First Jews return from Babylon to rebuild the city
538-333	Persian Period.
520-515	Jerusalem ("Second") Temple rebuilt.
333-63	Hellenistic (Greek) period.
63	Rome (Pompey) annexes the land of Israel.
YEARS – C.E.	COMMON ERA
70	Destruction of Jerusalem and the second Temple.
132-135	Bar Kokhba rebellion (Second Jewish Revolt
368/426	Jerusalem Talmud compiled. Babylonian Talmud compiled.
570	Birth of Prophet Muhammad

<sup>244</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Timeline for the History of Judaism: Ancient Israelites" accessed on Nov. 6, 2024  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-for-the-history-of-judaism>

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AJCA	American Jewish Committee Archives	CZA - Central Zionist Archives
DIARNA	The Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life	IJCP International Jewish Cemetery Project
ISA	Israel State Archives	
JIMENA	Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa	
JJAC	Justice for Jews from Arab Countries	

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