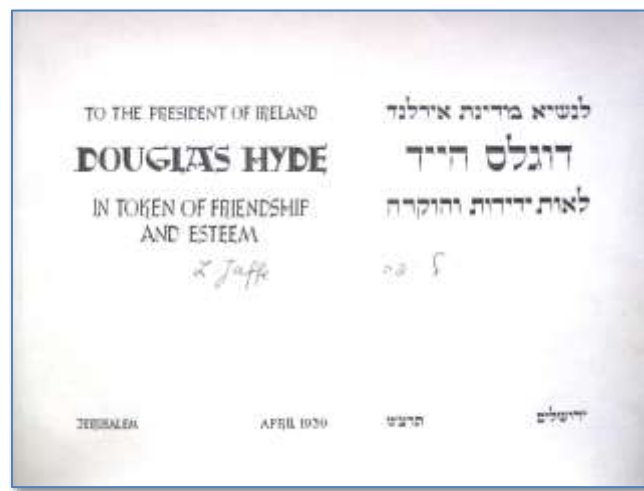


## Irish Connection: Leib Jaffe Encounters the Gaels

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On 1 November 1990, Christie's in London placed on auction photographs taken in Palestine during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> On 7 October, Prof. Shimon Gibson, then the photography curator of the Palestine Exploration Fund, had provided me with prior notification that among the items was an album of aerial photographs of Palestine. He expressed the hope that the album would find its way to Israel, to the archives of aerial photos of Palestine in the Department of Geography of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Many photographs, including some from the air, were taken in Palestine by travellers and researchers, as well as by members of foreign military units serving there during World War I. Many of those photographs were collected in albums, but the album in this auction was unique in comparison to others. Leib Jaffe, a senior official of the Zionist movement, presented it to Eire's President Douglas Hyde in April 1939.



A photo album is a collection of pages of photography bound together in book form. Albums generally include a selection of photos whose subject matter explains why they were chosen and collected, whether as a commemoration, a souvenir, or a token of appreciation. What led to the creation of the album or the reason for its presentation, and the relationship between the giver and the receiver, is at times more intriguing than its content. In the case of the present album, the relationship between the two persons involved – Leib Jaffe and the first president of Ireland – in the months that preceded the outbreak of World War II is both strange and intriguing.

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<sup>1</sup> '19th and 20th Century Photographs', *Christie's*, 1 Nov. 1990, p. 92.

## **The Zionist Emissary**

Leib Jaffe (1876–1948) was known as an intellectual, poet, writer, and journalist. In his hometown of Grodno (in present-day Belarus) he composed poems in Russian, edited anthologies, and translated into Russian the works of Jewish national poets and other Jewish writers and philosophers. In 1920, he immigrated to Palestine where he played an active role on the Zionist Commission established to lay the foundations for a Jewish national home, following the declaration to that effect by Britain's foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour, on 2 November 1917.

In 1920, a Zionist fundraising and educational organization, called Keren Hayesod,<sup>2</sup> was established in London primarily to raise funds among Jewish communities throughout the world for that purpose. In 1926, the year in which Keren Hayesod transferred its headquarters from London to Jerusalem, Leib Jaffe was appointed its director. He filled that post until he was killed when a car bomb exploded in the courtyard of the Zionist national institutions in Jerusalem on 11 March 1948.

During all these years, Jaffe continued his literary efforts while directing the major fundraising arm of the Zionist movement. He spent much time abroad as an emissary of Keren Hayesod, raising funds for the development of the Jewish community in Palestine and its institutions, while encouraging the spirit of Jews in the Diaspora.<sup>3</sup> On these journeys, he often developed relationships with political leaders and intellectuals in the countries he visited.

## **‘The Pleasant Little Branch’**

President Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), the recipient of the album sent by Leib Jaffe, was a linguist and scholar of Gaelic. He was also a poet, writer, and playwright. From June 1938 to June 1945, including the entire period of World War II, he served as Eire's first president. In 1893 he was one of the founders and president of the Gaelic League for the preservation and revival of the Irish language, publishing many pieces under the pen name An Craoibhin Aoibhinn (The Pleasant Little Branch).<sup>4</sup> He was

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, ‘The Founding Fund’.

<sup>3</sup> Diaspora is the term used to denote Jewish communities outside of Eretz Israel (The Land of Israel) and present-day Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Denis Joseph Dickey and James E. Doherty, *A Dictionary of Irish History since 1800* (Dublin, 1980), 234; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 29, p. 118.

also influential in making the study of Gaelic mandatory in Irish schools. For Hyde and his colleagues, the revival of Gaelic was a step on the road to national independence and an act of historical justice performed in their ancient language after years of subjugation to the British crown. As the League became more politicized, in 1915, he resigned from its presidency and devoted himself to academic activity. In 1921, an agreement was reached to partition Ireland, and in 1937 the Irish laid the foundations for the modern state of Ireland. Douglas Hyde was elected as their first president in 1938, admired national figure about whom there were no differences of opinion.

### **One Preached Zionism, the Other Called for Donations**

During his many fundraising missions abroad, Leib Jaffe made several visits to Great Britain and Ireland – especially to Belfast in Northern Ireland, the last in 1941. In late 1931, on his way to Belfast, he visited the small Jewish community in Dublin. During the first part of his visit there, Jaffe was accompanied by Osmond d'Avigdor-Goldsmid, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and, from 1926 to 1933, chairperson for the Jewish Agency for Palestine in London. English-speaking d'Avigdor-Goldsmid preached Zionism, while Leib Jaffe talked about donations. In the course of their visit, which began on 1 October 1931, several receptions were held in their honour. They were received by Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog and were his guests for dinner, followed by a reception attended by about 250 persons. Later they met with some forty leading members of the Jewish community, and with the mayor of Dublin, who took an interest in developments in Palestine. When invited for tea by the British governor-general, d'Avigdor-Goldsmid answered questions, put to them by their host, Jaffe spoke in Hebrew, which Rabbi Herzog translated. The latter introduced Jaffe to the governor: 'Mr. Jaffe has been here two weeks from Palestine. The other Jews, who are present, have been away from Eretz Yisrael for eighteen centuries'.<sup>5</sup> Jaffe also met with the Daughters of Zion women's organization and Irish journalists. In addition, he was asked to find a way to a member of the Irish Senate, Lady Desart, a generous Jewish philanthropist, who at the time was considered the most important Jewish female politician in the history of Ireland, and was a member of the Gaelic League.

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<sup>5</sup> Leib Jaffe to Keren Haysod Head Office, Jerusalem, 18 Nov. 1931, Central Zionist Archives (CZA), A13/350.

## **The Irish Ben-Yehuda**

Coming from the Hebrew-speaking Jewish community in Palestine, Jaffe was surprised to encounter the heated debate over the Gaelic, what should be Ireland's first official language. His Irish hosts wished to learn about the successful revival of Hebrew, on the assumption that language encourages national consciousness in countries under foreign domination. While in Finland they speak Finnish, their native tongue, the Irish speak English. Revival of Gaelic did not interest most Irishmen. They believed that the hegemony of the English language did not result from British domination but rather from a belief that Gaelic would have a diverse effect on their development.<sup>6</sup> Jaffe could not miss the competition between English and Gaelic. He could witness the tension between the two languages in street signs, names of institutions, on coins and stamps, and even in the back pages of newspapers. But, wherever he went, he heard only English. When lecturing in Jerusalem on impressions of his visit to Ireland, Jaffe related that among those whom he met in Dublin was a young man, the son of the head of the Zionist Organization in Dublin, who spoke Gaelic and Hebrew. He proposed that he should arrange for Jaffe to meet with Dr. Douglas Hyde, 'the Irish Ben-Yehuda',<sup>7</sup> who has devoted his life to the revival of Gaelic.

In his workrooms, both at home and at the university, Hyde showed his guest illuminated manuscripts in a language strange to Jaffe, and described his own struggle for revival of the language that had been replaced by English during the three centuries since Cromwell's oppression. He was saddened by the fact that only a few still spoke Gaelic, and these were elderly people, mostly country folk. He bemoaned the fact that Members of Parliament spoke English, and that even teachers of Gaelic in the schools did not have a command of the language. He proudly mentioned a class of about twenty students of Gaelic in Dublin, and that a few books were published in that language during the past few years. He was most interested to know how Hebrew was so successful in Palestine if only two boys in Jerusalem spoke modern Hebrew in Jerusalem two decades ago. Jaffe proudly related that Hebrew had become the living language of the Jewish population in Palestine in schools and textbooks, in science and literature, and that hundreds of Hebrew books were published each year. Prime Minister William Thomas Cosgrave, who found time for a short courtesy talk with Jaffe in Parliament, also highly praised the revival of Hebrew thanks to the efforts of

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<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'Why Hebrew Is Living and Irish Gaelic Is Dying', *The Times Saturday*, 9 Nov. 1996.

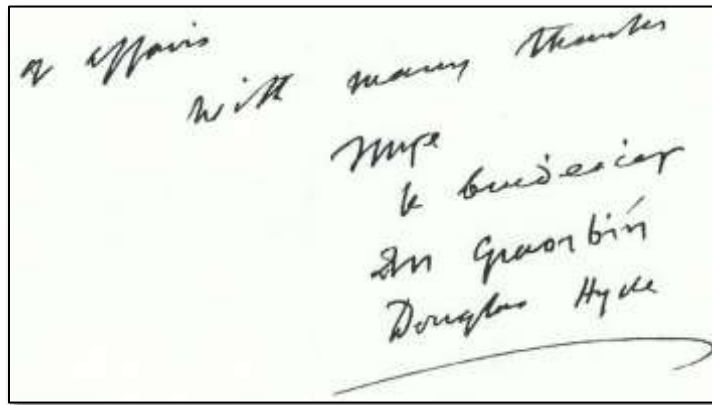
<sup>7</sup> Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922) was the driving spirit behind the revival of Hebrew as a modern language.

idealistic Jews. That evening, Jaffe was invited to listen to young girls and boys singing Hebrew songs. He summed up his impression: ‘Despite the gloomy sky and foggy night of a strange country, these sounds embody for me the glorious sunrises of Palestine’.<sup>8</sup>

### The Parallel

On 21 April 1938, while on a visit to Canada, Jaffe met with the British governor-general in Ottawa. The governor was a faithful friend and was pleased to hear first-hand reports of events in Palestine. He also intimately proposed to Jaffe the settlement of Jews in British Columbia. At the end of their conversation, Jaffe informed the governor that an album of photographs was on the way to him from Palestine, as a token of friendship and appreciation.

During his sojourn in Canada, Jaffe learned that Douglas Hyde had been elected president of Ireland. Since their meeting in 1931 had been both friendly and scholarly, focusing on the revival of ancient languages, Jaffe – in the spirit of their past relationship – sent him a congratulatory message. Hyde replied warmly, recalled their pleasant discussion about Palestine, expressed his hope that the situation there is less severe than that reported in the newspapers, and signed in English and with his Gaelic pen name.



### An Craoibín

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<sup>8</sup> Leib Jaffe, ‘The “Ben Yehuda” of the Irish People – Speaking Irish and Hebrew: Impression of a Visit to Erin’s Isle’. Extracted from *The Zionist Record*, 16 Dec. 1932, CZA, A13/342.

These were the years of the ‘Arab Rebellion’ in Palestine (1936–1939) and after publication of the report of the Royal Commission (‘Peel Commission’) in the fall of 1937, which proposed the partition of Palestine. Ireland was represented in the discussion of that proposal at the League of Nations by Prime Minister Eamon de Valera, a leader of the Irish struggle for independence from Great Britain. De Valera opposed partition of Palestine in view of the precedent of the partition of Ireland, and due to his negative attitude to the British proposal. He did not believe that partition would result in reconciliation between Arabs and Jews; moreover, he feared that Catholic interests in the Holy Land would be impaired. On 14 October 1937, Rabbi Herzog wrote to de Valera to convince him of the legitimacy of the Zionist stand. He described the former desolation of Palestine and the great change in its landscape through Jewish efforts, adding that the history of the Irish ‘offers so many parallels with the history of Israel’.<sup>9</sup> In time, a relationship developed between the Irish, who supported the Jewish struggle against Great Britain, and the underground group led by the future prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Shamir, who was influenced by the career of Irish underground fighter Michael Collins, and even adopted ‘Michael’ as his underground pseudonym. But, in 1937, it was Irish bitterness against the British that tipped the scales.

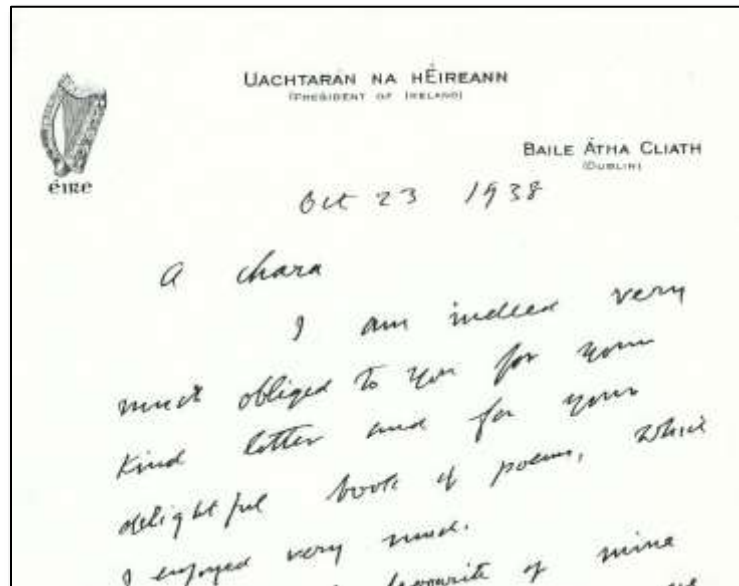
Leib Jaffe’s many tiring journeys abroad hampered his literary activity, but when a collection of twenty-six of his poems, originally written in Yiddish and Russian, appeared in an English translation, he still had a copy in hand to send to Hyde, who was also a poet.<sup>10</sup> These were poems about the Land of Israel and its landscape by a poet who devoted most of his life to travelling from one Jewish community to another singing the praises of that land. On 23 October 1938, Hyde thanked him and repaid Jaffe in the same currency with a poem, which was one of his own favourites, ‘The Parallel’, that same parallel noted by Rabbi Herzog in his letter to de Valera. The opening line hinted at the close relationship of the two nations, as if they were two parallel lines drawing closer to each other; and one interpretation even hinted that the

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Shulamit Eliash, ‘De Valera and the Palestine Partition Plan’ [in Hebrew], *Cathedra* 97 (Sept. 2000), pp. 117–148, esp. p.139; CZA, J1/7628.

<sup>10</sup> Leib Jaffe, *I Sang My Song of Zion: Poems*, tr. Sylvia Satten (Tel Aviv, 1936). The book’s title is that of the first poem in the collection.

Irish had their origins in the Jews: ‘Yes, sad one of Sion – if closely resembling ...’<sup>11</sup> Hyde copied out the poem from the volume of *Irish Melodies* by national poet Thomas Moore, one of the great poets and composers who collected ‘melodies’ of nations and minorities for preservation and setting to music. Due to reverence for the Bible, many of these poems were variations on Psalms or biblical phrases, like the *Hebrew Melodies* by Lord Byron.<sup>12</sup>



### *A Chara*

## The Album

Photographs of the Land of Israel served as an important means of propaganda. They were not always used for that purpose, but since they were readily available they were sent, accompanied by written texts, and whenever their message was self-evident they were sent as a collection. Jaffe related that ‘I used to send him [Hyde] materials on the Land of Israel and collections of photos’. By ‘materials’ he referred to the address of Chaim Weizmann to the Peel Commission. By ‘collections of photos’ he probably referred to the album of aerial photos, despatched to Hyde in April 1939. Thus, the

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Moore, ‘The Parallel’, in *Irish Melodies* (London, 1849), no. 97 and n. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Israel David, “‘They Will Yet Call Me a Jew’: What are the *Hebrew Melodies* and How Were They Born?’ [in Hebrew], <http://www.bgu.ac.il/~idavid/The%20Hebrew%20Melodies%20of%20Byron%20and%20Nathan/a.a%20-%20hakdama/ma%20hen%20hamanginot.pdf> (accessed 6 Aug. 2016).

presentation of the album did serve as a means of public relations providing views and news, and was more efficient than any printed pamphlet.

Photos and articles published previously by photographers contained much visual and written information, though not necessarily of a Zionist nature. Therefore, the Zionist leadership in Palestine resolved that the national institutions should have an apparatus of its own to achieve their objectives. These years were marked by the development of illustrated magazines and photojournalism. Newspaper photographers easily traversed the country with their not very clumsy cameras, providing visual reports of what met their eyes, and these photos were widely distributed.

The wave of immigration to Palestine after World War I included several Jewish photographers, but only a few of them understood the needs of newspapers. In the past, photo albums were produced reflecting the biblical Land of Israel, but since 1925 we also find albums in the spirit of Keren Hayesod. Sir Arthur Wauchope, high commissioner for Palestine from 1931 to 1938, presented one such album to King George V proudly demonstrate the development of the Jewish community in Palestine under British mandatory rule.

After the 1929 Arab riots in Palestine, the Zionist leadership feared that time was pressing, that a great building momentum was essential to absorb the immigrants and lay a firm foundation for the Jewish community. They sensed that new and more dynamic means were now necessary to aid in fundraising and propaganda work among distant Jewish communities. In 1933, the photographer Zoltan Kluger immigrated to Palestine. During World War I he had served as an aerial photographer in the Austro-Hungarian Air Force; then he moved from Hungary to Germany and became a press photographer in Berlin who was well versed in photojournalism.

Kluger took thousands of photographs in all areas of Jewish activity in Palestine, and did not hesitate at times to 'stage' them. These were not artistic photographs but such that documented establishment of new settlements, industry and agriculture, or security efforts, all with emphasis on the Jewish labourer and social advance. He began taking aerial photos in Palestine in 1937. They were published in *A Land in Construction: Illustrated Bi-monthly* (1937–1947) in several language editions. Kluger's photos were displayed in international exhibitions in Paris, London, Brussels, and New York. They were also included in leaflets, booklets, and journals intended for Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

The photos instilled a sense of pride in the successful unfolding of the Zionist vision, and the aerial photographs, in particular, were visual documents that thrilled all who viewed them. In September 1938, when Shlomo Zalman Schocken, the owner



and publisher of the daily *Ha'aretz*, celebrated his sixtieth birthday, he thanked those who congratulated him with a collection of thirty-five such aerial photographs. One page in the March 1939 issue of *A Land in Construction* proved how effective aerial photographs could be in tracing the dramatic transformation of a settlement that was established as a fortified enclosure, and developed into an unenclosed and flourishing agricultural community in the Beisan Valley. It was almost as if this photo was intended to prove, what Rabbi Herzog wrote in his letter to Prime Minister De Valera in 1937, about the desolated landscape that had been so greatly transformed.



Beit Yosef 1937-1938-1939

Let us now return to Canada and Ireland. As noted, in 1938 Leib Jaffe told the British governor-general of Canada that an album of photos was making its way to him, and he may have sent a similar one to other leading personages. One of them, as we have seen, was presented to Douglas Hyde in April 1939. On 27 June, Hyde apologized in writing for the delay in acknowledging the gift due to his ill health, and thanked Jaffe for the splendid volume.

After the outbreak of World War II Hyde sent Jaffe a photo of himself and three plays in Gaelic that he had authored. Since he knew some Hebrew, he addressed the envelope of one of his letters in Hebrew and signed it with his Gaelic pen name. This was undoubtedly a private gesture without any relation to the war, in the wake of which Ireland was severely criticized. Ireland remained neutral and though it

extended indirect aid to the Allies, it did not open its gates to Jewish refugees from Europe. Furthermore, it did not close the German embassy in Dublin, and on the day of Hitler's suicide Prime Minister de Valera visited the ambassador and expressed his condolences to the German nation. Years later, when the archives were opened to the public, it turned out that Douglas Hyde, too, had expressed his condolences to the German ambassador a short while before the completion of his term in office in 1945.<sup>13</sup>

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The album that is the subject of this article somehow found its way to a public auction house. The Hebrew University was reticent about funding its acquisition and the Friends of the Hebrew University in London were requested to find a solution. Mr. Martin Lubowski of the Search and Research Services in London, a devoted research mate, suggested approaching the university's 'Friends' in Dublin. The request was met by the positive and gracious response of Mr. Clem Esses, a leading member of the 'Friends', and his family. By sheer coincidence, the Esses family was visiting the Hebrew University in Jerusalem precisely when the album arrived by mail to my desk at the Department of Geography archives of aerial photos and was present when we opened the album, which they had never seen until that very moment.<sup>14</sup>

I made one last attempt to satisfy my curiosity as to how the album came into the hands of the person who put it up for auction, but was not surprised when he refused my request, put to him through the auction house.

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<sup>13</sup> 'President Sent Sympathy on Hitler's Death', *The Guardian*, 31 Dec. 2005.

<sup>14</sup> 'Irishman Enables Photographs to Return Home', *Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Newsletter*, Winter 1990/91, p. 9.