



JEWISH PRESENCE IN OTTOMAN SALONIKA THROUGHOUT CENTURIES

Gülen GÖKTÜRK*

ABSTRACT

With the arrival of the Sephardim following the issue of Alhambra Decree that ordered the expulsion of the Jews of Spain in 1492, Salonika became a Jewish center. Beginning from the late fifteenth century, Muslims happened to be the second largest group coming after the Jewish population. Before the conquest of the city by the Ottoman Sultan Murad II in 1430, Salonika already had local Greek-speaking Jews called *Romaniois*, many of whom were forced to resettle in Istanbul after its conquest in 1453 to revive the economy of the new capital. Accordingly, the Iberian refugees outnumbered the local Jews. Interestingly enough, the new Jewish and Muslim inhabitants of the city also exceeded in number the indigeneous Greek Orthodox population and Salonika remained as a Jewish city until it was annexed to the Kingdom of Greece in 1913. Following the Turco-Greek Population Exchange (1923), migration flows to Palestine and the Holocaust, the city became a pure Greek city which was cleared from its Muslims and Jews. Despite its history as a Jewish center within an Islamic Empire, Salonika was never accepted as one of the major centers of Judaism in Turkish and Greek nationalist historiographies. For this very reason the article at hand aims at showing the Jewish life with its economic, social and cultural dimensions in Salonika throughout its presence as an Ottoman city.

Keywords: Salonika, Ottoman Jewry, Sephardim, Romaniois

OSMANLILAR DÖNEMİNDE SELANİK'TE ASIRLAR BOYUNCA SÜREGİDEN YAHUDİ MEVCUDİYETİ

ÖZ

1492'de ilan edilen Elhambra Kararnamesi Yahudilerin İspanya'dan sürülmesini emrediyordu. Bunu takip eden dönemde İberya yarımadasının Yahudi mültecileri başta Selanik olmak üzere çeşitli Osmanlı kentlerine yerleşmeye başladılar. Onbeşinci yüzyılın sonlarından itibaren, şehirdeki Müslümanlar sayıca Yahudilerden sonra geliyorlardı. Aslında Selanik Osmanlı Sultanı 2. Murat tarafından fethedilmeden önce de şehirde Yunanca konuşan ve *Romaniois* adı verilen yerli bir Yahudi cemaat bulunuyordu ancak onların büyük bir kısmı İstanbul'un 1453 yılındaki fethinden sonra yeni başkenti ekonomik olarak canlandırmak üzere İstanbul'a yerleştirilmişlerdi. Buna bağlı olarak Sefarad Yahudileri yerli Yahudileri de sayıca geçmişlerdi. İlginçtir ki, şehrin yeni Yahudi ve Müslüman cemaatleri, Rum Ortodokslardan daha kalabalık hale gelmişlerdi. Selanik bir Yahudi şehriydi ve bu durum şehrin 1913'te Yunanistan Krallığı'nın bir parçası haline gelmesine kadar sürdü. Türk-Yunan Mübadelesi (1923), Filistin'e göçler ve Holokost'tu takiben Selanik tüm Yahudi ve Müslüman nüfusundan arındırılmış, homojen bir Yunan şehri haline gelmişti. Ancak her ne kadar geçmişte bir İslam imparatorluğunun Yahudi kenti olarak varlığını sürdürmüş olsa da, hem Yunan hem de Türk tarih yazımı şehrin Yahudi geçmişini görmezden gelmeyi tercih etti. Buna bağlı olarak, bu makalede şehrin Yahudi geçmişinin ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel boyutları ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Selanik, Osmanlı Yahudileri, Sefaradlar, Romaniois

* Dr., Lecturer at Eskişehir Osmangazi University. E-mail: gulen.gokturk@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

Salonika was conquered by the Ottomans in 1430. Before the conquest, the city had already survived seventeen centuries of existence as a Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine metropolis. “According to an Ottoman legend, Sultan Murad II was asleep in his palace one night when God came to him in a dream and gave him a beautiful sweet smelling rose to sniff. When Murad asked whether he could keep it, God told him that the rose is Salonika”(Mazower, 2005, p.28).

The conquest resulted in Islamization of urban life in the city. A few Christians converted to Islam; and new settlers were brought from Anatolia in relation to Ottoman resettlement policy. Against this endeavor, however, Salonika never became a major center of Islamic learning because Muslims were never the majority. By 1520, as a result of the wave of Iberian refugees, more than half of Salonika’s inhabitants were the Jews. Muslims followed them as the second largest community. The Greek Orthodox was few in number compared to these two communities and this could only change after the city was annexed to the Kingdom of Greece with the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913.

“Roughly two decades before the unhappy ending of the Jewish presence in Salonika, on August 18, 1917, a devastating fire broke out in a neighborhood named by the Jews as Agua Nueva (New Water). It was a mixed area where the Jews, Greeks and the Balkan refugees were living together but the fire affected mostly the Jews many of whom became homeless and lost their properties. This sad happening was a turning point for the Jews in Salonika. Especially the rich ones kept low profile as they did during the Ottoman rule. This great fire had various repercussions among scholars. Some claimed that Greeks wanted to push the Jews out of the city and Hellenize and in fact modernize Salonika. The others, however, discussed this topic within a broader context of the place of European Jewry in nation-building process (Rozen, 2017, pp.78-79).

For centuries, there were visible frictions between Greeks and Jews. After city was captured by the Kingdom of Greece in 1913, hostilities between these two communities got even more intense. Despite the popular Greek anti-Semitism, Greek authorities including the Prime Minister Venizelos tried to gain sympathy of the Jews. A pro-Jewish policy might have been beneficial for the Greeks since there were competition over Macedonia between newly established Balkan states at the time. However, this pro-Jewish stand disappeared after the arrival of 100,000 Greek refugees from Asia Minor during and after the Turco-Greek War (1919-1922). The Jews were oppressed whether directly or indirectly by the Greek government which was now in compliance with popular Greek sentiments against the Jewry (Molho, 1993). As a result, by the late 1930s, a flurry of migrations to Palestine occurred (Flemming, 2008).

Following the flow of Greek refugees from Asia Minor and the Jewish migration to Palestine as a result of popular anti-Semitic sentiments and state policies, the Jews became a minority group. However, even until the German occupation of Greece in April 1941, there were still around 50 000 Jews in Salonika according to Holocaust Encyclopedia. Muslims, including the *Dönmes*¹ (converts) were forced to leave the city *en masse* with the Turco-

¹A community of crypto-Jews who converted to Islam following their leader Sabbatai Zevi who claimed to be the Messiah in the 17th century when Sultan Mehmed IV was on throne. Sabbatai’s claims created turmoil within the Ottoman Jews and as a result of the complaints coming from the Jewish community, Sabbatai was arrested.

Greek Population Exchange in 1923. The Jews, on the other hand, were finally perished at the hands of Nazis who invaded Greece in the Second World War. Following the war, the Jewish community of Salonika was almost completely destroyed. And Salonika was now a homogeneous Greek city.

The Jews of Salonika have been invisible in the Turkish and Greek nationalist historiographies for a long time. Both of them neglected the numerical and economical predominance of the Jews over other religious communities in the city especially beginning from the fifteenth century. Edhem Eldem (2014) points out this nationalist position according to which both Turks and Greeks omitted the Jewish past. For the historiographies of these two competing nationalisms, Salonika was not Jewish and should not be remembered and recorded as such (p. 435). In the end “neither the Ottoman past nor the Greek future left room for the Jews.” (Fleming, 2014, p.451)

As a response to these inconsistent stances that turn blind eyes to historical Jewish presence in Salonika and inescapably compete with one another, this article will portray the Jewish life in Salonika after the arrival of massive number of *Sephardim* and some Western European Jews to the city. The content of the text will cover how the Jewish population exceeded those of Muslims and Christians, how they organized their community life, what kind of economic activities they were occupied with, how they created a small Iberia, and lastly how they transformed this Mediterranean port city into a Jewish metropolis.



Figure 1. The New Mosque in Salonika. It was built in 1902 for the city's *Dönme* community (Photograph: Gülen Göktürk)

In order to escape his punishment, he converted to Islam. See Galante, A. (2000). *Sabetay Sevi ve Sabetaycılarının gelenekleri*. İstanbul: Zvi-Geyik Yayınları.

2. The Ottoman Empire and Its Jews

According to Ottoman sources, there were prosperous Jewish communities in the Ottoman Balkan cities such as Edirne and Salonika prior to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. After the conquest, however, Ottomans indicated an interest in various Jewish communities by resettling them in the ruined new capital by force in order to vitalize the economy. The Jewish population of Salonika was one of these communities who were driven from their homelands to Istanbul (İnalçık, 2002, p.4). According to Hacker, the Jews were heavily unsatisfied at the hands of early Ottoman administration because of its policies of decolonization and population transfers. As for the Jews of Salonika, they disappeared in the first half of the fifteenth century because of the resettlement policy (Hacker, 1982, p. 123). For the first time over a millennium, the Jews were completely absent in Salonika (Mazower, 2005, p.47).

The Jews had been living in Salonika long before there were any Christians in the city. During Byzantine epoch there were probably several hundred Greek speaking Jewish (i.e. *Romaniots*) families. At the time, the Jews managed to trade successfully across Mediterranean, despite the fact that they were subject to severe persecution under Byzantine rule. Shortly before the Turkish conquest, they were joined by refugees fleeing from France and Germany (Mazower, 2005, p.46). Ultimately, when the Ottomans captured the city, they treated the Jews kindly in comparison with the Byzantine emperors. Beginning from the fifteenth century, Ottomans actively encouraged Jewish immigration. For example, a letter was sent by Rabbi Yitzhak Sarfati of Edirne to the Jewish communities in Europe to invite them to the safe and prosperous lands of Turks (Güteryüz, 2009).

Position of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire was shaped by traditional and historical practices of Islamic civilizations and by the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad since they were regarded as one of the “peoples of books” (ahl al-kitab). Islamic law considered non-Muslims, *dhimmi*s, as members of a religious community with protected status as long as they accept their secondary status in an Islamic empire. According to the Kur’anic expression IX, 24, Muslims are expected to “fight those who do not believe ... until they pay the *djizya* ...”. This implies that as long as they had accepted to pay a distinguishing amount of tax, there was no reason to fight them (Cahen, p.227).

When Constantinople was conquered by the Ottomans, Rabbi Moses Capsali, who was the head of the Jewish community under the Byzantine rule, became the political and spiritual head of the community but his capacity of jurisdiction at the time is unknown (Epstein, 1982, p.103) Actually, the Jewish community was not institutional and was very much hierarchical; the congregational organizations opposed resentfully to any supreme authority; and the Ottomans felt little institutional need for a Jewish community head (Braude, 1982, p.80). Despite this phenomenon, since each religious community in the Ottoman Empire was represented to the sultan by its religious head-patriarchs, the Jews were ultimately organized as a community under *Hakham-bashi*. As a supreme religious authority, he exercised jurisdiction over his community in the areas of marriage, divorce, engagement and inheritance; in return he was expected to bring his community’s share of taxes and to keep order (Olson, 2009, p.75). Before the mid-fifteenth century there was no usage of the term *hakham* among the Ottoman Jewry. They used the Hebrew title *rav*. After the mass influx of the Sephardim from Spain, Sephardic term *hakham* entered Ottoman vocabulary. And despite the fact that there were no widely-accepted traditions of central authority and hierarchical

organization on the Jewish part, Ottoman authorities tried to impose hierarchical structures to the Jewish community especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Levy, 1992, p.54).

Traditional Islam considered Christianity and Judaism as earlier and imperfect versions of “true religion”. Even if believers of these two religions were protected under Islamic rule, they had to pay higher taxes, often poll tax called *djizya*, and to demonstrate their acceptance of superiority of Islam and Muslims. Some of the signs of this understanding were distinguishable cloths, prohibitions to ride horses and camels, restrictions to build new worship houses, not being able to marry Muslim women and so on. For example, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Jews were required to wear purple and dark blue. There were times when prohibitions against wearing expensive jewelry and gorgeous clothes were also implemented. The restrictions also included the shape and length of their turbans and caftans (Ben-Naeh, 2009, p.112). From time to time, however, Ottoman authorities remained blind to violations of these rules or openly allowed them probably because of some practical reasons (Levy, 1992, p.16). For example, doctors of Jewish origin who served for the sultans were permitted to ride horses and wear kalpak (Ben-Naeh, 2009, p.118). In general, during times of crisis the Ottoman Administration was much harsher on non-Muslims, probably because they wanted to provide themselves some sort of legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims. For Ben-Naeh (2009), the Ottomans, to receive the support of the Muslim public and the religious authorities, and to mediate their inconvenience in crisis times, behaved more severely and less tolerantly to non-Muslims. The religious authorities also put the administrative authorities under pressure to restrict the behaviors of non-Muslims. For example, a group of fanatic Sunni preachers called Kadızadelis (1630-1680), who were against any non-Muslim groups and Sufi orders, wanted the Sultans to suppress *dhimmi* (Barkey, 2008, p.113).

3. The Jews of Salonika

We cannot leave out the *Romanio*t in an article about Ottoman Jewry. *Romanio*t, as a term, is perhaps not very well known and the most difficult to explain. The word is a Jewish version of the epithet Roman that was used by the Greek Orthodox (*Romaioi*) from late antiquity to the nineteenth century. In the end, both the Jews and Christians were subjects or heirs of the Roman Empire and they were both Romans, although the Jews were considered as second class citizens. We are talking about the Eastern Roman Empire after all, even if the modern scholars name it Byzantine to prevent confusion. Until the sixteenth century, majority of the Jews in the Near East were *Romanio*t, and alongside them were the Jews who had a separate political identity subject to the Italian city-states and the emerging Ottoman Empire. When the *Sephardim* came to the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century following their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, they began to call the native *Romanio*t “Gregos” which meant Greek Jew since their mother tongue was Greek different from the Iberian Jews who spoke Judeo-Spanish. (Bowman, 2008, p.207)

In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled the Jews of Spain with the below stated Alhambra Decree:

“... the greatest damage caused to Christians by their participation, connection, and conversation with the Jews has been discovered. Since it is clearly demonstrated that they always try by all means at their disposal, to destroy and draw away the Christian believers from our Holy Catholic Faith... we have decided to remove the main cause of this through the expulsion of the Jews from our kingdoms...”

Following the issue of the decree, most of the refugees found themselves a shelter in the neighboring Portugal, in the small kingdom of Navarre and in the French region of Provence. Italy and the Low countries were more reachable than the Ottoman Empire; thus, only a small number of Jews left Spain for Ottoman lands. Consequently, Portugal, Navarre, France, and several Italian states implemented oppressive measures against the Jews and even expelled them. The expatriates gradually found themselves in the Ottoman cities. The most significant waves of immigration occurred between 1492 and 1512 (Levy, 1992, p.4).

Concerning Salonika, before the Sephardim arrived *en masse*, it had Jewish population mostly consisting of the *Romaniots*. There were also Jewish refugees who were expelled from Italy by Charles II in 1290, from Hungary in 1375 and from Spain in 1391 following the anti-Semitic speeches of Vicente Ferrar (Shaw, 1991, p.9). However, Ottoman population count of 1478 indicates that Salonika had no Jewish population at that date (Levy, 1992, p.6). It was because Sultan Mehmed II followed a policy of repopulating his new capital after the conquest of Constantinople. The Jews of Salonika were sent to Istanbul in order to revive the economy of capital city.

It could be claimed that among the other cities of the Ottoman Empire, Salonika benefited most with the influx of the Sephardim. By 1520, more than half of its inhabitants were Jewish (Mazower, 2005, p.49). And it differed in two aspects from other Balkan towns and cities: firstly, the Jews of the city were not an indigenous population, and secondly they not only outnumbered Muslims but also the indigenous Greek-Orthodox people (Lowry, 1994, p.203). Interestingly enough, a real break with Byzantium took place in the beginning of sixteenth century in Salonika with the small proportion of Greek-Orthodox population.

Greco-Jewish cohabitation was not peaceful, though; it was, indeed, full of tensions. Many complaints were directed against Jews at the imperial palace. Bitter commercial rivalries, the ritual murder accusations (i.e. blood libel) and assaults of Jewish properties took place especially in the sixteenth century (Mazower, 2005, p.49). For Greeks, hostility on religious ground was intensified when the Jews established themselves in economic and social arenas. Greeks considered themselves as being replaced by the Jews. On the other side of the coin, the Jews gradually preferred to settle near Muslim neighborhoods where they felt more secure. Nevertheless, they were exposed to verbal abuse of the Muslims as well. Despite these disadvantages, condition of the Jews was comparatively well. Ottoman authorities, in general, protected the Jews in order to maintain law and order (Levy, 1992, pp.40-41).

The Ottoman Jewish community remained not as a single, unified organization headed by a single leader as were those of the Armenians and Greeks, but as many self-governing congregations (Shaw, 1991, p.48). It was the case in Salonika as well. Towards the end of fifteenth century, with the new arrivals from Western Europe and especially from the Iberian Peninsula, the Jews established themselves separate congregations called *kehalim* in accordance with their country of origin. Initially, their objectives were to continue their lives according to customs and traditions of the lands they were forced to leave and to get rid of the trauma of dislocation. For the Jews, there was no single umbrella framework that served as a net over them. Rather, they created separate units in every city and even subunits in each city (Rozen, 1994, pp.216-217). In 1560s, R. Yosef Ibn Lev described the organization of Salonika as such: "In Salonika each and every man speaks in the tongue of his people. When the refugees arrived after the expulsion, they designated *kehalim*, each according to its tongue. Every *kahal* supports its own poor, and each and every *kahal* is singly recorded into the kings' register" (R. Yosef Ibn Lev quoted in Rozen, 1994, p.222). At the end of the sixteenth

century, the Jews of Salonika were still prosperous enough to maintain separate *kehalim* not only as places of worship but as organizations that could provide social and communal services. In time, when the differences between immigrant groups got blurred, an insistence to remain separate became pointless. In fact, the Sephardim in the sixteenth century were the dominant group among the Jews with their population because of the continuous flow of immigration from the Iberian Peninsula and with their sense of cultural superiority. The *Romaniot* Jews also somehow preserved their language most probably through their interaction with Greco-Christian inhabitants. However, other languages of the Jews became extinct in the course of time in Salonika. Concerning the *kehalim*, the leaders of these congregations tried to preserve their interests. Various laws enacted to prevent changing one's *kahal* but they had little effect (Rozen, 1994, pp.219-223).

The Jews did not really suffer at the hands of Sultans. Their situation was more or less the same with the other non-Muslim subjects. Following their arrival, the new comers tried to behave cautiously. Congregants were reminded by their rabbis to keep their voices down when they prayed not to provoke any aggressiveness against them coming from Greeks and Turks. This cautiousness did not have to continue for a long time. In less than two decades, more than twenty five synagogues were built in Salonika. After the fire of 1545, a delegation from Salonika visited Istanbul and obtained permission for many to be rebuilt. It may be argued that, the Sephardim created a small Iberia in Salonika. They worshipped in synagogues labeled with the names of their old homelands: Ispanya, Çeçilyan (Sicilian), Magrebi, Lizbon, Talyan (Italian), Otranto, Aragon, Katalan, Portukal and many others. Their family names, foods, games, curses, blessings and clothes linked them to their past. For the Spanish scholars who visited the city in the end of nineteenth century, a miniature Iberia was flourishing under Abdul Hamid (Mazower, 2005, pp. 51-55).

4. Economic Situation of the Jews in Salonika

The arrival of large numbers of Jews from the West resulted in an expanded pool of human resources, which was something appreciated by the Ottoman authorities since they were in need to develop their provinces. The European Jews, more than their *Romaniot* coreligionists, possessed knowledge, experience and skills which were what the Ottomans required. The Iberian Jews had extensive experience in banking, commerce, tax-farming, management of ports and custom houses, and the purveyance of foodstuffs, clothing and arms for the army (Levy, 1992, p.26). And the Ottomans benefited from their skills.

Early in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman administration delegated the Jews of Salonika the responsibility of manufacturing uniforms for the janissary infantry corps. By the mid-century, the industry was not only supplying military uniform, but also clothing the city's population and sending exports to Buda and beyond (Mazower, 2005, p. 52). The Jews of Salonika, within a very short period of time transformed the city into the most important commercial center in the eastern Mediterranean. The city was now a center of production. By the mid-sixteenth century, broadcloth from Salonika dominated the Ottoman government's exports and keenly competed with European manufactured textiles within the empire and also in the West. This success contributed to other segments of the city's economy and converted it to an economic, cultural and political Mecca. Therefore, it could be claimed that Salonika's metamorphosis into a Jewish city during the sixteenth century depended upon Jewish creativity and innovation production and marketing of textiles (Goffman, 2002, p.18). Salonika became a sort of vast cloth factory, with most of the families participating as units, working long hours at home; men, women and children alike, on their terraces, in the streets,

producing the finest and softest quality of stuffs. The constant noise of the weaving machine, the dye liquids joining in rivers and running through the streets was a typical scene from Salonika. For the sake of their communal and personal needs, people did not complain about the unhygienic conditions (Shaw, 1991, p. 93).

The primary role of the Jews in Salonika was to run the economy and to free Muslims for other occupations. After a century of Ottoman rule, more than half of the Muslims were now imams, muezzins, tax collectors, janissaries and other servants of the state. They administered the city and the Jews operated its economy. Salonika benefited from this division of labor at most and the city flourished. The Jews of Salonika also played a crucial role in the regional economy of the Ottoman Balkans. The local Jewish bankers collected taxes from drovers, vineyards, dairy farmers and slave dealers. They bankrolled major Muslim office-holders such as the *defterdar* and local troops and janissary commanders, and farmed the customs concession for Salonika itself. Furthermore, the Jews were good as iron forgers, smiths, wheelwrights, coach builders, sail makers and rope makers. Some of them were expert sailors and fishermen. There were also Jewish painters, shoemakers, porters (*hamal*), small shop owners, lime burners, masons and so on. One Jewish family in Salonika, the Venezia, for instance, had the right to collect the tax on weights; they held it since the town belonged to Venice between the years 1423-1430, and they continued to hold it until modern times (Mazower, 2005, pp.54-92).

There was another occupation for the non-Muslims including the Jews in Salonika especially beginning from the seventeenth century with the formal European presence in Salonika which was initiated by the kingdom of France in 1682. During the eighteenth century other European states followed them and established their own consulates in the city. For example, the English appointed their first consul to Salonika in 1715 (Ginio, 2014, p.299). The foundation of European representative institutions in major Ottoman port cities created new economic, social, and administrative opportunities for local non-Muslims. Local elite The Jews and Christians obtained protection from European consuls and this certainly improved their capacities to acquire various privileges and provided them dynamism to cope with external pressures. Salonika was no exception, and in the second half of the eighteenth century some prominent members of its Jewish community were employed by the foreign consulates there. At the same time, there were newcomers to the city. As a result of the introduction of an official European presence in Salonika, Western Jews, mostly from Livorno, started to settle in the city under European protection. Many of them started networks of commerce connecting Ottoman ports with harbors in Italy. The presence of the Western Jews in Ottoman ports constituted another important encounter between local Jews and foreigners arriving from Western Europe. This contact shaped new Jewish social elite known to contemporaries as “Francos” (Westerners) or “Portuguese” (Ginio, 2014, p.290). Their presence challenged traditional Ottoman taxonomies (Fleming, 2014, p.452) .

From the Ottomans’ point of view, the European presence in the Ottoman territories was a threat since they might have tempted the local non-Muslims to join one of the European communities. This, in fact, happened. The local Jews attempted to acquire similar status and they did. As previously mentioned, European existence in Ottoman domains also raised another danger to the existing order because it opened the way of the settlement of foreign Jews who could preserve their privileges as foreigners living and trading under the protection of European states. Not surprisingly, the newly arrived Francos did not give up their administrative affiliation with European states. On the contrary, the capitulation agreements allowed them to settle permanently in Ottoman port cities while still enjoying foreign

protection. In terms of culture, the Francos' European manners and continuing relationship with the European consulates became one of their major characteristics both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the locals (Ginio, 2014, pp. 295-297).

5. Women and Cultural Life

For the economic situation of the Jewish women in Salonika, they were under the patronage of a father, husband or brother just like their Muslim sisters. They were required to cover their bodies with layers of clothing and avoid male company by being away from the public spaces. There were also other restrictions binding men and women equally. Jewish regulations demanded the separation between men and women within Jewish society. Similar to Muslim society, encounters between men and women always had sexual implications. For this reason, the Jewish gender law discriminated against women. Adding to that, they had secondary status as part of a non-Muslim community within an Islamic state (Lamdan, 2005, p.251). Therefore, their oppression was twofold, originating from their communal gender roles as well as their status as secondary subjects in the Ottoman Empire.

It was ideally expected from women not to engage in economic activities that required work outside home and contact with strangers. But in spite of all such restrictions and prohibitions, the Jewish women in the Ottoman Empire gained the greatest extent of their independence in the economic sphere. Normally, women involved principally in finances and real estate transactions. And generally the ones who engaged in such financial activities were widows or divorcees, that is to say, older women who already received the sum of their marriage contract — the *ketubah* — as well as any other funds to which they were allowed. Emancipated from the guardianship of husbands and other family members, they could constitute an autonomous legal personality and do with their money as they pleased, including choosing a husband on their own financial terms (Lamdan, 2005, p.256). And Salonika's Jewish women were not an exception to this relative economic liberty.

As the Jewish economic life developed in Salonika, the Jewish cultural and intellectual life also flourished. Every refugee coming from Iberian Peninsula brought bags of books and manuscripts with themselves. Moreover, Salonika, often called as "Little Jerusalem" because of its Jewish majority, became one of the major centers for the Jewish mystic thought of the Kabbalists during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as did Safed in Galilee. Immigration from Spain not only brought the positive sciences but also the mysticism (Mazower, 2005, p.100).

In 1530, long before Ottoman/Arabic press entered Istanbul, Israel Sonsino's grandson Gershon ben Moshe Sansino with his son Eliezer established a press in Salonika. In seventeen years, the Sansino presses in Salonika published some forth books in Hebrew, including several works of Maimonides. Moreover, poetry was also very important for the Jews of Salonika where an entire poetic institute was founded by Moses ben Gedaliah Ibn Yahya at the outskirts of the city (Mazower, 2005, pp.105-107).

The language of the *Sefardim* of Salonika was Judeo-Spanish, an ancient form of Spanish dating back to medieval Spain. Through the centuries with words and phrases borrowed from their neighbors in the Ottoman Empire, the language got enriched. The Sephardic Jews of Salonika borrowed many expressions from Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, and, in the nineteenth century, French. The French influence was a result of the schools of

the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, whose medium of instruction was primarily in the French language (Esformes, 2001, p.15).

5. Conclusion

“Just a few short decades after the Balkan Wars, it already seemed ‘strange’ to think that, not long before, the most “visible” group in Salonika had been its Jews. The dramatic drivers of change that came in the thirty years following the conquest of Salonika by Greece are well known: the First World War; the Great Fire of 1917; the mass population movements of the early 1920s (capped off by the Treaty of Lausanne), which brought hundreds of thousands of Asia Minor Greeks to Greek Macedonia; and the Hellenizing policies of interwar Greek governments. As a result of these upheavals, by the end of the 1930s Salonika was no longer the “conspicuously” Jewish city it had been in 1911” (Fleming, 2014, p.449).

Following the Holocaust, the Jews were almost totally eliminated from Salonika where the Jewish life had flourished with its all aspects for centuries. Especially in the first two centuries after their expulsion from various parts of Western Europe, the Jews created a heaven for themselves in this Mediterranean city. Certainly, the benevolence of the Ottoman Sultans was also important in development of the Jewish life. As mentioned above, fortune of the Jews was tied to that of the Empire. When the empire entered stagnation and decline starting from the seventeenth century, the Jews went through the same phase. When the empire entered the phase of collapse, the Jews of the empire lost their privileged position. As the nationalist sentiments rose against the Ottomans in Salonika, anti-Semitism was directed against the Jews by Greco-Christians starting from the eighteenth century. After the wars, anti-Semitic tendencies, population movements and the genocide, a cosmopolitan city with its Muslims, Jews and Christians turned into “*a city of ghosts*”, as Mazower rightly names it and the city was filled with refugees coming from Asia Minor following the Turco-Greek War (1919-1922) and the Population Exchange (1923). And its Jewish past was, thus, deleted.

· An international Jewish organization which was established in 1860 in Paris by a French politician [Adolphe Crémieux](#). The organization promoted education and professional development among the Jews. For more information, see Rodrigue, A. (1990). *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey 1860-1925*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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