

Cultural and Scientific Relations between the Soviet Union and Egyptian Jews (1922 – 1935)

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Abstract

The vital role played by the All-Union Association for Cultural Relations reflected the strengthening of ties between the Soviet Union and the Jews of Egypt. These ties were not limited to the exchange of cultural knowledge only, but also included the exchange of scientific and technical knowledge that had a significant impact on the development of important sectors such as agriculture and industry. This cooperation, which was part of the strategies of the Zionist project, sought to exploit Soviet technologies to achieve progress in these fields. The interest of the Jews in Egypt in Soviet cultural, social and political programs also reflected the growing influence of Soviet ideology at that stage. Through cultural associations, the Soviets sought to expand their cultural and social influence among Jewish communities in various countries, which highlights the role of culture as a diplomatic and expansionist tool during that period.

Keywords: *Zionist, Agriculture, Expansionist, Cultural.*

Introduction

Cultural and scientific relations between Moscow and the Jews in Egypt witnessed a remarkable development after World War I, influenced by complex political and social conditions.

The Jews of Egypt and the Soviet Union are linked by individual human relations, as many of the Jews who arrived in Egypt from the Soviet Union maintained their connections with their families and friends. The Jews expressed their deep interest in what was happening in the Soviet Union through personal correspondence and stories told by those returning from there, as this correspondence is considered an essential means of maintaining contact with life in the Soviet Union.

In addition to the fact that the Soviet press played an important role in transmitting news about Egypt, as the information received reflected the main events in Egyptian life, which helped keep the Jews in Egypt informed of what was happening in their homeland, human ties appeared in the relationship between the Jewish communities in Egypt and the Soviet Union, which was characterized by mutual interest and cultural exchange, whether through direct communication or through the media.

First: Cultural Relations

The Palestinian Agency considered (The Palestinian Agency was an important source for Jews in Egypt of Soviet cultural, social and political products. Through this agency, Soviet periodicals and books entered Egypt on a regular basis, including famous Soviet newspapers such as Pravda. And "Izvestia" (Izvestia)(), issued by the Central Bank of the Soviet Union Soviet Central Bank

All Soviet publications entering Egypt were subjected to careful review by the Press and Entertainment Department of the Political Censorship Department, and publications were subjected to strict scrutiny by the Mandate authorities. The British did their utmost to protect the Levant, especially Egypt and Palestine, from the influence of communist propaganda. Among the measures they took was to prevent Soviet

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periodicals from entering Egypt, as part of their efforts to limit the spread of communist and revolutionary ideas.

Goldsman was forced to (Goldsman) in May 1925 to demand that Mussarcus cancel the subscription of the Palestinian Arcos Agency to the Izvestia newspaper, because the local authorities were preventing the passage of Soviet newspapers to Egypt.)It shows the extent of the efforts made by the British to monitor and restrict the flow of information from the Soviet Union, especially with regard to news that encouraged or promoted communist thought.

The books published by the Soviet government after the Bolshevik Revolution were sent to the Jews of Egypt through the government publishing house, and the export of printed materials was done with the approval of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade of the Soviet Union (People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade of the USSR), at the end of 1925 seven thousand copies of Soviet publications were delivered to the Egyptian government, valued at ten thousand rubles. This indicates that the Palestinian Agency played an important role in spreading Soviet thought and socialist cultural content among the Jews in Egypt, which contributed to the transfer of cultural and political influences from the Soviet Union to the Jewish community in the region.

Soviet cultural, social and political programs were in great demand by Jews in Egypt, reflecting the growing influence of Soviet ideology. The Salzman Company (Salzman Company) in Alexandria obtained gramophone recordings containing speeches by Lenin and Leon Trotsky. In ancient Hebrew, some have supported the idea of translating those recordings and speeches, as well as volumes of Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

These requests reflect a great interest in Soviet discourse and the ideas held by leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky, who were important symbols in the Bolshevik Revolution and in communist thought, and also indicate a desire to integrate Soviet thought within Jewish culture in Egypt, and to strengthen the links between communist values.

The main link for scientific and cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the Jews in Egypt is the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (All-Union Cultural Association of the Soviet Union with Foreign Countries)Its goal is to strengthen and develop scientific and cultural ties between institutions, organizations and workers in the scientific and cultural fields in the Soviet Union and Jews abroad, including Egypt.

The association aimed to help establish and strengthen cooperation between Jewish intellectuals and scholars from around the world, reflecting the Soviet trend in supporting cultural and intellectual relations with Jewish communities abroad, and enhancing their role in spreading communist ideology.

As a result of the development of cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the Jewish communities, it was decided that the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations should stop working directly and move to establish cultural rapprochement societies with the Soviet Union, these societies would be its cells in various countries, the aim of which was to strengthen cultural and scientific communication with the Soviet Union.

We note that the political goal of these associations was mostly to support communist ideology and organize activities that would enhance support for the communist movement and expand the influence of the Soviet Union abroad, in addition to working to attract intellectuals and activists in different countries to support the Soviet Union project and its ideology.

Chicherin pointed out (Shishirin) the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union at the end of 1928, that the Soviet Union enjoyed good relations with the Jews of Egypt. This statement came in the context of a report sent to the European Center for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies on the activities of the Friends of the Soviet Union societies abroad, meaning the Society for Friendship with the Soviet Union, which operates under the auspices of the Egyptian Communist Party, and which aims to strengthen cultural and political relations between the Soviet Union and the Jewish communities in Egypt.

It can be said that the association served as a link between the Soviet authorities and the Jewish communities in Egypt, as it reflected the Soviet policy of supporting the Jewish communist movement as well as trying to spread communism among Jews in different parts of the world.

Despite the decisions taken by the All-Union Association for Cultural Relations with Jews of Foreign Countries, the Egyptian approach to the association's activity towards Jews continued until the 1930s. Although the association sought to strengthen its relations with the Arab community in Egypt, the Jewish national cultural organizations acquired a stable character, as these organizations represented strong cultural links between the Jewish community in Egypt and the Soviet Union.

Cultural and political activities in Egypt were managed under the supervision of the Soviet Central Bank, which coordinated and supervised the publication of the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* and other propaganda materials of a communist nature, however these activities ended after the closure of the Society in 1930.

In March 1930, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations facilitated the departure of Dan Baines (Dan Baines) one of the leaders of the *HaHalutz* movement to Egypt, reflecting Soviet support for Jewish activists who were persecuted in the Soviet Union, as well as the Soviet desire to strengthen their cultural and political influence among Jews in Arab countries.

The cooperation between the General Union Association and *HaHalutz* reflected the overlap between communist activities and the left-wing Zionist movement at that time, especially with regard to supporting Jewish immigration to Palestine and working to spread socialist ideology among the Jewish communities.

A meeting was held in the Eastern Department of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union on December 10, 1931 to discuss the work of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Jews in the Eastern Countries. At that meeting it was emphasized that “work with the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Jews in Foreign Countries is of particularly important political importance for the Eastern countries.” It refers to the strategic importance that the Soviet Union attached to cultural relations with the Jews of the East, especially Egypt, in the context of strengthening its cultural and political influence.

The All-Union Association for Cultural Relations was distinguished by several cultural ties with the Jews in Egypt. The association worked to organize cultural rapprochement associations with the Soviet Union. One of its goals was to expand the network of cultural and educational communication between the Soviets and the Jewish communities abroad. In order to achieve this, the association sought the help of activists working in the Zionist-Communist organizations in the Soviet Union.

Although Egypt and Palestine became important centers of the Jewish book industry in the interwar period, there was no official export of Jewish books to the Soviet Union, indicating that the Soviet authorities continued to strictly control cultural imports, including Jewish books, with political censorship of content being the main criterion for determining what could be allowed into the Soviet Union.

Scientific exchange between the Soviet Union and the Zionist project was part of the cultural and technical cooperation between Jews from different parts of the world and the Soviet Union, especially in the fields of agriculture and applied sciences. Many Soviet Jewish scientists who immigrated before World War II participated in many agricultural and industrial projects, such as the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and the development of mechanized agriculture, in addition to winemaking and oil production projects.

Second: Scientific Relations

Jewish researchers from Egypt sent their papers and requests for scientific information to their colleagues in the Soviet Union. This scientific communication included information and research on prominent scientific institutions, such as the Hebrew University and the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. These institutions are important scientific centers, especially in the Jewish academic field, and represent a rich source of knowledge in fields such as history, literature, philosophy, and the social sciences.

We note that scientific exchange is part of Moscow's strategy to build strong cultural and educational ties with Jewish communities around the world, as well as to expand its intellectual and political influence by promoting communication between Jewish scholars in the East and the Soviet Union.

The Cairo Agricultural Experimental Station included experts from various nationalities such as the Soviets, British, Germans, and French, which became an important scientific center during the twenties and thirties, a leading scientific institution with the participation of scientists from all over the world. This station reflected an international character in scientific and research work.

The multilingualism of the station, with conversations conducted in English, Russian, German, and French, is indicative of the international environment that prevailed at that time, and also reflects the international character that characterised Egypt at that time, especially with the presence of diverse influences from different cultures in various areas of life, including science and technology.

This station is considered an important scientific hub, as it contributed to raising the intellectual and scientific level in Egypt, which made it a center of scientific radiation in the region, especially in the field of agricultural research.

The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries facilitated communication between Jewish researchers in Egypt and the Soviet Union, especially in the field of scientific and cultural information exchange. The Society was used as a means of exchanging scientific materials and bibliographic data, including biographies of famous Jewish figures, as well as requests for scientific literature and educational materials.

In 1929, the Jews of Egypt requested biographical data for the mother of Professor Ilya Metchnikoff (Ilya Mechnikov) (), a prominent Soviet biologist and Nobel Prize winner, Jewish scholars were interested in documenting such important scientific figures for research and academic purposes.

He also requested a list of educational literature on veterinary medicine and animal husbandry, reflecting the interest of Jewish researchers in expanding their knowledge in various scientific fields.

The Jewish trade representatives in Egypt also communicated with the association, as they were interested in developing the national economy of the Soviet Union, in addition to following the state of Soviet trade with Turkey and Iran. It also reflects the interest of the Jewish communities in Egypt in keeping up with economic and political developments in the Soviet Union, which is evident in their requests regarding trade relations between the Soviet Union and other countries.

The All-Union Association for Cultural Relations used the case of Jean de Leon (Jean de Leon) as a model for the exchange of scientific knowledge and information between Soviet and international scientists, especially in the agricultural fields.

Jean de Leon first visited the Soviet Union in 1932, and from that time began regular contact with the North Caucasus Sericulture Station, the Institute of Oilseeds and other Soviet specialized scientific institutions.

This communication was part of the efforts of the General Assembly to strengthen scientific ties between Soviet scientists and Jewish scientists abroad, and to exchange knowledge about agricultural techniques and innovations in the silkworm industry and other agricultural fields of interest to the Soviet Union at that time.

In the spring of 1935, Jean de Leon sent to the All-Union Assembly a report on the production of castor oil in Egypt, including notes on the castor oil factory and the processes of introducing this industry into the country. Soviet specialists highly appreciated his achievements in this field, given his experience in castor cultivation and the oil industry associated with it.

When the General Assembly learned of Jean de Leon's plans to visit the Soviet Union in the summer of 1935, the leadership of the Oilseed Institute reacted. Oilseed Institute) (Soviet institute for the development and breeding of oilseed plants) reacted positively to the visit, as the President of the Union of Agricultural Scientists Academy of the USSR, N. I. Vavilov, asked to give Jean de Leon the opportunity to visit the institute in order to exchange experience in the field of breeding and technology of castor bean cultivation.

The Soviet silk and sericulture authority also asked Jean de Leon to bring silkworm roots of the Grena strain, a strain that was known for its ability to withstand winter frosts. Soviet silkworm strains were unable to survive the winter from December to April, so they were looking for silkworm strains that could remain dormant for long periods in cold weather, which was a problem at that time.

Jean de Leon, being an expert in silkworm breeding, and possessing individual strains capable of withstanding these conditions, asked the Soviet agency responsible for silkworm breeding to bring one box or a few grams of this strain to raise it in the North Caucasus, where the climatic conditions were harsh. The request did not stop there, but also added the desire of the Soviet agency to receive seeds of plants that silkworms eat, since this is an essential part of the silkworm breeding process, since the type of food that the silkworm feeds on greatly affects its quality and ability to grow and reproduce.

These examples illustrate how the All-Union Society served as a link between the Jewish communities in Egypt and the Soviet Union, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and scientific data, including in various commercial and scientific fields.

Finally, Jean de Leon wrote a long article on silkworm breeding in the Soviet Union, which included scientific notes on Soviet methods and their differences from those used in Egypt. This article is an important reference for Soviet researchers. Jean de Leon also established scientific relations with the Soviet Academy of Agricultural Sciences (USSR Academy of Agricultural Sciences), which was a major center of agricultural scientific research in the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

It is clear from this that relations between the Soviet Union and the Jews of Egypt were governed by many factors that overlapped with Soviet interests at that time, as the All-Union Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was the main channel linking cultural and scientific work between the Soviet Union and the Jews of Egypt, and receiving scientific and cultural information from the Jews of Egypt with the aim of benefiting from it in developing the Soviet economy. It also appears that relations between the Soviet Union and the Jews of Egypt were unequal.

Hence, the focus on scientific exchange between Jews, Soviets, and Zionist organizations aimed to exploit Soviet knowledge and technology to achieve development in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Scientific ties with the Soviet Union were also part of the grand strategy to achieve the goals of the Zionist project.

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