



Jewish Settlements in Palestine: An Analysis of Some Ottoman Documents

Osmanlı'da Yahudi Yerleşimleri: Bazı Osmanlı Vesikalarının Analizi

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Abstract

This study analyzes 37 Ottoman documents regarding the Jewish settlements in Palestine, written between 1850 and 1920. Documents show that while Jewish groups were firm about making Palestine a Jewish homeland, the Ottoman government spent great effort to impede this goal. However, since Jews used illegal ways to settle in Palestine and corrupt Ottoman public servants helped them to obtain lands, residence, and citizenship, Ottomans failed to stop the unlawful Jewish settlements. Thus, the real number of migrants and lands purchased were always two-three times higher than the legal numbers. As a result, when Ottomans were no longer ruling Palestine at the end of the First World War, the region was already under the control of Jews. The study aims to reveal the Ottoman posture against Jewish immigration and settlements by analyzing state documents, and include it in the literature.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Ottoman Empire, Migration, Zionism

Özet

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü'nün Osmanlı'daki Yahudi yerleşimleri ile ilgili "Osmanlı Belgelerinde Filistin" kitabında geçen ve 1850-1920 yılları arasında yazılmış 37 adet vesikayı inceleyerek Filistin'in nasıl Yahudileştirildiğini ve İsrail'in nasıl kurulduğunu ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Bu sayede bugünkü Filistin-İsrail Sorununun da kökenine inilmesi beklenmektedir. Çalışmamız gösteriyor ki; Yahudiler Filistin'de bir devlet kurmak için ne kadar kararlılarsa, Osmanlı da kurdurmamak için aynı kararlılıktadır. Ancak Yahudilerin Osmanlı memurlarını rüşvetle kendi tarafına çekmesi gibi birçok illegal yollara başvurup toprak, mesken ve vatandaşlık alması Osmanlı'nın Yahudi göçünü ve emellerini durdurmasına engel olmuştur. Öyle ki Osmanlı'nın son 50 yılında Filistin'deki gerçek Yahudi sayısı ve ellerindeki mülkler resmi rakamların 2-3 katı olmuştur. Osmanlı'nın çöküş döneminde olması diğer önemli bir sebeptir. Sonuç olarak, Osmanlı Devleti Birinci Dünya Savaşında Filistin'i kaybettiğinde Yahudiler zaten bölgeyi fiili olarak kontrollerine almışlardı denilebilir. Çalışma, belgeleri özet olarak incelemesinin yanı sıra son bölümde kendi çıkarımlarını da sunmuştur. Mezkur kitabın yanı sıra başka kaynaklardan da istifade edilerek vesikalardaki bilgiler teyit edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail, Filistin, Osmanlı Devleti, Göç, Siyonizm

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Introduction

The Jewish settlement in Palestine has a 2.000-years old past, starting from the Babylonian exile. With the rise of nationalistic movements, pogroms in Eastern Europe, and the general hatred against Jews, some prominent Jewish businessmen and NGOs began to seek a homeland for dispersed Jews. The foremost place for a home was Palestine as it was claimed to be the promised lands to Jews, mentioned in Torah. While there were official efforts for an Israeli state by Jewish elites both in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, there were also secretive plans to resettle those Jews leaving Russia, Romania, and other Eastern European countries in Palestine by force or voluntarily. Jewish migration to Palestine systematically began in the second half of the 19th century. While the Ottoman Empire welcomed Jewish migrants and granted them citizenship, it did not allow them to live in Palestine, fearing that they may ask for an independent state shortly. The Ottoman fear was not groundless because Jews themselves openly stated that they want an autonomous region in Palestine. As a result, a struggle between Ottomans and Jews over the status of Palestine was witnessed from especially the 1880s onward. These days were also the dates when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was seeded. Jewish toplineers such as Baron de Rothschild, Theodor Herzl, and Baron Hirsch used both diplomacy and illegal methods to gather Jews in Palestine. Eventually, they could buy lands and resettled Jewish migrants in Quds, Haifa, Jaffa, and other cities. Since then, Palestine has become a battlefield of conflict, on which new concepts of wars and polarization have been developed (Albayrak, 2023:310, Karakuş and Şehitoğlu, 2021:108).

This study has analyzed 37 Ottoman documents written with the Ottoman alphabet, and extracted briefs from them to understand the Ottoman vs. Jewish stances against the Jewish settlements in Palestine. Based on the information in the documents, the study argues that the Jewish settlements were achieved despite prohibitions implemented by the Ottoman government. One reason for the success is the illegal ways used by Jewish organizations, enabling more migrants to reach Palestine and settle there. Documents indicate that most of the transactions were unlawful as Ottomans had strict control over migration. Therefore, the number of lands bought by Jewish organizations and migrants arrived at Palestinian ports skyrocketed. Perhaps, two out of three migrants illegally settled in Palestine. As will be explained below, there were many methods used by Jews to violate the prohibition. Second, corrupt public servants of the Ottoman state were influential as they helped Jews to settle in Palestine in return for lucrative bribes. It can be contended that settlements are a co-work of Jewish organizations and Ottoman clerks. Third, the illegality worked well and led to *de facto* control of Palestine by Jews even during the Ottoman era. Thus, as documents show below, although the Arab population comprised the majority, Palestine was already lost to Jews even before the Balfour Declaration owing to Jewish efforts, foreign support, and the failure of Ottomans.

1. Method

While literature was reviewed for the background of the issue, the main source of this study is the book titled “Osmanlı Belgelerinde Filistin - *Palestine in Ottoman Documents*”, published by the Turkish Directorate of Ottoman Archives. The study analyzes only chapter 5, named ‘Jewish Settlement in Palestine’. Consisting of 150 pages, the chapter contains 37 original Ottoman documents and their Latin transliterations. Documents consist of orders of the Ottoman government, correspondence between state institutions, translations of news, or advice and warnings of officials. Since the language used was difficult to understand, some help was received from the Ottoman alphabet experts. Only a

brief for each document was written as a full English translation would comprise more than one hundred pages. The focus was spotted on supposedly unique information that would help to reveal Ottoman views about the Jewish settlements. Few comments were added to briefs as the subsequent section was dedicated to the findings. Since it was not possible to publish all documents due to the space problem, two of them were symbolically inserted into the article.

2. Palestine and Jews

Jews had an aspiration to return to Palestine for 2000 years after the Babylonian exile. Spreading all over the world, they were not able to establish a homeland for themselves either in Palestine or any other location throughout history since they were disunited and disagreed among themselves whether a state was necessary or not. When discriminatory behaviors increased in the 19th century, at a time when nationalism was rising and threatening multiethnic states and empires, Jews also got affected by nationalist movements, thus Jewish businessmen and elites focused on finding a homeland where they could found a Jewish state (*Eretz Israel*). Before discussing Jewish efforts to return to Palestine in the late 19th century, it should be noted that Western powers had already supported a Jewish homeland in Ottoman Palestine. Their support was due to reasons such as (1) to get rid of Jews, (2) to benefit from Jewish wealth by supporting their causes, and (3) to use Jews for their imperial goals. For example, Napoleon of France had tried to get the loyalty of Jews by enabling them to return to Palestine to disturb the British influence in the Middle East (Kayyali, 1977: 98). He had called all Jews across the world to reconstruct the old temple in Jerusalem (Glatt, 2016). In addition, British policymakers also wanted a national homeland for Jews. While they tried to persuade the Ottoman Sultan for the return of dispersed Jews to Palestine, they also wanted to use them as a check upon Egypt's leader Muhammad Ali (Cohen, 2017). Moreover, American presidents such as John Adams and Abraham Lincoln supported a Jewish state and immigration of Jews to Palestine, which they claimed to be the Biblical home of Jews (Jewish Virtual Library, 2017).

The desire for a Jewish state by Jews was always existent but it began to be more institutionalized when the Zionist Movement came into being in the second half of the 19th century. Beginning with establishing NGOs and newspapers, the movement became a corporate entity when the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was founded in 1897. The goals of the WZO were declared as to promote a Jewish state in what they called as the 'Lands of Israel', uniting Jews, strengthening the Jewish national consciousness, and so on (Jubilee, 1947). The WZO was a nationalist organization rather than religious but they wielded Biblical promises to attract those Jews reluctant or opposed to immigrate Palestine. There are verses in Torah referring to 'promised lands'. For example, Genesis 15:18-19 reads; "To your descendants, I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates". Thus, the borders of Jewish lands are stated as from the Nile to the Euphrates. In addition, Moses says in Torah that when Jews return to God with all their soul and heart, the curse will be undone, and they will return to their land (Hewitt, 2013).

However, there are inconveniences in Jewish theology. First, God promised the land on the condition that they did not choose another God. In other words, they must be good worshippers to be entitled to live in the promised lands. It is not our business to claim whether Jews are good worshippers or not but since Palestinians are deprived of their basic rights and their lands are illegally occupied, their actions can not be defended morally and legally. Second, Torah promised lands to the descendants of Abraham but Arabs are also Abraham's sons. Therefore, when Arab people claim the same lands, the debate becomes

more complicated. Third, not only Jews but also people of other religions and denominations such as Rastafaris, Mormons, and Protestants assume to be the chosen people. Thus, Jewish privilege is not accepted by other religions. Fourth, asserting that Palestine was the home of Jews 2000 years ago can not be a reason to claim it again since it is against logic, traditions, and international laws. If this is the case, Europeans should go back to India, Turks to Central Asia, and Americans to Europe then.

Whether for religious or nationalist reasons, Zionists, headed by Theodor Herzl, met with German King Wilhelm II and Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamit II. Herzl offered to pay the entire debt of the Ottoman Empire but failed to convince the Sultan (Israel Information Center, 2004: 3). Zionists then turned to the British Empire with the help of Lord Rothschild and asked some concessions in Cyprus and the Sinai Peninsula. The British offered land in Uganda (in today's Eldoret region of Kenya) but they refused (Saylor, 2011: 7). However, massive Zionist pressure led by Chaim Weizmann, Nahum Sokolov, and Baron de Rothschild on the British government eventually culminated in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which stated the acceptance of a Jewish national home in Palestine. It was a great success for the Zionist movement since their plans on Palestine were officially recognized. The declaration also accelerated the influx of Jewish migrants to the British Palestinian Mandate. In the end, after the British terminated the mandate in 1945, the United Nations (UN) decided to partition Palestine into two states after a committee responsible for investigating the issue advised in this direction. As a result, Israel was founded on May 14, 1948. Yet, it led to the emergence of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that caused more occupation of lands belonging to the Palestinian state.

The foundation of Israel is a result of the organized immigration called *Aliyah* (meaning 'ascent'- moving to the Land of Israel as opposed to *Yerida* (descent)- emigration from the Land of Israel), which was perpetrated by the Zionists and funded by the rich Jewish businessmen. There were five waves of migration to Palestine (two during the Ottoman Empire and three during the British mandate). While the first wave took place between 1882 and 1903, bringing 35.000 Jews from Russia, the second one refers to the immigration of 40.000 Jews from Russia between 1904 and 1914 (Scharfstein, 1997: 231; Halpern and Reinhartz, 1991). The Ottoman government had conditionally accepted Jewish immigration from Russia. One condition was to revoke the citizenship of the origin country so that they will not be loyal to their ex-countries. In addition, Ottomans thought that Jews with foreign passports could be used against the Ottoman regime by foreign countries. Second, Jews were allowed to resettle in Ottoman lands other than Palestine as Sultan Abdulhamit II was suspicious that they were planning to found a state there (Öke, 1991: 71). However, legal and illegal Jewish migration continued. For instance, the British government persuaded the Ottoman government to accept up to 500 Jewish families at once (Buzpınar, 1994: 62). On the other hand, those coming to Jerusalem for pilgrimage did not return. Another way was to come over Western Europe as there was no prohibition on this route, at least before the year 1900. Although Ottoman officials shortened the duration of visit and later asked for a passport, Jews could still reach Palestine through illegal ways. Meanwhile, while migration was continuing legally or illegally, Jewish tycoons such as Baron Hirsch and Baron de Rothschild were simultaneously buying lands in Palestinian territories for Jewish settlements. What the Ottoman response to migration was and how it struggled with procurements of lands will be examined through the analysis of the Ottoman official documents in the next section.

3. Jewish Settlement in Palestine

This study analyzes Ottoman documents regarding “The Jewish Settlement in Palestine”, compiled as the fifth chapter in the book titled ‘Palestine in Ottoman Documents’. The book was written by a group of experts working at the Directorate of Ottoman Archives, a governmental institution translating and preserving Ottoman documents in Istanbul, in 2009. The book has 575 pages and contains 197 documents written in the Ottoman language with the Arabic alphabet, four maps, 79 photographs, two gravures, and a plan. All documents have their Latin transliteration as well. There are eight chapters in the book; 1) Administrative, 2) Health, 3) Security, 4) Reconstruction, 5) Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 6) Education and Social Life, 7) Religious Communities, and Institutions, and 8) Protection of Cultural Heritage. The fifth chapter, Jewish Settlements in Palestine, contains 37 documents and their transliterations, starting from document 44 to 81. While I can read Ottoman documents, I still got use of Latin Transliterations for the parts I did not understand and got help for the original document. Below is the brief translation of documents with their numbers in the book and issue dates in parentheses. Assessments about documents will be made in the following section.

*Document 44 (?)*¹: Titled as ‘Investigating The Reasons of Increase in The Number of Jewish Temples in Safed’, the document reveals that the Ottoman government requests the governor and *Qadi* (Muslim Judge) of Sham, of which Palestine was a part at that time, to investigate the increase in the number of Jewish synagogues. As per the letter, while previously there were seven mosques and three synagogues in Safed town, the number of the latter suddenly rose to 32. Besides, the letter complains about taller synagogues, and lands donated to these synagogues. The governmental letter asks the top administrators of Sham to learn who allowed building more synagogues and the procurement of lands for their use. The correspondence shows that Jewish synagogues were built illegally and the government is suspicious of collaborators (Palestine in Ottoman Documents, 2009: 219).

Document 45 (August 30, 1851): As verification of governmental officials’ collaboration mentioned in document 44, this document titled ‘Informing the Government About the Local Officials Who Violates the Prohibition to Sell Lands (to Jews)’ reveals that public servants turned a blind eye on the sales of Muslim properties to Latin, Greek and Armenian monasteries in Quds (Jerusalem). There is no mention of Jews in this document (Ibid: 221).

Document 46 (December 13, 1857): It is a letter sent to the Quds governor, indicating that foreigners like Russians buy lands from locals or foundations without documenting it, and public servants do not strive for preventing the illegal trading of properties. Since illegal Jewish migrants mostly come from Russia, the aforementioned Russians are likely of Jewish origin. (Ibid: 227).

Document 47 (May 9, 1880): This document is about ‘Refusal of The Demand Regarding Establishment of an Autonomous Jewish Settlement in Belka’. The document is a decision of the Ottoman Parliament about Laurent Oliphant’s request for an autonomous Jewish region in Belka (Ibid: 231). As per the document, Oliphant, an Evangelist Christian who visited Palestine in 1879 (Polat, 2017: 11), wants a colony for European Jews on a land of 4.300 square kilometers where there will be independent Jewish administrators, courts and military contingents. The parliament refuses the request. Meanwhile, Oliphant says in his book that he got the support of Syrian governor Mithat Pasha and Ottoman Sadrazam

¹ The date of this document is not clear but the content shows that it was written in the 1850s.

(Prime Minister) for his project (Oliphant, 1880: 415). While it is interesting that a non-Jewish person was asking for a Jewish homeland, he was likely sent by European Jewish elites.

Document 48 (April 4, 1881): After the refusal of Oliphant's request, this time Ritter von Newlinsky, a Jewish journalist having contacts with Theodor Herzl, comes to the scene. This document is the translation of Newlinsky's letter to the Ottoman Sultanate. Newlinsky begins with writing about the situation of European powers. He then argues that if Europeans do not partition the Ottoman Empire, it is because they have no consensus on this plan, yet. His solution for Ottomans is to appease ethnic and religious groups. Newlinsky finally offers his proposal and says that the Sublime Port (Ottoman administration) should accept Jews to Ottoman lands as it did during the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and asks for an autonomous region for Jews in Palestine. In return, he offered to pay all debts of the Ottoman Empire. What if Ottomans do not give permission? He threatens politely and says that the rich and smart Jews will realize their goals in other ways. Besides, he says the big European newspapers owned by Jews will be used against Ottomans. Whereas, if Ottomans accept the proposal, Jewish media will serve them, he adds. Thus, it can be concluded that Newlinsky offers both heaven and hell and asks Ottomans to choose either of them with their decision about a Jewish homeland in Palestine (Palestine in Ottoman Documents, 2009: 235).

Document 49 (January 29, 1881): It mentions a Britain-based bank lending money to landowners in return for mortgaging their lands. The British bank, whose name is not written, allegedly gives money with such high interest rates that sometimes debt can grow ten times within a few years. Since landowners are not able to pay such high amounts, the bank confiscates their lands. The bank also allegedly uses exchange offices and gold traders as its agents. What local administrators want from the government is to force banks to work legally and nullify contracts of the debt if there is no governmental approval. Using the banking regime can be regarded as a secret tactic to purchase lands. This tactic also reminds Newlinsky's words that 'the rich and smart Jews will realize their goals in other ways' (Ibid: 241).

Document 50 (July 2, 1886): In this document, the Syrian governorate asks a probe from the Ministry of Interior for public servants that illegally gave citizenship to 272 Jews emigrating from Romania to Haifa, and allowed them to build houses. This means that officials prepared fake citizenship documents and let Jewish migrants live in Palestine, which was strictly prohibited (Ibid: 247).

Document 51 (May 29, 1891): It is a letter of the Ottoman Ambassador to London, warning the government about illegal immigrants. Ambassador Abdulkhak Hamid mentions British Prime Minister Gladstone's letter published at *The Times* newspaper, where Gladstone asks the Ottoman Sultan to accept Jews escaping from the persecution of Russians to Palestine. Hamid proposes the Sultan not to tolerate Jewish migration and blames Gladstone for being hypocritical (Ibid: 251).

Document 52 (July 27, 1891): The situation of 400 Jews in Haifa and 40 Jews in Safed are discussed in the parliament. According to the document, mentioned Jews want to be Ottoman citizens and exempted from the tax levied in place of military service. However, the Ottoman government does not grant citizenship and orders them to be dispatched to America, arguing that their settlement in Quds may result in an autonomous Jewish entity. As can be seen in almost all documents, the Ottoman administration is alarmed about Jews' intention of founding a homeland in Palestine (Ibid: 253).

Photo 1: Document 52



Source: Ibid: 254

Document 53 (September 27, 1891): The document argues that Jews can found an Israeli state through purchasing lands, industrial production, agriculture, and commerce unless measures are taken. The letter is written by the Armenian origin clerk Mihran Boyacıyan based in Quds. Boyacıyan asserts that if Jewish migration is not stopped, they will buy the entire Palestine. He says the price of land has increased 30-40 times within the last 5-10 years. Since locals do not earn enough money from agriculture, they sell their lands to Jews. 50% of the coast between Haifa and Gaza belongs to Jews, he adds. Boyacıyan continues as such that 85% of stores in Quds are of Jews and they will soon buy all of them. Besides, he also warns about activities of Rothschild and Jewish NGOs like *Alliance Israiliyat* that benefit from capitulations granted to foreign countries. As per his claim, Rothschild is seen as the first Sultan of the to-be founded Israeli state in Jews' minds. Boyacıyan also makes some suggestions about halting Jewish expansionism. First, Syrian (Palestinian)

coasts should be cleared from Jews. Second, more punitive penalties must be given to those Jews not returning after visiting Quds, and they should not be allowed to arrive Palestinian ports. Third, Jews with foreign passports must be deported and those holding Ottoman citizenship must be settled in other parts of the Empire. Fourth, selling lands to Jews must be prohibited. Jewish schools must be under the control of the Ministry of Education and they should enroll non-Jewish students, too (Ibid: 257).

Document 54 (January 5, 1892): It is a letter sent from the Ministry of Interior to Quds governorate, ordering that Jews emigrating from Russia and Greece should not be allowed to enter Palestine and those being in Quds should be given only a one-month duration for visit (Ibid: 263).

Document 55 (January 15, 1892): In association with the previous document, this one is written by the Ministry of Interior, ordering Quds governorate to send back 200 Jews coming from Iran, and stop the arrival of 300 more Iranian Jews (Ibid: 265).

Document 56 (November 26, 1892): The Ministry of Interior warns Syrian, Beirut, and Quds administrations that some Jews are buying lands with fake names or nationalities through the mediation of Jewish NGOs. Moreover, sellers and buyers use hand-written title deeds, which are officially not enough for the realization of the sale. Therefore, administrations are ordered not to accept illegal sales and force people to sell by official title deeds. The document also says that some public servants are involved in such illegal activities (Ibid: 267).

Document 57 (August 15, 1893): It is an example of the problem mentioned in the previous document. According to the document, 140 Jewish families emigrating from Russia and Romania were illegally accepted to Haifa and allowed to buy lands, on which they built a village. The document argues that some civil servants are responsible for these illegal transactions. Besides, civil servants are accused of selling more than 500.000 acres to Jews via Baron de Rothschild's and Baron Hirsch's companies. Which officials got how much bribe is listed in the document (Ibid: 269).

Document 58 (September 24, 1892): It reveals that Michel Erlanger, a French citizen who has lands in Haifa and Jaffa, tries to sell his properties to a Jewish origin French citizen called Eli Shayed. It also states that 'Rothchild's men' got involved in this operation. Since selling lands to Jews is prohibited, the Interior Ministry asks Quds governorate to prevent the transaction. It seems that Jews hide their religious identity and behave as if they are French, British, or Russian (Ibid: 275).

Document 59 (January 3, 1894): It is a letter sent from the government to the Interior Ministry, expressing that some people deliberately file framed-up lawsuits to buy and sell registered and unregistered lands, and construct buildings on them. They also call officials to testify in the court. As such fraudulent lawsuits cause loss of tax, the government wants financial officials to be present at the court. While the document is not clear enough, it seems that an unregistered land can be possessed at the court if the head of the village testifies that it belongs to the plaintiff (Ibid: 281).

Document 60 (July 10, 1904): It is an order of investigation, stating that there are discrepancies in maps showing lands of the Sultan in Jericho and asserts that Stefanos, the Bishop and the Despot of Jerusalem, looks possessing Sultan's lands. The paper wants an investigation into how these lands were given to Stefanos and foreigners (Ibid: 285).

Document 61 (October 20, 1894): It stresses that Jewish immigrants deported from Russia and other countries continue to immigrate to Palestine systematically with the help of Baron de Rothschild. Seeming to be written by a former official, the document warns the Ottoman government about Rothschild and argues that the Ottoman administration might soon face a new case like that of Armenians, who were struggling for an independent state in the late 19th century (Ibid: 291).

Document 62 (March 18, 1898): Beirut governor Reshid Bin Mumtaz asks the Ministry of Interior to send a translator to make investigations about the population of Jewish migrants in Tiberia. He says that while there are 4.000 Jews, only 600 of them are registered (Ibid: 295).

Document 63 (September 3, 1898): It is a translation of an article containing Theodor Herzl's speech during the second World Zionist Congress from *Correspondance* newspaper of Austria. Herzl says during the congress that Palestine will be a road of civilization and commerce between Asia and Europe soon. He adds that a peaceful and entrepreneur nation (Jews) will strengthen the Ottoman power. Admitting that they aim to return to Palestine, Herzl also explains that the Jewish-Ottoman relationships will be based on "If you give me, I will give you" principle of reciprocity (Ibid: 299).

Document 64 (April 30, 1899): It is the letter of Theodor Herzl to Artin Pasha, Undersecretary of the Ottoman State. Herzl says in his letter that Zionism aims to provide a permanent home to Jews dispersed to many countries, and wishes Palestine to be the mentioned home. He expresses that Jews will be good citizens, pay their taxes, and enrich the Ottoman state. Besides, the Zionist organization will give hundreds of millions of Franks as lends to the Ottoman government. In addition, he promises to pay the debt of the Ottoman government to other countries. To this end, he adds, they founded Jewish Construction Bank in London. He also states that if their proposal is declined, they will find other ways to fulfill this goal (see *Document 48*, where Newlinsky uses similar words). Finally, he wants an appointment to talk to the Sultan (Ibid: 303).

Document 65 (September 30, 1901): It mentions that as the lands bought by Nersis Lefen, the head of Jews in Paris, will be used for settlement of Jewish migrants in Beirut (Palestine) despite that the otherwise was stated by Lefen, the sales agreement is asked to be nullified by the government. The government thinks that Lefen will eventually use his lands for the settlement of Jewish migrants (Ibid: 307).

Document 66 (March 14, 1900): The document is a military letter revealing that although Baron de Rothschild was allowed to buy 22.000 acres of land to build 130 homes on it, he was caught buying more lands and settling more illegal Jews. Thus, the letter wants a committee to be formed to investigate the case (Ibid: 309).

Document 67 (October 1900): It consists of instructions of the government about visits of Jews to Quds. The document says that the prohibition of Jews to settle in Palestine does not mean that they can not visit holy places. Non-Ottoman Jews can stay for three months but if their visit exceeds the duration, they will be expelled by force (Ibid: 313).

Document 68 (March 15, 1906): This document is an order for keeping the Remilan tribe away from Sultan's lands in Rafah and build additional military posts to protect the lands (Ibid: 319).

Document 69 (April 4, 1909): It indicates that some lands in Masrafa county of Quds were bought by the Ottoman Sultan. The last two documents (68 and 69) show that the Sultan buys new lands or protects his existing lands not to be sold to Jews (Ibid: 321).

Document 70 (June 13, 1909): It mentions that a Jewish merchant named Izak Fernandez wants the size of his farms in various provinces to be measured by the state so that he can sell them. Yet, the document shows that he was not allowed to sell his farms in Palestine as the state is suspicious that he can sell them to illegal Jewish migrants (Ibid: 323).

Document 71 (June 20, 1909): The document shows that Jews want to settle in Palestine through benefiting from the declaration of the constitutional monarchy in the Ottoman Empire. The governmental document underlies that prohibition of Jews to settle in Palestine continues. There is an apparent expectation on the Jewish side about free immigration but the government reminds that administrative changes will not change the prohibition on migration (Ibid: 327).

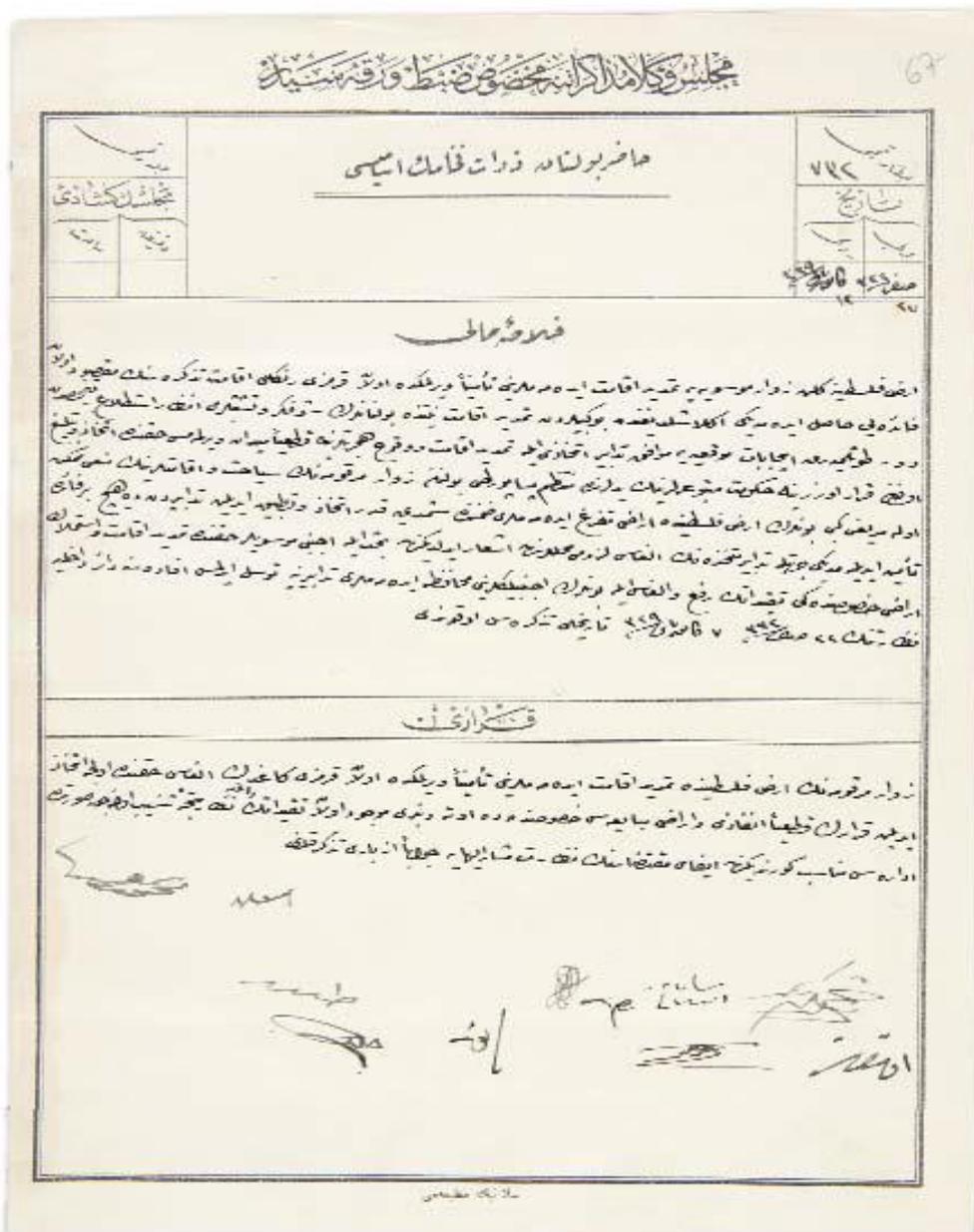
Document 72 (1908): It mentions that a Russian Jew named Ilya Baykov did not accept the document of temporary residence when he arrived at Jaffa port, arguing that the residence permit was not valid in the new era (constitutional monarchy). Yet, Quds governorate stresses that prohibition on Jewish settlement continues (Ibid: 331).

Document 73 (June 2, 1910): People and governors in Ras Al-Ein and Sur want to seize lands of the overthrown Sultan Abdulhamit II with administrative decrees. Yet, the governmental response says that they should go to the court to claim rights on lands (Ibid: 337).

Document 74 (January 11, 1914): It is a document sent from the Syrian governorate to the Ministry of Interior. The governorate says that some illegal Jewish migrants buy lands in Palestine with fake identity cards and give bribes to public servants to legalize the transaction. The document also reveals that while there are officially less than 20.000 Jews, the real number is more than 40.000. Besides, it warns that if illegal migration is not prevented, Jews will comprise the majority (Ibid: 347).

Document 75 (January 25, 1914): The document is an administrative decision regarding red-colored residence permits. As per the document, since the red card fails to stop Jewish migration and procurement of lands by Jews, it is ordered to be abandoned. Besides, laws regarding the prohibition of Jewish migration and land sales are demanded to be applied strictly (Ibid: 351).

Photo 2: Document 75



Source: Ibid: 353

Document 76 (January 13, 1915): It is a decree stating that the Ottoman government has prepared a 2000-Lira budget to pay the return tickets of those poor Jews from hostile countries, who did not accept the Ottoman citizenship. In other words, the government pays the travel costs of deported Jews (Ibid: 355).

Document 77 (April 10, 1915): It is a police letter to the Ministry of Interior, responding to claims of *Daily Mail* and *Daily News* newspapers of Britain. The police administration says that 90% of more than 120.000 Jews immigrated to Palestine with the help of Zionist NGOs and their secret services from hostile countries. Those not accepting Ottoman citizenship voluntarily repatriated to their home countries. In addition, the Ottoman administration covered the travel costs of poor immigrants. Besides, the leaving Jews are behaved well as opposed to British newspapers' claims (Ibid: 357).

Document 78 (September 14, 1917): The document was sent from the Chief of Staff to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that Monsieur Kedeshini, one of the Pope's new

ministers said in an interview to a Spanish newspaper that Catholics will not allow Palestine to be under the control of Muhammadans (Muslims). The Chief of Staff wants the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to contact the Vatican's representative in Istanbul to make an explanation about the interview (Ibid: 361).

Document 79 (October 7, 1917): It is another correspondence from the Chief of Staff to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It informs the ministry that the military attaché in Switzerland has learned that the US president Wilson asked Russians to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine (Ibid: 365).

Document 80 (October 13, 1917): The document is a letter from the Vienna Embassy of the Ottoman Empire to Mr. Ahmed Nesimi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The letter expresses that the US president Wilson promised an Israeli state in Palestine and the British support this idea with the Balfour Declaration. The embassy urges the government to strengthen the Ottoman army in Palestine so that the British army located in Gaza can not enter Quds (Ibid: 367).

Document 81 (February 3, 1919): It is about how to transfer Sultan Abdulhamid II's lands based in Iraq, Hejaz (Saudi Arabia), the Balkans, and Palestine to his inheritors (Ibid: 371).

4. The Assessment of Documents

The above documents show how the Ottoman government struggled to prevent Jewish migration, and how Jews and their organizations used all ways to settle there. Based on the Ottoman state documents, several findings can be suggested here. First, the Ottoman Empire has no hostility towards Jews. As Ottomans accepted Jews expelled from Spain in the late 15th century, they welcomed Jews escaping from the pogrom in Russia and other countries, too. Besides granting citizenship to immigrant Jews, Ottomans allowed them to live in any parts of the Empire except for Palestine. Quds city and its vicinity were important for the Sublime Port since it was a holy city like Mecca and Medinah. Besides, Quds was the home of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, Muslims' first *kiblah* (direction for prayer) before *Ka'ba* of Mecca. In addition, Ottomans knew that Jews were asking something more than migration, literally an autonomous state, which would turn into an independent state later. Jews also did not disguise their intention about a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Therefore, Ottomans prohibited the settlement of Jews in Palestine except for temporary visits. Moreover, Ottomans did not accept to sell lands, which they conquered with blood. According to the Ottoman approach, sacrificed lives are priceless, thus their blood can not be exchanged with money. Sultan Abdulhamit II responded to Herzl as such that he will not give Palestinian territory to Jews since such a decision can not be explained to the public, and may create problems with Russians (Ortaylı, 1981: 115). The Sultan's piety was also factor for not leaving Quds to Jews.

Second, Jews are decisive about founding a homeland in Palestine, claiming that it is the 'promised lands'. Attempts to found a homeland started long before the establishment of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) that perhaps the WZO is a result of such attempts. While Jewish elites sought for support of great powers for a Jewish state in Palestine, they simultaneously helped Jews to immigrate there. Migration was sponsored by notable rich Jews to save lives of pogrom victims and grow the Jewish community in Palestine since a state would not be established without a population. The biggest pioneer and sponsor is Baron de Rothschild, who used his wealth to buy lands and fund Jewish migration. In Document 53, the writer of the letter says that Rothschild is supposed to be the first Sultan

of a likely state founded by Jews. This comment, as per documents analyzed, is quite correct. Yet, besides Rothschild, there were other Jewish businessmen, intellectuals, and NGOs that helped the settlement. The Jewish capital and intellectuality seem to be used at the maximum level to realize the goal of founding the Israeli state. Furthermore, Jewish toplineers are so self-confident that they do not hide their plans, and threaten to use illegal ways to realize their plans. As can be seen in correspondences above, they force the Ottoman Empire to choose between the good and the bad and do not hesitate to say that they will try all options to establish their countries.

Such attitudes disclose that Jewish policies are illegal. A few fraudulent ways that Jews used to settle in Palestine can be seen in documents. For example, they gave bank credits to Palestinian landowners with high interest rates, which they thought farmers would not be able to pay back. Indeed, farmers could not pay their debts and had to give their lands to banks. Moreover, they bribed public servants to buy lands, prolong their visits, and obtain Ottoman citizenship (more comments are below). Another way is to hold fraudulent court trials and use bribed witnesses to claim rights on controversial lands. In addition, purchasing transactions were conducted between buyers and sellers without registering to the state land registry offices. Illegal procurements were later legalized in other ways. Furthermore, since Jews were prohibited to buy lands and settle in Palestine, they hid their Jewish identity and pretended to be Russian, French, or else. It seems that they bought large amounts of land via fake identities.

Third, the lands bought and the number of illegal immigrants were always bigger than official numbers. Jewish NGOs and immigrants themselves bought lands through fraudulent ways and generally unregistered them due to the prohibition. While real numbers were never found by the Ottoman officials, they could learn some of the illicit procurements via investigations and changes in maps. For instance, Document 57 reveals that corrupt clerks sold an additional 500.000 acres to Baron de Rothschild. On the other hand, the number of Jews was hard to be learned. For example, Beirut governor says in Document 62 that while only 600 Jews are registered, the real number is 4.000 in Tiberia. In addition, in Document 67, the Syrian governorate states that there are more than 40.000 Jews in Palestine despite that the official number is less than 20.000. Also, Document 77 says that more than 120.000 Jews immigrated to Palestine as of April 1915. These results came into being because Jewish organizations used illegal methods as Ottomans did not allow Jews to resettle in Palestine. Documents also imply that Jewish NGOs funded by rich Jews played a great role in illegal immigration and settlement. In other words, no actions were organic, natural, and ordinary but a result of a well-designed plan.

Fourth, while the Ottoman government was firm about not allowing Jews to resettle in Palestine, public servants did not apply laws about the prohibition and helped Jewish NGOs and people to immigrate and live safely in Palestine. Regarding the Ottoman administration, it was well aware that Jews planned to found a state in Palestine. It could not accept Jewish demands as Quds was a holy city for Ottomans, and Muslim Arabs were living there. An approval of Jewish demands would certainly stir the Arab street (Kurşun, 2022). What is more, Ottomans believed that a territory conquered by blood can not be sold with money. Besides, as can be seen in documents, Sultan Abdulhamit II seemed to buy lands in Palestine with his own money to impede illegal sales. On the other hand, documents show that large amounts of money were given to corrupt civil servants in return for purchasing lands, obtaining residence permits, and even citizenship. There were officials available in most of the fraudulent transactions (Uçar, 2002). Therefore, besides the Jewish

decisiveness about settlements, the corruption of civil servants facilitated the realization of Jews' settlement plans. The situation would probably be different during the analyzed period, had servants served their country instead of being on the payroll of Jewish organizations.

Overall, fifth, it can be contended from documents that when Ottomans lost Palestine to the British at the end of the First World War, Jews were already controlling Palestine. Jewish people gradually immigrated to Palestine in the last quarter of the 19th century and became a large community, though the number of Arabs was still higher. They controlled the industry and commerce sectors in the region in a very short period of time. For example, Document 53 dated September 27, 1891 states that half of the coast between Gaza and Haifa is under the control of Jews. Moreover, it discloses that 85% of stores in Quds are owned by Jews. In addition, almost the whole Jewish wealth was behind immigrants and it was abundantly spent for settlements. Jews were also lucky because the Ottoman Empire was sick and tackling so many other issues. In addition, Western powers supported an Israeli state in Palestine. Yet, it was not because they loved Jews but mostly to exploit their wealth or help them leave Europe. Finally, the systematic immigration sponsored by Jewish NGOs like the WZO and rich men was successful despite its illegal nature.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed 37 Ottoman documents regarding Jewish settlements in Palestine in the last 70 years of the Empire. Documents show that Ottomans did not allow Jews to settle in Palestine but the latter could reside there despite prohibitions. One reason is the sponsorship of migration by the strong and wealthy Jewish businessmen and organizations. Second, these groups did not hesitate to use illegal ways for the settlement of migrant Jews. In this way, the influx of migrants was enabled and they were resettled on lands, secretly bought with high prices. The assistance of corrupt public servants for purchasing transactions is particularly conspicuous. Ottoman officials legalized unlawful sales in return for large amounts of bribes. Thus, limited migration and the purchasing of lands became illegally unlimited. The collaboration of Jewish organizations and public servants eventually made Palestine a de facto Jewish homeland long before the British made it a mandate. Documents also show that the Ottoman posture was anti-immigrant as it did not want to lose territories to Jewish immigrants. Paying all Ottoman debts could fiscally relieve the Empire but Sultan Abdulhamit II refused the offer. In terms of literature, this study reflects the Ottoman view about Jewish settlements in Palestine, which might be helpful to understand the subject by looking with Ottomans' eyes.

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