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AZARBAIJAN IN JEWISH HISTORY

By WALTER J. FISCHEL

1.

The spread and diffusion of the Jewish Diaspora beyond the Euphrates and Tigris into Asia (Persia, Caucasus, India, China, etc.) is still an obscure chapter of Jewish historical research. While small and large Jewish communities in the lands of Europe have found their historian thanks to an abundance of source material (archives, records, etc.) the whole continent of Asia is still to a large degree terra incognita for the Jewish historian. Not a single Jewish community on the map of Asia — with the exception perhaps of Baghdad,¹ and to a lesser degree of Isfahan² — can be traced back through all the stages of its historical development. Recent investigations, however, have shed some new light on the Jewish connections and associations of some regions and provinces of the Trans-Euphratian Diaspora, arrived at by means of a thorough combing of all the available Oriental and Occidental sources.³

Pursuing this method of the regional approach this study tries "to conquer" another forgotten region of Asia for Jewish history, namely the province of Azarbaijan.

* For various reasons the system of transliteration of Oriental names could not be consistently followed.

¹ D. S. Sassoon: *A History of the Jews in Baghdad*, Letchworth, 1949.

² See the present writer's study on "Isfahān — The Story of a Jewish Community in Persia" (in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume*, New York, 1953, pp. 111–128).

³ See on "Kurdistan," *Jewish Social Studies*, 1944, pp. 195–226; on "Khorasan," *Historia Judaica*, 1945, pp. 29–52; on "Moghul India," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1949, pp. 137–177; on "The Persian Gulf," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, New York, 1950, pp. 203–230; on "Ormuz," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Philadelphia, 1950, pp. 379–399; on "Afghanistan," *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* V, Tel Aviv, 1953, and a forthcoming study on "Bokhara."

Azərbayjan, that northwestern province of the Persian Empire, bordering on Soviet Russia in the north, on Iraq and Turkey in the west, is a region with an extraordinary history. Its leading cities in Islamic times such as Tabriz, Urmia, Maragha, Khoy, Salmas, Ardabil, Sultaniya, played quite a role in the social and religious development of Asia. From the earliest times Azərbayjan has served as a trade route between Europe and the Orient, a meeting place of caravans, a bridgehead of communication, and a natural avenue of entry to the great Persian plateau for the foreign armies of the invaders of the Assyrians and the Medians, of Cyrus, Alexander the Great and others until the time of the Turks, and Soviet Russia of today. Through its territory, particularly through Tabriz, passed Marco Polo, on his way to China, and R. G. de Clavijo, en route to Samarkand, to the capital of Timur.⁴

2.

What role if any did this province of Azərbayjan play in Jewish history throughout the centuries of Islamic rule? What do the sources reveal pertaining to the association of Azərbayjan in general and to Tabriz in particular, with Jewish events and activities?

There can be no doubt that Jewish settlements in this area were in existence at an early date, although the Talmudic and Midrashic literature, as far as it could be ascertained, does not supply any concrete data.⁵ Only later sources indicate Jewish settlements in Azərbayjan, such as a Geniza-fragment⁶ in which is stated that Rabbi Barukh Yisrael, of Maragha, took a manuscript of Rabbi Sa'adya Gaon b. Joseph al-Fayyūmī from the city of

⁴ For further details see G. Le Strange: *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1905, pp. 159-171; P. Schwarz: *Iran im Mittelalter*, Vol. VIII, Zwickau, 1932; Vol. IX, Stuttgart, 1936; H. Filmer: *The Pageant of Persia*, New York, 1936; L. Lockhart: *Famous Cities of Iran*, Brentford, 1939; and the respective articles in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

⁵ S. Krauss: *Paras weRoma ba-Talmud uwa-Midrash*, Jerusalem, 1949.

⁶ See H. Hirschfeld: "The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah," (*JQR.*, O.S., Vol. 16, pp. 294-298).

Urmia, because there was nobody in this city who could even read one word in the Arabic language, (bileschon hagarith).⁷

Benjamin of Tudela, to whose "Travels" we always turn when we look for information about the Trans-Euphratian Diaspora, does not mention Jews in Azarbaijan or in any of its cities, but it is possible that he meant to include them when he listed the countries which according to his view stood under the authority of the Exilarch, the Resh Galūtha, in Baghdad.⁸

The important correspondence of R. Samuel b. Ali (12th century) with the Oriental Jewish communities contains a number of place-names of Jewish settlements in Persia, many of which have not yet been identified, but may refer to communities in Azarbaijan.⁹

The veil of obscurity over the Jews in this region in the 12th century was somewhat lifted by the Jewish physician Samuel b. Yahyā b. 'Abbās al-Maghribī, (d. 1174), a convert to Islam and the author of the ill-famed *Ifhām al-Yahūd* (Confutation of the Jews),¹⁰ who himself moved from Baghdad to Azarbaijan toward the end of the 12th century, settled in its capital Maragha, and there became the court physician of the then ruling Pehlevan dynasty. Experiencing the echo and repercussions of the appearance of David Alroy, the Pseudo-Messiah of Amadia in northern Iraq, in Kurdistan, this Samuel reported that David Alroy (1160) had found followers not only among the scattered Jewish communities in the mountainous regions of Kurdistan but that "Jews in Khoy, Salmas, Tabriz, Maragha and Urmia used to swear in the name of David Alroy, praised him at all their meetings and continued to believe in him as the expected Messiah"¹¹

⁷ In another interesting Geniza fragment published by I. Ben-Zwi: "A Jewish Merchant's letter from the 11th Century," *Zion*, Jerusalem, 1938, III, p. 179 ff., the reading of "Tabriz" has been challenged by A. I. Braver (*Zion*, III, p. 275), who suggested "Takrīt," although even this is doubtful.

⁸ Massaoth, ed. A. Asher, London 1840, I, p. 62 ff.

⁹ *Iggeroth R. Samuel b. Ali*, ed. S. Assaf, in *Tarbiz*, Jerusalem, Vol. I, 1930, esp. pp. 22, 24.

¹⁰ *Badhl al-Majhūd fī ifhām al-Yahūd*, ed. Cairo, 1939.

¹¹ See *Emek ha-Bakha*, ed. Wiener, 1858, p. XXII-XXIX, p. 169-170;

3.

These few and scattered references shed but little light on Jewish life in this region.

Azarbaijan entered the arena of Jewish history in a more definite sense only in the 13th century under the Mongol Il-Khan dynasty (1258–1335). With the conquest and destruction of Baghdad in 1258 and the dissolution of the Abbasid Caliphate by Hulagu Khan, the grandson of Djinghiz Khan, Baghdad ceased to be the center of the Islamic world, and lost its political and cultural hegemony. The new Il-Khan dynasty¹² founded by Hulagu moved the capital of their great empire from Baghdad to the East and made the province of Azarbaijan in northwestern Persia the center of political gravity. Their seat of government under Hulagu was in Maragha, then under Abaqa and Arghūn in Tabriz and from 1310 under Uljaytu in Sultaniya — all cities in Azarbaijan, in a region which hitherto had not played any central political role under the Caliphate and had been far away from the highway of history.

This geographical shift, this transfer of the capital to Azarbaijan had a considerable effect on the distribution of the Jewish Diaspora in Persia and Central Asia.

It is a well-known fact that the spread and dispersion of Jewish settlements in the Orient has always been largely conditioned by the change and shift, the expansion or contraction, of the political and cultural centers of the dynasties under whose rule they lived. Whether it was Ecbatana, Susa, or Babylonia, in pre-Islamic Persia, or Baghdad, Ghazna, Isfahan, Lar, or Teheran in Islamic times — every newly established center immediately drew new waves of Jewish immigration to it, or caused a new concentration of Jews in it. It is very probable that a Jewish community formed itself in every newly established provincial or national capital, in every new center of political

Steinschneider: *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, Frankfurt a/M 1902, § 149; Graetz, *Geschichte*, 4th ed., VI, 250; *Encycl. Judaica*, I, 177.

¹² About this dynasty and their rulers see for general reference: M. D'Ohsson: *Histoire des Mongols*, Hague-Amsterdam, 1834–35; H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, London, 1888, Vol. III; B. Spuler: *Die Mongolen in Iran* (1220–1350), Leipzig, 1939; the articles in the *Encycl. of Islam*.

gravity, and that the steady switch of political centers, so typical of Persian history throughout the centuries, was immediately accompanied by a similar transfer of the center of gravity in Jewish life. Jews must have flocked from other regions to these new centers — to Tabriz and Maragha — and begun to emerge as a prominent segment of the population.

4.

The geographical change was however only one factor in making Azarbaijan so prominently the scene of Jewish life in the second part of the 13th century. It was also the new attitude of the early Il-Khan rulers towards religion in general and the religious minorities, Jews and Christians alike, in particular, which contributed greatly to the appearance of Jews on the soil of Azarbaijan.

The early Mongol Il-Khan rulers, as it is known, were affiliated religiously with paganism, Shamanism, or Buddhism, and did by no means recognize the Islamic-Koranic division of mankind into "believer" and "non believer." For the Mongols — thus attests even the Christian historian Bar Hebraeus (13th Century) — "there is neither slave nor free man, neither believer nor pagan, neither Christian nor Jew, but they regard all men as belonging to one and the same stock."¹³

In consequence of this fundamental religious change, Islam lost, after the establishment of the new Il-Khan dynasty, its dominant position as a state religion in the Eastern lands of the Caliphate and became just one religion among others. The cornerstone of the interconfessional policy of Islam, the concept of the "protected peoples," was thus deprived of its importance, and all the restrictions and disadvantages, social, legal, and economic, resulting from this concept, were abolished. The Jews of Persia — and the Nestorian Christians as well — were deeply affected by these changes.

¹³ Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. and transl. under the title: "The Chronography of Gregory Bar Hebraeus," by E. A. W. Budge, Vol. I, London, 1932, p. 490.

This religious transformation, in addition to the transfer of the Il-Khan's residence, may account for the rather sudden emergence of Jews in the remote area of Azarbaijan and explain the fact that at no other period in its history has Azarbaijan been so closely and prominently associated with Jews and Judaism as under the Il-Khan rulers of the 13th and 14th centuries. Just as Tabriz became in the 13th century the official capital of Persia, outshining and superseding even Baghdad, so the Jews of Tabriz and Azarbaijan rose to prominence, entering the limelight of history and pushing back Baghdad's Jewry from the frontline of events. It is even probable — although sufficient documentary evidence is still lacking — that the seat of the Resh Galūtha, the Exilarch, was transferred to Tabriz after the decline of Baghdad.¹⁴

5.

It was particularly under Arghūn Khan (1284–1291) that the Jews of Tabriz experienced an unexpected rise to political power and influence. The emergence of leading Jews in Tabriz is singularly connected with the name of the Jewish physician, Sa'd ad-Daula ibn Hibbat-Allāh b. as-Ṣafī, from Abhar in the Persian province of Jibal, usually referred to in the Arabic and Persian sources as Sa'd ad-Daula, the Jew.¹⁵

He first enters the scene of history in Mosul as an agent (dallāl);¹⁶ he seems to have moved then to Baghdad, where he appears in 1284 — the first dependable date about him in the available sources — in the role of a physician, a profession to which, according to some authorities, he had devoted himself

¹⁴ Mention is made of a Fakhr ad-Dīn Harūn as "Ra's al-jalūt," probably of Tabriz, in a still unpublished part of Ibn al-Fūṭī's Arabic chronicle (see C. Brockelmann, *G.A.L. Suppl.*, II, 202), referred to by 'Abbās 'Azzāwī in his "Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq," Baghdad, 1939, III, p. 23, Appendix and now also in A. Ben-Jacob's most interesting study in *Zion*, Jerusalem, 1951, p. 61.

¹⁵ It is not essential to list here the various names of Sa'd ad-Daula's ancestors as given in the sources.

¹⁶ Thus Abul-Fidā', *Annales Muslemici*, ed. Reiske, Hafniae, 1788–95, IV, p. 18, and Ibn Khaldūn, *Kiṭāb al-'Ibar*, Bulāq, Vol. V, p. 546, 25.

from the very beginning of his activities. Despite his practice of medicine he found many opportunities of making himself familiar with matters of administration in Baghdad, and as a result of his expert knowledge of the financial administration he was appointed by the Government in 1285 a member of the Diwan in Baghdad. His abilities and his promotion must have aroused the enmity of his superiors, as well as that of his colleagues. In order to remove him from Baghdad they lauded his great medical capacities, claiming that as a doctor his equal was not to be found, that he therefore ought to be transferred to the court of Arghūn in Tabriz in Azarbaijan, the capital of the Il-Khan dynasty.

It was not the physician alone, but also the man, who found favor in Arghūn's eyes. Even his enemies could not avoid pointing out this human side of Sa'd ad-Daula's character, relating that he knew how to demean himself with dukes, that he was of excellent address, and spoke perfectly Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Mongolian. And so an uncommonly close friendship between the Mongol ruler and the Persian Jew developed which finally led to Sa'd ad-Daula's appointment as vizier, prime minister of the whole Il-Khan empire. In this capacity he ruled over a territory which extended from the Caucasus to the Indian Ocean, from Afghanistan to the Syrian desert.¹⁷

It was through this Sa'd ad-Daula that Tabriz and Azarbaijan reentered Jewish history.

After his appointment as responsible chief of the administration of the whole Il-Khan empire, Sa'd ad-Daula, according to custom, immediately removed all his opponents and filled the key posts in the administration with those upon whom he could

¹⁷ His rise to power is fully described in all its stages by Ibn al-Fūṭī, in his Arabic Chronicle, *al-Ḥawādīth al-Jāmi'a* . . . ed. M. Jawād, Baghdad, 1932, and by Rashīd ad-Dīn, in his *Jāmi' at-Tawārīkh*, of which the Persian text pertaining to the Il-Khan dynasty has recently been made available. See K. Jahn: *Ta'riḥ-i-Mubārak-i-Gāzānī* (Geschichte der Ilhāne Abāga bis Gaiḥātū, 1265-1295) ed. Prag, 1941. For further details about Sa'd ad-Daula's rise and activities, based on all available sources, see W. J. Fischel: *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam*, London, 1937, pp. 94-117.

depend (Mongols, Christians or Jews) but primarily with members of his own family. As Governor of Baghdad, in Iraq, he appointed his brother, Fakhr ad-Daula, together with Muhadh-dhib ad-Daula b. al-Māsha'iri, apparently a relative of his, to whom the Muslim Jamāl ad-Dīn ad-Dastajirdān was appointed secretary.

Another brother, Amīn ad-Daula, was put in charge of the district of Mosul and Diyar Bekr, Diyar Rabi'a and Mardin. In charge of the province of Azarbaijan was Labīd b. abi-r-Rabī' the Jew; and as Governor of Tabriz and its district, the Jewish physician Muhadh-dhib ad-Daula Abū-Manšūr, a relative of Sa'd ad-Daula.

His activities as Vizier and responsible leader of the administration of the Empire are highly praised in all sources, and even his greatest enemy Waṣṣāf¹⁸ says in his honor that Sa'ad ad-Daula established the administration on the basis of law and justice; that his reform led to the disappearance of oppression, robbery and thieving, to security and facilitation of the pilgrimage to Mecca; that the finances of the state were consolidated and that all the inhabitants benefitted from his successful efforts.

6.

This spectacular rise of a Jewish family to a position of power and influence in the Il-Khan empire certainly must have filled the Jews of Asia with pride.¹⁹ As we may assume from a statement by Bar Hebraeus: ". . . many Jews who were on the fringes of the world gathered together to him and they all with one mouth said, Verily, by means of this man the Lord hath raised on high the horn of redemption and hope of glory for the sons of the Hebrews".²⁰

¹⁸ Waṣṣāf, 'Abdullāh, b. Faḍlullāh of Shiraz: *Ta'rikkh i Waṣṣāf*. MS Brit. Mus., Add. 23517.

¹⁹ This Sa'd ad-Daula who remained a faithful Jew all his life and laid his protective hands over his fellow Jews can indeed be regarded as the most influential Jew not only of Azarbaijan but of Persia as a whole, after Mordecai and Esther, and after Ezra and Nehemiah, ever to play a role in the political arena of Persia.

²⁰ Bar Hebraeus, *loc. cit.* p. 490. It is a vain effort to try to discover who was

It may well be that this Jewish situation had brought to Tabriz the Jewish scholar from Tiflis, Isaiah b. Joseph, who began to develop a considerable literary activity in Tabriz and was the author of several cabalistic treatises.²¹ In the colophon of one of his works *Sefer Gan Eden*, the author stated that he had copied this manuscript in 1330 in Tabriz, for Elijah ha-Levi, "the Dayyan of the city of Tabriz."

The rule of these Jewish officials in Tabriz over a predominantly Muslim population caused much resentment in many circles. To be sure, the Mongols, who were tolerant with regard to all religious matters, could not see anything wrong in the elevation of a Jew as such to the highest post of the administration. For them there was no difference between Jew, Christian or heathen. All they demanded was strenuous service and submission. Sa'd ad-Daula, however, had personal enemies among the most influential of the Mongol dukes, who felt themselves overlooked as a result of Sa'd ad-Daula's power and Arghūn's unlimited confidence in him. When the Il-Khan Arghūn suddenly became dangerously ill at Tabriz, this awakened hopes of a speedy downfall of the Vizier, and the court circles inimical to

meant by the "Jews who were on the fringe of the world." It can also only be asked whether the Jewish immigration tendency indicated by Bar Hebraeus had any connection with the emigration movement to Palestine which began at that time from Germany and Western Europe, and under the influence of which the renowned Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg prepared to take the wanderer's staff in hand.

References to Sa'd ad-Daula in Hebrew sources have not yet been found, and the various attempts to identify him by H. Graetz, (*Geschichte d. Juden*, 4th ed., Vol. VII, p. 183 and note 10 p. 424), by I. Levi (*R.E.J.*, 1898, Vol. 36, p. 237-255), and by A. Marmorstein, (*Jewish Guardian*, London, 1929), remain unconvincing. Another identification was recently suggested by A. Ben-Jacob on the basis of a reference to a "Jewish Treasurer of Babylon" in a responsa of Rashba, ed. Livorno, § 74, (*Sinai*, Jerusalem, 1945, Vol. 16, pp. 330-332; 1946, p. 120).

²¹ About his writings see: A. Z. Schwarz: *Die Hebräischen Handschriften der Nationalbibliothek in Wien*, 1925, pp. 132-135, and the valuable remarks of Alexander Marx in *JQR.*, n. s., 1926, Vol. 16, pp. 340-341; also in *Proceedings of the Academy for Jewish Research*, 1932-33, Vol. IV, p. 160; cf. D. S. Sassoon: *Ohel David*, p. 552, 1069. The publication of some of his writings by Solomon Musa of Bukhara, Jerusalem, 1891, was not accessible to the present writer.

Sa'd ad-Daula succeeded in shifting the blame for Arghūn's illness to his shoulders and accused him of having poisoned Arghūn.

Although the accusation was an obvious absurdity, since Sa'd ad-Daula, apart from other considerations, must have known that Arghūn's end would lead to his own downfall, it served his enemies at the court as an excuse to get rid of him. At a banquet, Sa'd ad-Daula and the majority of his supporters were arrested by the conspirators, a large number were slain at once, and Sa'd ad-Daula was executed the following day, even before Arghūn passed away. This was, according to nearly all the sources, at the end of the month of February 1291, two years after Sa'd ad-Daula's rise to the highest rank of the state in Tabriz. Sa'd ad-Daula and his Jewish brethren and relatives thus met the inevitable tragic end of court-Jews and leading statesmen in a medieval Islamic state. A large scale persecution of Jews in Tabriz and other Jewish communities in the Il-Khan empire ensued.

The troubled years which followed the death of Sa'd ad-Daula and his protector brought the economy of the Il-Khan empire to the brink of destruction because of the decrease in revenues and the subsequent introduction of paper currency (called *chao*).²² The new Il-Khan ruler Gaykhatu (1291–1295) faced, in addition to the economic upheaval, such a shortage of foodstuff in his own court at Tabriz that he again had to call in the aid of a Jew, Rashīd ad-Daula, whose task it was to supply and prepare the necessary food for the ruler. This is what a source has to say concerning this Jew and his special mission: "Now a certain Jew whose name was Rashīd ad-Daula had been appointed to prepare food suitable for Gaykhatu and thus the Jew stood up strongly in this matter and he spent a large sum of his own money and bought myriads of sheep and oxen and he appointed butchers and cooks and he was ready in a most wonderful fashion on the condition that in every month

²² Cf. K. Jahn, "Das Iranische Papiergeld" in *Archiv Orientalni*, Prag, Vol. X, 1938, pp. 308–340, and W. J. Fischel, in *J.R.A.S.*, London, 1939, pp. 601–603.

of days silver and money should be collected for the Sāhib Diwān because the Treasury was empty and it was destitute of money and not even the smallest coin was to be found therein. And he wrote letters and sent to the various countries, but the Jew was unable to collect anything. And thus the whole of his possessions came to an end and as he was unable to stand in a work such as he was doing — he left and fled.”²³

As may be inferred from the duty entrusted to Rashīd ad-Daula, he was a physician by profession, to whom the duty of supervising the commissariat of the Il-Khan could be entrusted. In any case, the Jew Rashīd ad-Daula was summoned at a highly critical juncture to deal with a grave situation. However, after great but fruitless efforts, he was compelled to drop his public career.

7.

Under the Il-Khan ruler, Ghāzān, the Jewish position in Azarbaijan entered an entirely new phase. It was this Ghāzān (1295–1304) who became the “Constantine” of the Mongol Dynasty by breaking with the heathen past of his forefathers — with Buddhism — and by becoming a Sunna Muslim, in June 1295. This step meant the triumph of Islam in Asia over Mongol paganism and certainly meant a turning-point in the religious development of Asia.²⁴

By restoring Islam to the position it occupied under the Abbasid Caliphate before the invasion of Hulagu, by introducing the Muslim Sharī‘a law as the basis of the state, the concept of the “ahl adh-dhimma,” the protected religions, and the payment of the poll-tax (jizya) once again became the basic religious principle of the state. Ghāzān also renewed the restrictions of

²³ Bar Hebraeus, *l. c.*, p. 496; no other source seems to mention the role of this Jew of Tabriz.

²⁴ See literature mentioned in note 12. The Persian text of Rashīd ad-Dīn's “History of Ghāzān” has now been made available by K. Jahn's edition in Gibb Memorial Series, N. S., London, 1940; see also K. V. Zetterstéen: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlükensultane*, Leiden, 1919, pp. 34–36; pp. 75–81.

the so-called "Covenant of Omar" against Jews and Christians and ordered the destruction of Buddhist temples, Christian churches and of the synagogues of the Jews in 1295 — the first reference to a synagogue in Tabriz in a Persian source and another clear confirmation of the existence of a Jewish community there at that time.²⁵

This reversal of the attitude towards the Jews, brought about by the conversion of Ghāzān Khan to Islam, had a disastrous effect on the upper strata of leading Jews at the court of Tabriz. In order to escape the humiliation of being again classified as "protected people" many a leading Jew in Azarbaijan, of the intellectual class, decided to turn Muslim, and indeed, the sources report of a wave of conversions of Jews to Islam.

The exact size of this wave of conversion is hard to establish, but many references in the contemporary Islamic sources to physicians, astronomers and others, who are expressly designated by such statements as, "he was a Jew but became a Muslim," or "his father was a Jew and he turned to Islam," and similar indications, leave no doubt that the trend of conversion assumed considerable proportions far beyond Azarbaijan and Tabriz.²⁶

²⁵ See *History of Ghāzān Khān*, ed. K. Jahn, p. XXVIII, p. XXXI; and text 85.6, 92.15, 94.17. Bar Hebraeus, *l. c.*, pp. 506–507.

²⁶ The reaction on the Jewish side to the alarming spread of conversions at that time has been eloquently expressed by the Jewish scholar, physician, and philosopher, 'Izz ad-Daula Sa'd b. Maṣṣūr b. Kammūna, who lived towards the end of the 13th century in Baghdad. Author of many scientific treatises on medicine and chemistry, on the immortality of the soul and other aspects of philosophy and religion, he took also special interest in the "Jewish Case" of his time. In his major philosophical work *Tanqīḥ al-Abhāth lil-Milal ath-Thalāth* (A Critical investigation regarding the Three Religions) — a Kusari-like work and the last manifestation of the philosophical spirit of Oriental Jewry — Ibn Kammūna shows himself a fervent advocate of Judaism. He thought it necessary, to raise the voice of Judaism and to condemn the motives which had led many of his co-religionists at that time to abandon their religion. He enumerated as such motives, among others, the striving for a better social position, the love for a Mohammedan woman, or the avoidance of taxes, etc. Ibn Kammūna also showed in his work a critical attitude towards Islam, which caused the populace in Baghdad to riot against him, because they could not forgive a Jew who expressed critical views on Islam. They demanded his death, and only due to a ruse of the Governor of

Considering the instability in religious matters of the Il-Khan rulers, and the fact that within the span of one generation the rulers in Tabriz and Maragha professed in short succession such different religious beliefs as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sunnism and Shiitism, the repercussions of this religious confusion upon the population — Christians, Jews and Muslims alike — can at least be appreciated.

8.

Tabriz, which as has been shown, was the stage on which one of the most remarkable chapters of Jewish history in medieval Asia unfolded itself through the rise to power of the Jewish Vizier Sa'd ad-Daula and his group, continued even after Ghāzān Khan's new policy to be the scene of spectacular events of Jewish relevance and importance. It was in Tabriz and then in Sultaniya, the new residence of the later Il-Khan rulers, that again a Jewish personality arose, who entered the annals of Persian history, namely Faql-Allāh b. Abi-l-Khair b. 'Ali al-Hamadāni, known as Rashīd ad-Dīn.²⁷

He appears on the public scene in Tabriz as a practising physician in the service of the Il-Khan rulers Abaqa (d. 1282) and Gayhatu (d. 1294). In 1298 he was appointed to the highest political office, to the rank of Vizier, Prime Minister of the Il-Khan Dynasty by Ghāzān Khan (d. 1304) and he remained at the head of the government also under the subsequent rulers

Baghdad, who placed him in a leather-covered box and carried him outside of Baghdad to Hilla, where his son was a government official, was his life saved. See the present writer's *Jews . . . in Medieval Islam*, pp. 134-136, and Sa'd Ibn Manṣūr Ibn Kammūna, *The Arabic Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*, ed. L. Nemoy, Yale Univ. Library, New Haven, 1944.

²⁷ For details about Rashīd ad-Dīn's work see: E. Blochet, *Introduction à l'histoire des Mongols*, Paris, 1910; E. G. Browne, *Persian Literature under Tartar Dominion*, Vol. III, Cambridge, 1920; W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, London, 1928; C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature, A Bibliographical Survey*, London, 1935, pp. 70-78; 'Abbās 'Azzāwī, *Ta'rikh al-'Irāq*, Vol. I, Baghdad, 1935; Letters of Rashīd ad-Dīn Faql-Allāh Ṭabīb (Persian Text) ed. by Mohammad Shāfi', Lahore, 1947, (Panjab University, Oriental Publication, No. 7).

Uljaytu (d. 1316) and Abū Sa'īd Khan, thus serving as Vizier in continuous succession three Il-Khan rulers until his tragic death in Tabriz in 1318.

His spectacular rise to political power and influence was accompanied by unique achievements in the field of scholarship. His fame as author of medical and scientific treatises in the Persian language,²⁸ (he was referred to just as "Rashīd Ṭabīb," Rashīd the Physician), his establishment of hospitals, colleges, and libraries, his care for scholars in a specially constructed quarter called Rashīdiya, made the Mongol court, Tabriz and Sultaniya, centers of learning throughout the Oriental and Islamic world.

Moreover, charged in 1302 by Ghāzān Khan to write the history of the Mongol rulers and then by his successor Ulyaitu Khan to continue this work and to include also the history of all peoples who had come into relationship with the Mongols, he composed a universal history, *Jāmi' at-Tawārīkh* (Collection of Chronicles), which, according to all views occupies an absolutely exceptional place in the literature of Asia.²⁹ It has come to be regarded as "unquestionably one of the most important historical works in the Persian language."³⁰ Drawing on written and oral sources, collecting historical traditions of all peoples, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, through direct personal contact with Buddhist hermits, Chinese and Mongol scholars, Christian monks and Jewish savants, Rashīd ad-Dīn opened with his vast historical encyclopedia a new epoch in Persian historiography.

²⁸ See C. Elgood, *A Medical History of Persia and the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1950.

²⁹ The edition of Rashīd ad-Dīn's monumental history was begun over a century ago by E. Quatremère, *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, Paris 1836; he published the text, with a French translation, covering the period of Hulagu Khan until the fall of Baghdad. This was followed by the publication of other portions of his great history, in 1858-88 by I. N. Berezin on the Turkish and Mongol tribes, and in 1910-11 by the publication of the history of the Mongols from Okedai, the successor of Jenghiz Khan, by E. Blochet (Vol. I-II, Leiden).

It was only in 1940 that the edition of the post-Hulagu period of Rashīd ad-Dīn's work began to appear by the meritorious editor, Karl Jah. See above, note 17.

³⁰ Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, London, 1888, III, p. 589.

No other historical work in the Persian language before and after Rashīd ad-Dīn has dealt with such a degree of objectivity with so many non-Muslim peoples and their history. It is indeed the first systematic attempt to deal with the historic development of all great peoples of the Pacific and Atlantic, the first "Weltgeschichte," of the Middle Ages, such as no single people in Asia or in Europe had possessed until that time.³¹

9.

This literary event which took place on the soil of Azarbaijan is of utmost relevance to Jewish history not only because this "Universal History" contains a chapter on the history of the Jews³², but foremost because of the author's Jewish origin.

Despite the astounding unanimity in Oriental sources as well as in European literature as to the prominence and eminence of Rashīd ad-Dīn as statesman, physician, historian, and patron of scholars, one aspect of his life, namely, the question of his Jewish origin and religious affiliation has remained hitherto obscure and controversial.

European scholars who have dealt with Rashīd ad-Dīn's life manifest a great confusion in this respect. Their statements range from emphatic denial to the admission of the possibility of a Jewish origin.³³

³¹ K. Jahn, in Preface to his edition of Rashīd ad-Dīn's "*Histoire des Francs, Texte persan avec traduction et annotations*," Leiden, 1951, p. 3; cf. also: Barthold, "Turkestan," *l. c.*, p. 46; see C. Brockelmann, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Leiden, 1952, p. 37, "Die einzige wirkliche Weltgeschichte des Mittelalters nicht nur im Bereich des Islams, sondern auch des Abendlandes."

³² Rashīd ad-Dīn's chapter on the "History of the Jews" is still unpublished and untranslated — the present writer hopes to undertake this task in due course.

³³ E. Quatremère, in his *Histoire des Mongols*, p. VI, regards it as utterly impossible to assume a Jewish origin of Rashīd ad-Dīn; see, however, E. Blochet, *Introduction*, pp. 29–30. Hammer-Purgstall: *Geschichte der Il Khane*, Darmstadt, 1842–43, Vol. II, p. 80, refers to him as "angeblich ein Jude"; E. G. Browne, *l. c.*, III, p. 69, states cautiously only, "he was asserted by his enemies to have been of Jewish origin," while G. Sarton, in *Introduction to the History of Science*, Baltimore, 1936, Vol. III, p. 966, asserts, "It has never

In the light of all available sources, however, there can now be no doubt any more that Rashīd ad-Dīn was born in Hamadan as the son of a Jewish druggist,³⁴ and that until his conversion to Islam at the age of thirty he was a loyal member of his Jewish community.³⁵ During this first period of his life he stood under the influence of his Jewish environment and education and became acquainted with Jewish traditions and customs, as well as with the Hebrew language.

His Jewish origin and education in Hamadan did not fail to be evident, even after he had formally severed his connections with his former religion and had risen to power and influence. In the intrigues of the court circles against him, his enemies tried to ascribe to him the origin of a letter written in Hebrew characters, "a letter in secret signs", — according to which he,

been proved that he had Jewish origins." C. Brockelmann, *GAL, Supplement II*, p. 273, admits, "vielleicht jüdischer Herkunft," while B. Spuler, regards "Raschīd ad-Dīn's Herkunft aus dem Judentum als sicher." See also the following interesting statement by B. Spuler in *Oriens*, Leiden, V 1952, p. 130 (Review of K. Jahn's *Histoire des Francs*): "Zum ersten Male auf islamischem Gebiete unternahm es der bekannte Wesier der mongolischen Ilchane in Iran, Raschīd ad-Dīn — eine Weltgeschichte in dem Sinne zu schreiben, dass sie den Bereich der islamischen Oikumene ueberschritt. Das war moeglich geworden, seit die mongolische Eroberung weltweite Verbindungen geschaffen und Quellen zugaenglich gemacht hatte, an deren Heranziehung vorher nicht zu denken war. Es mag sein dass auch Raschīd ad-Dīn's Herkunft aus dem Judentum — ihm auch nach seinem Anschluss an den Islam den Blick fuer Dinge offen hielt, die jenseits von dessen Grenzen lagen."

³⁴ Of the many Arabic sources which mention Rashīd ad-Dīn's Jewish origin we list here, apart from as-Saqā'ī (Ms. Paris No. 2061, used by E. Blochet, *l. c.*), Badr ad-Dīn al-'Ainī (d. 1448), *'Iqd al-Jumān fī ta'rīkh ahl az-Zamān* (Ms. quoted in 'Abbāz 'Azzāwi, *Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq*, Baghdad, 1935, Vol. I, p. 455.); Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 1449), *ad-Durar al-Kāmina fī A'yān al-Mi'a ath-Thāmina*, Hyderabad, 1348-50, Vol. III, pp. 232-233; Ibn al-'Imād (d. 1679), *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*, Cairo, 1350-1351, Vol. VI, p. 49.

³⁵ Benjamin of Tudela estimated the size of the Jewish community in Hamadan at about 50,000 — a figure which is evidently grossly exaggerated. But we know from the Iggeroth of R. Samuel b. Ali (ed. Assaf, Jerusalem, 1930, pp. 28-29) that in the first half of the 13th century Hamadan was an important cultural center, a seat of a well organized Yeshivah. This could not have left Rashīd ad-Dīn's education unaffected.

together with another Jew at the court,³⁶ had supposedly attempted a plot against the Il-Khan. Though this letter was a falsification and Rashīd ad-Dīn was not its author, public opinion at the court took it for granted that he knew the Hebrew language and that he could at least use the Hebrew characters as a vehicle of correspondence among Jews. That Rashīd ad-Dīn had a certain knowledge of Hebrew is quite evident from his use in his works of numerous Hebrew terms and words from the Bible and their correct transliteration into Arabic characters.³⁷

His familiarity with Jewish customs is furthermore well attested. When several Jewish physicians in Tabriz, apparently led by the Jew, Najīb ad-Daula,³⁸ in 1305, intended to become Muslims, the new renegades were asked to manifest their conversion to Islam and their real break with the Jewish past, by first eating a dish of camel meat boiled in milk, alluding to the passage in Exodus 34.26, — a test which is ascribed to Rashīd ad-Dīn.³⁹

One could hardly ascribe the knowledge of the Hebrew language and customs in Tabriz in the 14th century to anyone but a Jew or to a person of Jewish origin or Jewish education.

³⁶ We hear of a good number of Jewish officials and persons at the court of Tabriz being in contact with Rashīd ad-Dīn, such as Jauharī, son of a Jewish money-changer of Tabriz, an anonymous Djahūdak, "a little Jew," the Jewish physician Jalāl ad-Dīn and particularly Najīb ad-Daula, the oculist. See Blochet, *l. c.*, p. 21; pp. 26–31.

³⁷ See Manuscript Paris 2324 (Catalogue de Slane, p. 407) containing some of Rashīd ad-Dīn's collected writings in Arabic, especially folios 111–116 where many Hebrew terms are listed and explained by him; see also E. Quatremère, *l. c.*, LIX; LX; LXI; and R. Levy, *Persian Literature*, London, 1923, pp. 67–68, who states that Rashīd ad-Dīn's story about the creation is based not on the Book of Genesis, but on a Midrashic account.

³⁸ About this Najīb ad-Daula, see Blochet, *l. c.*, p. 21 ff., and K. V. Zetterstéen, *l. c.*, p. 76.21.

³⁹ This test is said to have been introduced by Rashīd ad-Dīn, according to al-Qashānī (see Blochet, *l. c.*, pp. 19–20), perhaps to prove his own faithfulness to Islam; see Hammer-Purgstall, *l. c.*, II, pl 186; Howorth, *l. c.*, III, 538. During the persecution of the Jews under the Safavid dynasty in the 17th century, this test was revived and applied to the victims of the forced conversions in Isfahan and other places. See W. Bacher, *Les Juifs de Perse au XVII et au XVIII siècles*, Strassburg, 1907, pp. 109–110.

This Rashīd ad-Dīn, equally famous as vizier, physician, and historian, found a most tragic end, indeed the typical death of a Jew who, though converted, rose to power and influence at the court of a medieval Oriental potentate. He was accused by his enemies of having caused the death of the ruler, Ulyaitu Khan, by having given him a laxative, despite his diarrhoea, which caused him vomiting and waning of his power until he died. In a dramatic trial, reported by the sources,⁴⁰ Rashīd ad-Dīn replied to this accusation: 'God forbid, how could I? I was a simple Jew, a druggist, and in the Il-Khan's days and in the days of his brother Ghāzān I was placed at the head of the kingdom.' But when the physician of Ulyaitu Khan, the Jew Jalāl ad-Dīn ibn al-Ḥazzān⁴¹ was summoned and questioned about the Il-Khan's death it was concluded . . . that Rashīd had caused the death and without any further trial Rashīd ad-Dīn together with his son Ibrahim was sentenced and cruelly executed, in 1318 near Tabriz at the age of 71. His head is said to have been sent to Tabriz where it was proclaimed, "This is the head of the infidel Jew."⁴²

This terrible end of Rashīd ad-Dīn was not, however, the final step in his fate. Even in his grave he found no rest. Almost a hundred years after his death, Mirān Shāh,⁴³ son of Timur, the governor of Tabriz, (1407) ordered the exhumation of the bones of the "Jew" Rashīd ad-Dīn and their transfer to a Jewish cemetery in Tabriz, so that he might not share peace with "true believers."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The details of the trial are given in the sources mentioned above in Note 34. A. 'Azzāwī, I, p. 455 gives a complete survey of the Arabic sources pertaining to the trial.

⁴¹ No details about this Jalāl ad-Dīn ibn al-Ḥazzān, the Jewish physician of the Il-Khan, are known.

⁴² When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the famous Arab geographer, visited Tabriz and later, in 1325, in Baghdad met one of the sons of Rashīd ad-Dīn, Ghiyāth ad-Dīn, who rose to the rank of a vizier under Abū Sa'īd, despite the fate of his father, he (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa) refers to the father Khodja Rashīd ad-Dīn as "one of the Jewish immigrants" (*Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, Paris, 1914, Vol. II, 116).

⁴³ For further details see W. Barthold, *Ulug Beg und seine Zeit* (transl. by W. Hinz), Leipzig, 1935, p. 44, note 4, and W. J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*, Berkeley, 1952, pp. 104-105.

⁴⁴ See Daulatshāh, *The Tadḥkirat ash-Shu'arā'*, ed. E. G. Browne, London,

10.

Tabriz continued to be the capital of Persia⁴⁵ for two and a half centuries even after the decline of the Il-Khan dynasty of Persia, the invasion of Timur, and the rise of the new dynasty of the Safavids under Shāh Ismā'il (1502–1524), whose cradle stood in Ardabil, another city in East Azarbaijan. The proximity to the Ottoman border and the constant menace of attack by the Ottoman Sultans, however, caused Shāh Tahmasp (1524–1576) to move his capital from Tabriz to Qazwin while Shāh 'Abbās I, (1587–1629) transferred it to Isfahān.

For these two and a half centuries very few sources have been preserved to shed light on Jewish life in Azarbaijan. It seems that Jews of the intellectual strata began to emigrate from Tabriz, as was the case of the Jewish physician Nafīs b. Dā'ud b. 'Anān at-Tabrizī,⁴⁶ apparently a Karaite, who moved in 1354 from Tabriz to Cairo, where he became a Muslim and a very leading physician and scholar.⁴⁷ That Azarbaijan was generally a center of Karaite groups is indicated by Hebrew manuscripts whose owners or copyists according to their colophons were Karaites from the city of Khoy near Tabriz, from Tabriz proper, or from other smaller places in Azarbaijan.⁴⁸

1901, p. 330, and E. Blochet, *l. c.*, p. 30. The reference to a Jewish cemetery in Tabriz is self-explanatory.

⁴⁵ See V. Minorsky's article on Tabriz, *Encycl. of Islam*, IV, pp. 582–593.

⁴⁶ For details see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *ad-Durar al-Kāmina*, *l. c.*, IV, 396–397; A. N. Poliak in *Zion*, 1937, Vol. III, pp. 84–85.

⁴⁷ Many leading personalities, statesmen and physicians, in Mamluk Egypt were descendants of this Jewish family from Tabriz. The "chief of the physicians" and the most intimate friend of the Mamluk Sultan Barqūq (1382–1399) was the converted Jew, Faṭḥ ad-Dīn Faṭḥ Allāh, born in Tabriz in 1358. The contemporary Arabic sources such as Maqrīzī, Sakhāwī, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, Ibn Iyās, Qalqashandī and others, have a great deal to say about him. See G. Wiet, "Les secretaires de la Chancellerie en Egypte," in *Mélanges R. Basset*, Paris, 1923, Vol. I, p. 276 ff. (Public. de l'Inst. des Hautes Études Marocaines, Vol. X); and E. Strauss, *History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluks*, Jerusalem, 1944, Vol. I, pp. 323–324.

⁴⁸ See S. Poznansky, "Karäische Kopisten und Besitzer von Handschriften" in *Zeitschrift fuer Hebraeische Bibliographie*, Frankfurt a. M., Vol. 19, Jhg. 1916, pp. 78–122; *Catal. Bodleiana*, ed. Neubauer, pp. 117–118, No. 608; *Catal. Brit. Museum*, ed. G. Margoliouth, II, p. 191, No. 600; J. Mann, *Texts*

A most illuminating indication of the continuous existence of a Jewish community in Tabriz comes from the Yemenite Jewish traveller, Zakharyah b. Se'adyah, who visited Tabriz in the middle of the 16th century, and who in one of his "Maqāmoth" of his *Sefer ha-Musar*, described Jewish life in Tabriz, where he stayed for some time, in not too favorable terms.⁴⁹

The existence of a Jewish community in Tabriz and in other places of Azarbaijan during the rule of the Safavid rulers is also attested by Armenian and European sources. The Armenian historian Arakel of Tabriz⁵⁰ lists the Jewish community of Tabriz as having been severely affected by the wave of persecution which swept the whole of Persia in the time of 'Abbās I (1587–1629) and 'Abbās II, (1642–1667).⁵¹ and among European travellers to Persia of the 17th century it is in particular J. Chardin, who refers to "Jews in several districts of Azarbaijan."⁵²

That the Jews of Azarbaijan survived these persecutions under the Safavids is proven by the fact that between the years 1711–1713, a messenger (Shaliakh) from Hebron, Rabbi Judah b. Amram Diwan, visited, among other Jewish communities in Persia, also Tabriz;⁵³ it is furthermore attested by the documents

and Studies, Cincinnati, 1935, II, p. 74 speaks of a Karaite community in Khoy at the beginning of the 14th century.

Mention is made of a Moses b. Abraham of Khoy, of Aaron b. Elija of Tabriz, of Abraham b. Isaiah of Tabriz, of Daniel (who completed the copy of Rabbam's *Mishneh Torah* in Tabriz) and others.

⁴⁹ See Maqāma 28. This work, still available only in manuscripts, is an important historical source and offers a wealth of information on the Jewish communities in Asia, which the Yemenite author had visited during the second part of the 16th century. Some "Maqāmoth" of his *Sefer ha-Musar* have been published by Brody, Kehati, Schirman, Goitein, and Fischel. See D. S. Sassoon, *Ohel David* II, pp. 1021–1033, esp. 1030. Thanks to the courtesy of Prof. A. Marx, the manuscript in the possession of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary was used.

⁵⁰ See the French translation of the respective chapter of Arakel's Chronicle by A. Galanté: *Marannes Iraniens*, (Haménorah), Istanbul, 1935; F. C. Basnage, *L'histoire des Juifs*, Rotterdam, 1707, Vol. V, p. 1921; 1928.

⁵¹ See the present writer's study on "Israel in Iran" in *The Jews*, ed. L. Finkelstein, New York, 1949, pp. 837–839; and *Zion*, 1937, II, pp. 273–293.

⁵² *Voyages en Perse*, ed. Langlès, Paris, 1811, X, 242.

⁵³ See A. Yaari, *Shelukhei Erez Israel*, Jerusalem 1951, pp. 381–382; 421–422; 487–488; *Encycl. Judaica*, V, p. 1159 s. v. Diwān.

published by J. Mann,⁵⁴ which throw interesting light on the religious life, during the 18th century, of the Jewish community in Maragha and its relationship to the Jews in Kurdistan especially Amadiyah.⁵⁵

At the beginning of the 19th century, Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel, the famous Jewish traveller,⁵⁶ found during his tour through Kurdistan, Babylonia and Persia, Jewish communities in Urmia (200 Jewish families), in Salmas (100), in Saughbulagh (25) and in Miandob (15), while Maragha and Tabriz, according to his account, had already ceased to have a Jewish community. Undoubtedly persecutions by the Christian and Muslim population in Azarbaijan during the 19th century had decimated the Jewish population to such a degree that Azarbaijan as a whole had ceased to play any important role in the annals of Jewish history.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ J. Mann, *Texts and Studies*, Cincinnati, Vol. I, 1931, pp. 477-549.

⁵⁵ For further details about the Jewish community in Maragha see the manuscripts which the present writer had brought back from Kurdistan and Persia, part of which has been published by S. Assaf in *Zion*, O.S., Jerusalem, 1934, pp: 101-109.

⁵⁶ See his *The Travels of Rabbi David D'Beth Hillel; from Jerusalem, through Arabia, Koordistan, Part of Persia, and India to Madras*, Madras, 1832, pp. 74-82; also the present writer's study in *Sinai*, Jerusalem, 1939, reprint pp. 1-39; and in *Jewish Social Studies*, New York, 1944, pp. 195-206.

⁵⁷ A more detailed documentation of the remnants of Jewish life in Azarbaijan during the 19th and 20th centuries is beyond the scope of this study and will be published in another connection.

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[Footnotes]

³³ **Review: [Untitled]**

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