The Jews of Iranian Kurdistan Under the Leadership of Chacham Shmuel Bruchim at the Migrants Camp in Teheran (1950–1951)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yaffa Israeli

With the foundation of the State of Israel, many Jews residing in Islamic countries wished to immigrate to Israel for religious and nationalist-economic reasons. The nascent Israeli government decided to make urgent efforts to extend Aliyah services to Jews from Yemen, Iraq, and Libia, who were designated “endangered diasporas” because of the existential threat hovering over them. To assist with their relocation, the Jewish Agency, with help from international organizations such as the Joint[[2]](#footnote-2) and the Oevre de Secours (aux Enfants) (OSE), established camps in the migrants’ countries of origin as well as transit countries: Camp A in Teheran took in Jews emigrating from Iraq, the “Ge’ulah” camp in Aden took in the Jews of Yemen, and the Brindisi camp in Italy took in Jews coming in from Libia. The Agency sent envoys from Israel to these camps and set up a system for teaching Hebrew and preparing the migrants for life in Israel. The envoys also issued passports, conducted medical checks, and took care of all other matters from the moment the migrants arrived at the camps and until they departed to the airport (Iraq and Yemen) or the seaport (Libia). In the years 1948–1951, approximately 197,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from Iraq, Yemen, and Libia.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Jews of Iranian Kurdistan were also under existential threat and worked tirelessly to be included in the “endangered diasporas” group. They traveled to Teheran by their own means and were lodged in an additional transit camp set up there (Camp B), from whence they immigrated to Israel. The present article will examine the circumstances that led to the establishment of this camp, its management, the actions undertaken by its administrators, and the preparation for immigration it offered during its operational years (1950–1951).

# Jews in Iranian Kurdistan Before the Establishment of the State of Israel

Kurdistan is located in the west and southwest regions of Iran, bordering the Azerbaijan province to the north and Iraqi Kurdistan to the west. Its territory consists of predominantly stony hills, and its climate is known for heavy snowfall in the winter and abundant rain in the spring, which runs off the hillsides and turns into mighty streams. The combination of stony ground and harsh climate make it a difficult region to traverse—it is a kind of natural fortress, only loosely controlled by the far-off authorities. The Jewish population in the region, almost all of whom were devoutly religious, lived as a minority within the Suni Kurdish majority in exclusively Jewish quarters. Every such quarter would have at least one synagogue. The spiritual and rabbinical leadership of the Jewish community handled internal religious affairs, while the public authorities managed the life of the community both within the Jewish quarters and when it came to the community’s relations with outside factors, especially contact with the government. The main occupations available to the Jews were smithing, trade (in fabrics and spices predominantly), and commerce.[[4]](#footnote-4) They communicated with the local Muslims in Kurdish, with the neighboring villagers in Azeri Turkish, and with government officials in Farsi. At home and with fellow Jews, they conversed in Jewish neo-Aramaic, a Semitic language that is the direct living descendant of ancient Eastern Aramaic, represented by classical Syriac (Christian), Mandaic (Gnostic), the language of the Babylonian Talmud, and that of the Geonim (Jewish). They referred to their Aramaic dialect as *Lishana Noshan* (“our language”), while Hebrew was considered the “holy tongue.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The Kurdish population was concentrated in a few main settlements, with a total of roughly 7,260 Jews living among them.[[6]](#footnote-6)

On the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, Irani newspapers published articles condemning Israel and the Jews. The main victims of this propaganda were the Jews of Kurdistan.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Suni Kurds, considering themselves kin to the Muslims in Palestine, vented their anger at their Jewish neighbors by banning any commercial relations with them. By late 1949–early 1950, twelve Jews had been killed in Bukan, six in Tikab, and twelve in Baneh.[[8]](#footnote-8) Chacham Bruchim described the situation of the Jews in his town during this period as follows:

We were, in our town, among the goyim, starved and stifled, pressed and squeezed, both by trade, which they had agreed among themselves to conduct no longer with Israel [Jews], and by religious hatred, with which they cursed at us sharply and relentlessly. And when they saw an Israelite in hiding, they beat and hurt him. And in the cities, they kill them ruthlessly, and the Jewish schoolchildren are trodden and tortured by the children of strangers [non-Jews].[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Jews of Bukan described a similar situation:

Yes, in poverty, we are destitute and beggared, in want of all, hungry and thirsty, tortured and enslaved among the goyim, the strangers […] And we have no more strength to suffer the world for all our hardships […] They curse, and slander, and deride us in the markets and on the street corners. They hit our children, our holy children, with stones, and curse at them and at us […] And there is nothing we can do in response […] As for goods, what bare little we have is not enough to provide for us […] but even that they won’t allow us to sell and take our livelihood out of our hands, swearing at buyers lest they buy from us, and they refuse to pay any debts owed to us, they deny them, make false claims. Even in the courts they scoff at us, and we have no power to prove their debts and get payment out of them.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In 1949, Chacham Bruchim wrote letters to the Central Aliyah Committee in Teheran, whose members included Moshe Tuv, the veteran chairman of the World Zionist Organization in Iran; Zion Cohen, also known as Hajji Abdallah, an envoy of the Mossad LeAliyah Bet; and Zion Ezri, an Aliyah activist from the Jewish community in Iran. Chacham Bruchim asked them to help the unfortunate Jews of Saqqez immigrate to Israel. The letters were signed by members of the Saqqez Jewish Community Council. The letters from July, August, and September talk about large families who have lost everything due to the relentless persecutions and are now living in poverty: “Now, extravagant prices and hunger rule the day. Some reach out to borrow bread, others clothing, still others sustenance, but their hands come back empty.” The members of the Saqqez community even asked the Teheran committee if they could find employment for the bright son of a good family whose entire fortune would be wasted away lest the committee process his Aliyah right away: “Not through charity, but through hard work, for he is too ashamed to receive charity, or gifts, or even food for the road.” Another request pertains to a poor woman whose husband and stepsons (from the husband’s first marriage) converted to Islam, and who, along with her daughter, is being coerced by him to convert to Islam as well. The members of the council ask the committee to advance her date of Aliyah “for she is in great danger.” A third letter describes the situation of a widow whose two sons were murdered by Muslim Kurds, their burial place unknown. The council asks for her Aliyah to be sped up as well because, “perhaps in this manner she will find consolation and relief for her suffering.” In August of 1949, the Jews of Bukan also sent a missive to the Aliyah Committee in Teheran stating that the city’s Jewry needs to make urgent Aliyah. A similar letter was in December, asking the council to “write our names among those volunteering to immigrate to the Land of Israel so as to save us from certain death and deliver our thoughts form darkness, perhaps it will be the cure to our ailments for it is all we have strived for our entire lives.” And if, God forbid, “it is not in your power to remove us from our town,” then “half of us will die of hunger due to poverty and price-gouging, or convert and lose themselves and the members of their households.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Because of the imminent danger threatening the Jews of his community and their desperate economic condition, Chacham Bruchim decided not to wait to receive immigration visas from the Aliyah Committee, but to force their hand instead. He advised other Jewish community leaders in Kurdistan who came to seek his council to do the same.[[12]](#footnote-12) In a letter to Yitzhak Rafael (director of the Aliyah division at the Jewish Agency), Chacham Bruchim explained why the Jews of Kurdistan decided to come to Teheran of their own accord without waiting for visas from the Aliyah Committee: being “pressed and strained and having reached the limits of suffering,” they were forced to run “and leave everything we have behind—be it our homes, our fortunes, or our debts,” which the locals were not willing to pay back. According to him, they accepted these tribulations “because of our love of the Land of Israel and its settlement. We risk our lives and our fortunes to immigrate and work the Holy Land.” Chacham Bruchim nominated his student, Shalom Chamani, to be the leader of the Jewish community in Saqqez and his agent in all things pertaining to organizing the immigration to Israel.[[13]](#footnote-13) He also wrote a *piyyut* (a Jewish liturgical poem) in Hebrew to encourage his fellow community members to leave their possessions and immigrate to Israel: “The free people raised a great cheer, God has saved us from slander and jeer; the enemy is shamed, the libelers are scorned, be strong and have courage, your foes will yet mourn; gather your bundles and leave your affairs, and let not your eye wander wistfully there; for all the good of the Land will be yours to enjoy, go and inherit your forefathers’ cherished soil.”[[14]](#footnote-14) We can infer the gravity of the danger looming over the Jews of Kurdistan from Chacham Bruchim’s use of multiple synonyms for enemies: *daltorin*, *shurin*, *tzar*, and *orev*.

In January 1950, two hundred refugees from Kurdistan arrived in Teheran. In a letter to the Mossad Le-Aliyah in Israel, Zion Cohen remarked that the Jews of Kurdistan should be categorized as an “endangered diaspora” because of the threat posed to their lives by their neighbors. This designation was applied to Jewish communities who were in real and imminent danger of extinction, making them a priority for Aliyah according to the criteria established in Jerusalem (see the chapter by Zagagi in this collection). In his letter, Cohen requested that these two hundred Jews, who were already in Teheran, be transferred to Israel immediately: “Their economic situation and level of safety are no better than those of the Jews of Yemen, but they are working people. They have come here by their own means and of their own initiative. To escape the persecution and harassment of the local effendis. They must be treated by the same standards as the Jews of Iraq and Yemen.” He added that “there is no way to send them back and no justice in doing so. They must be washed, fed, and sent to Israel—to work.” Apart from that, he reported that three children had died due to the lack of medicine or proper healthcare.[[15]](#footnote-15) In February 1950, another 600 Jews from Kurdistan arrived in Teheran without visas. They had travelled a long way through the snow and the cold, carrying whatever meager belongings they had on their backs, and arrived in a state of dire exhaustion—but there was no place for them in Camp A, which was housing the migrants from Iraq. Under these pressing circumstances, the envoys redirected them to the enclosure of the Beheshtiyah—a Jewish cemetery located about eight kilometers outside of Teheran. There, the refugees put up makeshift tents made of blankets and sackcloth. Zion Cohen made an urgent appeal to the Jewish Agency in Israel and to the Joint asking for help in setting up a camp for these incoming migrants.[[16]](#footnote-16) On March 22, 1950, two Jews from Bukan were killed just outside their town, on the road to Teheran, victims of the spontaneous flight of Kurdistani Jewry. Following the murders, the Jewish community of Bukan sent a telegram to the Iranian Minister of the Interior, with a copy to the Prime Minister and the Aliyah Committee, begging for security forces to be dispatched to their town in order to protect the Jewish population. The telegram specified that the two victims, Solomon and Yitzhak Ne’eman, were killed in proximity of Bukan, that their bodies were never found, and that the lives of the 360 Jews who resided in the town were in real danger. The community was, therefore, asking for military forces to come restore order in Bukan and enable them to live in peace.[[17]](#footnote-17) With the coming of spring, the Jews of Kurdistan made a last effort to sell whatever property they had left, although finding buyers proved difficult, if not impossible. In April 1950, they assembled a convoy of old, rattling trucks, which were filled to the brim, and then set off to the cemetery outside Teheran. All this, they did of their own accord.[[18]](#footnote-18) By May 1950, 3,000 refugees from Kurdistani towns (Baneh, Bukan, Sanandaj, Saqqez, Sain Qaleh, and Tikab) were camped out among the gravestones of the Beheshtiyah, waiting to immigrate to Israel with all their worldly possessions: bundles of kitchen utensils and household tools, boxes of books, ancient prints of holy books from Vilna and Amsterdam, Aleppo and Djerba, and Torah books from Kurdistan. They constructed tents out of whatever cloth was at hand and covered them with straw mats at night to protect themselves from the cold and the fierce sandstorms. The children and their mothers ate the grass in the fields, while the men satisfied their hunger with leftover, rotten fruit they found in the city’s garbage cans. During the first few weeks, over thirty people in the camp died, most of them of typhoid. Their graves were dug only a few paces away from their families’ tents, and many children’s lives were hanging by a thread.[[19]](#footnote-19)

# Camp B

The many difficulties encountered by Kurdistani Jews at the transit camp did not deter their brethren from continuing to make their way to Teheran. Indeed, in June 1950, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, director of the European branch of the Joint, came to visit the camp and found 4,000 Kurdistani Jews scattered among the gravestones. The camp was completely unmanaged, and each person was left to stake out their own corner of the place. A corroboration of the dire state of the refugees can be found in Chacham Bruchim’s letter to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion from July 1950:

And today we have here four thousand people, male and female, strewn about and parked outside the cemetery’s death gates, without food or shelter, they are short on water, short on bread, they lie upon the dirt of the earth with nothing to shield them from the sky, the heat of the day and the cold of night, and the wind blows up the dust, which covers their bodies, but they have nowhere to clean their bodies, to purify their souls, for our soul is mired in dirt and our belly sticks to the ground […] we have escaped from the frying pan and into the fire, and no one asks about us, no one cares.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Joint allotted 100,000 US dollars for urgent aid to the refugees staying at the cemetery, and the Jews of Teheran donated a similar amount. Thanks their efforts and those of the Jewish Agency in Teheran, a temporary camp was established at the cemetery, with Abraham Ernan (envoy of the Mossad LeAliyah Bet) and Leva Levin (representative of the Joint) as coordinators. The local HeChalutz activists organized classes to teach Hebrew to children and adolescents. A special commission, made up of the wealthiest Jews of Teheran, made food provisions for the camp.[[21]](#footnote-21) At the beginning of July 1950, Yitzhak Rafael visited Teheran and instructed to transfer the committee for Aliyah from Iran from the hands of the Mossad LeAliyah Bet, most of whom were members of Mapai and Mapam kibbutzim, into the hands of the Jewish Agency’s Aliyah division, most of whom were representatives of the religious parties in Israel.[[22]](#footnote-22) The camp’s official designation was “Camp B,” but its residents referred to it as the “Kurdish” camp (Camp A was known as the “Iraqi” camp or the “Arab” camp). An envoy from the Aliyah division of the Jewish Agency, Moshe Shapira, was appointed director of the camp and given a staff to help manage it. Chacham Bruchim blessed Yizhak Rafael for his appointments and thanked him for the “mercy and compassion that he showered upon the nation of Israel upon coming and seeing our struggle and strife when we were mired in misery and tossed aside like expired cadavers.” The Chacham was grateful that “his heart warmed and his pity went out to his brothers and he sent right and true emissaries to watch over us […] to witness our wants and answer our needs.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Under Shapira’s management, camp life revolved around three pillars: cleanliness, work, and study.[[24]](#footnote-24) The camp residents nominated Chacham Shmuel Bruchim, rabbi of the Saqqez community, to be their leader and representative.[[25]](#footnote-25) Even though his function was mostly religious-spiritual, he was the one who had contacted the heads of the Jewish Agency and the Aliyah ministry in Israel and urged them to speed up the immigration of the camp’s residents to Israel. The latter praised Chacham Bruchim before the Agency’s representatives in Israel: “He is a straight, loyal and god-fearing man,” who spread the word of the Torah for forty years in Saqqez, guided the community on matters of Torah law and justice, “and took on the burden of seeing to the public’s needs.” At the transit camp “he took responsibility for four thousand migrants and all of their affairs.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The camp residents, who were almost all of them working people, did not like receiving handouts and preferred to work at any job necessary for the camp to function properly. The migrants were divided into groups based on the town they had come from, and every group appointed a representative to liaise with the camp’s management. These representatives were in charge of making the work arrangements.[[27]](#footnote-27) When all residents of the camp became responsible for its day-to-day operations, administrative costs radically decreased. Only two workers had to be brought in from the outside—a hairdresser and a photographer. Peddlers from Teheran also came over to the camp to sell luggage to the migrants. Beside the graves, a whole city of clay huts sprung up in anticipation of winter. Over a dozen streets now traversed the cemetery grounds. Portraits of David Ben-Gurion, Chaim Weizmann, and Theodor Herzl, cut out of newspapers and journals, adorned the walls inside the huts. The residents even managed to install their own toilets and showers. A large shack made out of straw mats, which could fit up to a thousand people, served as the camp’s dining room, auditorium, and school. Every family cooked for itself based on the ingredients provided and had its meals at the dining room. Water was obtained from a local spring using a small pump or from the camp well, but there was no hot water, which made showering difficult in winter. A fixed sanitation team made up of camp residents cleaned it every day, and disinfected the toilets and showers. A hospital with thirty wooden cots, which were mainly intended for the migrants’ children, was set up in the purification chamber (a large hall with high ceilings in the middle of the cemetery). The Joint and the Jewish Agency sent over nurses and doctors to take care of the sick. Because of the primitive housing conditions, the constant dust, and the shortage of clothing, skin diseases were a common phenomenon in the camp, especially among children. Yet the camp residents tended to trust the doctors less than the charms and amulets they had relied on before the medical staff’s arrival: “For the doctors’ healing to bear fruit, the patient must have an amulet to ward off the evil eye.” The women in the camp gave birth on the ground with the help of one of the residents who happened to be a midwife. In October 1950, they even saw the establishment of a maternity clinic, run by Rina Bleicher, a nurse from Israel. The migrants got vaccinated against Typohid, and the children received nutritious meals.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Two hundred and eighty children went to school in the big straw-mat shack in two shifts—a morning one and an afternoon one (about 300 children did not attend school due to a shortage of teachers). Roughly ten classes huddled in the corners of the shack to be instructed in Hebrew, grammar, and Bible studies for approximately two hours. Then the children would all be gathered to hear a story read out in simplified Hebrew or learn a Hebrew poem or song. The Hebrew teachers were young people who had undergone an intense training course at the camp, and were given an extra meal per day for their work. Anyone who learned Hebrew from the envoys or from a Hebrew manual would teach what they had learned to their loved ones. In addition, the camp residents made sure to study Torah in the late evening or early morning hours.[[29]](#footnote-29) Chacham Bruchim even wrote a thank-you letter to the Jewish Agency in Israel for the work of Yonah Cohen, the Aliyah division’s envoy in charge of education and culture at the camp, for having

gathered all those entitled to learning, boys and girls aged nine to twenty, and appointed teachers over them, and he, chief among them, taught the teachers and the students the how to learn with great passion and great love and sweet speech and fine songs. […] Because of their love of the Torah and their love of songs, the people are eager to learn, to hear, and to listen to the Hebrew tongue and to keep it in their heart for the time when they shall need to make use of it.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The same straw-mat was used to hold cultural activities or communal singing. Yonah Cohen would accompany the singers with a small mouth organ. On August 16, 1950, the Agency envoy Baruch Duvdevani organized a memorial service in honor of the passing of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Abraham Isaac Kook. Memorial services were also held on July 5, 1950 for Theodor Herzl and Hayim Nahman Bialik. This was the first time the camp residents heard speeches on these subjects. The men gathered inside the shack while the women followed the proceedings through the “windows,” which were no more than crack and rips in the straw-mat walls. The camp’s youths made a Star of David out of twigs and straw stalks. Eliezer Ben Dov, a veteran envoy of HaPo’el HaMizrahi,[[31]](#footnote-31) talked about Herzl’s having “stood up before kings and ministers” and demanded: “Let my people go!” Yonah Cohen spoke of Bialik, saying that “every downtrodden Jew in the Diaspora having read his poems stood up tall with pride and said ‘I am glad to be a Jew.’” The speeches were delivered in Hebrew with Shlomo Cohen Tzedek, Chief Secretary of the Otzar HaTorah educational institution network in Teheran, translating into Farsi.[[32]](#footnote-32) Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Levi, director of Otzar HaTorah in Teheran, called for all the camp residents to study Hebrew assiduously, concluding his speech with consolation verses from the Prophets.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The following evening, the eve of the Sabbath, the camp residents appeared particularly animated. They beat the dust out of their tattered blankets, swept the floors of their tents, their clay huts, and the prayer room, and planted candles in stone nooks, wooden crannies, or sand pits to protect them from the wind. Everyone dressed in their best clean clothes and gathered for prayer in the straw-mat shack. Following the prayers, they listened to stories of the righteous, read out by an envoy from Israel and the *kiddush* performed by Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Levi. At the end of the communal meal, they sang Kurdistani Shabbat songs in Hebrew[[34]](#footnote-34) and listened to stories about the War of Independence and a lecture about the Land of Israel. After the *shacharit* prayer and before bedtime, the men studied the Torah, recited the *ma’amadot,*[[35]](#footnote-35) and read preselected passages from the Bible, the Mishnah and the Zohar.[[36]](#footnote-36) In honor of the New Year (5711 in the Hebrew calendar), Chacham Bruchim made ornate greeting cards for the Prime Minister, the Minister of Religions, the Minister of Aliyah, the head of the Aliyah division, and the camp envoys.[[37]](#footnote-37) He finished his praise of the work of the envoys to Camp B by thanking them and the Israeli government for their blessed endeavors and pleading ardently to keep them in place until all residents of the camp would have immigrated to Israel.[[38]](#footnote-38) Meanwhile Camp B grew more and more crowded. When there was no more room left for new arrivals, the cemetery gates were locked and the camp was closed. Roughly 1,300 Jews from Kurdistan and the field cities huddled outside the gates begging to be let in and “looking enviously at those ‘lucky’ few who had been let into the cemetery.” Some ended up sneaking into the camp when the gates were opened for funeral services. Others went so far as to marry camp residents for the privilege of staying there.[[39]](#footnote-39)

# Immigration to Israel

The leaders of the community wrote letters to the Israeli government asking them to speed up Aliyah proceedings because they did not believe the latter were aware of their hardships. In one of these letters, the camp representatives begged the government:

Hurry, take us away from here and bring us to Jerusalem, the Holy Land. We have known a great deal of woe in this diaspora. They slaughtered us, took what is ours and we could not say a thing. Now that the state has been founded and the hand of Israel has prevailed over the seven nations, the goyim tell us—leave here and go to your own country. So we left and came here, to Teheran. And here, too, we suffer many torments. That is why we beg and beseech you, take us to Israel, and may God bless you [the Prime Minister of Israel], the government, and the Jewish Agency.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Moshe Shapira, director of Camp B, mentioned in his letter to the Agency that the camp residents are fit for immigration and integration in Israel, and that the settlement style best suited to them would be the labor *moshav*.[[41]](#footnote-41) With accordance to Aliyah quotas, candidates for immigration were driven by truck once a month to the Teheran airport, from whence they were flown directly to Israel by airplanes that could carry eighty passengers.[[42]](#footnote-42) This is how a journalist from Jerusalem described one such flight from the Teheran airport to Israel:

The passengers bound for Israel are excited: they are told to stay in their seats, but it is impossible to contain their enthusiasm. Countless times they ask whether they are in Israeli airspace yet, and when they finally receive a positive answer, they burst out with exclamations of joy. They clap, they hoot, they holler—the elderly among them sit and cry. There is no end to their happiness. […] [Upon disembarking] the immigrants bow down and press their lips against the holy ground. It would appear that this is the moment they and their fathers and their fathers’ fathers have been waiting for since the destruction of the Temple.[[43]](#footnote-43)

And yet, the immigration quota accorded to the Jews in Camp B was miniscule—350 people a month. Chacham Bruchim complained of this in his letter to Ben-Gurion: “If this is the queue for Aliyah, by the time part us make it over, two parts will be lost, because this immigration quota is no remedy and in the meantime we have already lost children and nursing infants, and many of the men and women who remain grow weaker as well.” He asked the Prime Minister to “order the ministers and the officials to quickly grant us the Aliyah for which we have been hoping for two thousand years. Raise our quota and rescue us from deathly danger, for *pikuach nefesh* [heb. saving a life] supersedes most mitzvoth.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Chacham Bruchim also turned to Yitzhak Rafael to ask for the quota to be raised before the winter to “spare us great sorrow and many tribulations.” Finally, in September 1950 it seems, the quota was raised to 600–800 people a month. In February 1951, the Jewish National Fund received a thank-you letter from the heads of the community in Camp B to Abraham Hetzroni, director of the Alyiah division in Teheran, along with a sum of money collected from the camp residents to have the names of the immigration workers at the camp registered in the Fund’s Golden Book.[[45]](#footnote-45) Camp B was finally shut down on March 4, 1951, and its residents were transferred to Camp A.[[46]](#footnote-46) Out of the 7,260 Jews from Baneh, Bukan, Sanandaj, Sain Qaleh, Saqqez, and Tikab, 3,750 immigrated to Israel in the period between 1950 and 1951. In the years 1957–1969, another 1,230 made Aliyah. Two thousand Jews remained behind in Sanandaj. Most of them ended up moving to Teheran, and from there, a fraction moved to the United States.[[47]](#footnote-47)

# Conclusion

The Jews of Kurdistan, who had never stopped dreaming of the return to Israel, suffered tremendous persecution at the hands of their Kurdish neighbors upon the establishment of the State of Israel. These two factors—love of Zion and the burden of exile, as well as the leadership of Chacham Shmuel Bruchim, who persistently wrote to the leadership in Israel about the great suffering of his people and their burning desire to immigrate, led to the Aliyah of 3,750 Kudistani Jews in the years 1950–1951. Upon arrival in Israel, they were first directed to the Shaar HaAliya camp near Haifa, for processing and medical checks, and then moved to the immigrant camps near Beit Lid and in Giv’at Olga. From these camps, they were sent to settlements across the country: *ma’abarot* (settlement camps) in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Be’er Sheva, Ashkelon, Bat Yam, Herzliya, and Holon, development towns (Ofakim), and *moshavim* (Ahituv, Kfar Yona, Menuha, Maslul, Nahariyya, Netanya, Pa’amei Tashaz, Shovalim, Shibolim, and Talmei Bilu). Thanks to their diligence, physical strength, and love of the Holy Land, they had no trouble integrating. These immigrants were not deterred by hard labor and hardships: the majority of them initially found employment working for the Jewish National Fund (in rock-clearing and afforestation jobs) and government initiatives (paving and construction). The more affluent among them were even able to open grocery stores. They became quickly acclimatized to agricultural work and set up farming *moshavim* such as Nes Harim in the Jerusalem hills, Menuha and Noga in Hevel Lakhish, Patish in the northwestern Negev, and Eshkol in the northern Negev. The young people among them completed their studies in Israeli schools, served in the army, trained in various professions, and raised families in Israel.[[48]](#footnote-48)

[handwritten text]

Dr. Yaffa Israeli is a lecturer at the Hebrew Language Department at the David Yellin College of Education. She specializes in spoken and written neo-Aramaic in the dialect of the Jews of Saqqez in Iranian Kurdistan. This unique dialect is spoken by a diminishing number of people, and its knowledge, along with the majority of the culture that was expressed in this language, is no longer being transmitted to future generations.

1. This article is based on Yaffa Israeli’s article “Yehudey kurdistan ha-iranit be-machane ha-olim shel teheran ba-shanim 1950–1951,” *Ab”a: Ktav et le-cheker yehudey iran, bukhara ve-afghanistan*, XII (2020), 51–67 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Haim Saadoun (ed.) *Be-galuy u-be-seter: Ha-aliyot ha-gdolot me-artzot ha-islam* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Machon Ben Zvi, 2000), 11–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Avraham Ben Ya’akov, *Kehilot yehudey Kurdistan* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Machon Ben Zvi, 1961), 143–149. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For more on the Jewish neo-Aramaic dialect of Saqqez Jews, see: Yaffa Israeli, *Ha-aramit ha-chadasha she-be-fi yehudey saqqez (drom kurdistan)* (Hebrew) (PhD. Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem,1998). For more on the Jewish neo-Aramaic dialect of Sanandaj Jews, see: Geoffrey Khan, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sanandaj* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Baneh, roughly 350 Jews (two synagogues); Bukan, roughly 400 Jews (one synagogue); Sanandaj (Sine), roughly 4,000 Jews (three synagogues); Saqqez, roughly 1,350 Jews (three synagogues); Sain Qaleh, roughly 360 Jews (one synagogue); Tikab, roughly 800 Jews (one synagogue). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Orly Rahimian and Ido Litmanowitz, “Reka le-eduto shel zion ezri,” *Ab”a*, III (2010), 73 (Hebrew). The reference is to Zion Ezri’s activism for the sake of helping Iraqi and Kurdistani Jews immigrate to Israel in the years 1950–1951, as documented in the book authored by his son, Meir Ezri, *Be-oz u-be-ahavat israel* (Jerusalem: self-published, 2007), 170–220. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Meir Sasson, “Ha-zionut ve-ha-aliyah,” in Haim Saadoun (ed), *Iran: Kehilot israel ba-mizrah ba-me’ot ha-tesha-esre ve-ha-esrim* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Machon Ben Zvi, 2006), 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yonah Cohen, *El ha-milion ha-nishkach: Shlichut Aliyah le-suriya ve-le-iran* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kaneh, 1987), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Meir Ezri, *Be-oz*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The letters were preserved by Zion Ezri, see: Meir Ezri, *Be-oz*, 173, 191­–194. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hagai Bruchim (son of Chacham Bruchim) testimony: The Department for Oral Testimony, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 18 (210). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Letter from Chacham Bruchim to Yizhak Rafael, June 19, 1950, Central Zionist Archive (CZA), file S6/5051. For more on Chamani’s role in the Aliyah of Kurdistan Jewry see: Shalom Chamani, The Department for Oral Testimony, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 4 (210). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shmuel Bruchim, *Shirei no’am* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Agudat Shmuel Bruchim, 1974), 35–37 (my translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Letter from Zion Cohen to the Mossad Le-Aliyah, January 10, 1950, CZA, S6/5051. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Zion Cohen, *Le-teheran u-be-chazara*, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Meir Ezri, *Be-oz*, 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Binyamin Cohen, *Be-simchat pneychem: Sipur ishi* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 2014), 164–167. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Yonah Cohen, *Ha-tzofeh*, June 29, 1950, CZA, S71/204; Yonah Cohen, *Ha-milion*, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Letter from Chacham Bruchim to Ben-Gurion, CZA, S6/5052; Yonah Cohen, *Ha-milion*, 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Report by Zion Cohen, July 31, 1950, CZA, S6/5052. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Yitzhak Rafael, *Lo zachiti be-or min ha-hefker* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Idanim, 1981), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bruchim, *Kovetz ktavim ve-shirim* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Agudat Shmuel Bruchim, 2002), 257–258. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. According to Moshe Shapira’s descriptions, September 1950, CZA, S6/6733. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Chacham Shmuel Bruchim (1882–1979) was born in Bukan. After he was orphaned at the age of sixteen, he moved to Saqqez and began teaching sacred studies and modern Hebrew. He wrote poems in Hebrew, and the members of his congregation chanted them on Shabbat and other joyous occasions. Shmuel Bruchim, *Shirey no’am* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Agudat Shmuel Bruchim, 1974), 4; *Kovetz ktavim ve-shirim*, 256–259; Yaffa Israeli, “Se’udat tzaharaim be-text le-limud ha-ivrit ke-safa chaya be-kurdistan ha-iranit,” *Hed: Ha-ulpan he-chadash le-hanchalat ha-ivrit ve-tarbuta*, 101 (2013), 39–44 (Hebrew); “Kinuy ovdim be-re’i sefrut chazal be-textim le-limud ha-ivrit ke-safa chaya be-kurdistan ha-iranit, *Hed*, 102 (2013), 128–134 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Letter from representatives of the camp to the Jewish Agency in Israel, unknown date, CZA, S6/5052. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Yitzhak Ziv-Av, *Ma’ariv*, December 8, 1950, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Letter from Dr. Ruth Berman (a doctor at Camp B), December 1950, CZA, S6/6733. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Yonah Cohen, *Ha-tzofeh*, September 18, 1950, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Shmuel Bruchim, *Kovetz*, 258–259. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The movement operated in collaboration with the socialist Labor Zionism movement and became associated with HeChalutz and the Histadrut, even though they were part of the religious Zionist block. It promoted nation-building in Israel and socialism alongside adherence to the mitzvoth, Torah learning, and religious education, as embodied by the slogan “*Torah ve-avoda*” (“Torah and work”). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Shlomo Cohen Tzedek had composed a Hebrew grammar manual—*Sefer chizukey shnat avar: Le-bney israel ha-parsim* (Teheran, 1918). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Yonah Cohen, *Ha-milion*, 178–180. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Shmuel Bruchim, *No’am*, 2–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Sections of scriptural, mishnaic, and talmudic selections for each day of the week, recited after the *shacharit* service. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Yonah Cohen, *Ha-milion*, 181–183. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Greeting card to Ben-Gurion, Israel State Archive, תת-1/19; for the rest of the cards see, Yonah Cohen, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Shmuel Bruchim, *Kovetz*, 256–257. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Yonah Cohen, *Ha-milion*, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Letter from Moshe Shapira to the Jewish Agency, October 1, 1950, CZA, S6/6733. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Theodor Levita, *Ma’ariv*, April 30, 1950, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Theodor Levita, “Od shevet nidach chozer ha-baita,” *Ma’ariv*, April 6, 1950, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Yonah Cohen, CZA, S71/204. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. CZA, KKL5/17800-1t. Thank you to Professor David Minshari for having brought the existence of this letter to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Report from Teheran to the Jewish Agency, March 5, 1951, CZA, S6/6732. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Report by Shalom Chamani to David Ben-Gurion, November 12, 1950, CZA, S6/6733; Binyamin Cohen, *Be-simchat*, 93–96. According to Yonah Mordechai, *Encyclopedia shel yehudey Kurdistan, Vol. A* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2003), there were also about 800 Jews living in the town of Karand, out which approximately 300 immigrated to Israel in the years 1950–1951 and the rest in 1957–1960. However, this town is not included in the above-cited report by Shalom Chamani. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Orah Shwartz-Barry notes that in towns such as Saqqez and Bukan the Jewish communities ceased to exist, while only a few families remained in Sanandaj. Orah Shwartz-Barry, “Doch nesi’a le-kurdistan ha-parsit (mi-15 be-september 1977 ad le-27 be-october 1977), in Haviv Shim’oni (ed.), *Hithadshut*, 3 (2018), 11–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)