

ARABS AS PORTRAYED IN THE ISRAELI HEBREW LITERATURE  
SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

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Submitted by the family of the late Benjamin Friedman

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This thesis has been submitted by the Family of the late Benjamin Friedman.

## BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Mr Benjamin Friedman was enrolled as a student of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. He was working on a thesis for the degree of Doctor Litterarum in Semitic languages with Professor E J Smit as his promoter. He had done a massive amount of research on the modern Israeli Hebrew literature when he passed away. He was unable to bring his research to completion. This study is therefore an unfinished work, reflecting his research into the primary sources. It is lamentable that he was unable to integrate his research on the secondary sources in this work, this being the main shortfall of this unfinished work. Also lacking was a summary of the main conclusions he reached emanating from his research. To add to the value of this work, I have written a final chapter summarising Mr Friedman's conclusions. This chapter adds no new material to that which Mr Friedman had done, but presents his conclusions in a structured summary, referring quite often by page number (in brackets) to Mr Friedman's own work. The late Mr Friedman's work was submitted by his family for the award of the degree Magister Artium. In the examination the additional chapter was not taken into account. This work is the late Benjamin Friedman's monument, and the final chapter is dedicated to his memory.

H F VAN ROOY

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ARABS AS PORTRAYED IN THE ISRAELI HEBREW LITERATURE  
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Introduction

The romantic - nostalgic approach prevalent in the Israeli Hebrew literature in the years of the Twenties and Thirties.

Review

Modern Hebrew literary critics draw the line between two distinct periods dealing with the topic. The first - the years 1920-1930; the second - the outbreak of the Second World War, the years since 1940. Both differ radically in their approach to the topic. Writers of the first period see the Arabs romantically, like a myth of bygone days. The writers of the later period see the Arabs as a problem, and their portrayal is more realistic.

The writers, who arrived in Eretz Israel with the second and third aliyah (immigration wave) in the years 1904-1914, and then after the First World War in the years 1919-1923, hailed from Eastern Europe. They were familiar with the landscape of Eastern Europe; they found the scenery of Eretz Israel strange and exotic. The Negev, the Galil, the Arab villages, the Bedouin and their tents, the camels, the citrus groves, the palm trees, the cypresses, the eucalyptus trees (introduced to Eretz Israeli soil from Australia as a means of eliminating the swamps) with their white stems and willowy drooping branches, all made a deep impression upon the young Chalutzim and caught their imagination.

Nurtured by the early Zionist movement, 'Friends of Zion', these writers had the sensational feeling that the ancient Eretz Israel, so vividly reflected in the Bible, had come alive again and they instinctively imagined the Arabs to be the people of the Bible. It was like a dream fulfilled. During the second aliyah the opinion prevailed that the fellahin, the Arab peasants, were none other than Jewish farmers who had been forcibly compelled to abandon their

religion - their Jewish faith - during persecutions and evil decrees on Jews in Europe (according to Israel Balkind, author of the book, Eretz Israel of our Times). The Arab fellahin were, in fact, the descendants of the Jewish people, who were the inhabitants of Eretz Israel before the present era.

The literature of the Twenties was like a direct continuation of the literature of the Biblical Epoch bemoaning the weeping of Hagar and the outcry of Esau.

The writers, Moshe Smilansky, Yehuda Burla, Moshe Stavy (Stavsky), Pesach Bar Adon, and Yakob Churgin, described the Arabs and their way of life in an exact forthright way, but the majority of Hebrew writers mentioned the Arabs indirectly while describing the Jewish Settlers, their problems and struggles. In all the literary efforts of the Israeli Hebrew writers, the Arabs appeared inseparable from Jewish reality in Eretz Israel.

The Hebrew writers who described the Arabs of this period differ greatly in their approach to the subject.

Moshe Smilansky, who introduced this topic in the Hebrew literature and wrote the first novel on the Arab way of life, was himself a great friend of the Arabs and greatly respected by them. His style was that of a sentimentalist, charmed by their romanticism and simplicity, which were characteristic of the Arabs and their mode of life at that period.

A similar line was adopted by all the writers who came to Israel with the second and third aliyah. They carried high the ideals of the early Chalutzim, to get to know the Arabs intimately, to work with them to drain the swamps, to combat malaria, and to cultivate the land.

On the other hand, the writers Jehuda Burla, Yitzchak-Shamai, Yakob Churgin, Moshe Stavy and Nahum Yerushalmi were born and bred in the land of Eretz Israel. They featured the Arabs in a genuine and true portrayal.

This study is broadly concerned with the Arabs, the various Bedouin tribes, and the Druze, starting with the Turkish rule in Palestine and with particular stress on our present era, specifically from the beginning of the Second World War. It deals with Arabs in the South of Palestine, at the foot of the Hermon and the mountains of the Lebanon, Arabs living at the border of Syria, Transjordan, and the Arabian Peninsula, and Arabs of the countries of Arabia itself, all of whom have been reflected in Hebrew literature.