

matched by the local Arab Christians or the Muslim governors, since they depended on Jewish Bankers for their financial administration, which explained the great power of the dexterous Jewish Bankers, who were familiar with economic affairs.

From the French Consular report from Tripoli, in 1813, the Consul wrote that "The house of Hayyim the Jew Sarraf or Banker, contained the real Governors of Syria, but they used their powers to further the best interests of the provinces of Acre and Sidon, enabling security and justice to be established.

The Damascus Blood Libel, came as a real shock to the Jews in Syria, and demonstrated their vulnerability, but it was not really a turning point for the Farhi family, although they had lost their political clout, still enjoyed their material wealth. Sir Moses Montefiore left England in some haste, to try and defuse the Blood Libel accusations with success, and the Syrian Jewish community had received its first warning as to the delicacy of its position, in the Syrian community.

From the records, we know that Raphael and his brother Murad, were singled out as being the wealthiest Merchants in Damascus. Raphael was also known as The Nasi, and although in poor health, received a large number of visitors to his palatial hom, who witnessed his great library. According to



Wilson, it contained nearly the whole body of Jewish literature, except some of the additions, which may have been made to it in Europe in the last quarter of the century. The library contained three beautiful scrolls of the law in the richest silver cases, and the Farhi Bible, about 450 years old, most splendidly illuminated and coloured. Wilson described it as, "The finest manuscript which I have ever seen".

Raphael passed the management of the Bank to his son, David, and the Farhi Bible seems now to have come into his possession. The Public Records Office in Kew have detailed affidavits of his daughter, Habibe's statements, claiming ownership. Habibe was one of David's five children.

So when we look at the simple curtain on the Ark, we are naturally unaware of the history of the Farhi Family, and the very large contribu-

tion it made to the life of the Syrian Jewish community.

Habibe Farhi married my grandfather, Joe C. E. F. Dwek, bringing two major families together, and Joe Dwek continued the work of the Farhi family by founding the Orphanage in Aleppo, and founding a large family of his own, which became spread over the world. The Dwek family, according to the history books, spent a long time in India, over many generations, mostly in Calcutta, where they obtained British nationality in 1860.

Habibe Dwek ruled her family as a typical matriarch, leaving Syria and staying for a short time in Belgium, she came to join her sons in Manchester, passing away in February 1963, and her legacy to the community is simply this modest curtain on the Ark.

Joe C. Dwek
6 April, 1998

Farhi; The Jewish Encyclopedia, pp 343-344

J. Wilson; The Land of the Bible (Edinburgh 1847, 2 Vols), vol 11, pp 34

Thomas Philipp, The Farhi Family and The Changing Position of Jews in Syria, 1750-1860, The Middle Eastern Studies, pp 37-52