

mother community of Aleppo at its peak. Smaller, but no less flourishing communities may be found in other countries in the American continent, in various countries of Europe and even in the Far East. This process began before the crisis, while business in Aleppo was still flourishing, but increased and developed with the decline in trade and the rise of Syrian nationalism.

Family-based economic empires arose. The style of work which had begun to evolve with the arrival of the *Francos* from distant lands, was developed and improved. How was this group superior to other merchants? They had the advantage of knowing many languages, and of having loyal and devoted relatives who could be relied upon and trusted, scattered throughout the important trading centers of the world, and linked one to another by ties of blood and commerce.

When the community declined and finally collapsed, everyone had someone to turn to, somewhere to go. Individual families were not satisfied with the general Aleppo network, and sent out 'scouts' to 'spy out the land', the country of migration, to determine whether things were easy or difficult there, and what could be done.

The history of my family is quite typical. My two oldest brothers were sent, as I have mentioned, to Mexico, and for two months rocked in an immigrants' boat. They set out, two young men, accompanied by three aunts and two uncles on my mother's side; they looked after each other through all the difficult and bitter years. When I reached Mexico in 1975, I found a large family of some five hundred close relatives — aunts, uncles and first cousins, all of them linked by ties of marriage, society and livelihood, all of them helping and supporting each other and visiting with each other. There was also jealousy and gossip, as is the way of the world. The aim of my journey was to seek out the culture of Aram Soba, which is Aleppo, and I found it well-preserved there.

My two brothers left in the twenties. It was at that time that the spirit of Zionism began to be felt amongst us, and the third, fourth and fifth of my brothers (there were another two sisters, and finally myself) began to gravitate toward Zion. My third brother, Yitzhak, of Blessed Memory, founded a Zionist organization called "*Pirhei Yisrael*" (The flowers of Israel) at the age of sixteen and a half. He was the president, and was assisted by a secretary, a treasurer, and a committee who attempted to make contact with the Committee of the Sephardic Community in Jerusalem, in Zion. Quite by chance, I came across a letter written and signed by him in the archives of the Committee in Jerusalem. He had never told us of this youthful escapade.

There were two branches in our family. One went to America, the other to Israel; one was involved in trade and commerce, the other had an intellectual-cultural orientation. My brother Yitzhak graduated in Law from the University of Beirut and became a popular and successful lawyer, but his heart was drawn to literature and while still a student he began to write articles in Arabic for important journals published in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.

Due to his publications and his reputation he was invited by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to come and teach Modern Arabic Language and Literature. That was in 1937. About two years earlier my brother Tuvia had immigrated to Israel. He settled in Tel Aviv and upon the founding of the Histadrut Arabic-language weekly "*Hakikat al-Amar*" was appointed deputy editor. He remained in this position for many years and later transferred to the daily paper "*El Yom*". Thus the two Zionist brothers became Arabic Orientalists in Israel. This branch was joined by my brother Yaakov, the fifth in number, who put his knowledge of languages, primarily Arabic, at the disposal of the Security Services.

