



The  
**Farhud**

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## *The Farbud*<sup>1</sup>

We walked on Shabbat  
in the Bustan al-Khass<sup>2</sup>  
(lettuce orchards)  
on the East bank  
of The Dijla (The Tigris),

or in al-Sa'adoun, built  
to look like Hyde Park.<sup>3</sup>  
Watch us work, prosper, plod,  
tread the middle ground, during  
a two thousand six hundred year<sup>4</sup>  
sojourn with family, food, festivals.

Listen to us speak Aramaic, Qiltu,  
then Gilit.<sup>5</sup> You never learned  
our languages after you arrived,  
we wrote literatures preserved  
for you now in different geographies.<sup>6</sup>

Watch Britain's renegade Grand Mufti<sup>7</sup>  
translate National Socialism into  
his Promised-Land apartheid, listen  
to the whispers that the Führer  
was born in an Egyptian village.

Watch him and hundreds of Palestinian  
and Syrian intellectuals-in-exile train soldiers,  
police, militia-men and children, watch  
nothing stop the Golden Square Generals,<sup>8</sup>  
even once their leaders temporal and spiritual  
run away from the British, for whose oil-fuelled

infantry eight kilometers was further than the walk  
from Ambassador Cornwallis<sup>9</sup> dinner plate  
to his card table.<sup>10</sup>

Look, there's a man in a dark suit at Maqbra,<sup>11</sup>  
who'll later press his cheek and arms up  
against a semi-cylindrical grave where  
one hundred and eighty Farhud-dead are buried.  
This is not the only tomb, they were not the only dead.

But go back before the Omer,<sup>12</sup> watch us  
tremble as we asked "Mnein Jitem"<sup>13</sup>  
that Erev Pesach after the lawyer,  
Rashid al-Gaylani's coup turned  
the hilleq<sup>14</sup> bitter. Watch our hopes surge  
when within the month he and the Grand Mufti  
escape from the British to Iran, plummet  
when Yunis al-Sab'awi<sup>15</sup> declares  
himself Governor General and orders us  
penned in our homes, soar again when it's he  
who's deported within the day. Hear us attest

to our treble-terror reprieved when we eat  
our Tbit<sup>16</sup> on the Shabbat which runs  
into Tikkun Leyl,<sup>17</sup> and hear Regent<sup>18</sup>  
Abd al-Allah's due back the next day,  
Sunday June 1st. Watch us cheer him home  
on the first day of Eid al Ziyarah.<sup>19</sup>

Then watch soldiers, police, civilians attack us  
on al-Khurr bridge, at al-Rusafa,<sup>20</sup> Abu-Sifain<sup>21</sup>  
everywhere until 3 a.m. and silence. Watch  
at 6 a.m. on the second day of hag<sup>22</sup> when  
they start again. Not just the poor from al-Karkh<sup>23</sup>

who cross the river empty handed,  
then load-up having cruelly sacked  
our homes, shops, synagogues,  
but from everywhere they yelp

“Idhbahu al-Yehud” (butcher the Jews).  
Drilled by Salah al-Din as-Sabbagh,<sup>24</sup>  
or by centuries of knowing our place,  
keeping the rules, paying the price  
being no guarantee of protection.

They cut up Jewish babies and threw them  
into the undertow, no Moses survived.<sup>25</sup>

They raped girls and old women,  
cut their breasts, no Dina<sup>26</sup> survived.

They beheaded and severed, taunted  
and tore. Dragged Jews from buses  
which they used to run them over.  
Every attack intended to humiliate.

The dead, hurt, stolen, destroyed  
uncountable, even once the Regent  
called in the cut that felled  
the saturnine mob.<sup>27</sup> Where was natural,  
civil, military, sharia law? The assumed  
duty to dhimmi?<sup>28</sup>

In the stand taken by Moslems<sup>29</sup>  
like Dr Sa’ib Shawkat,  
Dean of Baghdad’s Medical College?<sup>30</sup>  
No but it was in the acts of landlords

who risked their lives to save those  
whose houses the Hitler Youth-styled  
Futuwwa had painted with red khamsas.

In the arms of neighbours  
who caught children in blankets  
when they were thrown to safety  
and sheltered families who jumped  
across flat roofs where Baghdad  
used to spend its summer nights.

Yes, we fought back, we boiled  
siraj (sesame oil) and threw it  
from our shnashil (latticed balconies)  
where women, unseen, had watched  
their households' comings and goings.  
We used the bricks from our parapets,  
we had no guns, few had iron fists.<sup>31</sup>

Since the funerals our children  
remember with new knowledge  
and their picnics of beith-bla'ham,<sup>32</sup>  
timman-ahmar,<sup>33</sup> and kahi,<sup>34</sup> never go south  
to al-Kifl<sup>35</sup> for the Shabuot pilgrimage, sing  
Shirit Hagvarim<sup>36</sup> at its seven  
waystations, or hear the tomb  
of Yehezkel cry for its Jews.





## Notes

- 1 The Farhud (Kurdish word for *violent dispossession*) occurred on the 1st and 2nd June 1941, on the Jewish Festival of Shabu'oth (Pentecost). This poem was commissioned by Harif/Stand With Us for the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Farhud. The author read the poem on 2nd June 2017 at a service at London's Lauderdale Road Synagogue, and at the Knesset (Parliament) in Jerusalem on 6th June 2017 to mark the Israeli Government's announcement that they would compensate victims on the same scale as Holocaust survivors.
- 2 Bustan means orchard in Hebrew, in Arabic it is a garden. Bustan al-Khass was originally a market garden, which had at the time of the Farhud become a fashionable suburb of Baghdad, where Jews lived side by side with Muslims and Christians.
- 3 Al-Sa'adoun: An older commercial neighbourhood of Baghdad.
- 4 A two thousand six hundred year sojourn: Jews came to Baghdad as captives from Jerusalem between 597 and 586 BCE.
- 5 Aramaic, Qiltu and Gilit: These three languages were spoken by Jews and others in Baghdad prior to the establishment of Islam circa 630 CE. Aramaic was the language spoken across the Middle East from Biblical times. Versions of the language are still spoken today among Kurdish Jews and Assyrian Christians, from Northern Iraq. Aramaic was superseded by Arabic in much of Iraq following the Arab conquest and the establishment of Islam circa 630 CE in garrison cities. Outside of Kurdistan, Jews also adopted the use of Arabic. The dialects of these sedentary Arabic-speaking communities pronounced the letter ق [Hebrew ק] as an unvoiced velar plosive – like a “k”, but pronounced further back in the throat. These dialects are referred to as Qiltu dialects, representing their pronunciation of the word for “I said”. Today, dialects with this feature are spoken in Northern Iraq, and by Jews and Christians from Baghdad and Basra. From the 15th Century, Bedouins from Arabia settled in southern Iraq, speaking dialects where ق is pronounced like English “g”. These are referred to as Gilit dialects, their pronunciation of the word for “I said”. Muslims in Basra and Baghdad speak a Gilit dialect. When Jews and Christians in those cities interacted with Muslims, they used the Gilit dialect of the dominant, Muslim population.
- 6 We wrote literatures preserved for you now in different geographies: Where Jews identifying as Iraqis live today.
- 7 Britain's renegade Grand Mufti: The British Mandate Authority in Palestine created the title Grand Mufti of Jerusalem then conferred it on Mohammed Amin Al-Husseini, who then used this status to foment opposition and terror attacks against both Jews and the British. To avoid arrest in 1937, he fled Palestine and had made his

way to Iraq by 1939, where he continued his agitation against the Jews and the British and continued to express allegiance to Hitler.

- 8 The Golden Square Generals were four young military leaders, Colonels Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, Kamil Shabib, Fahmi Said and Mahmud Salman, who staged an anti-British, pro-Nazi coup on 1 April 1941, supported by the Grand Mufti, the German Ambassador Fritz Grobba and the political leader Rashid al-Gaylani who served as Prime Minister of their regime.
- 9 Ambassador Cornwallis of Britain ignored Winston Churchill's orders to deploy British forces (then 8 kilometers away, guarding the oil fields) to protect Baghdad's Jewish community.
- 10 From ...dinner plate to his card table: The British Ambassador was informed that Baghdad's Jews were being attacked whilst he hosted a dinner party which he did not interrupt, and after which he and his guests played cards.
- 11 Maqbra: Cemetery.
- 12 Before the Omer: the 49 days Jews count from the second day of Passover to the eve of the festival of Shabu'oth, to prepare spiritually for the commemoration of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The first night of Passover is "before the Omer", when the home rituals of the Seder (Iraqi Shetakha) take place.
- 13 Mnein Jitem: Literally, "*Where did you come from?*" Iraqi Jews stage a brief dramatization of the Exodus from Egypt during the Seder on the first and second nights of Passover, where the youngest participants march off carrying their "provisions" of massa/matzah, and are quizzed, when they return, about where they have come from (answer: from Egypt), where they are going (to Jerusalem), and the provisions they are carrying.
- 14 Hilleq: The word Iraqi Jews use for haroset (Hebrew), made from almonds and walnuts mixed with date syrup and eaten at the Passover Seder.
- 15 Yunis al-Sab'awi: A committed Anti-Semite, who translated Mein Kampf into Arabic and fostered al-Futuwwa, a youth group modelled on the Hitler Youth.
- 16 Tbit: A slow baked Sabbath dish of stuffed chicken and rice.
- 17 Tikkun Leyl: Literally, "*correction of the night*". It is a Jewish custom to learn and to listen to shiurim (lessons) beginning on the eve of Shabu'oth and continuing throughout the night, staying up till Shaharith (morning prayers) on the following morning. Midrash (biblical interpretation) has it that the children of Israel overslept on the morning that they were due to receive the Torah. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai and later Rabbi Isaac Luria refine the reasons for the custom.

- 18 Regent, Abd al-Allah: King Faisal II was just 6 years of age at the time of the Farhud. The country was administered by his uncle Abd al-Allah prior to the coup, and again after the coup was defeated.
- 19 Eid al Ziyarah: The festival of pilgrimage, the Arabic name for Shabu'oth/Pentecost.
- 20 Al-Rusafa: A commercial district of Baghdad, east of the Tigris River.
- 21 Abu-Sifain: The old, poor Jewish quarter of Baghdad.
- 22 Hag: Festival (Hebrew), here refers to Shabu'oth.
- 23 Al-Karkh: A district of Baghdad, west of the Tigris.
- 24 Salah al-Din as-Sabbagh: One of the Golden Square, see footnote 8 above.
- 25 No Moses survived: Pharaoh Ramesses I decreed that all male Jewish babies be drowned in the Nile at birth. Moses' sister Miriam placed him in the river in a pitched basket and he was rescued by Princess Seti I (Pharaoh's daughter). By contrast, there was no one to rescue the children attacked by the blood thirsty mobs.
- 26 No Dina survived: Unlike Baghdad's Jewish rape victims, Dina – our biblical forefather Jacob's daughter - survived her rape by Shechem the Hiwite.
- 27 The cut that felled the saturnine mob: Iraqi Kurdish soldiers, loyal to the Regent who were summoned to Baghdad, had to use extreme force when they arrived before they could quell the mob, and coined the phrase Farhud for what they had witnessed.
- 28 Duty to dhimmi: The legacy of *dhimmitude* (legally prescribed subservience and payment of tax to Muslims in return for protection). Although the status of dhimmitude had formally been abolished, it continued to permeate society in the form of a collusive co-existence.
- 29 In the stand taken by Moslems: i.e., standing against the Regent, and in the present context incitement against the Jews.
- 30 Dr Sa'ib Shawkat was head of al-Futuwwa, a known Fascist and Pan-Arab nationalist, famous for his 1933 "The Manufacture of Death" speech, Iraq's Director of Education from 1938.
- 31 Iron fists: The then contemporary term for knuckle dusters.
- 32 Beith-bla'ham: Meat and potato fritters, literally *eggs with meat*.
- 33 Timman-ahmar: Iraqi dish of chicken and rice, literally *red rice*.
- 34 Kahi: A deep-fried sweet pastry, traditionally eaten during Shabu'oth.
- 35 Al-Kifl: The tomb of the prophet Yehezkel (Ezekiel) in al-Kifl was the object of

pilgrimage (ziyarah) during Shabu'oth. The tomb was also regarded as holy by Muslim Iraqis.

36 Shirit Hagvarim: Psalms, literally *songs of men*.

## *About the Author*

The poet Yvonne Green is a British-born Jewess of Boukharian extraction. She read law at the LSE and was called to the Bar in both New York and London. Her pamphlet, *Boukhara* (2007), won The Poetry Business Book & Pamphlet Competition. She has published 4 full-length collections including; *The Assay* (2010), *Honoured* (2015) and *Jam & Jerusalem* (2018). *After Semyon Izrailevich Lipkin* was named as the Poetry Book Society's Translation Choice in 2011 and her *Selected Poems and Translations* was published for Kindle by Smith|Doorstop in 2014. Her work has been translated into Hebrew by Tal Nitzán and published by Am Oved.

