



A PENANG KADDISH :
THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN GEORGETOWN
A case study of the Jewish Diaspora in Penang (1830s-1970s).

Raimy Ché-Ross, Barton, Canberra

Email: azrail2@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The story of the Jewish community in Penang has hitherto remained hidden within the footnotes of local history, known only to the few who have been acquainted with its past. Though it has warranted occasional curious mention in the contemporary press, little effort has been made to conduct a comprehensive study on the establishment, growth and subsequent migration of the former Jewish community in Penang. This brief paper will merely provide a preliminary discussion on the subject, via a survey of an important historical landmark relating to their past, namely the Jewish Cemetery on Jalan Zainal Abidin (Jahudi Road). But it is hoped that by evaluating its history within the shared context of Penang's historical environment, due attention may be drawn to preserve and protect this site as a tangible reminder of Penang's rich communal identity and unique cultural diversity.

*“The greater part of this community are but sojourners for a time,
so that the population of the island is continually shifting
as to the individual members of whom it is composed”*

John Dickens, Judge & Magistrate

Prince of Wales Island

1st June 1802

Introduction

In his keynote address to this conference, Dr. Tan Liok Ee proposes that the historical development of Penang may be viewed via three focal concepts; Penang as an area of confluence, Penang as the conjuncture of individuals & communities, and finally Penang as the transitional setting of multi-dimensional contestations. These concepts are perhaps no-more profoundly embodied than in the evocative history of the Jewish community in Penang.

The story of the Jewish community in Penang has remained largely undocumented and unstudied, save for the occasional mention in newspaper articles and general academic studies. In the February colloquium preceding this conference, Himanshu Bhatt (2002) brought to our attention the revelations of these sojourners, who have been ranked alongside our Parsee, Burmese, and Armenian neighbours as historical minorities on this island.

My paper¹ proposes to expand on Bhatt's topic via an overview look at the community's history from the 1830s-1970s, with a particular focus on documented history of the Penang Jewish Cemetery site. By doing so, it is hoped that we may gain a better insight into the Jewish Diaspora in Penang, as a small but significant reflection of her own confluence, conjunctures and contestations.

The Jewish Diaspora in Penang

Though firm evidence of a Jewish trading presence in the Malay Peninsular may only be gleaned from records dating back to the early 19th-century, it is plausible that Jewish merchants may have plied their trade as early as the 9th Century A.D. on the riverbanks of the Bujang

Valley² and well onto the 18th Century A.D. in the cosmopolitan bazaars of Malacca³. On factual ground however, the significant arrival of Jews – to be more precise Shephardic Baghdadi-Jews - in Penang may be dated with some confidence to ca. 1830⁴.

Their migration to the island was instigated directly via the persecutions meted out by the Governor of Baghdad, Daud Pasha (1817-1831). His acts of cruelty and injustice prompted a mass exodus of Baghdadi Jews from Persia to India, where they established themselves as rich merchants and senior members of the community. By 1833, some 2,000 “*Bene Israel*”, an appellation by which they are still known in India, were living in Surat and Bombay (Roland 1989:14-15). Prominent among them were the Sassoon and Meyer families, children of whom eventually expanded their fortunes to the growing entrepôts of Singapore and Penang, and whose success brought in their wake other members of the community to these islands⁵.

An interesting (if somewhat patronising) record of such a group is preserved in the memoirs of the Rev. James Tomlin, a Protestant priest who had travelled to the *Nusantara* on a mission to distribute religious tracts to the heathen. During his initial sojourn in Singapore in 1830, Tomlin noted that,

“A small party of Jews from Persian and Turkey, consisting of eight or ten persons, have lately settled in this place, with whom we had occasional conversations on the points at issue between us. They have travelled over many parts of Europe and Asia, and some of them display more than ordinary candour and intelligence. They are well acquainted with their own scriptures; and when they cannot deny the applicability of many of the prophecies of the Christian dispensation, generally evade the consequence by referring to their approaching restoration to their own land, saying then the mystery will be cleared up. One of them asked for a Hebrew Testament, which we gave him, and which we have reason to believe is frequently read and examined”

(Tomlin 1844:23)

Although preliminary research is yet to uncover definite documentation on the background of early Jewish settlers in Penang, they were probably of the same ilk as Tomlin’s

respondents; pious determined Baghdadi-Jews who were obliged to seek their fortunes in a haven safer than their own. The growing colony, with its unique position as a centre of confluence for both trade and the meanderings of various nations, would have been an obvious and seemingly lucrative choice.

In this respect, the early Jewish settlers of Penang were playing out the archetypal role of the Middlemen minority; strangers in a strange land seeking self-employment or employment by the dominating communities, functioning as middlemen bartering trade and skills between the ruling elite and the lower-classes (Zenner 1983:146-148). The specialisation of such Middlemen roles embraces the provision of rudimentary services (street peddlars, tailors, petition-writers) to the assistance of the privileged (jewellers, money-lenders, money-changers). Sowell (1996:27-28) notes that the Middlemen minority are often inclined towards jobs which facilitate the movement of goods from the producer to the consumer, without necessarily producing anything on their own accord. This view certainly holds true for the early Jewish community in Penang, whose known occupations were mainly based in the tertiary sectors of the local economy.

Nearly a century later in 1920, the Zionist nationalist Israel Cohen visited Penang, where he paid a brief courtesy call on the oldest Jewish inhabitant on the island, Ezekiel Aaron Manasseh. Cohen has published a vivid recollection of the meeting, which has also inadvertently preserved for us a startling vignette of the resentment harboured by some within the community itself towards the inferior nature of such occupations (in light of its importance, the excerpt from his memoirs concerning Penang is quoted in full below),

“Thirty-six hours after leaving Singapore, the *S.S. Ekma* on which I was bound for Calcutta, dropped anchor some distance from the picturesque port of Penang. As soon as breakfast was over, a young co-religionist came on board to greet me and take me on land. He was a son of Mr. Ezekiel Menasseh, the oldest Jewish resident in Penang.

Thanks to a steam launch and a motor-car, I was soon brought to the pleasant-looking house of Mr. Menasseh, a little grey-haired man, who gave me a friendly “*Shalom Aleichem*”. He took me up to a large sitting-room, whence

we had a good view of the town in various directions, and using a Biblical phrase, he said that his house was “*al em ha-derech*” (on the cross-roads).

On the wall was a framed oleograph, showing scenes in the Holy Land, with Hebrew inscriptions, and the eyes of the old man lit up with wonder when I told him that I had actually seen those venerated sites.

My host told me that, like most Jews in the Far East, he had come from Baghdad and had settled in Penang over thirty years ago. Until recently, he had been the only Jew there, but the tribulations of war had brought a few other Jews from Baghdad, mostly poor pedlars, who consorted with Chinese and Malay women, and lived debased lives.

As for Mr. Menasseh, he had, despite his isolation, remained faithful to orthodox tradition. He rose every morning between four and five, when the sun was already up, and said his prayers in full. He kept a Kosher house, and had his own stock of poultry. He had been studying Malbim’s “*Commentary on the Book of Daniel*” and showed me a passage in the last chapter which foretold that the restoration of Palestine would take place about the years 1920 and 1922.

“I showed this to Mr. Menasseh Meyer,” he said, “and he thought it was most remarkable.”

“And well he might” I added, as I read through the commentator’s chronological calculation.

Young Mr. Menasseh then took me out for a drive to see something of the beautiful scenery in the neighbourhood. We traversed a fine straight road bordered by towering palms, with magnificent vistas on either side, and passed an interesting group of Malay huts, built some distance from the ground; and after reaching a famous waterfall, which broke the noonday

stillness with its ceaseless splashing, and gazing out at the mirror-like sea, we speedily returned.

But we had scarcely begun “*tiffin*” when the news came that the Ekma would be casting anchor very shortly; and so, abandoning the meal and taking a hurried farewell of the family, I was driven post-haste to the shore, where it was necessary to charter a special launch to reach the ship. Five minutes after I had stepped on board, the vessel continued on her northward course”

(Cohen 1925:207-208)

Menasseh’s sweeping statement regarding the absence of other Jews on Penang before him, and his scathing remarks about the perceived predilections and lowliness of his kinsfolk⁶, are perhaps more telling of his personality, as opposed to a factual representation of Jewish life in Penang in the 1920s. It is also symptomatic of the inevitable response to a sense of isolation and alienation commonly identified within pioneering minority migrant communities. The dissent being primarily motivated by those who cling steadfastly to the preservation of a traditional lifestyle, against those in favour of integration with their host communities, and vice-versa⁷.

But “poor pedlars” aside, the Jewish community was well-represented as a Middleman minority by the affluent and renowned Messrs. Storch Brothers and the Meyer Grand Company in the 1920s and 1930s. And besides the Menassehs, there were also the Isaac, Mordecai, Solomon and Sadka families, whose relatives were spread between Penang and Singapore. Despite Manasseh’s negative assessment, and though they were eclipsed by their more affluent cousins in Singapore, the Jewish community in Penang were no less contented, and led a generally peaceful and quiet livelihood well into the late 1930s.

Fig. I. General Census of Jewish settlers in Penang (1881-1941).

Year	Males	Females	Boys	Girls	Total
1881	14	9	5	4	32
1891	47	64	14	30	155
1899	83	41	33	15	172
1901	16	17	8	4	45
1941	11	8	6	5	30

Source: Eze Nathan, A History of Jews in Singapore, 1983. p. 173

Small as they were, the community was nevertheless close-knit and well-organised; services were held under the leadership of the *Hazan*, a Mr. Hiawi, at the Penang Synagogue in a converted shop house at No. 18, Jalan Nagore, where, as Charlie Ephraim, a former Jewish Penangite recalls, “we would meet regularly for Saturday prayers ... it was a small place and had 12 copies of the Torah placed in a row for us to pray toward.” (Bhatt 2000:2). A cemetery was maintained nearby (see discussion below), and there was also a *Shohet* to ensure a steady supply of Kosher food to the faithful (Nathan 1983:171).

This tranquil existence was shattered by the advent of World War II. With the Japanese forces poised to conquer the island – and cognizant of their alliance with the Nazis - the British found it imperative to evacuate Jewish families from Penang to Singapore among the first wave of refugees. Meyer Grand, by now the doyen of the Jewish community and a well-respected jeweller, escaped to Singapore and found shelter with his relatives, the Sadkas. His impressions of the event were subsequently recorded by a member of his clan,

“ .. Penang had proved an easy prey for the Japanese. It had been virtually undefended. Its citizens, the majority of whom, as in Singapore, were loyal Chinese, had flocked into the streets when they heard the planes approaching, thinking they were the RAF. Mesmerized by shock when the bombs started to fall, they were killed in their hundreds. Many who survived the bombs succumbed to bullets, as the Japanese flew in low and fired their

machine guns indiscriminately. Later, survivors discovered that Military Orders had been circulated secretly the night before to evacuate troops and Europeans immediately, as Penang was at the point of surrender.

As we listened to Meyer's words, we recalled the broadcast made by Churchill's special envoy to Singapore, Sir Alfred Duff Cooper. We had not realised the significance of his words until then. He had said that, "It had been necessary to evacuate many of the civilian population." and towards the end of his speech, he had expressed thankfulness that so many "had been safely removed". It had not occurred to us that Duff Cooper had referred only to the Europeans.

The Governor immediately became aware of this blundering misinterpretation of the truth. He called a meeting of representatives of the Asian communities and apologised in person. Had he not done so, irreparable harm might have been inflicted on racial harmony, more crucial to maintain now than ever before in the history of the Straits Settlements.

Meyer also told us that, in their haste to carry out the evacuation, the Command had left behind an oil refinery, oil and petrol depots, scores of small craft, and the Penang Radio Station in full working order, undreamt of bonuses for the occupying and invading forces."

(Nathan 1983:92-93)

Faced with the definite threat of internment and possibly death, most of the Jewish evacuees eventually fled the Japanese Occupation by migrating to Australia via the Dutch East Indies. A few members of the community did however opt to stay behind. Ephraim was one of those who underwent the ordeal,

"... Jewish adults had to wear red and white striped tags on their sleeves for identification purposes. The Japanese, afraid that we may be spies, also

barred us from being present within half-a-mile of Penang island's shoreline."

(Bhatt 2000:3)

The end of the war brought little respite to the community, now numbering merely a handful converging around the precinct of Jalan Jahudi. The lack of desirable occupations, an uncertain future and, to some extent suitable marriage partners, contributed to the continued migration of the few remaining Jews on the island, particularly to Singapore, Australia, Israel and the United States.

By 1969, there were reportedly only three Jewish families left in Penang. The inability to support a sustainable congregation, and the absence of a strong religious grounding amongst the younger generation finally led to the demise of the community. In 1976, the synagogue was closed after the death of Basookh Ephraim, Charlie Ephraim's father (Bhatt 2000:3). The effects of the subsequent rise of local anti-semitic sentiments and other political considerations raised between the 1970s-80s needs no further elaboration (Parfitt 1977:9-10). Suffice to say that this dismal state of affairs has ultimately led to the all but complete disappearance of the Jewish community from Penang's social and communal landscape today; resulting in yet another Exodus for the Chosen Ones.

The Jewish Cemetery Site

The immense potential of investigating colonial cemeteries as a primary source for historical and genealogical data, has been generally overlooked by local scholars. This is hindered in part by the isolated locations of these sites and the obscurity of its history. Primarily however, cultural taboos and religious inhibitions associated with such places act as an anathema to those wishing to undertake fieldwork in this field. This is a pity, as our old cemeteries can provide us with a better understanding of how our early communities lived and thrived. They are also rich in historical, genealogical, social and cultural significance. Jones (1979:7) notes that cemeteries are, "a valuable source of historical information with a peculiar intrinsic value of its own." Thus these memorials to the dead should inspire us to seek the past, for through their preservation we gain a better appreciation of our legacy for the future. Such a principle can be clearly seen in the case of the Penang Jewish Cemetery, one of the few remaining tangible witnesses to the existence of this

community in our vicinity. In this respect, the site remains not only as a collection of individual memorials, but it is thus also a memorial to the wider community within the context of its historical time and place.

The Penang Jewish Cemetery (PJC) forms a 38,087 square feet cleaver shaped plot of land situated alongside Jalan Zainal Abidin, a small link road located between Jalan Burmah and Macalister Road. Locals would perhaps recognise the pathway better by its former name, Jalan Jahudi or Yehudi Road.

Fenced off by high sturdy walls, this cemetery has evaded unwanted scrutiny by dint of its obscure location. Anchored by an electrical sub-station at one end, and with pre-war shop houses surrounding it, the cemetery is quite secure. This feature is compounded by the strong wrought iron gates guarding its entrance. On closer inspection however, the gates bear an intriguing sign simply stating, "*The Jewish Cemetery*". It is in fact the only cemetery in the country solely dedicated to the Jewish community.

Conventional wisdom relates that the site was gifted to the local Jewish community by an Englishwoman of Jewish extraction, who had acquired the land in the early 19th century, as a token of thanksgiving for her recovery from a dire illness⁸. Bhatt mentions the fact that she was later buried at the site in 1835. Since this point concurs with oldest gravestone found in the cemetery, the benefactress may be tentatively identified as Mrs. Shoshan Levi, wife of Tzolach, who died on 9 July 1835.

It is significant to note that this date effectively places the PJC as one of the earliest colonial-period cemeteries in the region. Its creation was contemporaneous with the consecration of, and first burial in, the Fort Canning Cemetery (1834-35) in Singapore⁹, and is only predated by the Christian Cemeteries in Malacca (see Harfield 1984), and the Protestant Cemetery (1798) in Northam Road¹⁰. The earliest tombstone in the Protestant Cemetery dates back to 1789 and the latest to 1892 (Ch'ng 1987:75). The Fort Canning site on the other hand, was officially used between 1834-1865. The oldest and latest tombstones there date back to 1821 and 1868 respectively (Stallwood 1973:269 - 270). The earliest gravestone in the PJC on the other hand is dated 1835 with the latest erected in 1978¹¹.

The general layout of the grounds¹² are as follows. The cemetery's boundaries are enclosed by walls three metres high, which are broken approximately every two metres by capped pillars. There is only one entrance to the site, i.e. the gates referred to above. There are approximately 106 individual graves in total, bearing the remains of infants, children, teenagers and adults, local residents and foreign visitors alike. The oldest graves can be seen lying directly opposite the gates on a low wide stone base, as one enters the site. The remainder of the graves are set in no particular order until the early 1930s. From then on, the graves were arranged in the last row nearest to the back wall in a rough chronological order. The graves of Cohens are set (as Jewish tradition dictates) aside from the rest, in the North-Eastern corner of the cemetery, adjacent to the gardener's shed. Resting among them is the grave of a British soldier killed in an accident in 1941 (see Appendix I). Bhatt (2000:1) informs us that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is currently undertaking the maintenance of this particular grave.

General Description of the Graves

The graves are relatively well-preserved considering their age, the tropical climate, and their surrounding environment. Apart from one or two graves that have been split open by the forces of nature, the rest of the graves are clean and generally well kept¹³. Some tombs were built too close to the older graves making it difficult to manoeuvre between them. This is somewhat puzzling considering that there is enough space in the cemetery for at least another three score graves. The early Jewish settlers were probably aware that burial land within the city would be scarce as the port-city developed and hence tried to save as much space as they could for future generations.

The designs of the graves range from simple medieval alcove-shaped tomb covers to elaborately carved miniature crypt-styled edifices. Some bear inscriptions chiselled out in Hebrew while the others are engraved or sandblasted in Latin alphabets, a good portion in Gothic font. It is interesting to note that the older graves appear roughly hewn, those dating from the ca. 1850s-80s are ornately Victorian, while the modern graves are rather stark and simple. The majority of the graves however, were built as low and long pyramidal structures.

The peculiar shape of these graves are often commented upon by local visitors, who are more accustomed to seeing foreign graves marked by crucifixes, plain tombstones or basic chest /

Greek Revival House Tombs - such as those in the Northam Road Cemetery. Most of the tombs in the PJC take the form of a triangular/pyramid-like vaulted or gabled lid casket. These grave-caskets were shaped to resemble ossuaries commonly found in Israel (Rahmani 1994:3-6), where it was a practise to gather and keep bones from one or several corpses in a single casket. These were originally made out of wood fixed with hinged gabled lids for the convenient addition of new bones. The general shape of these caskets was later imitated by European stone masons for their Jewish patrons. A distinct feature of these uniquely shaped vaulted/gabled tombs is the fact that they often have fingertip shaped depressions of varied sizes and depth cut into the narrow sides for easy handling. Some of the flat sliding lids have a shallow depression at one narrow end for this purpose as well. This feature may be found on some of the older PJC graves.

The Board of Trustees

Though my own research into the ownership of the site has stopped short of sighting the original land-grant (due to the lack of time on my last visit to the *Pejabat Tanah & Galian Negeri Pulau Pinang*), existing records show that the earliest formal title was held in trust between a Joseph Abraham Solomon (as the Principal Indenture) and Nahoor Shawl Isaac. Both parties witnessed the formalisation of the indenture on 28 May 1885 as Registration No. 688 of 1885 as "*stand seized of the same as a burial ground or cemetery for the benefit of the Jewish Community of Penang and Province Wellesley*".

Due to the deaths and migration of subsequent witnesses to the deed, the responsibilities of the trustees were entrusted between a number of different individuals throughout the years.

The deed was first signed over to the same Joseph Abraham Solomon (as Principal Trustee), with the addition of Aaron Abraham and Saul David Ekaireb as fellow trustees on 28 November 1907, twelve years after the death of Nahoor Shawl Isaac on 19 December 1896. Two years later on 15 February 1909, Abraham and Ekaireb discharged their share of the trusteeship into the hands of David Mordecai.

The bureaucratic management of the site seems to have lapsed into neglect over the next two decades, for the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements for the Settlement of Penang issued an Order (Originating Summons No. 2 1928) on 5 March 1928, whereby David Mordecai - as the

sole surviving trustee of the site - was ordered to observe the rule that the trusteeship should never be reduced below three and that the quorum be upheld with a new appointment whenever a vacancy arises. The two other trustees appointed at the same time were Abraham Isaac Cohen and Aaron Manasseh. Cohen subsequently relinquished his appointment to Silas Solomon on 28 August 1930 (Registration No. 101 Vol. 689), who promptly retired soon after.

Meyer Grand was then asked to fill the vacancy and another indenture was signed on 12 September 1935 (Registration No. 42 Vol. 760) to this effect. Notwithstanding the fact that *"the said Meyer Grand was out of Penang during the Japanese Occupation and was incapable of continuing to act as such Trustee of the Principal Indenture"*, bureaucratic strictures (upheld even by the invading administration) demanded that the position of a trustee be maintained, and this was filled by Hayo Jacob on the 26 May 2604 (1944).

The Trustees changed hands once more a decade later, due to the death of Aaron Menasseh on the 3rd of June 1957. They now included Michael John Redhill, Alec Davidson and Mordecai David Mordecai. In an earlier move indicative of the waning fortunes of the community, portions of land and chattel owned by the Jewish community were also mortgaged to a money-lender, Meenatchi Achee daughter of Annamalai Chettiar, for an unspecified sum in 1954. Matters relating to the trusteeship lay dormant until 1963, when Redhill left Malaya and Hayo Jacob took his place as a trustee once more. Unfortunately, fate dictated that Jacob would soon join the tenants of his property, for he passed away barely a year later on 22nd April 1964.

This vacuum was quickly filled by appointing Jacob Barookh Ephraim and Barook Ephraim as fellow trustees alongside Mordecai David Mordecai in 1965, Davidson being discharged of his responsibilities. By this stage, the number of Jewish families in Penang had dwindled to less than a handful. Most had by now migrated to Singapore and Australia. From then until 1993, the trusteeship has remained firmly in the capable hands of Mordecai David Mordecai, Charlie Ephraim and Tefa Barookh Ephraim. But with their descendants living overseas, and their closest relatives residing in Singapore, it is unclear as to how the Trusteeship will be maintained in the future.

The Register of Deaths & Burials

The list of names given in Appendix II have been transcribed from a red leather bound register kept by the caretaker of the cemetery. The ledger-sized book contains about 150 folio sized ruled pages in the form of a business register. The register seems to have been brought to the site on the 22nd of March 1921, presumably when the first caretaker was appointed to supervise the upkeep of the place.

The register had been updated regularly up until 1978, when the last burial was recorded. Burials prior to 1938 were not recorded nor catalogued, leaving a vacuum of information on the inhabitants of the remaining two thirds of the graves. The register had been written over by at least three people, judging from the handwriting; most of the names are written in ink, some in a neat copper plate font, and others in a hasty jaunty scribble.

The register is the only one in the cemetery and the caretaker rarely takes it out from the shelf where it is kept, perhaps wisely so. No other artefacts were found in the possession of the caretaker nor were mentioned by her.

The Caretaker

The position of the official caretaker has been handed down from one generation to another: the first caretaker of the cemetery was an Encik Mahmood, who was succeeded by his son Encik Rabu. Mrs. Fatimah (79), the latter's daughter, and grand daughter of the first caretaker, is the present caretaker. She explained that her grandfather was appointed the caretaker when the Jewish Synagogue at Nagore Road was still active. She recounted that the majority of the Jewish families in Penang then lived either at Nagore Road or along Jahudi Road, the road adjacent to the cemetery. Most of the buildings there were also either owned by or rented out to them. She recalls that the Jewish men worked as tailors or money-lenders while some of them were successful lawyers and bankers.

She does not know who has the authority to deal with future burials, but she did mention that a few "church people" from Butterworth would pay regular visits to inspect the site and pay

the monthly fee of RM45 (A\$22.50-US\$18) for her services¹⁴. This fee is meant to cover the upkeep of the cemetery. She pointedly remarked that that fee has remained unchanged since the time of her grandfather. She has built her home on the site, in the form of a rough hut of corrugated iron and wooden planks. This sparse "living area", if you may call it that, is situated immediately to the left entrance as you enter from the main road.

Mrs. Fatimah is currently bedridden and is being taken care of by her daughter Tipah. Although ill and weak, she nevertheless regained her vigour long enough to ask that she be placed in her wheelchair and taken out into the sun for a chat during our interview. Her memory is still sharp; she recalled a Jewish burial that she had witnessed as a child - the death had occurred on a Friday morning and she remembers the mourners rushing for the burial to be concluded before dusk on the same day. She remembers seeing a great number of lighted candles at the head and foot of the coffin and how the mourners made haste and insisted that her father help them with the digging of the grave.

She says that she does not know who will continue to look after the cemetery after she has passed away, probably her daughter, but it would be impractical to ask her to "live in a cemetery".

Concluding Remarks

"Living in a cemetery" is certainly a poignant note for us to end this paper on – poignant and yet ironic. For it is thanks in part to the preservation of the Penang Jewish Cemetery, that we are able to re-construct a tentative history of the Jewish community here. Sojourners for a time, the Jewish settlers of Penang have nevertheless left an indelible mark on our historical landscape; individuals who have shared and contributed to the rich social fabric of Penang's cultural and social heritage. Through it we are able to perhaps better appreciate and comprehend the lives led by individuals within this Diaspora; a community once driven by external contestations to seek a new beginning, who subsequently thrived in this unique area of confluence, finally being subjected to transitional influences and various conflicts, yet again, to move onto a better realm.

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Appendix I: An excerpt of transcriptions taken from some tombstones at the Penang Jewish Cemetery.

The following transcriptions are taken from my field journals, being notes compiled during brief visits to the site between 1996-2001. As it only covers the inscriptions found on 33 tombstones, the list is by no means complete. Inscriptions originally written in Hebrew¹⁵ are given in brackets. The caption (Star of David) denotes that a "Star of David" design is carved upon it. They are arranged in chronological order as follows,

1. Gravestone for the burial
of the wife of Tzolach
Shoshan Levi
9th July 1835

2. This is the burial gravestone
of Yehuda Chezkiel Ashkenazi
(remainder of the inscription is illegible)

3. Ginda Grimberg
Age of 49 Carr.Cait.On
7 March 1876

4. H. Schneitzer
Born 1854
Died 24th January 1882
- ¹⁶ Here lies corpus mortem of a young man
Whose death is regretted by all his
Family and friends
Murdoch & Co. Calcutta

5. Here lies the remains
Of
Mendil Yancovitch

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- Born 1828
Died at Penang
14th September 1896
6. Here lies the remains of
Hermann Charkas
Born 1826
Died 13th July 1897
Penang
7. Hosses Brambier
Born 1848
Died 30th July 1899
Aged 51 years
8. In Memory of
Abraham Reuben Ezekiel
Abdullah Gubai
Died on the 25 December 1880
May His Soul Rest in Peace
9. Here Rest
The Remains
Of
Wolf Horn
Born April 2nd 1833
Died March 23rd 1900
10. (The Woman, Marat Elke
The Daughter of Zvi Hersch Houfswang)
In Loving Memory Of
Elke
The Dearly Beloved Daughter

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- of
Hersch Houfswang
Born in July 1881
Died in January 1903
11. In Loving Memory of
Ada
The Beloved Wife of
Harry David Grand
Died 19th September 1906
Aged 26 years
Thou Art Gone But Not Forgotten
12. In Loving Memory Of
Fanny Bernstein
The Beloved Wife of
J. Bernstein
Born 15th April 1845
Died 28th June 1906
Aged 61 Years
13. In Loving Memory of
Lizzie Schwartz
Beloved wife of Julius Schwartz
Born in Romania 4 August 18 (illegible)
Died at Penang 14 March 19 (illegible)
Aged 42 years
14. In Loving Memory of
Rosa Schwartz
The Beloved Wife of
Jacob Schwartz
Died 22nd December 1911

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Aged 56 Years

15. In Loving Memory Of
Regina Valeria Eisenberg
The Beloved Wife Of
Isidore Eisenberg
Born 25th February 1885
Died 13th August 1918
Thou Art Gone, But Not Forgotten
Calcutta - Brown & Co Scts

16. Rahamin David Akarib
Aged about 39 years
Died Tuesday 10th May 1921
Rest in Peace

17. The Sacred Memory of
Mrs. Seemah H. Lazarus
Born 3rd April 1832
Died 5th July 1923
May Her Soul Rest in Peace Amen

18. In Loving Memory of
Jacob Eliyahu Shamash
Died 25th April 1935
May His Soul Rest in Peace

19. In Loving Memory
Of
Mrs. Annette Kofman
Died 23rd February 1938
May Her Soul Rest in Peace Amen

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20. In Loving Memory of
Manassem Mordecai
Died 10th October 1938
May His Soul Rest in Peace Amen

21. In Loving Memory of
David Mordecai
Died 24th May 1950
Age 85
Thou Art Gone But Not Forgotten

22. In Loving Memory of
Mozelle
Wife of David Mordecai
Died on 27th November 1950
Age 63
Thou Art Gone But Not Forgotten

23. Ephraim
Aboody Nahoum
Died on Saturday
30th June 1951
Aged 85 years

24. In Loving Memory
Of
Mark Shister
Born 23rd May 1879
Died 19th June 1956
By his loving children
Grandchildren & brother
Rest in Peace

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25. In Loving Memory of
Aaron Manasseh
Died 3rd June 1957
Aged 59
26. Benjamin Simmons M.A.
Died 19th July 1962
Aged 55
Most Beloved Husband of
Cecilia
27. In Loving Memory
Of
Hayoo Jacob
Died 22nd April 1966
Aged 56
28. In Loving Memory of
Sasson Hai Jacob B.A. (Hons)
Born 13 March 1945
Died 13 June 1972
May His Soul Rest in Peace
Amen
29. (Star of David)
In Loving Memory of
Barookh Ephraim
Died 19th June 1976
Age 66
30. In Loving Memory of
Flora Barookh
Wife of Albert Barookh

Departed on
6th October 1976

THE COHEN PLOT

31. (Avraham Shalon Eliyahu Saliman The Cohen
Died on Wednesday 13 Iyar
Buried on Thursday the 14th Iyar of the year 5682
He lived for 48 years)

32. (Saliman Eliyahu Saliman The Cohen
Died on Monday 13 Cheshvam
Buried on the 14th Cheshvam of the year 5682
He lived for 60 years)

33. (Star of David)
(This is the burial gravestone of
Eliyahu Chaim Victor
The Son of Sason, The Cohen)
Lt. Eliaho Hayeem Victor
Cohen
2/9 Jat Regt
29 - 11 - 1918
10 - 10 – 1941

34. (The Old Man Yitschak Avraham The Cohen)
Isaac Abraham Cohen
Died on 15th July 1925
Corresponding to 27th Tamuz 5685
Aged 62 years

**Appendix II: List of Names Taken From the Register of The Jewish Public Cemetery.
Register of Deaths Under Section III of Act 14 of 1856 (Dated 22 March 1921)**

The information provided here is given in the following order (as found in the Register) :

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|----|----------------|
| a. | Year of death | e. | Age |
| b. | Date of death | f. | Place of Death |
| c. | Name | g. | Cause of Death |
| d. | Gender | | |
-

List of Names

- | | | | | |
|----|---|---|----|---|
| 1. | 1938 - February 23rd
Mrs. Kofman (Aretta)
Female
60 years
General Hospital
Bronchial Pneumonia | - No Burials Up To Date (18 / 7 / 1947) - | 4. | 1949 - April 25th
Mazziet Manaseh
Female
75 years
384 Burmah Road
Senility |
| 2. | 1939 - March 31st
Hyam Abraham Hyam
Male
63 years
28 Nagore Road
Chronic Iyelilis | | 5. | 1949 - May 25th
David Mordecai
Male
77 years
24 Nagore Road
Heart Failure |
| 3. | 1939 - October 10th
Manesaeh Mordecai
Male
60 years
3 Nagore Road
Cerebral Haemoragge | | 6. | 1950 - November 27th
Mozelle D. Mordecai
Female
62 years
24 Nagore Road |

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	Cerebral Haemoragge		56 years
			General Hospital
7.	1951 - June 30th		Cerebral Vascular Accident
	Ephraim Aroody		
	Male	12.	1967- June 3rd
	81 years		Aaron Manasseh
	17 Lorong Selamat		Male
	Heart Failure		59 years
			384 Burmah Road
8.	1956 - June 19th		Colonic Carciuoma
	Mark Skister		
	Male	13.	1972 - July 19th
	80 years		Sasom H. Jacob
	Bangsar Hospital		Male
	Cerebral Haemoragge		27 years
			47 Mile Jalan Ipoh
9.	1958 - October 23rd		Fracture Base of Skull on the
	E.E. Manasseh		left side & sub. anatomical haemorrage
	Male		
	62 years	14.	1976 - June 19th
	384 Burmah Road		Basookh Ephraim
	Uraemia		Male
			66 years
10.	1961 – December (?)		7 Lorong Abu Siti
	A.S. Barooth		Hyocandial Infection
	Male		
	80 years	15.	1976 - October 3rd
	102 c Hutton Lane		Florence Basookh
	Senility / Sangene Penani		Female
			76 years
11.	1964 - April 22nd		79 Bt. Lancang Larut
	Haya Jacob		
	Male	16.	1978 - April 21st

Harry Moses

62 years

Male

Septaemia BPH

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ . The following report is a condensed version of a larger paper on the subject, which is scheduled for publication early in 2003. It will contain a conservation proposal for the Penang Jewish Cemetery site, as well as further details on the history of the Jewish families mentioned in this paper.
 - ² . Those of us who are familiar with the Scriptures may also perhaps recall Solomon's legendary goldmines of Ophir, and the attribution of its location by recent scholars to our *Gunung Ledang*. Hiram's fleet were reportedly sent by Solomon to Ophir to obtain incense, sweet-woods and gold for his temple, produce formerly abundantly available from Malayan shores. If nothing else, this quaint hypothesis at the very least acknowledges a passing familiarity in the Levant with our region in Biblical times.
 - ³ . The existence of early 18th Century Armenian graves on St. Paul's Hill in Malacca (Mills 1936:264-271) bear testament to the presence of Armenian merchants trading in the port-city from the 1730s. They were Armenians of Persian origin, who had fled the persecutions of the Persian ruler, Shah Abbas. In 1604, Shah Abas ordered the forced migration of nearly 25,000 Armenian families from Azerbaijan to hinder the approach of invading Turks. They were re-settled near Isfahan, but continued discrimination and oppression led them to the Far East for a better life – a move repeated by the Baghdadi-Jewish community for nearly similar reasons in the 1800s.
 - ⁴ . Prior to that, it is probable that a number of Jewish merchants, particularly from Singapore, may have established themselves as traders in the fledgling settlement. But I am yet to find conclusive evidence of this. Wade has kindly drawn my attention to scattered entries in the *Prince of Wales Gazette* referring to the activities of, what appears to be, a number of Jewish merchants. I hope to pursue this further once the opportunity arises for me to delve into early archival records held in Penang, Singapore, and London.
 - ⁵ . Links with their Jewish brethren in India were likewise maintained, as religious authority was primarily vested in their elders there. Despite having the synagogue at Jalan Nagore, and two synagogues nearby in Singapore, the community depended on the learned Jews of Calcutta for religious direction; "Jewish communities in Singapore and other cities of

the Far East were not as well organised as the Calcutta Jews in the 19th Century. They looked to Calcutta for religious guidance. For instance, for marriages conducted in Singapore, the “*Ketuba*” would be written in Calcutta, and sent to Singapore, as scribes were difficult to come by in Singapore.” (Parasuram 1982:106)

- 6 . These comments are undeniably the source of two myths still perpetuated today; that the first Jew to live in Penang was Menasseh himself (Nathan 1983:171) and that the Jewish Community in Penang during the 1920s consisted mostly of poor Jews (Encyclopaedia Judaica 1971). The full entry under “Penang” in the Encyclopaedia Judaica reads, “*A few Jews settled in Penang. The first was Ezekiel Menasseh from Baghdad in 1895. Although he was the only Jew in the area for 30 years, he continued Jewish observances, kept a Kosher house and welcomed visiting co-religionists. Other Jews arrived after World War I, mainly poor pedlars. During World War II, the community was evacuated to Singapore, subsequently occupied by the Japanese. Of the Jews who settled there after the war, some 20 families remained by 1963. Only three Jewish families lived there in 1969*”.
- 7 . There are naturally, positives and negatives in favour of both. A former Jewish Penangite recalls that when he was young, “my family spoke a mixture of Hebrew and English at home, with smatterings of Hokkein, Malay, and Arabic” (Bhatt 2000:2), a fine product of a multi-cultural milieu. At the same time however, such assimilation inescapably results in the gradual decline of a community’s grasp on its individual conventions, “.. among those who remain, the younger generation is not as versed in Jewish customs and traditions as the elders” (ibid:2).
- 8 . Nathan (1983:172) provides an alternative tradition, viz. that it was an American tourist who had paid for the cemetery, in thanksgiving and gratitude for the nursing and care he received from the local Jewish community in Penang, after docking there and falling ill on a P&O voyage. I am yet to confirm the veracity of either tale.
- 9 . Stallwood (1973) and Harfield (1988) have both published detailed studies of this important historical site. Consecrated by the Bishop of Calcutta, Daniel Wilson, in 1834, the Fort Canning Cemetery holds the remains of Singapore's early Christian elite, and is divided into sections between the Anglicans, Protestants and Roman Catholics (Samuel 1991:15 - 17).

- ¹⁰ . A brief but valuable study of this cemetery was made by John & Christopher Bastin in 1963. Together, they managed to transcribe a list of 93 important memorial tablets and gravestones (including some found at the nearby St. George's Church) during an arduous investigation at the site. The results were later published as "Some Old Penang Tombstones" (JMBRAS Vol. XXXVII Pt. I 1964). This article was followed two decades later by a report from David Ch'ng (JMBRAS Vol. LX. Pt. II 1987), who added information on the existence of graves belonging to members of the London Missionary Society, Catholics, and early Chinese converts.
- ¹¹ . In August 1996, I spent two days photographing, measuring and noting information given on 45 gravestones from a total of approximately 106 at the site. Since then, I have made two brief follow-up visits while on transit (one in 1998, the other in 2000), and I expect to complete an initial survey of all the gravestones in the near future.
- ¹² . The grounds are generally well-maintained and the caretaker has taken some pains to "beautify" the area by cutting the grass and planting small floral shrubs. But the further upkeep of the place has been clearly hampered by a lack of funds and professional know-how. Apart from this, the general sanctity of the place is disrupted by the presence of rough wooden dwellings built within the cemetery walls. The situation is somewhat awkward as the huts have been the home of the caretaker's family since the 1930s. In many respects, the cemetery owes much of its present state of preservation - from vandals and other negative influences - by their constant presence. Unless good security may be guaranteed for the site, moving them would necessitate their relocation to a nearby home, from where they would still be able to maintain a constant surveillance of the site. However the problem may reach a natural conclusion over the next few years, as the septuagenarian caretaker is in ill-health. But this would in-turn create a new vacuum viz. security, as her daughter has indicated that she was reluctant to continue "living in a cemetery".
- ¹³ . There is mercifully only one grave displaying traces of human "vandalism", but I have been assured that the tombstone was struck accidentally with a hoe by an overzealous gardener. Some graves are obscured by overgrown grass and general debris, which has sometimes hampered efforts to read the inscriptions on the lower graves.

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- ¹⁴. Bhatt (2000:1) further reports that a Mr. Ong Thiam Lye, the Commission's resident caretaker, and the caretaker for the Taiping War Cemetery, visits the grave of Lt. Cohen every six months to clean and inspect its surroundings.
- ¹⁵. I am indebted to Kevin Mayer for providing the transliterations and translations to the Hebrew inscriptions.

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