

The First Ember and a Mind's Plight: Translated Stories of Ya'aqub Bilbul (Ya'akov Lev)

Arielle Korman

B.A. Thesis

Languages and Cultures

of the Middle East



Ya'aqub and Blanche Bilbul, Baghdad 1950

- (from "The First Ember and A Mind's Plight: Selections in Arabic and Hebrew)

1) Who was Ya'aqub Bilbul?

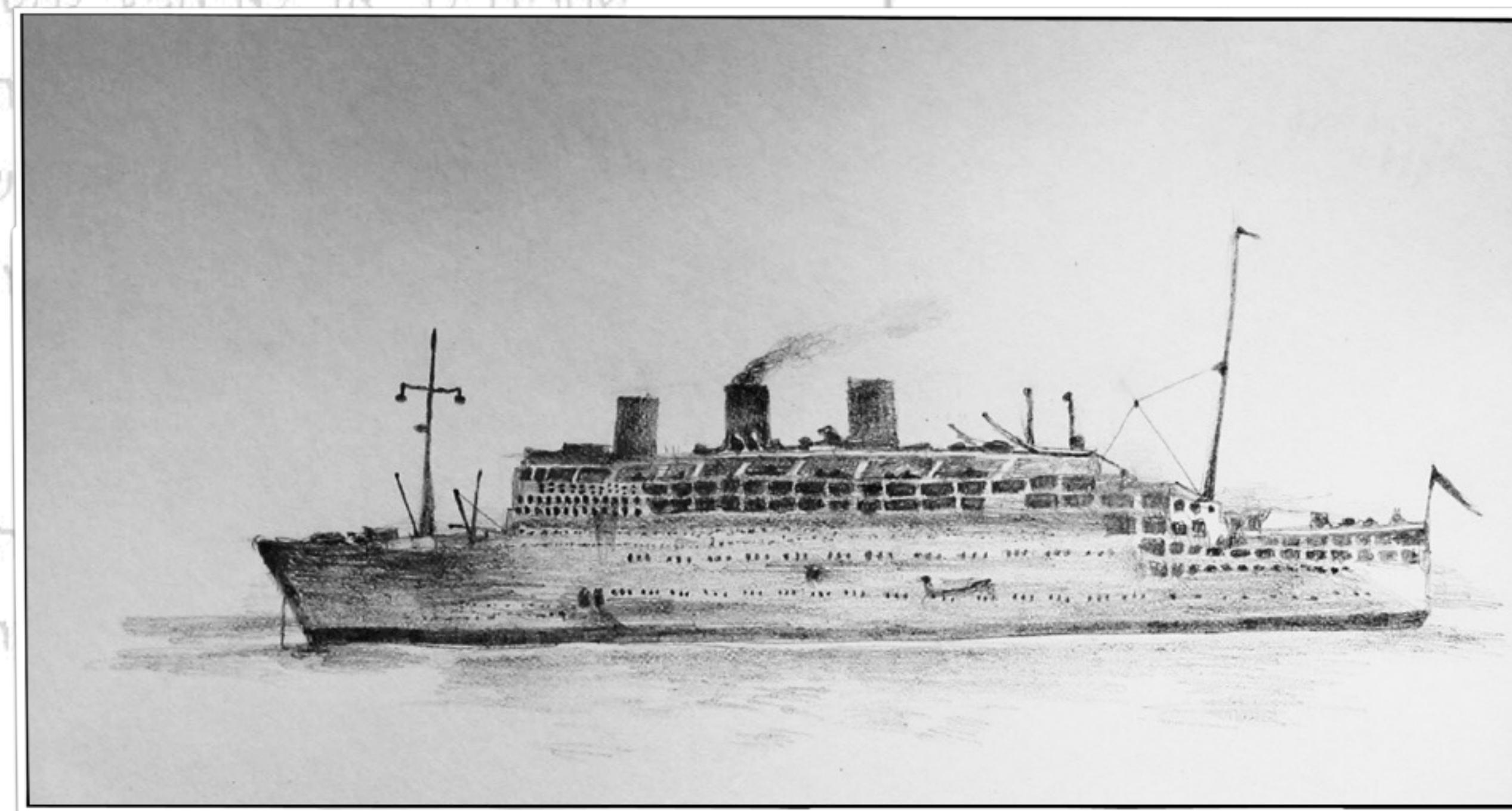
Born in Iraq in 1920, Bilbul was a Jewish-Iraqi writer, journalist, and businessperson. He was among the last generation of Jews to live and thrive in Iraq.

2) History of Jews in Iraq

Jews inhabited Mesopotamia for over 2,000 years. In the first half of the 20th century, most Jews in Iraq lived in Baghdad, which writer Nissim Rejwan

"He looked outside, finding an overcast sky and heavy black clouds. The rain would not stop pouring on this dismal country... he felt that night that his home was far away. All that was inside of him and all that surrounded him said, in one voice: *return*."

-From "The Return" by Ya'aqub Bilbul



Pencil Drawing by Arielle Korman: Illustration for "The Return"

remembers as a "Jewish city." Coercion by the Iraqi government led nearly all Iraq's Jews to immigrate to Israel in the 1950's.

3) Reading and Translation

Translating literature of Jews writing in Arabic challenges the dichotomy of "Arab" and "Jew." Bilbul wrote stories and poems, which demonstrate intellectualism and deep Iraqi patriotism.

Some challenges and questions to consider in translating:

- Dealing with repetition and strings of adjectives in Arabic
- American or British English?
- Maintaining certain words in the original language