Yaron Harel

The Jews in Ottoman Syria

The roots of the uninterrupted Syrian Jewish settlement, the Diaspora closest to the land of Israel, lie in antiquity. Over the course of centuries, this community experienced cycles of growth and decline and changes in its pattern of settlement. The late fifteenth century arrival of several families of Spanish exiles brought in its wake an economic and intellectual flourishing that continued into the sixteenth century, when Syria, like the rest of the eastern Mediterranean basin, came under Ottoman rule.[1]

As an even smaller minority within a Muslim majority and Christian minority, the distribution of Jewish settlement was not influenced by the dictates of the Muslim majority. Jews were not legally barred from settlement in any rural or urban areas in Syria, and the Muslim population viewed the Jewish presence as natural. Consequently, internal Jewish considerations – primarily needs related to security, economic opportunity, and socio-religious requirements – carried greater weight in determining the largely urban distribution of Syrian Jewish settlement and its concentration in the main urban centers. As compared to rural areas and outlying towns, which were more vulnerable to attack by robbers or local militias, the gubernatorial seats and their military barracks provided a greater degree of personal safety. Jewish urban settlement was also promoted by the extremely limited involvement of Jews in agriculture, the consequence of the Islamic ban on Jewish landowning. As way stations in the East-West trade and important commercial centers, Damascus and Aleppo offered Jews a variety of commercial and financial opportunities. Lastly, Syrian Jews typically sought to live in a supportive Jewish environment with full communal services, such as a prayer quorum, a ritual bath, kosher food, a Talmud Torah, and a cemetery; nowhere in Syria do we find isolated settlements of single Jewish families, or even less than a quorum within a non-Jewish setting. There were, however, smaller satellite communities in the towns surrounding the two largest communities, which, by and large, relied on the mother

1 On the history of the Jews in Syria since the medieval period, see, for example, Strauss-Ashtor, Eliyahu: History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria. Under the Rule of the Mamluks. vols. 1–3. Jerusalem 1944–1970 [in Hebrew]; Bornstein-Makovetsky, Lea: A City of Sages and Merchants. The Community of Aleppo (Halab, Aram Tzova) during the Years 1492–1800. Ramat Gan 2012. [in Hebrew]; and Harel, Yaron: Conflict and Agreement: Sephardis and Mustarabs in Aleppo. In: Ladinar: Studies in the Literature. Music and the History of the Ladino Speaking Sephardic Jews 1 (1998). pp. 119–138 [in Hebrew].

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111048949-010

community for their religious-spiritual needs, namely, for decisions on halakhic questions, for religious leadership, and for the provision of Jewish functionaries.[2]

Although Syrian Jewry lacked any regional umbrella organization, even on an ad hoc basis, this by no means testifies to isolation on the part of the individual communities. Notwithstanding the difficulties of travel between the Jewish communities, the Aleppo and Damascus communities were bound by marital, as well as extensive economic and commercial ties, and by halakhic interchanges. The poorly maintained roads, which also slowed the introduction of modern means of transport such as carriages and trains, meant that, as compared to previous centuries, the distance and time required to travel from one community to the other remained virtually unchanged.

Any attempt to determine the number of Jews in the different Syrian Jewish communities from the numerous sources available necessarily confronts the fact that they are all based upon estimates rather than upon precise data. The demographic data found in consular reports and in approximations by travelers and tourists cited in books or in contemporary newspapers are neither comprehensive nor, as a rule, trustworthy. Even the results of the first official Ottoman census in Syria, from 1848, like those of earlier censuses held elsewhere in the empire, are incomplete; moreover, contemporary observers had already questioned the extent to which this census reflected the demographic reality. Prior to 1880, no data on Syrian Jewry are available from other Ottoman censuses. Although relatively comprehensive and accurate as compared to previous ones, nonetheless, the censuses carried out from 1881/1882 to 1893 by no means provide definitive data with regard to the non-Muslim minorities.[3]

The time span of this examination of the Jewish minority in Syria, the period beginning in 1840 and ending with 1880, when economic disaster overtook Damascus Jewry, overlaps what is known in the history of the Ottoman Empire as the *Tanzimat* era. A key phenomenon of this era was the ever-widening encounter between East and West. This led to profound changes in Ottoman imperial rule and society in general, and in Syria specifically from 1840, when Ottoman rule was reinstated. The shifts in Jewish society are examined against the broad background of the political, social, and economic changes taking place in Syria during the period in question.

The two main Jewish communities differed with regard to social structure, economic endeavor, communal leadership and organization, and education, essen-

2 Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010. pp. 69 f.

3 On these censuses, see Karpat, Kemal H.: Ottoman Population, 1830–1914. Madison 1985. pp. 33 f.; and Karpat, Kemal H: Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82–1893. In: International Journal of Middle East Studies 9 (1978). pp. 237–274.

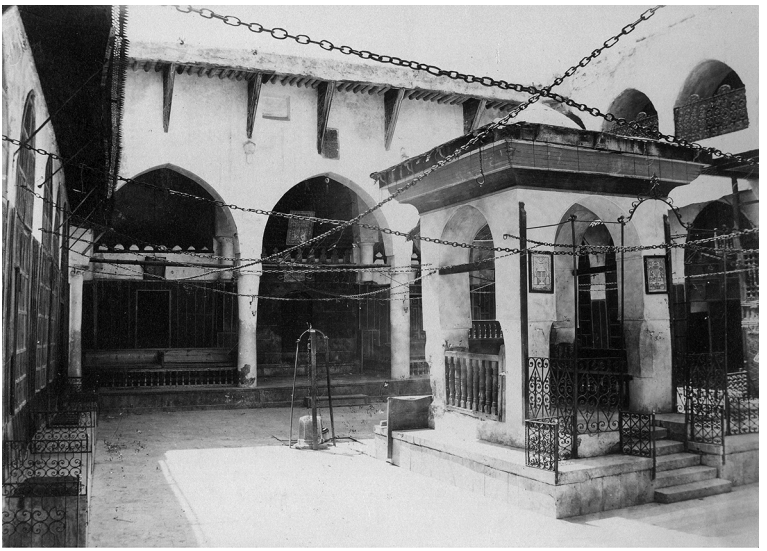

Fig. 1: The Synagogue of Aleppo, 1899. Courtesy of the Max von Oppenheim Stiftung.

tially retaining their heterogeneity during the period in question. Their identity and identification were grounded not in a shared Syrian Jewish awareness, but rather in a developed, unique, local-communal identity. If the Damascus Jewish community was characterized by a wide gap between a thin stratum of elitist affluent families, wealthy by any standard, and the majority, among the most underprivileged stratum in Syrian society, in contrast, the middle class dominated Aleppo's Jewish society, attenuating the gap between rich and poor in this community.[4] Aleppo was also distinguished by a small social elite – dubbed Francos – composed almost entirely of descendants of eighteenth-century European Sephardi Jewish settlers (Fig. 1). Although these Jews were neither members of the Jewish community, nor bound by its taxation or regulations, this by no means detracted from this elite's influence on the Jewish community. During the period under consideration, the nucleus of this European Jewish elite was in a process of decline, causing it to focus inwardly and to concentrate on the preservation of its status and privileges,

4 See Harel, Yaron: Zionism in Damascus – Ideology and Activity in the Jewish Community at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. London 2015. pp. 1–4.

evinced through its desire to create a separatist, modern education system for its children and through its lessened support for communal institutions.[5]

Alongside the Francos, a new Syrian Jewish elite developed. Drawing its strength and status from the acquisition of modern education, it became more closely linked, spiritually and culturally, to Europe than to the Muslim East. Notwithstanding some identifiably Maskilic tendencies in this stratum, we should not mistake it for a full-blown Haskalah movement in the European sense; its members rather admired, and recognized, western culture's superiority. Coupled with a recognition of the practical importance of general education, this perception inspired this group's members to attempt to inculcate its values in the community at large, generally through efforts to synthesize tradition and modernization.[6] Lack of success led this group to despair of enlightening the Jews in the Middle Eastern setting and was one reason for this cultural elite's emigration from Syria, starting in the late 1870s. This emigration had far-reaching short and long-term social ramifications for the Syrian Jewish communities. In the short term, because most of the emigrants belonged to the educated stratum, the Jewish communities lost their most talented young people. In the long term, because of the absence of those young people, the stratum ripest for moving the community toward progress and the twentieth century, the Jewish communities declined.

During the period in question, their fields of economic endeavor, which were both closely tied to and influenced by the Ottoman economy, also distinguished the two main Syrian Jewish communities. Up until the 1840s, Damascus and Aleppo Jewish merchants engaged mainly in international trade via the camel caravans that traversed the distance between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. From the 1840s, Damascus traders largely abandoned this pursuit and turned to the business of extending credit (Fig. 2). They partly funded government activity, but primarily provided loans to the rural fellahin. Aleppine merchants, on the other hand, continued to engage in trade, concentrating on western imports. Aleppo's middle class engaged mainly in small business enterprises, money changing, and middlemanism, whereas in Damascus the majority of the Jewish community pursued various crafts and peddling. Accordingly, the opening of the Suez Canal impacted differently on each of the communities. Although the opening of the

5 On the Francos, see Harel, Yaron: The Controversy over Rabbi Ephraim Laniado's Inheritance of the Rabbinate in Aleppo. In: Jewish History 13/1 (1999). pp. 83–101; and Harel, Yaron: The Date When the Francos of Aleppo Disappeared from the Stage of History. In: Aleppo Studies – The Jews of Aleppo. Their History and Culture. vol 1. Edited by Yaron Harel, Yom Tov Assis and Miriam Frenkel. Jerusalem 2009. pp. 221–244. [in Hebrew].

6 See, for example, Harel, Yaron: Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia. Leader of the Education Revolution in Damascus 1864–1895. In: International Journal of Jewish Education Research 1 (2013). pp. 5–27.

Fig. 2: Frederic Leighton. Old Damascus. The Jewish Quarter, 1874. Courtesy of Alamy.

canal decreased the scope of the Aleppine commercial houses' trade and affected communal functioning, it did not lead to a total collapse. On the other hand, the opening of the canal barely affected the Damascus Jewish community, which crashed some years later, with the Ottoman Empire's 1875 declaration of bankruptcy.[7]

A main factor behind the inception of the stream of immigration to the West was the Ottoman fiscal crisis. In addition, the economic success enjoyed by the first immigrants to the New World played a role in drawing others in their wake, further shrinking the Jewish communities. Not only educated youths emigrated for economic reasons, but also members of the younger generation slated to inherit the small and medium-sized businesses. Many young people, even those who had not studied in modern schools, imitated the educated youth and sought their fortune elsewhere, first in Egypt and then in the West.[8] This dilution of the community further compounded the economic decline. The decreased numbers of marriageable men also created a social problem: a rise in the number of unmarried women, whose need for support further strained communal resources. The economic damage caused by emigration was partly repaired when the successful emigrants began to support their relatives who remained in Syria; nonetheless, this financial subsidy was not sufficient to fully rehabilitate the communal economy.

There were also differences between the two main communities with respect to patterns of leadership. In Damascus, the leadership consisted of two chief rabbis: one, the *hakhām bāşī* who liased between the regime and the community; the other, the leading spiritual authority for the community. Functioning alongside them was a committee comprised of the Damascus notables. The power struggles between the notables and the *hakhām bāşī* for control of the community, and among the notables themselves regarding the appointment of local rabbis, fostered a phenomenon of "importation" of rabbis from other communities to Damascus and even the local Ottoman regime's involvement in the choice of the *hakhām bāşī* on occasion. In Aleppo, on the other hand, the *hakhām bāşī* was also the supreme spiritual authority, which endowed him with a higher and more stable status among most of the community's Jews. Nonetheless, the 1870s saw the beginning of a decline in the status of the rabbinate in Aleppo as well, and the eventual adop-

7 Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010. pp. 45–57.

8 Harel, Yaron: The Unique Case of the Syrian-Jewish Immigrants in Egypt. In: From Catalonia to the Caribbean. The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times – Essays in Honor of Jane S. Gerber. Edited by Federica Francesconi, Stanley Mirvis and Brian Smollett. Leiden 2018. pp. 207–218.

tion of the two-rabbi pattern operating in Damascus.[9] The declining status of the rabbinate and of rabbinic sages in Syria, which began earlier in Damascus than in Aleppo, motivated a wave of emigration by this class from Syria in the 1880s. Unlike the younger population, who sought economic opportunities, the Torah scholars chose to move to Jerusalem, which they viewed as the most suitable place for preservation of the traditional framework and of Torah scholarship. Scholars only began to emigrate overseas after the Syrian Jews established themselves abroad and sought to import religious functionaries to assist in the organization of a traditional Jewish communal framework.[10]

Any consideration of why the Syrian Jewish communities turned westward cannot ignore the significant role played by the introduction of modern education through the agency of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[11] The shift from traditional to modern education proceeded slowly, but largely without polemic and with minimal friction between traditionalists and modernizers. This was due not only to Syrian Jewish admiration for the Alliance and their world Jewish leadership, but also to the wisdom of policy pursued by the Alliance envoys to Syria: their integration of secular and religious studies into the curriculum. Opposition to Alliance activity began only in the late nineteenth century, with the weakening of religion in the Syrian Jewish communities. Whereas in Damascus, this was due to a general process of secularization, in Aleppo it emerged from an ideology with Maskilic overtones, which questioned rabbinic status and the legitimacy of the halakhah and even culminated in an attempt at reform.[12]

Alliance influence in Syria extended beyond the academic sphere. Undeniably, the Alliance made intensive efforts to found schools whose graduates comprised the new elite mentioned earlier. But this society's greatest influence was vested in a realm outside its expressed aims: emigration. Consistent with its principles, the Alliance at first sought to improve the situation of Syrian Jews in their homeland and to facilitate their integration into the local economy and administration, on the European pattern. But local conditions – the ever-deteriorating economic situation, the Jews' continued low social status in Syrian society, and the Alliance

9 On the leadership in the Jewish communities, see Harel, Yaron: Intrigue and Revolution. Chief Rabbis in Aleppo. Baghdad, and Damascus 1774–1914. Oxford 2015.

10 Harel, Yaron: The Reliance of Syrian Jewish Immigrants to Argentina on the Rabbis of Their Communities of Origin. In: International Journal of Latin American Religions 3 (2019). pp. 390–412.

11 On this society, see Rodrigue, Aron: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition. The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. 1860–1939. Seattle 1993.

12 Harel, Yaron: A Spiritual Agitation in the East – The Foundation of a Reform Community in Aleppo in 1862. In: Hebrew Union College Annual. LXIII (1992). pp. 19–35. [in Hebrew].

students' Francophone tendencies – led Alliance envoys to support and encourage the immigration of young Jews to the West.[13]

Even if the *Tanzimat* era saw an alteration in the Muslim Ottoman Empire's formal-legal standpoint toward its non-Muslim minorities, these minorities did not achieve integration into Muslim society. Although a string of reforms touching upon all spheres of life abolished discriminatory signs, granted broader freedom to exercise religion and outlawed forced conversion, and there were additional steps aimed at establishing equality and integrating minorities into the administrative and judicial networks, yet, because their implementation required not only the issuing of firmans but also preparation, education, and a change in Muslim public opinion, in many areas the reforms remained unrealized. The Muslims, the dominant element of Syrian society, could not simply dispense with a millennium of tradition governing minority treatment. In essence, continued Muslim religious fanaticism sidetracked any real change in the minority's status. The Ottoman regime neither challenged its Jews to either become integrated into Muslim society or to engage in social action; nor did it demand a clear statement by the Jewish community on its attitude toward the regime. For their part, Jews were not eager to seek integration into the Ottoman frameworks. The Jewish leadership feared that such a trend would diminish its judicial autonomy and also lead to disintegration of the Jewish framework if individual Jews no longer needed its services. At the same time, it was wary of arousing Muslim fanaticism, which viewed equality between believers and infidels with resentment. Initially, Syrian Jews sought no privileges, and remained passive with regard to the reforms and their implementation. Only toward the end of the period do we find some alteration in the Jewish attitude, not just among the educated stratum. Alliance incentive even promoted awareness of the advantages of the implementation of the letter of the reform law among the rabbinic leadership. Moreover, as the rabbis' status receded internally, they sought Ottoman authorization for their leadership. This support brought with it increased government involvement in the internal affairs of the Syrian Jewish communities.[14]

In the sensitive framework of the relationship between the Muslim majority and the religious minorities, the Jews were more vulnerable than their Christian rivals, and pursued a policy of political reticence. Although the Jews did not enjoy most of the promised reform privileges as result, they also did not arouse the anger of the Muslim populace. In this they differed from the Christians,

13 On the Francophone phenomenon and the disillusionment with it, see Harel, Yaron: In the Wake of the Dreyfus Affair. An Alexandrian Jewish Intellectual Reconsiders His Admiration for France. In: Revue des Etudes Juives 166 (2007). pp. 473–491.

14 Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010. pp. 97–147.

who, in seeking to realize their privileges, offended Muslim religious sensibilities. Coupled with the Muslim perception of local Christians as collaborators with western European Christian powers, this on more than one occasion led to violent anti-Christian outbreaks; the Jews remained largely unharmed. Namely, the Muslim majority adhered to its traditional attitude toward its Jewish minority, as required by Islamic law, but its attitude toward Christians shifted sharply. Growing Muslim closeness to Jews prompted an extreme manifestation of Christian hatred for Jews: the ritual murder accusation by Damascus Catholics in February 1840.[15] After the Damascus affair, there were repeated blood libel accusations in Damascus and Aleppo until the July 1860 massacre of the Christians.[16] Although carried out by Muslims, the Christian public manufactured claims of Jewish participation. Because of the Christian communities' loss of economic and social clout in the wake of the massacre, there was now a significant decline in the frequency of blood libel accusations. Toward the late nineteenth century, concurrent with the Jewish economic decline, the Jewish-Christian balance of power shifted and once again new ritual murder accusations raised their head.

If there was longstanding animosity between Jews and Catholics, the arrival of Protestants on the Syrian scene brought Jewish exposure to a less hostile Christian denomination. Protestant backing during the Damascus affair, coupled with the fact that the Catholics persecuted them as well, endowed them with the image of being friends of the Jews. But this friendship was transformed into suspicion and even antagonism once their primary motivation of converting the Jews became apparent.[17]

On the complex interreligious Syrian social scene, contacts between Arabs and Jews remained restricted to interaction on the daily level. The processes of modernization and accompanying change detailed here did not alter the basic Muslim-Jewish relationship. Notwithstanding the alterations in nearly all areas of Syrian Jewish life, spanning from education to the economy, no substantive shift took place in the Jewish attitude toward the surrounding society. Jewish society neither aspired, nor demanded, to become part of the larger society. Although there was pronounced acculturation, there was no assimilation. Among Syrian Jews, accul-

15 On the Damascus Affair, see Frankel, Jonathan: The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840. Cambridge 1997.

16 Harel, Yaron: Jewish-Christian Relations in Aleppo as Background for the Jewish Response to the Events of October 1850. In: International Journal of Middle East Studies 30,1 (1998). pp. 77–96; Fawaz, Leila: An Occasion for War. Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860. London 1994.

17 Harel, Yaron: Fighting Conversion to Christianity. The Syrian Case. In: Jewish Studies Quarterly 17 (2010). pp. 29–43.

turation was not vested in a desire to resemble the surrounding society based on a perception of its cultural superiority; it is better defined more as a protective means of camouflage than as an attempt to imitate an ideal culture. Syrian Jewish and Syrian Arab intellectuals neither convened nor engaged in joint activity for socio-cultural or national needs. Even though the Jews were formally granted equality, Muslim Syrian society did not easily absorb this externally imposed notion. Consequently, notwithstanding their improved legal status, Jews did not perceive themselves as equal citizens in a changing state, and did not view emancipation as an actively pursuable goal inherent in a belief in the principle of equality and in a desire to become useful citizens. We do find, however, a passive aspiration for equality that grew out of an understanding of emancipation as a means of release from discriminatory oppression on a religious-sectarian basis. This came to the fore mainly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which saw the formation of two political movements in Syria. Because the first called for an Arab-Muslim identity and the second for a secular Syrian identity, Jews could not be integrated into either national movement, and the walls of Jewish solidarity and separatism remained unbreached. Jews retained, in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the surrounding society, the identity of a separate and separatist national-religious collective. The emergent Syrian national identity in which Jews had no place was another element encouraging Jewish immigration to the West, in addition to the already cited economic-cultural dynamic. The closer relationship between Syrian and European Jews, which enhanced Jewish national feelings and solidarity, prevented the formation of either a local Syrian or all-Ottoman identity among Jews.[18]

Another factor promoting the westward turning of Syrian Jews was their recognition of the ability of European powers to lobby the Ottoman regime to improve its treatment of its non-Muslim minorities. In the context of active European intervention in Ottoman affairs, the various minorities acquired consular protection. France protected the Catholics, and England, which had no large Protestant communities in the region in need of protection, made the Jews its protégés. In the Catholic-Jewish conflict, the French consulate sided with its protégés and cultivated an anti-Jewish approach with anti-semitic overtones. Because of England's backing of the Jews, this local Catholic-Jewish tension became a disputed aspect of the international diplomatic turf. The positive shift in the French consulate's attitude toward the Jews in Damascus, which came in the wake of the 1860 massacre of Christians, was the outcome of several confluent factors: the weakened position of the

18 Harel, Yaron: Zionism in Damascus – Ideology and Activity in the Jewish Community at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. London 2015. pp. 8–14.

Christians, the founding of the Alliance in France, and the fact that the French consul in Damascus was a Judeophile. Although Prussia, Austria, and Persia also granted protection to the Syrian Jews, nonetheless, throughout the period in question, Britain remained the primary protector of the Jews, much to their political and economic benefit. The western consuls safeguarded the rights and security of the non-Muslim minorities, acting mainly in the sphere of implementation of Ottoman reforms. By dint of coming to the aid of the Jews in instances of ritual murder accusations, and by mediating between Jews and Protestants, British involvement with the Syrian Jewish community crossed the boundaries of the complex intercommunal fabric.[19]

During the period under consideration, the Picciottos, members of the Franco elite, served as consular representatives for most of the European powers in Aleppo, with the exception of England and France. Paradoxically, the fact that local Jews of European extraction served as consuls in Aleppo delayed the need there for British and French protection and slowed the westernization of Aleppine Jews. Only in the early 1870s, with the declining status of the Picciottos and the recognition of the weakness of their consular protection, did Aleppine Jews begin to seek to become protégés of the major European powers. Moreover, there could be dissonance between the vested interests of the Francos, headed by the Picciottos, and the communal good. In such cases, the Picciottos did not refrain from pursuing their own goals to the disservice of the Jewish community as a whole. This attitude played a role in the waning number of Aleppine Jews seeking consular protection from the Picciottos. Moreover, the Jewish consuls had a negative image in the eyes of their contemporaries, both Christian and Muslim. Their low consular status, their failure to cooperate with the other consuls, their self-serving activity, and their imputed corruption contributed to hostility on the part of the Muslim public and on the part of their fellow consuls.[20]

Contacts with European Jewish communities and Syrian Jewish awareness of the ability of European Jewish communities to appeal to their governments to act on behalf of Middle Eastern Jewry were of supreme importance to the Syrian Jewish communities and fostered their westward orientation. Syrian Jews were no longer divorced from events in the wider Jewish world, and concern for their safety and welfare became part of the western European Jewish agenda. The ties initiated with the 1840 Damascus affair were not simply maintained but also widened. From this perspective, Damascus was the corridor via which renewed

19 Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010. pp. 201–225.

20 See Harel, Yaron: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Consuls in Aleppo. In: Turcica 38 (2006). pp. 233–250.

Jewish solidarity and western Jewish interest in the Jews of the Middle East penetrated the entire Mediterranean basin, bonds strengthened when the Jews of Damascus required European Jewish assistance to escape accusations of involvement in the 1860 massacre of Christians. Although Syrian Jews rarely traveled to the West, a fair number of European Jews visited the Middle Eastern Jewish communities, either for that specific purpose, or as a way station en route to Erez Israel. European Jewish engagement with the Syrian Jewish communities encompassed such spheres as the anti-mission struggle, philanthropic activity, and confrontation of hostile consuls, and the willingness of western European Jews to come to the aid of their Middle Eastern co-religionists endowed them with the status of leaders and heroes in Syrian Jewish eyes. Accordingly, Syrian Jewry drew closer to the emerging spirit of Jewish revival and renewed Jewish solidarity in the wake of the Damascus affair. Among non-Jews, this phenomenon gave rise to a negative image of an international Jewish conspiracy, always prepared to come to the aid of Syrian Jews, rescuing them from every, even justified, complaint. Increasing Alliance involvement in Syria reinforced this perception, with Jews and non-Jews alike viewing this society as the "government of the Jewish people".[21]

This examination of Syrian Jewry shows that it was not stagnant during the period in question. Indeed, until the 1870s, the picture is one of slow, but consistent, progress. The economy flourished, Jewish social status saw some minor, ongoing improvement, and the winds of modernization and enlightenment began to influence sectors of Jewish society. The downturn, which began with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and intensified when the Ottoman Empire declared bankruptcy in 1875, spiraled ever downward with Sultan 'Abd al-Hamīd's suspension of the constitution in 1878, which heralded retrogression with regard to the status of the non-Muslim minorities. Despairing of improvement either in their socio-political status in Syria or in the economic situation, and recognizing the superiority of western culture and the chance of a better future in the New World, the 1880s saw many young Syrian Jews emigrating overseas.

Despite the changes charted in Syrian Jewish society during the 1840 to 1880 period, westernization and modernization were not fully realized in its context. Moreover, because the surrounding Muslim society did not alter its overarching worldview, it was more difficult for Jews to free themselves entirely from traditional perspectives. They could not act in accord with modern criteria when the surrounding society had not yet absorbed this conceptual change. Thus, it was not the Jewish communities in Syria that reaped the fruits of change but rather their new, overseas satellite communities, which were built and flourished on

21 Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010. pp. 235–253.

the ruins of the traditional Jewish communities in their homeland. But here, too, we find an intriguing phenomenon. Despite a high degree of economic integration into the modern world, from the socio-cultural viewpoint, the immigrant communities chose to remain in the old world, voluntarily founding communal frameworks similar to the traditional ones under rabbinic-religious leadership. Unable to break out of the *hārat al-yahūd* and become citizens in Syria, emigration alone made this feasible. Nevertheless, this escape was not accompanied by abandonment of tradition; rather, the Syrian Jewish immigrants chose to re-create the Jewish quarter in their new centers. In addition to the sociological factors that prompt immigrants to seek the warmth of the familiar, there was also a desire on the part of Syrian Jews to preserve the foundations of their old world. The introduction of modern education and other changes, which had begun to detach Syrian Jews from the East, had not yet turned them into citizens of the West. Thus, for years to come, they did not assimilate to their new homelands, but zealously guarded their identity as Damascus or Aleppo Jews living outside Syria.[22]

Emigration from Syria ebbed and flowed, according to circumstances, until 1949, when Syrian Jews became hostages in their land of residence. Only in 1992 did the Syrian regime, under Hafez al-Assad, allow the remnants of the Jewish community to emigrate. Most of its members took this opportunity to leave Syria, bringing the history of the most ancient Jewish Diaspora to a close.[23]

Bibliography

Bornstein-Makovetsky, Lea: A City of Sages and Merchants. The Community of Aleppo (Halab, Aram Tzova) during the Years 1492–1800. Ramat Gan 2012. [in Hebrew].

Fawaz, Leila: An Occasion for War. Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860. London 1994.

Frankel, Jonathan: The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840. Cambridge 1997.

Harel, Yaron: A Spiritual Agitation in the East – The Foundation of a Reform Community in Aleppo in 1862. In: Hebrew Union College Annual. LXIII (1992). pp. 19–35. [in Hebrew].

Harel, Yaron: Conflict and Agreement: Sephardis and Mustarabs in Aleppo. In: Ladinar: Studies in the Literature. Music and the History of the Ladino Speaking Sephardic Jews 1 (1998). pp. 119–138. [in Hebrew].

Harel, Yaron: Jewish-Christian Relations in Aleppo as Background for the Jewish Response to the Events of October 1850. In: International Journal of Middle East Studies 30,1 (1998). pp. 77–96.

22 Harel, Yaron: The Reliance of Syrian Jewish Immigrants to Argentina on the Rabbis of Their Communities of Origin. In: International Journal of Latin American Religions 3 (2019). pp. 390–412.
23 Harel, Yaron: Comment la Syrie et le Liban se sont totalement vidés de leurs Juifs. In: La fin du Judaïsme en terres d'islam. Edited by Shmuel Trigano. Paris 2009. pp. 231–276.

Harel, Yaron: The Controversy over Rabbi Ephraim Laniado's Inheritance of the Rabbinate in Aleppo. In: Jewish History 13/1 (1999). pp. 83–101.
Harel, Yaron: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Consuls in Aleppo. In: Turcica 38 (2006). pp. 233–250.
Harel, Yaron: In the Wake of the Dreyfus Affair. An Alexandrian Jewish Intellectual Reconsiders His Admiration for France. In: Revue des Etudes Juives 166 (2007). pp. 473–491.
Harel, Yaron: Comment la Syrie et le Liban se sont totalement vidés de leurs Juifs. In: La fin du Judaïsme en terres d'islam. Edited by Shmuel Trigano. Paris 2009. pp. 231–276.
Harel, Yaron: The Date When the Francos of Aleppo Disappeared from the Stage of History. In: Aleppo Studies – The Jews of Aleppo. Their History and Culture. vol 1. Edited by Yaron Harel, Yom Tov Assis and Miriam Frenkel. Jerusalem 2009. pp. 221–244. [in Hebrew].
Harel, Yaron: Fighting Conversion to Christianity. The Syrian Case. In: Jewish Studies Quarterly 17 (2010). pp. 29–43.
Harel, Yaron: Syrian Jewry in Transition 1840–1880. Oxford 2010.
Harel, Yaron: Rabbi Isaac Aboulafia. Leader of the Education Revolution in Damascus 1864–1895. In: International Journal of Jewish Education Research 1 (2013). pp. 5–27.
Harel, Yaron: Intrigue and Revolution. Chief Rabbis in Aleppo. Baghdad, and Damascus 1774–1914. Oxford 2015.
Harel, Yaron: Zionism in Damascus – Ideology and Activity in the Jewish Community at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. London 2015.
Harel, Yaron: The Unique Case of the Syrian-Jewish Immigrants in Egypt. In: From Catalonia to the Caribbean. The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times – Essays in Honor of Jane S. Gerber. Edited by Federica Francesconi, Stanley Mirvis and Brian Smollett. Leiden 2018. pp. 207–218.
Harel, Yaron: The Reliance of Syrian Jewish Immigrants to Argentina on the Rabbis of Their Communities of Origin. In: International Journal of Latin American Religions 3 (2019). pp. 390–412.
Karpat, Kemal H.: Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82–1893. In: International Journal of Middle and East Studies 9 (1978). pp. 237–274.
Karpat, Kemal H.: Ottoman Population 1830–1914. Demographic and Social Characteristics. Madison 1985.
Rodrigue, Aron: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition. The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860–1939. Seattle 1993.
Strauss-Ashtor, Eliyahu: History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the Rule of the Mamluks. vols. 1–3. Jerusalem 1944–1970.