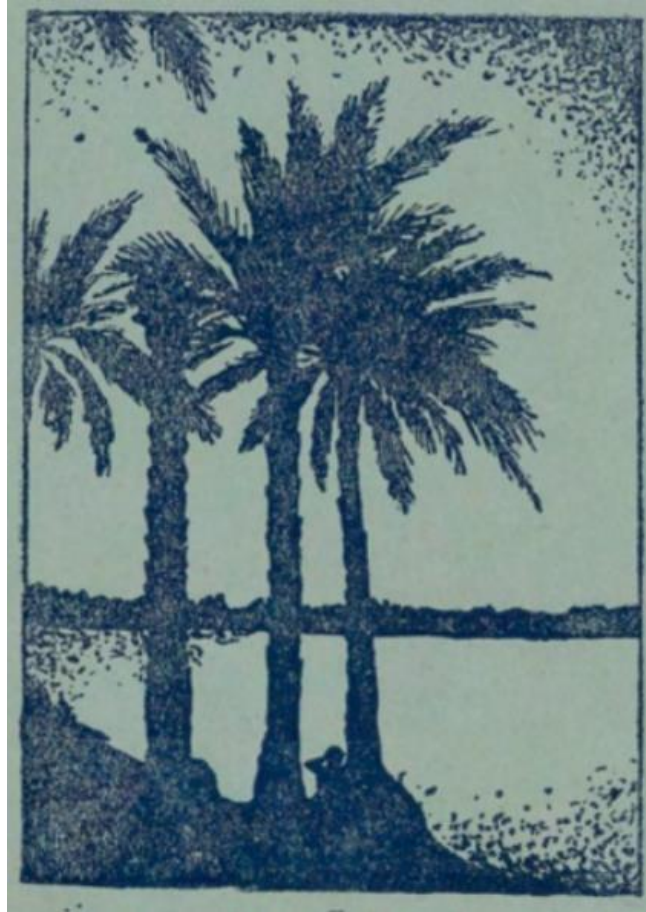


Building Modern Identity in Jewish Baghdad

The Frank Iny School and the Making of Modern Jewish Life in
20th-Century Baghdad



Ido Ninburg

Supervision: John Hanna

TU Delft | AR2A011 History, Form and Aesthetics | 2024-2025

Building Modern Identity in Jewish Baghdad

The Frank Iny School and the Making of Modern Jewish Life in 20th-Century Baghdad

Ido Ninburg 5307406

0. Abstract

This research explores the Jewish community in Baghdad during the early to mid-20th century, focusing on the establishment of the Frank Iny School. The project examines the socio-political conditions surrounding the Jewish community and how these factors influenced the creation of the school. It also explores the architectural significance of the building itself and its role in the community's cultural and educational life. Drawing on historical newspaper articles, archival sources and interviews with former students, the research aims to address and analyze the significance of the school both as a physical structure and as a symbol of Jewish identity in Baghdad.

Keywords: Jewish community in Baghdad, Frank Iny School, Iraqi Jewish Archive, Architectural history, Al-Nidhamia School (الاعدادية النظامية للبنين, current name).

1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 20th Century, there were 135,000 Jews in Iraq, most of them in the city of Baghdad. The community, rooted in the first temple Babylonian exile in the 6th Century BCE, experienced accelerated modernization processes while engaging in economic, cultural, political integration in Iraq and its surrounding imperial space. One of the most prominent expressions of these changes is the establishment of the Frank Iny high school, an independent Jewish educational institution active between 1941 and 1973. ¹

The importance of this research is to understand the manners in which educational institutions were utilized to shape a Jewish communal transnational awareness in a Muslim area. It is also significant to examine Iraqi Jewry from a perspective that does not see it as no more than a "marginalized" community, but of an enterprising, developing community in a complex historical fabric. Frank Iny, as a structure and as a

¹ Jasim Mohammed Rajab, Frank Iny Jewish School in Baghdad (1941–1973): A Historical Documentary Study, *Journal of Studies in History and Archeology* 84, 213–244.

story, allows a finer fathoming of the place of Modernization, Philanthropy, Ethno-religious identity and Jewish-Iraqi architecture in the time of extreme shifts.

1.1 Research questions:

1. What were the socio-political conditions that influenced the establishment of the Frank Iny School in Baghdad?
2. How did the architecture of the Frank Iny School reflect the cultural and educational needs of the Jewish community in Baghdad?
3. In what ways did the Frank Iny School shape Jewish identity and community life in early to mid-20th century Baghdad?
4. Who were the key figures involved in the establishment of the Frank Iny School, and what were their motivations?
5. How did the Frank Iny School interact with the broader socio-political and architectural landscape of Baghdad during this period and how was modified by it after its build?

2. Sources

Using a variety of sources enables a layered examination that suits the nature of such research, which aspires to combine the built environment and wide-reaching historical processes, community life and individual points of view. Every type of source is characterized by its own unique advantages and tensions: journalistic sources of Iraqi Jews, for example, often suffered free speech limits due to a fear of political persecution, while Israeli journalism tended to frame diasporic communities through a Zionist lense as suffering communities that must be "saved", as discussed later. Archival materials provide formal documentation of institutions and their activity, but it lacks a broad, or sometimes any, social or cultural context. This context can be clarified through oral testimonies, which yield a personal angle and experiential memories. However, those require a certain caution as well, as they sometimes contradict each other or are influenced by emotinal inclinations. Graphic sources, after their verification, provide an understanding of the characteristics of physical space, but are also of limited a scope, availability and information they may provide.

A general survey of the sources used:

2.1 Journalistic Sources

The research is based, among others, on journalistic publications in the Jewish Iraqi, general Iraqi and Israeli newspapers in the 20th Century, which were written in

different environments and from different ambitions. These newspapers provide real time documentation of events on a communal, national and global scale. The incredible survival of the documents allows for previously unimaginable archival access to letters and correspondences of Jewish schools, including floor plans and a construction contract that will be examined later.

2.2 Iraqi Jewish Archive

This research is mostly based on the Iraqi Jewish Archive. This collection of over 2700 books and tens of thousands of historical documents was scanned and is today available online for open access.

2.2.1 Formation of the Archive and the Ethical Question

The Iraqi Jewish Archive was formed by confiscation of the property of the Iraqi intelligence agency, who collected the content of the archive as part of its activity to marginalize the Jewish communities, among others under the regime of Saddam Hussein.

In 2003, the US army invaded Iraq and toppled the Saddam Hussein government. When searching the basements of the intelligence agency, the archive was uncovered in a flooded basement. It was extracted and preserved in the US using advanced technologies.

There is an ethical dispute regarding the retrieving the archive and keeping it. Some see this as part of a broader pattern of unjust interference of the US in the Middle East, that prevents states from accessing their resources using military and economical force and pressure. This can be expressed by the US holding the documents for a "temporary" time, that has lasted over 22 years.²

On the other hand, the Jewish communities and the people whose property was in fact found in the archive support the preservation of the archive in Israel or the US and see no justification or logic to send the Jewish archives back to Iraq, where there are neither jews or their descendants left, neither any interest in research of their heritage.

2.3 Interviews conducted

Throughout the years, testimonies of Iraqi Jews in writing, print and online accumulated as part of different documentation projects of life stories. These

² Rich Tenorio, "Who should keep Iraqi Jewry's archives, saved from Saddam, now on tour in US?", *Times of Israel*, January 6, 2016, accessed on April 16, 2025.
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/who-should-keep-iraqi-jewrys-archives-saved-from-saddam-now-on-tour-in-us/>.

testimonies include various descriptions of the community and at times even the school itself, the treatment of the teachers, social activities and more.

In addition, as part of the research I contacted a number of Jews who emigrated from Iraq at a later stage and assisted in confirmation of facts and providing further testimonies. These conversations were converted to summaries and are to be found in the appendix.

2.4 Graphic materials and online photos

In addition, the research is based also on graphic materials collected online and directly from the school's graduates. These photographs, sketches and visual descriptions contribute to the confirmation of the structure's descriptions and allow a more accurate examination of its architecture. The graphic materials are used as supplementary evidence for the written sources.

3 Historical Background

3.1 The Beginning of the Jewish Community in Iraq

The roots of the Iraqi (Babylonian) Jewry stem from the Babylonian exile of Jews after the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in the year 586 BCE. A large portion of the Jewish population from the kingdom of Judea were exiled to the area of Mesopotamia, where they led a continuous and independent communal life that made it a focal point of the diasporic Jewish people. Already in Persian times, under the Achaemenid, Parthian and finally Sassanid empires, the community enjoyed a semi-autonomous status that allowed it to preserve its religious and educational institutions, while at the same time developing and crystalizing a stable diasporic-jewish identity that regarded the land of Israel as a religious center.

Between the 5th and 11th centuries CE, there was a golden age of the Iraqi Jewish community, in which it became a global authoritative source of Halakha, Jewish law.³ Following this golden age, at the end of medieval times there began a process of decay that included political and climate shifts and destruction of administrative infrastructure that led to a severe decline in the Jews' status. Starting in the 17th century and following the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, the community began to regain its power. In the 17th–19th centuries the community, especially in Baghdad, was rehabilitated. A layer of educated merchants and Jewish leadership that had connections to the government flourished. In this time, modern ideas began to spread

³ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *A Long History in the Land of the Euphrates and Tigris* (Ben Zvi, 2024), 39.

through Jewish networks, and the center of the community became established in Baghdad and nearby Basrah.

3.2 Satellite communities and London

The Jewish community in Baghdad was not secluded. Starting in the 19th century and as part of a global process of Jewish mobility, so-called satellite communities began to form, connecting Baghdad to strategic centers in Asia. Unlike the perception of emigration as detachment, the Jews of Baghdad established networks of commerce, family, religion and culture that connected the metropole of Baghdad to the communities of Bombei, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai.⁴

Bombei (Mumbai) was the first with the arrival of the Sassoon family in the beginning of the 19th century,⁵ when it became a Baghdadi Jewish center with active religious and educational institutions.⁶ In Singapore, that became a free harbor in the 1830s, there became a small yet influential community that retained a distinct Baghdadi identity. In Hong Kong, since 1841, families such as the Cardoso and Hacohen established fixed institutions and a Jewish living pattern. In Shanghai, starting with the 1850s, entrepreneurs such as Cohen-Rial, who led banking and communal institutions.

This network functioned as an organic unit with institutional and cultural ties that strengthened the status of Baghdad. At the same time, a Baghdadi Jewish axis was formed in London – a separate financial and political focal point with families such as Sassoon, Khadhouri and Hakham that connected Baghdad to Europe.⁷

3.3 Modernization and Westernization of Iraqi Jews

Starting with the 19th century a process of modernization begins for the Jews of Baghdad, comprised of different closely related aspects and as part of a broad historical context of Jewish awakening, British colonialism, shifts in the Baghdadi Jewish community and in the Iraqi administration. This process will be further discussed in the following chapter, as it has created the conditions fit for opening the Frank Iny school.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Yosef Nedava, Rothschilds of the East, *Hamashkif*, July 18, 1941.

⁶ Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism* (Brill, 2021), 77.

⁷ See also Sasson Somekh, *A New Jewish Time*, Vol. 3 (2008).

4 Circumstances of establishment of the Frank Iny structure

The Frank Iny school is not only an educational institution but also a symbol: It reflects the dilemmas of Iraqi Jewry between tradition and modernity, local identity and transnational Jewry, prosperity and fracture. Understanding the story of Frank Iny school helps to understand the dynamics of a community that thrived and was uprooted in mere decades – but leaves after it an impressive testimony of a rich, open and lively culture.

4.1 Politicization of Iraqi Jews

In the first decades after the Great Exodus, research on Iraqi Jewry was written in the context of endangered communities and regarding the state of Israel, meaning as an ideological tool utilized to serve either Zionist or Anti-Zionist propaganda.

The Zionist narrative utilized the fact that this community dates back to the first temple exile to compare the mass Jewish exodus of Iraq to the 5th century BCE Return to Zion, a mass return of Jews from Mesopotamia to the Land of Israel, a realization of the biblical prophetic vision. This is reflected in framing the exodus from Iraq as a direct result of the Farhud pogrom and as a redemption from antisemitic persecution leading to the community being saved, both materially and spiritually, while the connection between Jews and their Iraqi environment is framed as loose. The opposing school presents the mass exodus as driven by messianic motivations and a result of Zionist propaganda in Iraq and Zionist activity in Palestine.

On the eve of the mass exodus of Jews from Iraq, senior Iraqi and British politicians linked the Iraqi Jews' destiny with the destiny of the Palestinians. Shortly after the mass exodus, Israeli politicians even dubbed it "de facto population switch".⁸

As different scholars testified in recent years, the history of Baghdad's Jews does not easily fit into either a Zionist or an Anti-Zionist narrative that generalizes and simplifies the complex processes that operated in the Baghdadi community, in Iraq and in the Middle East.⁹

⁸ Yehouda Shenhav, "The Jews of Iraq, Zionist Ideology, and the Property of Palestinian Refugees of 1948: an Anomaly of National Accounting", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 4 (1999), 605–630.

⁹ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, "The Question of the Immigration of the Jews of Arab Lands" (2021), accessed April 16, 2025. <https://hazmanhazeh.org.il/mena-immigration/>.

4.2 Pro-Nazism and Anti-Jewishness

After the liberation of the area from the Ottoman occupation, the British Empire united the Velayet of Basrah, Baghdad and Mosul under one state and King Faisal I. The king was closely connected to the Jewish community and led a pro-Western rule. His grandson, Faisal II was also characterized by an amicable treatment to the Jews, new freedoms and rights, and even appointed Sir Sassoon Eskell as minister of finance.¹⁰ Around the middle of the 20th century, political unrest in Iraq led to political radicalization in several groups:¹¹

The Nazi ideology became prominent in the political arena of Iraq already in the 1930s, but the great shift occurred in April 1941, when an outspoken Pro-Nazi government rose to power headed by Rashid Ali Al-Gaylani. While this government and an official national Nazi ideology in Iraq lasted only two months, these were crucial for its spreading in the country.¹²

Amin Al-Husayni, a Palestinian leader exiled by the British to Iraq was another promoter of fascist views.¹³ These circles, including the alleged pro-Western prime minister of Iraq, saw Jews as a source of evil and damage to Iraq, going as far as describing them as "British traitors" and "fifth column", to which communist groups joined.¹⁴ Ironically, holders of ideologies imported from Western, Central and Eastern Europe marked the local Jewish community as a foreign power to be taken care of.

After two months of the reign of Al-Gaylani, the British reconquered Iraq. In the beginning of June, before the British entered Baghdad, a pogrom was perpetrated in the city. Riots started in Ghazi street and quickly spread to Jewish neighborhoods, accompanied by murders, injuries and looting.¹⁵ In the second day around noon, the Iraqi military entered the city and dispersed the riots.

¹⁰ Nur-Eldeen Masalha, "Faisal's Pan-Arabism, 1921–33", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 27 no. 4 (1991): 684. See also Ezra Haddad, *Alphabet and Reading Exercises*, Al Sharqiya Press, 1948, 73. See also David Karakukli Zamiri and Lily Shor, "A Journey for the Curious Interested in the History of the Jews of Iraq", Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, accessed on April 15, 2025.

¹¹ George Lenczowski, "Radical Regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq: Some Comparative Observations on Ideologies and Practices", *The Journal of Politics*, 28 no. 1 (1966): 29–56.

¹² Stefan Wild, "National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939", *Die Welt des Islams* 25, no. 1 (1985): 126–173.

¹³ Philip Mattar, "Amin Al-Husayni and Iraq's Quest for Independence, 1939–1941", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1984): 267–281.

¹⁴ Zainab Saleh, "The Denationalization of Iraqi Jews: The Legal and Rhetorical Production of Otherness", *Palestine/Israel Review* 1, no. 2 (2024): 392–420, see also Arif al-Arif, *An-Nakba, 1947-1955, Vol. 4*, (Al-Maktaba al-Asriya, 1960), 893.

¹⁵ Hayyim J. Cohen, "The Anti-Jewish Farhūd in Baghdad, 1941", *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 1 (1966): 2–17.

Following the Farhud, students at the elementary schools Rachel Shachmon, Alwataniyya, Mas'uda Salman, Menashe Salah and Nur'el were left without regular education. Some dozens of students were accepted to government middle and high schools, but the majority of parents refrained from sending their children to school out of fear for their safety and well-being.¹⁶ The community council could not bear the burden of the budget of a new high school, and suggested the funding come from tuition fees through the management of the Rachel Shachmon elementary school. In a week a hundred students were already registered, and the tuition was decided to be 6–12 dinars a year per student.¹⁷ Most of the students were from middle or low class households and could not afford the full tuition, which led the community to look for another source of funding.

4.3 Trans-national Jewish networks

Historically, there was a strong connection between Jewish communities, starting with the Babylonian Exilarch in the 6th century and onwards, as proven by the Genizah.¹⁸ Starting in the middle of the 19th century the size and intensity of these networks changed, attributed by some scholars to the kidnapping of a Jewish child in Italy that led to a multi-communal mobilization and solidarity to save him, eventually failing. The immediate need to establish a Jewish apparatus is implemented in the school chain "Alliance" founded in 1860 to spread Jewish identity, foreign languages, modern values and science studies among Jews.¹⁹

Despite attempts by the Iraqi government to destabilize the communities through anti-Zionist or anti-Jewish legislation such as the prohibition of moving to the Land of Israel in 1930,²⁰ prohibition of teaching Modern Hebrew in 1935,²¹ criminalization of Zionism,²² and various limitations on the curriculum, Frank Iny and many schools in Iraq who were allegedly not part of a certain chain could consolidate a trans-national intellectual Jewish space that provided exposure to ideas from outside Iraq. This was possible not only through teachers from different backgrounds (see below) and oral

¹⁶ Abraham Haim Twina, *Jewry of Iraq: Dispersion & Liberation, Vol. 5*, Geula Synagogue Association Press, 1975, 121.

¹⁷ *ibid*, 122.

¹⁸ Arnold E. Franklin, "Jewish Communal History in Geniza Scholarship: Part 2, Goitein's Successors", *Jewish History* 32, no. 2 (2019): 143–159.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 105–118.

²⁰ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *A Long History in the Land of the Euphrates and Tigris* (Ben Zvi, 2024), 200.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² Shmuel Segev (Sabbag), *Behind the Curtain: An Iraqi Investigation on the Failure of the War on Israel* (Maarachot, 1954), 60.

spreading of the ideas, but also through a modern library with international writings in Hebrew, Arabic and English.²³

4.4 Transnational Philanthropy

It seems the Jewish community gave priority the mission of Jewish education for all, which was too difficult for the local Baghdadi community in its own powers. This imminently led to an attempt to recruit various actors, such as AJA, the Joint, Alliance and others, but also with rich Jewish families and personae directly linked to the Baghdadi community or to one of its satellite communities. For example, Sir Albert Ben David Sassoon and his family and the Shammash family donated significant sums through the AJA for the opening of the school, as did the Shammash family, Menahem Saleh Daniel and other philanthropists, who usually became rich through intercontinental trade on commerce bridges such as Baghdad–Bombay–London while donating. Transnational Jewish networks and rich pillars of the communities chose at times to use education and opening of schools as a central medium to expand their philanthropy.²⁴

Shortly after the schools closed following the Farhud, the Jewish philanthropist Mr. Frank Jacob Iny, son of Yusuf Iny, a successful merchant and member of the Baghdadi chamber of commerce,²⁵ visited Baghdad and listened to the plight of the community. He agreed to take the school under his wing in return for a few conditions, such as having the school open to all. Already in the same year he rented a large building and furnished it while starting to build a luxurious structure that will bear his name. The concert hall was named after his father.²⁶ He funded the school deficit that was caused by indigent students and thus turned the school into a philanthropic instrument that contributes to the lower classes.

²³ Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism* (Brill, 2021), 165–166.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94,

²⁵ Meer Basri, "The Baghdad Chamber of Commerce", *The Scribe*, September 1995, 12. Accessed April 15, 2025. <https://www.dangoor.com/TheScribe64.pdf>.

²⁶ Eli Timan, "Sett Semha Full Interview 2007", YouTube Video, accessed on 15 April 2025, https://youtu.be/e8mqRJ-zE_I, see also Yosef Meir, *Social-Cultural Development of Iraqi Jews from 1830 until Today* (Naharayim, 1989), page 49.



Frank J. Iny a frame from the YouTube video 'Sit Semha', by Eli Timan, published August 3, 2008, 3:18.

4.5 Intra-communal solidarity

Judaism as an ethno-religion allows for a relatively homogeneous perception of the community as a family. This brought intra-communal solidarity already starting from the first stages in the world of Jewish education in Iraq. Already in 1886 the idea of inclusive education open for all became prominent and a crafts workshop for indigent boys was established with no tuition.²⁷ Later it can be seen as well that despite the school being a relatively prestigious product in the broad Iraqi context, it was considered much more integral and central in the Jewish community.²⁸

In the same way, the Frank Iny school, albeit with high education, a new building and its perceived "prestige",²⁹ was also utilized as a tool for intra-communal solidarity. After the mass exodus, most students in the institute did not pay full tuition and were supported by donations through gradual tuition. As part of the conditions for Frank Iny's funding, the school included no prohibition, limitation or conditions for accepting Jewish students. Some of the money arrived from taxation on kosher meat;³⁰ The school and different Jewish institutions gave recommendations for donations for individuals in need in the community.³¹

²⁷ Avraham Ben Yakov, *A Short History of Jews of Babylonia: From their Inception until Today*, (Reuven 1971), 91.

²⁸ Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism* (Brill, 2021), 153.

²⁹ Eli Timan, "Sett Semha Full Interview 2007", YouTube Video, accessed on 15 April 2025, https://youtu.be/e8mqRJ-zE_I

³⁰ Head of Corporal Council to Jewish Community in Baghdad, Iraqi Jewish Archive. IJA #3052. Accessed on 15 April 2025.

³¹ Rabbi Sason Khadhuri to Rabbi Sulaymun Barazani et al., Iraqi Jewish Archive. IJA #3764. Accessed on 15 April 2025.

4.6 Modernization and Westernization of Iraqi Jews

In Iraq Jews formed the cutting edge of modernization and westernization.³² Starting with the improvement of the treatment by the Ottomans, Jewish integration in administrative institutions became possible and the Jews begin to improve their status, a global process of these centuries. Since literacy from a very young age has been a common practice for Jews for millennia, by 1910 Jews enjoy relative power and control in various new fields such as the British–Iraqi foreign commerce³³ and Baghdad’s movie theaters.³⁴

Jews underwent accelerated modernization compared to their Muslim and Christian neighbors in Baghdad. This can be ascribed to relatively few oppositions from the community heads, who did not see modernization and westernization as a threat to their way of life, but as an immediate improvement to their status. Tsimhoni sees this as a result of the lack of a neighboring western society to emigrate into. It can also be claimed that Jews in Muslim countries had a societal role to be more progressive than Muslims and Christians in the 19th century.

In the colonial context of Iraq, the Jews of Baghdad wanted to be classified as “white” and progressive in the eyes of the regime, which they wooed.³⁵ The Jewish elites adopted the colonial customs of clothing and architecture.³⁶

It’s easy to acknowledge Frank Iny school as such a tool and recognize it in the curriculum. Alongside obligatory studies, tests in French and English for international certificates including GCE and Cambridge University of London.

In this global turning point, schools served as a prominent tool for spreading modernization and its ideas in the Jewish community. The perceptions of equality of rights and globalization deeply suited the interests and principles of the Jewish community. Through the schools, students could acquire foreign languages and scientific and economic knowledge to make them an established status in the community as Iraqi citizens.

In addition, before the British Mandate, Jews lived in the Old City, while outside the wall was a neglected area with no rule at the mercy of rioters. Since the British

³² Dafna Tsimhoni, "Notes on the Beginning of Modernization of Babylonian Jews in the 19th Century until 1914", *Pe'amim* 36, 1988, 7–34.

³³ Ibid, 34. See also Elie Kedouri, "The Jews of Baghdad in 1910", *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London, 1974).

³⁴ Pelle Valentin Olsen, "A Tale of Three Brothers: Ezra, Me'ir and Hayyawi Sawda'l and the History of and Iraqi Jewish Cinema Business", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55, no. 4 (2024), 630–649.

³⁵ Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism* (Brill, 2021), 102.

³⁶ See also Sasson Somekh, *A New Jewish Time*, Vol. 3 (2008).

Mandate of Mesopotamia in 1921, Jews began to go outside the wall and concentrate in neighborhoods such as Bustan al-Khas and Al-Alawiya in more modern houses than in the center of Baghdad.³⁷

Frank Iny was located in a geographic urban area that is a direct product of this modernization – the neighborhood of New Al-Alawiya which was still under development at that time.³⁸ The urban development of Baghdad in the 1930s and 1940s is characterized by an orthogonal grid of streets, modern streets with central boulevards with main traffic axes.³⁹ Frank Iny was founded as a modern educational institute in a spacious area, away from noise and density of the historic center.

4.7 Shift in the community's center of gravity

In 1910, 8 Jewish schools were active in Baghdad, but by 1949 their number grew to 20.⁴⁰ The schools did not just become more common but became more and more prominent in the social and cultural cohesion of the community. Historically, the community center of gravity belonged almost exclusively to synagogues and religious institutions, but the process of modernization made the synagogue lose its exclusivity and secular educational and cultural institutions such as schools and clubs became very prominent.⁴¹ These institutes became a symbol of professional-class identity.

The shift in the communal center of gravity can be identified a few decades before Frank Iny school was founded. In 1925 the Jewish elite, including Rabbi Sassoon Khadhouri, Ezra Dangoor, Menahem Saleh Daniel and others hosted King Faisal I and the Iraqi prime minister in the Rachel Shachmon school. A year before, a similar event occurred in the Khadhouri school. In addition, intra-communal gatherings used schools, such as weddings,⁴² which testifies for its central status as educational institutions in the life of the community.

³⁷ Sason (Samoha) Levi, "The Forgotten Million: Jews Uprooted from Arab Countries", accessed on 15 April 2025. https://www.forgotten-million.co.il/eduyot/iraq/levi_sason.html. See also Sasson Somekh, *A New Jewish Time*, Vol. 3 (2008), 324.

³⁸ "Contract Material About Building onto the Frank Iny School", Iraqi Jewish Archive. IJA # 3099, accessed on 15 April 2025.

³⁹ Dhirgam Alobaydi, Mahbub Rashid, "Morphological Evolution of Baghdad: Analyzing Urban Growth Patterns and Transformation Processes. *Journal of Engineering* 30, 12 (2024)

⁴⁰ Hayyim J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860–1972* (IUP, 1973), 123.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zion Edre'i and Yakov Zion, "Jews of Babylonia", Yeshurun, December 9–10, 1920.



Group portrait at the Kadoorie School, Baghdad, 1925. Seated in the center: Sir Sassoon Eskell, Iraq's first Minister of Finance; to his left, King Faisal I; and on the far right, Senator Menahem Saleh Daniel. *Photographer and source unknown.*

Schools were not only a place of gathering but also a communal engine, manufacturing and creating activities such as plays, newspapers, movie screenings and others.⁴³

The rise of political and social tensions deeply affected the Jewish community in Baghdad as many Jewish institutions began to disappear, some due to the decline in the number of activists due to the mass exodus of 1951, others due to persecution and accusations of Zionism. In this setting, the schools, later united to the complex of Frank Iny,⁴⁴ remained a widely legitimized Jewish institution that could not be closed with no pretext and served as a significant anchor, perhaps the last one, for the Jewish community life in Baghdad.

The Frank Iny School was a product of British and Western colonial influence, reflecting the transfer of architectural knowledge to Iraq. Its modern design—marked by straight lines, simple geometry, and no ornamentation—embodied Western ideals of order and efficiency. For the Jewish community, this style symbolized progress and served as a tool to assert bourgeois identity, integration, and legitimacy. Rather than a passive adoption, modernity here was an active strategy for building power, status, and communal identity⁴⁵.

⁴³ Yosef Meir, *Social-Cultural Development of Iraqi Jews from 1830 until Today* (Naharayim, 1989).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5–8, 16.



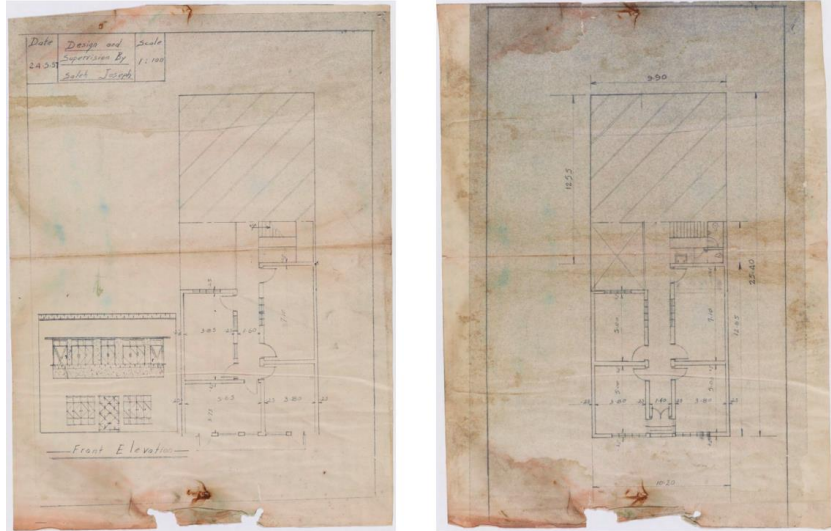
Student in the courtyard of the Frank Iny School, Baghdad, ca. 1950s. *Photographer and source unknown.*

5. The construction of Frank Iny school

Based on the original list of building materials and floorplans from 1957⁴⁶, an accurate picture of the building methods can be reconstructed for the Frank Iny school. The list points to wide use of modern materials and western building techniques. It includes reinforced concrete, cement plaster, iron chains and moisture-proof coating – all materials characteristic of progressive public construction for the time.

The structure presented here is not the central structure of Frank Iny school but a later addition, plausibly for the non-scientific class that was opened at the time. It is adjusted to fit the general grid of the school, both in the number of stories and the style of the openings compared to the original structure. The addition includes a warehouse and classes.

⁴⁶ "Contract Material About Building onto the Frank Iny School", Iraqi Jewish Archive. IJA # 3099, accessed on 15 April 2025.



Front elevation and floor plan of the Frank Iny School, Baghdad. Drawn by Saleh Joseph, May 24, 1957. Architectural drawing.

The thickness of the walls in the plan is 25 cm. Combined with photographed documentation from the site, the standard brick size in modern urban Iraqi construction of the time as 6.5X12X25 cm. In accordance with clear British influence, the 5th clause of the list uses the term "cement brick" (لبين بالإسمنت), meaning bricks laid by cement and not mud, a testimony to a modern construction method. It's probable that these were one-layer load-bearing walls, as expected from a modern two-story building.

The list also includes a layer of moisture-proof concrete under the floors, coarse spreading of external plaster and iron frames for the windows, all elements who owe their origin to western construction methods.

An additional testimony to the deep acquaintance between the engineer, Saleh Joseph, and western practices can be found in Lavender-type windows with a counter-weight mechanism in clause 44. These mechanisms were common in the time's British architecture, especially in public structures and educational institutions. Their appearance in an educational project in Baghdad goes to show a conscious adoption of western planning solutions, not only in the façade and materials, but also in technology and comfortability of use.

The combination of this knowledge with the high level of details in the plan and the style of drawing point to a British background in profession and education of the engineer. His name, Joseph and not Yousuf, supports this hypothesis.

It seems the same engineer planned a warehouse and structure for a Jewish cemetery a year earlier.⁴⁷ These plans were written in Arabic, which probably points to Saleh being a community member who acquires his education in the UK as common at the time.

The Frank Iny School, as completed in 1949, functioned as a fully developed secondary education complex. Its facilities included administrative offices, a secretariat, an accounting department, a library and reading room, two science laboratories, a gymnasium, a lecture and assembly hall, and a dedicated cinema space. Surrounding the building were expansive athletic grounds featuring two tennis courts, two volleyball courts, two basketball courts, and a football field⁴⁸.



Declassified satellite image of Frank Iny, Baghdad, Iraq, February 24, 1984. Captured by KH-9 spy satellite; visible: neighborhood of Al-Alawiya. via Soar.Earth.

This diverse programmatic layout reflected the school's ambition not only to provide academic instruction, but to cultivate a holistic educational environment—intellectual, physical, and cultural—that positioned the school as a central institution in the life of Baghdad's Jewish community. Therefore, the Frank Iny School is not merely a single building, but a complex of structures, open spaces, and distinct educational institutions.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

6.1 Conclusions

This research yields several key conclusions. First, the Frank Iny School stands as a clear expression of the processes of modernization and Westernization that characterized the

⁴⁷ Head of Corporal Council to Jewish Community in Baghdad, Iraqi Jewish Archive. IJA #649. Accessed on 15 April 2025.

⁴⁸ Abraham Haim Twina, *Jewry of Iraq: Dispersion & Liberation, Vol. 5*, Geula Synagogue Association Press, 1975, 120-121.

Jewish community of Baghdad during the first half of the 20th century. This is evident in its location in the modern Al-Alawiya neighborhood—distant from the traditional Jewish quarters—as well as in its architectural language and construction methods, which incorporated modernist elements and symbols of colonial prestige as a means of asserting legitimacy and social status.

Second, the establishment of the school was made possible through transnational Jewish solidarity networks that linked Baghdad to satellite Jewish communities in Asia and the West. On the intra-communal level, the school also served as a platform for channeling resources to underprivileged segments of the community, using education as a tool to promote social mobility and reinforce internal solidarity.

Its transformation into a symbolic center for Baghdad's Jews in its later years (1949–1973) intensified as Jewish communal institutions were increasingly dismantled and the visibility of Jewish life diminished under growing political and social pressures.

6.2 Discussion

As the story of the Frank Iny School suggests, the rapid modernization of Iraqi Jews—including the adoption of Western values, active participation in foreign and colonial systems, and deep integration into commerce and state institutions—may have functioned as a double-edged sword. While initially enabling upward mobility and positioning the community as a modern actor, this same modernization later marked the Jews as foreign and suspect, especially during times of political instability. After 1948, Jewish identity was increasingly perceived as dual and unstable—Baghdadis identified with external powers. In this light, their labeling as a "fifth column" stemmed not only from actions but also from the symbolic threat they represented: an old bridge between East and West that, in the eyes of many, had become dangerous and had to be excluded.

Nonetheless, further research is needed to substantiate the direct correlation between the processes of modernization and the negative political labeling of the Jewish community.

The exact location of the 1957 building attributed to the Frank Iny School remains unclear. It was initially suspected to be part of the Ezra Daniel Menahem complex, but testimonies indicate the original Frank Iny structure had only one floor, while the 1957 plans show two. Further investigation is limited due to lack of physical access and the unavailability of tools like Google Street View in the area.

Future research could benefit from a broader comparison with other Jewish communities in the Middle East that underwent similar processes. A focused architectural field study, if made possible, could also help clarify the physical evolution of the Frank Iny School and its surrounding complex.