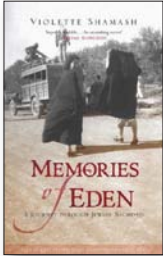


The Jews of Iraq

John Nicholls



Memories of Eden—A journey through Jewish Baghdad.

Violette Shamash.

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MEMORIES OF EDEN—*A journey through Jewish Baghdad* is a remarkable book based on the memoirs of Violette Shamash, who was born in Baghdad in 1912 during the Ottoman rule of Mesopotamia. She died in 2006, but her daughter and son-in-law edited the memoirs. She lived through the Great War and the British rule of Mesopotamia, the Second World War and the 1941 Nazi-inspired persecution of the Jews (the Farhud), in which more Jews in Baghdad were killed than were killed on Kristallnacht.

She was born into a well-to-do Jewish family, and the major section of the book describes how Jews and Arabs lived in harmony before the persecution. The Jews made up nearly forty per cent of Baghdad's 200,000 population in 1917. "We felt ourselves secure and integrated, rooted in the country we had been in since biblical times". She recalls a life she compares to paradise, in orchards of lemons, riding to school on a donkey, witnessing the appearance of the first matches and watches. In 1941 she and her family escaped to India, and then to Palestine, Cyprus and Israel, before finally settling in London in 1964.

The final section of the book describes how it was that the Jews of Baghdad were forced in 1941 to leave the country they had lived in for thousands of years, a story that brings no credit to the British. Brethren and sisters interested in the customs and ways of the Jews as well as how they fared in Iraq in the last century will find this a lovely book to read, and it is warmly commended.