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## JEWISH WOMEN IN OTTOMAN EDUCATION AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ALLIANCE ISRAELITE UNIVERSELLE: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL (1839-1916)

### Abstract

Throughout history, education and training activities have not only contributed to the culturalization processes of societies but have also been instrumental for them to gain a sense of community, to keep up with the times, and to simply exist. The development of these activities is greatly influenced by the times in which they occur.

The modernization phase experienced throughout the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also had an impact on educational activities, which is an important factor in political, economic, military, and social existence. Thus, the aim, scope and structure of education have changed, bringing the traditional system to a new and modern level. The Ottoman State was one of the countries where this transformation was intensively experienced. The legal and legislative developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century not only served as the lawful ground for the country's modernization process, but also constituted the legal basis for modern education and training. Following these developments, the transformation in the field of education took place on legal grounds and was encouraged. In this context, the educational activities of the Ottoman Jewish community also underwent a shift. In the past, community schools, which developed around religion and ensured the religious and cultural continuity of Jews for centuries, were operating as a part of the religious institutions and under the control of the religious authorities. In this system, Jewish women had no place in education, and they mainly received religious instructions and skill-based trainings in their homes. This paper investigates in the light of documents the change in this mentality as well as the educational contributions of the Jewish communities' working women in Istanbul and their areas of activity, the degree of effectiveness of the Chief Rabbinate, which had the say over the understanding of traditional education, with the Ottoman modernization, and the support of the Alliance Israélite Universelle to the women educators and the schools.





In conclusion, it was determined that most of the educational institutions for Jewish girls in Istanbul belonged to and survived with the support of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and that willing Jewish women prepared Jewish girls for the socio-economic aspect of life, made them an active part of the modern society, taught them Ottoman Turkish as well as other foreign languages, and integrated them, again in accordance with the Alliance's wishes, into the French culture.

**Keywords:** Istanbul Jewish Community, Alliance Israélite Universelle, Modernization, Jewish Women, Ottoman Education.

## OSMANLI MAARİFİNDE MUSEVİ KADINLAR VE ALLIANCE ISRAELİTE UNİVERSELLE'NİN FAALİYETLERİ: İSTANBUL ÖRNEĞİ (1839-1916).

### Öz

Eğitim-öğretim etkinlikleri, tarih boyunca toplumların kültürlenme süreçlerine katkı sağlamış, aynı zamanda onların topluluk şuuru kazanmalarına, çağa ayak uydurmalarına ve mevcudiyetlerine vesile olmuştur. Bu faaliyetlerin gelişiminde, içerisinde bulunulan zamanın etkisi büyüktür.

19. yüzyılda dünya genelinde yaşanan modernleşme süreci; siyasi, iktisadi ve askeri olduğu kadar toplumsal mevcudiyetin önemli bir faktörü olan eğitim faaliyetlerini de etkilemiştir. Dolayısıyla eğitimin amacı, kapsamı ve yapısı değişerek geleneksel formu yeni ve modern bir zemine taşımıştır. Bu dönüşümün yoğun bir şekilde yaşandığı ülkelerden biri de Osmanlı Devleti'dir. 19. yüzyılda yaşanan hukuki ve yasal gelişmeler, ülkenin modernleşme sürecinin yasal dayanağı olmakla birlikte, modern eğitim-öğretimin de hukuki temelini teşkil etmiştir. Bu gelişmelerin ardından, eğitim alanındaki dönüşüm, yasal bir zeminde gerçekleşmiş ve teşvik edilmiştir. Bu kapsamda, Osmanlı Musevi cemaatinin maarif faaliyetlerinde de hareketlilik yaşanmıştır. Eskiden din ekseninde gelişen ve yüzyıllar boyunca Musevilerin dini-kültürel devamlılığını sağlayan cemaat mektepleri, dini kurumlar bünyesinde ve din adamları kontrolünde faaliyet yürütüyordu. Bu düzende Musevi kadınlar, eğitim-öğretimde yer almadıkları gibi ekseriyetle hanelerinde din talimi ve beceri isteyen eğitimler görüyorlardı. Çalışmamızda, bu zihniyetin nasıl değiştiği, İstanbul'da görev yapan Musevi cemaatine mensup kadınların eğitim-öğretim etkinliklerine katkıları, faaliyet bölgeleri, geleneksel eğitim anlayışı Hahambaşılık makamı denetimindeyken, Osmanlı modernleşmesi ile birlikte bu makamın ne derecede etkin olduğu ve Alyans İsrailit Cemiyetinin eğitimci kadınlara ve mekteplere desteği belgeler ışığında incelenmiştir.

Sonuç olarak, İstanbul Musevi Kız eğitim kurumlarının çoğunun, Alyans İsrailit Cemiyeti'ne ait olduğu ve bu cemiyetin desteğiyle ayakta kaldıkları, bununla birlikte gönüllü Musevi kadınların, Musevi kız çocuklarını sosyoekonomik açıdan hayata hazırladıkları, modern toplumun bir parçası haline getirdikleri, Osmanlı Türkçesi ile birlikte yabancı diller öğrettikleri ve onları yine Alyansın isteği doğrultusunda, Fransız kültürüne entegre ettikleri tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İstanbul Musevi Cemaati, Alyans İsrailit Cemiyeti, Modernleşme, Musevi Kadınlar, Osmanlıda Eğitim.





## Introduction

In the Ottoman society, Jewish women occasionally held positions that enabled them to establish relations with the Ottoman palace and serve as a liaison between the harem and the outside world (Aydın 2001:624). Parallel to the process of modernization, the role and position of Jewish women in the society underwent a significant change (Mazower 2007: 391). Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman Jewish women entered the workforce in various business sectors as workers (Dıġıroġlu 2014: 236) and became involved in the banking sector as well (Bali 2005: 25).

Besides these sectors, for example, the Jewish women living in Salonica collaborated with the State by engaging in charity works. In this regard, the Jewish women came together to support the construction of an operating room for the military hospital and donated a certain amount of money they had collected among themselves for the said operating room. In recognition of their contributions and their loyalty to the Ottoman State, the Jewish women of Salonica were rewarded with the Order of Charity (*Şefkat Nişan-ı Hümayunu*) upon the request of the marshalship of the Ottoman 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (BOA., Y.PRK. BŞK., 51/100, 29 dhu'l-Qa'da 1314 AH; 1 May 1897 AD<sup>1</sup>).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the women from two of the leading families of the Ottoman Jewish community, Fernandez and Camondo, were engaged in important activities in the social sphere. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Fernandez women were involved in activities to address the needs of their coreligionists who migrated to the Ottoman State (Ünal 2017: 158). In this respect, the name that stands out is that of Helen Fernandez. Madame Fernandez was honored with the Second-Class Order of the Medjidie (*II. Rütbe Mecidi Nişanı*) for her charitable activities (İpek 2011: 116). Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, Jewish women took action and organized various meetings in Jerusalem to raise awareness on the constitution among the Jews (Batmaz 2012: 49).

The Reform Edict of 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*) was significant for transforming the educational activities of the Ottoman Jewish community as well as the traditional understanding in this field. Consequently, Jewish girls were able to participate in educational activities (Rodrigue 1997: 65). These activities were carried out not only in institutions that belonged to the community, but also that were under the auspices of various societies. In this regard, the endeavors of the Alliance Israélite Society are of critical importance.

<sup>1</sup> AH refers to the Hijra Calendar and AD refers to the Gregorian Calendar. Rumi Calendar is not abbreviated. The names of the months are translated into English based on the research article of Richard B. Rose (Rose 1991: table 2).





The Alliance Society's endeavor in the education and training of women/girls had a revolutionary significance for the Jewish community. With their involvement, for the first time, Jewish girls began to receive regular education in independent institutions. Their work was defined in the context of modernization as an innovation in the emancipation and status of women. The changes also started to impact the social structure, and the number of early marriages decreased. Women who received education in these schools were seen as the preferred wife candidates of the Jewish men who graduated from the Alliance institutions. Therefore, the inclusion of women in the educational system has also contributed significantly to their social status (Güven 2013: 85).

The emergence of the Alliance schools has positively influenced the worldview and quality of the Jewish women's lives. This has brought about a new and modern cultural formation in society. The institutions that provided education primarily in French elevated the cultural level of women in the society (Polat 2019: 19).

After opening its first school in Istanbul, the Alliance operated in the neighborhoods of Balat, Kuzguncuk, Hasköy and Ortaköy. Girls' schools were also opened in a similar fashion (Kuran 2009: 76).

The changes in the education and training of Ottoman Jews of Istanbul were centered around the schools of the Alliance Israélite and "private educational institutions" that were established as an alternative to the community institutions. As modern enterprises in education continued, the pioneering roles of the Jewish women in the field of education gained momentum in meeting the social needs. It is apparent that women were engaged in activities of education and training in the neighborhoods where the Istanbul Jewish communities were densely populated, and that they also contributed to social transformation. In this regard, it is also important where the women worked, whether they acted on their own or with the support of a community, what kind of activities they were involved with, whether their endeavors were legal or not, and what their roles were in these activities.

In this paper, the educational activities, goals, and teacher profiles of the women from the İstanbul Jewish community will be investigated in the context of each school. Tanzimat was defined as the period of "Mekteps" (1839-1918). With the law of Unification of Education (*Tevhîd-i Tedrisat*), a new era begun, and the word "okul (school)" replaced the word "mektep (school)" (Kodaman 1999: XI-XIV). In this paper, the word "school" will refer to the word "Mektep", as the paper focuses on the Tanzimat period and because it was the preferred word in the source documents. In addition, although "Alliance Israélite Universelle" is the commonly adopted spelling, it was mentioned as "Alyans İsrailit" in the archives and thus in the Turkish version of the paper except when they were cited from a source who used the common spelling.





In this study, we will show in the light of documents that Ottoman Jewish women from non-Muslim communities living in Istanbul established schools so as not to send other Jewish women to state schools and to provide them an education in accordance with their own community structures, and that they received support from the Alliance Israélite. While most of the documents we examined did not indicate the stages of education of the established schools, it can be concluded from the type of education provided and from the statements in some of the documents that these were primary (*İbtidâî*) or secondary (*Rüşdî*) schools.

### 1. Acceptance of the French Education System and the Jewish Women Educators of Galata

After the Ottoman rule began taking steps towards emancipating its non-Muslim populations, European Jews became actively involved in their Ottoman coreligionists' lives, in the hopes of making them useful imperial citizens who were also worthy of the equality they themselves had recently achieved. When the Alliance Israélite Universelle opened its first school in the empire in 1865, Ottoman Jewry entered a period of continuous transformation. The elites of the Ottoman Jewry adopted the standards of behavior of the European bourgeoisie. The directors and teachers at the new Alliance schools, who thought that the French-Jewish models of integration into the French nation-state could be applied to the Jews living in the Ottoman lands, took it upon themselves to teach their Eastern coreligionists to be modern, civilized, and respectable members of the society (Cohen 2017: 36-37).

Upon observation, we understand that the Jewish Girls' Schools in Istanbul were run with the support of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. In addition to providing free education to poor children, the organization also supplied them with stationery and clothing. According to the curricula of the schools, French, German and Hebrew languages were taught along with other subjects such as history, geography, calculus, natural history, philosophy, chemistry, painting, needlework, and handicrafts (Kuru and Papuççular 2022: 21).

A significant number of the female teachers working in the Alliance Israélite's schools in the Ottoman lands were trained at the Paris-based institution known as the teacher training school (Rodrigue 1997: 65-114-117). Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum Effendi had also stated that the headquarters of the Alliance was in France, and that this headquarters was the leading institution in spreading the French language and influence in the East through language and programs (Benbassa 1998: 191). Here, it can be asked why the Alliance Schools provided education predominantly in the French language. There were those who explained this by the conjuncture after the Cretan insurrection in 1866.

The Cretan insurrection, which put the Ottoman government in a difficult position, caused the European States to intervene individually. The justification for the interventions







was that the Ottoman government had failed to realize the reforms it had promised with the Reform Edict of 1856 and had been negligent in this regard. If it was left to its own devices, anarchy would arise in the Empire and threaten the balance of the European States as well. Based on this reasoning, the European states presented separate reform projects to the Ottoman government. When the Ottoman government was forced to choose and implement one of these projects, it chose the French government's reform proposal and accepted the project presented by France on 22 February 1867. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education organized the Ottoman education system based on the French education system (Kodaman 1999: 20).

As a result, a large part of the Ottoman Jewry, thanks to the education they received in the schools of the Alliance Israélite in the Ottoman lands, gravitated towards France. This expanded, in the cultural sense, the influence of the French enlightenment on the Jewish community. In addition, the Alliance society also offered its female graduates the opportunity to have a place in the teacher training school in France (Guttstadt 2012: 51).

The opposite situation was also observed. For instance, it was recorded that a Madame Semah, a graduate of the Paris University, was appointed as the director of an Alliance Israélite school in Galata in İstanbul, where Jewish children were educated. The school, whose name was not mentioned in the documents, employed teachers named Madame Mazağano, a French teacher of British nationality, Ğrosman who was a German citizen, Mademoiselles Feraci and Kanitri Dalfazi Derjinsevi who were Ottoman citizens, and Lerişer Nefer who was an Austrian (BOA., MF. MKT., 1099/8, 13 Muharram, 1327 AH; 4 February 1909 AD). There is no information available on the records regarding them other than favorable opinions (BOA., ZB., 340/72, 22 February 1324 (Rumi Calendar); 7 March 1909 AD).

## 2. Jewish Women of Hasköy

Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the only education available to Jewish women in the Western world was private education. Apart from private education, there were no organized educational institutions during this period. However, reforms from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards have led to various developments in the field of women's education as well (Brenner 2011: 142-176).

Jewish women living in the Ottoman State also underwent a process of progress following the advancements in education in the Western world. Documents allow us to trace this process. For instance, the establishment of a private school in Filyos Street of the Yeni Neighborhood, door no. 49, and its management by a Mademoiselle Sara Danon for the purpose of providing education for the girls of the Jewish community in Hasköy was mentioned in a document dated 2 dhu'l-Qa'da 1311 (7 May 1894) sent by the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Police (BOA., MF.MKT., 206/8, 2 dhu'l-Qa'da 1311 AH). A year





later, an Alliance Israélite School for Girls, providing education and training in an official capacity, was established in Hasköy, and a Mademoiselle Viktorie Danar was appointed as the director. She was working in cooperation with the other active Alliance schools and, in her statement to the Ministry of Education, had expressed the importance she placed on the study of Ottoman Turkish and her desire to educate patriotic girls (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/6, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). It is noteworthy to mention the following detail about the education system: during the reign of Abdülhamid II, the head of the Ministry of Education was the Sultan himself. The Ministry of Education would recommend a person as the director of an institution, and the Sultan would approve him/her. The main purpose behind this practice was to raise elites who had absorbed the Ottoman culture (Somel 2015: 294-295).

Another Alliance Israélite School for Girls, also in the Hasköy district, was founded at Kiremitçi Ahmed Ağa Street. The teaching staff of the school, including the director, consisted of nine teachers. In addition to the director, Madame Lina Naboni, the names of these teachers were listed as Mademoiselle Matild Behar, Mademoiselle Felor Somah, Mademoiselle Fortina Behar, Madame Klara Pinsal; and their assistants as Mademoiselle Raşel Ya'ış, Mademoiselle Rebeka Şestar, Mademoiselle Luiz Loy, and Mademoiselle Felor Hason (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/1, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD). The information we have obtained from the archives regarding these individuals enabled us to find out the place of birth, age, occupation, and other details about some of them. According to the information, the director of the school, Madame Lina Naboni, was born in Pest in Hungary, was a French teacher by profession, and was 36 years old at the time. She had resided in Üsküdar for 20 years and was previously the director of the Ortaköy School. Since 1901, she was employed at the Alliance Israélite School for Girls. Her husband was David Nabon, the director of the Alliance Israélite School for Boys in Hasköy at the time. The living quarters of the Nabon family were in the boys' school (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/3, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD).

As mentioned in the records, the director of the school, Madame Lina Naboni, made some changes in the school's curriculum upon the decision of the board of trustees. Penning a letter explaining the new curriculum, Naboni requested a license from the Ministry of Education. In response, the Ministry referred to the school's existing license and indicated that the school was already registered by the registry office (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/8, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH, and BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/9 of the same date).

Another document of the same date contains the following information about the teachers. For instance, Mademoiselle Matild Behar, the 20-year-old French teacher at the school, was born in Kuzguncuk and was living at the time in Aynalıkavak as a lodger. Identified as a teacher, the Yambol-born Mademoiselle Felor Somah, after completing her education, was appointed as a French teacher to the school in 1904 at the age of 19 and was





residing in Aynalıkavak. Also mentioned in the document, the Hasköy-born Mademoiselle Fortina Behar, aged 21 at that time, was Matild Behar's sister and taught sewing. Another Hasköy-born teacher was Madame Klara Pinsal, who was a 22-year-old French teacher. She was married to a teacher named İnpalo in an Alliance Israélite School for Boys (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/3, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD).

The existence of İstanbul-born teachers, which have come to our knowledge thanks to the archival documents, confirms Rodrigue's observation that most of the teachers employed within the Ottoman lands since 1865 were of Oriental (Ottoman) origin. As a result of the modern education they received, they had achieved an identity nothing short of revolutionary in a traditional Jewish society (Rodrigue 1997: 65-114-117).

There was also some information about the assistants employed in the school. For example, 17-year-old Mademoiselle Raşel Ya'ış, born in Hasköy, worked as a French teacher's assistant at the school. 18-year-old Mademoiselle Rebeka Şestar was born in Galata and assisted Madame Klara Pinsal. 19-year-old Mademoiselle Luiz Loy, born in Hasköy, was employed at the school as a French teacher's assistant. Another Hasköy-born, 24-year-old Mademoiselle Felor Hason was employed in the school as an assistant. Whereas the teachers and assistants were all young, Madame Lina Naboni was 36 years old, and Mademoiselle Ventora Komanto, who was born in the Sabuncuoğlu neighborhood and taught sewing at the school, was 35 years old (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/3, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD). As it is evident, the school in question also carried out activities to help girls in learning languages and gaining experience in needlework.

Information regarding the nationalities and religions of the teachers working at the girls' school is available (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/5, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD). However, there was no detail provided about the content of their diplomas, even though it was stated that they had been reviewed by the Ministry of Education (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/6, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD).

In a written statement given by the neighborhood headman regarding the school, it was stated that the school staff and the area where the school was located were supported by the Jewish notables and that the staff were elected and appointed to the school by the residents of the neighborhood. The document further states that these people had "good manners and proper attitudes" (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/11, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD).

The Governorship of Beyoğlu District, after verifying the information related to the school staff, had expressed a positive opinion about the school administration (BOA., MF. MKT., 755/17/13, 13 Shawwal 1321 AH; 2 January 1904 AD). Some clarification is needed here as some confusion may arise from the fact that, although the school was an Alliance school, the teachers and assistants were appointed by the Jewish community. As a rule, the Jewish "community school" teachers were selected and appointed by the community of the







neighborhood in which the community school was located. However, the document mentioned that the school staff of the Alliance school was appointed by the Jewish community, i.e. not directly by the Alliance Organization. The main reason for such a statement by the relevant authority was to show that the school received its legal status from the Jewish community of Hasköy and to state that it was established in response to the request of the community. This appears to be a formula put into action by the Alliance Society to gain legal status. As a matter of fact, until the abovementioned dates, the Ministry of Education had already stipulated that an Alliance School must have the qualification of a "community school" to start operating.

Similarly, it was observed that the Alliance Israélite School in Tripoli went through a similar process in this context. The administration of the school in Tripoli was informed that it could begin its educational activities on the condition that it would operate under the authority of the local rabbinate and would not be connected to the Alliance Society (BOA., DH.İD., 30/7/1, 14 Shawwal 1328 AH; 19 October 1910 AD). Therefore, it is revealed that the Alliance Israélite School for Jewish Girls in Hasköy had also started its activities under similar conditions with the status of a "community school." In other words, it can be said that the Alliance society, by securing the support of the local community, began and performed its activities on legitimate grounds.

Another location where Jewish women carried out educational activities in Hasköy was Karanfil Street in Piri Mehmet Paşa neighborhood. Recina, the daughter of an İsak Holo who was a Jewish citizen residing in the neighborhood, taught Hebrew to Jewish girls in her own home, acting in the capacity of a governess. Recina, who was reported to have no diploma, taught girls aged 3-5 between 1901-1907. According to a decision of the Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*), it was not required for governesses to have diplomas, and therefore it was considered sufficient for Recina to obtain a license only for the school for it to start operating. However, Mademoiselle Recina was informed that, due to "local issues", the school must be located in a different place other than the mentioned address. (BOA., MF.MKT., 1027/8/1, 4 dhu'l-Qa'da 1325 AH; 9 December 1907 AD, and BOA., MF.MKT., 1027/8/2 and BOA., MF.MKT., 1027/8/4 of the same date). In the records regarding the investigation conducted by the Ministry of Police upon the request of the Ministry of Education, it was stated that Recina was a woman of virtue and therefore deemed suitable to be granted a license (BOA., ZB., 29/154/1, 24 Kanun-i-evel 1323 (Rumi Calendar); 6 January 1908 AD, and BOA., ZB., 29/154/2 of the same date).

The school in Hasköy was closed down during the Pan-Germanism period since it was regarded as an Alliance-supported school. When Chief Rabbi Nahum Effendi declared that all Alliance schools were Jewish community schools and that he would close the synagogues if





the schools were shut down, the rulers of the time sent a directive to all officials in the capital and in the provinces not to interfere with the programs and activities of the Alliance schools (Benbassa 1998:191).

### 3.Kuzguncuk Jewish Girls' School and Banker Fernandez

The Kuzguncuk Jewish Girls' School, which began operating in 1881 (BOA., ŞD., 209/57, 1 Safar 1304 AH; 30 October 1886 AD), was closed in 1895 due to a financial crisis, but after some time, it was reopened with the support of the Alliance Israélite Society (BOA., İ. MF., 3/1, 17 Muharram 1313 AH; 10 July 1895 AD). (Türkan 2019: 424). The school had a female director, and female teachers whose diplomas were registered at the school (BOA., MF. MKT., 265/29, 3 dhu'l-Hija 1312 AH; 28 May 1895 AD). The records only indicate that the director of the school in Kuzguncuk/Virandere was a Madame Sara, but no information was provided about the other staff members (BOA., MF.MKT., 1066/32/1 18 Jumada'l-ukhra 1326 AH; 18 July 1908 AD; and BOA., MF.MKT., 1066/32/2., and BOA., MF.MKT., 1066/32/3 of the same date).

Towards the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, although the school continued to operate, the school administration decided to organize a ball to find a solution to its financial problems. Regarding this event, Madame Sara Levi, the director of the school, applied for a permit (BOA., MF. MKT., 1066/32, 18 Jumada'l-ukhra 1326 AH; 18 July 1908 AD). Even though the school also had financial difficulties in 1895, the fact that it was able to continue its educational activities until 1908 can be credited to the assistance of the Alliance Israélite Society. Therefore, it is seen that the Alliance Society provided financial support not only to the schools under its responsibility but also to schools outside its scope, thus ensuring the continuation of education and training activities.

İzak Fernandez, who was described as an important person serving the Jewish community in Istanbul and who held various positions, was also known as a banker among the Jewish community (İpek 2011: 98). The Alliance Israélite Society divided its schools that were established within the Ottoman lands into regions and monitored them through representatives called "regional committees" (Rodrigue 1997: 102). Fernandez was one of these representatives. In addition to his role as a banker, Fernandez was also engaged in the problems of the Jewish schools and presented various petitions to the authorities. In this regard, Fernandez, who took action for the Jewish girls' school in Kuzguncuk, sent a telegram to the Ministry of Education in his role as the head of the Alliance Israélite and informed the Ministry that the school was facing closure due to financial problems. Yet, in the same text, he also mentioned that, thanks to the contributions of the Alliance Society, the school was not closed and continued to operate (BOA., MF. MKT., 225/28/1, 10 Rabi'l-awal 1312 AH; 11 September 1894 AD). (BOA., BEO., 630/47248, 2 dhu'l-Hija 1312 AH; 27 May 1895 AD). According to the Alliance's inspection mechanism, when the "regional committee" completed





an inspection of a school affiliated with the society, the report of the inspector who conducted the inspection was also subjected to an inspection process. Thus, issues such as the physical aspects of the school buildings, the cleanliness of the students, the effectiveness of the teaching and whether foreign languages were taught at the schools were investigated. In addition, the school's relations with the local Jewish community, the chief rabbinate, the notables of the community and the committees were also a matter of curiosity, about which information was also included in the reports by the inspector (Rodrigue 1997: 102). In summary, it is possible to say that Banker Fernandez was at the head of this control mechanism of the Alliance in Kuzguncuk. He played an active role in the "regional committee" and, in his position as head, wrote reports to both the Alliance Israélite and the Ottoman Ministry of Education.

In 1869, the Ministry of Education implemented a regulation called the "General Education Regulation" to establish order and stability in education. The regulation was intended to ensure that the minority and foreign schools, in addition to the traditional educational institutions of the Ottoman State, carried out their educational activities in an organized manner. One of the major issues addressed in this regulation was regarding the requirement for schools to operate under a license obtained from the registry office (Haydaroğlu 1999: 152). This regulation, of which articles from 128 to 131 contained information on private education, set the framework for the opening, operation, and closure of schools (Çağır and Türk 2017: 64), and introduced certain conditions for schools to obtain a license as well. Articles 15 and 16 of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 (*Kanun-i Esasi*) enabled non-Muslims to engage in educational and training activities, as long as these activities were under the control of the government (Eren 1994: 73). In this context, Fernandez, declaring that they rented a house in Virandere, Kuzguncuk, for educational purposes, applied for a license to operate a primary school (BOA., MF. MKT., 225/28/1, 10 Rabi'l-awal 1312 AH; 11 September 1894 AD). (BOA., BEO., 630/47248, 2 dhu'l-Hija 1312 AH; 27 May 1895 AD). After a few months, Fernandez wrote another letter stating that due to the long delay in obtaining the license, the school could not start operating, and that during this time, the rent and teacher salaries were paid unnecessarily and the students were deprived of education (BOA., MF. MKT., 265/29/1 and 2/, 3 dhu'l-Hija 1312 AH; 28 May 1895 AD). (BOA., ŞD., 2653/9, 3 Muharram 1313 AH; 26 June 1895 AD). (BOA., İMF., 3/1, 17 Muharram 1313 AH; 10 July 1895 AD). Shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Education granted the necessary license for the school to start operating (BOA., BEO., 654/49029, 20 Muharram 1313 AH; 13 July 1895 AD).

Leaders living in the Ottoman lands began shaping their patriotic projects according to notions of personal obligation and belonging to a nation-state, while also imbuing these notions with qualities unique to the Ottoman State. The Jewish leaders, while indicating the new responsibilities that being an Ottoman citizen imposed on them as individuals, attempted to realize this change from within the framework of a specific religious community, or *millet*





(Cohen 2017: 35). The female staff of the Kuzguncuk Jewish Girls' School, during the early years of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, can be given as an example to this. In the relevant document, the appointment of a female Ottoman Turkish teacher to the school was addressed and it was stated that the school aimed to raise a patriotic generation (BOA., MF.MKT., 1904/63, 29 dhu'l-Hija 1326 AH; 22 January 1909 AD). Also, the female teachers at the Jewish Girls' School in the Viran Street expressed that they were encouraging and making the utmost efforts for the children to learn the Turkish language (BOA., MF. İBT., 501/42, 9 Rajab 1332 AH; 3 June 1914 AD). Among the duties of the Ministry of Public Education (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Nezareti*), the most important one was the article stating that "education shall be in Turkish in the second and third level schools" and that teachers were required to have a good command of this language, which demonstrated the beginning of the nationalism movement in education and the conscious steps taken towards it. Thus, we understand that the idea of nationalizing education was embraced by the educators of the period and that it was aimed to give a national character to the Ministry of Public Education (Kodaman 1999: 17).

#### 4. The Activities of the Jewish Women in Üsküdar

During an inspection of education by the Ottoman Ministry of Education in the Dağhamamı region of Üsküdar district, it was discovered that some Jewish women were gathering students in their homes and giving them lessons on various subjects. According to the inspection carried out by the department in charge of the non-Muslim schools, women named Mademoiselle Viktor and Mademoiselle Solanaf had opened their residences to Jewish children for education and, in this context, were giving lessons to about 20-25 children in the subjects of Arabic alphabet (*elifba*), the principles of reading (*usul-i kiraat*), and needlework (i.e. sewing). In addition, as a result of the reports from the area, it was also found out that similar activities were taking place in some other residences, and that women were providing education in their private homes to Jewish children. The Ministry of Education considered these activities, which were carried out without its authorization, as illegal and thus put a stop to them (BOA., MF. MKT., 241/12, 26 Jumada'l-ukhra 1312 AH; 25 December 1894 AD).

It was also found out that one of the buildings of the Jewish community's Ahinoh Boys' School in Dağhamamı, which was in operation in 1907, was illegally allocated for the education of Jewish girls. Apparently, the education of girls was not only conducted illegally in local residences, but also in this Jewish school as well. The relevant authorities urged the school administration to obtain a license so that the school would not face the danger of closure (BOA., MF.MKT., 1014/34, 22 Rajab 1325 AH, 31 August 1907 AD). The appointment of teachers shortly afterwards to the Jewish Girls' School means that the school had obtained a license and continued its operations. Mademoiselle Minase, living in house number 9 in the Şehsuvar neighborhood, and Mademoiselle Raşel Kalaf, living in Ortaköy, were appointed to this school called Ahinoh. The records of the Ministry of Police also confirmed that this





institution was named Ahinoh Girls' School (BOA., ZB., 391/43, 30 Tishrin-i-evel 1323 (Rumi Calendar); 12 November 1907 AD). After some time, the school was moved from its original building and continued to operate together with the Jewish Girls' School in Dağhamanı, Üsküdar. In the merged school, Yudamnase Effendi, a rabbi, and Vitali Yaiş Effendi, a male teacher, also held positions. Although the school employed male teachers for a while, later female teachers were also appointed. In addition to the appointed female teachers, the records reported that the founders of the school were Mademoiselle Holanef and Mademoiselle Vitoryan Arvadaki (BOA., ZB., 29/137, 24 Tishrin-i-evel 1323 (Rumi Calendar); 6 November 1907 AD).

### 5.The Illegal Operation of the Haydarpaşa Jewish Girls' School

Until the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict of 1839, no regulations were made regarding the educational activities of non-Muslims. With the founding of Jewish schools in the modern sense after the proclamation of Tanzimat, legal arrangements were made to prevent any potential problems that might arise in the schools (Gün and Sorgu 2020: 41).

During the reign of Abdülhamit II (1876-1909), foreign schools, which were regarded as the concrete expression of cultural imperialism, were considered as institutions that were harmful and needed to be controlled. Because these schools were described as institutions that were loyal to the interests of the state and *millet* they represented and that wanted to raise the local people as if in a colonial education system. The measures taken against these schools were signs that both awareness and the desire for nationalization were gradually emerging in education (Kodaman 1999: 34).

The documents also revealed the existence of a girls' school, which belonged to the Jewish community and whose name was not mentioned, in the Osmanağa neighborhood of Haydarpaşa, Istanbul, that had started its activities before 1896 and had been operating illegally for 11 years until 1907 (BOA., MF. MKT., 306/14, 6 Ramadan 1313 AH; 20 February 1896 AD).

When it was discovered in 1907 that the school was engaged in illegal educational activities, it was shut down by the Ministry of Police. Subsequently, the school administration began efforts to obtain a license for the school to continue operating. According to the school's service records, the school had two teachers, Rebeka Zerson and Mademoiselle Palel (BOA., ZB., 29/147, 15 Tishrin-i-sani 1323 (Rumi Calendar); 28 November 1907 AD). The fact that only two teachers were mentioned in the school's service records shows the small size of the school and its staff. At one point, when the school was in a financial crisis, it collaborated with the directors of the Jewish boys' school in the area to organize a ball. (BOA., MF. MKT., 306/14, 6 Ramadan 1313 AH; 20 February 1896 AD).







We understand that obstacles to education like those mentioned above were experienced in the Ottoman lands during the First World War as well and affected the non-Muslim elements in many ways. For instance, in accordance with one of its wartime decisions, the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*) closed most of the establishments belonging to countries defined as the "enemy states" (BOA., DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 19/20, 19 Muharram 1334 AH; 27 November 1915 AD). Institutions of education and training were also impacted by these developments (BOA., DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 4/37, 7 Muharram 1333 AH; 25 November 1914 AD). Therefore, the schools operating under the umbrella of the Alliance Israélite were also subjected to sanctions on the grounds that they belonged to the subjects of an enemy state (BOA., DH.EUM.5.ŞB., 29/46, 28 dhu'l-Hija 1334 AH; 26 October 1916 AD).

While the sanctions against the schools continued, Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum made efforts with the Ottoman government regarding the Alliance Israélite schools. After long efforts, the schools affiliated to the organization were recognized as community schools and their activities were allowed to continue freely. Although the schools were eventually free in their activities, communication and cooperation between the Alliance and the schools were reduced to a minimum. This situation led the schools to experience serious economic problems. (Rodrigue 1997: 237).

## 6. The Jewish Schools in Balat and their Women Educators

An Esmeralda Cervantes, who taught music to girls at the palace during the reign of Abdülhamid II, had provided statistical data on the Jewish girls' schools in Istanbul that were affiliated with the Alliance Israélite Society, and stated that there were 298 female students and 8 female teachers at the Balat Girls' School, with only 27 of the students paying fees to the school (Kuru and Papuççular 2022: 21).

The records show that the Jewish community in Balat, Istanbul, had built two separate schools for the education of boys and girls. Although the establishment dates of the schools were not recorded, it was mentioned that a Madam Kolb of French nationality was employed as the director of the girls' school in 1903, and that in 1904 she was appointed to a school whose name was not written. Upon the vacancy of the director position at the girls' school, Madame Ester Ades, the wife of Monsieur Ades, who was the director of the Jewish boys' school in Balat, was appointed to the job. Madame Ester, who received her education in France, had previously served as the director of the Alliance Israélite School in Salonica for three years before her appointment to the school in Istanbul. Although Madame Ester Ades was of French nationality, through her marriage to Ades Effendi of Ottoman nationality, she was entitled to acquire Ottoman citizenship. However, according to the records of the Ministry of Police, in 1904 she had yet to receive her citizenship certificate (BOA., MF.MKT., 756/51/1,2,3,4, 22 Shawwal 1321 AH; 11 January 1904 AD).





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Citing Kemal Karpat on the issue of citizenship, Cohen states that new legal definitions of Ottoman citizenship, which had begun to emerge in certain Ottoman provinces, became valid throughout the country with the 1869 Citizenship Law, which acknowledged everyone born in the empire to be an Ottoman citizen unless they prove otherwise (Cohen, 2017, s.35). It is possible that Ades Effendi became an Ottoman citizen by utilizing this law.

In 1906, a school called "Zara" was opened for Jewish girls in the Kızılçavuş neighborhood of Balat. The founder and director of the school, Mademoiselle Camilla, operated the primary level school, without a license for two years, and then in 1908 applied to the Ministry of Education to obtain a license for it. The school's two female teachers were of Ottoman nationality. It was reported that Zara school generally offered lessons in needlework and trained girls aged between 8-10 years old (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/5,6, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD).

Although other courses were also taught at the Zara school in addition to needlework, they were usually language lessons. In this regard, the textbooks read at the school were listed as Spanish alphabet, Spanish reading, French syllables, French reading, and history of Israelites in French. Therefore, these textbooks were taught in the school and the lessons were mainly focused on teaching foreign languages (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/8, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD). One of the textbooks included in the school curriculum was titled "Fransızca Kıraat (French Reading)" and was written by Moiz Fresko Effendi (Gün and Sorgu 2021: 201-216).

At the school, a Mademoiselle Fortoni Peres was employed to teach needlework (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/9, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD). The investigation conducted by the Ministry of Police on the employees has determined that Mademoiselle Camilla was the daughter of Avusturyalizade, an herb and spice seller residing in Kızılçavuş neighborhood, and Mademoiselle Fortoni was the daughter of Mişon Effendi, a water company employee, and that both were graduated from an Alliance Israélite school. The building reported to be the school was in fact a three-room house (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/12, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD). According to the information obtained by the relevant municipality, the school was a four-room stone building that had a maximum capacity of 50-60 students (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/13, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD).

Looking at the Tanzimat implementations, it is seen that especially the plans aimed to regulate the general tax system and education failed to be carried into effect. While state schools filled their classrooms with Muslim students, missionary schools mainly served non-Muslim students (Cohen 2017: 37, 38). Although Cohen argues that efforts to plan and organize education with the Tanzimat failed to succeed, we know that, for instance, Mademoiselle Camilla's school was granted a license after she agreed to not admit Muslim





students and to abide by the regulations of the Ottoman State (BOA., MF.MKT.,1044/88/14, 18 Safar 1326 AH; 22 March 1908 AD). (BOA., ZB., 340/11, 30 March 1324 (Rumi Calendar); 12 April 1908 AD). This is significant in showing us that the Jewish schools complied with the state regulations.

Also in Balat, a school for girls called "Menba-ı Marifet", which belonged to the Jewish community, had operated in the İstiradi area. The records show that, in 1894, relocation of the school to a building in the Balat Hacı İsa neighborhood was under consideration due to the insufficient capacity of the school (BOA., MF.MKT., 204/41, HC. 29 Shawwal 1311 AH; 5 May 1894 AD). An Avram Salah was appointed as the director of this Jewish girls' school. The records indicate that in 1902 the school was moved to a two-room house on the Sinan Çeşme Street of Hacı İsa Neighborhood (BOA., MF.MKT., 608/33/and1, 10 dhu'l-Qa'da 1319 AH; 18 February 1902 AD).

### **7. Jewish Women's Efforts to Establish a School in Sirkeci and the Reactions of the Locals**

Jewish women also carried out educational activities in Sirkeci. The records show that a license was requested for the use of a house located in the Sahaf Süleyman Ağa neighborhood in the vicinity of the Porte and owned by a woman called Hacı Hanım as a Jewish community school (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/1, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). In the application for the license, the director of the school was stated to be one Mademoiselle Danon. Mademoiselle Danon, in her letter, wrote that she was a graduate of an Alliance Israélite School and had given private lessons at the school before taking up the position of director. Mademoiselle Esteria Danon stated that the local Jewish community had requested her to discipline and educate their children and explained that the school for which she was requesting a license would be a primary school and would operate accordingly (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/2, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). In response to this request, the Ministry of Education did not approve the opening of the said school due to local social sensitivities (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/12, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). In addition, the Ministry of Police refused to give a license on the grounds that there was an insufficient number of Jewish girls in the area and that the school building was located close to a mosque (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/27, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). Considering that the primary school was to operate in a house with a few rooms, it appears that in areas where the Jewish population was small, the establishments carried out their activities in houses, whereas in neighborhoods where the Jewish population was dense, the schools operated in independent buildings.

Mademoiselle Esteria Danon described the school that was planned to be opened as a "schoolroom". The school/schoolroom was tailored to educate not only girls, but also boys.





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Madame Danon stated that Turkish, French, and Spanish lessons would be taught at the school. The number of students was planned to be around 7-8 (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/28, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). Upon the refusal of her license request, Esteria Danon submitted another application to the Ministry of Education. Stating that no language lessons would be taught in the schoolroom and that she intended to teach only needlework, she made another request for a license (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/30, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). The Ministry of Education's investigation into the school revealed that the house belonged to Esteria Danon. According to the investigation, the sign on the door of her house read "French teacher, seamstress for ladies and children, also a master of needlework and all types of embroidery" (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/3, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). It is clear from this plate that Esteria Danon's expertise extended beyond needlework, and that she was knowledgeable enough to teach language lessons. The director of the Jewish Girls' School in Hasköy, Mademoiselle Viktorie Danar, had also become involved in this matter regarding the school for which Esteria Danon was in charge, and sent a letter to the Ministry of Education. As stated by Madame Danar, the school curriculum emphasized Ottoman Turkish, and they had raised hundreds of girls who loved the Ottoman country and its language (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/6, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). According to Cohen, only a few Jews were fluent in Ottoman Turkish, which was the official language of the state. Jews faced more obstacles than any other non-Muslim group in entering government service. Indeed, Jewish observers complained about the absence of Jewish individuals in many state institutions, such as the Imperial School of Medicine (*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şahane*) and the Assembly of Notables (*Heyet-i Âyan*), throughout the nineteenth century. The Jewish community leaders, activists, students, and journalists considered their efforts to spread Ottoman Turkish among their coreligionists to have limited impact (Cohen 2017:38), and similarly, in 1895, despite her declared intent to make Ottoman Turkish widely known through her lessons, we see that Madame Danar also had experienced some obstacles regarding the school she wanted to operate.

From Madame Danar's statements, we understand that the main reason behind the refusal of the school's license was the reaction of the local community. The school was reported to be in a house on the Bab-ı Ali Bakkal hill. Saying that denying the school a license was unjust, Danar also emphasized that their wish was to serve the children of the country through education (BOA., MF.MKT., 271/6/6, 2 Muharram 1311 AH; 25 June 1895 AD). According to the information obtained from memoirs, the border regions with high non-Muslim populations, the band activities, and the attacks on the civilians all laid the groundwork for the notion of the non-Muslim "others" to emerge among Muslim children, which posed a threat to the safety and well-being of the Muslim community (Somel 2015: 304). These can also be the reasons why the school was not given a license.





## 8. The Jewish School in Ortaköy

Another school to mention regarding the education of the Jewish community's girls was in Ortaköy. The fact that subjects such as history and geography were taught at this school, and that maps were used as visual materials in these lessons, were some of the practices that were not seen before in other schools (BOA., MF. MKT., 630/37/1, 23 Safar 1320 AH; 1 June 1902 AD).

On the other hand, there was also another girls' school belonging to the Jewish community in the Ortaköy/Armenian neighborhood. According to the records, this school operated under the management of a woman named Maria Açefran, without a legal permit, and was closed down for this reason (BOA., MF. MKT., 630/37/4, 23 Safar 1320 AH; 1 June 1902 AD). Due to the insufficient data on the schools in Ortaköy, it is not clear whether the school run by Maria Açefran was the Jewish school that had 290 students. Therefore, it is possible to consider that there were either two separate schools, or only one school belonging to the Jewish community.

Rodrigue confirmed the presence of a Jewish girls' school in Ortaköy. He also emphasized that the Jewish girls' schools in Istanbul had faced financial problems during their educational operations, and that their funding was provided by tuition fees, and the subsidies sent from Paris (Rodrigue 1997: 91-144). It is conceivable that these supports stemmed from the Western models, which French Jews hoped would take root among the imperial Jewish communities, that were laid onto very different foundations (Cohen 2017: 37).

Eventually, Jewish leaders living in the Ottoman lands began to shape their patriotic projects according to ideas of personal obligations and belonging to a nation-state, while also instilling them with entirely Ottoman characteristics. While the Jewish leaders pointed out the new responsibilities placed upon them as individuals by Ottoman citizenship, they sought to bring about this change within the framework of a particular religious community or *millet*. The main objective here was to keep the Jewish community intact (Cohen 2017: 37). It appears that the Jewish leaders had accomplished this through the Alliance Israélite-supported Jewish community schools.

## CONCLUSION

Thanks to the reform efforts, the groundwork was laid, and legal regulations were enacted to realize the changes that were planned to be made in the field of education. Non-Muslim elements in the Ottoman population also benefited from this, and the educational activities went through qualitative developments. The İstanbul Jewry had accessed the modern education that was centered around a community-based understanding earlier than the ones in many other parts of the empire and adopted this system.







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To demonstrate their desire to serve the country through education, the directors of the Jewish girls' schools had included Ottoman Turkish lessons in their curricula. Although learning languages was considered as a means for culturalization, it is understood that the underlying goal was to gain an advantage when applying for a civil service position. This was because in the Ottoman society the number of Jewish citizens who knew the Ottoman language was low, which created a disadvantage for them when they applied for civil service positions.

The Ministry of Education decided whether to grant licenses to Jewish girls' schools, based on the tendencies of the local population. It is understood that licenses were not given to the schools that the local population did not want. If there were not enough Jewish children in the area or if the school was planned to be opened near a mosque, locals raised objections.

Even though modernization was underway, the traditional mindset and way of living was not entirely abandoned. It was evident that, for a short period of time, male teachers also served in girls' schools. However, the responsibility of conducting educational activities in these institutions was later transferred to teachers recruited from among the Jewish women. Considering that the history of the Israelites, philosophy, and Hebrew were included in some of the school curricula, it is understood that the developing modern education concept was in harmony with the traditional understanding.

A significant number of the female teachers were associated with the Alliance Israélite and were educated at its teacher training school in France. This shows that the French educational model was instrumental in the transformation of Jewish education and that the French worldview was influential in shaping the Jewish modern culture in the Ottoman lands. Reasons as to why were explained above.

Although the schools that were affiliated to the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Ottoman lands were closed down and the teaching of French was abolished during the Pan-Germanism period, it is understood that the situation was rectified through efforts.

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