

CHAPTER ONE:

JEWES AND JUDAISM IN ISLAM

The advent of Islam in the seventh century, both historically and geographically took place in the gulf between two great empires: Eastern Roman (Byzantium) and Persian. Arabia, with its important trade routes lay between the two, which were in want of control in the area. Jewish and Christian Arabs were recruited by the armies of the two empires, and the political and economic conflict between the two, thus acquired a religious character.

Jews and Christians tried to convert other Arabs to their religions; and in embracing one faith or the other, the convert was also declaring loyalty to one of the two empires. Islam's founder and prophet, Muhammad, was born in Mecca in 570, right in the middle of this conflict. A central doctrine of Islam places Muhammad at the end of a chain of prophets from God, starting with Adam and embracing all the prophetic figures of Judaism and Christianity, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

The message in the Quran was intended to bring all peoples together. It was this point from which originated one of the first keys to the conflict among the three. According to the Islamic tradition, centuries before Islam

was born, the coming of Muhammad was announced in both the Torah and in the Gospels.

The denial of this by Jews and Christians is interpreted as a change in, or misunderstanding of, the scriptures of earlier revelations, obscuring the truth. This basic imparity underlies much of what Muslims believe about Jews and Christians. The Quran and writings about Muhammad show both positive and negative attitudes towards both groups. In the Quran Christian are said to be nearest to Muslims in "love" (Quran 5:82), and yet Muslims are not to take Jews or Christians as close allies (Quran 5:51). In the histories, we see some Jews as hostile to Muhammad and his mission, while yet others become his allies.

The so-called "Constitution of Medina," which Muhammad negotiated with his followers and the Jews of Medina, makes provisions for Jews in the community, allowing them freedom of association and religion in return for the payment of an annual tax. This agreement and the subsequent treaties negotiated by Muhammad established the precedent of including "People of Scripture," Jews and Christians, in the Muslim community.

Muslims share with Jews and Christians a view that each religion has its origins in the monotheism of Abraham. The Quran also mentions Moses and Jesus and respects them as prophets, and Muslims hold Jesus' mother, Mary, in high esteem. Like Jews, Muslims do not eat pork, and like Christians are not to eat food offered to idols. From a Muslim perspective, the same God sent revelations to the prophets of all three religions, with a common message to make the world a more just and God-fearing place.

Arabs spread Islam through a combination of military conquest and peaceful trade. In the century after Muhammad's death in 632, Muslims ruled from Spain in the West to Afghanistan in the East. Not everyone converted to Islam, but many Jews and Christians were willing to be governed by Muslims because the new empire provided some rest from the Byzantine-Persian conflict that had been raging for centuries.

There exist two opposing views concerning the status and treatment of Jews in Islam. One proposes a Jewish-Islamic interfaith utopia, a “golden age” of toleration while the second and contradictory view transposes the theory of Jewish suffering from Christendom to Islam, stressing the negative aspects of Islamic treatment of Jews. This radical divergence of opinions can be related to the interpretation of the term “tolerance”.¹

The willingness of a dominant religion to coexist with the others is termed as tolerance. Although the Quran explicitly states that “there is no compulsion in religion” with the verse *la ikrâha fi'l-dîn*. (II, 256), this was in no means to suggest that the adherents of other religions had an equal status with the Muslims. Their faith was accepted, only with resentment and there existed discrimination within the Islamic society in which the believers of previous revelations were inferior to the Muslims. Yet this discrimination took place, with the exception of isolated examples at the beginning of Islam, by and large without persecution². While persecution was rare and atypical, usually due to specific circumstances, discrimination was permanent and necessary, inherent in the system and maintained by both Holy Law and

¹ Mark Cohen, “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,” in *Jews Among Muslims*, edited by S. Deshen and W.P. Zenner (London: Mac Millan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 50-52.

² Mark Cohen, p. 60.

common practice. Thus Islam was intolerant by one definition of the term, tolerant by another.

Jews enjoyed a relatively better status under Islamic rule than they did under the rule of Christianity. When considering the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the middle ages, at the advent of Islam one encounters a head-on conflict between the two. This conflict had its roots in the Christian belief that they replaced the Jews in God's favour. The foundations of Christianity and the New Testament implied a Christological reinterpretation of the Old Testament and a direct confrontation with Judaism. The preference of the Christians by God meant the rejection of the Jews. Christianity, which emerged out of Judaism, disseminated originally by professing Jews and which lacked an independent ethnic base, found itself in a struggle to integrate and then differentiate itself from its Jewish parent, from its onset. From the beginning, the Christian church developed a complicated anti-Jewish doctrine to win its recognition from pagan Rome and to assert its superiority.³

Moreover, during the early middle ages Jews came to Europe principally as international merchants, fulfilling an important function in a predominantly rural and agricultural setting. However, due to the Christian doctrines that placed commerce at the bottom end of the scale of religiously acceptable occupations and a prejudice characteristic of Roman society, Jews were identified with a despised occupation, which contributed to the alienation of Jews from the Christian society. With Christian merchants entering commerce from the 11th century onwards, the Jewish merchant became a resented commercial

³ Mark Cohen, p. 59.

competitor. This was the period, which saw the birth of commercial guilds that required a Christian oath of initiation; the Jews were unable to take. Unqualified to continue on with their trades the Jews found their only means of livelihood in usury (a taboo practice for Christian merchants), which further promoted the Jewish contempt in Christian society.

On the other hand the Jews of the medieval Islamic world experienced a relatively more favourable position, which was related to economic, political and social factors. First and foremost unlike Christianity the identity of Islam was not established at the expense of its Jewish parent. As a religion Islam was established on a solid ethnic foundation; the tribes of the Arabian peninsula, spreading to politically control a large area through military conquests within decades.

In addition, there was a positive attitude towards commerce in Islam, which was influenced by the mercantile background of Muhammed's native city Mecca. With jurists of the early Islamic period being themselves merchants, Islamic law was shaped to meet the needs of a mercantile economy and a prejudiced attitude towards the Jewish merchants akin to that in Christendom did not exist. On the contrary, as result of the Islamic conquests, which resulted in an economic revolution in the politically unified Mediterranean and southwest Asia, the Jewish merchant became an equal and important participant in the economy. Hence, unlike their European counterparts Jews were economically integrated into the Islamic society, gaining status and privileges at times within the state administration.⁴

⁴ Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979)

Moreover, the Jews did not pose a political and/or military threat to Islam, whose major rival was Christianity, both religions being universalistic and missionary. Muslim religious discrimination was directed at the non-believers, who were divided into several groups, as a whole rather than Jews in particular, and there exists several studies revealing that the anti-Jewish Islamic polemics find their roots in pre-Islamic Christian sources.

Actually there is no proof supporting the existence of a deep-rooted enmity in Islam, against the Jews or any other group, similar to the anti-Semitism that exists in Christianity. Unlike the Christian Anti-Semitism, Muslim treatment of non-Muslims, instead of fear, hatred, or hostility was marked with a sense of contempt and disdain. Consequently in order to understand the conditions to which the Jews were subjected it is essential to examine the status of the non-Muslims within the Islamic society as a whole.

Islamic society is claimed to be an egalitarian one, rejecting the social basis for the formation of an hierarchical society on the basis of social rank or wealth. Compared to the cast system of India or the aristocracy of feudal Medieval Europe, at the time of its advent, recognizing neither cast nor aristocracy, it certainly appeared so. Although at times both were experienced in the Islamic societies, this happened despite the religious order and not as a part of it, being condemned by devout and faithful Muslims as a non-Islamic innovation.

Yet, the egalitarian society of Islam was only so in comparison to existing social orders of its time, and was marked with certain basic inequalities that were inherent in the system. The dichotomies of man and woman (which

persists in contemporary societies), master and slave, and believer and unbeliever marked the boundaries of the definition of the term equality within Islam, with fundamental inequalities among each pair being regarded as necessary for the functioning of the society. These basic inequalities found their origins in the doctrines of the religion and were apparent in daily practice.

All three inferior categories had their place and were seen as necessary for the conduct of the business of society. All had their functions, though occasional doubts were expressed about the unbeliever. There is however one very important difference among the three. Women could not become men; slaves could be freed, but only by legal process and by the will of the master and not of the slave. Unbelievers were such entirely by their own choice. Their status of inferiority was voluntary -Muslims might say willfully- and they themselves could easily end it at any time by an act of will. From the point of view of the Muslim, unbelievers were people to whom the truth had been offered in the final and perfect form of God's revelation, but which they had wilfully refused. Of the three groups of social inferiors, therefore, the unbeliever was the only one who remained so by his own choice.⁵

Both Judaism and Christianity are recognized in Islam with communities professing these religions being allowed the tolerance of the Islamic state and permitted to practice their religions, though subjected to certain conditions. As holders of the earlier revealed books, the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel, both the Jews and Christians are called the "Possessors of

the Scripture” or “People of the Book”, in the Quran and the resultant Muslim terminology. Later the Sabeans and the Zoroastrians were to be included in this nomenclature.

The term “people of the book” first appears in the Quran at the end of the Meccan period. An earlier expression is “ahl al zikr” which means possessors of edification, witnesses of previous revelations, but “kitab” already denotes the Pentateuch and the Psalms.⁶

The affinity of faith between the possessors of the earlier scriptures and the followers of the new revelation is emphasized in the Quran. The religious and moral virtues of the “people of the book” is recognized and Muhammed is called to interrogate them. The stubbornness of the Jews of Medina and of the Christians to accept the message of and convert to the new religion, which was essentially a perfection of Judaism and Christianity, resulted in the disappointment of Muhammed, leading to the belief that they were not to be treated as allies but to be fought against.

The Quranic texts, which mention the adherents of this religion by their proper names (Banu Israil and Yahud for the Israelites of biblical history and the contemporary Jews of Medina respectively), adopt similar viewpoints and determine the entire future attitude of Islam toward these groups. The children of Israel are God’s chosen people, recipients of his bounty admitted to his covenant under his law, to whom paradise is assured. The Quran recognizes several episodes of their history: the bondage in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, their wanderings in the wilderness, their sojourn

⁵ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), p. 4.

⁶ G. Vajda, “Ahl al Kitap,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol.1, (1965).

before the Mount, their division into twelve tribes, their entry into the Promised Land, and into the Holy City and the City by the Sea. But they distinguish themselves by their rebellious spirit and unbelief; they worship the golden calf, they demand to see God, instead of believing in the prophets, they persecute them. They violate the Sabbath and disobey the Law, they are uncircumcised in heart. They alter and pervert the meaning of the Scriptures given to them. Cursed by the Lord, metamorphosed into apes, punished in this world where they are doomed to humiliation, they are finally consigned to Hell. They can only be saved by righteousness.

At first the Quran admits that Jews, Christians, and Sabeans can, like Muslims, achieve salvation through the performance of the rites of their respective religions, but this standpoint is not maintained. At Medina, the Quran admonishes the Jews and summons them to Islam. Although certain Jews are praised and granted forgiveness, the tension, and finally the breach and conflict between the Jews and Muhammed are reflected by the condemnation of their doctrines, by the ban on association between them and believers. Their sins fall into the moral as well as the religious category. Their attitude resembles that of their ancestors. Eager to enjoy life, they fear death; ungrateful for God's blessings, they practice usury, war among themselves, and rush into iniquity. They study their Law, but do not hesitate to transgress it, to distort its phraseology and to conceal the truth. The prohibitions concerning food have been imposed on them as a punishment. Their hatred toward the Christians is not forgotten. Even their monotheism is questionable. They ally themselves with the polytheists. They approach the Quranic revelation, the advent of which has caused disunity amongst them,

with hostility and unbelief. They are the worst enemies of Islam; they interchange words with the Prophet, are jealous of the believers, and are marked for their mockery, their machinations and their treachery. Assured of disgrace in this world, they are destined to Gehenna in the next:

“Children of Israel, remember the favours I have bestowed upon you. Keep your covenant, and I will be true to Mine. Dread my power. Have faith in My revelations, which confirm your Scriptures, and do not be the first to deny them. Do not sell My revelations for a paltry price; fear Me. Do not confound truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth. Attend to your prayers, render the alms levy, and bow down with those who bow down. Would you enjoin righteousness on others and forget it yourselves? Yet you read the Scriptures. Have you no sense?” (II-40-47)

“When they (the Jews) meet the faithful they declare: ‘We too are believers.’ But when alone they say to each other: ‘Must you preach to them what God has revealed to you? They will only dispute with you about it in your Lord’s presence. Have you no sense?’ “(11-76)

“God made a covenant with the Israelites and raised among them twelve chieftains. God said: ‘I shall be with you. If you attend to your prayers and render the alms levy; if you believe in My apostles and assist them and give God a generous loan, I shall forgive you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams. But he that hereafter denies Me shall stray from the right path.’ But because they broke their covenant we laid on them Our curse and hardened their hearts. They have tampered with words out of their context and forgotten much of what they were enjoined. You will ever find them deceitful except for a few of them. But pardon them and bear with them. God loves those who do good.” (V-12)

“Fight against such of those (Jews) to whom the Scriptures were given as believe neither in God nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the true Faith, until they pay tribute out of hand are utterly subdued. The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them’ How perverse they are!”(IX-29-31)

“To those (Jews) that hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in God’s cause. Proclaim a woeful punishment. The day will surely come when their treasures shall be heated in the fire of Hell. And their foreheads, sides, and backs branded with them. They will be told: ‘These

are the riches, which you hoarded. Taste then what you were hoarding.”
(IX- 35)

“We gave Moses the Book and made it a guide for the Israelites, saying: Take no other guardian than Myself. You are the descendants of those who We carried in the Ark with Noah. He was a truly thankful servant.’ In the Book We solemnly declared to the Israelites: ‘Twice you shall commit evil in the land. You shall become great XVII-3-4)...“We said: ‘God may yet be merciful to you. If you again transgress, you shall again be scourged. We have made Hell a prison-house for the unbelievers.” (XVII-8)

“Tell of Moses, who said to his people: ‘Why do you seek to harm me, my people when you know that I am sent to you by God?’ And when they went astray God led their very hearts astray. God does not guide the evil-doers.” (LXI-5)⁷

The attitude of Islam towards the Jews and Christians, as reflected in the *hadis*, is laden with mistrust. Concerning both the religious and social conduct, it stresses the importance of differentiating at all costs, between the believers and these two religious groups, which are rather superficially understood. Moreover in Muslim tradition there is a clear tendency to stress the originality of those Muslim institutions that invite comparison with Jewish institutions. Finally, various abuses prevalent among the Muslims and certain positions taken up in many internal controversies within the Muslim community are sometimes put into a polemical context in the *hadis*. The principles and processes employed betray more than once their Jewish origin.

The basic rule is “do not act as do the people of the Book”, which corresponds to the Talmudic ban on following the practices of the Gentiles. By virtue of this principle, the *hadis* condemns numerous practices of little consequence in themselves. But to Jewish rigorism it opposes a certain

⁷ *The Koran with parallel Arabic text*, translated by N.J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 1990)

degree of Muslim laxity, especially in sexual matters. It claims as purely Muslim (if it does not date back to “Israelite” antiquity or to pre- Islamic Arabia) an institution like the fast of Ashura which is in fact derived from the Jewish Yom Kippur and is moreover virtually supplanted by Ramadan, which again is found to have its origin in Jewish and Christian institutions. Muslim tradition underlines the enmity of the Jews and the Christians by developing and intensifying the grievances mentioned in the Quran ranging from certain episodes in the prophet’s life to eschatological disputes. Muslim tradition rarely gives evidence of direct acquaintance with large portions of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. Yet it accuses the inheritors of those Scriptures, of suppressing certain portions, which were, about desuetude (capital punishment for adultery in Deuteronomy) or which foretold the mission of Muhammad. They are also accused of interpreting passages falsely and even of materially altering their sense. Discussion with the “people of the book” is regarded with dislike, and consultation of their religious documents is berated due to probable fraudulency of their owners and the autarchy of the Quranic revelation, which revokes all that is antiquated in previous revelations and renders the remainder superfluous by superseding it. In contrast, the didactic stories connected with the antiquity of the ahl al- kitab are tolerated.⁸

The anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics of Islam display a remarkable consistency in their major themes from the writings of the controversialist of the 3rd/9th – 4th/10th centuries down to contemporary apologetics. Unlike the hadis, They make use of a scriptural, theological,

⁸ Vajda, p. 265.

historical and sometimes liturgical knowledge, which is ample if not always exact.

There exist two opinions among Muslim theologians concerning the two testaments. The first suggests that Judeo-Christian scriptures in their existing forms are authentic documents in need of a suitable interpretation. The second claims that the earlier revelations were not properly kept and transmitted, leading to the falsification of their actual meaning. Hence they lack the necessary guarantee of sincerity and authenticity, and they cannot be accepted as the Torah and Gospel as actually revealed to Moses and Jesus. They are the corrupt relics of authentic revelations and they cannot be trusted.

In the anti-Jewish polemics the main theological problem is the revocation (*naskh*) of previous divine revelations, which does not imply alternation of God's purpose (*bada*). The principle charge levelled at Judaism, in most of the traditional compositions, is that of the anthropomorphic conception of the Deity.

Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to the members of other revealed religions provided that they acknowledge the domination of Islam. According to Islamic Law this is related to their privileged status known as the *zimmi*. although this status renders their faith inferior, it also legitimizes it.

The *zimmi* is defined as against the Muslim and the idolater, and also against the *harbi*⁹ and the *Musta'min*¹⁰. Originally only Jews and Christians

⁹ The lands occupied and governed by the *kafir* are called *dar-ül harb* and the inhabitants are called *harbi*.

¹⁰ The *harbi* that resides for a given while in Muslim territory is called *müstamin*.

were involved; but later, it became necessary to consider the Zoroastrians and in Central Asia, other minor faiths not mentioned in the Quran.

The bases of the treatment of non-Muslims in Islam depend partly on the attitude of the Prophet, partly on conditions obtaining at their conquest. Muhammed is known to have first tried to integrate the principle Jewish groups at Medina into a rather loose organization, then opposed them violently and finally, after the expansion of his authority across Arabia, concluded agreements of submission and protection with the Jews of other Localities such as Khaybar.¹¹

The essential Quranic text is IX - 29: "Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe neither in God nor the Last day, who do not forbid what God and His apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the true Faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued." Which would imply that after they had come to pay there was no longer reason for fighting them.

The word *cizye* which is perhaps connected with an Aramaic original, occurs in the Quran (IX,29) where even at that time, it is applied to the dues demanded from Christians and Jews, but probably in the somewhat loose sense, corresponding with the root, of "compensation", and in any case as collective tribute, not differentiated from other forms of taxation, and the nature of its content being left uncertain.

The *zimmis* had to pay the Muslim community a tax, which from the point of view of the conqueror, was material proof of their subjection, just as for the inhabitants it was a concrete continuation of the taxes paid to earlier

¹¹ Bernard Lewis, *the Jews of Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 10.

regimes. This tax could be of three sorts, according to whether it was levied on individuals as such, or on the land, or was a collective tribute unrelated to any kind of assessment. In the Abbasid period, the texts show us a clear theoretical distinction between two taxes, on the one hand a tax on land, the *haraç*, which except only in particular instances could not be suppressed since the land had been conquered once for all for the benefit of the permanent Muslim community, and a tax on persons, the *cizye*, which, for its part, came to an end if the taxpayer became Muslim.¹²

During the period of the expansion of Islam, there existed an enormous numerical superiority of non-Muslims over Muslims in the conquered countries. Given the bias of the non-Muslim population towards the Arabs, the only possible policy -and one, which was already tested experimentally in Arabia- in the new territories, was to maintain a flexible attitude. This was crucial in providing that the regime of the conquerors endured.

Within a short period, Muslim population increased and Islam was institutionally organized and culturally deepened. Polemics began to make their appearance between the faiths, and the Muslims sought to restrict more clearly the rights of non-Muslims. Although the measures for Islamization of the state introduced by Abd al-Malik included an indirect threat to the *zimmis*; the first discriminatory measures concerning them is attributed to Umar b. Abd al-Aziz. Thereafter one must come down to Harun al-Rashid, and more especially to al-Mutawakkil, to encounter a policy really hostile to the *zimmis*. The doctrinaires, found mainly among the *fukaha* and the *kadis*, who had interpreted the regulations concerning *zimma* in a restrictive way, developed

¹² Claude Cahen; "Djizya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol.II.

a programme which, if not one of persecution, was at least irritating and repressive. From time to time a sovereign, either through Islamic zeal or through the need for popularity amongst them, ordains measures to the doctrinaires' satisfaction. Sometimes there are outbursts of popular anger against the zimmi. which in some cases arose from the places occupied by zimmi in the higher ranks of administration, especially that of finance.¹³

Until the 6th/12th century in the west and 7th/13th in the east the condition of the zimmi was essentially satisfactory, in comparison with that of the admittedly smaller Jewish community in the neighboring Byzantine Empire.¹⁴

During this period people like the *zindiks*, Manichaeans and those under their influence, who were suspected of wishing to proliferate false doctrines within Islam, were excluded from the benefits of the zimma. On the other hand the rights of the *zimmi* in the traditional sense held good, and their financial situation improved, compared to the early years of Islam becoming closer to that of the Muslims. The main reason behind this was because the inhabitants of the conquered areas who were converted into Islam had to pay the *haraç* and the *zakat* even though they didn't pay the *cizye*. Moreover the *zimmi* using the right that was granted to them by their special status retained the autonomy of their own internal law and although they were able, if they wished, to apply a Muslim judge they continued normally to resort to their own chiefs where these existed.

¹³ Claud Cahen; *Djizya*..

¹⁴ Claude Cahen; "Dhimma", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol.II.

Nevertheless, in relations between *zimmis* and Muslims, the two parties were not treated equally; thus, the Muslim could marry a *zimmi* woman; but a *zimmi* could not marry a Muslim woman; a *zimmi* could not own a Muslim slave, although the converse was permitted; at the frontier the *zimmi* merchant, although paying only half the rate paid by the *harbi*, would pay double the rate for Muslims. In criminal law it was frequently considered, in spite of the contrary opinion of the Hanafis, that the blood-wit for a *zimmi* was less than that for a Muslim.

According to the doctrine dating back in to the time of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz, the *zimmi* had to wear distinguishing articles of dress, in particular the *zunnar* belt the original intention of which was perhaps to prevent administrative errors but which gradually came to be regarded as a sign of humiliation, and was accompanied by complementary restrictions such as the prohibition of fine cloth, noble steeds and uncut forelocks. It would appear that these regulations, often variable in their detail, had never been respected for any length of time, and it is even doubtful whether there was any real desire to apply them outside Baghdad and the great Islamic centres. On the other hand, although there may have been a natural tendency for town-dwellers to reside in different districts according to their faiths, there were neither precise nor obligatory quarters for *zimmis* of any kind. On the contrary, it was the close association of Muslims and non-Muslims in everyday life that provided the *raison d'être* of the restrictions mentioned. Similarly, although there may have been some professional specialization, such as the trade of dyeing in the hands of the Jews, in general the mixture

of faiths among all trades is the striking characteristic of Islamic society in “classical” times.

Islam tolerated the religions of the *zimmis* but with the following restrictions:

It was forbidden to insult Islam, to seek to convert a Muslim and apostasy was forbidden. All this, in principle, was subject to penalty. The child of a mixed marriage was Muslim. As regards places of worship, the jurists are almost unanimous in interpreting restrictively the undertaking made on behalf of Muslims to uphold them, in the sense that this promise could apply only to those buildings which were in existence at the time of the advent of Islamic power; hence new building was forbidden, and rigorists opposed even the reconstruction of buildings fallen into decay.

There were also various limitations on the outward expressions of worship, such as processions and the use of bells, though these were never general in the earlier centuries of Islam. Only in Arabia, most strictly in the Holy Cities, was permanent residence by *zimmis* forbidden.

The restrictions involved some limitation on the clothes the *zimmis* might wear, the beasts they might ride, and the arms they might bear. Christians and Jews were to wear distinguishing emblems on their clothes. This was the origin of the yellow badge, which was first introduced by a caliph in Baghdad in the century and spread into Western lands -for Jews- in later medieval times. Even when attending the-public baths, they were supposed to wear distinguishing signs suspended from cords around their necks so that they might not be mistaken for Muslims when disrobed in the public bathhouse.

They were required to avoid noise and display in their ceremonies and at all times to show respect for Islam and deference to Muslims.¹⁵

In conclusion according to the medieval Muslim, salvation in the afterlife would only come through the one and only true faith; Islam. Believers of other religions would all be condemned to eternal hell-fire and in this belief he was similar to the medieval Christian. On the other hand where he differed was that he saw no reason to anticipate the divine judgment in this world and was content to allow *zimmi* non-Muslims to practice their own religions, maintain their own places of worship, and to a very large extent run their own affairs, provided that they recognized unequivocally the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of Muslims.

¹⁵ Braude and Lewis, pp. 5-6

CHAPTER TWO:

THE JEWS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE PRIOR TO 1492

There is significant proof in Ancient historical and geographical sources of the existence of Jewish communities in Anatolia as early as 4th Century B.C, with the earliest known synagogue was built in Sardis in 2nd Century B.C. The existence of sizeable Jewish communities at the dawn of Christianity, in different parts of Asia Minor, and especially at places the apostles and early church fathers visited, is regarded as an important contributing factor to the spread of Christianity in the area. After the invasion of Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 A.D. and the expulsion of Jews from Judea and Samaria, thousands of them settled in lands, which were later to be the dominions of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium).

As Christianity became the state religion of Byzantium the persecution policy that was directed towards early Christians by the Roman emperors, was transposed to the Jews of the Empire. Starting with the reign of Constantinus the limitations and pressures exerted on Jews increased with each successive ruler, finding its peak in massive killings at times and resulting in forceful conversions and mass migrations. During the 10th Century, large groups of Jews fled north of the Black Sea to the Russian

principality of Kiev. There they again experienced persecution in the 11th century when the Ukraine was converted to Orthodox Christianity, and most of them fled on to Kafa and the Tatar Khanate of the Crimea in the 13th Century. So when the Ottomans conquered Anatolia during the 14th and 15th centuries, of the thousand of Jews that had settled there after the Exodus, very few were left.

The massive expulsions and flight of Jews coincides with the decline of the Byzantine Empire. Turkomans invaded Anatolia after the battle of Manzikert in 1071 and formed Turkoman principalities throughout the peninsula. Byzantine Jews both helped them against Byzantium and fled from Byzantine persecution to Seljuk protection even before the Ottoman state was born. The Ottomans first established their principality around 1300, and within a century they expanded through south-eastern Europe all the way to the Danube. They conquered Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and in 1453, Constantinople. Jews contributed significantly to the Ottoman conquests. The Jews of Bursa actively helped Orhan to capture the city in 1324. As a reward, to repopulate the city and develop its economy, he brought in Jewish artisans and moneychangers from Damascus and Adrianople so that it could become the first Ottoman capital. The ancient Etz ha-Haim synagogue marked the centre of the *Yahudi mahallesi*. Jews entering the Ottoman dominions were allowed to practice their professions, and to own landed property and buildings. In return for this, they had to pay to the state a certain percentage of their revenues as head tax. At first all the Jews of Bursa were Romaniots, or Greek-speaking Jews who had escaped

from the Byzantine. Later they were joined by Ashkenazis from France and Germany as well as Sephardic Jews from Iberia.¹⁶

The small and poor Jewish communities under Byzantine persecution helped Süleyman Paşa and Murad I in their conquests. After Edirne was made the capital of the country, the city was repopulated with large numbers of Jews resettled from the newly conquered lands in Bosnia and Serbia, as well as with Ashkenazi refugees from Hungary, southern Germany, Italy, France, Poland and Russia. They were given substantial tax exemptions and other concessions. The Jewish community in Edirne became the largest in Europe. Jews from Bursa were transferred to the new capital where they were assigned a part in the development of a new administrative centre.¹⁷

Actually, from the beginning onwards self-interest had been the determining factor in Ottoman attitude towards the Jews. While the majority of the Ottoman-Turks were soldiers and villagers, activities such as trade were left to Christian and foreign minorities. The Jews who were not considered to have anti-Ottoman sentiments and act against the state, and who were useful because of their skills, could infuse into these fields and form a beneficial force. From the early decades of the Empire, and years before the migration of Sephardims from the Iberian peninsula, such an Ottoman policy of tolerance and protection towards the Jews was shaped and established as a tradition.

¹⁶ Stanford J. Shaw; *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: NYU, 1991), p.26; Moşe Sevilla Sharon, *Türkiye Yahudileri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları,1992), pp. 29-31.

¹⁷ M.A.Epstein; *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and SixteenthCenturies* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwartz Verlag, 1980), p.102; See also Naim Gülerüz, *Türk Yahudileri Tarihi I* (Istanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik A.Ş, 1993), pp. 21-29.

Following the Ottoman conqueror of Byzantine Constantinople in 1453, Mehmet II 'The Conqueror' (Fatih) encouraged the persecuted Jews of Germany and Spain and elsewhere in Western Europe to immigrate into his Empire, using for this purpose the Chief Rabbi of Edirne (Adrianople), Isaac Tzarfati, who himself had fled from persecution in southern Germany earlier in the century. He sent Tzarfati's appeal to his fellow Jews to join him in the dominions of the Sultan:

“Your cries and sobs have reached us. We have been told of all the troubles and persecutions, which you have to suffer in the German lands.... I hear the lamentation of my brethren.... The barbarous and cruel nation ruthlessly oppresses the faithful children of the chosen people..... The priests and prelates of Rome have risen. They wish to root out the memory of Jacob and erase the name of Israel. They always devise new persecutions. They wish to bring you to the stake.... Listen my brothers, to the counsel I will give you. I too was born in Germany and studied Torah with the German rabbis. I was driven out of my native country and came to the Turkish land, which is blessed by God and filled with all good things. Here I found rest and happiness. Turkey can also become for you the land of peace.... If you who live in Germany knew even a tenth of what God has blessed us with in this land, you would not consider any difficulties. You would set out to come to us.... Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We possess great fortunes. Much gold and silver are in our hands. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes, and our commerce is free and unhindered. Rich are the fruits of the earth. Everything is cheap, and every one of us lives in peace and freedom. Here the Jew is not compelled to wear a yellow hat as a badge of shame, as is the case in Germany, where even wealth and great fortune are a curse for a Jew because he therewith arouses jealousy among the Christians and they devise all kinds of slander against him to rob him of his gold. Arise my brothers, gird up your loins, collect your forces, and come to us. Here you will be free of your enemies, here you will find rest.”¹⁸

Murat II (1421-1451) established military troops named “garaba” from non-Muslims. Jews who joined these troops, participated in many campaigns

¹⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp.135-136.

with the Ottomans. Medical scientist Ishak Pasha, physician to Murat II was also a Jew. Murat II was the first Sultan to mandate distinctive dress for the Jews. They were to wear long dresses like other non-Muslims and they had to wear yellow hats.¹⁹

The Conquest of Constantinople and the Sürgün Policy

According to some sources, Mehmet II was assisted by the Jews of Constantinople in his conquest of the city in 1453. Stanford Shaw writes that Mehmet II's armies broke into the city through one of the Jewish quarters and with the assistance of the local Jewish population who were overjoyed at the opportunity to overthrow their Greek oppressors.²⁰ Though by Muslim tradition Constantinople should have been looted for three days because it had resisted Muslims, Mehmet II prevented his soldiers from looting the city for more than one day. In this way he fulfilled Islamic tradition and also spared the city from destruction so that it could become his capital as soon as possible.

The majority of those Jews settling in the Ottoman lands prior to 1492 were Hellen speaking Romaniots. As the Ottoman state expanded and incorporated the Byzantine lands into its dominions the number of Jewish communities that became Ottoman subjects increased. Most of the Rabbanid Romaniots and Karaites lived in Balkans and Asia Minor.²¹

¹⁹ Yusuf Besalel, *Osmanlı ve Türk Yahudileri* (İstanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş, 1999), pp.20-21.

²⁰ Shaw, p.26.

In the writings of the Romaniot Jews a different view emerges. Jews in Crete and Rhodes wrote laments on the fall of Constantinople and the fate of its Jewish community. In a letter written in Rhodes before 1470 and sent to Crete, the fate of the Jews was described as similar to the fate of the Christians. Many were killed; others were taken captive, and children were brought to the *devşirme*. Some letters describe the transfer of the captive Jews to Istanbul (which will be discussed below) and are filled with anti-Ottoman sentiments. It may be said that such attitudes were generally found among the Byzantine Jews. The deportation and resettlement in Istanbul drew the deepest criticism. The outcome of these forced deportations was very grave for the Byzantine Jewry. Their freedom was limited amid the laws and status of *sürgün* was applied to them. The Karaites also expressed bitterness and sorrow arising from these new circumstances.²²

Jewish historiography of the Ottoman Empire and its Jewry disregarded these facts and attitudes from the 16th Century onwards. Elijah Capsali, who was a Cretan Jewish scholar and who wrote a history of the Ottoman dynasty in 1523, did not mention compulsory resettlement at all, and told nothing about the fate of the Jews of Constantinople after its fall. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the friendly policies of Mehmet II, and the good reception by Bayezid of the Spanish Jewry, caused the Jewish writers of the 16th Century to overlook both the destruction which Byzantine Jewry suffered during the Ottoman conquests and the later outbursts of oppression

²¹ Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Türkiye ve Balkan Yahudiler Tarihi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık A.Ş, 2001), pp.81-82.

²² Joseph R. Hacker; "Ottoman Policy toward the Jews and Jewish Attitudes toward the Ottomans during the Fifteenth Century," in *Christian and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), p.121.

in the days of Bayezid and Selim; secondly, by referring to the past as a “Golden Age”, Jewish historians hoped to induce tolerance and favoritism in the sultans, because their ancestors had acted in that way as well.

Compulsory deportation and resettlement was a policy that was followed because population was a problem. Only about 50 thousand people lived in the city that was already ruined by the Latin crusaders at the start of the 13th Century. So the method of Bursa and Edirne was repeated. First Mehmet II tried to get the Christians who had fled. He also settled one-fifth of his Christian prisoners and their families along the Golden Horn. They were provided free houses and tax exemptions. Then he forced Muslims, Christians and Jews from all over the empire to migrate to Istanbul. For instance, there were no Jews in Salonika according the 1478 census, since the Turks deported the Byzantine population of Jewish origin of the city to Istanbul after the conquest.²³

This was called the *sürgün* policy. It involved a mixture of economic inducement and religious tolerance that would increase Istanbul’s population, and the percentage of that population that was Jewish. Offers of free land and tax-free incomes for those who developed trade and commerce were an important factor; as was an astute tolerance of major religious groups. Mehmet II allowed these groups, called *millet*s, to live under their own leaders and follow their own religion and customs. It helped maintain social stability, and coaxed the support of those religious leaders – both in the ruling empire; and at the frontier of Mehmet II’s conquests. Christians were still prohibited from building new churches within the Empire, but Mehmet II

²³ Benbassa and Rodrigue, p. 88-89.

gave exceptional rights to the Jews. Islamic law prohibited the construction of new synagogues, allowing only the repair and construction of existing houses of prayer. Yet the Sultan regarded the Jews as zimmi, and enabled them to build synagogues on the foundations of existing houses. The rule of Law was bent to facilitate Mehmet II's policy. By issuing irades (imperial orders) the Sultan allowed even the smallest existing structures to be transformed into major religious establishments, without contradicting religious law. These establishments, once constructed, were to become the nuclei of separate Jewish communities. His policy offers, in part at least, an explanation for the fact that three decades after its conquest, Istanbul's population had risen to 16,326 households (5,162 of which were Christian, and 1,647 of which were Jewish²⁴).

Mehmed's policy was expansive, and he encouraged the emigration of Jews from Europe. He is said to have issued the proclamation:

"Who among you of all my people that is with me, may his God be with him, let him ascend to Istanbul the site of my imperial throne. Let him dwell in the best of the land, each beneath his vine and beneath his fig tree, with silver and with gold, with wealth and with cattle. Let him dwell in the land, trade in it, and take possession of it"²⁵

As a result of these and other such appeals, large numbers of Ashkenazi Jews came to Sofia, Vidin, Plevne, Nicopolis, Salonika and Istanbul; And not just Ashkenazi Jews; but Jews from England, France, Germany, Spain, Poland and Lithuania. By 1489, as a result of Mehmet II's efforts, the number of Jewish households in Istanbul had risen to 2,491.²⁶

²⁴ Shaw, p.28.

²⁵ Shaw, p.30.

²⁶ Shaw, p.37.

By comparing the list of Jews living in pre 1492 Istanbul with the entries in the *tahrir defterleri* of the various towns and provinces from which they came, it seems that the Ottoman Balkans had almost no Jews left within two or three years of the conquest.²⁷ The sürgün policy had grave effects both on those that were forced into exile, and on the social structure into which they were injected. While part of the local conquered population was transferred to previously conquered territories, population from long time Ottoman territories was transferred to the new areas. These operations involved the entire population of the Empire, and were not necessarily directed at Islamization. At times it was intended to subdue rebellious elements in a region already under Ottoman control. On other occasions it was used to settle and develop a region badly ravaged by battle or pillage, or to undermine local authorities and aristocratic cliques in recently conquered areas.²⁸

A study of the status and obligations of a person exiled by decree shows that he was forbidden to leave his new region without permission of the subaşı. His children were likewise forbidden to leave. He was sometimes forbidden to marry a person from anywhere else, and could not at times marry someone who was not an exile. He was also obliged to engage in a certain occupation if it was for this occupation that he had been exiled. Though he enjoyed a partial tax exemption for a given period of time and in

²⁷ Mark A. Epstein, "The Leadership of the Ottoman Jews in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries" in *Christian and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), p.103.

²⁸ Joseph R. Hacker; "The Sürgün System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire during the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry*, edited by Aron Rodrigue (Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies, Bloomington, 1992), p.3.

most cases a place to live, the real estate he had owned in his previous domicile was on occasion taken from him by the authorities without compensation. The status of sürgün differentiated the person from the other inhabitants of the region. In Istanbul, for example, all new arrivals were first organized in special neighborhoods according to their origin, and were not permitted to move to other parts of the city to reside.²⁹

Although it is true that it was not only Jews who were transferred to Istanbul, still the fact that almost all the Jews in the Empire were subjected to the sürgün policy is significant. It may be interesting at this point to recall İnalçık' s thesis with respect to Mehmet II's de-Turkification attempt. Çandarlı Halil Paşa had opposed the siege of Istanbul, and Mehmet II, who had long desired a move against the Turkish nobility and especially the Çandarlı family, took this opportunity to have him and most of his family imprisoned. Zaganos Paşa, who was a devşirme, replaced Çandarlı. A new tradition began, whereby the most important positions of the central government were reserved for the slaves of the Sultan. Large-scale confiscations of *timars* and private properties soon reduced the power of the major Turkish families. They were awarded to devşirme members, who then quickly rose to power.³⁰ There seems to be a link, or a parallelism, between the two events. Mehmet II's preference in repopulating his new capital seems to be part of a greater shift - what took place on the level of the political elite was also taking place on a social level.

²⁹ Hacker, p.6.

³⁰ Halil İnalçık, "The Policy of Mehmet II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City," *Dumbarton Oak Papers* 23, 1979. p.56.

The Millet System and the Jewish Community

The Ottoman Jewish community was one of the several religiously based communal organizations called millet. These organizations were 'self-governing to a great degree and were directed by religious leaders who also had secular authority. This was a Middle Eastern tradition that was developed before Islam; the Ruler and his circle of elites were there to defend and expand the state, to maintain order and security, and everything else was left to the communities. Within these communities, members were allowed to worship in their own way and to govern themselves according to their own laws and traditions, using their own language. The millet leaders were responsible for making certain that their followers did their duty to the Sultan - that they kept the peace and paid their taxes. The government only interfered when these obligations were not met, or when conflicts could not be resolved within the community.

From the Ottoman point of view, the millet system had a religious-legal and a practical basis. In Islamic law Jews and Christians are "People of the Book". They are considered second-class because they have not accepted the final and perfected successor religion to their own. Nevertheless, they are entitled to the protection of their rights under Islamic concepts of justice.

The place of non-Muslims was subordinate but still quite clearly defined. They were under general disabilities, the chief one being a poll tax called *cizye*. Others included selected special taxes, restrictions on building, repairing or enlarging religious facilities, sumptuary laws, and various

prohibitions such as having to give way to Muslims, and not being allowed to ride horses in the streets of the capital. The manner in which many of these were implemented was meant to humiliate. “For the author of a standard commentary on the Quran, the meaning of [the words describing the manner of payment of *cizye*] is that it ‘shall be taken from them with belittlement and humiliation.’ ”³¹

The *cizye* was divided into three groups according to income, and Kemal Karpat sees this as an instance of the Ottoman pre-occupation with justice, defined not in the modern but in the Platonic sense:

“The three categories of *cizye* had been devised in order to achieve an equitable distribution of the tax burden. In the past the government had repeatedly refused to accept one uniform *cizye* tax, despite the fact that this would have brought more revenue to the treasury. Two seventeenth-century documents give evidence of the opposition to a single rate for the head tax; At one point, when the number of *cizye* taxpayers in a locality decreased from 2,956 to 2,450 families, the government refused to spread the loss over the remaining families by levying an equal amount on each (regardless of the differences in wealth) but retained instead the three-layer system as being more equitable; In Kayseri the government refused to combine all three categories into a single one designated *ala* (highest), ordering that the taxpayers be classified into three categories as before.”³²

³¹ Bernard Lewis, p.53.

³² Kemal Karpat, *The Ottoman Population 1830-1914, Demographic and Social Characteristics*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), p.19.

A second religious-legal basis was that “the religious law was considered as personal, made for believers and only for them. There was, therefore, no provision for a person of a different faith.”³³

The practical basis for wanting the non-Muslims to largely run their own affairs was that the Ottomans had little interest in or resources for such tasks. Ottoman rulers, like their predecessors the Selçuks, were content if subject people paid taxes, refrained from rebellion, and behaved according to their second-class status.³⁴

The positive side of the millet system was that it allowed peoples of different cultures, languages and religions to live alongside each other without interference. This communal isolation helped prevent inter-community conflicts that were so common in Middle Eastern societies. But this also produced a negative impact: people of different religions were so segregated from each other that they became more hostile than ever. As time went on, their religious prejudices deepened, and their political aspirations turned into enmity. Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Turks lived in the same society but remained strangers. They were separated by the walls of their quarters, but also by the barriers of religion and language. What is more, this separation did not prevent conflicts. This is why after centuries of living close to one another, the conflicts and enmities of these communities

³³ Aryeh Shmuelevitz; *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, Administrative, Economic, Legal and Social Relations as Reflected in the Responsa* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), p.5.

³⁴ Walter F. Weiker; *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity: A History of the Jews of Turkey* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1992), p.50.

became even more bitter and bloody, leading to the weakening and then the demise of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

The Ottomans followed the *zimmi* model of the classical Islamic empires, but they also took the Byzantine model. Before the conquest, a Patriarch, who commanded a hierarchy of priests, led the Greek Orthodox Church. This structure could be used to control his subjects, so Mehmed II appointed Greek Orthodox Patriarch George Scholarius as secular and religious leader of the Greek Orthodox community in 1454. The Armenians got their own community organization, because they refused to accept being subordinated to the Greek Church. In 1461 Mehmet II authorized a separate Armenian Orthodox community under the chief Armenian bishop in Istanbul. He was appointed as Patriarch in preference to the older Armenian sees centered at Sis in Cilicia and Echmiadzin in the southern Caucasus, which were not yet under Ottoman control.

The case with the Jews was different. Mehmet II faced the danger of having the Jews persecuted at the hands of the Greek priests; this would endanger his plans of rebuilding the Empire's economy with the help of the Jewish population that he had relocated. One solution would be to form a hierarchy for the Jews similar to the two Orthodox organizations. Some historians have claimed that the leader of the Romaniot Byzantine Jewish community of Istanbul, Rabbi Moses Capsali (1420-95) agreed to pay a special tax called the *rav akçesi* in return for the Sultan's recognition as Grand Rabbi (*hahambasi*). In 1495 he was succeeded by another distinguished rabbi called Elijah Mizrahi, who held the position until his death in 1535. It is said that these grand rabbis directed all the rabbis and

Jews throughout the Empire in the same way that the Greek Patriarch led the Greeks and the Armenian Gregorian Patriarch dominated the Armenians. Both are said to have been granted membership in the Imperial Council with precedence over their Christian counterparts.³⁵

Jewish Leadership

The account above is based largely on the writings of Elijah Capsali. Jewish historiography from the 16th Century onward accepted these facts of Capsali. At the end of the 17th Century the story was exaggerated by Joseph Sambari's chronicle. Divrey Yosef the 19th century historian H. Graetz introduced this exaggerated version into modern historiography. Historians of the Ottoman Empire also accepted this account.³⁶

Contemporary sources do not, however, corroborate the story. Neither the exact dates of the appointments, nor the extent of the power that they encompassed are known. Ottoman records do not mention their presence at the Imperial Council. And as there is no religious hierarchy in Judaism, it is doubtful that the Ottoman Jews had a centralized organization, with the Grand Rabbi as their leader. Other rabbis around the Empire, it seems, did not easily fall into cooperation with Capsali or Mizrahi. The most likely case is that the two never claimed or received the title of Grand Rabbi for the whole Empire. They were probably only responsible for collecting the poll tax that

³⁵ Shaw, p.42.

³⁶ Hacker, p.118.

the members of the Istanbul Jewish community owed the Sultan, and for acting as the community's chief judges.

Mizrahi, for example, is known to have encountered serious opposition from other rabbinical leaders even in Istanbul because he attempted to establish relations with the Karaites. Capsali had opposed them, and there was a constant quarrel among those who wanted to retain the Karaites within the community and those who did not. Mizrahi also raised opposition because he was stricter in his interpretation of Judaism, and he considered the Sephardic Jews to be departing from Judaism proper.

Neither Capsali nor Mizrahi seem to have exercised any extensive authority over Jews outside of the capital. Mizrahi delegated the task of maintaining relations with the Ottoman government, plus the collection of taxes, to the Kahya -this position was given to Rabbi Shaltiel, because he knew Ottoman Turkish and had close relations with high Ottoman officials. After Mizrahi died, this decentralized administration remained. The Jews of each major city were led by Chief Rabbis of equal rank, and kahyas acted as business managers and agents in charge of relations with Ottoman officials. The office of Grand Rabbi was not used until the Tanzimat era, when the whole system was modernized and centralized.

The first source to ascribe all these positions to the grand rabbi is Sambari. Elijah Capsali, who was related to Moses Capsali, does not mention the position, despite his long and detailed descriptions of his famous relative. There is no mention of a grand rabbi in the Ottoman Hebrew sources of the 15th and 16th Centuries.³⁷

³⁷ Hacker, p.119.

In an autograph responsum of Elijah Mizrahi from 1498, he discussed Moses Capsali's authority in Constantinople, while Capsali was still alive and in charge of communal activities. According to Mizrahi, Capsali's authority was limited to Istanbul and its neighbourhood and it was never exercised or claimed over the Ottoman Empire as a whole.³⁸

Mizrahi also notes the tension between the rabbis and the public. As a result, the rabbis of Istanbul decided to have a strike (the only one known in Jewish history) and stop public teaching and serving the congregations. The cause of the tension was that Jewish men were spending their entire lives and all their energy in financial enterprises. It is evident that a small class of Jews rose to wealth and influence in Istanbul, but the majority was poor, and the gap between them was large. The success of the few caused bitterness in many, and the rabbis seem to have sided with them. However it is also true that the wealthy Jews paid not only their own taxes, but also the taxes of the Jewish poor who were not able to pay the *cizye* themselves.³⁹

The Ottomans had one major concern: that the communities saw to their own affairs, administered themselves effectively, and paid their various taxes and assessments to the government. The Jewish community was special in that unlike the Christians, they had no established hierarchy on which the Ottomans could rely as a basis for an administrative system, or on which the subjects could rely as a basis for countering and resisting the Ottoman

³⁸ Hacker, p.119.

³⁹ Hacker, pp.122-23.

regime.⁴⁰ As a result, they had no means to resist the sürgün policy which rooted them at the whim of the Sultan, who moved them around in his empire like so many pawns. In general, in the 15th century the Jewish community responded well to the concerns of the Sultans, and took part in the overall increase in wealth, which was the result of increased domestic and foreign trade. Among other things, this was facilitated by the fact that Christians were looked upon with disfavour. In the 1480s and 1490s, even before the arrival of the great wave of Jewish migration, Jews were replacing Greeks as tax farmers in Rumelia. This, of course, created a reaction in the form of frequent Greek attacks on Jews.⁴¹

In the 15th Century the rabbi of the capital, first at Edirne and then at Istanbul, seems to have guided the community with the approval and encouragement of the Ottoman authorities. The Istanbul community changed during this century, and the newcomers wanted to play a more influential role in the leadership of the community. This resulted in a net weakening of the central power of the rabbinate in Istanbul. In the Balkans new communities emerged after 1492, which led to the emergence of local systems of leadership outside Istanbul.⁴² But after 1492, nothing would remain the same for the Jews of Europe or the Ottoman Empire.

⁴⁰ Epstein, p.113.

⁴¹ Weiker, p.31.

⁴² Epstein; p.112.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE MASS EXODUS OF 1492

Towards Expulsion: 1391-1492

The quest for “unitarian” explanation (social or religious) has been one of the dominant features of the historiography on the pogroms of 1391. To the modern eye, internal Hebrew sources are apparently surprising, in some respects, in their response to the events. One contemporary in 1403 sees the massacres as divine punishment for neglect of Bible study.

Another, in 1416, sees them as a retribution for the social and economic injustice perpetrated by a small group of Jews who “had been given the keys of treasury”. A century later, a chronicler would write that the Jews had cohabited with Christian women and it was their bastard offspring who had been prominent in the attacks against the communities. A chronicler of the events, writing in the autumn immediately following the attacks of the summer of 1391, implies by the allusive texture of his account that the pogroms belong within a continuum of Jewish suffering whereby every local community in Castile, Andalusia or Aragon is another Jerusalem, destroyed by the Divine Will in retribution for the sins of God’s people.

Nevertheless these reactions are important signs of mentality. Despite antecedents, such as the attacks on Jewish communities during the civil war in Castile (1366-1368) and the Black Death in the crown of Aragon (1348), they all seem to agree in seeing 1391 as a major turning point. Emblematic of this attitude is the attempt to turn a date into a motto. In the Hebrew calendar, where letters act as numerals, “QN” (“zealous”, which: 5151 (i.e. 1391)) became the year of the zealous God.⁴³

In 1391 the problems caused by the minority of the king, Enrique III, “the Ailing”, a mere lad of twelve, are highly relevant to the pogroms in Castile. They helped to create an atmosphere of civil unrest. In Seville itself riots occurred some months before the pogroms. The social explanation is particularly persuasive for the crown of Aragon: The inflation of 1340 to 1380, and the crisis and bankruptcies of the main bankers of Barcelona had implications for a Jewish population, some of whose members were *corredores* (licensed middlemen) and many of whom lent small amounts of money to the burghers and to the peasantry of the hinterland, especially in Mallorca and Barcelona. Wolff’s theory that the pogroms belong with the “social revolutions of the late Middle Ages” such as the English Peasant’s Revolt is enhanced, for Barcelona, by the fact that after the Jewish population had disappeared either by death or conversion the riots continued unabated and were directed against members of the city council.

⁴³ Eleazar Gutwirth, “The Jews in Fifteenth Century Castilian Chronicles” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4, April 1984, pp.379-96.

A typical document of the collaboration of all classes in the anti-Jewish activities might be the testimony before a Christian notary of Joseph Abraham, a Jew of Valencia:

“At noon of the ninth of July past, the plaintiff being in his house they closed the gates of the juderia with great noise and shouts from the Jews and he shut his door. Before the hour of three, the people of the town assaulted the wall by the Old Valladar and even though he had his gate secured by great and strong nails, they forced it down with a battering ram and his house was assaulted by twenty men armed with swords, sticks and knives, some with blackened faces and hoods. They immediately broke and splintered boxes desks, wardrobe. They even took the little mattresses off the beds without leaving a nail on the wall... all assessed at three thousand gold forms. They also stabbed his brother Nahor in the neck while he was trying to repel their attack... Because the plaintiff complained about the damage... the head of the criminals hit him, wounding his arm and also behind his ear... Asked whether he knew... the perpetrators of the assault and those who raped the women, he said that by certain words and a golden earring which one of those with a blackened face wore he suspects a man of estate but he can not be sure.”

On the fifth of August the Valencian town councillors wrote to the king to explain why “no real punishment has been carried out” subsequent to the pogroms:

“It seems to us that this does not happen because... some magnates, because they themselves or their relatives are guilty... impede that those who are most guilty should be denounced by threatening the claimants who have been damaged... because the guilty are of all conditions: men of the country and the town, of the Order of Montesa and of the Order of the mendicant orders, , gentlemen... they also induce the people to show displeasure towards us giving them to understand that we do this to damage the lower orders...”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Y. Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain Vol 2 (Philedelphia: 1966), p.95.

Polemics

Whether the robbings and killings of 1391 were a result of religious fervour or not, it still was religion which demarcated the boundaries of the conflict between Jews and Christians. Polemics, whether oral or written, might be seen as a metaphysical, theological extension of the violence. In his *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Pablo de Santa Maria created a vision of contemporary Jewish history whose main protagonists were Jewish “courtiers”. According to Pablo, these embodied for the Jews the fulfilment of the prophecy that “the staff (i.e. rulers) shall not depart from Judah”. For him, 1358, one of the many putative dates of redemption, was transformed into the Jewish “courtiers”. According to Pablo, these embodied for the Jews the fulfilment of the prophecy that “the staff (i.e. rulers) shall not depart from Judah”. The attacks of 1391 were understood by Pablo as the result of the actions of “the mob inflamed by the blood of the Messiah”.

The Tortosa Disputation has captured the attention of scholars who seem to see it as the major event of religious polemic in fifteenth-century Spain, particularly because of its putative effect: the conversion of large numbers of Aragonese Jews. In this context it would be useful to note the converts’ own perception of the circumstances of their conversion. And here very little evidence has been found to show that converts viewed their conversion from Judaism as a result of the Tortosa disputation.

Still, it would be an error of perspective to see these polemic texts, written in Latin and hence accessible to a small fraction of the laity, as the most significant aspect of the Jewish Christian polemic in fifteenth century

Spain. Although they have attracted a great deal of attention, the research of recent years has increased our awareness of the many other similar texts written in late medieval Spain. It sometimes seemed as though Spain lagged behind European scholasticism because its intellectual energies were directed toward such polemical activities. To privilege one group of Latin polemics over another would require a more convincing explanation than is available in the literature at present. Similarly, the fifteenth century in Spain saw the appearance of works in the vernacular which appealed to the rising lay literate public and can be documented as forming part of fifteenth-century libraries. One such work is the Memorial of Maestre Juan el Viejo, a work that was widely read. In it, even those Christian laymen without access to Latin, who formed the public of the various translations into the romance of Latin works in fifteenth-century Spain could find a store of arguments against Judaism.

Above all, when we speak about polemics in the fifteenth century, unlike in previous centuries, we don't have to restrict ourselves to the hypothetical assumption that Latin technical texts faithfully and accurately reflect the reality outside the text. The preservation of Inquisition files means that we have documents in the original romance of the polemical conversations held by Jews and Christians outside any formal framework. For example, around 1470 the Calatayud Jew, Judah Benardut was told:

“Benardut why do you not become a Christian? You are dejected, you are subjected, and you are humiliated by any child. This is insufferable. This one throws stones at you. The other calls you a Jewish dog. If you turned Christian you would be honoured, you could be obeyed, you could get offices and a thousand other honours.”

The Jew replied: “I do not wish to become a Christian, neither for those honours nor in order to escape insults. I hold fast to my religion and I

believe that I will be saved in it, and the more humiliations I have to endure to sustain my religion the more shall my soul be saved.”⁴⁵

The many conversations of this type reported in Inquisition files may lack theological precision, but they probably reflect much more accurately the actual realities of Judeo-Christian polemics in 15th century Spain than any Latin text.

Learned and Popular Culture

As an alternative image of ailing Hebrew Literature and culture one may propose another of a flourishing popular Jewish culture, sometimes in the vernacular. In this context, “popular culture” is a problematic concept. Thus, magic and superstition have been viewed as “popular” and opposed to an elitist, theosophical, Kabala. Nevertheless, throughout the 15th century, some of the leading exponents of learned culture amongst the Jews of Spain occupy themselves with the problem of magic and related areas and try to explain and perhaps legitimise them through rationalizing explanations. Efori writes: “Those who are perfect in this science (or wisdom) know how to change the nature of existing things and to do signs and miracles by means of the names of the creator and holy angels... and this knowledge has spread amongst them and they call this knowledge Simus Tehilim and the choice of the famous name of 72 letters.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ An example of Christian vernacular and the Jewish polemic in Fifteenth Century Spain is discussed in Eleazar Gutwirth “Maestre Juan el Viejo and his Tratado Madrid,” Proceedings of the Nineth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: 1886), pp.129-134.

⁴⁶ Eleazar Gutwirth, *Caste, Class and Magic: Witches and Amulets amongst the Jews of Late Medieval Spain* (Barcelona: 1989), p.85.

The use of the vernacular and oral literature may be included in this category of popular culture. Liturgical texts, translations, popular medicine, songs related to the corpus of Judeo-Spanish ballads, *endechas*, proverbial idioms in private letters, have increased the confidence of the historian in accepting the earlier dating of linguists and folklorists for a number of phenomena appertaining to the domain of popular culture.

The omissions of Christian elements in such songs was not always consistent or necessary. Similarly, the rubrics, or tune markers of liturgical poems, where the first line of a current Spanish song follows, are to be found in 15th century Hebrew poems. That some of them are dirges lamenting Christian persecutions is culturally significant: even when the theme was allusive of persecution, the melody, expected to be recognized by cantor and congregation alike, was not outside Spanish culture.⁴⁷ These complex cultural ambiguities extend to various other realms. Onomastic usage is another example of the continuity of attachment to the romance, though Arabic forms exist as well. Toponymics are shared by Jews and Christian but there is also a tendency toward using names of animals (e.g. Gato or Gategno, but also Trucha) or nicknames such as Correnviernes (he who runs on Friday). Particularly noteworthy is the continuity of women's romance names taken from a relatively restricted semantic field (Sol, Oro, Dona, Orasol). The proverbs which paremiologists believe entered Hispano-Jewish usage at this period also have Christian parallels.

⁴⁷ Eleazar Gutwirth, "Towards Expulsion," in *Spain and the Jews*, edited by Elie Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.58.

In understanding the 15th -century cultural horizons of Spanish Jewry it is necessary to look at the Jewish nachleben of works written in other periods. It was in the 15th century that Jews copied, read and memorized such Jewish vernacular literature as the Poema de Yosef or the Proverbios Morales of the 14th century Rabbi Sem Toy of Carrion. Recently discovered manuscript probably of the same century shows that Jews were interested in Christian paremiology, copying and transcribing it into Hebrew characters. The proverbios of Rabbi Sem Toy were quoted in the sermons of the Zamoran Rabbi Abraham Saba. It has been argued that the teacher of the Toledan Yeshivah, before the expulsion, Rabbi Isaac Caro, used such vernacular proverbs in his sermons.⁴⁸

These features of Hispano-Jewish “popular” literature and culture do not support the notion of isolationism, which is part of the usual image of a declining Hispanic Jewry. And it could be argued that the 15th century was one of the periods of the most visible and documentable mutual influence or contrast between Jews and Christians in the Spanish kingdoms. For example, verse written by Christians in this period, in Castilian, may be said to have the highest incidence of Hebrew words and references to Jewish customs. Such references are within a satiric context. But it is hardly likely that they would have been learnt for the purposes of writing a particular poem. Rather they should be understood as revealing the high awareness of Jewish customs amongst the Christians. More relevant than the fact that the writers are frequently conversos is the point that they expected their Old

⁴⁸ Eleazar Gutwirth, p.59.

Christian audiences understand their allusions to concepts such as the rabbi, the Torah Sabbath, and mamzer.

Self-government

Historians who have taken for granted the unmitigated decline of Hispanic Jewry in the 15th century were faced with the problem of explaining how the most ambitious and extensive internal legislation which has reached us from medieval Spain is the product of precisely this period: the tagganot or bye-laws of Valladolid (1432).⁴⁹ To begin with there was the problem of the language: why was there so much Spanish and so little Hebrew in the text? Nevertheless rather than seeing the language of the text as a mark of the decline of Hebrew knowledge it may be understood as a product of the ethnic identity that was being crystallized after the pogroms of 1391. The tagganot are the final product of the work of a Junta or assembly of the Jews of Castile, which gathered at Valladolid in March 1432. The assembly was a logistic and administrative achievement. The fact that it could take place should be understood against both the immediate political conjuncture and the inner tradition of Jewish self-government.

The central figure of the assembly is the Ray dela Corte Abraham Bienveniste. Research on the image of the Jews in Castilian chronicles shows how closely connected he was with Juan de Furtado in the minds of his Castilian contemporaries. Juan de Furtado belonged by family and other

⁴⁹ Eleazar Gutwirth, p.62

ties to the circle of Alvaro de Luna whose victory at Higuera three years earlier had raised his prestige and status by the time of the Valladolid Junta. Abraham Bienveniste had been responsible for much needed loans some years earlier. The time was for a far reaching initiative within Jewish self-government. Such an initiative could base itself on a number of legitimising traditions: that of the previous Juntas was one of those mentioned in the text of the tagganot.

The formulation of the tagganot suggests a differentiation between various types of members of the Junta: the delegates from local communities, the rabbis and scholars, and finally the Jews “who are about the court”, with Abraham Bienveniste presiding. The formulation of the tagganot with their paragraphs of explanation and justification headed by the word “porquanto” and the paragraphs of legislation which begin with the word “otrosi” similarly parallel the formulations of the Cortes notebooks. The *soferim* or notaries of the assembly are another centralized institution, which legitimises and is responsible for aspects of the work of the Junta.

The actual content of the legislation could be seen as secondary to the fact that the assembly took place at all. After the preamble there follow five sections, or gates. The fact that the first one is concerned with education, a subject which was less likely to arouse opposition, is not only consistent with communal ideology but with the inner politics of such committee work as well. In line with the claims of pedagogues throughout the ages, the statutes paint a grim picture of educational prospects.

The second chapter concerns the election of judges and other officers. This may be another example of the centralizing tendencies which

characterized the political thought of Castilian Jewish leaders as they did that of the circle of Alvadora de Luna, precursor in some ways of the centralizing policies of the end of the century. The statutes envisage local communities dominated by small power groups. Phrases such as “and in the places where there are no judges” or “let them choose the judges without tricks and without regard for partisanship in interest groups” or “the said officers should not co-opt their offices without communal licence” may at first sight seem to show the shortcomings of the appointment of officers. But in fact the statutes tend toward enhancing the central power of the Ray de la Corte: they legislate that if communities fail to agree on the election of ‘judges... veedores, treasurers, those who take care of public needs and other communal officers... they must let the Ray de la Corte know so that he should appoint them and the community is obliged to follow his orders about this.” Centralization depends on the tensions and disagreements at local, communal level.

Internal discipline in medieval corporations, towns, monasteries, and universities, military and religious orders was paramount to the survival of the corporation. The crown, highly interested in the smooth running of the tax collecting machinery, had long since granted privilegia legitimatising the punishment of members who broke internal discipline. It is probable that the highest incidence of such attempts against internal discipline concerned taxation. The highest punishment for those who had repeatedly threatened internal discipline was death, although in previous centuries documented punishments had included the cutting out of the tongue.

The fourth section concerns one of the most important and problematic issues of communal life: taxes. The main problem here was the influence of powerful non-Jewish nobles who granted exemptions to their Jewish favourites. Although exemptions granted by the king, most of the problematic exemptions seem from the text to be granted nobility, creating within the Jewish community a class of exempt Jews who increased the taxation burden on the rest of the community.

The last chapter consists of sumptuary laws, which, although legitimised by the allegation that clothing causes “the envy and hatred of the gentiles”, give the impression of a standard of living far removed from that of impoverished communities. The most detailed legislation is against women although here, as in the complaints at the Cortes against Jewish clothing, men are included as well.

Commerce

Economic decline has been assumed in a number of areas. The main focus of attention used to be the upper socio-economic echelons which in practice meant collectors of income, mostly tax collectors but also mayordomos (stewards) for the nobility. At other levels, that of the artisans, it has been usual to use legislation as evidence. The statutes of Valladolid (1412) do indeed try to enact economic discrimination against the Jews. These were followed by those of Ferdinand I of Aragon and by the Bull of Benedict XIII in 1415. There have been affirmations to the effect that the economic horizon of Hispanic Jews was very limited and that they only

thought in terms of attending to the shop or, in terms of interurban commerce; their economic experience was limited to Spain and had shrunk even further in the fifteenth century.

The Expulsion

The years between 1391 and 1492 saw a steady decline in the situation of the Jews, a mounting persecution of which the expulsion was the logical climax.

The text of the edict gave a religious reason: to preserve the Christianity of the conversos. The Catholic Monarchs have been seen as exemplary in their religious fervour.

The previous expulsions from Andalusia, or the partial ones from the towns are certainly important precedents. And, similarly, the history of anti-Jewish discrimination in the 15 century is undoubtedly part of the background. It is also true that the particular formulations used in the edict can largely be attributed to Tomas de Torquemada, the representative of the inquisition at the royal council. But is this enough completely to “explain” the moving factors behind the decision?

Various recent theories have tried to account for the expulsion. One sees it as part of the general struggle between crown and nobility in Europe (England, France) where the crown had acceded to demands of the third estate, wishing to eliminate competition, in order to find an ally. Another puts forward the view that the conversos, who dominated the town councils,, and whose anti-Jewish tendencies are visible in some of the treatises they wrote,

were the prime movers in the drive to expel their former co-religionists and potential witnesses for the inquisition, third identifies the expulsion as a use of religious antagonisms to “mobilize” the emergent nation into unity and encourage submission to the ever increasing power of the crown.

But although the subject of the edict itself is religion, most of the documents following upon it are concerned with the appropriation of Jewish capital and property. Property Readers of the Hebrew accounts of the expulsion would be wrong in undervaluing them as mere examples of the “martyrological” genre or as exponents of “lachrymose history”. The ever increasing documentation on the daily workings of the expulsion shows quite clearly that, on the contrary, if there is a tendency in these accounts it follows a different direction: that of selecting only a minimum of the possible examples that could have been add is not from these chronicles but from archival documentation that we learn details of the physical attacks on Jewish victims of the expulsion in the roads of Spain, such as those on the Jews of Huesca on their way to Navarre at the valley of Ortila; those perpetrated by Christian thieves on the Jews of Biel in the desfiladero of Isuerre; those of Pina at Gelsa as well as the looting of Jews by Christians near Sos or Uncastillo.

Most of those expelled seem to have made their way on foot, leaving the mules for the sick and elderly. Similarly, the use of boats and fluvial routes was restricted to few cases within Spain. The Christian population capitalized on this need and the price of mules rose inordinately at this time: on 22 June, in Magallon, a Jew had to exchange whole houses for a black mule, a silver cup and a piece of cloth. In a number of cases, the expulsion meant that the

quarters in which there had been a Jewish presence for centuries became abandoned and hence degraded, creating municipal problems and devaluing the property. Thus, in Teruel, after the expulsion, there followed looting, mainly of the doorposts, the windows and the beams of Jewish houses, which were used for rebuilding or as firewood. Some of the houses were occupied by beggars. Some municipalities tried to demolish those icons of isolation of the juderias - walls and gates. Others erected squares and widened roads. Synagogues were frequently appropriated by the Church: the Synagogue of the Torneros in Saragossa passed into the hands of the monastery of the Beatas of Santa Maria de Jerusalem; the Biqqur Holim Synagogue was bought by the Provincial of the Jesuits. In Albarracin the synagogue became the Ermita de San Juan and in Calatayud a synagogue became the Church of Saint Catherine of Siena.

The crown was particularly anxious to establish a prior claim to all other creditors of the Jews, trying to recoup what it claimed was the loss of revenues in taxes or debts on the one hand and prohibiting the sale of communal property to pay for such debts on the other. The result, in some cases, was that single wealthy families had to carry the burden of paying the taxes of the rest of the community.

The expulsion was, of course, viewed as catastrophic by the Jews, and the full significance behind the rhetoric of Hebrew accounts, poems and incidental references in biographies remains to be revealed. European reactions to the expulsion were varied. Most of them have been loosely described as "anti-Semitic". Images of disease abound. Jews were compared

to a leprosy from which Spain had been cured, or a cancer that had been removed by surgery.

The Purpose and Consequences of the Expulsion

On 31 March 1492, three months after they had accepted capitulation of the city of Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain decreed the expulsion of the Jewish population of their united realms. The expulsion has seemed so transcendent an event that commentators both then and now have virtually suspended their judgment before it: Machiavelli regarded it as an act of statesmanship and like other contemporaries praised Ferdinand and Isabella for their purification of the realm.⁵⁰

The focus on 1492 follows from the symbolic importance of that year in Spain's history: Moorish Granada capitulated to the Christian forces in January, the decree expelling Jews was issued in March; then in October Columbus made his landfall on the outer Antilles. Despite the coincidence in time, and the fact that resolution of the Granada wars enabled the crown to turn its attention to other matters, The Jewish expulsions have little to do with the Moors or with America and must be looked at rather in two quite different but fundamental context: the situation of Jews in western Europe in the 1480s, and the evolution of the Castilian Inquisition.

Before the Spanish decree, Jews in western Europe were under pressure.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Henry Kamen, "Towards Expulsion," in *Spain and the Jews*, edited by Elie Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.74.

⁵¹ Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750* (London: Oxford Press, 1989), pp.7-8.

When the Spanish decree was issued in 1492, neighboring states were unlikely to be happy about large-scale immigration of Jews, a problem aggravated by further decrees in Portugal and Navarre and later in the Italian states associated with the Spanish crown.

The constant unanimity between the king and the queen on every policy decision, and though Isabella's modesty her statement to Isaac Abravanel, the leading rabbi in Castile, that "the Lord has put this thing into the heart of the king,"⁵² it is striking that most recorded public statements on the execution of the decree emanate more from the king than the queen. The distinction between the two is assuredly of no importance, except that greater emphasis on the king's role serves the purpose of exploding the traditional image of a fanatical queen leading a more restrained husband.⁵³

In realpolitik terms, the decision came from neither of them but, it would seem, from the Inquisition. The terms of a letter from Ferdinand to the count of Aranda, which was sent the same day as the decree, are unequivocal:

"The Holy Office of the Inquisition, seeing how some Christians are endangered by contact and communication with the Jews, has provided that the Jews be expelled from all our realms and territories, and has persuaded us to give our support and agreement to this, which we now do, because of our debts and obligations to the said Holy Office; and we do so despite the great harm to ourselves, seeking and preferring the salvation of souls above our own profit and that of individuals."⁵⁴

The Inquisition at this period was a tiny group of men with no firm organization or authority at their disposal, and certainly with no power to

⁵² Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel* (Philadelphia: 1968).

⁵³ Kamen, p.75.

⁵⁴ Kamen, p.76.

impose decisions on anyone: so that its capacity to persuade the crown may be explained by one of two reasons: either the expulsion followed logically from previous policy, or the decision coincided with advice and pressure from other quarters.

The Inquisition began its activity in 1480 under the leadership of Torquemada as first Inquisitor-General. There is no doubt that the tribunal was in its origins an instrument of anti-Semitism: the first calls for it to be created arose out of the prosecution of Judaizers in the 1460s, and in its first years it devoted itself almost exclusively to the prosecution of Christians of Jewish origin (conversos), who represented well over ninety per cent of its victims in the final decades of the century. Since its foundation antedated the expulsion by over twelve years, we must treat those years as a time of serious trial not simply for conversos but for Jews as well. And it continued in intensity well after the expulsion, up to the early years of the reign of Charles V⁵⁵

Because the inquisitors believed that the presence of Jews and of synagogues acted as an incentive to judaizing, a belief for which there was ample justification (since the coexistence of cultures in many towns encouraged converso Christians to follow Jewish customs, on the premise that these did not invalidate Catholic belief), they began pressure to separate the two religious communities without actually calling for the suppression of Judaism. Two policies were pursued: firm separation of the religions by putting into effect the old decrees for confining Jews to ghettos; and the

⁵⁵ Kamen, p.76.

expulsion of Jews from select areas, specifically the region of Seville, where the first measures took place.

Separation, whether voluntary or obligatory, had long been part of the medieval Jewish way of life, but was seldom rigidly practiced. In the city of Soria, for instance, the last separation order has been in 1412, but it was never implemented. In 1477, for reasons that are unclear, the crown ordered separation in the city, but this too was never put into effect.⁵⁶ Only in 1480, on the petition of the towns in the Castilian Cortes that met at Toledo, did the crown agree on a general decree that Jews should be restricted to ghettos, and walls built where necessary; a period of two years was allowed for the measure to be implemented. Like much previous legislation, this remained all too frequently a dead letter⁵⁷: In Soria for instance as late as 1489 richer Jews were in undisputed residence outside the aljama, their houses backing directly on to the cathedral. Many municipalities used the 1480 decree to take harsh measures against their Jewish population, but the crown vigorously resisted what it considered illegal moves, since the Jews were directly subject to its jurisdiction and discrimination against them could hurt the crown's fiscal interests.

In a supplementary order of 1480 the king explained that, "no Christian may eat and drink with a Jew nor invite them nor live with them nor bathe with them." Jews could not act as sponsors at weddings or other Christian ceremonies. The prohibitions are of course evidence that the two cultures still frequently socialized, but also indicate a harshening of the public

⁵⁶ Kamen, p.77.

⁵⁷ Kamen, p.77.

mood. The policy of expulsion was begun at the end of 1482, when a partial expulsion of the Jews of Andalusia was ordered. In January 1483 the Inquisition ordered the expulsion of Jews from the dioceses of Seville, Cordoba and Cadiz. The crown delayed implementation and they were not actually driven out from Seville until summer 1484, only the poorer Jews left and all the rest remained.⁵⁸

In 1486 a royal order was issued for the expulsion of Jews from the Aragonese dioceses of Saragosaa, Albarracin and Teruel; the order was later suspended, and the Jewish population appears to have been still in place in 1492. From about 1480, therefore, a limited policy of separation was attempted. The expulsion decree of 1492 had ample precedents, and apparently involved little change of policy, the one new factor being the demand for forced conversion.

Historians have suggested that the 1492 decree was related to the foundation of the Inquisition, because both allegedly arose from three main motives: the crown wanted power, it wanted to impose religious unity on Spain, and it wanted to rob the Jews. Juan Antonio Llorente was possibly the first scholar to argue, from credible evidence, that Ferdinand of Aragon “considered the Inquisition a useful tribunal for his political ideas” and that it gave him “an opportunity to confiscate immense riches”. Ranke in 1827 went further and stressed that the Inquisition supplied the king with a tool for absolute authority over both Church and state. As part of his argument in 1844 Hefele, claimed that the primary cause for the establishment of the

⁵⁸ Kamen, p.77.

Inquisition was the threat from the Judaizers or secret Jews, who “threatened to uproot the Spanish nationality and the Christian faith” and “to Judaize the whole of Spain”⁵⁹

The argument that the Inquisition and the expulsion formed part of a plan to rob the wealth of the Jews can be found in Llorente, who suggests that the Inquisition “gave Ferdinand an opportunity to confiscate immense riches.”⁶⁰ The continual insistence on wealth and riches, and on a plot to rob the Jews, represents an undesirable distortion of the context within which the expulsion was decreed.

The Motive: Exile or Conversion

The decree as issued in March 1492 had a curious feature, which few historians have seen fit to comment upon.⁶¹

“Because of the communication of Jews with Christians, in the Cortes we held in the city of Toledo in 1480 we ordered the separation of Jews in all the cities and towns of our realms, giving them separate places wherein to live, hoping that with this separation the situation would improve. We also ordered an Inquisition to be set up in these realms, which has been in operation now for twelve years and many guilty have been punished by it. But we are informed by the inquisitors and many other people, religious, churchmen, and laymen, of the great harm suffered by Christians from the contact, intercourse and communication which they have with the Jews, who always attempt in various ways to seduce faithful Christians from our Holy Catholic Faith...And since we felt that the effective remedy for all these ills was to separate Jews completely from Christians and expel them from all our realms, we ordered them to leave the cities, towns and villages of Andalusia where it was felt they were the most harmful, believing that this would be enough for the others in the other cities of our realms to cease their activities.., all have until the end

⁵⁹ Kamen, p.77.

⁶⁰ Kamen, p.79.

⁶¹ Baer, p.650

of July this year to leave all our realms, with their children and servants and relatives both old and young, and not dare to return... And if they do not observe this and are found guilty of remaining in these realms or returning to them, they will incur the death penalty and confiscation of all their goods...⁶²

From the wording of the decree it is easy to conclude that this was a total expulsion, giving no alternative, and that death and confiscation were the lot of those who came back.

Economic Consequences

There is not a single protest over the economic consequences of the Jewish expulsions. The Jews were a disadvantaged minority, with many firmly established rights -notably the right to own land (a right denied them in eastern Europe)- which were always subject to restriction in some parts of Spain, and which in the 1480s were sharply cut back with the policy of ghettos. The restrictions made it difficult for Jews to develop their incomes, buy property freely, trade on equal terms with Christians, or hold any public office: some Jews did all these things, but they were both an exception and a tiny minority. All the contemporary Spanish criticism of the expulsion, cited above, restrict themselves to saying that the Jews were hard-working and made money.⁶³

Jews in 15th century Spain were neither a capitalist class nor a middle class. Essentially the Jewish economy of medieval Spain was a stagnant

⁶² Kamen, p.81.

⁶³ Kamen, p.87.

one, interlinked with the Christian economy through the mechanism of loans and debts but otherwise used largely in the service of the Jewish community and incapable of any development because of the social restrictions. When Jews accumulated wealth, they did it not in investments but in cash, jewellery and rural credits, which significantly was the form taken by the assets of the community in Saragossa in 1492. There are also exceptions: although in much of Spain and particularly in Andalusia the Jews seem to have remained an urbanized minority, in the north after the urban fury of 1391 they had drifted into the countryside, and there, in a more tolerant environment had become an industrious rural grouping. In the area of Toledo, by the late 15th century a high proportion of Jews were peasants working their own smallholdings. The economic state of Jews thus depended completely on local circumstances, and there were several exceptions to the rule of their general distress.⁶⁴

The expulsions gave people an opportunity to rob Jews of their many personal possessions, but the public economy was apparently unaffected, and nowhere throughout Spain was any voice raised to complain of the unfavourable economic consequences.

The “expulsion” decree of March 1492 was, like the subsequent decree of 1502 directed against the Muslims of Castile, not a decree of expulsion: it aimed not to expel but to convert. Both decrees were part of a consistent policy of religious persecution, but did not form part of a programme for religious unification, since the Islamic faith continued to be legally recognized

⁶⁴ Kamen, p.88.

for another quarter of a century in Spain, in the crown of Aragon. The decree of expulsion was opposed by many advisers of the crown, who considered it unjust in principle, just as they considered previous such decrees to have been unjust. The measure formed part of a general drive against Jews in Western Europe in the last decades of the 15th century and was not peculiar to Spain alone; but there were differences of policy between states, many of which (like the papacy) were happy to allow entry to a limited number of refugees. There were contradictions in the policy of Spain itself, which prohibited Judaism within realms directly subject to the crown (Castile, Aragon and the Balearics, Sicily and Sardinia), but permitted its existence outside (as in Oran) and tolerated its exercise in all the other states of the monarchy (at this period Naples) where local laws gave Jews the right to exist. Possibly 150,000 Jews were finally expelled from Spain; many converted or returned to the country after leaving it.

The expulsion decree was largely inspired by the Inquisition, but it had the active support of the king, and there is no firm evidence of other interests being involved. The motive was simply to deprive the converso Judaizers of an active religious choice, and the decision was taken only as a last resort, after the failure of a policy, pursued intermittently over ten years, of separation of Jews by confining them to ghettos or by expelling them from select areas. The campaign of fear mounted against converso Christians in the 1480s was concentrated in the south of Spain, but the Inquisition subsequently took it to the north. Persecution of conversos certainly -if we credit the many complaints made- had a dislocating effect on sections of the economy, but the exact economic consequences of the Jewish are not

known; all that can be said is that their fiscal impact was cushioned by the seizure of Jewish property assets in the form of houses or credits.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Kamen, p.91.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE JEWS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AFTER 1492

It is legitimate to ask what made Jewish settlement in the Ottoman Empire so attractive and successful. Compared with contemporary Christian Europe, the Ottoman Empire gave its religious minorities an unequalled degree of tolerance. This was mainly due to the pragmatic strategies of the Ottomans, which resulted from necessity. During the 14th and 15th Centuries, non-Muslims formed the majority of Ottoman subjects. Life in Ottoman towns was not idyllic, but for most of the time, the different groups lived in peace. The Ottoman legal system reflected this order - it was pragmatic and flexible. In comparison to Europe, the Ottoman Empire offered Jews a great degree of freedom and also of safety. Two other factors that attracted Jews to the Ottoman Empire were, its closeness to the Holy Land, and after 1516, the inclusion of Palestine within Ottoman boundaries.

Several factors contributed to the successful settlement of large number of European Jews in the Ottoman Empire. In the first place, it was a matter of timing. The expulsions of the Jews coincided with Ottoman expansion. This created huge economic opportunities, and there was a great demand for people with economic and managerial skills. The Jews had a good record in this area, and the Ottoman government expected the refugees to cooperate in the development of the empire. The European Jews also brought with them

knowledge of European sciences and medicine. According to the famous 16th Century traveller Nicolas de Nicolay,

“[The Jews] have amongst them workmen of all artes and handicraftes moste excellent, and specially of the Maranes of late banished and driven out of Spaine and Portugale, who to the great detriment and damage of the Christianitie, have taught the Turkes diver inventions, craftes and engines of warre, as to make artillerie, harquebuses, gunne powder, shot, and other munitions; they have also there set up printing, not before seen in those countries, by the which in faire characters they put in light divers languages as Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and the Hebrew tongue, being too them natural, but are not permitted to print the Turkie or Arabian tongue...”⁶⁶

The Europeans were aware of this as well. When authorities in Venice were preparing to expel Jews in 1573, an Italian returning from Istanbul said to them;

“What pernicious act is this, to expel the Jews? Do you not know what it may cost you in the years to come? Who gave the Turk his strength and where else would he have found the skilled craftsmen to make the cannon, bows, shot, swords, shields and bucklers which enable him to measure himself against other powers, if not among the Jews who were expelled by the Kings of Spain?”⁶⁷

The Sephardim brought various skills with them. In their homelands they had heavily engaged in crafts, industry and commerce. In the Ottoman Empire they soon organized in Salonika and Istanbul markets for everything they found lacking there including establishing or greatly strengthening the manufacture of textiles, metal goods, leather goods and more.⁶⁸ They also moved vigorously into trade. At the lower level many became travelling

⁶⁶ Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Darwin: Princeton, 1992), p.26.

⁶⁷ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Med. World in the Age of Philippe II*, Vol II (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p.808.

⁶⁸ Braudel, p.760

salesmen throughout the area. At the upper levels a number of Jews became important as international traders, serving both the Ottomans and themselves through their connections in European commerce. They also efficiently ran customs operations, tax farms, and other revenue-generating institutions. Others were physicians, lawyers, or other professionals. They served as advisors to Sultans. The Sephardim also continued some of the brilliant scholarship, which had, in the view of most historians, made Spain the most learned and illustrious Jewish community in the mediaeval world.⁶⁹ One of the most significant innovations that Jews brought to the Ottoman Empire was the printing press. In 1493, only one year after their expulsion from Spain, David and Samuel İbn Nahmias established the first Hebrew printing press in Istanbul. The first book to be printed here in 1494 was *Arba Turim*, the famous work of Jacob ben Asher.⁷⁰

Approximately 150,000 Jews came from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire in the late 15th Century. Some of them came directly, either by sea through the Mediterranean or overland from Central Europe. Some came indirectly through the Straits of Gibraltar in North Africa, Naples, Genoa or Venice in Italy, or the Aegean islands. Then they were expelled again and had to move on further east. The wealthier Jews managed to survive for some time under Habsburg protection, giving big gifts, but the Inquisition finally forced them onward.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Weiker, p.33.

⁷⁰ Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Türkiye ve Balkan Yahudileri Tarihi*, translated by Ayşe Atasoy (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), p.155.

⁷¹ Shaw, p.34.

Bayezid welcomed them not from pity. Many who came from Portugal often brought considerable wealth with them, and while those from Spain were mostly poor, they had economic and commercial skills. Bayezid II is said to have remarked, “You call Ferdinand a wise king, he who impoverishes his country and enriches our own...” by expelling the Jews.⁷²

As Braudel says, “The Jews played an exceptional role in transfers of technology.”⁷³ The Sultan also tried in general to “encourage immigration to populate the devastated lands in Macedonia.”⁷⁴ The Ottoman conquests during the 16th Century resulted in the inclusion of more Jews in the Empire. Selim II continued the policy begun by Mehmed II of deporting segments of the population to Istanbul to assure the obedience and good behaviour of those left behind.

Jewish Population

The total number of Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire during this period is estimated to be between 100,000 to 250,000. This compares to a little more than 30,000 Jewish refugees in Poland and Lithuania at the end of the 15th Century, and 75,000 in the mid-16th Century. So the Ottoman Jewish community was the largest in the world at the time. The Jewish emigration from Spain, together with the forced settlement of Jews from Serbia, Greece and Iraq brought the number of Jewish households in

⁷² Gülerüz, p.61.

⁷³ Braudel, p.808.

⁷⁴ Mair Jose Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and the Character of the Hispanic Jews* (New York: Sepher- Herman, 1982), p.54.

Istanbul to 8,070. The largest Jewish city in South-eastern Europe was Salonika; it was almost depopulated when it was conquered in 1430, but by 1530 there were 2,509 Jewish households. Jews constituted the majority in this city. Edirne had 231 Jewish households in 1519, shortly after most of its Jews had been transferred to Istanbul. This rose to 553 households in 1568, as a result of the arrival of new refugees from Central Europe, but fell to 341 in 1570 as the new residents moved to Salonika and Istanbul. These cities were rapidly becoming more important economic and political centres. In Anatolia, the largest Jewish community was in Bursa there were 166 Jewish households in 1540. In Mardin there were 92 households in 1518, and 118 households in 1540. There weren't many Jews in Izmir in this period; it was only after the Marrano emigration from Spain in the 17th century that Izmir gained a sizeable Jewish community. There were 199 Jewish households in Jerusalem in 1525, 233 in Safed, and 95 in Gaza. Bringing together all these figures, one reaches a total of approximately 150,000 Jews across the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century. This was approximately 3% of its population.⁷⁵

Jewish Diversity/Disunity

Ottoman Jews had no central authority during the reign of Mehmed II, and, were not to do so until the Tanzimat. One of the reasons for this was the diversity of the Jewish community. The Jewish population of the Ottoman Empire came from very different cultures, and they reflected this diversity in their customs, language, and even in their conception of Judaism.

⁷⁵ Shaw, p.40.

First, there were the Greek-speaking Jews who had remained under Roman and then Byzantine rule. These were called Romaniots, and they continued to use Greek as their secular language. They were proud of their Greek heritage, and considered themselves the aristocracy of Judaism.

In the eastern provinces lived the Mustarab Jews; they spoke Arabic and were heirs of the Umayyads and the Abbasids. They disdained both the Romaniot and the European Jews, even though they were divided among themselves into the Mizrahiyyim in Iraq, and the Maraviyyim in Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo.

Ashkenazi Jews had come to the Empire from Western, Central and Northern Europe, in order to escape from Christian persecution. They were very poor and lived in ghettos. As a result, their observance of Judaism was very strict, and they looked with contempt on others who modified their practices. Refraining from mixing with Christians became a religious obligation. Moreover, being against the intervention of non-Judaic authorities into any of their affairs, Ashkenazi sentenced those who applied to the courts of the Ottoman State by *herem*.⁷⁶

Another Jewish group in the Ottoman Empire was the Karaites, who denied talmudic-rabbinical tradition, and maintained their own traditions and practices in isolation. Constituting another separate community, they had significant doctrinal and ritual differences from the Rabbanids. Both groups regarded each other as deviants and sinners. Consequently, acknowledging the differences between the two groups, and not forcing Karaites to conform

⁷⁶ Ahmet Hikmet Eroğlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Yahudiler* (Ankara: Se-Ba Ofset, 1997), p.78.

to the religious authorities of the Rabbanid Jews, the state granted them the right to appoint their own Chief Rabbi.⁷⁷

Then there were the Sephardic Jews coming in from the Iberian Peninsula, as well as from Italy and North Africa, whence they had fled during the expulsions of the 15th Century. They had been wealthy nobles, businessmen and leading intellectuals. As an integrated group within Spanish culture, they had modified their Jewish practices, and the Ashkenazis were disgusted with this. They were never scorned like the Jews living in the ghettos of Central Europe. They had mixed freely with their social equals in Muslim Spain, so when they came to the Ottoman Empire they were not servile or shy toward superiors. Because the other Jewish groups were, the Sephardics considered them ignorant and backward.

Each of these groups was proud of its own heritage, and wanted to uphold its own customs and traditions, without being subject to the other groups. Even though they adhered to the Rabbinic form of Judaism based on the Torah, and even though the language of religion was Hebrew for all of them, they differed in their practices and in their daily language. They continued to reflect the cultures from which they came even in the way they ate.

These differences made it necessary for the Ottoman Jews to organize themselves into self-governing congregations called kahals. In the smaller towns, or in cities where there were few Jews, there were only single kahals, but in Istanbul, Salonika, Izmir, Edirne and the other major cities where numerous Jews lived, there were many. Each had its own Rabbi, synagogue,

⁷⁷ Eroğlu, p. 81-86.

hospital, cemetery, schools and slaughterhouse, and each provided its members with secular and religious leadership.⁷⁸

In Mizrahi's time the political and social disputes between the Romaniots and the Sephardim began to become serious. At first the Romaniots did not consider the Sephardim as rivals, but viewed them as fellow Jews. There was, however, very little social contact between them. Part of this was because of differences in language and culture. But as time went on Romaniot leaders insisted more and more on their own domination. Capsali had been rigid with respect to some Sephardic customs such as their special Shabbat clothing or their wedding practices. Mizrahi, despite his respect for the Sephardim, did not like their "attempts to impose customs and procedures to which they were accustomed but which were contrary to those ruling in Turkey."⁷⁹ The friction between the Sephardim and the Romaniots became so great that when Mizrahi died in 1526, they were unable to agree on a successor, even simply for Istanbul. The office was not filled until 1834.

There were similar frictions with the Karaites and the Ashkenazim. The Karaites were found unacceptable. The Ashkenazim were wary of the Sephardim because they did not want to be overrun. They tried to preserve their own traditions in areas such as food and marriage. Early in the 16th Century neither the German nor the Spanish Jews would eat in each other's homes.

There was no internal unity amongst the Sephardim themselves. They usually settled in small kahals based on cities of origin. Each of these usually

⁷⁸ Shaw, p.48.

⁷⁹ Weiker, p.60.

organized around its own synagogue, and showed the strongest determination to preserve its individuality and independence. Each kahal had an elaborate network of social institutions.

During the 16th Century the Jews of Istanbul gathered in two loose groups due to two reasons: tax arrangements and Jewish internal acculturation. The Ottoman officials began to identify all the Romaniot congregations in Istanbul, including the former congregations of Byzantine Constantinople, as *sürgün*. At the same time, the new congregations were designated as *kendi gelen*. In this way, the fiscal separation between the “transferred” and “immigrant” congregations contributed to the foundation of two institutionalised Jewish communities in Istanbul. Each had its own tax collection apparatus.

The second factor was cultural and socio-economic. The Sephardim came to a position of predominance within the Ottoman Jewry. The most important reason for this is not that they were in the majority - as late as 1623, the Sephardic immigrants constituted a minority in the Jewish population of Istanbul. The major cause appears to be that they brought with them higher educational and cultural standards. The majority of the most respected rabbis, along with most distinguished Jewish physicians, scientists, entrepreneurs and courtiers were of Sephardic origin.

There was also resistance to Sephardic domination. The society was conservative in general and each group wanted to pass its heritage to the new generations. In addition there was an important financial consideration. Each congregation was responsible for paying a certain amount of tax, and

the defection of its members would mean the remaining members had to face a heavier tax burden.

The Romaniots of Istanbul were supported by a number of particular factors. They were, first of all, the majority until the 17th Century. They also were proud to be the “natives” of the country who welcomed and helped all the others. This was strengthened by the fact that Greek was a popular language in Istanbul (and elsewhere). The Romaniots held onto their Judeo-Greek language, and for a long time resisted the Sephardim. As a result, Sephardic influence in Istanbul first spread among other immigrant groups, especially the Italian and Ashkenazi Jews. This was made easier by the Ottoman tax arrangement.⁸⁰

The cleavages among the various segments softened with time. Fires, earthquakes and other disasters caused the Jews to relocate and this made it very difficult to maintain geographic segregation. The Romaniots gradually assimilated into the Sephardim as well. This was mainly caused by their adoption of the language of the newcomers. For community actions, proclamations, sermons, business, and for relations among persons from different regions, Castillian was used, with added Turkish and Greek vocabulary. Even the Greeks and the Turks learned it and used it in their contacts with the Jews.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Levy, p.61.

⁸¹ Weiker, p.62.

Jews of the City

Ottoman Jews lived in their own mahalles, and they usually left it only to go to market. This segregation was common to all religious groups. Like all the urban quarters in the Middle East, those of the Jews were like labyrinths where a stranger could easily get lost.

In Istanbul the Romaniot Jews were concentrated in the area immediately beneath and to the west of the Topkapı Palace, Eminönü, Tahtakale, Bahçekapı, Yemişiskele and Galata. Most Jewish immigrants from Anatolia, South-eastern Europe and Spain were settled on both sides of the Golden Horn. They had a dolmuş service by sea between Balat and Haskoy.

In Salonika, Jews were in the majority so they spread into most quarters, though they concentrated most completely in those nearest the seaport along the city wall, in the Frankish quarter, and in the quarter near the Hippodrome. At first the Spanish refugees attached themselves to the Romaniots, but when their number grew they established their own synagogue - first the Catalans, then the Castillians and finally the remaining Spanish immigrants. All the Sephardic synagogues of Salonika were divided by discord during the 16th Century.

In Sarajevo there were Sephardic Jews as well as Ashkenazis fleeing from persecution in Germany, Hungary and Poland.

In Palestine there were four sancaks Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus and Safed. The Jewish population grew rapidly with the influx of Ashkenazis, Sephardim, Magrebis and Mustarabs. All towns and cities of the region benefited from this, but it was Safed that developed the most. During the

early years of Sultan Süleyman's reign, it became a major industrial and trade centre. The highly developed wool industry was the greatest source of wealth.

In Syria, Arabized Jews and Karaites were already there before 1492, after which date Jews from Spain and Portugal also began to arrive, but it was after the Ottoman conquest that they came in floods. They became merchants, artisans and traders, and developed close relations with their counterparts in the Holy Land.

In Egypt, the status and prosperity of the Jewry increased greatly after the conquest in 1517 by Sultan Selim I. Ottoman rulers trusted Jews much more than they did their Arab Christian subjects, so Jews were given all the important financial positions in central and provincial governments. Jews in Cairo prospered as moneylenders and bankers as well as dealers in precious metals, goldsmiths and shopkeepers. Many Jews acted as *mültezims* for Ottoman officials.

Jews in the cities commonly lived in buildings that resembled the *cortijo* in Spain, which itself was influenced centuries ago by the traditional Muslim *han*. The *cortijo* was a low building stretching around a central courtyard up to stories high, normally with tiled roofs, with residences and shops intermixed in some, and almost constituting a village in itself. Balconies and terraces hung precariously over the outside streets as if they were ready to fall on people passing underneath. The residences were very crowded because of the continuous arrival of new immigrants. Most daily activities were therefore carried out in the open. There was little permanent furniture. In most of these buildings there was no running water and no ready drinking

water. There was little sanitation and no heat, with insects and animals running everywhere. It did not take very much for small blazes to become great fires, and for individual illnesses to become epidemics.⁸²

Community Organization

More than anything else, the millet organization provided its members status and protection. Each kahal was like a municipality. It represented members with the government and with members of other millets. It provided religious, judicial and cultural leadership. It was responsible for registering members, imposing and collecting taxes, making expenditures for community activities, maintaining religious, social and political institutions, punishing violations of its laws and sometimes Ottoman laws, settling internal disputes whenever possible.

All the kahals of major cities developed central community organizations and committees called Bet din hagadol, composed of delegates from each kahal. These met only rarely for particular matters that interested them all. Their powers were limited and they had little authority of enforcement. Only in Salonika was the central Jewish organization powerful and influential, especially after the 18th Century.

Each kahal in the major cities maintained its own mahalle, usually separated from others by high walls and gates which were closed during the night and guarded at all times. The kahal itself maintained the streets. Security against serious threats such as Janissary raids and Christian mob

⁸² Shaw, p.56.

attacks from outside was provided by regular bribes provided to the Janissaries and by networks of secret tunnels.

The kahal also maintained the institution of hazaka, which referred to the right to follow certain occupations, to limit competition among Jews in the same occupation, and the right of a Jewish tenant to maintain his rental tenancy in property owned by non-Jews as a permanent possession. This meant that no Jew could evict another Jew from his house if that house belonged to a Muslim.

The kahal trained and licensed slaughterers and cheese-makers, to ensure that they met the Kosher requirements. There were special rabbis that inspected them and dealt severe punishments in case of violations.

The kahal had great powers over its members - the community came before the individual. It was also very difficult to leave a kahal, because that would mean a financial loss for the community, which had to come up with a certain amount of tax payment and to maintain regular expenses.

The members of the kahal elected its Rabbi. They were obliged to follow his orders in both secular and religious matters. He usually also was chief educator of the community schools. He was the head of the religious court Bet din, and performed two major functions. He was the chief propagator of the law, interpreting and legislating. In addition, along with the judges he settled differences and administered penalties. The greatest punishment that the Rabbi could inflict was excommunication, which was imposed on members who gave false testimony in court or gravely failed to carry out their religious duties. This punishment was rarely applied, and the procedure for absolution was very simple. Nevertheless, the Rabbi was not absolute. Even

though each of his own congregation members owed him respect and obedience, they usually did not let him act without control or objection. Being a Rabbi did not mean immunity or infallibility. The rabbis had to secure the respect of their followers through a combination of tact, ability and energy, and sometimes even by spending their own money.⁸³

The affairs of the kahal were administered according to halakhah (Jewish law), haggadah (custom), takkanot (regulations), haskamot (agreements) and responsa (legal opinions or interpretations of legal scholars or rabbis). They established commercial standards for prices and quality as well as conditions for merchandise, particularly for those community members who had no guilds of their own. They determined the exact form and colour of the clothing that people wore; the length and shape of their beards, moustaches and hairstyles; the quantity and value of jewels that a woman could wear in public or even in private. They regulated community taxation, and they established the exact obligations of each member to contribute to the community's help to the poor. They determined the size of graves and tombs and the writing on tombstones; and the exact form of conversation and behaviour in dealings with each other and with members of other millets. This was a sort of code of law and jurisprudence, which regulated in great detail all religious, social and economic areas of life in each Jewish community as well as in the pullet as a whole. The kahal enforced them with a kind of police surveillance, and the bet din courts imposed various penalties. Prisons were maintained in the synagogue buildings to punish members who violated community laws, but violators of the Sultan's laws

⁸³ Shaw, p.63.

and those requiring execution and more severe or lengthy punishments were turned over to Ottoman police and prisons.⁸⁴

The Extent of Autonomy

Understandably, Jewish leaders wanted as much internal jurisdiction as possible. The main way in which this was achieved was by limiting the degree to which individual Jews were able to use Ottoman law and institutions. The millet system enabled them to do this in many areas. The amount of autonomy varied from time to time, place to place, and among spheres of activity. One of the areas in which there was most tolerance was religious observance. The government did not interfere with purely religious matters. Yet, apparently supervision was quite close. There were numerous fermans which seem to imply that separate ones were needed for almost everything, like specific clothing which was allowed, permission to have a kosher butcher (and sometimes even their names were specified). There were also fees for many specific privileges such as payment of 100,000 akçes for the privilege of having a certain number of kosher butchers.⁸⁵

There was far less autonomy in the application of commercial, civil and penal laws. Jews struggled hard to combine the two systems in these areas. They had to observe the limitations of their own jurisdiction, and to maintain good relations with the kadıs. The kadıs could maintain close supervision over Jewish courts if they wanted to and sometimes, when necessary, they

⁸⁴ Shaw, p.65.

⁸⁵ Avram Galante, *Fatih Sultan Mehmet Zamanında Istanbul Yahudileri* (Istanbul: 1953), p.20.

did. One example was when the case was an economic matter. Rabbinical courts attempted to regulate Jews' economic behaviour to prohibit actions that might badly affect Jewish domination over a particular production or commercial sector. In such cases, the Jewish community often made special efforts to prevent the kadi from finding out that they were making rulings in such areas.⁸⁶

In the area of penal law, there were limitations on the secular punishments, which Jewish courts could impose by their own authority. They usually had to ask the government to impose them. The main exception to this was excommunication, which was very much under Jewish jurisdiction.

The rabbis tried to get detailed familiarity with Ottoman law and legislation, to "avoid any pretext that would lead to the intervention of Ottoman administrative and legal authorities within their communal internal affairs."⁸⁷ The rabbis did not like Jews to go to Ottoman courts, so they adopted the following policy:

"There were cases in which according to the Jewish law the one side would win, but according to the laws of the Ottoman Empire the other side would win. In such cases the rabbis were inclined to give a verdict agreeing with the laws of the Empire, so long as these laws did not contradict Biblical law."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Joseph Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Isidore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1987).

⁸⁷ Schmuelevitz, p.39.

⁸⁸ Schmuelevitz, p.40.

The information on how well Jewish authorities succeeded in these efforts is contradictory, probably because it varied for different cities. In Jerusalem there was a considerable amount of success. There the Jews decided for themselves how much *cizye* each individual would pay.⁸⁹ In other places there was less success. There was a bitter controversy because the rabbis decreed that Jews could not go to Turkish courts with some kinds of cases, and some Jews were very displeased because government courts served their interests better.⁹⁰

Taxation and Finance

Members of the Jewish millet paid taxes to the Ottoman treasury and to the community. In the first group there was *cizye*, or the poll tax, which levied annually according to the income of each head of household. In addition there were various excise taxes such as customs duties, the household *avariz* tax to finance army expenses, the *haraç* tax on agricultural produce, the *ray akçesi* (rabbi tax), the *ordu akçesi* paid to maintain the army, the *celb akçesi* to maintain the imperial flocks. These were assessed and collected by the millet leaders on behalf of the Treasury, and the Ottoman officials intervened only if the required amount was not collected. Individual Jewish notables, especially physicians and diplomats who performed important services to the Sultan were often given exemptions.

⁸⁹ Amnon Cohen, *Jewish Life Under Islam: Jerusalem in the 16th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1984), p.8.

⁹⁰ Weiker, p.53.

Cizye was the most universal tax, levied throughout the Empire, and it was very important because all other taxes were based on it. So one of the major political efforts of the community was to have it set as low as possible. There were at least three methods for this. One was to have size of the community recorded as low as possible. There were lots of debates about this because there was no single overall Jewish organization. The tax was apportioned first on individual Jewish communities (cities) and within that on congregations. There were complicated formulas to determine how much a community or congregation had to pay. A second-method was that “the communities and congregations generally initiated revisions when a deterioration in the economic condition had occurred or the number of their taxpayers decreased.”⁹¹ This depended on how strong the particular Jewish leaders were, and on how the government needed the money. A third method was to give bribes to the tax assessors and collectors. Whatever the result, there were “only a few objections to paying taxes - it was always considered as the most important measure to secure government protection.”⁹²

To finance community activities, regular taxes were levied on all community members. The most important of these taxes was the annual aritha tax on capital. Community commissions assessed and collected this tax. In general, the length of the individual’s residence within the boundaries of the kahal, as well as his wealth and ability to pay, determined his liability to financial participation in its communal and charitable activities.

⁹¹ Schmuelewitz, p.87.

⁹² Schmuelewitz, p.108.

The internal taxes for financing the Jewish community were of two general types. One was on the basis of fixed rates and was permanent. The second was special assessments. Almost everywhere the chief tax was mas gabella, a sales tax on food, especially meat and usually also on fruit, oil, cheese, herring, strong liquor and wine. Second was the pecha, additional assessments on the wealthy and third was a tax on real and personal property. The sales taxes were sometimes collected through concessionaires, who bought the privilege at public auctions. Individual communities also had unique taxes. For example in Istanbul all merchandise imported by Jews was taxed. With the money that these taxes raised, Jews taken captive by Russia were freed.

The rules for apportioning taxes were very closely regulated both for accuracy and for fairness. The overall system was based on two principles. One was majority rule. The second was the powerfulness of customs: "Most of the rules concerning the taxation system within the communities were based on customs in force in each congregation or community and were included in their agreed regulations."⁹³

In addition, the Ottoman Jewry considered itself to be "Treasurer for Eretz Israel", collecting and sending its contributions to Jerusalem. It also collected the contributions of much of the European Jews. For this purpose an extra imposition of one para weekly was assessed on every Jew in the Empire and in Western Europe.

⁹³ Schmuelevitz, p.112.

Clothing

Ottoman clothing regulations were obsessively detailed and discriminatory. The system was borrowed from the Byzantines, and it served to identify the position and status of each individual in the Ottoman system. It was applied to everyone - the ruling class, the subject class and to all religious communities. Clothing was not a matter of personal taste, but some sort of an "identity card" - at one glance. It made it possible to tell "who" the person is. Clothing even differed among the members of the ruling class according to which institution an individual belonged to, how high his rank was, and how close he was to the Sultan.

These regulations changed over time, so it is difficult to state what the typical Jewish costume was. In general, they wore darker colours than Muslims, with black or dark red garments and shoes dominating. Jewish men often wore a dark coat with wide sleeves over a plain or striped gown or wide şalvar trousers attached with a wide folded sash. They wore cylindrical hats widening at the top with a collared turban over the lower part. Jewish women on the street wore simple dark long cloaks with wide shawls covering their heads, but indoors they wore robes, shirts and long trousers similar to the men, differing mainly in their head coverings.

The Sephardic Jews attempted to retain their old customs for clothing, because they wanted to stress the fact that they were different from and also superior to the other Jewish communities in the Empire. Instead of the long cloak they wore the Spanish caperone (a woollen topcoat) and refused to put on the yellow cap. In the 16th Century a number of Imperial orders were issued on this subject, because the rules were breached. All Jewish men

were required to wear feraces (cloaks) or yaşmaks (overcoats) of black cloth, with skirts of calico or cloth rather than silk, and belts of mixed cotton and silk material not costing more than 40 akçes and not-too-large hats of green-blue cloth, with no silks to be used in any part of their costumes. Their turbans had to be blue and relatively small. Later both Jews and Christians were forbidden to wear turbans. At this point the shoes of the Jews had to be black and relatively wide, and without the interior lining used by the Muslims. This is an interesting point because it shows that the dress code was not only used for purposes of identification, but also served to humiliate non-Muslim groups. The same thing applies to the fact that the costumes of non-Muslims had to be made of inferior quality material - it was not enough that their costumes were different, they had to be inferior as well.

It must be noted that these regulations were constantly breached, and that the Ottoman authorities and the Jewish community had to issue and re-issue regulations to clearly distinguish among the costumes worn by different groups. The Jewish communities themselves were very strict about clothing regulations. They discouraged outward displays of wealth or luxury both indoors and outdoors. This was mainly to discourage jealousy on the part of Christians. Those who violated these community admonitions were subjected to severe punishment by their Rabbis.

Other Social Restrictions

In the Ottoman legal system, there were a lot of laws and regulations that prohibited various acts. Non-Muslims could not bear arms or serve in the

army. There were limitations concerning the height of houses and synagogues - they could not be higher than mosques or the houses of Muslims. There were regulations about how people should greet each other when they met on the street. Non-Muslims were forbidden to ride on horseback in cities. It was forbidden for them to bear arms. In the hamam, Jews had to wear wooden sandals, and the towels they used could not then be used by Muslims. Non-Muslims could not sell coffee in Istanbul, and they could not have Muslim slaves. In Ottoman courts if the person on trial was a Muslim, Jews' testimonies was not accepted.⁹⁴

In accordance with the regulations concerning the zimmi, a Muslim man could marry a Jewish woman, but the contrary was forbidden. Jews were also prohibited from giving Muslim names to their children. Names that existed in all three major religions, such as Yusuf and Davut were spelled differently in all.⁹⁵

It was possible to circumvent all these prohibitions and regulations through bribery. In fact, this was so widespread that the system amounted to certain privileges having certain prices. The state thus had it both ways: on the one hand it discriminated against non-Muslims and denigrated them, and on the other, it earned money. Because the essence of bribery is its volatility and untrustworthiness, the state could easily manipulate both the privileges and their prices. Even when a bribe was accepted, there was no guarantee that some other authority or power would not attempt to punish the non-

⁹⁴ Benbassa and Rodrigue, p.79.

⁹⁵ Yusuf Besalel, *Osmanlı ve Türk Yahudileri* (Istanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın, 1999), p.203.

Muslim briber for the “privilege”. It was exactly this state of that undermined the equality of the non-Muslims in general and the Jews in particular.

Jews and the Military

Jews played a disproportionately important role as contractors and purveyors for the military and as private bankers for senior military officers. The position of *ocak bezirganı* was generally occupied by Jews. Nevertheless, Jewish and Ottoman sources record numerous instances in which Jews suffered from the threats and attacks of the Janisaries, as well as other military units. These attacks usually took place during times of unrest, and they were not directed only against Jews. Still, the frequency of these acts suggests that Jews were regarded as an easy target.⁹⁶

An example of such an attack is related by Franco in which two Janisaries, try to punish the Jews, whom they held responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. Ten days before *the matsa* they kill one of their own children and throw the corpse to the Jewish Quarter. Applying to the State Council the next day, accusing the Jews for the murder, they fail to persuade the Sultan. Being questioned they admit to their crime, upon which the Jews are granted the right to kill the Christians entering their Quarters by the Sultan.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Levy, p.40.

⁹⁷ Eroğlu, p. 124.

Jews and Christians

Non-Muslim communities were hardly in cooperation in the Ottoman Empire, if anything, they held deeply set grudges against one another. They competed to win the favour of the Sultan, and to have the other groups fall into disfavour. The Christians, for example, resented the dominating presence of Jews in finance, industry and trade. This was made worse by the fact that Jews were seen to be in collaboration with the Ottoman conquerors of Christian lands. The Jews coming from Europe brought with them not only know-how concerning business but also their expertise in producing armaments. Bayezid was religiously conservative, but still he decreed that all Jews fleeing from Spain and Portugal should be admitted to his dominions without restriction.

The Christian community was better organized, and thus was able to present its interests at the court more effectively. The Patriarchs were there as the representatives of centralized religious organizations, whereas there were no Grand Rabbis of equal standing. This made it difficult for Jews to defend their interests against the advances of Christians, and often the task fell to physicians or financiers who were close to the Sultan.

In 1530, the Armenian priests and notables of Amasya accused some Jews of slaughtering a young Armenian boy and using his blood at the Passover feast. As a result of mass agitation, the Jewish quarter was attacked and pillaged for several days. This was the first of a series of similar

incidents that would continue throughout the 16th Century and the centuries to come.⁹⁸

In 1821 after the execution of the Fener Patriarch, the persecution of 5000 Jews in Mora was reported. It was believed that three Jews, upon being instructed by Benderli Ali Paşa dragged the dead body of the patriarch to Haliç, and this was the main reason behind the incident.⁹⁹

In the case of the Greeks, hostility on religious grounds grew stronger because of economic and social factors. The Greeks saw themselves as being replaced by the Jews. As a result, Jews generally preferred to settle near or within Muslim neighbourhoods, where they felt more secure. Even in Muslim neighbourhoods, however, Jews were not completely safe from contemptuous attitudes, verbal abuse, and occasional assault. The word çifüt, miser, was an insult reserved by Turks specifically for Jews. In fact, the very word Yahudi, Jew, was often used as an insult when addressed to non-Jews.

Jews and Kurds

In the Kurdish areas of Eastern Anatolia, discrimination was regularly practised against the Jews. Kurdish tribes regularly attacked areas that were settled by Muslims, Christians or Jews. The Jews of the area were therefore quite poor - only a few engaged in trade or industry, and banking was left totally to the leaders of tribes.

⁹⁸ Shaw, p.84.

⁹⁹ Eroğlu, p.151.

Jews and Arabs

The general impression derived from the sources is that, in the Arab-speaking provinces the attitudes of Muslims toward Jews, was more hostile than in Anatolia and the Balkans. This was perhaps because the Sephardic Jews there were seen as culturally more alien than the Arab-speaking local Christians and Jews. They were also seen as a privileged minority protected by the Turkish-speaking Ottoman rulers.¹⁰⁰

Language and Education

Prior to the migration wave of 1492, Jews of Anatolia, especially men involved in trade with Turks, spoke the Turkish of the era as well as Hebrew. The language spoken by Jews varied according to where they came from, the place they settled, their livelihood, and their numbers. Those who migrated at the end of the 15th Century established their own neighbourhoods where they lived according to their traditions having no attempt to learn the local language.

Romaniots spoke Greek until their assimilation by the Sephardim upon which they adopted Judeo-Espanol. At the beginning, Iberian Jews spoke Castellano, which later evolved in to Ladino that has some words both from Turkish and Hebrew. Meanwhile Jews of Eastern European and Russian

¹⁰⁰ Levy, p.41.

origin maintained their language, which was Yiddish. Besides, according to where they settled, Jews used different languages like Arabic or Aramaic.¹⁰¹

In the 19th Century, the discourse that failure to speak Turkish arrested Jewish development, gained acceptance among the Jewish community. It was only then, and especially following the *Tanzimat Fermanı* (1839), that learning Turkish became important. Also in this century, with the establishment of Alliance Israélite schools, French became a second language.

The most significant development about the use of Turkish took place in 1900, when the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul gave a petition to the Ottoman State expressing their will to replace the Spanish they used until then with Turkish as their mother tongue. Approval of this will along with newspapers printed in Turkish with Hebrew alphabet contributed to the spreading of Turkish.¹⁰²

The education of Jewish community can be examined in two periods: before and after the *Tanzimat*. In accordance with the zimmi tradition Jews had autonomy in education and right after the migration of 1492, they established schools of their own, with some prominent teachers especially in Salonika.¹⁰³

Before the *Tanzimat*, Jews had two types of schools. The first one was *Havra*, where the education consisted of basic information, teaching of Hebrew and Judeo-Espanol. Then there was the *Yeşiva*, which was for the education of the Rabbis. Religious texts, philosophy, mathematics, and

¹⁰¹ Eroğlu, pp.193-194.

¹⁰² Besalel, p. 152.

¹⁰³ Eroğlu, pp.189-190.

astronomy were taught in this school. Jewish schools, in a system resembling the Turkish foundations, were built and maintained by the rich or the contributions of the community.

With the *Tanzimat*, there emerged some attempts to modernise the Jewish schools causing resistance among the conservative Rabbis. As a result, for a long time the Jewish community showed no interest in the modern schools established during the *Tanzimat*. For instance, the first Jewish student enrolled in medicine school 34 years after its foundation.

However, this resistance softening in time, Alliance Schools, which were modern education institutions, became popular among the Jews by the turn of the century. Besides, with the increasing importance of Turkish this language was also taught and some schools were also given Turkish names.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Eroğlu, p.191-192.

CONCLUSION

1492 was a turning point in Jewish history, when the most populated and famous medieval Jewish group was forced on exile from their homeland, Spain. Immediately afterwards, as a consequence of the absolute conversion policies of Portugal, Jewish presence in Iberian peninsula, of over 1000 years came to an end. The result was the spread of approximately 200 000 Jews in the Mediterranean and Balkans, settling in the Ottoman dominions, becoming one of the tiles in the cultural mosaic of the Empire.

Comparing the existence of the Jews in Spain before the mass exodus with the existence of the Ottoman Jews both prior to and after 1492 reveals some interesting results. The Jewish proclamation of self-governance at Valladolid shows that the Jewish community was interested in five issues: education, choosing judges, tax collection, tax exemption, and regulations for clothing. These issues retained their importance for the Jews in the Ottoman Empire after the exodus; as a matter of fact, even after the conquest of Constantinople, they came up on their agenda. The regulations concerning these issues were strikingly similar in Spain and the Ottoman Empire.

Another important similarity between the two countries is that in both cases Jews were settled in ghettos. In Spain, as in neighbouring countries, Jews were dislocated and driven into ghettos, having to forego their property, whereas in the Ottoman Empire the Jews, both the *sürgün* and the *kendi*

gelen were settled according to the will of the government, into tight *mahalles* with little interaction between them and others, either Christians or Muslims.

The prohibitions accompanying their existence in Spain and the Ottoman Empire are also comparable, so much so that one gets the impression that these prohibitions are the *sine qua non* of Jewish life through the ages.

On the other hand, there are two significant disparities, and these determine the essential distinction of the condition of the Jews in Spain and that in the Ottoman Empire: it can be said that these differences are what made the Jews travel all the way across Europe. In Spain, both the Inquisition and the throne, not to mention the lay Christians, considered the Jews a religious threat. The fact that conversos continued to live according to Jewish rules meant that Christians were subservient to Jews, and that this could spread, resulting in Judiaization of Christian lands. In the Ottoman Empire, this was never the case. Jews, far from being a religious threat, were regarded as inferior and easily circumscribable. Even converting Jews to Islam was not a policy that was followed with much fervour. In fact, Muslim polemics were not concerned with the Jews, who were relatively insignificant, targeting the Christians who posed a greater threat for the Muslim beliefs and the Islamic world order. Jews on the other hand, neither threatened the political, nor challenged the religious order of Islam. Anti-Jewish polemics were rare and when existed, were almost at all times, originating from either Jewish converts to Islam or pre-Islamic Christian sources. The interesting thing to note is that the Christians of the Empire adopted toward the Jews the attitude of their religious brethren in Europe, and the demise of the Jews

later on in the 18th century was caused by this hostility that was guided by the prejudices of the Inquisition.

The second major difference was economic: whereas in Spain there was economic discrimination against the Jews which led to appropriations in the Ottoman Empire Jews were given incentives and various exemptions to practice their trades, and were actually wanted for this purpose. The Ottoman state preferred to tax the economic activities of the Jews, and had no concern that various areas of trade and commerce were taken over by them.

This attitude is manifest in the strengthening of Jews' positions as merchants and craftsmen in the 15th and 16th Centuries. Moreover, majority of customs clerks and tax collectors were Jews during this period. The surest path to wealth was through involvement in financial affairs of the state. Yet, neither political influence nor wealth could be trusted. In fact, disastrous demises of influential Jews are recorded in the Ottoman history. This could come to mean (for them and sometimes their relatives), the annexation of their possessions and at times losing their lives. In the same manner, although the Jews conducted most of the financial affairs of the Janissaries, often this resulted in dire consequences for them, with many being accused of fraud and sentenced to death.

In addition the praised autonomy of the minorities in the Empire was actually a necessity, instead of a favour granted to these communities as it is represented. Social structure of the Ottoman Empire was based on religion and non-Muslims conforming to this principle gained a relative autonomy. In fact, in a multinational, multi-religious system with no central authority,

Ottomans had no other chance but to grant some self-governance to these groups and this ethno-religion based system was the best suitable model.

Although the general attitude towards the Jews can be considered as one of tolerance this was not as warm and free of tension as the “Golden Age” myth suggests. At times the restrictions imposed on *zimmi*s in general and Jews in particular were lenient, but more often than not they were applied with rigour, reaching their peak with decrees ordering the burning down of religious buildings constructed without permission.

Essentially, as it has been shown so far, the attitude of the Muslims towards the religious minorities was that of a ruler towards his slaves. As long as they know their places and act accordingly, he will treat them with an aloof, arrogant tolerance.

Moreover at the decline of the empire, Muslim majority became more suspicious and less tolerant. Although explicit attacks and violence was still rare and most of the time fuelled by the Christian minorities, they were in comparison to the earlier periods, more frequently encountered.

In conclusion, the Jewish existence of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire was essentially similar to the one in Spain and elsewhere; what made the difference was the fact that in the Empire they were not regarded as a religious or economic threat. Rather, they were seen as a community that excelled in activities that were regarded below a Muslim, a community that could be kept within boundaries without upsetting the social order, and, most of all a tax-paying community.

Stanford Shaw claims that “The Golden Age” of Ottoman Jewry vanished “almost overnight” around 1700, that “the powerful Jewish bankers and

international traders were replaced by more energetic and knowledgeable Armenians and Greeks. Large-scale Christian anti-Semitism, supported by European diplomats and merchants, drove the Jews out of the privileged position which had been given them by Mehmed II and retained by his successors during the next century. No more were there influential Jews at court. The mass of Jews, moreover, never as prosperous as their leaders even in the Golden Age, now settled into a poverty and ignorance which lasted well into the nineteenth century.

History rarely changes overnight - the fate that befell the Ottoman Jewry had been long in the making, not in the Empire, but throughout the history of Jews.