

## The anti-Zionist discourse of David Fresko in his work *Le Sionisme*

Doğa Filiz SUBAŞI\*

### Abstract

Following their arrival, the Jewish communities lived under the Ottoman Empire a *pax* which kept them faithful to tradition and to the extreme conservatism of deeply-rooted Sephardic customs. But the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a cultural and linguistic revitalisation on three fronts: the modernisation of the Ottoman state itself, the Western influence represented mainly by *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, and Zionism from the northern countries. This state of cultural ferment brought along the emergence of a multitude of newspapers, with opinion articles and debates in the years between the two centuries, including, most fundamentally, the Zionism/anti-Zionism debate. In this article, we are going to analyse the opinions expressed over several years by David Fresko in his newspaper *El Tiempo*, which he compiled in a booklet and published in 1909 in Istanbul and was translated into French under the title *Le Sionisme*. The aim of this article is to analyse the articles collected in *Le Sionisme*, which are a clear reflection of the sociocultural situation of the Ottoman Sephardim who, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, experienced the leap into modernity that would affect their way of life, their culture, their linguistic reality, and also the profound revolution in Judaism triggered by the Zionist movement.

**Keywords:** Sephardim, Ottoman Empire, Zionism, Anti-Zionism, David Fresko.

\* Assistant professor, Yozgat Bozok University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Division of Spanish Language and Literature, doga.subasi@bozok.edu.tr

## David Fresko'nun *Le Sionisme* Adlı Eserindeki Siyonizm KarŐıtı Söylemi

### Özet

Yahudi cemaatleri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na geldiklerinden itibaren köklü Sefarad geleneklerine ve geleneklerinin aşırı muhafazakarlığına sadık kalarak barış içinde yaşadılar. Ancak XIX. yüzyıl üç cephede birden kültürel ve dilsel bir canlanma getirdi: Osmanlı devletinin modernleşme uğraşları, esas olarak *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle* tarafından temsil edilen Batı etkisi ve Kuzey ülkelerinden gelen Siyonizm. Bu kültürel mayalanma hali iki yüzyıl arasındaki yıllarda, en temelde Siyonizm/anti-Siyonizm tartışması da dahil olmak üzere, fikir yazıları ve tartışmalarla çok sayıda gazetenin ortaya çıkmasını beraberinde getirdi. Bu makalede, David Fresko'nun *El Tiempo* gazetesinde seneler içinde dile getirmiş olduğu ve 1909 yılında İstanbul'da derleyip *Le Sionisme* başlığı altında Fransızcaya çevrilmiş bir kitapçık halinde yayınladığı görüşlerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. *Le Sionisme*'de toplanan bu makaleler, XIX. yüzyılın sonları ve XX. yüzyılın başlarında, yaşam biçimlerini, kültürlerini, dilsel gerçekliklerini ve aynı zamanda Siyonist hareketin Yahudilikte meydana getirdiği derin devrimi etkileyecek olan modernleşmeye geçişi deneyimleyen Osmanlı Sefaradilerinin sosyo-kültürel durumunun açık bir yansımasıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sefaradiler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu; Siyonizm; anti-Siyonizm; David Fresko.

## 1. Introductory remarks. Zionism in the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is the period setting the framework for this analysis, Ottoman Jews experienced a period of great cultural splendour, which was reflected in the boom in press productions and publications,<sup>2</sup> thanks to the creation of a large number of newspapers. This cultural activation emerged against a historical context in which the dismemberment of the Empire was taking place and, also, the emergence of political Zionism, a movement that represented a turning point and an intellectual confrontation which divided the local Jewish society into two quite irreconcilable camps: on the one hand, the Zionists like Lucien Sciuto (Lewental 2010; García Arévalo 2021: 81-93), Haim Nahum (Erbahar 2010), Ben Giat,<sup>3</sup> David Izak Florentin,<sup>4</sup> Izak David Florentin,<sup>5</sup> David Elne-cave<sup>6</sup> or Nahum Sokolov (Cano Pérez-García Arévalo *et al* 2021: 20-24) (Polish Jew, who joined the debate in the Ottoman Sephardic newspapers), who were advocates of the solution of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine; and on the other hand, the anti-Zionists like David Fresko or Samuel Halevi,<sup>7</sup> who chose to remain loyal to the Empire and fight against any postulate of the Zionist thesis. Both sides used their literary skills in defence of their positions, advocating their own ideas as if it were a fierce war (Güteryüz 2015, 77-79).

The how and why of the rapid and important irruption of Zionism in the Ottoman Sephardic society can be explained as a result of the modernisation that its world, immersed in the multicultural society of the Empire, underwent the same process of modernisation and Europeanisation as the rest of its inhabitants. The adoption of European customs and fashions, ranging from cultural to social and political processes, within the Sephardic society was spearheaded by *L'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, a philanthropic organisation founded in Paris in 1860 to provide the most 'backward' Jewish communities with a Europeanist education, essentially Frenchified, that would equip them with the means to combat anti-Jewish prejudice. Ottoman society in general and Sephardic society in particular adopted the European culture, customs and mores. For the Sephardic world, this was an unprecedented cultural and linguistic revitalisation and contributed to its entry into the modern world. French made a strong entry into schools as the language of instruction and, consequently, into Sephardic society as a whole, influencing both literature and trade relations with other countries.

In this context, the traditional Judeo-Spanish-speaking Sephardic communities gradually replaced their mother tongue with French, as their yearnings were directed towards the West, particularly France. This led to a proliferation of journalistic and literary activity outside the traditional one,<sup>8</sup> and in addition to French, there were those who advocated the use of the Turkish language, and even those who backed the use of Hebrew. But it was difficult to abandon Judeo-Spanish, as it was the mother tongue of the majority of people, and as a result, writings in the Sephardic heritage language

1 More information on this subject can be found in the "Estudio Preliminar" of the book *Lyorar i reir. Los conflictos del sionismo en el mundo sefardi* (Cano Pérez-García Arévalo *et al.* 2021: 20-24) and in García Arévalo-Subaşı 2023.

2 More information about Ottoman press see: Hassán 1966; Romero 2007, 9-35; Díaz-Mas 1986; Güteryüz, 2015; 2006: 71-76.

3 Ben Giat (Ghiat, Benghiat), Aleksander, for more information see: Borovaya-Phillips Cohen 2010; Bunis 2021: 355-384.

4 On David Izak (Isaac/Yishak) Florentin and his politics see: Borovaya 2010; Hadar 2014; 2016.

5 On Izak (Isaac/Yishak) David Florentin (not to be confused with the above) and his political vision, see: Hadar 2014; 2016.

6 Founder of the Zionist-leaning newspaper *El Cudyo* (1909), of which he was editor for 21 years (Papo, 2010: 215; Romero 1992: 183-214).

7 On Samuel Halevi and his political position see: Ulusal 2019.

8 These genres were cultivated in Sephardic literature as a consequence of the sociocultural modernisation of the Sephardic world. They are known as 'adopted genres', and alongside them are novels and theatre. Although some, such as drama, can be traced back to heritage literature, like theatre, they are the product of the new literary genres and currents resulting from contact with the European literature. See Díaz-Mas 1989; Ayala 2005.

also proliferated. The printing presses in Istanbul, Izmir and Thessaloniki emerged as major publishing centres for both monographic works and newspapers. Journalistic activity continued until the 1930s (Rodrigue 1992: 190).

The intellectual debate and ideological struggle generated by the emergence of Zionism was reflected in the national press in the form of disputes between Lucien Sciuto and David Fresko, in articles published in their respective newspapers, *L'Aurore*<sup>9</sup> and *El Tiempo*. The debate between the two, bitter and temperamental, went as far as the courts. At the international level, David Fresko and Nahum Sokolov also clashed – the debate was intense and hostile to the point that each published a work to discredit the other. Fresko's *La monstroza impostura a Sr. Sokolov* was answered by Mr. Sokolov's *La Trajikomedia o Reir i Llorar*.<sup>10</sup>

This work attempts to approach this intense atmosphere of important and heated debates on Zionism within the Ottoman Empire based on an analysis of David Fresko's anti-Zionist discourse – *Le Sionisme* – in order to gain a better understanding of the arguments and theses defended by each side.

## 2. The author and the work

### 2.1 David Fresko<sup>11</sup>

David Fresko (Istanbul, 1853 - Nice, 1936) was a journalist, editor, translator and writer, as well as an accomplished polyglot who was fluent in several languages. His work as a journalist focused on two Sephardic publications: the Istanbul-based *El Telegrafo*,<sup>12</sup> where he worked for two years, becoming co-director in 1878; and *El Tiempo*,<sup>13</sup> of which he was editor after Izak Haim Karmona, a position he held until its closure. As a regular contributor, he worked on four other newspapers: *El Instruktor*,<sup>14</sup> *El Sol*,<sup>15</sup> *El Amigo de la Familia*<sup>16</sup> and *El Nasyonal*<sup>17</sup> (successor of *El Telegrafo*) (Phillips Cohen-Abrevaya Stein 2010: 369).

*El Tiempo*, which had previously published articles in Judeo-Spanish that were later published in French translation in a monographic work and analysed in this paper, was the second longest-lived newspaper after *Şalom*<sup>18</sup> (Güteryüz 2015, 41). From its

9 Weekly newspaper in French, founded in 1909 in Istanbul by Lucien Sciuto. The newspaper was an outspoken supporter of the Zionist movement, but in addition to this political stance, it was a champion of the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression. The most prominent Zionist leaders such as Sokolow, Victor Jacobson, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Abraham Elmaleh or David Isaac Florentin (Lewenthal 2010a: 275, also Lewenthal 2010b) wrote their opinions in *L'Aurore*. Sciuto personally considered that Ottoman-Turkish nationalism and Zionism could be complementary movements.

10 The edition and a short study of *La Trajikomedia o Reir i Llorar* can be consulted in Cano Pérez-García Arévalo *et al* 2021.

11 David Fresko has been the subject of research by many scholars. For more information, see the Sefardiweb site, available at <http://sefardiweb.com/node/251> [03/03/2023].

12 *El Telegrafo* (1878-1930), a newspaper founded by Yehezkel Gabay in Istanbul in 1860 under the title *Jurnal Israelit*, the name under which it was published until 1871. In 1878 it was renamed *El Nasyonal*, edited by Gabay himself, Mois dal Mediko, David Fresko and Marko Mallorkas. From 1878 until its disappearance in 1931, it appeared under the title *El Telegrafo*. In the early years it was edited by Mallorkas, followed by Izak Gabay. It included political and economic information; articles on history, folklore, science, news about Jews in the world and in particular in the cities of the Ottoman Empire, literary articles, etc. (Subaşı 2018: 455).

13 *El Tiempo* is one of the most important and long-lived newspapers in the Sephardic world founded in 1871(?) by Merkado Fresko, Sami Alkabes, Izak Karmona and David Fresko in Istanbul. Its first director was Izak Karmona. From 1892 until its closure it was edited by David Fresko. It was a political, literary, commercial and financial newspaper, containing general information, with political and economic news, articles on history, folklore and science, news from the Jewish world, literary material, etc. (Subaşı 2018: 455).

14 *El Instruktor* (*El Enstruktor*) (1888-1889); a newspaper founded by David Fresko in Istanbul (Güteryüz 2015: 53-54).

15 *El Sol* was founded in 1878 in Istanbul by David Fresko and closed the following year, in 1879 (Güteryüz 2015: 55).

16 Newspaper edited with Mois Dalmediko was founded in 1881 by David Fresko, and was published until 1886 (Güteryüz 2015: 55-56).

17 Formerly called *El Jurnal Israelit*, it was later renamed *El Telegrafo*.

18 A newspaper founded in Istanbul in 1947 by Avram Leyon, which is now published by Gözlem Gazetecilik. For more information see: Martínez Corral, 2016.

beginnings in 1871, it was the leading and most influential newspaper in the country's Sephardic Hebrew communities, and its editorial line was characterised by presenting to the community the modernisation undergone by Sephardic society in all areas, mainly cultural, economic and social. Fresko played a key role in the implementation and maintenance of this editorial line. Through his extensive production of articles, he strongly defended the importance of Turkish – the official language of the Empire – and even Hebrew, as well as French. He was also opposed to Zionism, which spread in the Ottoman territories after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, as he believed it encouraged the dismemberment of the Empire and he was an advocate of the territorial integrity of the Empire. Fresko was a long-lived and prolific journalist and writer who devoted his entire output to attacking Zionism and defending the ideals of the Young Turk Revolution, while at the same time remaining constantly critical of the social and political changes of his time and environment.

In relation to Zionism, the paper's openly oppositional stance was based both on the danger it posed to the territorial integrity of the Empire and to the Jewish community itself (Cytrin-Dori 2017: 2; Bali 2007: 258). The Zionist aspiration to establish a 'Jewish national entity' within Ottoman lands was clearly a threat to social balance within the community.

## 2.2 The anti-Zionist booklet by David Fresko

It should be noted that *Le Sionisme* by Fresko is a little book – or even a booklet in the author's own words – of barely 83 pages. It was published in December 1909 in *Konstantinople* by *Imprimerie Fresko*, the author's own publishing house. It was the French translation of a series of anti-Zionist articles that he had previously published in Judeo-Spanish in his newspaper *El Tiempo*.

As far as the content of this booklet is concerned, it is made up of seven small chapters of barely 10 pages each. The book begins with an *avant propos* of the author. The first chapter describes religious Zionism in antiquity and criticises how it evolved into political Zionism in modern times (Fresco 1909: 7-15). The second explains the "Mission of Israel" based on the good and noble ideals of Judaism and contrasts it with the material aspirations of Zionism (Fresco 1909: 15-23). In the third, he portrays Zionism as a movement that runs counter to the progress of humanity (Fresco 1909: 24-32). In the fourth, the author highlights the benefits of Jewish assimilation to other cultures and sharply criticises Zionists' denial of this assimilation (Fresco 1909: 33-41). In the fifth, he explains why Zionism is a utopia and cites several reasons that in his opinion make it impossible for this movement to achieve its aims (Fresco 1909: 42-55). In the sixth, he warns Ottoman Jews of the danger of Zionism and urges them to learn the Turkish language and found schools and institutions to achieve this end and to contribute to the progress of the country (Fresco 1909: 56-72). Finally, in the seventh chapter, he tries to prove by argument and evidence that Zionism deceives Ottoman Jews by telling them that it has no political aim or aspirations to create an

independent Jewish state in Palestine.

As for the reasons and motives that led Fresco to compose his short anti-Zionist work, it is worth noting that he himself explains them clearly – albeit briefly – in his preface. He openly states that his main aim with this publication is to combat the ideas of Zionism and to prevent their spread among his Jewish co-religionists and the compatriots of his country, i.e., the other non-Jewish components of the Empire.

He also adds that this work has its precedents in a series of articles he had published in *El Tiempo*, and in the face of the barrage of criticism and slander from the Zionist Organisation, led above all by the newspaper *L'Aurore*, he decided to disseminate his postulates on Judaism and Zionism by publishing a French translation of his theses against this movement as defended in his articles that appeared in *El Tiempo*.

It can be deduced from his words that this translation has two purposes: A general one, which is to reach a wider audience, given that his articles in *El Tiempo* were aimed at an exclusively Jewish and Judeo-Hispanic-speaking public, and a more specific one, which is to address those people who had embraced the ideas of those advocating Zionism, without knowing the arguments of Jewish anti-Zionists like him.

Another interesting fact he offers in his *avant propos* is his testimony regarding the entry of Zionism into the Empire, since he made it clear that from the creation of the Zionist movement until 1908, Zionism had had very little diffusion in Ottoman lands (Fresco 1909: IV-V), but after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, which led to the proclamation of constitutional rule in the Ottoman Empire, the leaders of this Turkish movement began to spread Zionist ideas among Ottoman Jews. To this end, they had taken the following measures: sending emissaries from Istanbul to different cities in the Empire; and creating new papers or reusing existing ones, in addition to the founding of several French-language newspapers, the most prominent of them being *L'Aurore* (Fresco 1909: V-VI).

### 3. Analysis of the discourse<sup>19</sup>

#### 3.1 Public delegitimation of Zionism

Fresco already laid out his cards from the outset in his preface,<sup>20</sup> since he did not hesitate to start with the most important thing, namely the delegitimation of Zionism in the eyes of his own target audience, i.e., the Jews. Therefore, he began by addressing “almost all the Jewish intellectuals of the entire world” (Fresco 1909: IV), emphasising the idea of almost all the Jewish scholars on the planet “as well as the great Jewish organisations of Europe and America” (Fresco 1909: IV) to indirectly imply that these important institutions are the ones that know and look after the true interests of the Jews and pointing out that all of them – intellectuals and organisations – “are very hostile to this movement” (Fresco 1909: IV). It is worth noting that he uses the word “hostile” intentionally not only to emphasise that they are opposed to Zionism,

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19 In this section, in order to analyse Fresco’s anti-Zionist discourse, we have chosen some of the most interesting theses defended by him – evidently we cannot include all of them here due to the permitted size of the article –. It should be noted that, in order to make the analysis clear and easily understandable, the fragments that are translated into English are quoted verbatim. For those interested in the French passages, the original texts are provided in the notes for reference.

20 The original *Avant Propos* in French can be found in the *Annex* to this article.

but also to emphasise that they are enemies, as if they were warring adversaries.

What reasons does the author give for discrediting Zionism? He points out that this movement contradicts the spirit of Judaism because – according to him – it is “*absolutely contrary*” (Fresco 1909: IV), i.e., for him there is nothing else in existence that is “*opposed to the true aspirations of the Jewish religion*” (Fresco 1909: IV).

He also adds that it harms the interests of Jews around the world, being “*an extremely harmful form*” (p. IV). We can see how he again uses expressions that exaggerate or overstate the extent, in this case, of the damage or harm. To what end? Well, “*to the well-understood interests of the Israelites throughout the universe*” (Fresco 1909: IV). In other words, Zionism can only be harmful to the Jews.

And he ends the opening of his speech by dropping the *bombshell* with which he intended to destroy his enemies, by accusing them that their postulates foster the racial and religious prejudices of dark ages, proclaiming: “*This movement has also the serious disadvantage of nourishing and strengthening the old prejudices of race and religion which science is trying to eradicate from all peoples*” (Fresco 1909: IV).

### 3.2 From Religious Zionism (Old Hope) to Political Zionism (Modern Utopia)

After presenting his instruments, Fresko went on to attack the Zionists directly, saying that they had not invented or brought anything new to the world or to the Jews, since Zionism was not a new movement because it had already been repeated several times in the history of Judaism. And to present this idea, he made a simile with the repetition of things and events throughout history: “*It is said that history repeats itself [...] The Zionist movement of today is only the repetition of an event that happened several times during the captivity of the Israelite people, from [the time when] this people lost their political independence*”.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, according to him, Zionism is an event that repeats itself in Jewish history when political independence is lost. Thus, this ancient belief has been ingrained in the Jewish faith since the destruction of the first Temple and survives over time, nourished by the hope of regaining the lost state in the Promised Land, an idea he puts forward in the following words:

“During the early days of the existence of the Jewish State until the destruction of the first Temple or rather until the close of the Prophets’ series, the belief in the necessity of a Jewish State and the hope of its restoration in case of loss of independence seem to have been, so to speak, an integral part of the Jewish religion. [...] Israel has always nurtured the hope of regaining its lost independence one day in the country of its forefathers”.<sup>22</sup>

But in the wake of the “*moral epidemic*” (Fresco 1909: 13) – the exact expression Fresko uses – that arose in Europe (France, Germany, Austria, Russia and Romania), awakening the old anti-Jewish hatred and causing many victims, Zionism mutated the old belief in realising the old hope from religious Zionism to political Zionism, which

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21 On dit que l'histoire se répète; en effet plusieurs événements qui ont lieu dans le cours de la vie des peuples se produisent quelques fois de nouveau sous des formes et dans des conditions différentes (Fresco 1909: 7). Le mouvement sioniste d'aujourd'hui, n'est que la répétition d'un événement de ce-genre qui a surgi plusieurs fois durant la captivité du peuple israélite, depuis que ce peuple a perdu son indépendance politique.

22 Pendant les premiers temps de l'existence de l'Etat juif jusqu'à la destruction du premier Temple, ou plutôt jusqu'à la clôture de la série des Prophètes, la croyance dans la nécessité d'un Etat juif et l'espoir de sa restauration en cas de perte de l'indépendance, semblèrent pour ainsi dire faire partie intégrante de la religion juive. [...] Israël a toujours nourri l'espoir de regagner un jour son indépendance perdue, dans le pays de ses aïeux (Fresco 1909: 7-8).

led the Zionists to second divine intervention and to put human action before it. Fresko puts it this way, speaking in the first person plural and on behalf of the Zionists: “*We no longer told the masses, as before, that with the help of divine force, with the force of miracles, we were going to save the people of Israel, but with the united effort of all Israelites and through some political combinations*”.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3 From Noble Ideals to Material Aspirations: From Universality to Exclusion

After undermining the religiosity and faith of the Zionists as putting human action before divine intervention in their aspirations for the Jewish people, Fresko continued his offensive against them by insisting that they not only misunderstand the noble ideals of Judaism, but have even gone so far as to hurl offences against religion and to confuse the Israelites with aspirations based on the possession of material wealth, saying: “*Zionism insults Judaism in the gravest way*”,<sup>24</sup> i.e., that there can be no worse enemy of this religion than this movement. But why does he say this? What is the reason? Where is the offence? Well, “*in trying to make people believe that religious faith is intimately connected with owning a piece of land*” (Fresco 1909: 22).

Therefore, regarding the ideal of linking the Jewish religion to the concept of “*territorial possession*” (Fresco 1909: 22), he uses the expression “*to restore to the Jewish religion its primitive character, its exclusionary, purely national character, while the glory of evolved Judaism is to have a universal and humanitarian character*”,<sup>25</sup> thus capturing that Zionism and Judaism are two antagonistic concepts, the former being primitive and exclusionary, while the latter is universal and humanitarian.

Therefore, he does not hesitate to strip the Zionists of their religiosity, stating bluntly that this limitation of the Jewish religion is a heresy, with all the negative baggage that such an accusation entails for the Jewish public: “[...], *to give the Jewish religion a racial character, a national character, is the greatest heresy that can be committed against it. This places it among the religious beliefs of certain semi-barbarous peoples*”.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, according to him, racism has no place within the Jewish religion or among the Israelites because the people of Israel are not a barbaric people. And he ends his offensive against the faith of the Zionists by insinuating that the gathering of all Jews in Palestine contradicts the will and the “*Peace and Justice*” of God, because the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world is a pious divine work: “*It is a charity that God gave to the world by scattering the children of Israel among the peoples of the earth, so that they might work for the spread of Monotheism, from which the ideas of Peace and Justice were to be born*”.<sup>27</sup>

23 On ne disait plus aux masses, comme autrefois, que c’était avec le concours de la force divine, par la force des miracles, qu’on allait sauver le peuple d’Israël, mais bien avec les efforts réunis de tous les israélites et moyennant quelques combinaisons politiques (Fresco 1909: 14).

24 Le Sionisme me semble faire au Judaïsme l’insulte la plus grave en essayant de faire croire que la foi religieuse est intimement attachée à la possession d’un lot de terre (Fresco 1909: 22).

25 [...] c’est redonner à la religion juive son caractère primitif, son caractère exclusif, purement national, tandis que la gloire du Judaïsme évolutionné c’est d’avoir un caractère universel et humanitaire (Fresco 1909: 22).

26 Donner à la religion juive un caractère de race, un caractère national, c’est la plus grande hérésie qu’on puisse commettre à son égard. C’est la placer au rang des croyances religieuses de certains peuples semi-barbares (Fresco 1909: 22-23).

27 C’est une charité que Dieu fit au monde en dispersant les fils d’Israël parmi les peuples de la terre, pour qu’ils travaillent à répandre le Monothéisme, d’où devaient naître les idées de Paix et de Justice (Fresco 1909: 17-18).



### 3.4 Against the will of God

An important idea that Fresko intends to spread against the Zionists is that they are not philanthropically helping the persecuted Jews of the world, but that they want to uproot the Israelites from their territories against God's will and turn them into adherents of an exclusionary culture, which is out of step with history and with the opening of humanity towards a world society without borders and without distinctions in the human family:

“Zionism wants to tear Israel away from the countries where it lives, if not materially, at least morally, by trying to make it adopt an exclusionary education and civilisation, by making it believe that it should consider itself as an outsider among other peoples and not associate itself with the great movement of Humanity, a movement which tends to make all borders disappear, all distinctions created by lies, and intimately link all members of the human family”.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.5 Denying assimilation, turning one's back on God, religion, science and history

Another thesis that Fresko fiercely defends is the benefit of assimilation for mankind, and therefore he uses the denial of assimilation by Zionism as an opportunity to accuse this movement of going against the course of nature, against the evolution of history and against the progress of mankind:

“Against the laws of nature, against the laws of evolution, Zionism has this absurd and ridiculous pretext of preventing this action of assimilation from extending to the followers of a belief, the Israelites. Zionism, on the other hand, expresses horror at the idea of Israelites merging and assimilating with other members of the human family”.<sup>29</sup>

His attack is not only limited to calling Zionism a regressive movement against the evolution of humanity by denying assimilation, but also against the principles of Jewish culture and morality, since it disobeys God's decree on the equality of men, which in Fresko's view negates Judaism itself as a religion:

“God, said the inspired Doctors of Jewish Doctrine, created one man so that the members of the human family could not claim superiority over one another. All men are children of the same Father, the work of the same Creator. It is precisely because Jewish Doctrine proclaimed this noble and equitable principle that it is respectable. To deny this principle to Judaism is to deny Judaism as a whole; it is to lower it to the rank of a pagan cult”.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.6 Is a walled ghetto the solution?

Finally, Fresko ends his offensive against the Zionist deniers of assimilation by asking them, in the form of questions that force one to agree with him, what solutions or alternatives they intend to offer the Israelites, since the result of the denial of assimilation and the consequences of carrying out the plan to gather and isolate the Jewish people in one land can only alienate them from the human family:

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28 Le Sionisme veut arracher Israël des pays où il vit, si non tout à fait matériellement, au moins moralement en essayant de lui faire adopter une éducation et une civilisation exclusives; en lui faisant croire qu'il doit se considérer comme étranger parmi les autres peuples et ne pas s'associer au grand mouvement de l'Humanité, mouvement qui tend à faire disparaître toutes les frontières, toutes les distinctions créées par le mensonge et à lier intimement tous les membres de la Famille humaine (Fresco 1909: 32).

29 Contre les lois naturelles, contre les lois de l'évolution, le Sionisme a l'absurde, la ridicule prétention d'empêcher que cette action de l'assimilation s'étende sur les adeptes d'une croyance, les Israélites. Le Sionisme, lui, exprime une horreur à l'idée que les Israélites se fusionnent, s'assimilent aux autres membres de la Famille humaine (Fresco 1909: 36).

30 Dieu, dirent les Docteurs inspirés de la Doctrine juive, créa un seul homme afin que les membres de la Famille humaine ne puissent pas prétendre à une supériorité les uns sur les autres. Tous les hommes sont les fils d'un même Père, l'œuvre d'un même Créateur. C'est précisément parce que la Doctrine juive proclama ce principe équitable, noble, qu'elle est respectable. Nier ce principe au Judaïsme, c'est nier le Judaïsme tout entier, c'est l'abaisser au rang d'un culte païen (Fresco 1909: 37).

“And what do you ask of the people of Israel? Do you, Zionism, want them to remain locked in the ghetto, to be surrounded by walls in their material and intellectual life, to be imprisoned and to submit voluntarily to all the miseries that result from isolation and inaction? For Israel to be preserved from assimilation, it is necessary that it should live alone, absolutely apart from the other members of the human family. It must not live outside its particular neighbourhood, it must be walled up in its ghetto, otherwise it can come into contact with the non-Jew and then it can dress like him, appropriate his habits and customs”.<sup>31</sup>

### Final Remarks

So far we have seen a brief notion of Fresko’s anti-Zionist discourse. To conclude, one can only affirm that his work *Le Sionisme* is a mine of ideas and theses against this Jewish nationalist movement that can be further exploited, since it is a booklet based on Jewish and non-Jewish sources, principles, scholars and authors. Moreover, it possesses arguments that are capable of persuading and convincing readers of the theses defended in it, due to the good exposition, approach and narration of the ideas held. So there is much to analyse about these debates that arose after the emergence of Zionism in the Ottoman Empire. In short, it is necessary and essential to study and analyse more thoroughly not only Fresko’s book, *Le Sionisme*, but also to compare it with his Judeo-Spanish versions and his other statements on the subject. It is also necessary to analyse the postulates held by the advocates of these two ideologically opposing camps in order to gain a detailed understanding of the impact of the Zionist doctrine in the Ottoman Empire.

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31 Et que demandez-vous du peuple israélite? Voulez-vous, Sionisme, qu’il reste enfermé dans le ghetto, qu’il s’entoure de murailles dans sa vie matérielle et intellectuelle? Qu’il s’incarcère et se soumette, volontairement, à toutes les misères qui résultent de l’isolement et de l’inaction? Pour qu’Israël soit préservé de l’assimilation, il est nécessaire qu’il vive seul, absolument retiré des autres membres de la Famille humaine. Il ne doit pas habiter hors de son quartier particulier, il doit être muré dans son ghetto, autrement il pourra être en contact avec le non-Juif et alors il pourra s’habiller comme lui, s’approprier ses us et coutumes’ (Fresco 1909: 38).

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## ANNEX

AVANT PROPOS.<sup>32</sup>

*Depuis quelque temps, tout le monde à Constantinople a dû, probablement, entendre parler très souvent d'un mouvement juif qui a pris naissance en Autriche et dont le nom, Sionisme, exprime toutes ses aspirations. Ce mouvement qui a été créé, il y aura bientôt quinze ans, à la suite de la publication d'un ouvrage intitulé l'«Etat juif», n'avait cours jusqu'à ces derniers temps que dans quelques milieux israélites de l'Étranger. Mais, depuis la proclamation du régime constitutionnel en Turquie, les chefs de ce mouvement ont eu la malheureuse idée de vouloir le répandre parmi les israélites de notre pays. Ils ont à cet effet envoyé des émissaires à Constantinople et dans d'autres villes de l'Empire et ces émissaires ont, à leur tour, créé des journaux ou acheté quelques feuilles déjà existantes à Constantinople et en province, parmi lesquelles l'«Aurore», en langue française et un autre quotidien, également en français.*

*Presque tous les intellectuels israélites du monde entier ainsi que les grandes organisations juives d'Europe et d'Amérique, sont très hostiles à ce mouvement qu'ils considèrent tout d'abord comme absolument contraire aux vraies aspirations de la religion juive et ensuite comme extrêmement nuisible aux intérêts bien compris des israélites de tout l'univers. Ce mouvement présente aussi le grave inconvénient d'alimenter et de fortifier les vieux préjugés de race et de religion que la Science tâche d'extirper de chez tous les peuples.*

*En ma triple qualité d'homme, de citoyen ottoman et de Juif, j'ai crû de mon devoir de combattre les idées aussi dangereuses qu'absurdes préconisées par ce mouvement réactionnaire et d'empêcher, autant qu'il m'était possible, sa propagation parmi mes coréligionnaires et compatriotes de ce pays. J'ai, à cet effet, publié une série suivie d'articles dans le journal israélite «El Tiempo» paraissant à Constantinople. A la suite de ces publications la meute nourrie par l'Organisation Sioniste a été lancée contre moi et le journal «Aurore» a déversé sur ma personne tout un déluge d'injures et de calomnies aussi imméritées et aussi insensées les unes que les autres. Cette attitude du journal sioniste m'a décidé à faire connaître au Public de Constantinople mes vues et mes opinions sur le Judaïsme et le Sionisme en publiant une traduction en français de la thèse contre ce mouvement que j'avais soutenue dans le «Tiempo», c'est-à-dire devant un public exclusivement juif. Du moment qu'on a voulu porter le débat, plutôt la querelle, devant un auditoire cosmopolite, je crois avoir bien le droit de faire entendre aussi le son de ma cloche, afin de projeter un peu de lumière sur la conscience de quelques égarés qui, contre toute logique et le simple bon sens, se sont prononcés pour un parti sans entendre les arguments de l'autre. Je serais curieux de connaître l'opinion que ces Messieurs se feront, après avoir lu cet opuscule, de l'homme qui a soutenu un pareil ordre d'idées.*

DAVID FRESCO.

Constantinople, Décembre 1909.

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32 Both italics and typographical errors in the text have been respected.