

**ASA'S ANTI-ISRAEL BOYCOTT BIGOTRY, U.S.'S IRAQI JEWISH
ARCHIVES, & PRE-MODERN JEWISH SELF-GOVERNMENT**
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Isranet Daily Briefing, December 20, 2013
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**BOYCOTTING ISRAELI UNIVERSITIES: A VICTORY FOR
BIGOTRY**

Alan M. Dershowitz

[Ha'aretz](#), Dec. 17, 2013

The American Studies Association has just issued its first ever call for an academic boycott. No, it wasn't against China, which imprisons dissenting academics. It wasn't against Iran which executes dissenting academics. It wasn't against Russia whose universities fire dissenting academics. It wasn't against Cuba whose universities have no dissenting academics. It wasn't against Saudi Arabia, whose academic institutions refuse to hire women, gay or Christian academics. Nor was it against the Palestinian Authority, whose colleges refuse to allow open discourse regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. No, it was against only academic institutions in the Jewish State of Israel, whose universities have affirmative action programs for Palestinian students and who boast a higher level of academic freedom than almost any country in the world.

When the association was considering this boycott I issued a challenge to its members, many of whom are historians. I asked them to name a single country in the history of the world faced with threats comparable to those Israel faces that has had a better record of human rights, a higher degree of compliance with the rule of law, a more demanding judiciary, more concern for the lives of enemy civilians, or more freedom to criticize the government, than the State of Israel. Not a single member of the association came up with a name of a single country. That is because there are none. Israel is not perfect, but neither is any other country, and Israel is far better than most. If an academic group chooses to engage in the unacademic exercise of boycotting the academic institutions of another country, it should do it in order of the seriousness of the human rights violations and of the inability of those within the country to seek redress against those violations. By these standards, Israeli academic institutions should be among the last to be boycotted...

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China occupies Tibet, Russia occupies Chechnya and several other countries occupy Kurdish lands. In those cases no offers have been made to end the occupation. Yet no boycotts have been directed against the academic institutions of those occupying countries. When the President of the American Studies Association, Curtis Marez, an associate professor of ethnic studies at The University of California, was advised that many nations, including all of Israel's neighbors, behave far worse than Israel, he responded, "One has to start somewhere." This boycott, however, has not only started with Israel. It will end with Israel. Marez's absurd comment reminds me of the bigoted response made by Harvard's notorious anti-Semitic president A. Laurence Lowell, when he imposed anti-Jewish quotas near the beginning of the twentieth century. When asked why he singled out Jews for quotas, he replied, "Jews cheat." When the great Judge Learned Hand reminded him that Christians cheat too, Lowell responded, "You're changing the subject. We are talking about Jews now."

You would think that historians and others who belong to the American Studies Association would understand that in light of the history of discrimination against Jews, you can't just pick the Jewish State and Jewish universities as the place to "start" and stop. The American Studies Association claims that it is not boycotting individual Israeli professors, but only the universities at which they teach. That is a nonsensical word game, since no self-respecting Israeli professor would associate with an organization that singled out Israeli colleges and universities for a boycott. Indeed, no self-respecting American professor should in any way support the bigoted actions of this association...

Shame on those members of the American Studies Association for singling out the Jew among nations. Shame on them for applying a double standard to Jewish universities. Israeli academic institutions are strong enough to survive this exercise in bigotry. The real question is will this association survive its complicity with the oldest and most enduring prejudice?

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BOYCOTT ME. PLEASE

Martin Kramer

[Foreign Policy](#), Dec. 20, 2013

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I am now subject to a boycott by the American Studies Association (ASA), an organization of professors that includes roughly 5,000 members. The resolution, passed by the organization's rank-and-file on Dec. 15, supposedly doesn't apply to individuals, but it applies to me. The ASA explains: "The American Studies Association understands boycott as limited to a refusal on the part of the ASA in its official capacities to enter into formal collaborations with Israeli academic institutions, or with scholars who are expressly serving as representatives or ambassadors of those institutions (such as deans, rectors, presidents and others) ... until Israel ceases to violate human rights and international law." Since I am the president of Shalem College in Jerusalem, an accredited Israeli academic institution, I'm clearly subject to the ASA boycott. And while my fledgling liberal arts college doesn't have any "formal collaborations" with the ASA, it's the thought that counts.

So just what was the ASA thinking? I don't follow American studies — my field is the Middle East — and until this episode, I hadn't heard of the organization. What I know about such associations comes from the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), an organization of scholars who study the region. Needless to say, MESA has had plenty of boycott advocates among its leadership and rank-and-file. A few years back, they tried to pull MESA onto the boycott cart, but they failed. Boycott advocates haven't tried since, and for good reason: There are just too many people in MESA who know something about the Middle East. And by those standards, it's not self-evident that Israel should be singled out and boycotted for its supposed transgressions. All you have to do is peruse the "intervention letters" sent by MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom. These letters-in-a-bottle to the likes of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan protesting dismissals and show trials of scholars and police violence on campuses are a pretty good indicator of where academic freedom in the Middle East is truly imperiled.

ASA president Curtis Marez acknowledged that some countries in the region have worse human rights records than Israel. However, he then justified the boycott with the unforgettable claim that "one has to start somewhere." If you know nothing about the Middle East, and have made a studied effort not to know more, you might think that "somewhere" is Israel. That's because Israel and the Palestinians get outsized attention — in America. The crimes of others are ignored: What Syrians do to Syrians, Egyptians do to Egyptians, and Iranians do to Iranians — especially to professors — just isn't compelling news, no matter how horrific. In that sense, the boycott resolution perfectly mirrors the U.S.-centric bias of the

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ASA: Everything over the horizon, beyond the continental scope of "American studies," is just a vague blur of media caricatures...

I'm not exactly sure what I should do to get myself off the ASA's blacklist. The organization posed this very question in an explainer about its decision, and could only conclude: "This is a difficult question to answer. The boycott is designed to put real and symbolic pressure on universities to take an active role in ending the Israeli occupation and in extending equal rights to Palestinians." Although this isn't an answer at all, it suggests that I should abandon what I believe under pressure — acting not out of conviction, but out of fear for the fate of my institution. Instead of speaking truth, I am supposed to distort my truth. The boycott presumes that I am akin to a widget exporter, so focused on my bottom line that I can be turned into a lobby for just about any cause with the sufficient application of "pressure."

Here is the fatal flaw in the boycott's design: If I, as a scholar, were to change my tune under "pressure," my credibility would be rightly destroyed, and I would lose my power to convince anyone of anything. Let's say that I'm on a first-name basis with a few Israeli cabinet ministers (I am). According to the boycott's strategy, I should request a meeting with each of them, and tell them it is time to "end the occupation and extend equal rights to Palestinians." "Why?" they would ask. What has changed since the last time we had a conversation? In the past, I spoke out of conviction, in terms of what would best serve the interests of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. So why should they give a whit if, now, I tell them I speak out of fear for the standing of one institution, cherished though it may be? I would not only be unconvincing, I would become contemptible in the eyes of others and, above all, myself.

So I regret to inform the ASA that I will not knuckle under. I would sooner resign my presidency than alter, by one iota, my considered view of what is best for Israel. I may not be right (especially by the standards of the ASA resolution, which, if Peter Beinart's assessment is correct, implies that the best thing for Israel would be its total dissolution). But it is my truth, arrived at freely, and the suggestion that I might be pressured into distorting it presumes that I, and my fellow heads of Israeli universities, lack all intellectual integrity. To which my reply is: Boycott me. Please.

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While we languish under boycott, Shalem College will continue to do our best to bring to Israel the benefits of an American-style education. Ours is the first institution in Israel to find inspiration in the American tradition of the small liberal arts college. Shalem Press, our scholarly imprint, has commissioned and published outstanding Hebrew translations of The Federalist Papers, Thomas Paine's Common Sense, and Alexis de Toqueville's Democracy in America. These works are now assigned in dozens of university courses throughout Israel. We will continue to bring the most important American ideas to Israeli readers in Hebrew. And we will continue to teach our Israeli undergraduates the fundamental ideals behind the world's greatest democracy, and their origins and resonance in the Jewish tradition. Boycott or not.

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**U.S. SHOULD NOT SEND IRAQI JEWISH ARCHIVES
TO BE DESTROYED IN**

**IRAQ
Haidari**

Nabil Al-

[Gatestone Institute](#), Dec. 18, 2013

This fall, two Iraqi experts travelled to the U.S. to study the archival material of Iraq's former Jewish community, in order to prepare measures of conserving it so that they can take care of the archive when it is returned to Iraq. At present, work is progressing rapidly in the branch archives in College Park by a team of experts with high-tech equipment for cleaning and restoration and digitization of records and documents. It is strange that there is much talk today about sending the Jewish archives next year to the Iraqi Department of Antiquities in Baghdad, although it is not clear where it is to be kept or exhibited. The question is: How can the archives be sent back to Iraq without real guarantees for its preservation, maintenance and access, particularly as the government claims it has multiples of that volume in Iraq? If so, why does the government not fully conserve and maintain the already existing volumes and then place them in museums and exhibit them so they can be of use? The other question is: Where are the rights of the Jews of Iraq today? If the Iraqi government acknowledges their great history, it should return to them their citizenship, first and foremost. In the First Interfaith Conference convened in Suleimania last year this author demanded that they be given their parliamentary seats, just like other religions, then have returned to

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them all property and assets unjustly and wrongfully plundered, and be compensated for the great losses they suffered. How can the archive be returned without its true owners? Such a act is unreasonable and unacceptable.

The Iraqi Jewish archive includes a large number of valuables, pictures and documents of the Jews of Iraq. The archive was kept by the previous regime in terrible conditions, partially immersed in water and exposed to damage. It was discovered by U.S. forces accidentally while searching for weapons of mass destruction. The archive was found in a flooded basement cellar and managed to be collected and dispatched to the National Archives in the United States for restoration, maintenance and preservation. The Jews of Iraq, almost all of whom either fled the country or were killed, contend that the archive should not be sent to Baghdad, and are demanding that the U.S. authorities not to hand over the documents to the Iraqi government. Today there remain in Iraq only seven Jews, according to the *New York Times*, whereas they once made up a third of the population of Baghdad, according to Mir Basri in his book about the Jews of Iraq, in which wrote about more than 100 individuals who contributed to building modern Iraq.

If there are still many Iraqis who regard Jews — and now Christians who are being massacred — as less than human, why should they regard their archives as worth more? The truth is that the Holy Quran considers the Jews as people of the book, and Moses is their prophet to whom God gave the Torah. There are dozens of verses that favor them in the Quran, such as the verse "we gave the people of Israel the book, the wisdom, the prophecy and provided them with sustenance and exalted them among the nations of the world". And the Quran described the Torah as light and guidance from Allah. Many of the shrines of Jewish prophets are still in Iraq, such as that of the Prophet Nahum, in the village of Alqosh near Mosul; the Prophet Heskell [Ezekiel] in the village of Kifl near Hilla; Ezra in Qurna where the two rivers meet; Joshua in Al-Karkh in Baghdad; Daniel in Kirkuk close to the castle; Ezair in Basra in an area called by his name; as well as countless other personalities and scholars. These people should be honored, celebrated and glorified as they live on in the hearts and minds of the honorable and the faithful. History underlines their achievements in letters of gold immortal through the ages.

A meeting was convened in London by a large number of Iraqi Jews, there were demands that their archives be kept outside Iraq; they include an important part

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of their heritage, their history, their life and their personalities. Already, one man has claimed that some of these documents refer to him personally, and as such he is the sole owner and that they have been seized from him unjustly and wrongfully. According to Dr. Harold Rhode, the archives — which are scheduled to be returned to the Iraqi government in June — are stolen property to begin with; sending them to back Iraq would be like sending back to Germany property stolen from the Jews by the Nazis. At the meeting, Edwin Shuker spoke of the archive and its importance, displaying a number of documents transferred from Iraq to America in 2003. They had been found in the underground cellar of the Iraqi Intelligence Center, immersed in water and about to disintegrate save for the last-minute efforts of the U.S. Army.

One of the most important items displayed by Shuker was his own school certificate that he said is part of his history, his life, his core relationship and his love for Baghdad, where he recalls his little house in the Batawin area. The archive contains many such personal documents, for example, a photograph of Farah Sheena, aged thirteen, a young girl with dark hair, taken during her studies at the intermediate school in Baghdad, where she was an elite student. According to her brother, Sami Sheena, Farah died of cancer in England in 1968, at the age of 29, leaving behind a husband and two small children. Doris Hamburg, Director of Programs for the Preservation of Archives, said that the record of Farah Sheena was one among nearly 2,700 books and tens of thousands of documents retrieved from the destroyed cellar of the secret police in Baghdad. Also discovered was a 400 year-old Hebrew Bible, a 200-year-old Talmud originally from Vienna; and a small Passover Haggadah, kept by the former Iraqi regime but stored in a despicable state, exposed to damage and flooding. There was also a French prayer book dating back to 1930, and a collection of beautifully printed speeches by a Rabbi in Germany from the year 1692. There are also folders filled with school records of students from 1920 to 1975.

Most of the Jews were forced out of Iraq by means of the farhud [seizing of property, pogrom] murder, imprisonment and withdrawal of citizenship, leaving behind traces of a rich history dating back 2,500 years. The archive shows clearly that the Jews were immensely distinguished in various political, social and economic fields. There is no doubt that Iraq owes a lot to the Jews of Iraq in terms of its history, development and prosperity. In contemporary history, to name a few, Sir Sasson Heskell, one of the best 20th century finance ministers of the Middle East, and the first finance minister who served Iraq with distinction. Among other accomplishments, he negotiated with Great Britain for oil revenue payments

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be made in gold instead of paper currency — a far-sighted request since soon after, the currency depreciated and gold climbed to considerable heights. He was bitterly mourned by many; the poet Ma'rouf Al- Risaffi said: "Do not say he died/ But that fine men lost a star/ We lost in a darkly night /The master of Parliament when he speaks."...

A petition was written to the U.S. Administration; it was signed by many attendees, appealing to the Administration not to return the archives to Iraq, as they constituted a natural right of Iraqi Jews after all the tribulations, tragedies, displacement and suffering that they had endured. This intervention represents a call for preserving this history and its glories, as well as striving to restore usurped rights for a community with a brilliant 3000 year history that has exceeded the Muslims and Christians. A great history of three thousand years cannot be erased by fifty years of suffering, distress and displacement, and will remain immortal written in letters of gold — good people of various religions and sects coexisted together and intermarried and lived with affection, integration, harmony and peace. The place of the United States is to save a heritage, not to be complicit in destroying it



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JEWISH SELF-GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE WAS NOT JUST A DREAM—

IT WAS A FAILURE

Moshe Rosman

[Tablet](#), Dec. 16, 2013

The Council of Four Lands (Va'ad Arba Aratzot) was the most elaborate and highly developed institutional structure in European Jewish history—a national council or parliament that existed from the mid-16th century to the 18th and whose decisions affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews and sought to coordinate the policies and actions of hundreds of communities in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Born in the last quarter of the 16th century out of congresses of religious leaders and elders during great fairs in civic centers such

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as Lublin, the central institution emerged to serve local groups as supreme legislative, administrative, and—sometimes—judicial body.

In the absence of Jewish sovereignty anywhere in the world, the Council of Four Lands (usually connoting as well the Council of Lithuania with which it often worked in concert) served both as a reminder of Jewish sovereignty in the past and as a harbinger of the promised messianic Jewish state of the future. As the wine merchant and memoirist Ber of Bolechow, an 18th-century Polish Jew, noted: “This [Council] was for the Children of Israel a measure of Redemption and a bit of honor.” Communication between the Va’ad (council) and Jewish communities outside of Poland was not standard or even commonplace, so its decisions and actions became known abroad only serendipitously. The very fact of its existence, however, aroused feelings of admiration. Rabbi Avraham Halevi, who lived in Egypt in the early 18th century asserted: “Poland is a great city of God and every pronouncement made there is spread to all the cities of Ashkenaz.” The Sephardi rabbis of Amsterdam wrote to the Va’ad, in 1671, addressing their letter to those whose “fortress [authority] extends over the entire community of the Exile.”

It is noteworthy that these foreign observers spoke as if the Va’ad were a rabbinic body, or at least one led or dominated by rabbis. The sources make it clear, however, that the Va’ad’s members and leaders were mostly laymen and its authority did not derive from rabbinic sanction. For most of its existence, even rabbis who did sit on the Va’ad did so as representatives of their communities and not by virtue of their rabbinic office or training. Recent scholarship may have created an optical illusion that might make it easy for determined secularists, anti-Zionists, and modern-day Haredim alike to anachronistically imagine the Council of the Four Lands as a quasi-democratic body that functioned on European soil without instruments of coercion and without the bothersome trappings of a state—an alternate model for Jewish autonomy, outside the Middle East.

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[Some Lessons in Effective Scapegoating](#): Jeffrey Goldberg, *Bloomberg*, Dec. 16, 2013 — In the matter of the American Studies Association's just-ratified boycott of Israeli academic institutions, one must be thankful that the organization's president, Curtis Marez, is something of a dolt.

[Discovery and Recovery: Preserving Iraqi Jewish Heritage \(Online Exhibition\)](#): *U.S. National Archives*, Nov., 2013 — On May 6, 2003, the 16 American soldiers from Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha, a group assigned to search for nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, entered the flooded intelligence headquarters. The basement housed thousands of documents and books that were under four feet of water.

[Discovery and Recovery: Behind the Scenes Work on the Iraqi Jewish Archive \(Video\)](#): *U.S. National Archives*, 2013

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