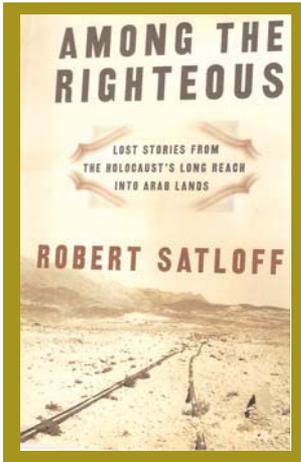


Of Unsung Arab Heroes



If you ever had an illusion of surplus or saturation in the area of the Holocaust historiography, you cannot afford it any longer. In his *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*, leading American expert on Middle East Robert Satloff makes us aware of an ocean of deficit instead in the field. He



Jewish workers en route to a forced labour camp in Tunisia

AMONG THE RIGHTEOUS: LOST STORIES FROM THE HOLOCAUST'S LONG REACH INTO ARAB LANDS.

AUTHOR: ROBERT SATLOFF

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Jerusalem has honoured over 21310 of them --- Good Samaritans among the Arabs also came forward. But ironically, none has sung their song so far . Among such unsung heroes, he finds, there were ordinary mortals "who would share what they had with the Jews-their small huts, their meagre food, their tattered clothes. And when the Germans would come looking for the Jews, the Arabs would say they are their cousins." An Arab would hide a pretty young Jewish mother on his farm away from the sexual predations of a depraved Nazi officer. In Vienna an Egyptian would help his

tells us what the Holocaust historiography has long overlooked : the saga of over half a million Jews in the

Like those much -praised non-Jews in Europe, including Turkey, Bosnia and Albania, and in faraway Brazil, Japan and China, who helped out with whatever they had their neighbours of life- time facing threat to life, liberty, dignity and what not, Good Samaritans among the Arabs also came forward . But none has sung their song so far, laments renowned American expert on Middle East **ROBERT SATLOFF in the enterprise under review.**

Arab land during Nazi Germany , Italian Fascism and Vichy France and the response thereto of the Arabs in their own land as well as in mainland Europe .

Rob tells us in the enterprise the behaviour of Arabs conformed to the pattern shown by other non-Jews elsewhere during the crisis. While there were amongst them Nazi collaborators, persecution cheerleaders and passive neutrals , there were righteous ones too . Like those much -praised non-Jews in Europe, including Turkey, Bosnia and Albania, and in faraway Brazil, Japan and China , who helped out with whatever they had their neighbours of life- time facing threat to their life, liberty, dignity and what not--- Yad Vashem in



SS Col. Walter Rauff who led Nazi efforts to terrorise the Jews of Tunisia.

Jewish sweetheart and other members of her family migrate to London. And there were also some important Arab personalities who would even put themselves at great risks to help out the Jews : Morocco's Sultan Muhammad V, Tunisia's wartime leader Moncef Bey, Prime Minister Mohammed Chenik, former Mayor of Tunis Si Ali Sakkat , Si

Kaddour Benghabrit of Great Mosque in Paris, Egyptian



Wartime leader Moncef Bey: remembered with affection by Tunisian Jews

'Arab Wallenberg' in Berlin and so on .

Rob deserves applause for his painstaking efforts in this whole exercise . To tell these lost stories he has worked hard a good five years starting his research in the basement of his house in Washington to basing himself, along with his wife and two children, to Rabat in order to have a

direct feel of the region once under the Nazi control or influence. He has visited a dozen countries involving professional researchers and volunteers to conduct interviews, translate numerous testimonies and documents into English and track down obscure records, books and memoirs. Rob has been to places near former labour camps and Jewish hiding shelters and met some



Tunisian Prime Minister Mohamed Chernik who saved Jews at his own risk

of the surviving octogenarians and whomever he thought could give him any information in his research. Doing all this has not been an easy exercise . Many Arabs (or their heirs), Rob found, would still not like to be found. They would deny themselves the status of heroes. The Jewish population in the Arab land also preferred silence on their persecution of the time as part of their overall strategy for survival. They would even sound fiercely devoted to their rulers and say what the latter wanted to listen. Rob had to be , what he might prefer to say, "hard" to get his stories.

The author deserves accolades also for his style of narration in the enterprise. The language of the book is simple. He has used shorthand terms such as Arabs and

Jews to refer to the two main groups of people in the region . This approach is specifically helpful to non-specialists and laymen in comprehending the nature of the fundamental friction in the region and automatically moving towards exploring their possible remedies. One would suggest the book may be translated in the languages of all countries with sizeable Muslim population. The resultant popular awareness should help building harmony between clashing communities in the region..

Rob has rightly suggested there is a need to go beyond what he describes as " part history , part travelogue , part memoir," bring out more stories of good souls among the Arabs and prepare "a comprehensive account" on the subject. The Arab opinion on the Holocaust has long been misguided by the region's politicians of all hues and their allies in their own short- term , petty interests . In the process the dominant impression that has prevailed in the region is that the Holocaust has been invented by the Christians and Jews just to win sympathy for Jews and create Israel out of the land of Arabs. Telling the Arabs their own true versions of the Holocaust may help in dissipating this culture of hatred and finally leading them to accept the reality of Israel and peaceful co-existence with Jews as a far better option . Democracy could be meaningfully assertive in the Middle East only if the knowledge of truth spread amongst the masses.

Besides, the suggested account might bring some relief to those Jews who suffered in the labour camps during the genocide in the Arab land but have remained undiscovered so far. Trends are positive . Rob's work has already helped convince Berlin to offer compensation to thousands of the discovered ones.

Future historians and researchers would do well to seize the opportunity. Rob has wisely counseled in the book , "There is still a treasure chest history waiting to be discovered. Time is short. Witnesses are dying and their stories are also dying with them."



Tunis Mayor Si Ali Sakkat who sheltered Jews fleeing a labour camp



Khaled Abdelwahhab : An Arab guardian angel

— Jagdish N Singh