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Jews in Turkey during the Ottoman period: an overview of the state of research

During the fall of 2021, the video streaming service Netflix featured a series entitled “Club”, telling the story of a Jewish “mother with a troubled past working at a nightclub to reconnect with and help the rebellious daughter she couldn’t raise in cosmopolitan 1950s Istanbul”.¹ It created enthusiasm among the Jews of Turkey. As Liora Morhayim said: “It is an incredible feeling. It’s the first time I had heard Ladino being spoken on TV. For the first time, the story of a Jew from Turkey is being featured in mainstream media [...] Moreover, the show also has a political side. Political events and processes such as the Turkification policies of that period and the Wealth Tax are also the other sides of the story.”² The near future will tell whether this enthusiasm among the Jews of Turkey will contribute to the scholarly and non-scholarly interest on this subject, an interest that began to develop in Turkey around thirty years ago.

The celebrations of 1992 can be taken as a symbolic marker of the beginning of that interest in the history and anthropology of the Jews of Turkey. It was in 1989 that 113 Muslim and Jewish Turkish citizens, aiming to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the welcoming of Sephardic Jews into the Ottoman Empire in 1492, established the Quincentennial Foundation. Since then, through numerous conferences, exhibitions, and publications, this foundation has sought to raise public awareness about the existence and history of Sephardic Jews in modern Turkey. And it was with the same perspective that the foundation inaugurated the Jewish Museum of Turkey in 2001. The same period, the 1990s, saw a flourishing of scholarly literature on the history of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, thanks to the works of Aron Rodrigue, Stanford J. Shaw, and Avigdor Levy, who portrayed the general characteristics of the history of the Ottoman Jews³ and paved the way for more specific topics to be treated. This political and scientific foundation has since given rise to a larger scholarly and non-scholarly literature on the history of the Jews living in the lands of modern Turkey during the period

¹ See, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13317582/> (10. 09. 2022).

² Öz, Efe: Netflix’ın Kulüp dizisi için Türkiye Yahudileri ne diyor? <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-592239> (09.09.2022).

³ Rodrigue, Aron: French Jews, Turkish Jews. The AIU and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925. Bloomington 1990; Shaw, Stanford J.: The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. London 1991; Levy, Avigdor: The Jews of the Ottoman Empire. Princeton 1994.

of the Ottoman Empire, which has evolved in several directions. It is the aim of this article to highlight and evaluate the literature on the history of the Jewish communities which fall within the borders of present-day Turkey (with the exception of the Ottoman capital of Istanbul).

Though my analysis is limited to works prepared mainly after the 1990s, it starts – unsurprisingly for any evaluation of the history of the Jews of Turkey in the Ottoman Empire – with Abraham Galante's voluminous work on the history of Anatolian Jews, as it sets the tone and perspective for the succeeding research agenda.⁴ Conceived as two volumes, the first one is devoted to the Jews of Izmir and the second comprises a history of other Jewish communities (those that had once existed or that still existed at the time of writing) in Anatolia. Although it is clear that this research does not employ a properly scientific methodology, as rightly underlined by Yaron Ben-Naeh,⁵ still these two volumes constitute a significant source for researchers who seek to focus on any specific Jewish community or the Jewish community of the Ottoman Empire in general. The importance of the works of Galante is also attested by their re-publication in nine volumes by ISIS in the 1980s, which greatly improved their availability for researchers.⁶

As an introductory note, several points can be underlined. First of all, scholars and non-scholars alike have contributed to the literature on the history of the Jewish communities of modern Turkey. Having retired from their professional careers, authors such as Naim Gülcüyüz, Erol Haker, and Rifat N. Bali have contributed to this growing literature with a sincere devotion to keeping records of the history of disappearing Jewish communities. Though some of this research can be criticized on the basis of a weakness in historical methodology, etc., their contribution is beyond doubt. To their efforts, historians have also contributed to varying degrees. Siren Bora, the most prolific researcher on this subject, has devoted her studies to the history of Jews of western Anatolia.

The research concentrates mostly on the modern period, especially the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereas the early modern period is less visible in the Jewish historiography.⁷ This relative lack of interest can be attributed to the greater availability of archival material for the Jewish communities of the later periods, with journals, institutional archives such as Alliance Israélite Universelle

⁴ Galante, Abraham: *Histoire des Juifs d'Anatolie*. 2 vols. Istanbul 1937–1939.

⁵ Ben-Naeh, Yaron: The Historiography of Ottoman Jewry. In: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 69,1 (2018). pp. 109–133.

⁶ Galante, Avram: *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*. Istanbul 1986.

⁷ For a rare example, see Ben-Naeh, Yaron: Jews in the Realm of the Sultans. Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism). Tübingen 2008.

(hereafter AIU), and missionaries having contributed to the Jewish and Ottoman archival material and so facilitated access to the history of Jewish communities.

This article is organized in a thematic fashion, shaped around the primary subjects in the history of Jews: geographical setting; tangible cultural heritage; economy and society; politics; culture; migration; and personalities and families.

Geographical setting

It is a common convention in historical research to choose a geographical setting and focus on the functioning of an ethnic/religious community living in that area throughout history, leading to a proliferation of studies in which each and every datum about the community is collected and compiled. In most cases, these works are not structured around an issue or a question, and do not approach the material with a suitable methodology. Still, some such studies comprise important sources or collections regarding the Jewish communities of a specific locality, following the example of the works of Abraham Galante on the Jews of Anatolia mentioned above. Thanks to these works, we have an inventory type of collection on several Jewish communities of Anatolia which no longer exist.

The researchers who compile this type of collection may be either a local Jew and/or Jewish non-academic researcher, or a scholar specialized on the history of Jewish communities. There are three very prolific examples that fit into the first category: Naim Gülcü, Rifat N. Bali, and Erol Haker. After professional careers in other areas, in their retirement they have concentrated on research on the history of Jews in Turkey and produced important works. Naim Gülcü is the founding vice president of the Quincentennial Foundation, and served as its president (2008–2013). He contributed to the opening of the Turkish Jewish Museum in 2001 and managed it from 2001 to 2013. Not only has he produced several books on the general history of the Anatolian Jews, but he has also published studies on the Jewish communities of specific cities such as Gaziantep.⁸ Rifat N. Bali established a publishing house and published many works, both his own and by other researchers, on the history of the Jewish communities of modern Turkey.⁹ Erol Haker wrote

⁸ Gülcü, Naim A.: *Tarih Boyunca Trakya ve Anadolu'daki Yahudi Yerleşim Yerleri*, vol. 2, Trakya ve Anadolu. İstanbul 2017; Gülcü, Naim A.: *Tarihte Yolculuk. Edirne Yahudileri*. İstanbul 2014; Gülcü, Naim A.: *Gaziantep Yahudileri-Jews of Gaziantep*. İstanbul 2012.

⁹ Bali, Rifat N.: *Diyarbakır Yahudileri*. In: *Diyarbakır: Müze şehir*. Edited by Şevket Beysanoğlu, Emin Nedret İslî and M. Sabri Koz. İstanbul 1999. pp. 366–389; Bali, Rifat N.: *Edirne Yahudileri*. In: *Edirne: Serhattaki Payitaht*. Edited by Emin Nedret İslî and M. Sabri Koz. İstanbul 1998. pp. 205–227.

a monograph on the history of his family who settled in Kırklareli in the eighteenth century,¹⁰ and worked on the Jewish community of Edirne and its modernization attempts through the history of AIU schools. To these non-academic researchers, we can add the works of local Jews who have sought to write the history of their own Jewish communities – for example Beki L. Bahar, who prepared a book on the Jewish community of Ankara.¹¹ The second category comprises researchers who focus on the history of the Jewish communities of a specific locality. Siren Bora stands out within this category because of the quantity and quality of research she has engaged in, writing a general survey on the Jews of Anatolia that compiled the data on the Jewish communities living in western Anatolia during Antiquity.¹² Several others such as Oral,¹³ Öksüz,¹⁴ and Çalışkan¹⁵ have also been working on Jewish communities in Anatolia.

Some of these works focus on a wide geographical area such as Anatolia or Thrace, whereas others choose to concentrate on a more specific locality, such as a city or district. Although such differences in scope do not significantly change the content, they do to a certain extent modify the target audience, with the ones dealing with Turkish Jews in Anatolia aiming to reach a general audience, whereas others might have a more limited reader profile due to their more specific content. Two imbalances reveal themselves with regard to the geographical setting. Firstly, the Jewish communities of western Anatolia receive much more attention and research than those of other parts of modern Turkey. Moreover, the big cities are disproportionately favored in the literature over the smaller urban areas. These two points are probably related to the demographic importance of the Jews of big cities in the western part of Turkey, both historically and today. The folkloric data com-

¹⁰ Haker, Erol: Edirne, Its Jewish Community, and Alliance Schools, 1867–1937. Istanbul 2006; Haker, Erol: Once Upon a Time Jews Lived in Kırklareli. The Story of the Adato Family 1800–1934. Istanbul 2003.

¹¹ Bahar, Beki L.: Efsaneden Tarihe Ankara Yahudileri. Istanbul 2003.

¹² Bora, Siren: Anadolu Yahudileri. Ege'de Yahudi İzleri. Istanbul 2017; Bora, Siren: Yok olan Batı Anadolu Yahudi Topluluklarından Biri: Bergama Yahudileri-Kusa bir Değerlendirme. In: Journal of Izmir Studies 8 (2018). pp. 73–105; Bora, Siren: Başlangıçtan Günümüze Tire'de Yahudi İzleri. Tire 2017.

¹³ Oral, Mustafa: Duvarlar Arasında Antalya Yahudi Cemaati-I. In: The Pursuit of History. International Periodical for History and Social Research 5 (2011). pp. 125–140; Oral, Mustafa: Duvarlar Arasında Antalya Yahudi Cemaati-II. In: The Pursuit of History. International Periodical for History and Social Research 6 (2011). pp. 177–194.

¹⁴ Öksüz, Mustafa: Tanzimat Sonrası Diyarbakır Yahudilerine bir Bakış (1839–1873). In: Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Diyarbakır. Edited by Oktay Bozan [et al.]. Ankara 2019.

¹⁵ Çalışkan, Adem: XIX. Yüzyılda Antep Yahudileri. In: Tarih Yolunda bir Ömür: Prof. Dr. İsmail Özçelik'e Armağan. Edited by Burak Kocaoglu. Ankara 2019. pp. 47–74.

piled in these works spark interest among those who wish to learn more about the functioning of an urban setting in the “old days”. Within this framework, a very significant research project sponsored by the Quincentennial Foundation must be mentioned: between 1984 and 1989, researcher Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmann and photographer Laurence Salzmann conducted a survey on the Jewish communities of Turkey and photographed what remained of them.¹⁶ The work they produced has incredible value because of the scarcity of visual material on the subject, and they have extended their interest in the subject with a book on the rural Jewish communities living in Turkey.¹⁷

This brings us to the aim of preparing such works. The idea of leaving a written mark about Jewish communities that no longer exist seems to be the strongest motivation behind such endeavors. Another objective is to promote public awareness, with the publications of the Quincentennial Foundation falling mainly into this category.¹⁸ One final purpose that can be discerned from this research is to highlight the existence of Jewish communities in Anatolia long before the arrival of Sephardic Jews in the sixteenth century. Thus, Siren Bora argues that the Sephardic studies can convey the misleading impression that Jewish communities did not exist before their arrival.¹⁹

Two types of material used for the preparation of these works have a special place: the material conserved at the AIU archives, and the interviews conducted in most cases by the writer herself/himself. The archives of the AIU provide a significant source not only for schools, education, and students, but also for the analysis of the social and economic situation of the localities in which these schools were founded.²⁰ The reports and the letters exchanged between the center in Paris and the instructors and directors of AIU reveal important elements of the life and history of the Jewish communities. Moreover, they are all in French, to which access is easier than the Ottoman archival material or, for example, the Hebrew *responsa* literature. Other material that is easier to access is the interviews with the inhabitants of a locality or elderly people who had left the city for other places. Unfortunately, these interviews are not conducted using a scientific methodology, and in most cases can offer only a source for anecdotal stories rather than a critical perspective. Even so, they remain important sources for the history of the Jewish com-

¹⁶ Gürsan-Salzmann, Ayşe and Laurence Salzmann: *Anyos Munchos i Buenos. Turkey's Sephardim: 1492–1992*. Brookline Mass. 1991.

¹⁷ Gürsan-Salzmann, Ayşe and Laurence Salzmann: *Travels in Search of Turkey's Jews*. Istanbul 2011.

¹⁸ As an example see Gülcü, Naim: *The History of the Turkish Jews*. Istanbul 1992.

¹⁹ Bora, *Anadolu Yahudileri*. Introduction.

²⁰ Haker, *Edirne, Its Jewish Community*.

munities, since in most cases nothing else remains from the Jewish communities in question.

One final remark on the content of these works: as I mentioned, they generally start with the proof of the existence of the Jewish community in a certain locality during Antiquity. Then, in chronological order, the periods of the Byzantine, Seljukids, and Ottoman Empires are treated. Within this chronological order, various themes are highlighted from the secondary literature, focusing especially on the Ottoman period, such as synagogues, religious men, associations, schools, fires, Sabbatai Sevi, blood libel events, press, music, occupations, community institutions, quarters, traditions, family structures, cemeteries, and important events. In general, these themes are listed in order to “know” the history of the Jewish community in question without relating them either to their immediate environment or to any kind of scientific question that stands in need of treatment. Therefore, such works can only be treated as compilations for the curious reader and as “sources” to be referred to in future research. Unfortunately, these works perpetuate the idea of Jewish communities functioning within an enclave governed by its own laws, and not entertaining any kind of relation with the outside world.²¹

Tangible Jewish cultural heritage

As economic and social historians, we often tend to give priority to written sources over oral tradition, and archival over visual material, and thus disregard the importance of physical remains and their potential contribution to our understanding of history. Thanks to specialists from other disciplines such as the arts, architecture, and urban planning, we have a newly growing literature on Jewish cultural heritage sites such as quarters, synagogues, and cemeteries.

The Jewish quarter of Ankara with its synagogue has been the topic of several research projects. The first one mainly concerns the history of the Jewish quarter as it was described in travelers’ accounts, and the physical features of the synagogue.²² The very same topic, the Jewish quarter of Ankara and its traditional houses, street patterns and the synagogue, has also been analyzed from an urban planning perspective.²³ Though the Jewish inhabitants of the area are now completely gone,

²¹ Haim Gerber points to this error in his introduction, see Gerber, Haim: Crossing Borders. Jews and Muslims in Ottoman Law, Economy, and Society. Istanbul 2008. p. 9.

²² İlter, Fügen: The Jewish Quarter and Synagogue in the Old Urban Context of Ankara. In: Belleten LX, 229 (December 1996). pp. 733–743.

²³ Avcı Hosanlı, Deniz and A. Gülbiz Bilgin Altunöz: İstiklal (Jewish) Quarter in Ankara: History, Tissue, and Houses. In TÜBA-KED 14 (2016). pp. 71–104.

the original physical structure and the integrity of the historical tissue can be discerned through fieldwork. Siren Bora has conducted extensive research on the Jewish quarter (First Juderia) of Izmir and examined its emergence and development from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴

It is mainly architectural historians who have also analyzed the synagogues. The Great Synagogue of Edirne, built following the fire in 1903 that destroyed the Jewish quarters and the synagogues of the city, is an important topic for the history of architecture. Its architectural characteristics and urban form have been analyzed in comparison to the synagogues built in Europe during the same period.²⁵ The same synagogue, together with two other synagogues in Istanbul, has been analyzed through the lenses of memory, identity, and architecture.²⁶ Roysi Ojalvo Kamayor reveals the history of their restoration processes and analyzes their transformation into instruments for the reconstruction and representation of the past.

Together with the synagogues, cemeteries constitute an important element of the tangible history and heritage of the Jewish community. Like written documents, cemeteries contribute extensively to our knowledge of the social and economic history of the Jewish communities. Siren Bora points to this fact by underlining the importance of cemeteries for historical research, writing that “the cemeteries are the land registries, the genealogies of a community”.²⁷ Extensive research was conducted between 1987 and 1990 under the auspices of the Annenberg Research Institute by its directors at the time, Bernard Lewis and Minna Rozen. They undertook a project of identification, documenting and photographing Jewish cemeteries in Turkey dating from the Ottoman period. These cemeteries are found in Thrace and in western Anatolia.²⁸ They were able to make inventories of cemeteries in Izmir, Milas, Bodrum, Bergama, Tire, Edirne, Tekirdağ, Gelibolu, Çorlu, Kırklareli, and Çanakkale. Unfortunately, there is an urgent need to continue engaging in such research for several reasons: emigration; urban transformation of cities in Turkey starting with the 1950s; and finally, the impact of the conception

²⁴ Bora, Siren: *Birinci Juderia. İzmir'in En Eski Yahudi Mahallesi*. İstanbul 2021.

²⁵ Zağra, H. Çığdem and Hamide Burcu Özgüven: 20. Yüzyılda Edirne Kaleçindeki Yahudi Yerleşimi ve Dini Mimari. In: VIII. Uluslararası Sinan Sempozyumu, 25–26 Nisan 2013. Edirne. Proceedings. Edited by Esinan Benian and Semiha Kartal. Edirne 2013. pp. 363–370.

²⁶ Ojalvo Kamayor, Roysi: *Turkey's Jewish Heritage Revisited: Architectural Conservation and the Politics of Memory*. İstanbul 2018.

²⁷ Bora, Siren: *Tire Yahudi Mezarlığı*. In: *Tire Research Symposium Proceedings*, vol. 1. Edited by M. Akif Erdoğru and Şule Pfeiffer-Taş. Tire 2016. pp. 211–234.

²⁸ Rozen, Minna: A Survey of Jewish Cemeteries in Western Turkey. In: *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1/2) (July–October 1992). pp. 71–125.

of cemeteries in Islam.²⁹ Later, in the 2010s, other scholars contributed to their effort by taking inventories of Jewish cemeteries especially in western Anatolia. Siren Bora dedicated several of her works to the analysis of cemeteries in Bodrum, Bornova, Tire, and Manisa.³⁰ Mehdi İlhan has contributed to this field of research with an article on the Jewish cemetery of Akhisar.³¹

Though other disciplines such as architecture have made a significant contribution to the research on the history of Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, there is the danger of instrumentalizing the history of a given Jewish community as a background for an analysis of a certain area, or particular buildings and/or monuments. In this respect, the work of Ojalvo Kamayor is exemplary in that it shows the possible approaches to historical analysis while working on specific physical remains. The research on the cemeteries is still emerging and remains at the stage of keeping inventories, and there is still a great deal of room for critical analysis and use of the data that these cemeteries reveal.

Economy and society

The archives of the Ottoman central administration and the *kadı* court registers kept in the provinces offer significant data on the economic and social conditions and demographic trends of the Jewish communities living in the Ottoman lands.

For earlier periods of the Ottoman Empire, scholars have mainly made use of tax registers (*tahrir*), *kadı* court registers (*sicil*), and poll tax registers (*cizye*). Tax registers gathered the revenue sources of the localities in a periodic fashion, and therefore the traces of demographic trends such as the sixteenth-century Sephardic migration can be traced through these registers. Stefan Dimitrov, for example, analyzed the three consecutive tax registers of Edirne for the sixteenth century and on that basis determined the extent of the Sephardic migration to the city.³²

29 Rozen, A Survey, pp. 72–73.

30 Bora, Siren: İzmir Bornova Yahudi Mezarlığı. In: İzmir Araştırmaları Dergisi 2 (2015). pp. 39–83; Bora, Siren: Manisa Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Müzesi Bahçesinde Sergilenen İbranice Mezar Taşları-na İlişkin Değerlendirme. In: Geçmişten Günümüze Manisa. Şehzade II. Mehmed ve Manisa Tarihi-Kültürü-Ekonomisi, vol. I. Edited by Muzaffer Tepekaya and Zafer Atar. Manisa 2018. pp. 159–198; Bora, Siren: Tire Yahudi Mezarlığı. In: Tire Research Symposium Proceedings, vol. 1. Edited by M. Akif Erdoğru and Şule Pfeiffer-Taş. Tire 2016. pp. 211–234; Bora, Siren and C. M. Kösemen: The Bodrum Jewish Cemetery. İstanbul 2016.

31 İlhan, Mehdi: A Deserted Jewish Cemetery of Akhisar. In: Çekmece İZÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 4, 8–9 (2016). pp. 131–182.

32 Dimitrov, Stefan: Jewish Communities in the Town of Edirne in the XVI Century According to Ottoman Tax Registers Data (Tapu Tahrir Defterleri). Kongre Bildirileri. pp. 809–818.

Şevket Yıldız analyzed the Jewish migration to Bursa during the same period and focused on the economic reasons why Jews chose Bursa as a place to settle.³³ Haim Gerber's research both on seventeenth-century Bursa and sixteenth-century Edirne makes use of *kadi* court registers, which enabled him to portray a vivid picture of the economic and social functioning of these urban settings through the examples reflected in these registers.³⁴ Feridun Emecen's research on the Jews of Manisa between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries using *kadi* court registers portrays the general demographic, economic, and social characteristics and their transformation in time and distinguishes itself as a significant example.³⁵

Scholars who focus on the Jewish communities of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire generally utilize the income and property registers (*temettuat*) of 1844–1845. The Ottoman central administration compiled these registers with the aim of launching a new income and property tax in line with the 1839 *Tanzimat* reforms. These registers, kept for each household of a specific locality, compiled the income-generating activity and property of the head of the household, as well as the taxes and the poll tax (for the non-Muslims) on the bases of quarters. Taken as a snapshot of the mid-nineteenth century, they constitute a significant source of data for an analysis of economic and social hierarchies within the Ottoman society as a whole and within each community, including the Jewish. With this aim, Nurşen Gök analyzed the Jewish community of Ankara,³⁶ Necati Çavdar that of Tokat,³⁷ and Raif Kaplanoğlu that of Bursa.³⁸ Adem Çalışkan made use of different types of Ottoman archival material and analyzed the demographic, economic, and social conditions of the Jewish community of Antep over a long period.³⁹

³³ Yıldız, Şevket: XVI. Yüzyılda Bursa'ya Gelen Yahudi Göçmenler. In: Bursa Halk Kültürü, Uludağ Üniversitesi II. Bursa Halk Kültürü Sempozumu (20–22 Ekim 2005). Proceedings, vol. 1. Bursa 2005. pp. 165–172.

³⁴ Gerber, Haim: Crossing Borders. Jews and Muslims in Ottoman Law, Economy, and Society. Istanbul 2008. Chapter 2: The Jews in the 17th century Bursa. pp. 65–93 and chapter 3: The Jews in the 16th and 17th Century Edirne. pp. 94–104.

³⁵ Emecen, Feridun M.: Unutulmuş bir Cemaat, Manisa Yahudileri. Istanbul 1997.

³⁶ Gök, Nurşen: 19. Yüzyıl Ortalarında Ankara Yahudilerinin Sosyal-İktisadi Durumu. In: OTAM 26 (Fall 2009). pp. 117–139.

³⁷ Çavdar, Necati: Temettuat Kayıtlarına göre Tokat Mahallelerinde Yaşayan Yahudilerin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Durumları (1844–1845). In: Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi. Tokat Tarihi ve Kültürü Sempozumu. 25–26 Eylül 2014 Tokat. Proceedings, vol. 1. Tokat 2015. pp. 327–350.

³⁸ Kaplanoğlu, Raif: 1844 Yılı Temettuat Defterlerine Göre Değişim Sürecinde Bursa'nın Ekonomik ve Sosyal Yapısı. Nilüfer 2011.

³⁹ Çalışkan, Adem: XIX. Yüzyılda Antep Yahudileri. In: Tarih Yolunda bir Ömür: Prof. Dr. İsmail Özçelik'e Armağan. Edited by Burak Kocaoğlu. Ankara 2019. pp. 47–74.

The archives of institutions such as the Levant Company provide invaluable data on the economic activities of Jews and their relations within the community and with non-Jewish communities. Eliezer Bashan's work on the Jews in Smyrna using the archives of the Levant Company for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has reconstructed the story of the role of Jews in European trade and their perception by the company both as "competitors" and "without alternative", as well as the story of their acceptance by the company.⁴⁰

Making use of Ladino, Ottoman, and AIU archives, Dina Danon analyzed the process of modernity in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire through the changing perception of poverty and the embourgeoisement of the Jewish middle class, arguing that, instead of religion, class-based responses played a determinant role in becoming modern.⁴¹

Politics

Politics on the empire/state level (relations with the state) and politics on the local level (relations with non-Jews) are the two main themes under this heading. Julia Phillips Cohen's research on imperial citizenship reveals in an impressive manner the process of becoming a model community in the multi-lingual, multi-religious Ottoman Empire and deconstructs the "myth of a special Ottoman-Jewish relationship", a myth that understates the complex, multi-layered, and constantly changing dynamic between the state and the Jews over the centuries.⁴² For the purposes of the present article, this monograph is even more important, since her analysis is based, among other things, on journals published in Izmir.

Several scholars concentrate on the attitude of Jews during wartime, especially the wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. The siege of Edirne during the Balkan wars was the backdrop for an AIU girls' school director named Guéron, who kept a journal where she recorded the human suffering during the war, the condition of the Jewish community, and the activities of the AIU.⁴³ Some scholars

⁴⁰ Bashan, Eliezer: Contacts Between Jews in Smyrna and the Levant Company of London in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. In: *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* XXIX (1988). pp. 53–73.

⁴¹ Danon, Dina: *The Jews of Ottoman Izmir*. Stanford 2020.

⁴² Phillips Cohen, Julia: *Becoming Ottomans. Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era*. Oxford 2014. pp. 3–4.

⁴³ Rifat N. Bali translated this journal into Turkish, see Bali, Rifat N.: *Edirne Muhasarasi Sırasında Tutulmuş Bir Günlük*. In: *Tarih ve Toplum*. 190–191–192–193 (October–November–December 1999/January 2000). pp. 15–24, 26–30, 34–38. Avigdor Levy analyzed its content, see Levy, Avigdor: *The*

focus on World War I and its consequences for the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire. Siren Bora analyzed how the Jewish community of Izmir was influenced by the politics of national economy of the Committee of Union and Progress during the war,⁴⁴ whereas Ahmet Asker turns to the agricultural school of Or Yehuda in Akhisar (Manisa) to investigate the attempts of the local authorities to confiscate its large estate for the urgent need of agricultural production during the same war.⁴⁵

As Haim Gerber clearly puts it, in order to understand the functioning of an urban setting and its constituents (the inhabitants), it is imperative to analyze the communities in relation to one another.⁴⁶ An analysis as a separate enclave governed by its own laws would only provide us with a partial image of a community. Analysis of relations with other communities is therefore crucial in understanding the history of Jewish communities. Haim Gerber's research on the changing economic relations between Jews and Muslims through the *kadi* court registers is an important step towards such an approach.⁴⁷ However, there remain many questions and there is still a long way to go before we have a critical perspective on the myth of harmonious tolerance and the reality of relations between Muslims and Jews.⁴⁸

Blood libels constitute an important element for the analysis of relations between the Jewish and Greek Orthodox communities of Ottoman cities. Henri Nahum focused on the religious, political, and economic reasons of this type of anti-semitic event and the heterogeneous character of the attitude of different groups within the Greek Orthodox communities of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁹ As a case study, Esther Benbassa analyzed a blood libel event that took place in Izmir

Siege of Edirne (1912–1913) as Seen by a Jewish Eyewitness: Social, Political, and Cultural Perspectives. In: Jews, Turks, Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Century. Edited by Avigdor Levy. New York 2002. pp. 153–193.

⁴⁴ Bora, Siren: Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve İzmir Yahudileri (1914–1918). In: Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi II (4–5) (1994–1995). pp. 19–27.

⁴⁵ Asker, Ahmet: Savaş Yıllarında Akhisar'da bir Ziraat Okulu: Or Yehuda. In: MCBÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 15,3 (September 2017). pp. 49–68.

⁴⁶ Gerber, Haim: Crossing Borders. Jews and Muslims in Ottoman Law, Economy, and Society. Istanbul 2008. p. 9. See, as an example, Kontente, Leon: La Communauté Juive d'Urla- Equilibre Inter-Communautaires dans une Ville Ottomane en 1900. Istanbul 2016.

⁴⁷ Gerber, Crossing Borders.

⁴⁸ See, as an example, Çolak, Melek: Milas Yahudileri ve Türk-Yahudi İlişkileri (XIX. Yy Sonu-XX. Yüzyıl Başları). In: Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi 7,2 (August 2003). pp. 155–176.

⁴⁹ Nahum, Henri: İzmir Yahudileri. 19.–20. Yüzyıl. Trans.: Estreya Seval Vali. Istanbul 2000.

in 1901.⁵⁰ The importance of this case is due to its repercussions in the European press and the court that was established afterwards. Having gathered all the testimonies and analyzed them in detail, Benbassa concluded that this event was much more than a religious conflict.

Finally, Aron Rodrigue has analyzed the history of the Zionist movement in the Ottoman Empire, its development and its limitations, through the interesting personality of Baruh Mitrani who lived in Edirne in the late nineteenth century.⁵¹ Combining religious messianic ideas with modern Haskalah concepts, Mitrani became a partisan of religious Zionism. His case is an important example showing the multi-faceted aspect of the responses of Jews both to the Enlightenment and to Zionist activities. Mustafa Kaan Sağ has analyzed the activities of the British society for the propagation of the Gospel among the Jews in Edirne between 1865–1914, arguing that this missionary movement was the first driving force, even before the political movement of Zionism headed by Theodor Herzl, which mobilized the Jews of Edirne to move to Palestine.⁵²

Culture

The schools and the press, two important elements of modernization in the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century, are also important components of the transformation of Jewish culture of the period.

Several works have placed the schools of the AIU at the center of their research and analyzed their formation in Ottoman cities. Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa began their research on the schools of AIU with an article on the education of apprentices and questioned the success of these schools.⁵³ Then Aron Rodrigue traced the story of the establishment of the AIU schools in the Ottoman cities

⁵⁰ Benbassa, Esther: Kampana Çalanlar Davası: 1901'de İzmir'de Cereyan Etmış Bir Kan İftirası Vakası. In: *Tarih ve Toplum* 5,30 (June 1986). pp. 44–50.

⁵¹ Rodrigue, Aron: Jewish Enlightenment and Nationalism in the Ottoman Balkans: Barukh Mitrani in Edirne in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century. In: *Minorities in the Ottoman Empire*. Edited by Molly Greene. Princeton 2005. pp. 129–143.

⁵² Sağ, Mustafa Kaan: Edirne'de Bir İngiliz Misyonerlik Cemiyeti: Evangelikanizm, Milenyalizm ve Yahudiler. In: *Belleten* LXXXIII 296 (April 2019). pp. 309–334.

⁵³ Benbassa, Esther and Aron Rodrigue: L'artisanat juif en Turquie à la fin du XIXe siècle. In: *Turcica. Revue d'Etudes Turques* XVII (1985). pp. 113–126. The work on the agricultural apprenticeship schools of the AIU is treated under the part entitled “Migration”, since their establishment was directly related to the arrival of Russian and Romanian Jews following the wars of the late nineteenth century.

in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Having completed the process of acculturation and integration into the bourgeois society in which they lived, Western European Jewish communities aimed to “regenerate”, to “civilize” the “backward” traditional Jews by educating them in a modern fashion. Rodrigue analyzed the pattern of establishing an AIU school in Ottoman cities, noting the need for the existence of a powerful group who would support the institution wholeheartedly and contribute to its expenses financially, as was the case in Edirne and Izmir (p. 52). He also investigated the successes, and the limits of those successes, enjoyed by the schools. In another monograph that concentrates on the schools of the AIU, Erol Haker analyzed the AIU schools in Edirne.⁵⁵ He also questions to what extent the AIU succeeded in implementing its teaching program and how far its success served its regenerative aim. Melek Çolak's article on the AIU school in Milas covers the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic,⁵⁶ and she describes how the school was affected by this transition, hence its importance.

Apart from these studies centered on the activities of AIU schools, there are a number of studies which highlight the existence of AIU schools and their influence on the Jewish community of a given locality. The works of Beki Bahar, Henri Nahum, Halil and Hatice Erdemir, and Melek Çolak can be categorized in this manner.⁵⁷

The Jewish press constitutes another highly significant element of Jewish culture. Journals, magazines, and periodicals all contributed to the modernization attempts of the Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire and contributed to the Jewish cultural production of the period. Naim A. Gülcü prepared a bibliographical work on the Jewish journals and periodicals⁵⁸ in Izmir, Istanbul, and Edirne, and for each entry offers an annotated explication of their aim and content. Together with a list of journals, the research also contains the biographies of the authors, this being an important source for any investigation into the history of the Jewish press in the Ottoman Empire. Olga Borovaya focuses her attention on the Jewish press, *belles lettres*, and theater in the Ottoman Empire and analyzes their emergence as an output of processes of Westernization and secularization

⁵⁴ Rodrigue, Aron: French Jews, Turkish Jews: The AIU and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925. Bloomington 1990.

⁵⁵ Haker, Erol: Edirne. Its Jewish Community and Alliance Schools, 1867–1937. Istanbul 2006.

⁵⁶ Çolak, Melek: Milas Yahudileri ve Eğitim: Talmud Tora'dan Alliance Israelite Universelle'ye. In: Kebikeç 16 (2003). pp. 283–300.

⁵⁷ Bahar, Efsaneden Tarihe; Nahum, İzmir Yahudileri; Erdemir, Halil and Hatice Erdemir: Manisa'da Son Dönem Osmanlı Yönetiminde Yahudiler. In: Eski Çağ'dan Günümüze Yönetim Anlayışı ve Kurumlar. Edited by Feridun M. Emecen. Istanbul 2009. pp. 67–85; Çolak, Milas Yahudileri.

⁵⁸ Gülcü, Naim A.: Türk Yahudi Basını Tarihi. Süreli Yayınlar. Istanbul 2015.

that at the same time are “rooted in their own ways in the local culture”.⁵⁹ In particular, she provides a detailed analysis of the Ladino press in Izmir.

Migration

It is hard to imagine any research on Jews that omits a mention of journeys or migration. Two main issues related to migration emerge within the studies on the Jews of the Ottoman Empire. The migration of foremost importance is the arrival of Sephardic Jews in the Ottoman lands throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They settled, among other localities, among the Jewish communities of Anatolia, and profoundly changed the structure of the communities in question, to the point of domination. It is thus beyond doubt that these waves of migration constitute the most important focus for our attention. Within this framework, Jacob Barnai analyzed how local groups dealt with the arrival of newcomers in Izmir and how it affected the organization of the community.⁶⁰ His conclusion underlines that the relatively autonomous character of the Jewish congregations gave way to the emergence of a community that can be conceived as a single whole. Dealing with earlier periods of the two most important Anatolian towns Edirne and Bursa, Yıldız and Dimitrov follow the migration of Sephardic Jews to these towns and survey the transformations in the demographic trends using Ottoman archival material.⁶¹ Feridun Emecen focuses on migration within the empire and analyzes the reasons for the migration of Salonica Jewish weavers to Manisa during the second half of the sixteenth century.⁶²

The second set of waves of migration (that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century) that is of key interest for researchers is related to the Romanian and Russian Jewish migrants who left their towns and settled in the Ottoman lands following the Russo-Ottoman wars. In his study on the Jews of Anatolia, Abraham Galante remarks that the persecutions of Jews in Russia, Bulgaria, and Romania were the reason for the beginning of the agricultural movement in Tur-

⁵⁹ Borovaya, Olga: *Modern Ladino Culture. Press, Belles Lettres and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Bloomington 2012. p. 3.

⁶⁰ Barnai, Jacob: *Organization and Leadership in the Jewish Community of Izmir in the 17th Century*. In: *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*. Edited by Avigdor Levy. Princeton 1994. pp. 275–284.

⁶¹ Yıldız, XVI. *Yüzyılda Bursa'ya*; Dimitrov, *Jewish Communities*.

⁶² Emecen, Feridun M.: *From Selanik to Manisa: Some Information about the Immigration of the Jewish Weavers*. In: *The Via Egnatia Under the Ottoman Rule (1380–1699)*. Edited by Elizabeth Zchariadou. Crete 1996. pp. 97–109.

key (i.e., the Ottoman Empire).⁶³ This period coincides, not by accident, with the emergence of large estates and agricultural schools founded by the AIU and the Jewish Colonization Alliance (JCA).⁶⁴ They conceived the foundation of agricultural apprenticeship schools as a sound solution to the issue of Jewish migrants arriving *en masse* in the Ottoman lands subsequent to the wars with Russia. However, the research on these agricultural projects proves that they cannot be considered a real success.

Personalities and families

Several works have been dedicated to important Jewish individuals in order to show that Jewish people could be successful in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, and to make visible or underline the contributions they made to the state and society. Naim A. Gülcü's comprehensive work deals with the Jewish individuals who took part in universities, sports, education, culture, literature, the press, music, medicine, the legal system, industry, and the police in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Erdemir and Erdemir also made use of this type of approach in their article on Jews in the Ottoman administration in Manisa.⁶⁶

There are also works dedicated to a single individual which trace his/her professional and personal life trajectory. Halim Işık analyzed Rabbi Yosef ben Efraim Karo, one of the most important religious figures in Edirne in the sixteenth century.⁶⁷ As mentioned above in section 4 entitled "Politics", Aron Rodrigue analyzed political ideologies through the activities of Baruh Mitrani, a religious Zionist influenced by the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah.

Several other research projects deal with Jewish families. Henri Nahum's work on a Jewish family in Izmir is an important example which sets a direction

⁶³ Galante, *Histoire des Juifs*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Bora, H. Siren: *Alliance Israelite Universelle*'in Osmanlı Yahudi Cemaatini Tarım Sektöründe Kalkındırma Çalışmaları ve İzmir Yakınlarında Kurulan bir Çiftlik Okul: 'Or Yehuda'. In: *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1,3 (1993). pp. 387–400; Bora, Siren: *Bornova'da Alliance Israelite Universelle*'e ait Ziraat Okulu. In: I. Bornova Araştırmaları Sempozyumu, 5–6 November 2014. Edited by M. Akif Erdoğru. Izmir 2015. pp. 189–228; Esin, Taylan: 19. Yüzyılın Sonunda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kurulan Musevi İskan Birliği (JCA) Çiftlikleri. *Toplumsal Tarih* 249 (September 2014). pp. 22–33.

⁶⁵ Gülcü, Naim A.: *Toplumsal Yaşamda Türk Yahudileri*. İstanbul 2012.

⁶⁶ Erdemir and Erdemir, *Manisa'da Son Dönem Osmanlı Yönetiminde Yahudiler*.

⁶⁷ Işık, Halim: Rav Yosef ben Efraim Karo: Osmanlı Edirne'sinde bir Yahudi Din Bilgini. In: *Rumeli Journal of Islamic Studies* 3,6 (October 2020). pp. 43–66.

for future research.⁶⁸ Through a family photograph, he analyzes both the story of this family and the socio-economic conditions of the twentieth century, and thus provides an exemplary work of methodology. Finally, in their books Gizen Ender Hazan and Erol Haker relate their family histories, the first in Izmir and the second in Kırklareli.⁶⁹

Concluding remarks

The literature on the Jewish communities of modern Turkey has been growing since the 1990s, and at this stage, it is important to highlight key points to be taken into account in future research. Though the importance of analyzing the Jewish communities in relation to the environment in which they lived has been underlined time and again, it still seems to remain an important step yet to be taken. Thus, knowing the average yearly income of Jews living in Edirne would not enable us to reach conclusions concerning economic and social hierarchies or the place of the Jewish communities within that hierarchy unless we take into account the economic conditions of the Muslims and Christians living in Edirne during the same period. By the same token, the extant studies do not intercommunicate sufficiently among themselves. Thus researchers may deal with the same topic in different parts of Anatolia, yet they become themselves enclaves (just like the subjects they treat) governed by their own laws. So there is a need to survey the issues and examine the different responses given to a specific problem by various Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire, comparing and analyzing them in relation to one another.

Although migration is omnipresent in nearly all studies on Jewish communities, there is a relative lack of work done on migration per se, namely the trajectories, the patterns, the arrival, the settlement, and the process of acceptance and/or difficulties they encountered (either in the sixteenth or the nineteenth century); migration in short is a promising area of research on the history of Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire. Even more notable by its absence is research that deals with the period of transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic and how that process played out. An analysis of how the Jewish communities lived through this process, how they perceived themselves, how they were per-

⁶⁸ Nahum, Henri: 1900'e Doğru İzmir'de bir Yahudi Ailesinin Portresi. In: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Yaşamak. Edited by François Georgeon and Paul Dumont. Translated by Maide Selen. İstanbul 2000. pp. 197–208.

⁶⁹ Hazan, Gizel Ender: Aaron de Yosef Hazan. İzmir Musevileri 1600–2000. İzmir 2001; Haker, Erol: Once Upon a Time Jews Lived in Kırklareli. The Story of the Adato Family 1800–1934. İstanbul 2003.

ceived, and other issues, will definitely contribute to our understanding of the history of Jews living in modern Turkey.

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