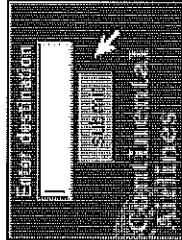


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## Torah makes dangerous trek from Iraq to women's institute

By Jeannine Mercer



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NEW YORK, Nov. 22 (JTA) — A group of female Jewish scholars here recently danced joyously with a 200-year-old born in Iraq and once held prisoner by Saddam Hussein.

"Here ye! Here ye! Here comes the Sefer Torah!" the women of the Drisha Institute exclaimed at the arrival of the Torah, which had made a difficult journey from Iraq to the United States by way of Jordan and Israel.

"Without a doubt, I am sure that the people who started with this Torah could not imagine that its home would be a women's study group," said Nina Bruder, executive director of Drisha, a Jewish women's study program.

Drisha's Torah, whose combination of flat mulberry juice ink and raised lettering indicates that it is 200 years old, was abandoned in a Baghdad synagogue with many other Torah scrolls during the exodus of Iraqi Jews to Israel in 1948.

There the Torahs remained, collecting desert dust until Hussein, the Iraqi dictator, stockpiled and hid them not long before the start of the Persian Gulf War.

But in 1991, the Torah was rescued, along with 34 others. After stealing the Torahs from Hussein's stockpile, an Iraqi Muslim stuffed them into the tires of Jordan-bound trucks and from there the sacred texts were transferred into Israeli hands.

Iraqi authorities caught the man and severely beat him.

"It's a remarkable story," said Blu Greenberg, whose son helped repair one of the smuggled Torahs a year ago.

It was during this time that Greenberg was chosen as Drisha's guest of honor at its 20th dinner anniversary. Greenberg, an Orthodox feminist author and activist, is a "great admirer" of Drisha.

Feeling shy about being in the spotlight, she half-jokingly told Drisha, "If you get me off the hook" as a dinner speaker, "I'll try to get a Sefer Torah for you."

Greenberg wasn't relieved from her speaking engagement, but after several discussions with her son and family, they decided to present the Torah to Drisha as a gift.

They dedicated the scroll to Greenberg's father, Rabbi Sam Genauer, who is remembered for his hourlong Torah study before work each day. His granddaughter, Lisa Schlaff, studied at Drisha in part because of his influence.

"It's a full-size Torah. Everyone was worried that it would be too heavy to lift," said Bruder, who explained that the women were instructed in how to handle the Torah prior to its arrival.

Drisha is the first women's study group in America to have its own Torah. Only two such groups in Israel have their own Torahs.

An unknown number of Torahs still remain in Hussein's possession.

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