



Memories of Eden: A Journey Through Jewish Baghdad (Jewish Lives)

Violette Shamash, Shmuel Moreh

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According to legend, the Garden of Eden was located in Iraq, and for millennia, Jews resided peacefully in metropolitan Baghdad. *Memories of Eden: A Journey Through Jewish Baghdad* reconstructs the last years of the oldest Jewish Diaspora community in the world through the recollections of Violette Shamash, a Jewish woman who was born in Baghdad in 1912, sent to her daughter Mira Rocca and son-in-law, the British journalist Tony Rocca. The result is a deeply textured memoir—an intimate portrait of an individual life, yet revealing of the complex dynamics of the Middle East in the twentieth century.

Toward the end of her long life, Violette Shamash began writing letters, notes, and essays and sending them to the Roccas. The resulting

book begins near the end of Ottoman rule and runs through the British Mandate, the emergence of an independent Iraq, and the start of

dictatorial government. Shamash clearly loved the world in which she grew up but is altogether honest in her depiction of the transformation of attitudes toward Baghdad's Jewish population. Shamash's world is finally shattered by the Farhud, the name given to the massacre of hundreds of Iraqi Jews over three days in 1941. An event that has received very slight historical coverage, the Farhud is further described and placed in context in a concluding essay by Tony Rocca.

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