

## Mikveh Israel Agricultural School

### *Mikveh İsrail Ziraat Mektebi*

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**Abstract:** Alliance Israelite Universelle, established in the capital of France, Paris, in 1860, embarked on a rapid schooling activity in the Middle East. The schools opened in cities such as Tangier (Morocco), Thessaloniki and Istanbul were followed by the Mikveh Israel Agricultural School opened in Jaffa in 1870. Charles Netter, one of the 6 founders of the society, established this school. With the opening of the school, it was planned to raise agricultural experts in order to carry out more qualified agriculture and animal husbandry in Jaffa. Furthermore, this school, which is hoped to make a significant contribution to the establishment of a Jewish state in the time to come, was named Mikveh Israel, that is, Israel's Hope. Thanks to the economic and political support of the society and wealthy Jewish families such as Rothschild and Hirsch, the school achieved a remarkable success in agriculture over time. Theoretical and applied courses were scheduled for 7 years in order to teach European style agriculture to students. Being in the limelight thanks to its stable and disciplined education, non-Jewish families had started to enroll their children in the school. Failure to take deterrent measures against school administrators who did not hesitate to act against the Education Regulations declared in 1869 and 1885 by the Ottoman State paved the way for the harmful activities of the school increasingly. In the preparation phase of this study, the main sources in the Presidency Ottoman Archives, research/analysis works in Turkish and English were utilized. Thus, in addition to the activities of the aforementioned school in the field of education, the study gives information about its contributions to Zionist activities until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

**Keywords:** Alliance İsrailite Universelle, Mikveh Israel School, Neter School, Charles Netter, Jaffa

**Öz:** 1860'ta Fransa'nın başkenti Paris'te kurulan Alliance Israelite Universelle, Ortadoğu'da hızlı bir okullaşma faaliyetine başladı. Tanca (Fas), Selanik, İstanbul gibi şehirlerde açılan mektepleri 1870'te Yafa'da açılan Mikveh İsrail Ziraat Mektebi takip etti. Cemiyetin kurulmasında yer alan 6 kişiden biri olan Charles Netter bu mektebin kurucusu oldu. Mektebin açılması ile Yafa'da daha nitelikli tarım ve hayvancılığın yapılabilmesi için tarım uzmanları yetiştirilmesi planlanıyordu. Ayrıca, ileride kurulması amaçlanan bir Yahudi devleti için önemli katkı sunacağı ümit edilen bu mektebe Mikveh İsrail (İsrail'in Umudu) adı verildi. Cemiyetin, Rothschild ve Hirsch gibi zengin Yahudi ailelerinin ekonomik ve siyasi destekleri sayesinde mektep zaman içerisinde ziraat alanında önemli başarılar elde etti. Avrupa tarzı ziraatın öğrencilere öğretilmesi için 7 yıl boyunca teorik ve uygulamalı dersler verildi. İstikrarlı ve disiplinli eğitim sayesinde dikkatleri üzerine çeken mektebe artık Yahudi olmayan aileler de çocuklarını kaydettirmeye başladılar. Osmanlı Devleti'nin 1869 ve 1885'te ilan edilen Maarif Nizamnameleri'nin hilafına hareket etmektен kaçınmayan okul idarecilerine karşı caydırıcı önlemler alınmaması/alınmaması mektebin zararlı faaliyetlerin artmasına zemin hazırladı. Bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında Cumhurbaşkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi'ndeki ana kaynaklardan, Türkçe ve İngilizce araştırma/inceleme eserlerden yararlanıldı. Böylelikle adı geçen mektebin maarif alanındaki faaliyetlerinin yanı sıra 1948'de İsrail Devleti'nin kurulmasına kadar olan Siyonist faaliyetlere katkıları hakkında bilgi verildi.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Alliance İsrailite Universelle, Evrensel İsrailoğulları Birliği, Mikveh İsrail Ziraat Mektebi, Neter Ziraat Mektebi, Charles Netter, Yafa

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Makale Türü: Araştırma | Geliş Tarihi: 23.04.2023 | Kabul Tarihi: 18.06.2023

Doğançay S. 2023, "Mikveh Israel Agricultural School". *MJH* XIII, 123-139.

## Introduction

The Jews found themselves in different quests to return to Jerusalem, which they regarded as a holy place. To that end, the Alliance Israelite Universelle (hereinafter abbreviated as AIU) was established in Paris on May 17th, 1860 (see Appendix 1 for the Alliance's founding manifesto). Putting its signature under important successes in the field of education since its establishment, this society carried out activities for the settlement of Jews in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem, and thus the establishment of the Jewish state.

The founders of the society were aware of the reform movements prevailing in the Ottoman State. They took action to take advantage of these developments in the state within the framework of their own interests. The society was founded by Jews of French citizenship, whose country carried a considerable weight on Istanbul. Those who led the establishment of the Society were as follows: Charles Netter, Isidore Cahen, Elie-Aristide Astruk, Eugène Manuel, Narcisse Leven and Jules Carvallo. Charles Netter, one of these six members who were the founders of the society and who hosted the founding meeting, was also the founder of Mikveh Israel (Israel's Hope), which is the subject of this study (For a stamp dated 1870 commemorating the establishment of the school, see Appendix 2). The school, which was founded in 1870 and received the help and support of the society, made significant progress in the field of education.

### 1. Establishment of the School

Europe's initial attempts to establish a colony in Palestine commenced in Jerusalem, Safed, Tabariya and Hebron. As a fertile geography and a regional economy based on agriculture, the first initiatives were directed towards agriculture. First, Dr Lorie founded the Colonization Society for Palestine in Frankfurt in 1860. The main goal of Lorie's initiative was to initiate the first attempts for the restoration of the Jewish State. Philanthropists such as Moses Montefiore and Baron Edmond de Rothschild financially supported these activities. These developments led to an increase in Jewish immigration to the region. The fertile and tillable lands of Jaffa and its surroundings gave rise to the idea of establishing an agricultural school here. Colonization activities and the idea of opening a school for the education of the Jews in the city began to gain general acceptance. The Jews, who wanted to make good use of this process and current circumstances, in which the support of the wealthy Jews were obtained than ever before, sent representatives to Istanbul and demanded an edict from the Ottoman Sultan to open a school (Schölch 2006, 75).

A number of conditions had to be met as an obstacle to the opening of the school. Article 129<sup>1</sup> of the Education Regulation announced a year ago stipulated three conditions for schools like Mikveh Israel to be opened. According to this; teachers to be appointed to schools were required to obtain an official certificate of approval from the Ministry of Education. The content of the books to be taught in these schools and the syllabus were also conditional upon obtaining

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<sup>1</sup> a) Private schools are defined as schools that are planned by communities, Ottoman people, individuals or foreigners for a fee or free of charge. The expenses of these schools will be covered by themselves or through the foundations under their control.

b) In order for these schools to be established, teachers are required to have diplomas prepared by the Ministry of Education or the local education institution. Another issue is that the books must be approved by the Ministry of Education or the local education institution in order not to give lessons against tradition, tradition and politics in these schools.

c) The responsibility for issuing licenses is given to the provincial education institution, the provincial governor, and the Ministry of Education in Istanbul (Mutlu 2005, 26).

a license from the same ministry after the necessary examinations were made. However, these conditions did not go beyond the official procedure. Because there was a significant increase in state, minority and foreign schools during this period. In particular, the number of openings by foreigners had increased more than in the first half of the 19th century. This situation made it difficult to supervise and keep the schools under control both before and after they were opened, and it could sometimes make it impossible in distant states such as Palestine. In such cases, the entire workload was on the local administrators and civil servants. However, it was not always possible to prevent all these problems. (Yerasimos 1987, 497; Şimşek 2017, 3;).

Achieving a positive result in the negotiations held through the French Embassy, AIU officials accepted the lease of 2600 decares of land in Yazur Village of Jaffa and a 12-item specification, including an annual tax of approximately 9,000 Kurus. Among the most noteworthy articles of the specification was that the land on which the school would be established would be leased to the society for 25 years and could be sold to the society for 80,000 Kurus if requested. The Turkish authorities, who signed the specification allowing the society to open a school in Jaffa, were of the opinion that thanks to this, more qualified and contemporary agricultural activities would develop in Jaffa and gradually all over Palestine. Also, the students to be admitted to the school according to the relevant specifications would definitely be Ottoman subjects, and the foreign subjects residing in the Ottoman borders would accept the nationality of the Ottoman State with the approval of the parents of the student who wanted to enter the school. After it became official with the approval of the Sultan and the AIU authorities, the license allowing the construction of a school was sent to Charles Netter (See Appendix 3) (Galanti 1947, 110; Silberman 1974, 141).

A year after the German Society of Templars established a settlement in Jaffa in 1869, with Netter's initiatives and efforts, AIU established the Mikveh Israel School in 1870, considered the spearheading of the agricultural colony. The founder and administrator of the school was Netter. Its financier was Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934), a French citizen from the Rothschild Family. This person played a significant role in the establishment of the school, ensuring its continuity, preventing the objections and attacks against it in Palestine, and the development and extension of agriculture in all of Palestine, especially in Jaffa (Büssow 2011, 214). Another important wealthy donor was Baron de Hirsch. Hirsch, who is also known as the person who laid the first railway in the Ottoman State, made a very generous donation of 1 million francs to AIU in 1873. Half of this amount delivered to Istanbul was sent to Mikveh Israel. Considering that there were only 11 AIU schools in Istanbul at that time, the importance attached to the school by the society can be better understood (Aydın 2009, 14-15). Mim Kemal Öke states that the Jews are quite inexperienced because they did not deal with agriculture before, instead, they have specialized in trade and banking from the very beginning, therefore, he claims that if the Rothschilds and other wealthy Jewish families, who are among the rich Jewish families of Europe, did not provide financial aid, they would die of hunger (Öke 2018, 102). If the first years of the school and the Jewish colony settlements are analyzed, the accuracy of this suggestion will be understood.

Netter was constantly informing the commission since the opening of the school and offering suggestions on deficiencies and how to overcome them. Coordination both pleased the commissioners and made Netter's job easier. Some of the issues that made the Commission and Netter think the most were: the appointment of teachers and administrators to the school, the admission of students to the school, the years of education to be adopted in the school, the names and contents of the theoretical and applied courses, and land to be rented or purchased

for practical lessons, and what crops will be planted. (Silberman 1974, 139-141).

Fellahs, natives of Jaffa and long-time farmers, were one of the major issues that worried Netter. Fellahs (The fellahans were the people who were engaged in farming.) were an important rival for the Jews, as they were settled here, cultivated the land, and knew very well the endurance of the soil, the climate and the precipitation regime. Netter aimed to beat the Fellahs and Muslim opponents in the village and the surrounding area, thanks to the support of AIU as well as modern techniques and agricultural tools. It was seen that he succeeded in this over time (Bigart 1901, 60-61; Schölch 2006, 281). Thanks to their embracement of the use the latest agricultural techniques, and Aaron Aaronson of Haifa, a qualified agronomist and botanist with the agricultural techniques and tireless work in production, they succeeded in putting the Jews ahead of the Palestinian Arabs. In fact, these agricultural activities reached a very advanced level and played a significant role in the agricultural development of modern-day Israel. Aronson, who rose to the position of agricultural advisor to the Syrian Governor Cemal Pasha due to his visible success in the field of agriculture, also acted shoulder to shoulder with the Zionists and made secret efforts for the establishment of the State of Israel. This man, who finally managed to establish an espionage organization called Nili, conducted many activities against the Turkish administration and the Arabs in Palestine (İskit 2017, 24).

After the start of education, the school determined orphans and poor children as the target student group. These children, who had limited financial means, did not have to pay any money to the school. Their numbers were in the range of 20-40. This situation continued, albeit with little change, until 1880 (Silberman 1974, 141). As of this date, changes were made to the student admission conditions and numbers. The condition of being poor or orphan for admission to the school was abolished. Then, children from all religions started teaching at the school. Based on the statutory legislation, local officials opposed this development. However, this relevant legislation was not implemented or school officials were not acting in accordance with it. The political and economic situation and the distance of Jaffa from Istanbul played an important role in the noncompliance of the school to the rules as of the aforesaid date. Due to the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 and the subsequent Berlin Congress convened, the adverse effects of this war on the state's economy were the main reasons for the school to act against the legislation. As it is known, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (Duyun-u Umumiye) was established in 1881. This is put forwarded as one of the most important indicators of how difficult the Ottoman economy was. When it comes to the distance, it was a known fact that The British Empire and France were active in the east of the Mediterranean Sea, where Palestine is also located. In 1869, the French opened the Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. Shortly after this opening, the British increased their activities and even occupied Egypt in 1882. Cyprus was already under British occupation in 1878. In other words, it was very long and arduous for Istanbul to reach Palestine by road. Transportation by sea was almost subject to the permission of the British. This situation was considered an opportunity for AIU officials.

The number of these opportunities increased over time. Besides Mikveh Israel, other schools also intensified their activities in Palestine over time. This was followed by the establishment of new settlements. The Jews who came to Syria's Taberiye and Safed townships from Europe went to Jerusalem and Jaffa with the safe conduct they obtained from Ottoman State. Here they started to establish villages on demesne land. They built farms, agricultural test stations and, as necessary, new schools in the villages they founded (BOA, DH, MKT, 1362/5). The cities of Mikveh Israel, Rishon Le Zion, Petah Tikvah were also small settlements established for this

purpose. The export of crops harvested through modern agricultural activities enabled the development of these settlements (The development of these cities continued during the British mandate period, which commenced after the Ottoman State left the region. Today, Petah Tikvah is the 4th largest city in Israel. This city, which stands out with its advanced agriculture, is famous for the vegetables and fruit seeds it sells to the world).

## **2. Education Program of the School**

### **a. Training of Teachers**

AIU's educational activities were based on three fundamental categories. These consisted of teacher training, promoting educational reforms, and language education (Laskier 1983, 154). Most of the teaching staff of the school came from Istanbul, Thessaloniki, as well as countries such as Tunisia and Morocco. After completing their education here, they were trained in Paris or other cities in France, and all their expenses were covered by AIU. During this period of internship, European culture and languages, especially French language and culture, were taught. This was considered an opportunity and a good experience for students. In addition to receiving education in accordance with the conditions of the age, they were also learning European culture and language(s). They were also aware that there was a reason why the society entrusted them this privilege and incurring an economic burden. This awareness made them feel that they had to act on behalf of the society and in their interests in the geographies they were in, especially in the schools they were assigned to. As a matter of fact, when they returned to their places of duty from Europe, each of them was appointed as a principal or deputy principal. Mikveh Israel was one of these schools. In this context, besides modern education, they began to impose European culture, dominantly the French culture, on teachers and students working under them (Laskier 1983, 155).

### **b. Education system**

Mikveh Israel, which was affiliated to the Ministry of Education when it was first established, provided primary and secondary education. The total education period was 7 years. This situation could vary from region to region and even from city to city. But in general, the education was 7 years. There was dual training, day and night. It was also possible to organize programs for weekends. Teachers prepared the content of the weekend education, which was left to the initiative of the teachers (Grunwald 1975, 168; Laskier 1983, 155). In this process, the mission of the school was to give students the awareness that they are different from the common people and their parents, that is, they become more intellectual. Moreover, the mission of the school was to instill hope in them unlike traditional schools that are far from that and raise them as individuals who can adapt to the modern world (Silberman 1974, 142).

The school entered into service of the Ministry of Forestry, Industry and Agriculture in 1895. It was Gotiye, the principal of the school, who demanded this annexation. Since the Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture had not been established in the year 1870, the school was affiliated to the Ministry of Education. It was thought that if the annexation took place, the school would be inspected by the specialized inspectors of this ministry, both in the field of syllabus and other matters. This request of the principal of the school took place on 04.06.1313 with the approval of the Minister of the Ministry Selim Melhame and the Sultan (BOA, ŞD, 520/41; MF, MKT, 275/15; BOA, MF, MKT 294/40).

In the first three years of the school, students received half-day theoretical training. For the rest of the day, they were given hands-on field training. In addition, there was an hour or two study practices in the evening. In these classes, the students were repeating the information

about the lessons they had practiced on the farm during the daytime. In these hands-on classes, they were trained in the following: viticulture, vine-growing, wine storage in cellars, fruit growing (Worldwide, the orange variety known today as the Jaffa orange was also grown in these gardens. The development of this genre, its supply to the world market and its spread has been thanks to this school), orchard maintenance and repair, nurseries, fruit and vegetable seedlings cultivation in orchards and maintenance and repair, ploughing, land clearing, barn and dairy construction, animal breeding, their maintenance, carpet weaving, sewing/embroidery, workshops, various handicrafts. All the students were taking part in these works on a rotational basis (For the 1920s curriculum of the school, see Appendix 4). Besides agriculture and animal husbandry, another important issue that graduates who are the future practitioners of this profession had to know was the weather. The fundamental principles of meteorology were taught in the school. However, the knowledge of local Arabs and Jews on these issues was rather weak (Silberman 1974, 143; Laskier 1983, 156; Grunwald 1975, 168). For instance, eucalyptus trees grown in the only nursery in Palestine belonging to the school were purchased by the Turkish administrators in Palestine in 1882 and planted for the forestation of the cities (Silberman 1974, 142).

With the support of various Jewish associations and organizations, especially the AIU, three or four graduates were sent to Europe for internships at agricultural institutes or farms. Trained in this way, these students were able to find jobs without much difficulty. The fact that even the traditionalists who are the natives of Palestine and the Jews who are against the Jews from Europe want to enroll their children in this school after a while is one of the important proofs of the success of this school (Bigart 1901, 60-62).

The primary aim of the administrative staff and educators of the school was to train people who would lead and guide the agricultural production with more contemporary techniques. They aimed primarily at being an alternative to the traditional Jewish schools of Talmud/Torah, called Heder, and then completely replacing them. Moreover, they aimed to unite the Jews religiously and nationally, and to enable the youth to attract their surroundings to their side. The school also aimed to prevent both girls and boys from marrying at an early age. In the Palestinian region where the school was established, Jewish people were married at an early age, just like the Arabs. The average age of marriage was 14-15. Instead of sending their children to school, families preferred to marry them at early ages. Although this helped to increase the Jewish population, their education was more important than the population. When their efforts to persuade families failed, this time the focus was on children. Thanks to this method, the marriage age of both girls and boys increased, although it did not reach the target level. Moreover, there was a significant decrease in the rate of early marriage. (Laskier 1983, 155).

One of the most important matters for the society was that the students were multilingual. The language of education was French, but they especially wanted to learn which language(s) is spoken in their place so that they can use the languages they will learn fluently. If they knew the language, they could go to other cities or countries, benefit from this language in commercial life, and provide the services of AIU and Jews by joining the educational staff. Language was vitally important in the spread of culture. Moreover, the place of these languages was important for their appointment to the administrative staff of the cities or countries they were in (Silberman 1974, 142). Based on these reasons, care was taken to teach Hebrew and Arabic alongside French. The reason behind the emphasis on teaching Hebrew and Arabic apart from French was undoubtedly that they were widely spoken throughout Palestine, including Jaffa.

(Grunwald 1975, 168).

### **3. Students**

The contribution of Mikveh Israel, founded by the Alliance Society in Jaffa, to the establishment of the State of Israel and to the increase in modern agricultural technology and production is proven in the sources. On the other hand, it is worth noting that as students from Palestine were accepted to this school, students were also sent to Anatolian schools. The following farms can be given as the most obvious examples: Or Yehuda in Akhisar, Mesilla Hadasa in Istanbul Sultanbeyli, Fethiköy in Silivri, Tekfur in Balıkesir Bandırma, and Mamure in Eskişehir. These farms were established before Mikveh Israel, and Jews were both sheltered and trained in these farms (Erdemir 2015, 4).

A report dated 1893 on the level reached by the AIU provides noteworthy information. According to this report, not only education was given in the school, but also production was carried out. This production was done not only in agriculture but also in animal husbandry. As it is understood from the report, one hundred of the total students who were educated at the school at the aforementioned date had already acquired a profession. Twenty of them were gardeners, ten of them were groundskeepers, the rest were carpenters, tanners (leather tanners) and blacksmiths. The report also suggests that the school no longer only appeal to students from Palestine, but also students from Russia, Anatolia and even Romania for education. In order to prevent the students from falling into financial difficulties after their graduation, they were given approximately 1000 francs each. The students did not have any concerns about being unemployed. By the time they graduated, they were employed in a short time because they were already able to perform one or more professions and to easily apply modern techniques in the field. Graduates could be employed in schools or farms in charge of administration in the Middle East, as well as easily find employment in agricultural fields, farms, pastures, stud farms and dairy farms (The Exhibit of the Alliance Israelite Universelle 1893, 3-4).

### **4. Supports Provided by Foreign States to the School**

As for Jewish immigration to Palestine, the fact that Jews outside Palestine-especially Jews in Europe and Russia- were very willing to settle in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, and that they tried every way to do so, caused Ottoman statesmen to be worried. Religious Jews believed that in order to reach Heavenly Jerusalem, they had to live in earthly Jerusalem. Jewish immigration to Palestine due to this belief was increasing gradually. Before 1880, that is, before the Zionists started to agitate for Jewish immigration to Jerusalem, the Jewish population in Jerusalem was about 25,000 and the number of Arabs was 500,000. Much as the Jewish population was considerably less than the Arab population, social unrest had already begun to arise between the two communities. It was not difficult to foresee that the intensity and number of these conflicts would increase as the number of Jews increased. Moreover, although it was known that the Arabs were reactive against Jewish immigration, it was believed that not preventing this would cause a reaction against the Turkish administration. For these and similar reasons, the Turkish administration banned Jewish immigration to Palestine. Despite these prohibitions, the immigration of Jews who were determined to return to Zion continued to increase gradually (Öke 1993, 225).

In the second half of the 19th century, foreign or non-Muslim schools were used to mobilize the nationalist feelings of the minority elements in the Ottoman State, especially with the influence of external interventions. The teaching and administrative staff working here took an active part in Zionist activities. This paved the way for a break with the state. Izak

Fernandez, the representative of the society in Jaffa, was questioning why the request of the student studying at the Agricultural School to buy vineyards and orchards in Jaffa was rejected in his petition dated 1896, which he sent to the Governor of Jerusalem. He also wanted to know whether this was due to the prohibition of Jews to settle and own property in Palestine (BOA, BEO, 884/66278). It can be argued that the reason why the government did not allow this sale was to prevent the increase of the Jewish population and their ownership of property. This was already one of the issues that were emphasized sensitively during the reign of Abdulhamid II. To this can be added the discomfort felt towards the activities of the school. Because, although European-style agriculture was practiced in this school, works that were brought from France that contained issues against the Ottoman State were taught, European culture was imposed on the students here, and the Jews residing here were also uncomfortable with this school.

As a matter of fact, the following statements were stated in another document dated 1902:

*“In the vicinity of Palestine and Syria, there are many schools and places of worship and other facilities of the French, British, Russian, American and German. It is not known what purpose and objective they pursue. Moreover, even by an orthodox corporate propaganda, there is a malicious effort to take the schools under their own administration in Syria and Palestine in order to give legitimacy to its own real ambition.....”* (BOA, DH.MKT, 534/65).

As can be understood from the foregoing statements, Sultan Abdulhamid II did not want Jews to be residents of Palestine. Theodor Herzl visited him several times and asked for consent for the settlement of Jews in Palestine, and even offered to pay the Ottoman foreign debts. Although Herzl had not yet collected this funding, he did not hesitate to promise it. Despite all his insistence, he failed to persuade the Sultan. Other Zionists took the place of Herzl, who did not give up his struggle until his death in 1904. But the Sultan's decision did not change. However, the same could not be said for some local authorities or officials in Palestine. Taking advantage of Palestine's distance from the capital, these officials could allow Jews to buy land and even settle there (Engin 2012, 116). For this reason, it would be an erroneous inference to come to the conclusion that the State of Israel was established only through the policies pursued by the Jews. Because when the State of Israel was established in 1948, the amount of land purchased by Jews from Palestinian Arabs amounted to only 6.8% in total.

Despite all the restrictions and objections of Abdulhamid II and his government, the Jewish population in Palestine increased to 80 thousand immediately after the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908. The approximately three-fold increase in population can be considered as an indicator of the Jewish aspirations for Palestine and their determination to settle (Öke 1993, 227). Since then, this number had increased exponentially. Stating that he is a graduate of Edirne Alliance School and even a Freemason, Tevfik Rıza, who gave a speech at the Young Jews Association in Istanbul on March 11, 1909, did not hesitate to openly state that Jews have more right to settle in Palestine than Turks and Arabs, and therefore there could be nothing more natural than their settlement here (Öke 2018, 161-162).

The Zionists, let alone starting the Jewish immigration to Palestine, have increased both the number of emigration and the number of those who came during these migrations over the years by taking advantage of the current situation and political developments. This situation faced intense reaction from Arabs as well as Jews already settled in Palestine. Also, the issue was not just the increase in the Jewish population. The Jews were also engaged in activities to expand their influence in the towns where they settled. As they were foreign to the language, culture

and customs of both Arabs and local Jews, they did not feel the need to learn them and act in accordance with them. They did not abide by the rules of the new place they were in, and made an extraordinary effort to integrate the rules of the place they came from. For instance, according to the Ottoman land system, pastures were demesne (state owned) land and were open to the common use of the villagers. This actually stems from an Islamic understanding. Although the Zionists and the Jews they migrated learned this late, they insisted upon accepting it. They did not allow the Arabs to graze near their villages so as not to damage their cultivated lands. This situation caused disagreements and even fights between the two sides (Öke 1993, 225-226; Murphy 2011, 323; İskit 2017, 24).

İlknur Polat Haydaroglu comments on foreign schools operating within the borders of the Ottoman State:

*“States such as France, US, Italy and England began to open their own educational institutions, legally groundless and unrestrainedly. Thus, free from all kinds of obligations, registrations and responsibilities in a state where they were established, these institutions started their activities in line with specific purposes. Besides spreading their own language and culture, their aim was to gain political influence, to have a say over certain groups, and to create favorable conditions and environments in political and cultural fields”* (Haydaroglu 1990, 9-11).

The fact that Mikveh Israel continued its activities by going beyond the rights granted to it after its opening can be considered as one of the obvious examples of this.

The petition dated 1899 of a citizen residing in Haifa, who is from the family of Iştoğalı Mehmet Ali Pasha, an immigrant from Bosnia and Herzegovina, contains information that sheds light on this issue. In the petition, the greedy intentions of the Jews, particularly the Jews from Europe, the purchase of land by trick are mentioned and continues with the fact that this situation had intensified for ten or fifteen years, and that especially influential and rich families such as Roschild did their best to make this place a Jewish homeland:

*“Taking advantage of the poverty and weakness of the long-time resident people and loyal Muslim subjects in the provinces, newly arrived merchants buy their lands and real estates and sell them to the Jews. Local government officials, on the other hand, help and serve the Jewish people for the sake of their personal interests in the devaluation and the spread of real estate purchases. During these ten or fifteen years, mostly foreign Jews were sent from Europe under the name of Jewish immigrants and settled in Palestine. These Jews, on the other hand, were not Jews as we know them, but received education in European countries and equipped with European convenances. This is a community who find strength and power on a continent would be disturbing. In short, Roschild and other companies in Europe continue with seriousness and determination, making their best sacrifices for the sake of settlement of foreign Jews in large numbers in Palestine. Government officials see the Roschild Company as a political figure. They show respect and privilege to the Jews more than the local people. As a result, the helpless ancient Muslim people and loyal subjects were targeted. They are persecuted by Jews on the one hand and government officials on the other”* (BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ, 40/34).

It was of vital importance that the aforementioned school, which is one of the key influence-acquiring devices of the society, be able to carry out this task in Palestine, to have continuous support from Paris. The society was sending works that praised European language and culture

but denigrated Islam and Turkish culture and civilization to schools in Palestine by mail (BOA, DH, ŞFR, 339/62). As a result of these activities, which were one of the important goals of the school, the Turkish presence and administration were weakening from year to year, while the European influence was becoming even more dominant.

### **5. Objectives of the School**

The people who provided economic support to Charles Netter to establish the school were members of the Rothschild Family and the inspiration was the success of the French peasant in production. According to Netter's understanding, firstly in Jaffa, and then in all Palestine, self-sufficiency and modern agricultural understanding should be adopted, similar to the mercantilist understanding in trade as in France and Germany. To that end, there was a suitable land, fertile soil, and suitable climate in Jaffa. Moreover, the Jews would be able to raise their animals here and thus be able to produce their own animal products. This situation also meant that they sold the products or goods they produced and earned income on behalf of the school. Since Netter was aware that a school was one of the important elements in the realization of all this, he founded the Mikveh Israel School, which implies Israel's Hope (Laskier 1983, 158).

Like all AIU schools, this school in Jaffa was attached to the centre in Paris. The principals of the school were sent from Paris, and financial aid was sent from Paris in order to ensure the continuity of the school and its commitment to Paris. Knowing that it was in their interests to be under the auspices of a foreign state, school administrators and AIU officials acted as if they were under the auspices of France (1903) (Haydaroglu 1990, 176).

Two documents in Yıldız Perakende Evrakı (Yıldız Archive in Istanbul) provide brief but important information about Mikveh Israel and other schools established by AIU in Palestine. With the information given in the documents, it is understood that the purpose of AIU is not merely education. Accordingly, the society was buying land under a pseudonym, trying to increase the Jewish population in Palestine by summoning the Jewish population, and trying to transform this population in a European way through their schools. Since they could even agree to pay several times the value of the land to purchase, it was demanded from the Capital to prevent these activities (BOA, Y, PRK, AZJ, 50/86; Y, PRK, DH, 7/29). For this purpose, the latest agricultural techniques, quality and abundant production, characteristics of farm life, village life, animal care and breeding information were systematically given to the students enrolled in the school. The school, which was opened in 1870, had evolved into a different aspect every passing year and remarkable gains had been made for the founders (Güven 2013, 48).

On the other side, the Jewish Colonization Association (IJA), one of the associations established to support Jewish studies and ensure the establishment of a Jerusalem-based Jewish state, expanded its activities to Palestine. Being aware of the fact that Mikveh Israel had accomplished great things in terms of education and agricultural activities, the officials of the association allocated a considerable amount of funds to this school. Based upon this economic contribution, school administrators increased student admission to the school. From the 1880s to 1896, student enrollment in the school was limited to approximately 90 each year, while it was increased to 150 in 1897 and to an average of 250 from 1898 to 1901. The association, which did not want to limit its supports, gave some graduate students permission to work on the farms they established in Palestine. It also sent some graduated students to France for further education in agriculture and horticulture to be employed as farm specialists and managers in settlements in Argentina (When the Zionists announced that they wanted to establish an

independent state, representatives of the United States and France, especially England, offered to establish this Jewish state in Argentina. This country, which the Jews were not strangers to, was rejected after being the subject of debate among the political Zionists for a long time). Until The World War I, the school graduated about 500 students (Silberman, 1974, 144). According to this statistic, the demand for the school increased from year to year, but many students left the school or could not continue.

The school, which made great progress in a short time compared to the date it was founded, expanded its territory over the years and started to practice its education by going beyond the rules. In the document dated April 6, 1908 (4 Rabi al-Awwal 1326), it was stated that the Neter Jewish School (Mikveh Israel) was expanding its territory, that they accepted Muslim children, and that this situation should not be evaluated as abuse (BOA, BEO, 3293/246953). In the document dated 1910, this situation was pointed out, and it was requested that the school expand the land it operates with arbitrary practices and prevent the admission of students to the school (BOA, DH, MKT, 1244/84). In this period when the arbitrary practices of the school officials became commonplace, the Ottoman state had to struggle with internal instability as well as the events in Tripoli, Yemen, Iraq and the Balkans. During this process, the activities of the school expanded. The school became one of the important centres where activities against the state, especially intelligence activities, are carried out as well as educational and agricultural activities. Because school officials were responsible for making reports as to the geostrategic and geopolitical location, cultural, political and economic situation of the settlement where the school is located to the centre. The Jewish Intelligence Organization, Nili, founded by the Aronson brothers and led by Aaron Aronson, had an important role in the withdrawal of the Ottoman State from Jerusalem. The agency's work and agents went unnoticed by civil or military officials for a while. Aaron Aronson, who was the head of the Intelligence Agency while acting as a consultant to Cemal Pasha, was apparently engaged in agricultural production using modern agricultural techniques. One of the institutions Aronson collaborated with was of course Mikveh Israel. (For detailed information, see; Celil Bozkurt, *İmparatorluğu Yikan Örgüt NİLİ*, Otuken Neşriyat, İstanbul, 2021).

Besides being a school, Mikveh Israel had become a training centre for Jaffa farmhands and a station for contemporary agricultural research and sample-making. This made a significant contribution to the process of transforming Palestine into a Jewish homeland. David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of the State of Israel, commented on the 90th anniversary of the founding of the school:

*“For decades, this institution has instilled this Jewish spirit of work and Jewish heroism in thousands of students, who are descendants of workers and proponents of the Jewish state before, during and after the founding of the state.”* and even went one step further and stated: *“The establishment of the state was possible with this school. If this school had not been founded to serve the studies of Judaism, I would have doubted that the Jewish state could have been established”* (Silberman 1974, 145-147).

## **6. Reactions to the Activities of the School**

Much as the majority of the students of the school were Jews, the long-time resident Jews were also uncomfortable with this school and reported their displeasure to the capital (Istanbul). They claimed that this school alienated the Jews from their religion and harmed Jewish culture. In fact, in stark contrast to the traditional Jewish education, the school adopted a secular education. It also gave priority to European culture and languages, and did not pay the same

attention to the teaching of Jewish culture and Hebrew. This situation inherently caused the Jews settled in Jaffa to make propaganda against the school and to frequently send letters of complaint to Istanbul.

It would not make much sense to argue that the movement that the school would create against the Arabs and the Ottoman administration in Palestine was not noticed by the civil, administrative and military officials. The main problem was that the state was in a great economic and political turmoil at the time the school was founded. Another important reason was that the British and the French almost forced the state to follow a policy of tolerance towards minority elements, especially fragile and important countries such as Palestine. Because of these pressures, the administrators could not prevent and limit the opening of Mikveh and many other schools. Even though they were aware of their harmful activities, they could not close it. Much as alternative schools were established to these schools, it was not possible to compete with this school. The most obvious proof of this is that Muslim and Turkish families enrolled their children in this school. (Baraijia 2021, 361-362).

As stated above, based on Article 129 of the Education Regulation of 1869<sup>2</sup> foreign schools or schools under the wing of foreign states were prevented from taking action against the state, the curriculum and the books taught were kept under control, and when necessary, these schools were closed, but this was failed. (Baraijia 2021, 363). Thereupon, Sultan Abdulhamid II ordered that the relevant article of the regulation be amended in 1885. Accordingly; the relevant books to be followed in the courses were to be reported to the Ministry of Education before the commencement of the education, foreign or minority schools under the wing of foreigners would be periodically inspected, and the criminal records of those who established the school, administrators and teachers would be clean. However, this article, like many other minority and foreign schools, could not prevent the disruptions and harmful activities in the Mikveh Israeli School (Mutlu 2005, 31-32). In the letter sent to the Ministry of Education dated April 27, 1901 (08.01.1319), a number of documents and books written in Bulgarian were seized among the belongings of a Jewish boy from Edirne, a student of Mikveh Israel School. The student preferred to act in the way of denial, stating that he obtained them from his friends at school and that he did not know the content. In the concept of the document, it is stated that there were 115 students in the school at the mentioned date, only three of them were Muslims and the rest were Jews (BOA, DH, MKT, 2477/73). As a result of the investigation, it is understood that the school was opened without a license and has not undergone any inspection until this date, and important questions such as what the curriculum is, who its administrators and teachers are, and for what purpose it was opened remained unanswered (BOA, DH, MKT, 2510/45).

Thereupon, Abdulhamid II asked some state officials to prepare a report. One of them is the report prepared by Zühdü Pasha. Some of the prominent titles from the Pasha's statement are as

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<sup>2</sup> Private schools are schools that are established by communities in some localities or by members of state subjects or non-Muslim citizens, either paid or unpaid. Their expenses and needs are covered either by their founders or by the foundations they are affiliated with. The Sultan must approve the establishment of such schools. In particular, teachers must get approval from the Minister of National Education or the local education administration. The content and books of the courses to be taught in these schools should be approved by the Ministry of National Education or the local education administration in order not to teach courses that are against moral rules and politics. In rural areas, it must be licensed by the provincial education directorate or the provincial governor, and in the capital by the Minister of Education. Unless these three conditions are fully met, the establishment and continuation of private schools is not permitted. If a movement is detected against it, it will be banned and blocked. Even if the professors to be appointed by the founders of private schools have a certification in their hands, they will have to be certified by the education administration (1869 General Regulations of Education, 204-205).

follows: Not to allow the operation of schools that try to break the spiritual unity of the Muslim people with the government, undermine the state at every opportunity and contradict their own interests, not to allow those who make people around them adopt their religious thoughts and try to shake the foundations of Islam, albeit indirectly and to those who did not leave a single inch of unpublished land of the Ottoman State in order to adopt their religious thoughts.. (About the report, see; Atilla Çetin, (1982), Maarif Nazırı Ahmed Zühdü Paşa'nın Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Yabancı Okullar Hakkındaki Raporu, *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, C. 0, S. 10-11, ss. 189-219). As Pasha also stated in his report, the society was trying to be influential not only among Jews but also among Muslims by utilizing its schools, and by this means, it was trying to weaken and finally break the ties of the state with its subjects, who were settled far from Istanbul and had different nationalities. It can be understood from the following statements of David Ben Gurion that this is one of the most important missions of Mikveh Israel: *"If this school had not been founded to serve the studies of Judaism, I would have doubted that the Jewish state could have been established"* (Silberman 1974, 145-147).

During the years 1881-1884, 1905-1906, with the effect of the massacres called Pogrom that took place in Russia, as well as the similar ones in Europe, there was a significant increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine, and mostly to the United States. These population movements drew reactions from the Palestinian Arabs already settled in the region, as well as the Jews. This reaction soon turned into protests. Without the intervention of the European consuls, it was very difficult for Jewish immigrants to stay in Jaffa and other cities. European diplomatic circles benefited from the political atmosphere experienced in the last period of Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign and the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, and as a result, the number of Jewish settlements began to increase. At the end of the ongoing migrations, new ones were added to them. At the beginning of the reign of Abdulhamid II, the Jewish population in Jaffa was about 1,800, while the Muslim population was 8,000. After the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908, the number of Jews reached 7,500 (Laskier reports the Jewish population in Jaffa as 5000 in 1913. (Laskier 1983, 168). Although we do not have any source on the Jewish population at this time, this rate remains low taking into account the fact that it coincided with a period of increased immigration of Jews to the city, the activities of the school, the successful agricultural activities of the Jews in the region and the economic prosperity brought by this) and the number of Muslims reached 25,000. The important points that attract Jews to Jaffa can be listed as follows: The economic support of their kin from many parts of the world to the Jews who migrated here, the fertile agricultural lands of Jaffa, the favorable climate, the abundance of water resources, the port opening to the Mediterranean, the number of people who grew up from the agricultural school making agricultural production with modern techniques, to pack the crops they have obtained with modern methods and to have the ability to transport them in person, ensuring that the region is revived in terms of agriculture (Büssow 2011, 215-216).

The activities of this school, which was established in Jaffa, were very important in the process leading to the withdrawal of the Ottoman State from Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel. Moreover, the favorable conditions of the region played a significant role in the opening of the school, expanding its activities and carrying it out with determination.

### **Conclusion**

The Mikveh Israel School is vitally important to Jewish history. Because this school did not only affect the establishment of the Jewish state; it was also the main trigger for the increase in the welfare of the Jews and their opening to the world market in the agricultural field. It should

be noted that the State of Israel is one of the rare countries that has achieved development in agriculture, as well as in the field of industry-especially the defense industry-. As a matter of fact, it is noteworthy that the seeds of many agricultural products produced by the Jews dominate the world market. As a result, Israel reached this successful position in the field of agriculture in a short time and the foundations of it were first laid with this school. According to the idealized understanding of Dr. Yehuda Leib Pinsker from Odessa, as well as many Zionists, the Jews could achieve their goals if they acted in accordance with the understanding of "self-liberation". In other words, all Jews could only get rid of anti-Semitism by establishing an independent state in Palestine, where they emerged on the stage of history. One of the important keys to this self-liberation is the industrial school established in Jerusalem and the agricultural school called Mikveh Israel established in Jaffa.

## Appendices

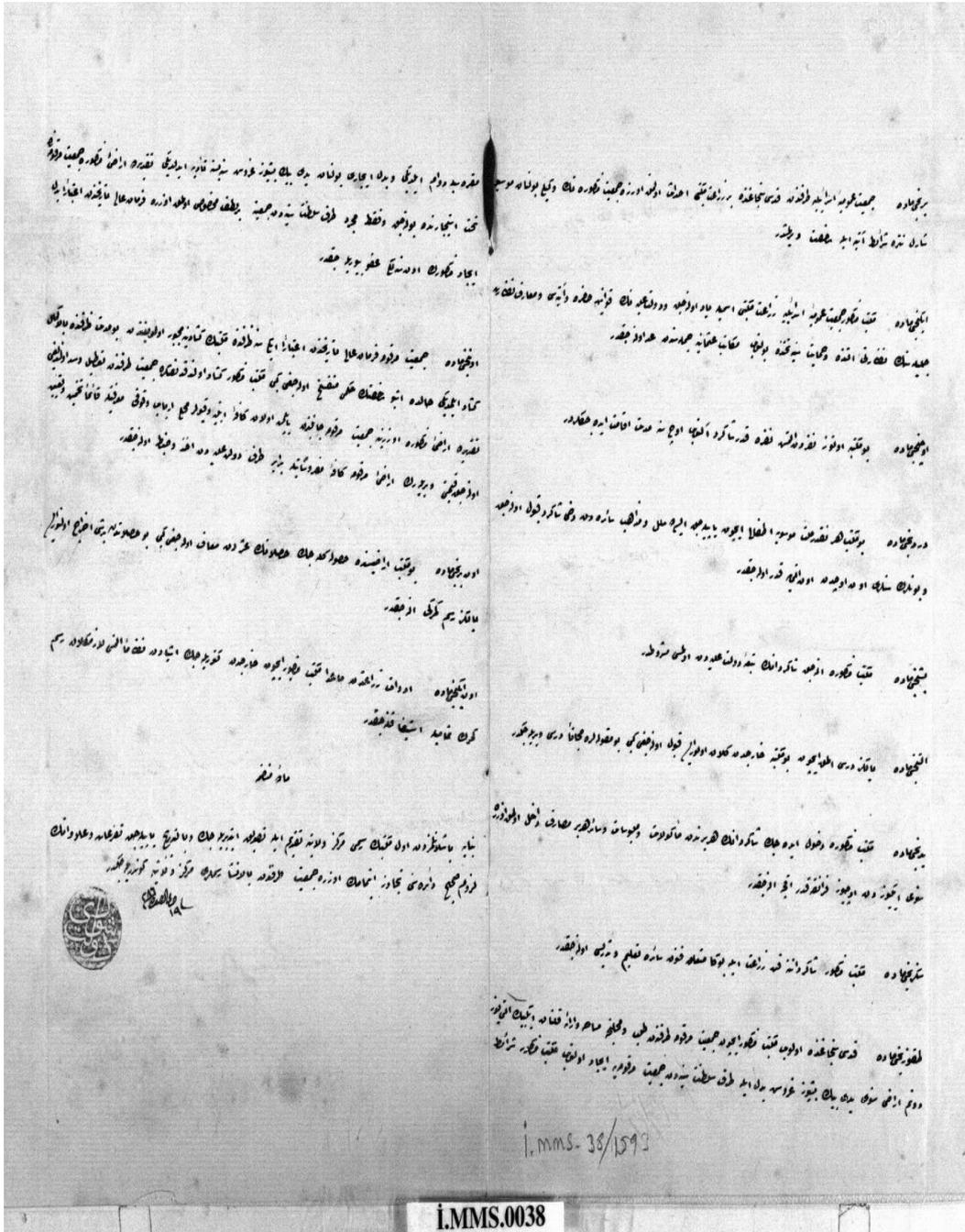
### Appendix 1: AIU Founding Statement

"Our co-religionists, no matter how weak the bonds that keep you back, much as you are scattered all over the world and fit into other nations, if you adhere to the ancient religion of your ancestors; If you do not deny your faith, if you do not hide your religion; if who you are doesn't make you blush, as weak souls do; if you hate the prejudices we are still subjected to, the generalized accusations, the repeated lies, the slander, the tolerance of injustice, the justified persecution; if you believe that freedom of conscience, which is the lifeblood of the soul, is best preserved only in countries where Jews are completely free; If you believe that the faith of our ancestors is the most sacred heritage for every individual, that the home and conscience are inviolable, that we should never see what we saw in the recent past; Although some common values are shared with the wider society, if you have the opportunity to share your personal feelings, desires and hopes, if you believe that unity will mean something; If you think that our co-religionists, who have been exposed to misery, use of force and prohibitions for 20 centuries, can regain their human and civic dignity; outnumbered, many in zeal, if you believe that the focus of all the forces of Judaism will be an honor for your religion, a lesson to the nations, a step forward for humanity, a victory for universal truth and logic; If you believe that the principles of the 1789 revolution are still prevailing in the world, that the lessons learned from them are just principles, that the spirit of the revolution should permeate everywhere, and that peoples who practice absolute equality in faith will have real power; All our co-religionists around the world, if you believe in all this, come and listen to our call, join us, our work is great and perhaps sacred: we are establishing the Alliance Israélite Universelle (Güven 2013, 116-117).

### Appendix 2: Charles Netter Themed Israel Stamp, Founder Of The First Jewish Agricultural Settlement



### Appendix 3: Specification Allowing the Inauguration of Mikveh Israel, BOA İ. MMS., 38/1593



Appendix 4: The curriculum of Mikveh Israel in 1920 (Silberman 1974, 146).

Subject	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
Bible	2	2	0
Jewish History	2	1	0
Hebrew Language and Literature	2	1	0
Elementary Geometry	1	0	0
Surveying	1	0	0
Physics	2	0	0
Chemistry:			
Organic and Inorganic Soil Chemistry	1	2	0
Fertilisation			
Practicum in Soil Chemistry			
	Soil Chemistry: 0	1	2
	Fertilisation:0	0	1
	Practicum in Soil Chemistry: 0	1	1
Botany	3	1	0
Zoology	2	1	0
Mineralogy and Geology	0	1	0
Agricultural Mechanics	1	1	0
Cereal Crops	1	1	1
Vegetable Growing	1	1	0
Horticulture	0	2	1
Viticulture	0	1	0
Animal Husbandry	0	1	1
Dairying	1	1	0
Veterinary Medicine	0	1	1
Poultry Raising	1	1	1
Apiculture	1	1	0
Silkworm Raising	1	0	0
Bookkeeping For Farmers	0	0	1
Gymnastics	2	2	2

### Archival Documents

#### Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives

BEO, 884/66278	İ. MMS. 38/1593
BEO. 3293/246953	ŞD. 520/41
DH. MKT. 534/65	MF. MKT. 275/15
DH. MKT. 1244/84	MF. MKT. 294/40
DH. MKT. 1362/5	Y. PRK. AZJ. 40/34
DH. MKT. 2477/73	Y. PRK. AZJ. 50/86
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