

A EUROPEAN PLOT ON THE ARAB STAGE

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Over the last half-century, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has been published and disseminated in the Arab world perhaps more widely than in any other part of the world. The *Protocols* was in fact first published in Arabic as early as 1925, but for about a quarter of a century this antisemitic pamphlet did not play a conspicuous role in the Arab struggle against Zionism.¹ It seems that the unparalleled reception of the *Protocols* came only with the establishment of the State Israel. The fact that a small community of Jews succeeded in defeating the combined armies of seven Arab countries, and in establishing a sovereign state despite the Arabs' wishes, has been a source of cognitive dissonance for the Arabs. The Jews, according to the Qur'an, are destined to live in misery and humiliation.² They are also described as cowardly in battle.³ Thus how could it be that Israel won the war and deprived the Arabs of victory? The belief in a global Jewish conspiracy, as described in the *Protocols*, provided a purportedly rational explanation for what was otherwise totally inconceivable to the Arabs. The fact that it answers a deep psychological need appears to account for much of the *Protocols'* popularity in the Arab world. Indeed, since the early 1950s it has become ubiquitous in the discourse of the Arab political elites.

The first to call attention to the existence of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Arabic was the Middle East scholar Silvia Haim, in 1955.⁴ In her article titled "Arabic Anti-Semitic Literature: Some Preliminary Notes," she points out that the first Arabic translation of the *Protocols* appeared in the 1920s. Surprisingly, the issue of the *Protocols* in Arabic and of Arab antisemitism in general did not attract the interest of researchers, academic or otherwise, until it was taken up by the late Yehoshafat Harkabi. In his seminal book *The Arab Position in the Conflict with Israel*, published in 1968, Harkabi documented many diverse phenomena of hatred for Jews in Arab literature and media, and appropriately labeled them "Arab Antisemitism."⁵ He devoted a special section to the *Protocols* in Arabic, and his bibliography provides an exhaustive list of extant Arabic versions.⁶ Unfortunately, since the late 1960s, the number of editions of the *Protocols* has increased many times over.

It is important to note that, while *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is of course of European provenance, its adoption and wide circulation in the Arab world was probably facilitated and enhanced by deeply-ingrained stereotypes of Jews which are rooted in Arab culture. I am not here referring to the general negative image of Jews as non-believers, but specifically to their stereotyped characterization as devious and given to hatching plots and conspiracies. Two important incidents from the early history of Islam, which is of course regarded as sacred history, helped to firmly establish this stereotype. Both have to do with the relations between the prophet Muhammad and the Jews in Medina. As is well known, Muhammad at first had an alliance with the Jewish tribes of Medina, but within a few years, he broke the treaty and attacked them. Understandably, breaking a treaty requires a good reason, and sacred Islamic history furnishes the purported reasons for Muhammad's

actions. According to the Islamic sources, the Prophet was sitting with a group of his disciples one day, leaning his back against a wall. Suddenly, he stood up and announced that the angel Gabriel had just revealed to him that the Jews of the Banu Nadhir tribe were conspiring to assassinate him by throwing a large rock on his head from on top of the wall. With this divine proof of Jewish conspiracy, the Banu Nadhir were expelled from the city and all of their property was confiscated by the Muhammad.⁷ Next in line were the Jews of the Banu Qurayzha tribe: they were rumored to be conspiring against Muhammad and plotting to betray him. The Muslims besieged them, and after they surrendered, the men were all put to death and the women and children were enslaved.⁸

These stories of the Jews' deceit and treachery are widely known among Muslims because they are included in the *Sira*, the Prophet's hallowed biography. Recently, these anti-Jewish stories have also been dramatized in a TV series and aired by the Saudi Iqra' channel.⁹ Another infamous Jewish plot against Muhammad is recorded in the *Sira*: the alleged attempt by a Jewish woman to assassinate him by poisoning his food, from which he was miraculously saved.¹⁰

It should be emphasized that everything that the prophet Muhammad reportedly did or said is not merely of historical importance, but, for Muslims, also serves as a normative model of behavior.

Sunni historians have traditionally placed the blame for the schism between the Shi'a and the Sunna on a secret Jewish conspiracy put into effect by the machinations of a certain Yemenite Jew, 'Abdallah ibn Saba', who outwardly converted to Islam with the intention of subverting it from within. Thus the most traumatic event, from the Muslim point of view, of the early history of Islam, was the result of a Jewish plot to corrupt Islam and to ruin it.¹¹

Hence, the Islamic record of the Jews being guilty of conspiracy against Muhammad and the Islamic community no doubt helped create a predisposition to accept the *Protocols* as an authentic document which reveals, as it were, the true nature of Jews and Judaism.

As previously mentioned, the first Arabic edition of the *Protocols* was published in 1925. However, this edition is hardly mentioned in later years, and later translations made no reference to it.¹²

A new Arabic translation by Muhammad Khalifa Al-Tunisi first appeared in 1951 and has since been reprinted in numerous editions. The second edition, from 1961, is worthy of note, since it was published with an introduction by a famous and highly esteemed Egyptian writer, Abbas Mahmud Al-'Aqqad (1889–1964). This introduction is, in fact, a reprint of a laudatory review article published by Al-'Aqqad in an Egyptian journal shortly after the first publication of Al-Tunisi's translation.¹³

The following are selected quotations from Al-'Aqqad's introduction: "In order to do justice to history, I must summarize here what is said about the book from a historical point of view in order to find fault with it and question the authenticity of its sources, or, conversely, in order to confirm and prove the truth of its contents. Those who cast doubt on the authenticity of its sources base their criticism on the similarity between the text of

the book and other texts that preceded its appearance by 40 years.... The critics also base their argument on the fact that the *Times of London* declared it to be a false document, after previously referring to it as authentic. On the other hand, the essence of the argument of those who affirm the truth of these documents or the truth of their contents is that these documents do not say anything new compared to what appears in the recognized Jewish books, such as the Talmud and the books of Jewish tradition – except that the Talmud speaks in general terms, whereas these documents are detailed and specific."¹⁴



Octopus and Serpent

The cover of the 1961 edition of *Al-Tunisi's* translation of the *Protocols* with Al-'Aqqad's introduction.

The cover displays the two symbols of Jewish monstrosity and deviousness: the octopus and the serpent

Israeli Soldier reading the *Protocols*.

This cartoon, which appeared in the Syrian government daily *Teshreen*, depicts an Israeli soldier butchering an Arab while reading the *Protocols*.

Source: *Teshreen* (Syria), March 7, 2007

Courtesy of MEMRI



Quoting the British journalist A. K. Chesterton,¹⁵ Al-'Aqqad says that "the elders of Zion may be a real historical fact or a product of the imagination, but the actual fact that cannot be doubted is that the influence that they try to achieve is a palpable reality." Al-'Aqqad further states: "I can personally add that we can see a huge machinery at work, from Istanbul to America to South Africa, and this, among other things, proves that an international gang is at work to achieve the goal, even if there was no coordination in the planning... Another proof [of the Jewish conspiracy] is that the Zionists use [their] influence to give fame to writers of lesser importance so as to entice them, and thus no Arab book written by an author who has ever criticized Zionism has ever been translated [into Western languages]. I don't need to look far – I see the proof with regard to my own books ... whose printing [in English and French] was stopped, despite all the trouble that had been taken to translate them, because I have been writing against Zionist policy."¹⁶

Al-'Aqqad's contribution to the ever-expanding "Protocols" literature in Arabic is not limited to the above-mentioned 1951 review article (which was republished in 1961 as the introduction to Tunisi's translation). In 1956 he published a book titled *Al-Sahyuniyya al-'Alamiyya* ("World Zionism") which is a virulent attack not only on Zionism but also on Jews and Judaism from antiquity to modern times.¹⁷ According to Al-'Aqqad, Jewish nature is so perverse and the Jews constitute such a threat to all other nations, that ultimately the world must force them to assimilate so that they will cease to exist as a distinct group.¹⁸ A summary of the *Protocols* is provided in an appendix. The book appeared in the *Iktarna Lak* ("We Selected for You") series, which served as a means of national indoctrination and was published by Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt's most prestigious publishing house).

In this book Al-'Aqqad adopts the old standard argument of those who propagate the *Protocols*, namely, that it does not really matter whether the details of the origin of the *Protocols* are true; what matters is that historical events conform to the Jewish scheme as presented in the *Protocols*. This supposedly proves that there is, indeed, a Jewish conspiracy.

It is worth noting that Al-'Aqqad was one of the most prominent figures in Egyptian intellectual life in the 20th-century up to his death in 1964. The official website of the Egyptian government dedicates a page to his life and achievements, which opens with the following statement: "Abbas Mahmud Al-'Aqqad is one of the pillars of intellect of the 20th century [Arab] renaissance. [...] He was an exponent of Egyptian conscience and morals."

The degree to which the *Protocols'* portrayal of Jews as seeking to control the world pervaded the Arab intellectual discourse in the 1950s becomes evident when one looks at the entry on "Jews" in the Egyptian *Lexicon of Egyptian Folk Customs, Traditions and Expressions*, published in 1953. The author of the lexicon, Ahmad Amin (1886–1954) was another leading figure in Egyptian intellectual life in his time. In the entry on Jews, he says, among other things: "In America, where their numbers do not exceed six million, they have gained power over its people, who number approximately 400 million [*sic*]. They have a keen insight as to what kind of activities are useful for taking control over the nation in

which they live, such as: medicine, banking, journalism, teaching, and so on. They are especially skillful in disseminating ideas and doctrines that undermine religion."

Another translation of the *Protocols*, which appeared in 1967, was prepared from the English edition by the Lebanese-Palestinian journalist and translator 'Ajjaj Nuwayhidh. This translation appeared in a much larger volume than Al-Tunisi's translation. The edition begins with a section on the supposed history of the Protocols and a history of Zionism; the second section is the *Protocols* itself; the third section discusses purported Talmudic sources of the *Protocols*; and the fourth section discusses Biblical sources and parallels. Nuwayhidh's translation seems to have become the standard edition in the Arab world and has been reprinted numerous times in various Arab countries.

Translations of the *Protocols* were not the sole medium contributing to the belief in a Jewish conspiracy in the Arab world. Other types of publications – summaries of the *Protocols*, for instance – were included in or appended to numerous books. The titles of some of these publications are instructive: *The Jewish Conspiracy against Christianity; Palestine and the Human Conscience; The Danger Posed by World Jewry to Islam and Christianity*. Among the more recent additions to this list are *The Secrets of the Evil Ones: Kabala, Clandestine Organizations and the Attempt to Control the World; Murder: From the Scriptures of the Jews and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to Knight Without a Horse*. Many of these books were published by state-sponsored publishing houses. The full bibliographic list is much too long to be presented here.

Even though the full text of the *Protocols* is readily available, both in hard copy and on the internet, it is worthwhile noting that, when it is mentioned, it is usually referred to as a general concept; only rarely is specific reference made to a particular protocol. It would appear that the *Protocols*, as a book, serves as a corpus delicti – as concrete evidence of the Jewish conspiracy. It serves to show that the existence of this conspiracy is not just a hypothesis, but is something palpable. This can perhaps explain the frequency with which the *Protocols* are reprinted and posted on the Internet.

It is not surprising that William G. Carr's antisemitic *Pawns in the Game* (1954) – a book which advances a modern version of a global conspiracy theory – has also been translated into Arabic and is often referred to as corroborating evidence for the existence of a Jewish world conspiracy.¹⁹

A famous incident from the 1970s attests to the pervasiveness of the belief in a Jewish conspiracy in the Arab world. Henry Kissinger recounts how, when he attended a state dinner in his honor in Saudi Arabia hosted by King Faisal, the king explained to him the danger of the conspiracy of the Jews and the Communists:

The silences for the King heightened my awareness in my first exposure to what throughout the Arab world, and in many more outlying regions, was immediately recognizable as Faisal's standard speech. Its basic proposition was that Jews and Communists were working now in parallel, now together, to undermine the civilized world as we knew it. Oblivious to my ancestry – or delicately putting me into a special category – Faisal insisted that an end be put once and for all to the dual conspiracy of

Jews and Communists. The Middle East outpost of that plot was the State of Israel, put there by Bolshevism for the principal purpose of dividing America from the Arabs.²⁰

Let us now leave the royal court and world politics and turn to the mundane affairs of ordinary people. On November 6, 2002, A teacher from Nazareth, asked for religious advice (*fatwa*) on a website specializing in online *fatwa* service. His problem was this: the Nazareth high schools have an annual trip to Eilat for their 12th-grade students, both the boys and the girls. On this trip they sleep away from home and the girls do not have any responsible male relative accompanying them. The sheikh on duty, an Al-Azhar cleric, ruled, as one could expect, that given the circumstances described by the inquirer, the trip was prohibited. The point relevant to us is that he opened his *fatwa* with the affirmation that this kind of trip is "one of the schemes of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* through which they aim to corrupt the youth...."²¹

In fact, any incidence of alleged licentiousness is likely to be attributed to the deleterious effects of the *Protocols*. For instance, in August 2003, when the Muslim Brotherhood called for a ban of Egyptian poet Ahmad al-Shahawi's book of poetry, *Wasaya fi 'ishq al-nisa'* ("Advice on the Subject of Desire"), they compared it to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.²²

Given the dramatic potential of the Jewish conspiracy as described in the *Protocols*, it was only a matter of time before such a promising plot was taken up by television.

On November 6, 2002 (the first night of Ramadan), some Arab television channels (including Egyptian State Television) aired the first episode of a 41-part series called *A Knight Without a Horse*. Significant elements of the plot of the series are based on "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." It should be noted that the nights of Ramadan are considered a peak time of television viewing in Arab and Muslim countries.

In fact, the series was slated to be shown on Ramadan of the previous year, but the broadcast was postponed due to delays in its production. In anticipation of the broadcast, the Egyptian weekly *Roz Al-Yusuf* published a story on the series together with an interview with its director and leading actor, Muhammad Subhi.²³ In the interview, Subhi stated that one of his sources of inspiration for making the series was 'Abbas al-'Aqqad's aforementioned book on World Zionism, and the latter's explanation that by comparing historical events with the plan outlined in the *Protocols*, one can see for one's self what elements of the *Protocols* have already been implemented and what further developments should be anticipated.

The series sparked protests in the West, with the U.S. State Department calling on the Egyptian government to prevent the broadcast – a demand that was rejected out of hand by Egyptian Information Minister Safwat al-Sharif. The series was viewed and approved for broadcast by a committee appointed by the Egyptian censor. An Egyptian Radio and Television Association committee declared the series "a landmark in the history of Arab drama." The Egyptian Information Minister stated that "the dramatic views expressed by the series contain nothing that can be considered anti-Semitic."²⁴ Nevertheless, under the pressure of criticism from abroad, the producers were obliged to change the wording of the opening introduction, prefaced to each of the episodes. The original introduction included

the following statement: "Some of the events [of the series] are real and some are imaginary, some have already occurred and some are expected to occur." The revised, more circumspect, version stated: "The series is not intended to confirm the veracity of what is known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which has not been historically authenticated."²⁵

A Knight Without a Horse aroused much debate in the Egyptian and Arab press. Most of the Egyptian and Arab press praised the series and vilified the Americans and Jews for their supposedly impudent request that it not be aired. There were nonetheless some voices in the Arab press that criticized the series and blamed its producer for having based it on a known forgery.²⁶ Among the Arab writers who publicly denounced the *Protocols* as forgeries are Syrian philosopher Dr. Sadeq Jalal al-‘Azm, President Mubarak’s advisor Usama al-Baz,²⁷ and Dr. Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, an Egyptian authority on Jewish history and author of an Arabic-language encyclopedia of Judaism.²⁸

Yet the overall tone in the Arab media was that the Zionist world conspiracy constituted a real threat. A typical example of this was an Al-Jazeera interview program dedicated to the topic of the *Protocols* that was aired on March 19, 2002. The program, "The Opposite Direction" (*al-ittijab al-mu'akis*) is widely viewed and its moderator, Dr. Faisal Al-Qasim, is a media celebrity throughout the Arab world. Two guests were invited: Mauritanian journalist Muhammad Jamil ibn Mansur, who argues that the authenticity of the *Protocols* as a document is a moot question while the substance of the *Protocols* has been confirmed by history, and the Iraqi Kurdish journalist Kameran Qurra Daghi,²⁹ who contends that the *Protocols* is an antisemitic fabrication that is irrelevant to the problems of the Arabs today and that taking it seriously is "an insult to Arab intelligence." The moderator, in his introduction, however, not only presents the view that the *Protocols* truly document a Jewish scheme as a legitimate one, but even raises the possibility that it is the Jews themselves who disseminate the *Protocols* in order to strike fear in the hearts of their enemies.

Following is the moderator's introduction:

Have the Arabs read *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*? Have they understood it? What have they done about it? And this at a time that it is being implemented night and day before their very eyes. That is what some people are asking, and for the benefit of those who do not know much about the Protocols, here is [a brief introduction]:

It is a book that contains 24 protocols authored by a group of Zionists more than 100 years ago in which they laid out their plans to achieve domination over Palestine and the Arabs, and afterwards over the rest of the world.

The *Protocols* have not ceased to stir controversy to this day. There are those who claim that they were concocted by the Russian secret police and have nothing to do with the Jews, and there are those who assert that it is an evil Jewish scheme based on Jewish doctrines that are found in the Jewish holy books. Those who hold this position believe that the *Protocols* are in essence the intellectual and theoretical assumptions, indeed the very constitution, of the Zionist enterprise, and that what is going on in the world now, on the political, economic, media, and cultural levels, is in fact a literal implementation

of the *Protocols*. And, in fact, the Jews have taken control, as they promised more than a century ago. They have taken hold of the economy, finance, and the media in the world.

Likewise, they are the first to have glorified terrorism, a terrorism which is now being practiced in Palestine and in other countries in the world. Terrorism, as some people believe, was invented, produced, and marketed by them. According to their opinion, the political terrorist is a martyr, as becomes clear from Protocol 19.

Those who cast doubt on [the authenticity] of the *Protocols* see them as a mere attempt by the enemies of the Jews to damage them and to smear them, and on this basis, to persecute them, as occurred in Russia and Germany.

Still others believe that the circulation of the *Protocols* is a service that has been given free to the Zionists, as it exaggerates Zionism's capabilities and its greatness. Would it be wrong to assume that the Jews themselves are behind the circulation of these false conceptions, which turn their rivals into prisoners of the big delusion that the Jews are a secret power that cannot be defeated and a frightening octopus that reaches into every country?

Still others maintain that if Zionism is really at the helm of political, economic, and media affairs in the West, then that is to their credit, since the West is on top – technologically, economically, and as in terms of the media.

These are questions that I throw out into the air, directly to [journalist] Mr. Kameran Qurra Daghi and to Muhammad Jamil ibn Mansur, one of the leaders of the Democratic Powers Bloc in Mauritania, a writer and an anti-Zionist activist, president of the Committee of the National Union For Resisting Zionist Penetration.³⁰

One year after the airing of *Knight Without a Horse*, another, even more virulent series, was aired in Ramadan 2003 at a peak viewing-time. The 29-part Syrian-produced series, *Al-Shatat* ("The Diaspora"), purported to show Jewish life in the Diaspora and the emergence of Zionism, and was broadcast by Hizbullah's Al-Manar satellite station. It included gruesome scenes such as the ritual murder of a Christian boy and the ritual execution of a Jew who married a Gentile. The series also shows how Amschel Rothschild, the founder of the supposed secret world Jewish government, instructed his sons from his deathbed to ignite wars and corrupt society all over the world to serve the financial interests and the political goals of the Jews.

It is interesting to note that the producers of *Al-Shatat*, conscious of the previous year's outcry against *Knight Without A Horse*, took pains to screen a disclaimer at the beginning of each episode stating that the series was not based on the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* but on historical facts and research, including writings by Jews and Israelis. Nevertheless, not only did the plot of the series focus on a secret Jewish global government as described in the *Protocols*, but Episode 22 actually dealt with the issue of the Jewish continuous attempt to deny any connection to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In this

episode, the "global Jewish government" convenes to celebrate the deaths of 1,000,000 in World War II, and their leader explains why killing Europe's Jews served the goals of their secret government:

The higher the number of Jews killed in this war, the more we will be able to convince the world that the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' is nothing more than a lie invented by the Christian world to increase people's hatred for the Jews. After public opinion is persuaded that this book is nothing more than a lie, we will launch a secret and quiet offensive to prove the truth of this book, until the world again fears us deep inside, and will be defeated by us without a war. Now, let's toast to this Great War.

The Syrian government denied reports that Syria's official television had been involved in producing the series. However, the credits at the end of each episode show that the Syrian government itself assisted in the production.³¹ *Al-Shatat* was not to be a show for one season or one channel only. For Ramadan 2005, the Jordanian TV channel Al-Mamnou' aired the Syrian-produced series. It was also aired by two Iranian channels during Ramadan 2004.³² Again, on the occasion of Ramadan 2009, Iran's Channel 2 began airing the series, with Farsi dubbing.³³



In this scene of "A Knight Without a Horse" the hero explains to his friends the danger of the Zionist conspiracy: "... The serpent is the Zionist symbol, and its progress is drawn on the map, step by step. The first step was in Europe in 429 BCE, in Greece, in the days of Pericles..."

Source: *Al-Manar TV*. Courtesy of The Middle East Media Research Institute - MEMRI

As one might expect, given the large media fallout from these television programs, the circulation of the *Protocols* has become more widespread. In addition, the Internet has been playing an important role in disseminating the *Protocols*, and it may today be found on hundreds of websites. The following is just one example of this phenomenon.

The Arab nationalist website *Arabrenewal.com* published in January 2003 (that is, a few months after the airing of the Egyptian series *A Knight Without a Horse*) the full text of the *Protocols* in Nuweyhid's translation. It was prefaced with a disclaimer of sorts:

The [Arab] Renewal family would like to make it clear that the fact that we are publishing this document does not signify a confirmation of its authenticity. However, in view of the commotion aroused by the television series *A Knight without a Horse* and in view of the connection between the American and Zionist campaign against this series and the references to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that are in it, and since we firmly believe in the public's right to know, and since this document, regardless of whether it is authentic or forged, has entered history and aroused a big controversy, we deem it important to publish it here.

A few days later one of the readers wrote to the site, and after congratulating the site on the great service they were doing in publishing the *Protocols*, he said:

I have noticed your disclaimer about the authenticity of the *Protocols*... You are of course fully entitled to publish such a disclaimer. I am however concerned about a serious complex which plagues us Arabs...namely that we accept the American media as truthful and we disbelieve anyone who tries to expose its lies and fabrications... I do not need to go far [for an example]; the *Protocols* themselves contain the proof of their authenticity. Even if we assume that they were fabricated, what is going on in the world is identical with what is described in the *Protocols*.³⁴

Despite the few exceptional voices noted earlier, when the *Protocols* are mentioned in the Arab media they are generally referred to as authentic. To be sure, there are many Arab writers who are well aware that the *Protocols* are a forgery. Nevertheless, most of them continue to make use of the *Protocols*, because, they argue, "it does not matter whether they are fact or fiction: their 'predictions' have largely come true."

One example of this is an article by Lebanese Christian journalist Ghassan Tuani: "Had we not known that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were forged by Russian intelligence in the 19th century...we would say that what is happening in the world today is exactly what world Jewry planned, due to the great similarity [between what's actually happening and] what is falsely attributed to [world Jewry]. [I refer] to the conspiracy to take over the world and to plunder it; to the deeds [of world Jewry] everywhere, and to the financial, political, and military status [world Jewry] has attained. This is in addition to their attempt to destroy everything that others hold sacred."³⁵

Arab and Iranian media emphasize the role of the Jews in spreading drugs with the aim of corrupting the non-Jewish society in accordance with the *Protocols*. Following are two examples. The Lebanese TV channel NBN aired a report on the *Protocols* on October 22,

2007. In it, the narrator said: "Drugs were the Jews' method of wearing down the German people, which led to the Nazi extremism, in which the Jews themselves played a role. In addition, they carried out widespread drug dealing in Czarist Russia, from the 17th century. This was in accordance with the Jewish Talmud, which says that the Jews must devote their greatest efforts to preventing other nations from ruling the land, so that the rule would be in the hands of the Jews alone."³⁶

When, in 2007, the Iranian police captured a large quantity of drugs, it presented the packages of drugs it to the TV cameras arranged in the shape of a star of David -- indicating the alleged connection between drug trafficking and the Jews.³⁷

The following incident is very revealing: in November, 2003, the Arabic translation of the *Protocols* was put on display next to the Torah and the Talmud as part of an exhibit on the sacred books of the three monotheistic religions. Dr. Yousef Zeidan, director of the Centre for Arabic Manuscripts at the Alexandria library, proudly reported this cultural achievement to a correspondent of the Egyptian weekly *Al-Ushu'*: "When my eyes fell upon the rare copy of this dangerous book, I immediately decided to place it next to the Torah. Although it is not a monotheistic holy book, it has become one of the Jews' sacred [texts] and part of their basic constitution, their religious law, and their way of life. In other words, it is not merely an ideological or theoretical book. Perhaps this book of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is more important to the Zionist Jews of the world than the Torah, as they conduct Zionist life according to it.... Thus it is only natural to include the book in this exhibit."³⁸ The correspondent describes the copy put on display: "[It] is the first translation of the *Protocols* into Arabic, by Muhammad Khalifa Al-Tunisi, and its binding features a Star of David, the Bolshevik Jewish symbol, surrounded by symbolic snakes."³⁹

As a result of international protests and diplomatic pressure the copy was removed from the display window and returned to its place in the library stacks. *Al-Abram* reported that its removal generated protests and discussions.⁴⁰ On December 6, 2003, Dr. Isma'il Siraj Al-Din, director of the Alexandria library, issued an official statement explaining the removal and saying: "Its very inclusion showed bad judgment and a lack of sensitivity. An internal administrative review is underway to determine whether further actions are to be taken." According to *Al-Abram*, "Dr. Siraj Al-Din's statement led to a tide of anger among local extremists, who raised questions in parliament, sent letters to the newspapers, and published articles claiming that [by Dr. Siraj Al-Din's] characterization of the book as a 'fabrication intended to foment anti-Jewish feelings' was an unpatriotic act of disloyalty on his part and that the library was subservient to the interests of the Zionist lobby, the State of Israel, and the United States. They also claimed that the library was curtailing freedom of expression by removing the book from display."⁴¹

The ubiquity of "the Protocols" as a trope for evil conspiracy has some unexpected manifestations. A few years ago, an Islamist website posted a document titled "The Protocols of the Elders of Qom" which purported to be the secret scheme of the Shi'ite ayatollahs -- dubbed "the elders of Qom" -- to bring about the destruction of Sunni Islam. (Qom, it should be noted, is the most important center of Shi'ism in Iran.) Reportedly, the

alleged Shi'ite plot had somehow fallen into the hands of loyal Sunnis living in Iran, who were publishing it in order to expose the so-called dangerous conspiracy. Significantly, although this crude fabrication had nothing to do with Zionism or the Jews, its title was clearly modeled on the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."⁴²

A few years ago, an Iraqi Shi'ite writer claimed that the Sunnis, who have been persecuting and massacring the Shi'ites ever since the 7th century, were doing so upon the instruction of what he termed "The Protocols of the Elders of the Sunna." This writer was outraged by the celebrations held in Salt, Jordan on March 10, 2005, in honor of a terrorist of Jordanian origin who had carried out a suicide-bombing attack on a Shi'ite mosque in Hilla in southern Iraq, which left 125 dead and twice as many wounded. The Shi'ite writer argues that the only possible explanation of this Sunni celebration of such a heinous crime, as well as of the long history of Sunni persecution of the Shi'ites, is the existence of an anti-Shi'ite program of Umayyad origin, which instructs the Sunnis to treat the Shi'ites in the most inhuman way in order to eliminate them, "just as the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' instruct the Jews to kill the 'Goyim', even the children, the elderly and the women...in order to achieve their goals."⁴³

Another manifestation of the ubiquity of the *Protocols* in Arab political discourse is the fact that in response to Detlev Mehli's report on the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri, a certain Sa'adun al-Hindawi published an article in which he accused Mehli of acting in accordance with the "Protocols of Zion."⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that the European myth of the Protocols seems to have been readily adopted by fundamentalist Islam and fully integrated in its thought and preaching. Article 32 of the Hamas covenant of 1988 refers to the *Protocols* as follows:

[T]he Zionist plan has no limits, and after Palestine they want to expand [their territory] from the Nile to the Euphrates, and when they finish devouring one area, they hunger for further expansion and so on, indefinitely. Their plan is expounded in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and their present [behavior] is the best proof for what we are saying.⁴⁵

The concept of a supposed Jewish scheme to gain control of the world by corrupting the non-Jewish society and by undermining the political order is now an integral part of the Islamist discourse and a common theme in Friday sermons. It is not even attributed to the *Protocols*, but mentioned as an established well-known fact. The following illustrates the point: in his Friday sermon on May 13, 2005 in Ghaza, Sheikh Ibrahim Mudeiris said,

With the establishment of the state of Israel, the entire Islamic nation was lost, because Israel is a cancer spreading through the body of the Islamic nation, and because the Jews are a virus resembling AIDS, from which the entire world suffers.[...] You will find that the Jews were behind all the civil strife in this world. The Jews are behind the suffering of the nations.⁴⁶



Israeli hands light the fuse of unrest in the neighboring Arab countries.

Published in the Jordanian daily *Al-Ghad*, January 27, 2011
Courtesy of the Middle East Media Research Institute - MEMRI

It would perhaps be appropriate to conclude this article with an example of the relevance of the issue of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the Arab world today. An official tenth-grade history textbook published in 2004 by the Palestinian authority included a chapter on the history of Zionism. The chapter summarized the resolutions of the first Zionist Congress in Basel. After a section in which the book gives a factual presentation of the main official decisions of the Congress, it went on to say:

There are a number of secret decisions issued by the Congress known as 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', which aim at taking control of the whole world. They were exposed by Sergei Nilus and were translated into Arabic by Muhammad Khalifa Al-Tunisi.⁴⁷

The nature of this text was exposed by Dr. Arnon Groiss on a radio program, and this was brought to the attention of the Belgian government, which had financially supported the publication of the book. As a result, the Palestinian Authority published an expurgated edition, from which this passage had been removed.

This episode shows, on the one hand, that this forgery is not only widely disseminated in the Arab world, but is regarded by Arab educators as a historical fact that needs to be taught in school. On the other hand, it demonstrates that exposure and well-directed political action can be effective.

٤- منح حق العضوية لكل يهودي في العالم يلتزم ببرنامج بازل، ويدفع اشتراكاً سنوياً يسمى (شافل).

الشافل:
وحدة نقدية عربية كنعانية استخدمها سكان فلسطين قديماً، وقد أشارت التوراة إلى أن سيدنا إبراهيم اشترى العار الذي دفن فيه زوجته بمبلغ اربعمئة شافل من الفضة من عفرون الحثي الكنعاني.

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وتم اختيار فلسطين لإقامة الوطن القومي للأسباب الآتية:
أ- تقارب المصالح البريطانية الاستعمارية مع أهداف الحركة الصهيونية.
ب- كون فلسطين أسهل من غيرها في تجميع يهود العالم واستثمارهم لبناء الوطن القومي فيها، بسبب اقترانها بالدين اليهودي والذكريات التاريخية القديمة.

الحركة الصهيونية بعد مؤتمر بازل:
واصل هرتسل جهوده من أجل الحصول على موافقة دولية تضمن تحقيق المشروع الصهيوني، فكانت ألمانيا أول دولة توجه إليها هرتسل لسببين:
أ- وجود أعداد كبيرة من اليهود في ألمانيا.
ب- أواصر الصداقة التي تربط ألمانيا بالدولة العثمانية التي كانت فلسطين جزءاً من ممتلكاتها.

اتجه هرتسل أيضاً إلى الدولة العثمانية مباشرة للحصول على موافقة السلطان عبد الحميد الثاني مقابل تقديم مساعدات مالية صهيونية، وشراء ديون الدولة، ولكنه فشل بسبب رفض السلطان العثماني، ومات هرتسل قبل أن يحقق هدفه. وقد واصلت الحركة الصهيونية مساعيها مع بريطانيا التي أصدرت في ٢ تشرين الثاني ١٩١٧م وعد بلفور، الذي يضمن تحقيق المشروع الاستيطاني الصهيوني في فلسطين.

أهداف الحركة الصهيونية:

- ١ إنشاء دولة إسرائيل التي هي الحل للمسألة اليهودية في العالم.
- ٢ الدولة اليهودية تعبير حقيقي ونجسيد لما يعرف بالقومية اليهودية التي يجب أن تشمل جميع يهود العالم.
- ٣ إنشاء هذه الدولة على أرض فلسطين، باعتبارها دولة إسرائيل التاريخية والدينية، ولذلك فهي ملك لليهود.
- ٤ امتلاك هذه الدولة كل مقومات القوة الاقتصادية والعسكرية التي تمكنها من الدفاع والهجوم في وقت واحد، وتقديم خدمات للدول الاستعمارية.

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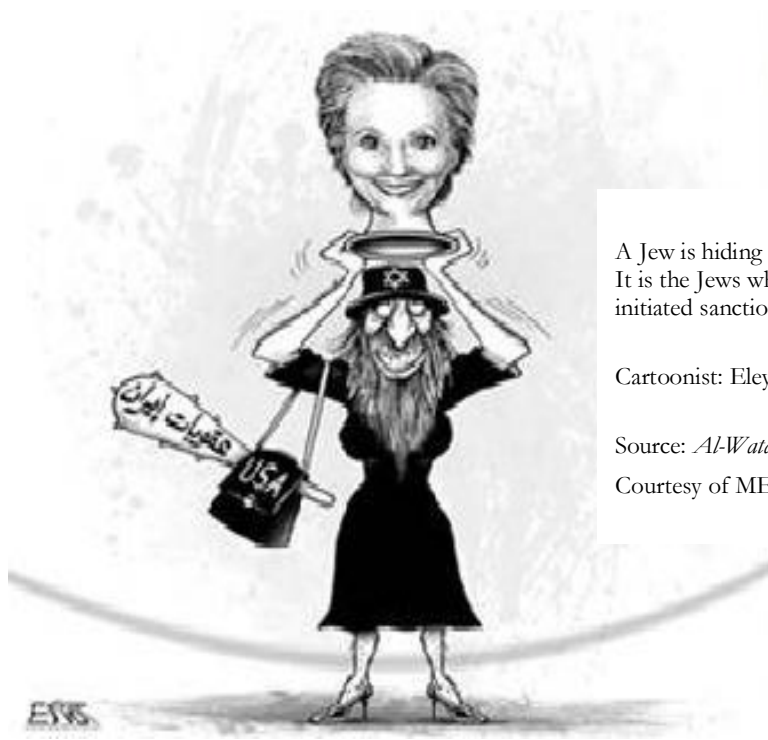
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The Protocols in a Tenth-Grade Textbook

The tenth-grade history textbook published in 2004 by the Palestinian authority before the removal of the paragraph (see left side) and after the removal (see right side).



A Jew is hiding behind Hillary Clinton:
It is the Jews who are behind the American initiated sanctions on Iran

Cartoonist: Eley Saleba

Source: *Al-Watan*, Qatar, February 17, 2010

Courtesy of MEMRI

NOTES

¹ It was translated from the French by an Arab clergyman, Al-Khuri Antoun Yamin, under the title *Mu'amarat al-yahud 'ala al-sbu'ub: al-muqarrarat al-sahyuniyya aw madhabit al-jalawat al-sirriyya li-hukumaa israil* (The Conspiracy of the Jews Against the Peoples of the World, or, The Protocols of the Secret Meetings of the Wise Men of Israel). This translation was based on the 1920 French edition, "La conspiration juive contre les peuples," published in the journal *La Vieille France*. Elyakim Rubinstein published a short study on the Zionist efforts to stop the distribution of this edition of the *Protocols*. See Elyakim Rubinstein, "Ha-Pirteikolim shel Ziqnei Tzion ba-sikhsukh ha-'aravi-yehudi b'Eretz Yisrael bi-shnot ha-'esrim" ("The Protocols of the Elders of Zion in the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine in the 1920s"), *Hamiẓrah Hehadash* vol. 26 (1976), 37-42.

² Cf. *Qur'an*, 2:61, 3:112.

³ Cf. *Qur'an* 3:111.

⁴ Silvia G. Haim, "Arabic Anti-Semitic Literature: Some Preliminary Notes," *Jewish Social Studies*, 17:4 (Oct. 1955).

⁵ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Emdat ha'aravim besikhsukh yisrael 'arav* ("The Arabs' Position in the Arab-Israeli conflict"), (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1968), 207-87.

⁶ The puzzling question of why Middle East scholars neglected this important subject is beyond the scope of this paper. I have dealt with it briefly in my article "What is Arab Anti-Semitism?" *Antisemitism International. An Annual Journal of the Vidal Sassoon International Center* (Jerusalem, 2003), 23-29.

⁷ See EI, 2nd ed., s.v. Nadir, Banu al-

⁸ See EI, 2nd ed., s.v. Kurayza, Banu.

⁹ <http://www.memritv.org/Transcript.asp?P1=922>

¹⁰ <http://switch3.castup.net/cunet/gm.asp?ClipMediaID=159833&ak=null>

¹¹ http://www.islamicweb.com/arabic/shia/ibn_saba_founder.htm

¹² A noteworthy exception is Emil al-Khuri Harb, *Mu'amarat al-yahud 'ala 'l-masihyya* ("The Conspiracy of the Jews against Christianity"), (Beirut, 1947). This small book includes extensive quotations from Yamin's translation.

¹³ *Al-Asas*, Cairo, 23 Nov. 1951.

¹⁴ *Al-Khatar al-Yahudi: Brutukulat Hukama' Sahyun*, trans. Muhammad Khalifa al-Tunisi, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1961), 12.

¹⁵ A. K. Chesterton (1896-1973) was a British Nazi and antisemitic journalist and was a propagator of the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy.

¹⁶ *Al-Khatar al-Yahudi: Brutukulat Hukama' Sahyun*, 14.

¹⁷ 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, *Al-sahyuniyya al-'Alamiyya, Ikharna Lake Series*, no 27 (Cairo, 1956).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 16-17.

¹⁹ An Arabic translation by Sa'id Jaza'irli appeared in Beirut in 1970. By 2001 this translation had been reprinted 14 times.

²⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, 1982), 661.

²¹ See <http://www.islamonline.net/livefatwa/Arabic/Browse.asp?hGuestID=Yk92VR>

²² <http://www.kitabat.com/i8507.htm>

²³ *Roz al-Yusuf* (Egypt), 17 Nov. 2001.

²⁴ See MEMRI's Inquiry and Analysis Series, nos. 109, 113 and 114 (8 Nov., 10 Dec., and 20 Dec. 2002, respectively). A video cassette of the relevant sections with English subtitles is available from MEMRI.

²⁵ *Al-Watan* (Qatar), 29 Nov. 2002.

²⁶ Mark Sayegh, a journalist opposed to the series' broadcast, found an unusual way to express his protest in his weekly column in the London Arabic-language daily *Al-Hayat*. In his article, titled "The Protocols of the Arab Elders: Enough, Egypt... Enough," Sayegh presented a reverse scenario - that is, Israeli television airing a program based on the "Arab conspiracy" to take over the world.

Writing in *Al-Hayat's* movie column, Ibrahim Al-Arabi also opposed the airing of the series. He argued that "the book [i. e., the *Protocols*], is known with certainty to be a 'fabrication' by the Russian

- Czar's secret police aimed at justifying attacks on the Russian Jews. This book always served fascist, racist, and antisemitic regimes...." See MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series No. 109, 8 Nov. 2002, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA10902>
- ²⁷ Al-Ahram (Egypt), 23, 24, 25 Dec. 2002. See MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 454, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP45403>
- ²⁸ A report by 'Ala' Abu al-'Aynayn, Islam Online Net, 11 Jan. 2003.
- ²⁹ Kameran Qurra Dari is presently the head of Iraqi President Jalal Talbani's office.
- ³⁰ <http://www.aljazeera.net/Channel/archive/archive?ArchiveId=90505>
- ³¹ <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=sd&ID=SP62703>
- ³² <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP101105>
- ³³ <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP251709>
- ³⁴ <http://www.arabrenewal.com/index.php?rd=AI&AI0=254>
- ³⁵ *Al-Ayyam* (Palestinian Authority), 28 Mar. 2000. The article is taken from the Lebanese daily *a/-Nabar*.
- ³⁶ <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP175407>
- ³⁷ See MEMRI-TV Clip No. 1413: http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1413.htm
- ³⁸ *Al-Ushbu'* (Egypt), 17 Nov. 2003. MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, No. 619. <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP61903>
- ³⁹ It is of some interest to note here that the correspondent also reports that Dr. Yousef Zeidan published an article in which he stated that the Holocaust did not, in fact, take place, that only one million Jews perished in World War II, among a total of 50 million victims, and that the gas chambers were merely sterilization chambers.
- ⁴⁰ See MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, No. 671, 2 Mar. 2004: <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP67104>
- ⁴¹ Ibid. *Al-Ahram* further reports that Dr. Siraj Al-Din defended his position in a long TV interview and that this position was supported by a petition signed by hundreds of Egyptian intellectuals. In an article in the independent Egyptian weekly *Nabdat Misr*, Salah 'Isa, editor of the Egyptian weekly *Al-Qahira*, criticized the dissemination of antisemitic ideas in the Egyptian media, referring, among other things, to the above incident. See MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, No. 703, 29 Apr. 2004: <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP70304>
- ⁴² <http://www.alsaha.com/sahat/Forum2/HTML/002007.html>. I am indebted to Prof. Isaac Hasson of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for calling my attention to this peculiar document.
- ⁴³ <http://www.shi3at.com/SHI3AT2/june/hasan1.html>
Found on 1 Sept. 2009: <http://majdah.maktoob.com/vb/majdah25615/>
- ⁴⁴ Part 1 (12/11/05) <http://www.kitabat.com/i9895.htm>,
part 2 (13/11/05) <http://www.kitabat.com/i9912.htm>
- ⁴⁵ <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP109206>
- ⁴⁶ <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP90805>
- ⁴⁷ *Tarikh al-'alam al-bdith wa'l-mu'asir* (Modern and Contemporary World History), The State of Palestine Ministry of Education (Ramalla-Al-Bireh, 2004), 63. The preparation of this textbook received financial support from Belgium.