



OUT OF BABYLON

Shlomo Hillel and the Rescue of the Iraqi Jews

Written by

Peter Lauterman

Story by

Tamar Morad, Dennis Shasha, Robert Shasha

Based on true events



JULY 26, 2018



Source: Jewishrefugees.blogspot.com

OUT OF BABYLON

Logline: It is 1948. Some 140,000 Jews are trapped in Iraq which has just lost a war with Israel. One Mossad agent is charged with getting them out. Based on a true story.

By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down; there we wept when we remembered Zion.

This is a story of how a young man named Shlomo Hillel rescued 130,000 Iraqi Jews from the jaws of death and brought them safely to the newborn State of Israel.

It was the sudden, unexpected culmination of six years of desperate efforts, between 1946 and 1952, to rescue the Iraqi Jews in the face of mounting

persecution, arbitrary arrests, torture and public executions—all cheered on by thousands of Iraqis though resisted by some.

It remains the greatest airlift rescue ever to take place.

It marked the abrupt, tragic demise of a community that had resided in Babylon for over 2,500 years—the oldest in the Jewish diaspora.

THE JEWS OF BABYLON

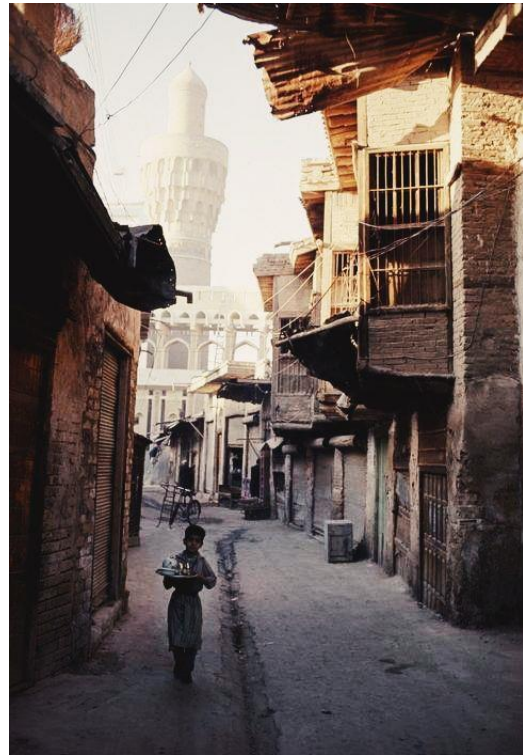
Exiles

They had come to Babylon as exiles from Judea—the ancient land of Israel—after their tiny nation had been overrun by the mighty armies of Babylon. It was here they wept for Jerusalem, and later wrote what came to be known as the Babylonian Talmud.

They were among the one million Jews who never wandered west into Europe after 70 AD, after the Romans once again drove the Jews into exile, this time it seemed, forever.

They came to rest in Morocco and Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt—and Babylon. They were the 'Mizrachi' ('of the east'). The 'Arab Jews'. Swarthy, Arabic speaking, steeped in Arabic culture.

Life for the Jews of the Mizrach had never been easy. Under Islamic law, Jews and Christians, as result of their 'dhimmi' status, had to pay a special tax to avoid having jihad practiced on them. If a Jewish merchant wanted to operate a business, a Muslim partner was required. Everyone had to be bribed over and over again. But, nonetheless, many Jews in the Mizrach prospered. None more so than the Jews of Iraq.



Life in old Baghdad (source: Pinterest)

By the 1930s there were nearly 150,000 Jews living in Iraq. They comprised a full third of the population of its capital, Baghdad; Baghdad's markets were quiet on Saturdays because Jews closed their stores for the Sabbath and didn't shop themselves.

The elite of their community had become the elite of Iraq. They were international bankers, traders, popular musicians, artists, influential politicians and high-ranking government officials.

They were deeply rooted and secure in their Iraqi nationality and Arabic language and culture. The country's best schools were Jewish, and the wealthiest Muslims and Christians sent their children to these schools. Occasionally there was violence. But it was never as murderous as it became in Europe.

And then, suddenly, it was.

As the twentieth century progressed, they found themselves caught in the crossfire of three converging forms of anti-Semitism: that of the German Nazis, the Palestinian exiles in Baghdad and Iraqi pan-Arab nationalists.

Abruptly, they had become scapegoats for every social and economic failure Iraq experienced. They found themselves trapped in a frightening world of trumped-up accusations, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution.



Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the Palestinian Arab nationalist leader in Palestine, meeting with Adolf Hitler. The British exiled him to Iraq, where he stirred up anti-Jewish sentiment that contributed to the Farhoud (source: The Times of Israel)

In 1941, a massacre led to the murder of 170 Baghdadi Jews; it became known as the Farhoud. In 1948, after the ragtag militia of Israel had managed to fend off the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq,, Shafiq Addis, a secular, non-Zionist Jew from Basra who was thoroughly assimilated into Iraqi society—and the richest man in Iraq—was accused of being a ‘Zionist spy’, convicted in a kangaroo court and hanged from a lamppost in front of his house while

thousands cheered their approval.

Once again, the doors were slamming shut, as they had in Europe in 1939. Once again, the darkness was falling. And once again, there was no legal way out.

Shlomo Hillel had seen these doors slam shut before with his own eyes: in Palestine ...

SHLOMO HILLEL: *We have a mission for you ...*

The British had promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine way back in 1919. But by 1930 the British had concluded their strategic interest lay with the Arabs, not the Jews. Just as the Holocaust was about to unfold, the British slammed the door shut on Jewish immigration. The Jews of Europe were trapped in their native lands.

Nov 25, 1940: A boat called the *Patria* sits in Jaffa Harbor crammed with desperate Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Europe. But the British will not let them enter Palestine. Instead, the British will ship the Jews to their African colony of Mauritius where they will be incarcerated.

There were 3,500 refugees aboard. Before the *Patria* could set sail for Africa, Jewish commandos secretly boarded the ship with the idea of blowing a small hole in the boat so it couldn't sail. They miscalculated badly. The explosion sank the boat. 257 refugees were killed.

The 17-year-old Shlomo Hillel—an Iraqi-born immigrant to Palestine/pre-state Israel—watches the disaster unfold from the roof of his family home.

He races to the shore to help the drowning refugees. Among the terrified survivors he helps pull to safety is 12-year-old Temima Rosner.



Jaffa Harbor (source: TripAdvisor)

Five years later, another boat crammed with Jewish refugees – Holocaust survivors – runs aground north of Haifa. The boat is the *Hannah Senesh*. It's Christmas Day Eve: the British are not watching. But Jewish commandos are. This



Shlomo Hillel in Tel Aviv as a young boy (source: Shlomo Hillel)

time everybody aboard is rescued. Over the course of the next few years, many immigrant ships bringing Holocaust survivors to Palestine attempted to reach its shores. Some made it—barely. Some were turned away. In Palestine, Jews reacted to the news with horror and dismay.

By now Temima and Shlomo are living as a couple on a kibbutz, in British-ruled Palestine. Shlomo is pretending to be a chicken farmer while overseeing the secret manufacture of weapons for the war with the Arabs everybody knows is coming once the British leave.

It is crucial, necessary work. But Shlomo is miserable. While boats full of survivors are being turned away or shot out of the water by British soldiers, Shlomo is spending his days and nights bickering with his fellow kibbutzniks. In the perfect egalitarian world of the kibbutz, everyone is equally in charge. There is nothing not worth debating ad nauseum.

Frustrated beyond reason, he summons Moshe Baron to help sort out the political wrangling. Moshe Baron is the head of the clandestine arms industry for the Haganah, the Jewish underground army in Palestine.

Baron agrees to come. But he has another purpose in driving out to meet with the fractious kibbutzniks. In fact, the Mossad has been watching Shlomo for years, studying his background, assessing his abilities.

Baron has come to offer Shlomo a mission to Iraq. To see if there was a way to get the Jews out Iraq, while there still is time.

Shlomo jumps at the prospect—as Baron knew he would. But Shlomo assumes there will months of training, careful planning, time devoted to developing strategies and refurbishing his half-forgotten Arabic.

But there is no plan, no strategy. He is 24 years old and he has been told—for all intents and purposes—to make it up as he goes along.

See what you can do.

And behind this apparently cavalier attitude looms a deadly serious purpose. ***We must not, cannot, fail again.*** Instead of months, he is given a week to say his goodbyes. Temima and Shlomo are not yet married. She is afraid she will never see him alive again. But she herself is refugee, a survivor. She knows what is at stake.

In 1945 there is still an Iraqi Consulate in Palestine. Shlomo tells them he has decided to go home, and asks for an Iraqi passport. The Iraqis don't believe him for minute. *Why on earth would a Jew want to go back?* But this is the Middle East. And a bribe in cash and cigarettes quells their suspicions.

In 1945 it is still possible to travel directly from Palestine to Iraq. He boards a BOAC 8-seat aircraft, never having flown before. For a moment, he is thrilled to see the landscape below. Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee. And then the rickety aircraft hits an air pocket and Shlomo vomits violently on the stiff-necked Englishman who is crammed into the seat beside him.

And so, it begins.

Before it is over, Shlomo will have flown many, many times – from Tel Aviv to Tehran to Paris to Beirut to Damascus and beyond – seeking a way to get the Jews out of Iraq.

In 1951, he will be aboard one of the planes that leaves Baghdad, crammed with refugees bound for Israel.

In between these two flights is a story that needs to be told.

OUT OF BABYLON – THE SERIES

The producers of *Out of Babylon* understand there are two paths we could follow with this project. One is a feature film in the mode of *Argo* or *Zero Dark Thirty*. The other is a limited TV series.

This story, as known in the historical record and relayed by Shlomo Hillel in his book *Operation Babylon*, unfolds over six years. Shlomo Hillel made four specific attempts to effect the rescue during that time. The first one was a painful failure. After that, his attempts became ever more elaborate, involving more people and moving parts



Shlomo Hillel in Iraq during his years as a Mossad emissary (source: Shlomo Hillel)

and at the same time became ever more fraught with potential disaster, building organically to the unexpected triumph of the airlift.

TV lends itself perfectly to this kind of episodic narrative. It will also give us the opportunity to follow other threads of the story that intersect with Shlomo Hillel and the airlift.

We will be able to move beyond portraying the Iraqi Arabs as cartoon bad guys.

We will get to know the Muslim neighbors and business partners who tried to protect their Jewish friends. We will get to know the Muslim women who sheltered Jewish children from mob violence and who even nursed the babies when the Jewish mothers were under the weather or out shopping.

As we follow Shlomo we will also be able follow men like Prime Minister Nuri el-Said, who had so much to do with stirring up hatred against the Jews, more for political expediency than because of any person animus. For el-Said, the Jews were a necessary scapegoat he could throw to the mob over and over again to explain away Iraq's myriad social and economic woes and military failures.

We will meet men like Tawfik el-Suwaidi, an Iraqi diplomat whose close friend and neighbour—Ezekiel Shemtob—became head of the Jewish community in Baghdad at the same time el-Suwaidi replaced Nuri el-Said as Prime Minister. It was el-Suwaidi who allowed the airlift to go forward.

We will come to know the Jews of Iraq. In all their fractious complexity.

The young Zionists who were prepared to work with Shlomo and risk their lives to get to Israel.

The Jewish communists, who came mostly from poor backgrounds and dreamed of fomenting a Soviet-style revolution in Iraq that would liberate all Iraqis – Jews, Muslim, Christian.

We will meet those wealthy merchants, cosmopolitan men who could see the storm that was coming but who were tied to their businesses and, considering the possibility of leaving, feared losing it all.

And the middle class and religious Jews, like Sasoon Kedourie, the official leader of the Jewish community, who just wanted Shlomo to go away. Hoping and praying that that this new orgy of violence would pass and life could go on as before.

And then there were Shlomo's Mossad bosses back in Tel Aviv. Issuing contradictory orders, providing him with badly forged passports, ordering him to commandeer vehicles and equipment and weapons but failing to provide him with the funds.

Hard-headed, cantankerous men who made it virtually impossible for him to succeed, then harshly chastised him for his failure to deliver the goods.

Sometimes forgetting about him altogether as they turned their attention to other pressing matters, like continuously preparing for war with the Arabs.

But always pushing him, hoping some how he would find a way to do the impossible.

Out of Babylon will present us with harrowing, nail-biting adventures and a wildly improbable cast of characters, framed by historical events that still resonate with us today. In this day when, once again, vast numbers of desperate refugees are running for lives, there is no better time to tell the story of the Iraqi Jews and the young man who rescued them.

The following episodic sketches are not meant to be detailed story outlines. They do illuminate the wealth of material at our disposal and a possible way forward.

EPIISODE 1

See What You Can Do ...

We begin our journey with a flashback.

1940.

In Jaffa Harbor, Jewish commandos steal aboard the *Patria* and blow a hole in her side to prevent the British from shipping the 3,500 Jewish refugees on board to Mauritius. But the commandos miscalculate. The boat sinks.

Shlomo is watching from the roof of his home. He races to the shore to help rescue the survivors. One of them is 12-year-old Temima Rosner. In time, she will become the love of his life.



Immigrant ship arrives on the shores of Palestine (source: Wikipedia)

Five years pass. We witness another harrowing rescue.

A boat crammed with Holocaust survivors runs aground north of Haifa. The boat is the *Hannah Senesh*. The British will not let it land in Haifa Harbor. It's December 24. Christmas Day Eve: the British are not watching.

But Jewish commandos are. This time everybody aboard is rescued.

Shlomo and Temima are involved in hiding scores of the rescued refugees in their kibbutz. Temima is now his girlfriend. They are dreaming about marriage and family and building a life in a Jewish State in Palestine.

He is pretending to be a chicken farmer while overseeing the secret manufacture of weapons for the war with the Arabs everybody knows is coming once the British leave.

But Shlomo is miserable. While boats full of Holocaust survivors are being shot out of the water by British soldiers, Shlomo is spending his days and nights bickering with his fellow kibbutzniks. In the perfect egalitarian world of the kibbutz, there is nothing not worth debating ad nauseum.



Moshe Baron arrives to deal with the wrangling kibbutzniks. Baron is the head of the clandestine arms procurement effort.

Kibbutz life: working the land (source: My Jewish Learning)

Baron delivers an inspiring talk to the wrangling kibbutzniks about the rescue of the refugees aboard the *Hannah Senesh*. He reminds them that **this** is what is important. But the real focus of his passionate address is Shlomo. In fact, he has come to recruit Shlomo for a mission: rescue the Jews of Iraq.

Shlomo jumps at the chance as Baron and his Mossad bosses knew he would.



Days later Shlomo meets with the Mossad in Tel Aviv. To his dismay, he discovers there is no plan, no strategy, no time. He is told to link up with the 'Zionist underground' in Baghdad. He is given a few names. He is reassured he will be in constant contact with Tel Aviv via wireless. He is given a week to say his goodbyes. Temima is terrified, but she senses this is his destiny.

Shlomo procures an Iraqi passport from the Iraqi Consulate in Jerusalem. He tells the consul that after 12 years in Palestine he wants to go home to Baghdad, where he was born. The Iraqi consul suspects he is lying. But a bribe greases the wheel with the guy who stamps the passport.

He boards a BOAC flight to Baghdad. Everything is fine until the rickety aircraft hits an air pocket and Shlomo vomits violently on the Englishman who is crammed into the seat beside.

Shlomo arrives in Baghdad and is met by one of the underground officers. They start to drive into the city. One of his first sights is a mass demonstration of crazed people yelling "Halal to kill the Jews". He's got his work cut for him.

EPISODE 2

LORDS OF THE DESERT

Shlomo in Baghdad.

The 'Zionist underground' turns out to be more a figment of the Mossad's imagination than anything tangible.

He seeks out his contacts. Sammi Moriah, Yunni Rabinowitz, Mordechai Ben Porat, Moshe Haramati. Like himself, they are barely more than kids. They will be his brothers in arms for the next six years.

There is an ancient wireless for contacting Tel Aviv. It is hidden in a tiny attic space and operated by a series of operators who are loyal undeterred by working round the clock in the pitch dark. They are a little ticked at Shlomo's assumption that he is managing the operation that they've been hard at work on for some time. The wireless sometimes works. Not often.

Shlomo now comes face to face with the divisions and conflicts within the Jewish community. The elders and merchants want nothing to do with him. There are cadres of teenagers who are ready to risk their lives to escape. But many in the community regard Shlomo and the Zionist project as a worse threat to their security than the Iraqi Secret Police.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri el-Said is back in office and maneuvering to secure his power. El-Said is using the rising tensions in Palestine to distract the Iraqi people from their crippling economic and social problems. He has appointed Rafik el-Hijazi to head up the secret police. Hijazi is a cunning, violent man with a particular animus towards Jews.

El-Said lets loose Mohammed Amin el-Husseini, the anti-Semitic Palestinian leader from Jerusalem with close ties to the Nazis, on the Jewish community of Iraq. Root out the Zionists and the communists!

The fear and tension are palpable. Every day, Jewish citizens are being arrested on trumped-up charges. They languish in dreadful conditions in prisons where they are beaten and tortured, sometimes to death if a family can't get a man freed with a bribe.

In this atmosphere, how Earth can they organize a 'rescue'? Shlomo is certain he is being followed. He is afraid he will be betrayed by his enemies within his own community.

Meanwhile, his Mossad overseers in Tel Aviv are demanding results.

They decide the only way is to smuggle Jews across the Iraqi desert, then into Jordan and finally Palestine.

Forty Jewish teenagers volunteer.

An unlikely team of Bedouin smugglers, tribal chieftains, corrupt Iraqi officials and Jewish middlemen is cobbled together.

Sheik Abdullah is a retired police captain and smuggler. He puts Shlomo with the Kuzberi brothers, AKA the Lords of The Desert. They are Bedouins who reassure Shlomo they know every inch of the route through the uninhabitable desert. The Kuzberis will link up with Emir Fauaz Sha'lan, the ruler of Rutba, where the boys will cross into Jordan...

An improbable cast of characters. The smugglers keep delaying while they try to squeeze more money out of Shlomo and his team. Finally, they are ready to go.

The boys are crammed into a derelict truck and off they go.

Everything that can go wrong, does.

The truck breaks down in the middle of the desert. It takes days to get it moving again. Food and water are running out. Finally, the truck is repaired but then they are enveloped in a violent desert sandstorm. The truck tips over. Two of the boys are killed. More are injured, some badly.



Desert Bedouin (source: The National)

The only mission now is to get them back to Baghdad alive.

Shlomo has the heartbreaking job of speaking with the parents of the boys who died and whose bodies are lost in the Iraqi desert.

But, under pressure from the Mossad, they try again. About 120 boys volunteer. The Lords of the Desert promise a better truck, a better outcome. Money changes hands. The Lords of the Desert literally vanish. With the money. Shlomo gives up and flies back to Tel Aviv.

EPISODE 3

Operation Michaelberg

Shlomo is home, trying to become a farmer again. Trying to forget the Lords of the Desert.

He promises Temima he will settle down. She knows better. But they are trying. And then Moshe Carmil arrives for a visit.

Carmil is a high-ranking operative in the Mossad. Shlomo is expecting to be grilled yet again about the failure in the desert.

Instead, Carmil tells him the Mossad has linked up with two American pilots, soldiers of fortune. Leo Wessenberg and a man forever known to Shlomo only as 'Mike'.

As with the Lords of the Desert, they are straight out of central casting. Chain smoking, hard-drinking, womanizing, utterly fearless Americans who see the post-war chaos in Europe and beyond as a chance to make money.

They have their own C46 cargo airplane and they willing to fly anybody anywhere for a price.

Carmil wants Shlomo to resurrect the Iraqi mission. But this time they will fly the Iraqi Jews out instead of trying to smuggle them by land.



The Operation Michaelberg plane (source: Shlomo Hillel)

Shlomo wants to know how.

Certainly, the Iraqi authorities aren't going to cooperate. And even if he and the Americans do manage to find a way to take off, where will they land in British-controlled Palestine, where no Jewish immigration is allowed?

Carmil has few answers—only the utmost confidence that Shlomo will sort these details out.

The mission is dubbed Operation Michaelberg.

A landing strip is created near the Sea of Galilee under the noses of the British.

Then Shlomo flies into Baghdad on the cargo plane. He has not even had time to say goodbye to Temima. He has a fake passport in hand and he is listed as a flight attendant. Why a cargo plane needs a flight attendant is a mystery, but they bluff their way past the Iraqis who don't seem to care.

When nearing Baghdad, Shlomo looks down and sees miles of desert. He suddenly panics.

The Mossad has directed Shlomo and the pilots to somehow fly the would-be refugees out from the desert, far from prying eyes. But as the C46 sweeps over the barren desert for landing, Shlomo realizes the Mossad plan is utter folly. It will be The Lords of The Desert all over again. Or worse. He berates himself for considering himself a flying expert; he feels in over his head.

Somehow, they will have to fly out of the airport. They reconnoiter and observe that no Iraqi soldiers bother policing the outer perimeter of the landing strip where the planes rev up their engines before taking off.

So, a different plan emerges. Park the C46 at the outer edge of the landing strip. Cut a hole in the unguarded perimeter fence and sneak the 'cargo' on board while the engines hum.

The airport is so poorly run that they can submit a cargo manifest but no one will actually check the cargo.

Then: disaster. Haramati, the youngest member of Shlomo's team, is arrested by the secret police. No doubt he will be tortured until he reveals everything he knows. They have to get him out.

Shlomo is forced to secretly approach the handful of influential Iraqis who are still sympathetic to their Jewish neighbors and business partners. His search for allies leads him to Leila el-Suwedi, the 24-year-old niece of a prominent Iraqi diplomat, Tawfik el-Suwedi.

A spark jumps. Yet another unexpected complication. She agrees to do what she can.

And then the pilots suddenly insist they must be paid in full before they take off. They drink hard the night before and sleep in; Shlomo is truly ticked off. The deal was half up front and half when they deliver the cargo. They won't budge. Shlomo is forced to write them a cheque for the full amount. Of course, the cheque would bounce if it was ever cashed. But the bluff works.

Nearly 100 Jews, packed and ready to go, are assembled near the airport, then smuggled through the hole in the fence and onto the waiting plane.



Operation Michaelberg lands near the Sea of Galilee (source: Shlomo Hillel)

The plane takes off without incident. A few hours later, in the middle of the night, it lands on a makeshift landing strip near the Sea of Galilee, virtually under the noses of British soldiers.

Success! Shlomo is elated. The operation is repeated several more times. Shlomo believes that thousands can be

brought out the same way... Then suddenly the operation is curtailed by the Mossad. The State of Israel is about to be born—and it will be attacked by its neighbors. The Mossad switches tracks: it needs Wessenberg and 'Mike', and their cargo plane, to smuggle guns from Europe, not people from Iraq.

The priority now is to get Haramati out of prison. Shlomo and his team try to organize an escape. But before they can get to him he is beaten to death personally by the police chief, Rafik el-Hijazi.

Another devastating blow.

EPISODE 4

A Season in Paris – and Teheran

It's 1948 and Israel comes into existence. The nation is fighting for its life.

For the Jews of Iraq, their lives suddenly become dramatically worse.

Nuri el-Said decides to secure his political base by championing the Palestinians and leading the anti-Israel charge – even though Iraq is 600 miles away.

He whips up anti-Jewish anti-Zionist sentiment into a frenzy. Every Jew in Iraq is now suspected of being a potential `Zionist spy; and a traitor. Hundreds are arrested.

Shafiq Adde, the richest man in Iraq and a Jew from Basra who is secular, non-Zionist , and thoroughly assimilated into Iraqi society, is accused of being a 'Zionist spy'. He is convicted in a kangaroo court and hanged from a lamppost in front of his house while thousands cheer their approval.

El-Said orders the creation of a military brigade to march into Israel and lead the charge against the Zionist entity. Other Jews are hanged publicly, their deaths celebrated by mobs. Some Muslims visit their Jewish friends, apologizing and ashamed of the acts taken out on their brethren.

He has no plan to actually send troops. He assumes the war will be over in a few days. But he is cornered when the war drags on. Early reports of glorious victories turn out to be false. Iraqi soldiers begin to return home in boxes and body bags.



The Haganah, Israel's pre-State army, fighting in Israel's War of Independence (source: Total War: Alternate Reality Wiki-Fandom)



So, he ratchets up the anti-Jewish hysteria in Iraq.

Shlomo is in Baghdad and sees for himself how bad it is. He works with the Zionist underground. Eventually, he is betrayed and arrested.

His Iraqi female friend, Leila el-Suweidi, helps him escape. He manages to make it back to Israel. Exasperated and exhausted, he quits the Mossad and tries to enlist in the army. But again, Moshe Carmil bullies him back to his mission in Iraq.

But with the creation of Israel he can no longer fly directly to Iraq or via any Arab country. The Mossad decides to send him via Paris.

He arrives in Paris as Yakov Munir. And now the story turns.

In Paris he meets Abbe Glasberg, a French priest and a convert from Judaism. Time and time again during World War II, Glasberg hid hundreds of Jewish kids from the German soldiers.

After the war, Glasberg was honored by the French government for risking his life to aid the Resistance. Glasberg has been to Israel, where he is welcomed warmly by Israel's new leadership. He is known to the Mossad and is a passionate supporter of the newborn State of Israel.



The Zionist underground in Iraq, who work with Shlomo (source: Shlomo Hillel)



The Catholic priest: Alexander Glasberg (source: Association COS)

Shlomo and Glasberg meet in Paris: all the talk is of the Iraqi Jews. Shlomo has an idea based on how the Mossad

(with a lot of help from Glasberg) shuttled Holocaust survivors from country to country in Europe in order to get them to their final destination: Palestine/Israel. Instead of trying to smuggle them west to Israel, why not move them east—to Iran? From Teheran they can be flown into Israel.

At this moment, Iran is neither anti-Semitic no particularly anti-Israel. Their real war is with the Sunni Muslims, not the Jews.

Glasberg promises Shlomo he can procure French visas for Jewish Iraqi refugees. Then, the refugees can be flown directly from Tehran to Israel with French visas.

Shlomo pitches the plan to the Mossad. The plan is rejected as outlandish. But when Glasberg backs him, the star-struck Mossad leader gives the go-ahead.

Shlomo is sent on to Teheran. Now he is Maurice Perez.

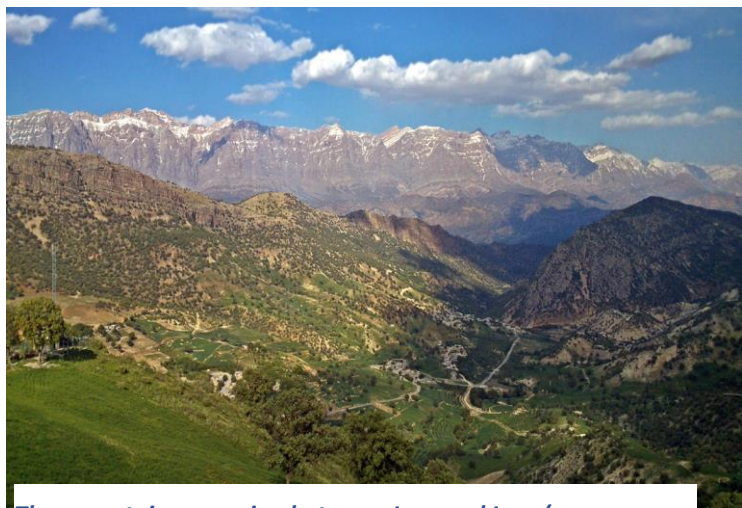
The first problem is how to get the Iraqis to the Iranian border. Iraqi troops are everywhere. They will shoot to kill. If the would-be Jewish refugees are caught, they are tossed into primitive prisons, beaten, starved, before they are sent back to Baghdad where they will be tried in kangaroo courts as Zionist spies.

But despite everything they begin to come.

All the Iranian border police require are cash bribes and they are happy to look the other way.

Shlomo is imagining that Glasberg will come up with a dozen or so visas at a time. Instead, he procures hundreds. Out of thin air, Shlomo creates long lists of fictitious names, builds entire families, to secure

visas; he'll worry later about matching real people and their pictures with the fake names, even making boys look like girls and vice versa.



The mountainous region between Iraq and Iran (source: Wikipedia)

The Iraqi Jews make their way, with Kurdish smugglers to the Iranian border. They cross, and make their way to Teheran, where they are issued with French visas. And then they are flown into Israel.

It begins as a trickle. But soon it becomes a flood.

EPISODE 5

Out of Babylon

The Iraqis are too disorganized to stem the flow. All they are able to do is escalate their violence against the Jews in Baghdad and Basra.

Hundreds of Jews, then thousands, begin to amass in Teheran



Soon there are reporters from the *New York Times*, telling the story of the Iraqi Jews to the world. In the aftermath of the Holocaust there is a brief window of sympathy toward the plight of the Jews.

Iraqi Jews in Tehran, awaiting departure to Israel (source: Shlomo Hillel)

The Iraqis are being made to look like heartless fools in the international media. Meanwhile, Shlomo and his crew in Teheran are struggling to deal with the thousands of refugees. There is no place to put them. The hotels fill up quickly, so he sets up a tent city at the old Jewish cemetery. The Iraqi Jews aren't used to the cold, and they are nervous, but they are relieved to be free.



New York Times front page, May 15, 1948 (source: New York Times)

Shlomo and his team are also attempting to acquire their own aircraft so they can airlift the refugees directly to Israel. Shlomo teams up with Ronnie Barrett. Barrett is a British Jew who is in the charter airline business. They create Trans Ocean Airways. The airlift out of Teheran is about to begin. Then: everything grinds to a halt.

Nuri el-Said sends the head of his secret police, Rafik el Hijazi, to Iran to demand that the Iranians stop giving the Jews sanctuary and to send them back to Iraq.

The Iranians stall. Sheltering the Jews has turned into a profitable business. And they have no real stomach for sending them back.

But in the aftermath of the creation of the State of Israel, cooperating with the Jews become a dangerous policy.

The Iranians agree to join the Iraqis in their '... struggle against communism and Zionism'.

Hundreds of would be refugees enroute to Iran are rounded up by the Iraqis.

The Iraq-Iran border is sealed.

Iraqi Secret Police are in Teheran, hunting for Shlomo Hillel.

He flees to Israel.

Once again, the rescue seems doomed to failure.

EPISODE 6

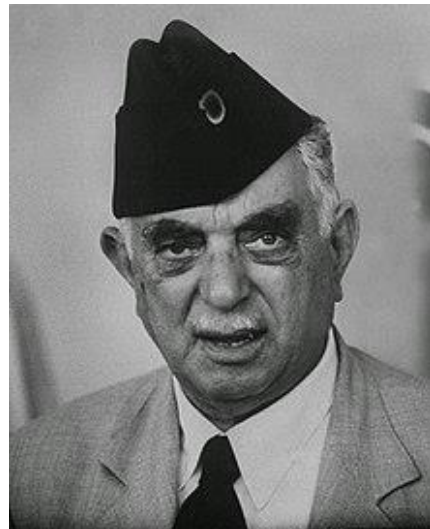
Out of Babylon

And then one more twist of fate.

Nuri el-Said's relentless scapegoating and persecution of the Jews has become an international cause celebre. Iraq's behavior is being scrutinized and condemned everywhere – especially at the United Nations.

At the same time, Iraq's economy is in freefall. The military is in disgrace after the debacle in Israel. Violence and chaos abound.

Nuri el-Said is forced out of office. He is replaced by Tawfik el-Suwaidi, a respected diplomat who is painfully aware of Iraq's tarnished reputation.



Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri el-Said
(source: Wikipedia)

Shlomo and the Mossad realize a window of opportunity has opened.

Shlomo is smuggled back into Iraq. Ronnie Barrett is with him.

Shlomo is now Richard Armstrong, a partner in Barrett's latest charter airline venture, Near East Air Transport.



Shlomo Hillel as Richard Armstrong, an official of Near East Transport, in his passport forged by the Mossad (source: Shlomo Hillel)

In the meantime, the Jewish community in Baghdad is finally ready to co operate with Shlomo. Sason Kedourie, the cautious, conservative leader, is replaced by Ezekiel Shemtov. Shemtov happens to be a friend and neighbor of the new Prime Minister. He is also Shlomo's cousin, though they have not seen each since Shlomo was a boy living in Baghdad.

Through Leila, a meeting is arranged between Shlomo aka Richard Armstrong, Barrett, and Tafik el-Suweidi in el-Suwaidi's home.

At the last minute, el-Suweidi invites his neighbor Ezekiel Shemtov to join the meeting. Shlomo is terrified that Shemtov will recognize him and inadvertently divulge his real identity. But whether he has forgotten the boy or is protecting the man, Shemtov says nothing. It's an awkward situation and Shlomo is in a panic that the truth will emerge.

Shlomo aka Armstrong convinces Suwaidi that there are only about 10,000 Jewish 'trouble makers' in Iraq. Let them go and everything—at home and abroad—will settle down. He knows there are more than that.

Suwaidi is not quite convinced. So, Shlomo, aka Armstrong, and Barrett offer him a partnership in Near Eastern Air Transport. As a partner, he will be paid \$10 U.S. for every Jew who is allowed to leave.

They have a deal: Jews who wish to leave will register at either of the two major synagogues in Baghdad. Once registered, they will forfeit their Iraqi citizenship. But they can go.

After the meeting, Shlomo tells his Mossad colleagues that he suspects there will be more like 40,000 who will opt to leave.

Everyone, it turns out, is wrong: 90,000 register.

El-Suwaidi is having second thoughts. Shlomo hurries back to Israel to let them know the Jews are coming out of Babylon. But time is running out.

To his horror, Levi Eshkol, a future Israeli Prime Minister who is then in charge of immigration absorption, tells Shlomo to call it off. They cannot come. In no way can the fledgling state of Israel absorb so many people all at once.

There are no resources. None. No money, no infrastructure, no houses, no basic necessities... nothing. It will be a disaster.

Shlomo is in shock, and infuriated. What has he done this all for? Somehow, he manages to get a meeting with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. He pours out his frustration and anguish. Ben Gurion says Eshkol is right.

But then he says: bring them. Bring them all. Somehow, we will manage. God knows how, but somehow.

Shlomo goes back to Baghdad one last time.

The airlift begins. But then el-Suwaidi is forced out of office. Nuri el-Said returns.

El-Said threatens to force all the Jews into a concentration camp. He threatens mass extermination. He threatens to force march them into Jordan. He threatens to end the airlift.

But in the end, he does nothing. Except one devastating thing. The property and wealth of any would-be emigrant is confiscated '... by the State'.

Every single thing they own except what they can carry in two suitcases is stolen by the government.

The result is about eighty percent of the Iraqi Jews who have not been able to get money out already, arrive in Israel utterly impoverished.

But the airlift begins. Leila finds out that the secret police suspect that the supposed Richard Amstrong (i.e., Shlomo) is a Zionist spy or at the very least a Jew. She warns Shlomo. As they embrace, he asks her why she has helped him.

“Because you protected me when I was 5 years old,” she replies. It turns out she had gone to the same Jewish school that Shlomo went to.



Iraqi Jews arriving Israel, circa 1950 (source: Times of Israel)

Ultimately, some 107,000 Iraqi Jews leave—almost the entire community is depleted. The streets of the once-bustling city of Baghdad, which was one-third Jewish, are have lapsed into an eerie, ominous silence. Shops are closed up; Jewish homes stand empty. More than 2,500 years of history is ended in less than six months.

Shlomo is on one of the first planes out. His work is done.

EPILOGUE

A brief visual epilogue will portray the hardships suffered by the Iraqi Jews upon their arrival in Israel. The poverty they endured. And the painful cultural conflict with the European Ashkenazi Jews. But ...

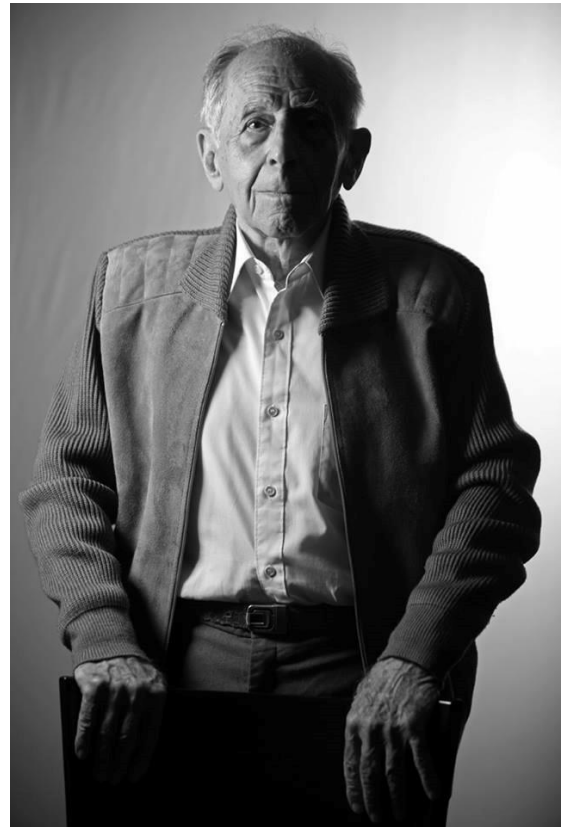
Visuals of modern Israel. For the Mizrahi Jews, the wounds have healed. They are now equal partners in building the modern State of Israel.

We see street scenes of the Mizrahi neighborhoods, the faces, the mixed marriages.

We see Shlomo Hillel, still alive today, age 95.

The generation who left Iraq is passing on. Some remember these events only with bitterness.

Others remember how beautiful it was in Baghdad. And still quietly mourn for everything they love and left behind, when they came out of Babylon.



Shlomo Hillel, 2017 (source: Sephardi Voices/Shasha Iraqi Voices Collection)